

August Sermon Series

Leader Guide ESV, Session 4

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Obeying from Love

Summary and Goal

The apostle John wrote 1 John to a group of believers and churches who had been bombarded with false teachings about Jesus. Some false teachers had left the church, but the controversy they stirred up lingered. John responded to these false teachers and their false claims not by backing down but by standing strong on the gospel with grace and truth. At the same time, he aimed to encourage the believers by reinforcing their understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He reminded them of the amazing love of God evidenced in the completed work of Christ and clarified how we experience His forgiveness. Through this session, we want to remember what is true about Jesus and encourage a life of obedience that flows from love by understanding His completed work on the cross.

Session Outline

1. Obeying Jesus comes from remembering His completed work (1 John 2:1-2).
2. Obeying Jesus comes from knowing Him (1 John 2:3-4).
3. Obeying Jesus comes from loving Him (1 John 2:5-6).

Background Passage: 1 John

Session in a Sentence

Jesus' work in securing our salvation gives His people ample cause to love Him and obey Him.

Christ Connection

In teaching the church about the nature of obedience, the apostle John reminded the church that obeying Christ comes from knowing and loving Him. Loving obedience is best demonstrated by Jesus Himself, who obeyed the Father and laid down His life for others.

Missional Application

Because Christ's obedience to the Father has brought about our salvation, we obey Christ's command to love others as we seek ways to provide for others in need.

Group Time

Introduction

EXPLAIN: Use the paragraph on page 75 in the DDG to help your group contemplate a scenario of "fake news" and how to respond to it.

We live in an age when we can access news about world events with the tap of a finger. But along with this access, we can easily receive information some would label as "fake," as unverifiable or even fabricated, which makes it difficult to know whether or not our information and our conclusions are true or false. On top of that, social media piles on perspectives and opinions about situations from various points of view. In this context, how are we supposed to know whether reported and shared facts are indeed facts or just another example of "fake news"?

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

When you search for information regarding issues of faith in God, how do you determine the difference between “fake news” and truth? (we might listen to trusted sources, such as pastors or Bible teachers from our church; we can ask more mature believers to verify the things we are listening to or getting involved in; we can evaluate all things through the lens of Scripture; we should test the fruit of the teachings we are receiving and try to listen to the Holy Spirit)

SUMMARIZE: The apostle John wrote 1 John to a group of believers and churches who had been bombarded with “fake news” about Jesus. Some false teachers had left the church, but the controversy they stirred up lingered. John responded to these false teachers and their false claims not by backing down but by standing strong on the gospel with grace and truth. At the same time, he aimed to encourage the believers by reinforcing their understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He reminded them of the amazing love of God evidenced in the completed work of Christ and clarified how we experience His forgiveness. Through this session, we want to remember what is true about Jesus and encourage a life of obedience that flows from love by understanding His completed work on the cross.

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Point 1: Obeying Jesus comes from remembering His completed work (1 John 2:1-2).

SAY: The apostle John began his letter with confidence and clarity, describing Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as the eternal Word of life. The disciples had heard His voice with their own ears, seen Him with their own eyes, and touched Him with their own hands (1:1-3). They first heard the message of eternal life from this Jesus, God Himself in the flesh. So John made it clear that the message he proclaimed in his letter was true and any alternative message was “fake news.” The first issue John wanted to set right regarded sin in the believer’s life.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read 1 John 2:1-2 (DDG p. 76).

1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 76) to explain why John did not want his readers to sin—because God is holy and sin kills.

John proclaimed that God is light and there is absolutely no darkness in Him (1:5). This metaphorical language has a moral quality to it: Light means righteousness, and darkness means sin. He began his letter with the truth that God is holy—without sin—because this impacts how we interact with Him. If we say we have fellowship with God but walk in darkness—in sin—then we are liars and do not practice the truth (1:6). We cannot to say one thing and then do another. So John’s hope throughout his letter is that we would not sin.

