

1 John Chapter 1:1-10

INTRODUCTION

In the latter part of the first century, as the Christian faith was spreading rapidly through out the entire known world, there was another growing movement, a cancer that started from within the heart of Christian churches and began to eat away at the churches in Asia Minor.

This cancerous doctrine threatened to undermine the very core of what all Christians had been taught in regards to salvation, the deity of Jesus, and the practicality of Christian living. This deadly heresy was an early form of Gnosticism and the proponents of this teaching were winning many converts from amongst the believers in Asia. These false teachers claimed that Jesus was not God in the flesh, they claimed that all flesh was evil therefore God could not have put on human flesh. This completely and utterly destroys the finished work of the Cross, because without the God-Man who died for the sins of all who believe, we are all utterly and hopelessly lost. The Gnostics taught that since the body was evil, and therefore no good, all the sins committed in the body did not matter, absolute indulgence in immorality was completely permissible!

These false teachers were winning many members of the church in Asia , and this left the Christians who remained discouraged, and many also began to question if what they had been taught about Christ was the truth, or if what the Gnostics taught was the truth. The easy- going way of life taught by the Gnostics caught the fancy of some members of the Church who felt that the standards which Christianity demanded were becoming a burden and they were tired of making the effort. The church was being ripped apart from within by these false teachers who claimed to be enlightened Christians. The only kind of person who could adequately address these heretics was an Apostle who walked with the Lord, and had been an eyewitness to all He did, and all He said.

The epistle of 1 John was written to refute these heresies, and an attempt to reassure those who were faithfully remaining as believers in Christ that _

all they had been taught was indeed the truth, and that their faithfulness to the truth was evidence of their possession of eternal life. In his epistle, John covers several major theological topics and doctrines including; the deity and incarnation of the Son of God, the tests of genuine, authentic saving faith, and an emphasis on obedience to Christ.

Over the next series of studies we will take a further look, by putting each verse under the microscope of expository study. We will see how relevant John's letter is to today's church, which is also under fire by false teachers claiming to walk in the faith. The church today bears a very similar resemblance to the churches of Asia, with many falling to heresies, and all sorts of teachings that completely undermine the core of Christianity, and leave those who are faithful shaken. My prayer is that these articles will help Christians to grow in their faith, and also to encourage fellow believers to stand strong against false teachings, to defend the faith, and to be assured of their salvation.

In a nutshell, the letters of John addresses issues concerning:

- The false teachers (1John 2:19; 4:1)
- The Denial of Jesus' Messiahship (1 John 2:22)
- The Denial of the Incarnation (1 John 4: 2-3)
- The Idea of God (1;5; 2:22; 4:15; 5:1,5)

Questions for discussions

- Who are the Gnostics and what are their core teachings?
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- Are there traces of Gnostic beliefs today? Give Examples
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Read 1 John 1

- What are John's aims (in the first 4 verses) for writing the letter?

Why does John emphasize the way he experienced the “Word” (vv1-4)? What does that reveal about Jesus? About John? About his audience?

John begins his first letter with a lengthy introduction in which he assures the readers that what he is going to tell them about, he saw, heard with his own ears, and even touched. He wants them to understand that his message is grounded in reality, a reality he himself was witness to. In this introduction, which comprises the first four verses, John gives two reasons why he is passing on this good news to them. In verse 3 he says that it is "so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." So the purpose of this letter is relational. The sharing of this truth brings about fellowship, participation with one another and with the triune God Himself. I find it so easy to impersonalize truth so that its endpoint is merely to increase my store of knowledge, but John here is saying that truth leads to changed relationships, to new fellowship in Christ. Secondly John says in v. 4 that "we are writing this that our joy may be complete." Joy comes as we can share in and fellowship in this truth with others--having others enjoy the sunset with us!

VV 5-10

- What does John mean by the statement “God is Light”?
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- What three erroneous views (about God, sin, forgiveness) is he exposing by this assertion and by the if/then clauses (1:6,8,10) which follow?
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- What does John mean by God is Light and in Him there is no darkness at all?

I found this verse fascinating. After building his readers through the introduction to trust what his message is, John tells them succinctly what the main point he wants to make. And it is that God is light...

- Now why is this the best news John has for his readers. Why should this be the first thing he wants them to hear?

Now consider how John talks about sin and darkness here. Now he continues with this darkness idea in v. 6 by saying that we cannot fellowship, have an intimate relationship with God when we are walking in darkness.

- So what does it mean for us to walk in the light? Does it mean to be sinless? How does v.8 explain verse 6?

John says in v.8 that we are deceiving ourselves when we claim we have no sin. And this seems to be following directly on his thought in v.6 about walking in the darkness. I think that John is saying that darkness involves deceit, being deceived about yourself and others. And what are we deceived about? About who we are, and where our source of life and identity truly lie. We say we are fellowshiping with God, but we are not receiving His light into our lives.

- What does John say about this sin?

What may seem ironic is, that the way to step into the light is to admit we are in darkness, that we sin. God in other words, is not expecting me to be perfectly trusting of Him on my own, or to be perfect independent of Him (as if that were even possible!) And what does John say about this sin? That when we confess it, God is faithful and just and will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So John turns his readers back to the wonderful character of God and expands their understanding of what it means that He is light. God is faithful, just, forgiving, and cleansing. Apparently then, it is not our job to make ourselves righteous. We participate in God's making us righteous by turning over to him all the junk His light continues to reveal to us.