

FIRST JOHN

#1

Introduction to First John

1 John 1:1-4

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Today we begin a new study in the book of 1 John. It is a small book but big things come in little packages and this epistle is packed full of practical truths for the Christian.
- B. The Epistle of 1 John was written by the Apostle John around 9 A. D. It seems that this epistle was a kind of circular letter sent out to the Christians in Asia Minor where John had ministered much of his life.
- C. The basic and underlying theme of this book is “fellowship.” It tells how Christians can fellowship with God and with one another. A person’s vertical fellowship with God through Christ has a definite effect on one’s horizontal fellowship with other men. A person must love God before he can love others!

II. BACKGROUND OF THE APOSTLE JOHN

- A. John was called to salvation and apostleship at a very early age. He was just a young man when he met Christ and decided to follow Him.
- B. John is known as the apostle of love because he, more than any other writer of the N.T., speaks of love for God and love for Christians.

Tradition tells of the Apostle John in his old age when he would have to be carried into the assembly because of feebleness. He would repeat over and over again. “Little children, love one another.” The Christians would keep asking, “Why do you keep repeating this?” John replied, “Because it is the Lord’s command; and if it only be fulfilled it is enough.”

- C. The apostle of love also became a “tiger” at times and was uncompromising about his convictions that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation. **Jn. 3:36: *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.*** **1 Jn. 5:12 *He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.*** He longed, as every good pastor does, to see Christians walk in the truth of Christ and be kept from error. **3 John 4: *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*** **2 Jn. 4: *It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us.***

The apostle of love did not hesitate to expose false teachers for he called them liars, antichrists and deceivers. Real love holds the truth in love and speaks the truth in love.

If you really love a person, you tell them the truth about Christ, even though they may not like it at first, because you desire to see them saved. If you had discovered a cure for cancer and it could only be put into the blood stream by a hypodermic needle, would you withhold this cure from mankind because you know some are going to “buck” at taking a shot? If you really love you give the truth or cure and suffer the consequences.

- D. John was also a realist who saw everything in black and white and there were no grays. He was no fence sitter. He sets opposites in direct contrast to one another – 1) light and darkness, 2) life and death, 3) love and hate, 4) truth and error. There is no middle ground in John’s concept of Christianity: 1) Men are children of God or children of the devil. 2) Of the world or not of the world. 3) They have life or do not have life. 4) They know God or do not know Him. People belong to one or the other of these two categories, with no third alternative.
- E. John’s writing ministry comes in after the church had been in existence for 60 years, and by this time apostasy had already crept in. There was a need for a voice to call people back to the original foundations and that was the ministry of the Apostle John. He called men back to the truth.
- F. When we, as Christians, begin to drift, when some false concept creeps into our thinking or into our actions, we should read the Epistles of John.

III. THE HERESY OF GNOSTICISM

- A. It is impossible to understand the Book of 1 John without understanding something about an early church heresy that was beginning in John’s day to get a foothold in the professing church.
- B. Gnostics means “knowing ones” and they believed that they had the supremacy of intellect and the superiority of mental enlightenment to faith and conduct. It was a hodge-podge of mysticism and philosophy with a little Christian teaching thrown in.
- C. Gnostics believed in the inherent evil of matter and everything material. If all matter is evil and Jesus Christ had a human body, then Christ could not be God or not have a real human body. One form of Gnosticism was Docetism which said that Jesus was divine but did not have a real body: it was a body of ghostlike qualities. **1 Jn. 4:2-3: *This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the***

spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

- D. Another more prominent form of Gnosticism was Cerinthianism, started by a man called Cerinthus. This view says that God could not create evil, so they devised a system where evil could be explained. God, or the pleroma, created an angelic being and from this first creation which was nearly perfect many more sub-angelic beings evolved and these were called aeons or emanations. Each emanation away from god and closer to man became more evil. Jesus Christ was merely one of this sub-angelic beings. Thus Cerinthianism denied that Jesus Christ was true deity, because he had a sinful flesh. **1 Jn. 4:15: *If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.*** **1 Jn 5:5: *Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*** We still have a form of Gnosticism with us today. The Jehovah Witnesses believe that Christ was the first created being and from him everything else was created. Thus they deny the deity of Jesus Christ because they do not believe he was and is eternal.
- E. The Gnostic made a distinction between the Jesus and the Christ. Jesus was simply
1) a man, 2) not born of a Virgin and, 3) sinful but at his baptism the Christ came upon him and was with him until his death. Just before death, the Christ left him and the man Jesus died as the sacrifice.
- F. Because all flesh is sinful, Gnostics took two approaches to this problem. Some said the 1) soul was free of sin but the body evil; therefore feed the flesh with all licentious deeds. These became known as antinomians (those who are against law). **1 Jn. 5:2-3: *This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome.*** 2) The other extreme was to asceticism which denied the body any and everything. These folks believed they could reach some state of human perfection: **1 Jn 1:8: *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.***

According to tradition John on one occasion rushed out of a public bath at Ephesus at the sight of Cerinthus, crying, "Let us fly, lest even the bath fall on us, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within."