- Sin separates people from God and people from others. Sin kills, just as God warned Adam in the garden of Eden that the wages of sin is death (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 6:23). Sin condemns people to God’s judgment and hell (Eph. 2:1-3). Sin should be such a foreign concept to us as image bearers of God that we would want to reject it, but so often we don’t.
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INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

If sin is so wrong, why do we sin? (our sinful nature inherited from Adam inclines us toward sin; sin offers us immediate pleasure and enjoyment; we sin because we want to be the god over our own lives; we think it doesn't matter what we do; we think no one sees us in our sin; we don't believe sin has consequences; we don't believe God's warning against sin)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 76) to emphasize that the person and work of Jesus Christ is our hope for salvation and our motivation for obeying Him.

John didn't want people to sin, but he also wasn't naïve about the human condition, which led him to bring up the gospel. Some people falsely claim to have no sin at all, in their past or in their present (1 John 1:8,10). John called them liars. Nobody can say they do not sin. But our hope for a relationship with God is not based on our sin or the lack thereof—it's based on Jesus, the only righteous One. If we believe in Him, He becomes our advocate before God our Father, and His plea on our behalf, whenever we sin, is the sacrifice He made of Himself on the cross for us. This, in turn, encourages us to resist sin and obey our Savior.

- John did not say that once we become followers of Jesus we will stop sinning, though that should be our ever-present goal because the work of Christ has freed us from our sin. Instead, he highlighted that when we do sin, we need to look to Jesus Christ's finished work on the cross and remember that He is our righteous advocate. Cleansing and forgiveness of sin come from Jesus when we are honest about our sin (1:9). When we confess our sin and bring it out from the shadows into the light of God's love, we can experience His forgiveness and never-changing, never-ending love. This is good news!
 - John's warning about the deception of sin and the good news of forgiveness from Jesus is what fueled his hope that we would not sin. Believers see their situation with more clarity than the people of the world because God has shone His light on us and in us so that we see Christ in His glory and subsequently turn from our sin and obey Him (2 Cor. 4:6).
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FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 76).

Christ as Propitiation: Because of God's righteousness and [holiness](#), humanity's sins must be atoned for in order for people to be [reconciled](#) to God. As the propitiation for sins, Christ's [death](#) is the appeasement or satisfaction of God's wrath against sin.

Essential Doctrine "Christ as Propitiation": Because of God's righteousness and **holiness**, humanity's sins must be atoned for in order for people to be **reconciled** to God. As the propitiation for sins, Christ's **death** is the appeasement or satisfaction of God's wrath against sin. Christ's propitiation for our sins demonstrates both God's great love toward sinners (1 John 4:10) as well as the necessary payment that results from the penalty of sins (Rom. 3:26).

Point 2: Obeying Jesus comes from knowing Him (1 John 2:3-4).

READ 1 John 2:3-4 (DDG p. 77).

3 And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. 4 Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 77) to highlight the strong connection between knowing Jesus by faith and obeying His commands.

John began this letter by reminding his children in the faith of his own real-life experience with Jesus Christ. He had seen Jesus and touched Jesus' human body with his own hands. In other words, Jesus was not simply a spirit; He was human and alive. Additionally, John and the disciples heard Jesus' voice as He taught, confronted, and gave commands. These weren't ordinary words but words of truth and eternal life—words to obey. If we say we have come to know Jesus but our actions tell a different story, then we are liars and without the truth. In fact, it appears to be impossible to know Jesus by faith and not be willing to obey Him.

Voices from the Church

“On the one hand, the person who keeps the commands can have confidence that he knows and abides in God. On the other hand, the one who claims to know God but does not keep the commands proves himself to be a liar. John does not envisage the possibility where one can know God and not live in a manner pleasing to Him.”¹
—Christopher Bass

- Later in his letter, John said that if we would know God and obey His commands, then we must know Him as love because God is love. In fact, the way we get to know God is through His love for us, revealed supremely in His one and only Son, whom He sent into the world. We know and experience God's love through the gospel. Jesus came to trade places with us so that we could know the love of the Father: He lived the perfect life we should have lived and died the death we were condemned to die in our sin so that we might live through Him (1 John 4:8-10).
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INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

What are some attributes Jesus helps us to know about God? (God is love; God is holy; God is truthful; God is gracious and merciful; God is faithful; God is just)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 77) to call out love for our neighbor as a chief example of one of Jesus' commands for believers to obey.

