

SUMMER OF LOVE – June 6 & 7 “Connecting with God / Christ”

1 John 1:6-10

POINT

Connecting with Jesus involves trusting the words of an eyewitness, John, who validates Jesus as God and as the cleansing agent God offers for our restored connection to Him and others.

TIP for the LifeGroup Leader: As the leader you have latitude to mold this lesson to your group and the time you've budgeted to study together. For any question you ask, consider ways you might need to ask a follow-up question that fits your group. This is just a guide for you to adapt to the people in your group. Enjoy!

TIP for the self-guided study: While this study is tailored for group discussion, it can also serve as a guide for your own Bible exploration. To maximize this, have your Bible handy, a pen in hand, and a pad of paper nearby to jot down thoughts and answers to the questions. May this serve as a launching pad to other insights from Scripture!

OPEN

How does anyone prove something is real? Take a person for example. How can a person be proven to have actually existed? In a nutshell, evidence is needed. A key piece of evidence that a court of law accepts when it comes to proving anything is an eye-witness account. Investigators and attorneys begin solving cases with this question in mind: Is there a person who can give a first-hand account of the primary subject and this subject's activities in life.

Once an eyewitness is found the credibility of their testimony is weighed. If no eye-witness can be located, then the search begins for a credible second-hand witness. But when there's a credible eye-witness, what he/she has observed is difficult to challenge.

Q. Tell of a time when an eye-witness solved the riddle with an accident or crime.

So when John, the “beloved” apostle of Jesus states some things about Jesus, our ears ought to perk up. Here's an eye-witness giving testimony; a firsthand observer. John saw, heard, and touched Jesus. John was convinced he was real, at least that's what he records in his Gospel account (i.e., “John”) and in his letters (i.e., “1, 2, 3 John”).

Why did John write these Bible books? He was concerned for a portion of believers in Christ who began to doubt Jesus actually existed. He wrote the books about 50-60 years after Jesus had died, resurrected, and ascended to heaven. That's plenty of time for some doubt to surface about Jesus actually being God and man at the same. That's a complex topic, but one John tackles in order to reinstate confidence in these disciples.

Q. Recall a moment when you first wondered if Jesus actually existed—and if he was truly God in the flesh? What particular person or group of people helped you trust that Jesus did exist and was God on earth in skin? (Take a moment to thank God for them.)

Read 1 John 1:1-10

DIG

Much of what John addresses in 1 John is an echo of what he recorded in his Gospel account of Jesus. Read John 1:1-5

Q. What similarities do you see between the opening of John's Gospel with the opening of John's first letter?

If you read through John's Gospel and all three letters of John, you will see what Bible scholars and historians of Scripture inform us about John's audience and purpose in writing. The Christians he was addressing were being influenced with thoughts that Jesus was not God, let alone a man. Many of the Christians John was writing to had a devout allegiance to Old Testament Scriptures, which taught that there can only be one God, not many gods. The God of the Bible is no match to pagan pseudo-gods. In fact as ancient Israel progressed through the Promised Land they were reminded time and time again of the 1st of the 10 commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai: "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3). Ancient Israel would often repeat grand statements of faith and devotion to God, such as, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deut. 6:4). The Bible of the early church (i.e., our Old Testament) was sprinkled with statements that there is only one God, and no other pagan man-made idols compare to Him.

So when Jesus comes on the scene of human history in the 1st century AD, and begins speaking as though He was God, many completely theologically disagreed (look for example at John 10:22ff. But then when Jesus would do things that only God could do, the masses took a second glance at Him. The amazing miracles Jesus did like raising the dead to life (ex., Lazarus in John 11) didn't persuade everyone, but he clearly set himself up in equal company with the Almighty One of ancient Israel.

John was one of the twelve chosen disciples Jesus tapped to be an apostle after his death and resurrection was an eyewitness to all of Jesus' ministry. John saw and heard Jesus say and do mind-blowing things—both to humanity and creation. John witnessed the betrayal by Judas, the unjust kangaroo-court trial by the Sanhedrin, and stood at the base of the cross with Jesus' mother Mary watching Him suffer. John also was one of the first inside the empty tomb where Jesus' body had been laid. He did actually see the risen Jesus, a point that validated his role as one being especially sent by Jesus with the Gospel message.

