

1 John

1. Koinonia in Christ

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The people who think that themselves as intellectual or physically tough declare that faith in God is nothing more than a feeble dependency to the unknown being or unintelligent thing by weak minded people. They might show their bright minds or macho attitude outside, but when they face their own life and death situation, they, too, seek mercy of this unknown God.

The reason why they reject God is that they don't know Him, they don't have fellowship with Him through His Son Jesus Christ. In other words, they claim to be intelligent, yet they are acting in pure ignorance.

God has put a desire for fellowship with Him in every one of us, a desire He intended to be met with the relationships with other believers in Christ, but most of all, to be met by a relationship with Him.

A. AUTHOR

The Spirit used the Apostle John to give us the Gospel of John, three epistles, and the Book of the Revelation. These three works complement each other and give to us a full picture of the Christian life.

The Gospel of John	The Epistles of John	The Revelation of John
Emphasis on salvation	Emphasis on sanctification	Emphasis on glorification
Past history	Present experience	Future hope
Christ died for us	Christ lives in us	Christ comes for us
The Word made flesh	The Word was made real in us	The Word conquers

Apostle John served as pastor of the church in Ephesus, which was founded by Paul.

B. THE CITY OF EPHESUS

To understand the First Epistle of John we must know something about the city of Ephesus at the beginning of the second century. It was very much like our city or hometown today. There were four important factors which prevailed in Ephesus and throughout the Roman world:

1) There was an easy familiarity with Christianity.

Many of the believers were children and grandchildren of the first Christians.

Christianity had become an old hat. The newness had worn off. They lost their first love for Jesus.

Revelation 2:4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

2) The high standards of Christianity demanded the Christians to be different, and the children and grandchildren of the first Christians did not want to be different.

The Ephesians had become assembly-line Christians with compromise. There was a breakdown of the Judeo-Christian ethics and a disregard of Bible standards.

3) The danger to the Ephesian church was not persecution from the outside but seduction from the inside.

Persecution has never been the real enemy of Christianity. Christianity has never faced the danger of being destroyed by persecution, but the danger of degradation by compromises within.

Matthew 24:24 For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

4) Gnosticism was the real enemy of Christianity, and it still is.

Gnosticism was the basic philosophy of the Roman Empire. Gnosticism took many forms. They declared that matter or material was essentially evil; only the spirit was good. There are two groups within Gnosticism: the Stoics and the Epicureans.

The Stoics were pantheists who held that the wise man should be free from passion, unmoved by joy or grief, and submissive to natural law. They observed rigid rules and self-discipline.

The Epicureans accepted the Greek gods on Mount Olympus. They desired pleasure more than truth of life. They taught their followers to satisfy the body's desires at any cost.

There were all shades and differences between the two extremes of Stoicism and Epicureanism, but all of them denied the messiahship of Jesus.

Don't you feel like we are listening to the description of the twenty first century churches in America?

C. THE PURPOSE OF THE LETTER

1) That we might have fellowship.

1 John 1:3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

"Fellowship" is the key theme of the first two chapters. Fellowship has to do with our communion with Christ, not our union with Christ, which is sonship. Depend on our mindsets, our daily fellowship with Him changes, but our sonship remains the same.

2) That we might have joy.

1 John 1:4 And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

The word "joy" is used only here, but the blessing of joy is seen throughout the entire letter. Joy is the result of a close fellowship with Christ.

3) That we might not sin.

1 John 2:1-2 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

The penalty of sin is taken care of when the sinner trusts Christ, but the power of sin over the daily life is another matter. 1 John explains how we may have victory over sin and how to get forgiveness when we do sin.

4) That we might overcome error.

1 John 2:26 These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you.

John was facing the false teaching of his day just as we face false teachers today.

5) That we might have assurance.

1 John 5:13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

In his Gospel, John tells us how to be saved, but in this epistle, he tells us how to be sure we are saved. The letter is a series of "tests" that Christians may use to examine their fellowship in chapters 1-2 and their sonship from chapter 3-5.