If we know Jesus by faith, then we will keep His commandments. So what are they? Well, right near the top is the command to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:39; Lev. 19:18). John condemned hatred for our brothers and sisters in Christ because hate lurks in the darkness and is not from God, which we would know if we know God at all (1 John 2:7-11). God is love, and He has loved us in and through the sacrifice of Christ, His one and only Son. If we know we have been loved in this amazing fashion, then how could we withhold our love from others? Believers who live in the light and in the truth can't and won't withhold God's love.

- Knowing God means knowing God's love firsthand. It means we have experienced salvation by faith in Jesus and received the Holy Spirit, who confirms in our hearts that we now belong to our heavenly Father as His children (1 John 4:13; Rom. 8:14-17). This is more than mere verbal assent. Just because we say something doesn't make it true. The Letter of 1 John teaches us that we know our words are true when they are backed up by our actions (1 John 2:3-4).
 - Our obedience to Jesus' command to love one another flows from God's love for us in the first place (1 John 4:19). While we were still sinners, enemies of God, Christ came to earth and died for us (Rom. 5:8). This kind of love stands in stark contrast to the fickle, shallow, often self-centered love the world has to offer. God's love is sacrificial, undeserved, unconditional, freeing, and inviting. And since God loved us this way in Christ, we should strive to love one another in the same way (1 John 4:10-11).
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INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

In addition to loving one another, what are some other commands believers should obey because they know God? (believers are given the capacity to forgive as they have been forgiven; believers who know God cannot help but proclaim and share the gospel to the ends of the earth; believers are freed from worry and anxiety because they know the God who will supply all their needs; believers who know God will learn to love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength)

Point 3: Obeying Jesus comes from loving Him (1 John 2:5-6).

READ 1 John 2:5-6 (DDG p. 78).

5 but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: 6 whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 78) to contrast obedience for merit with obedience that flows from love for God, who first loved us.

If you find it hard to believe that God loves you because of who He is—holy—and that He accepts you—a sinner—completely on the basis of what Jesus did for us, you are not alone. Many of us find it difficult to believe or understand unconditional love and unmerited favor. By nature, we want to earn our keep. We want to know exactly what is expected of us so we can merit the relationship bestowed upon us. But that isn't how love works. We love because God first loved us (4:19). Because of God's love shown to us in Jesus on the cross, we obey as we love others, and even more importantly, we obey because we love God in return.

- Some believers are competitive and try hard to out-perform everyone else. Some of us get our identity from what we can accomplish. Still others give up before we start, knowing that in comparison to everybody else, we never quite measure up. However, none of these modes of obedience, or the lack thereof, reflects the love of God or love for God. Each one reflects a self-centered attitude more focused on comparison with others than looking toward and resting in the gracious, unconditional love of God.
 - If we are children of God, we will want to keep His Word. But when we fail, which we will, we need not look to others in guilt; we need to confess our sin—our bad choices, our regular mistakes, our lustful or hateful thoughts—and bring them into the light of God's love. God still loves us and sent His Son to be our sacrifice and our advocate. "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (3:1).
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INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

What are some motives other than love for God that might fuel our "acts of obedience"? (a desire to be noticed and praised by people; a sense of shame and penance to make up for our failures; fear of punishment and judgment; a desire to look better than others)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 78) to explain how the Holy Spirit helps us with *sanctification* so that we obey God from love and walk as Jesus walked.

Knowing God, knowing His love for us in Christ, must work itself out in our lives as love for God and love for others. When believers keep Jesus' commands from a motive of love, then we can have assurance that we are in Christ by faith and saved from our sins. We can see that God's love is

accomplishing its purpose in our lives. Believers grow in this regard as they mature in the faith. We call this *sanctification*, and God does this work in us through the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity. The Spirit assures believers of their adoption into God's family and helps us to walk as Jesus walked—in loving obedience to God the Father (3:24; 4:11-13).

