

62. Jesus in 1 John

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Many people who think themselves as intellectually smart or physically tough often 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 off their bright minds or macho attitude outside, but when they face their own life and death situation, they, too, seek mercy from 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 intended to be met with the relationships with other believers in Christ, but most of all, to be met by a relationship with God Himself.

A. THE AUTHOR AND THE TIMELINE

The author of this epistle never identified himself by name, but Christians since the beginning of the church have considered this letter authoritative, believing it was written by John the apostle. That group of witnesses includes Polycarp, an early second-century bishop who as a young man knew John personally. In addition, the author clearly places himself as part of a group of apostolic eyewitnesses to the life and ministry of Jesus, noting that *"what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also."*

The Holy 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

Many biblical scholars believe that the apostle John wrote this letter from Ephesus, which was founded by Paul, where he served as the pastor of the church around AD 90. By then, Peter, Paul, and the other apostles had died at the hands of persecutors. Only John, who was perhaps in his eighties by now, remained as the last living link to the earthly ministry of Jesus.

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. In many aspects, it was very much like our American 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 century Christians. Christianity had become an old hat. The newness had worn off. In other words, 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, but the children and grandchildren of the first Christians did not want to be different from the rest of the world.

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

3) The danger to the Ephesian church was not persecution from the outside, rather seduction of compromise from the inside.

Persecution has never been the real enemy of Christianity. Christianity has never faced the danger of being totally 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. Don't you think we are listening to the description of the twenty first century churches in America?

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

C. THE PURPOSE OF THE LETTER

As he did in his Gospel, John stated with clarity the purpose of his first letter. He proclaimed the Good News about Jesus to the recipients of this 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 one of the key themes 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 in full.

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 deception.

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 of eternal life.

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 IMPORTANCE OF THE LETTER

The parallelisms in 1 John are striking for their simplicity: Christ vs. antichrists, light vs. darkness, truth vs. falsehood, righteousness vs. sin, love of the Father vs. love of the world, and the Spirit of God vs. the spirit of the Antichrist. While this is not a complete list, it reveals a letter that presents the world in an uncomplicated way – there is right and there is wrong, period.

To experience true fellowship with the Lord, the apostle John focused on three issues: the zeal of the believers; standing firm against false teachers; and reassuring the Christians that they have eternal life.

John wrote to churches full of people who had struggled with discouragement – whether due to their own sinful failures or the presence of false teachers in their midst. The aging apostle hoped to ignite the zeal of these believers so that they might follow the Lord more closely and stand firm against those who meant to sow discord among the churches. In doing so, they would solidify their relationship with God and gain confidence in His work in their lives.

E. THE STRUCTURE OF THE TWO MAIN THEMES

I agree with Bible commentator Zane Hodges for 1 John being notoriously difficult to outline. But eventually we can divide this Book into two themes of God: “God is Light (1:5-2:27)” and “God is Love (2:28-5:21)”.

1) God is Light

• Living in the Light – 1:5-2:11

To live in the light, we must first reject 3 false claims about our condition before the Lord:

- a. We can fellowship with God and still live in sin. That’s a demonic nonsense.
- b. We’re not sinners by nature.
- c. We have not sinned.

• Staying in the Light – 2:12-27

a. The apostle warns us not to love the world, because loving the world steals our affection from our God.

1 John 2:15-16 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the

world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

b. The apostle John warns us about false teachers. He calls them “antichrists,” who, like the Antichrist, claim to teach the truth, but actually deceive people. Their true color appears when they deny that Jesus is the Messiah and God Himself.

2) God is Love

- Practicing the righteousness and love of God – 2:28-3:23

Out of His great love for us, God has called us to be His children, and one day, He will transform us completely into the likeness of His Son. Until then, we are to grow in likeness, maturing in righteousness and shunning sin.

As children of the God who is love, the greatest way we resemble our Father is by loving His children. Expressing God’s love to others confirms that we are His and our God pours confidence into our faith.

- Testing the spirits – 3:24-4:6

Whether it’s cult members at our door or preachers on TV with heresies, if they deny that Jesus Christ came in the flesh and He is God, they are not from God. We don’t need to fear them, because greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world.

- Loving as God loves – 4:7-21

Everything God does, He does in love because He is love. The climactic demonstration of His love came when He sent His only begotten Son to die for us on the cross. Thus, loving God and loving others is a package deal for all the born-again Christians must do.

- Believing in Jesus – 5:1-21

The essential doctrine of Christianity is that Jesus is the Christ. The evidence of our faith is our love for others, love for God, and obedience to God’s commands. The outcome of faith is the victory over the world and the confirmation of our faith is the testimony of the Holy Spirit in our life.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Christianity has never faced the danger of being destroyed by persecution, but the danger of seduction 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.