

I John 1:1-2:2  
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Hampton Baptist  
Charles R. Smith

### Loving in the Light+

We find ourselves in the shadows of Easter. For the seven weeks prior to Easter, the season we call Lent, we focused on an intensive time of self-reflection, and soul-searching in preparation of the resurrection celebration. But now, Easter 2011 is a memory. Do you know why worship was moved to Sundays from Saturdays? Because Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday. While the recipients of John's letter were two or three generations from the Easter event, we are two millennia from that focal point in history. Yet John's words are applicable to us today. I hope that your Christianity is not something that you *do* or don't do, but something that you *are*. I hope that the thrill of Easter stays with you, and the only way for it to do so is with a personal relationship with the risen Christ.

I John was written about 60 years after the death of Jesus. John would have been a very old man, one of the few remaining that knew Jesus first-hand. To those who initially read or heard this letter, they were now second or even third generation Christians. In the early days of Christianity, there was a glory and splendor, but now living the life of a Christian had become a thing of habit. John was writing at a time when, for some at least, the first thrill was gone and the flame of devotion had died to a flicker.

Those second and third generation members of the church found the standards which Christianity demanded to be burdensome. They were called to be different from other people. The major difference was how they interacted with others. Their behavior was to be governed by love. Loving each other would be the benchmark of a Christian. Moral purity was to be understood under the banner of love. A person's speech was dictated by love. Forgiveness and service were motivated by a foundation of love. Once the thrill and enthusiasm were gone, it became harder and harder to go against the grain of society and love everybody. It was easier to conform to the mores of the age. Adapting to the general practices and standards of behavior was easier than loving at times. This was the context in which the letter was offered. It was not explicitly written to a particular church or group of people. Many scholars contend that it was a circular letter, meaning one which was passed around and read to many churches. As such, its words truly apply to us today.

As an apostle of Jesus, one of the original twelve, John could speak with authority of the Incarnation, the event of God coming to earth in human form. God was manifested in the form of Jesus, which John heard with his own ears, saw with his own eyes, and touched with his own hands. The life of Jesus was evident to John. He had experienced it; he was a first-hand witness that God came to us in the form of Jesus: *God in a bod.* What John personally saw and heard, he now wanted to share with those reading this circular letter so that they might have fellowship together, share common ground with one another. Fellowship is more than doughnuts and coffee or even a covered dish supper. Fellowship is sharing; holding common agreements and understandings. Fellowship is community, that feeling of being at home with folks. Fellowship is relationship. That is what we share with God and with God's son Jesus Christ. John had a personal experience with Christ.

I think that one of the major reasons that *American Idol* is the most-watched television show is that people can call and vote for the person they like; I was really hoping that Casey would win. It becomes experiential when we participate. Reality television capitalizes on the need for experience.

Christianity was intended to be an *experiential* religion. It is more than a list of things *not* to do. It is a relationship to be experienced with the risen Christ. That bond motivates us to *do* certain things and *not* do other things. What's most important is how we relate to Jesus. How we relate to Jesus is seen in how we treat others.

John was writing this letter so that those reading it may share in the greatest joy. More than happiness, it is contentment, not satisfaction or complacency, but peace found through fulfilled living. In verse four, John declared the primary purpose for recording the letter: that a person's joy may be made complete. A person's joy becomes complete through a relationship with God. Fellowship in the purest sense of the word brings a person joy. Community among others brings joy. Knowing God and living the Christian life is what brings joy.

John offered a firsthand account. He had already written a gospel, a biography from his perspective as a disciple. Now he was offering a letter to those who had not experienced the Christ first-hand. How does one describe God to the uninformed or the unenlightened? God is light, meaning in God, there is no darkness. God is love, not hate, apathy, nor indifference. The opposite of love is not hate; it actually is apathy or indifference. If we hate someone, we then are expressing some amount of energy, but if we are apathetic toward another, we give the impression that we don't care if they live or die. Indifference indicates that we never see their face, never look in their eyes, and never try to walk in their shoes. If we don't see another person or try to understand them, it is as if they do not even exist. Those are the people to whom apathy is generally directed. Those are the people for whom the test of love comes. If we are to have fellowship with God, then we are to love *all* people. For remember, God came to earth in the form of a person known as Jesus for ALL people: those who deserted him; the religious folks who schemed for his arrest; the Roman soldiers who nailed him to the cross; the Jews and Romans; the rich and the poor; the women and the men; those who lived then and those who live now. Jesus died for *them* all. Jesus died for *us* all, because we have all sinned.

Many have confused the word *sin* as an action that might get someone in the newspapers. Sin is not to be equated with crime. The word *sin* literally means *to miss the mark*. To fail to be as good a father, mother, husband, wife, son, daughter, worker, friend, or person as we might be is to sin, for we have missed the mark. These are sins which we don't necessarily intend to commit, but need to be acknowledged just the same.

All we have to do is confess our sins. We have to admit our wrongs. If we do so, God is going to forgive us and take away that which is a barrier to our relationship. God will restore our fellowship, if we confess. If we acknowledge our sin, that is the first step. The step toward resolution to any problem is to name it, to recognize it. With our own sin, we not only have to recognize it, but we have to confess it to God. Then forgiveness can come. But it won't come if we don't see our behavior as sinful. The

beauty is that after our confession, God will be faithful not to throw us out, but to forgive us.

If we say we are above sin, can't sin, won't sin, then we have nullified Jesus's death on the cross. We have stated that his action of love for us was in vain. We have also acknowledged that God's word is not in us.

John wrote these words to the readers and hearers so that their joy might be full, and that they may not sin; essentially, these should be the same thing. But the reality was that they *would* sin. So what happens when we sin? We know that the One who loved us enough to give his life for us will also be our Advocate. Jesus will always be on our side, even when we falter. We can always count on Jesus still loving us. One of the most amazing things about Jesus is that he has never lost interest in us. His love for us has never wavered nor diminished. We are not to think of Jesus simply as the one who died on the cross, and that was the end of his story. Jesus is still our advocate, bearing our sins.

Has your life become drab? Has your walk with God become routine and predictable? Loving others can be difficult, especially those whom society has deemed unlovable or those whom popular culture has given license to disregard. A witness for Christ which includes that unyielding love for others is sometimes seen as ridiculous, yet that is why Jesus died. Our Advocate continues to love us by removing the taint that indifference leaves with us, if we confess it. If we don't try to love others, then the truth is not in us, and we walk in darkness.

Want to find joy that will complete you? Try to love everybody. Try to live in the light. Acknowledge and confess when you don't. We don't have to stay in the shadows of Easter; we are to love in the light.