D. THE WORD OF LIFE BEFORE THE BEGINNING

1 John 1:1-2 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life-- 2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us--

If you are familiar with the Bible, you'd notice a similarity in the way of opening with Genesis 1:1, John 1:1 and 1 John 1:1. However, this beginning is not the beginning of creation.

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

It is taking us back to before the beginning in eternity past, to meet the Word of life who became a human for other human to hear, to see, to look upon and to touch.

Apostle John's words have the weight of eyewitness evidence. He did not speak of a myth or a matter of clever story-telling. He carefully studied this eternal One, and he knew whom he spoke about.

It also debunks dangerous teachings of Gnosticism which was that though Jesus was God, He was not actually, physically man, but some kind of pseudo-physical phantom. But John says, "I heard Him! I saw Him! I studied Him! I touched Him!"

E. GOD THE FATHER, GOD THE SON AND GOD THE SPIRIT

1 John 1:3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Apostle John makes no mistake in the identification of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Son of the Father – the Son of God and God Himself.

Jehovah's Witness and many other cults declare that Jesus was a son of God, but not God Himself. But the Jewish Pharisees who lived in the time of Jesus and understood the Old Testament better than those cult people thought differently than them.

John 10:30-33 I and My Father are one." 31 Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. 32 Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?" 33 The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God."

What they are saying is that the Son of God is equal with the God the Father and God Himself.

This leads to a basic Bible doctrine that has puzzled many people – the doctrine of the Trinity. The word “Trinity” is a combination of ‘tri-’, meaning “three,” and unity, meaning “one.” A “trinity,” then, is a three-in-one, or one-in-three. Even though the word “trinity” is not found in the Bible, the truth is taught there. It also is mentioned in Matt. 28:19-20; John 14:16-17, 26; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6.

Of course, some silly cult people will say, “That is in the New Testament only.” Well, I am glad that they are demanding more proofs. Just one more from Genesis to show the existence of Trinity:

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

According to the original language Hebrew, the word “God” is ‘Elohiym’ which is in plural tense. I don’t care what the cults might say, but I’d rather believe what the Bible says.

Christians do not believe that there are three gods. We believe that one God exists in three Persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Nor do Christians believe merely that one God reveals Himself in three different ways, much as one man may be a husband, a father, and a son. No, the Bible teaches that God is one but that He exists in three distinctive Persons.

Deuteronomy 6:4 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!”

They may say, “That is impossible.” I say. “Bingo! That is why He is God, you ain’t.” Trying to explain the Trinity will make you lose your mind. But trying to explain it away will lose your soul.

We can enjoy this fellowship with God even though we do not understand all the intricacies of the trinity. We can use our eyes even though we don’t know every detail of how our vision works. We can know God and believe in Him as He has revealed Himself, even though we can’t understand everything about His person or nature.

The idea of fellowship is one of the most important ideas in this letter of John’s. It is the ancient Greek word ‘koinonia’. It speaks of a living, breathing, sharing, loving relationship with another person.

This simple and bold statement means that one can have a relationship with God. However, there is one catch. It requires a commitment from our parts to Him. God the Son Jesus made the way for us to have a fellowship with Him and the Father in heaven. In turn we have to respond to His call. There is no other way to get to the Father other than through receiving Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

F. YOUR JOY MAY BE FULL

1 John 1:4 And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

Basically, sin is the cause of the unhappiness that overwhelms our world today. Sin promises pleasures but it always produces sorrow and it is temporary. But joy is God’s answer to the emptiness and the hollowness of life. Joy is not something that we manufacture for ourselves, but it is a wonderful by-product of our fellowship with God.

Too many Christians are passive in their loss of joy. We need to realize it is a great loss and do everything we can to draw close to God and reclaim that fullness of joy.

G. APPLICATIONS

- 1) Christianity has never faced the danger of being destroyed by persecution, but the danger of degradation by compromises within.
- 2) Trying to explain the Trinity will make you lose your mind. But trying to explain it away will lose your soul.
- 3) Too many Christians are passive in their loss of joy. We need to realize it is a great loss and do everything we can to draw close to God and reclaim that fullness of joy.