The point in all this is, that John was moved by the Holy Spirit to record that this human Jesus was truly God in the flesh. John's eyewitness account challenged the false doctrines against Jesus. John bluntly states in 1 John 1:5 that anyone who adheres to the apostles teaching about Jesus are considered righteous before God because they regard God as wholly righteous in Jesus (i.e., in the light); those who rejected Jesus as God were unrighteous before God (i.e., in the darkness). Being in the light speaks of one having fellowship with God because of adhering to the message about Jesus (1:6). In fact, John speaks of "walking" in the light, a verb that is used in the Old Testament metaphorically as an act of "obeying" God. In short, we're to obey the right that is found in God, not the wrong attached to the world's wisdom. The Bible condemns mixing up walking in the light (what is right to God) with walking in the dark (the wrong to God). Furthermore, this connection with God goes two ways: our fellowship each with God enhances our fellowship with other followers of Christ (1:7).

Q. In 1:7, what is the "blood" cure for our breach of fellowship with God and others? Why do you think John speaks of the cure in such a clearly physical way (not metaphorical or overly spiritual). How would that have challenged those who dismissed Jesus as being real?

Q. How does dishonesty about sin in me and you affect our ability to relate and fellowship? How does dishonesty about our sin impact our connection with God?

If we face our sins honestly and seek to obey the right things in God's eyes, we will live in such a way that truthfully exhibits his forgiving nature. If we do otherwise, our lifestyle exhibits God does not cleanse our unrighteousness. Jesus does restore us into right standing before God; but he also restores our very person to the core, not just improving our position before God but purifying our nature before God.

Q. Why is confessing our wrongdoings and relying on Jesus' cleansing blood so threatening to people? Why does this cause some people to hesitate connecting to God or Jesus?

Q. How does Jesus' blood validate He is real and that connecting with Him is life-changing?

APPLY

Dishonesty is the sort of behavior that makes you angry if you spot it in others. What makes some more angry is when that sort of behavior seems to get rewarded, like the AIG bonuses earlier this year. The apostle Paul writes as though such behavior does get rewarded. Paraphrasing his words:

But the free bonus is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free bonus by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free bonus is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free bonus following many trespasses brought justification. (Romans 5:15–16).

And more to the point, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8).

Years ago, Bill Hybels, Senior Minister, Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago, shared how he had seen a newscast about a big Vietnam Veteran's parade in Chicago. Part of the commemoration was a mobile version of the Vietnam Wall. Like the original, it bore the names of all the soldiers who had died in Vietnam. Hybels said one newscaster asked a vet why he had come all the way to Chicago to visit this memorial and to participate in the parade. The soldier looked straight into the face of the reporter and with tears flowing down his face said, "Because of this man right here." As the soldier talked, he was pointing to the name of a friend that was etched in the wall. He traced the letters of his friend's name in the wall. The soldier continued to answer the reporter by saying, "This man right here gave his life for me. He gave his life for me." As the news clip ended, the sobbing soldier let the tears flow, as he stood there tracing the name of his friend with his finger.

It was hard for that man to get his heart and mind around the sacrifice of his friend, so he kept retracing the story. We have that problem, too. There is, of course, someone who gave his life for me. We don't want to grow dull to Jesus' death for us, but we can tend to.

Take moments right now and center your mind in on your Savior and God. Reflect with Him verbally or in writing on what you've learned from 1 John 1. Rehearse with Him how this Scripture helps you in your relationship with Him and with others. Be honest with your sinfulness, not just specific sinful acts but the struggle of being human. And then, rest. Breathe deeply in his presence for the truth of his cleansing power at the cross that is still active today.

Then, live before your friends and family and co-workers this week in large font type, so that it will not take long for them to detect your true devotion and gratitude to Jesus. Be His big advertisement in your attitude and actions, cleansed by his blood. May all who pass by you this week see His work upon your life.