- Because believers are aware of their sin to fight it and we desire to obey God's commandments, we can know that we are in Christ and have been born again into God's family (3:9-10). We know this because God has given us His Holy Spirit, who lives in us and helps us to remain in God's love. If we confess that Jesus is the Son of God in the flesh and remain in His love, then we can know with confidence that God remains in us and does not condemn us but rather loves us and forgives us (4:13-18).
 - We find it challenging to follow Jesus Christ and walk as He walked because we live in a world that seeks to satisfy us *right now*. Instant gratification of our desires tugs at our hearts and wears us down until we give in to our temptations. But the Holy Spirit reminds us of the gospel, giving us confidence in our salvation today and hope for eternal life tomorrow so that we will resist temptation and obey our Savior (3:2-3). We are called to obey God in love in light of His great love for us, past, present, and future.
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My Mission

EXPLAIN: Because of the gospel of Jesus Christ, who lived, died, and rose again for us, we can walk in the light of God's love and forgiveness that frees us, transforms us, and gives us meaning and purpose in this life and in the life to come. Whenever we doubt God's love, we need only to look to the person and work of Jesus Christ and remember that He shed His blood on our behalf and is our righteous advocate who atoned for our sin on the cross. Now we are free to walk in the light with a new purpose—to love others in the same way God loves us so that the whole world may know of and believe in Jesus for salvation from sin.

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 79), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God's Word.

Because Christ's obedience to the Father has brought about our salvation, we obey Christ's command to love others as we seek ways to provide for others in need.

- **What steps will you take to know Jesus and His love more deeply?**
- **What are some specific ways you can demonstrate love for one another within your group and for your physical neighbors?**
- **How will the teaching of 1 John inform the way you present and commend the gospel to others in both word and deed?**

Voices from Church History

“Therefore everything which Christ has is ours, graciously bestowed on us unworthy men out of God's sheer mercy, although we have rather deserved wrath and condemnation, and hell also. Even Christ himself, therefore, who says he came to do the most sacred will of the Father [John 6:38], became obedient to him; and whatever he did, he did it for us and desired it to be ours.”²

—Martin Luther (1483-1546)

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Father, we praise You for Your love beyond our comprehension. Though we sin daily, You still graciously forgive us on account of Your Son, who gave Himself to the cross so that we might go free from our sin, death, and condemnation. And You have given us Your Spirit so that we would have strength and guidance to walk as Jesus walked. Help

us to love You from our hearts, and help us to love others as You have loved us. May the world know we are Christians and know the glory of Jesus by our love. Amen.

PACK ITEM 8: LOVE OTHERS: Cut out these bookmarks and pass them out to group members to remind them that God's love for us should flow through us so others may hear about and believe in Jesus.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the **Daily Study** devotions in their DDG (pp. 80-82), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use **Encourage One Another** (p. 83) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God's Word.

Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The **Daily Study** devotions in the DDG (pp. 80-82) will help group members get into God's Word and study it for themselves. **Encourage One Another** (p. 83) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 80-82) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.
- Share the following idea from the devotion for **Day 2** as a part of point 2 in the session: **As we spend time in the Word of God, we get to hear from God firsthand. We learn what it means to follow Jesus and to walk in obedience to His commandments.**

Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God's Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- **Day 1: "Understanding the depth and breadth of the gospel cannot happen until we have received Jesus Christ's death on the cross as payment for our sin."**
- **Day 4: "God invites us into a relationship of love and forgiveness that lasts forever, whereas the world promises short-lived and fleeting satisfaction."**

Visit www.GospelProject.com/Blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God's Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member's DDG (p. 83) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using *The Gospel Project* in their groups.

- **Encourage group members to affirm one another in the ways they see God's love evident in them through their treatment of other people.**
- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.

Additional Commentary

Point 1: Obeying Jesus comes from remembering His completed work (1 John 2:1-2).

