

1 John: Discussion Questions

From Last Time:

1. In 4:12 John says, “No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” Commenting on this, the Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Epistles (IVP) says, “Loving the unlovely or the difficult to love is an avenue, a mystical avenue, to discover God in our midst.” Have you ever found this to be true? What would it mean for you to see God, and how does loving others play a role in this for you? Whom does Jesus say in the Sermon on the Mount will see God—and how does this relate to 1 Jn 4:12?

Week 5: 1 John and Atonement

2. Popular theories of the atonement have included the *ransom* theory (e.g. 1 Tim 2:5), the *satisfaction* theory [both *expiation*—removing guilt through punishment by proxy (e.g. Rom 3:25) and *propitiation*—removing wrath by covering our sins (e.g. Rom 5:9)] and the *exemplar* theory (e.g. 1 Pet 2:20). What atonement theories (these or others) do you find in 1 Jn?

1:7: If we talk in the light as he is in the light...and the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin”

2:2: 2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

3:8: 8 He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

3:16: 1JN 3:16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

4:19: 1JN 4:19 We love because he first loved us.

4:10: 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

3. In the Gospel of John there is very little emphasis on the atonement, since John’s emphasis on Jesus’ divinity makes Jesus’ death his triumph and glorification (Jn 12:27-32; 13:1; 14:30-31; 16:10-11, 33; 17:1). (The exception to this is Jn 1:29’s “the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”—but note that the lamb is not a sin offering, but part of the Passover celebration.)

Why do you think 1 Jn has more emphasis on Jesus’ suffering than the Gospel of John?

4. “Whereas Catholics and Protestants have tended to view the crucifixion as the focal point of Christianity (with the former “specializing in the pietistic lesson of the Via Dolorosa and the latter in the theological ramifications of the atonement), Orthodox Christians have long heralded the incarnation as the central event in the Christian story”¹

¹ Louis A. Markos, “An Evening with Athanasius”, *Theology Today* 62 (2005), 240.

Where would you describe your focus, on this scale from passion to incarnation? Where would you like it to be?

5. John takes pains to assert that we are sinful and must acknowledge our sin in order to walk in the light and have fellowship with Jesus and the Father. In a sermon on 1 Jn, Gary Delashmutt of Xenos Christian Fellowship (www.xenos.org) argued that “Fellowship with God requires taking seriously God’s righteousness, our sin, and our need for God’s forgiveness. Any form of spirituality that rejects or trivializes God’s righteousness and human guilt is misguided or deceptive.” C. S. Lewis observed how our culture reacts to this:

Speak about beauty, truth and goodness, or about a God who is simply the indwelling principle of these three, speak about a great spiritual force pervading all things . . . and you will command friendly interest. But the temperature drops as soon as you mention a God who . . . does one thing and not another, a concrete, choosing, commanding, prohibiting God with a determinate character. (Then) people become . . . angry.²

Discuss.

6. Some in John’s fellowship apparently feared for their salvation. How does he reassure them? What criteria does he suggest for being among the saved? Do you meet these? Do your children, if you have any?

An Orphaned Question:

7. Compare 2:10, “Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble”, to both the concept of the “old self” in Paul’s letters (e.g. Eph 4:22) and to his struggles with his own sinful “old self” (Rom 7:14-20). What is John saying here?

² “Christian Apologetics,” cited in *The Inspirational Writings of C. S. Lewis* (New York: Inspirational Press, 1994), p. 306.