IV. PURPOSES FOR WRITING THE BOOK OF 1 JOHN

- A. Introduction: There are four reasons John states for writing this book, but most scholars agree that the primary reason is found in 1 Jn. 5:13 – that men who have trusted in Christ might know or be assured that they are truly Christians.
- B. Contrast of John's Gospel and John's Epistle: 1) He wrote the Gospel for unbelievers in order to arouse their faith (**Jn. 20:30-31: *Jesus did many other***

miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name), and the Epistle for believers in order to deepen their assurance 1 Jn. 5:13: I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. 2) His desire for the readers of the Gospel was that through faith they might receive life; for the readers of the Epistle that they might know they already have it. 3) The enemies of the truth in the gospel are unbelieving Jews but the enemies of the truth in the Epistle are professing Christians who really are not regenerate.

C. Purposes For Writing

1. To bring joy to the Christian (1:4): Fellowship with Christ brings one the assurance of salvation. Assurance brings joy – an inner joy that satisfies the frustrations and the longings of the human heart. This is not shouting or screaming or a false, put on joy. This is an inner joy of knowing God and the calm assurance of knowing we belong to Him through Christ.

Augustine said, “For there is a joy which is not given to the ungodly, that of all those who love Thee for Thine own sake, whose joy Thou Thyself art; and this is the happy life, to rejoice in Thee, of Thee. This is it! And there is no other.”

2. To produce holiness in the Christian (2:1): Fellowship with God keeps the Christian from sinning. Guilt is the result of sin. One of the greatest threats to human happiness is guilt and only God can keep us from sinning and forgive us when we do sin.
3. To protect the Christian from false teachers (2:26): Fellowship with Christ will keep one close to the Word of God, and the Bible will keep a person from going off into false teaching and heresy.
4. To assure the Christian of salvation (5:13): John says a Christian can know that he has eternal life and he applies three tests as to whether a person possesses eternal life or not: 1) Doctrinal: Do we believe that Jesus Christ is truly God (5:5,10,13) and truly man (4:2)? 2) Moral: Is a person practicing righteousness and, by God’s grace, attempting to keep the commands of God (2:3-4; 2:29)? 3) Social: Does a person show real Christian love for other brothers and sisters in Christ (3:14-15; 4:7-8)?

V. INTRODUCTON TO 1 JOHN 1:1-4

- A. **“That which was from the beginning”** – Christ was always from the beginning because He is the beginning and the ending. Before the material universe came into existence, Christ always was because He is eternal.

Since He is before all creation, He must be uncreated. Since He is uncreated, He must be eternal. Only God is eternal; therefore Christ must be God. This refutes the Gnostics who say that Christ is a created being. Our human minds think in terms of starting points. God is the starting point!

- B. ***“Which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;”*** -- Here John appeals to the physical senses of hearing, sight and touch to prove that Christ had a real body of flesh and bones and was not a phantom as the Docetic heretics claimed.
- C. ***“For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;”*** -- The Word, Jesus Christ, who is eternal life always existed with the Father as the second person of the Trinity, took upon Himself a human body and became a man.
Christ is the God-Man. He is perfect humanity and undiminished deity united in one person forever. He is the unique person of the universe.
- D. ***“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us:”*** -- The word “fellowship means to have in common. All Christians share in or participate in the very life of Jesus Christ.

John wanted his readers to enter into deep fellowship with Christ so as to experience the very life of the resurrected Christ. Life is found only in Jesus Christ because He is eternal life and Christians do participate in this life in an experiential and spiritual way by faith.

- E. ***“And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”***
Fellowship with the Father is found only through Jesus Christ, because he that hath seen the Lord Jesus, whether physically or spiritually has seen the Father.
- F. ***“And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.”*** -- This is not over exuberant joy but the inner joy and excitement of knowing you are: 1) God’s child, 2) having a prayer answered, 3) seeing the Lord use our lives in some small or large way. It is the joy that makes one sing on the inside because he knows his sins are forgiven and that Christ is in his life. It is the joy of knowing that our life is planned out by God and all things are working for good, even in the most difficult circumstances.

VI. CONCLUSION

- A. Jesus Christ is the God-Man and He alone can forgive a person his sins and give him eternal life. Jesus is the only way of salvation; there is no other!

B. You say, “I believe in God. Surely that is enough to take me to heaven.” Not according to the Apostle John who says, ***“No one who denies the Son has the Father, whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.”*** (2:23).