“John refers here to both the ‘righteous’ life of Christ and his ‘propitiating’ death, which together are the grounds of a believer’s justification (cf. Rom. 3:24-26; 2 Cor. 5:21). It is on these grounds—his sinless life and substitutionary death—that Jesus stands as our ‘advocate’ before the Father. The word ‘propitiation’ appears only rarely in the New Testament, but at crucial points (Rom. 3:25). Moreover, the reality expressed in the word ‘propitiation,’ with its profound gospel significance, reverberates throughout the whole Bible. This key term refers to a sacrifice which satisfies the just wrath of God for sin. As it is applied to Christ, we learn through his death Jesus absorbed the just wrath of God toward us for our sin and thereby opened the way for God’s full favor to be shown to all who believe . . . How Christ’s propitiation applies to the ‘sins of the whole world’ (2:2) may be explained in three ways: (1) Christ’s sacrifice is sufficient for all, though applicable only to those placing their faith in him; (2) Christ’s sacrifice is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise to bless all the nations of the earth through the Messiah; (3) Christ’s sacrifice is able to save believers from all the world, regardless of ethnicity or past loyalties. What is clear, however, is that John is clearly not arguing for some form of universalism (in which all persons will be saved regardless of their faith) because he says that ‘whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life’ (5:12).”³

“Jesus Christ, our advocate with the Father, is called ‘the Righteous One.’ The righteousness of Jesus is an essential qualification for dealing with human sin. In 1:7 Jesus’s blood ‘purifies us from all sin,’ which in Jewish thought would only be possible if he were free from sin himself. In the Old Testament, purification required the sacrifice of a spotless animal (lit. ‘blameless’; e.g., Lev. 1:3,10; 3:1; 4:3,23,28,32; 5:15,18). The blood of the blameless animal was shed on behalf of the repentant sinner. With the sacrificial system in the background, John knows that purification depends on Jesus’s own righteousness. Only the one without sin can bring about purification: ‘He appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin’ (3:5; cf. Rom. 3:21-26). In this same way, Jesus’s righteousness is essential to his atoning sacrifice in 2:2.”⁴

Point 2: Obeying Jesus comes from knowing Him (1 John 2:3-4).

“Again John states the importance of Christian profession and moral integrity. The assertion of v. 3, that we know we have come to know God if we are living out the truth God has revealed in Christ, leads John here to state its inverse. If anyone claims to have true knowledge of God but does not order their life according to God’s revealed truth (‘does not keep his commands’), that person is living a lie. They cannot know God while continuing to ignore his moral will.”⁵

“Throughout this epistle, John is preoccupied with Christian living, which he calls our ‘walk.’ The mention of our need of an advocate with the Father when we sin leads him to comment on how we can test whether we know the Father. He emphasizes that true knowledge of God is always associated with obedience to his commands (2:3-4). Claiming to know God while disobeying him is both a lie and a sign of an absence of truth in the person’s whole life. Complete love for God is shown by obedience to his word (2:5). Then, moving beyond the abstractions of ‘commands’ and ‘word,’ John summarizes what he means: *Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did* (2:6)—and Jesus has just been identified as ‘the Righteous One.’ The command to live as Jesus did reminds John of what Jesus called his new commandment [see John 15:12].”⁶

Point 3: Obeying Jesus comes from loving Him (1 John 2:5-6).

“John restates the claim made in the previous verse in a manner that links the proclamation of knowing God with the practice of proper Christian behavior epitomized in love. John cites the love of God precisely because it makes known the command par excellence of Jesus in the Johannine literature, ‘to love each other as I have loved you’ (John 15:12). This emphasis on the connection between love and obedience is shown throughout John 13–16 and could very well be the basis for John’s focus on the commandment to love given by Jesus in this part of the epistle . . . The one who claims to abide in God (Jesus) is faced with the obligation (debt) of conforming his life to the example that was set by the historical Jesus in his life. To live (abide) in God one must know God, and ultimate knowledge of God comes only through an intimate knowledge of and relationship with Jesus

“Our hope of eternal life is in him. He is the pattern of our patience. Otherwise we are using the likeness of a false profession if we do not follow the commands of him in whose name we glory. And these would not be burdensome to us and would free us from all dangers, if we would love only what he commands us to love.”⁸

References

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3. Mike Bullmore, “1–3 John,” in *Gospel Transformation Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 1707-1708, n. 2:1-2.
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5. Karen H. Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, in *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014) [Logos].
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8. Leo the Great, Sermons 90.2, in *James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude*, ed. Gerald Bray, vol. XI in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000) [Logos].