

1 Yochanan ~ Part 1

Introduction

"The epistle's title has always been **"1 Yochanan."** It is the first and largest of a series of 3 epistles bearing the **Apostle Yochanan's** name. Because the letter identifies no specific church, location, or individual to whom it was sent, it is classified as a "general epistle." Although **1 Yochanan** lacks some general characteristics of an epistle common at the time (e.g., an introduction, greeting, or concluding salutation), its intimate tone and content indicate that the term "epistle" still applies.

The epistle does not identify the author, but the church's strong, consistent, and earliest testimony ascribes it to **Yochanan** the **Talmid** and **Apostle** (cf. Luke 6:13, 14). This anonymity strongly affirms the early church's identification of the epistle with **Yochanan** the **Apostle**, for only someone of **Yochanan's** well-known and preeminent status as an **Apostle** would be able to write with such unmistakable authority, expecting complete obedience from his readers, without clearly identifying himself (e.g., 4:6). He was well known to the readers, so he didn't need to mention his name.

Yochanan and **Ya'akov**, his older brother (Acts 12:2), were known as **"the sons of Zebedee"** (Matityahu 10:2–4), whom **Yeshua** gave the name **"Sons of Thunder"** (Mark 3:17). **Yochanan** was one of the 3 most intimate associates of **Yeshua** (along with **Kefa** and **Ya'akov** - cf. Mt 17:1; 26:37), being an eyewitness to and participant in **Yeshua's** earthly ministry (1:1–4). He also wrote **Revelation** (Revelation 1:1). ¹

Prologue: Our Declaration

1 ¹ The Word, which gives life! He existed from the beginning. We have heard Him; we have seen Him with our eyes; we have contemplated Him; we have touched Him with our hands! ² The life appeared, and we have seen it. We are testifying to it and announcing it to you - eternal life! He was with the Father, and He appeared to us. ³ What we have seen and heard, we are proclaiming to you; so that you too may have fellowship with us. Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Yeshua the Messiah. ⁴ We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

As an apostolic eyewitness to **Yeshua's** ministry, including His death and resurrection, and as one of the 3 most intimate associates of the **Lord** (see above), **Yochanan** affirms the physical reality of **Yeshua HaMashiach** coming "in the flesh" (cf. 4:2, 3). In this way, **Yochanan** underscored the gravity of the false teaching by immediately affirming the historic reality of **Yeshua's** humanity and the certainty of the **Gospel**. Although the false teachers claimed to believe in **Yeshua**, their denial of his true nature (i.e., His humanity) showed their lack of genuine salvation (2:22, 23). Affirming a proper view of **Yeshua** is the first test of genuine fellowship (v. 3; see 1:5–2:2 for test two).

Fellowship with God

⁵ And this is the message which we have heard from Him and proclaim to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in Him - none! ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with Him while we are walking in the darkness, we are lying and not living out the truth. ⁷ But if we are walking in the light, as He is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of His Son Yeshua purifies us from all sin. ⁸ If we claim not to have sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we acknowledge our sins, then, since He is trustworthy and just, He will forgive them and purify us from all wrongdoing. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not been sinning, we are making Him out to be a liar, and His Word is not in us. 2 ¹ My children, I am writing you these things so that you won't sin. But if anyone does sin, we have Yeshua the Messiah, the Tzaddik,

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., The MacArthur Study Bible: New American Standard Bible. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006).

who pleads our cause with the Father. ² Also, He is the kapparah for our sins - and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world.

This section addresses a **Believer's** relationship to sin in general (what theologians call the "sinful nature of man") and to particular sins. These verses give a threefold message:

- (1) There is an absolute call to put away sin.
- (2) It is impossible to live without sinning.
- (3) Nevertheless, one has no right to give up the battle against sin.

God's Commands

³ The way we can be sure we know Him is if we are obeying His commands. ⁴ Anyone who says, "I know Him," but isn't obeying His commands is a liar - the truth is not in him. ⁵ But if someone keeps doing what He says, then truly love for God has been brought to its goal in him. This is how we are sure that we are united with Him. ⁶ A person who claims to be continuing in union with Him ought to conduct his life the way He did. ⁷ Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command. On the contrary, it is an old command, which you have had from the beginning; the old command is the message which you have heard before. ⁸ Yet I am writing you a new command, and its reality is seen both in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. ⁹ Anyone who claims to be in this light while hating his brother is still in the dark. ¹⁰ The person who keeps loving his brother remains in the light, and there is nothing in him that could make him trip. ¹¹ But the person who hates his brother is in the dark - yes, he is walking in the dark, and he doesn't know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. ²

Because there is no darkness in **God**, if we claim fellowship (v. 3) with Him but walk in darkness, then we are lying with our words and our actions (not living out the truth). Only when we let the light of **God** shine into our whole life, permitting even its secrets to be judged by Him, can He purify us of our sinful habits and make us more holy.

As a rule, people do not want to let in **God's** light (Yochanan 3:19–21), but instead of saying so, they claim they don't need it. **Yochanan** gives two examples: If we claim not to have sin, not to have a nature that tends to sin, not to have an "evil inclination" (see Romans 5:12–21) ever rearing its ugly head, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. Likewise, if we claim we have not been sinning, that our acts have been above reproach, and we have not committed actual sins, we are making Him out to be a liar, and His Word is not in us.

In **Yochanan's** day it was especially the **Gnostics** who, misusing Romans 6 and 8, said that since the **Messianic Believer** has the **Spirit** of the **Messiah** in him, he cannot sin anymore. **Yochanan** agrees that the **Spirit of the Messiah** cleanses us and gives us strength to overcome sin, in keeping with Ezekiel 36:27, *"I will put my Spirit in you and cause you to follow my statutes, and you will keep my judgments and do them."* Nevertheless, we still commit sin, as v. 10 reminds us; this aligns with what is said about the days of the **Messiah** in Jeremiah 31:29(30): *"Everyone will die for his own iniquity."* Isaiah 65:20 too speaks of sinners in the **Messianic Era**, and in the **Lord's Prayer**, Believers are told to pray, *"Forgive us what we have done wrong"* (Mattityahu 6:12).

² Yochanan 1:1 – 2:11