

LESSON EIGHT

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

TEXT: I John Chapters 1 & 2.

A. THE APOSTLE JOHN:

The Apostle John wrote five books of the New Testament: The gospel of John, three epistles and the Revelation.

He was the son of Zebedee and his mother was Salome, apparently a sister of Mary the mother of Jesus. He was a partner in a fishing business that employed hired servants (Mark 1:16-20). He had been a follower of John the Baptist but became one of the first five disciples of our Lord. He was one of the three disciples of the inner circle and the one closest to Jesus. Five times he is spoken of as the disciple "whom Jesus loved."

John made Jerusalem his headquarters, caring for Mary, the mother of Jesus, until her death. After the destruction of Jerusalem he lived at Ephesus. Here he lived to a great age and was the last apostle to die. Among his pupils were Polycarp, Papias and Ignatius.

John is known as the "apostle of love," but he was also a stern man who was intolerant of heresy. He was known to be great in his love for the brethren but strong in his condemnation of heresy.

B. THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN:

This epistle was written about 90 AD from Ephesus. The author is not named, but there certainly is strong evidence that the author was the Apostle John. In this epistle, John took a strong stand against the error of Gnosticism.

In the letter itself he stated the reason for his writing:

1. That the child of God might have fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ and with one another (I John 1:3).
2. That the child of God might have the fullness of joy (I John 1:4).
3. That he might not sin (I John 2:1).
4. That he might recognize the grounds of his assurance of eternal life (I John 5:13).

C. THE HERESY OF GNOSTICISM:

Morality in Ephesus was very low. The temple of Diana was a cesspool of sin in the name of religion. It is not surprising that with this low state of morality there should arise a heresy that would try to invade the church.

Gnosticism was a philosophy that attacked the truth of the incarnation. It taught that Jesus was either a Theophany who was not human at all or he was the natural son of Joseph and Mary upon whom Christ came at his baptism. They taught that all matter was evil which resulted in the two extremes: asceticism and antinomianism.

John answered these errors by emphasizing the incarnation and the power of the example of Christ's life.

D. CHAPTER ONE:

1. INTRODUCTION: (I John 1:1-3).

John introduces his epistle with a strong statement affirming the truth of the incarnation. He states this with a declaration of personal experience.

He declares:

1. He had heard Christ;
2. He had seen Christ;
3. He had gazed upon Christ;
4. He had touched Christ.

The epistle is introduced with a statement similar to that of the opening statement of John's gospel. In the gospel, John called Christ the Logos, the Living Word. Here in his epistle, he spoke of Christ as being the Word of Life. In the conclusion of this epistle, John wrote concerning Jesus Christ: *"This is the true God, and eternal life" (I John 5:20).*

Eternal life has neither beginning nor ending. Therefore this life was with the Father, but in the incarnation this life was made visible. John saw it and bore testimony to it. *"The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).*

John declared his personal experience of seeing and hearing Christ so that all may share in the blessing of also seeing and hearing the Word of Life, Jesus Christ.

John's purpose in writing the epistle was that they might experience fullness of joy. There is no joy greater than the joy of knowing the Lord. As a person experiences fellowship with Jesus Christ and receives eternal life, his joy becomes full.

2. GOD IS LIGHT:

Two things John declared that God is—Light and Love. *"God is light" (I John 1:4).* *"God is love" (I John 4:8).*

This truth reveals God's purity and holiness. It speaks of God's absolute, perfect holiness. In Him there is not even a shadow of darkness.

Darkness is a symbol of sin, ignorance and error. In God there is not even a shadow of sin or error. Sin and error are revealed in the presence of God. Flaws and stains, which are not seen in the shade, are revealed in the light. As the Christian draws nigh to God, all imperfections are clearly revealed.

3. FELLOWSHIP: (I John 1:6-7).

Fellowship is a sharing of that which is common to all. There is no fellowship without this sharing. For this reason, there is no fellowship between light and darkness, truth and error, life and death.

For this reason, anyone that would claim that he is sharing in the life of Christ and still living a life of sin and darkness, he is lying. His very life is a lie. Only as we walk in the

light, as Jesus is in the light that we are able to share a common life. As we walk in the light, we are cleansed from every sin by the blood of Jesus Christ. Anything less than this is not true fellowship.

4. **CONFESSION OF SIN:** (I John 1:8-10).

Four times in this epistle John accused the false teachers of being liars. God has said that all have sinned. If we deny this, we are only deceiving ourselves and making God a liar. In this case, the truth and His Word are not in us. It is only through heart searching and confession that the joy of forgiveness and the blessing of cleansing can be experienced.

The student should be careful to note that this is not referring to a willful abiding in open sin. If we are born of God, we shall be delivered from a life of bondage. However, being human, there are many imperfections, which will be revealed by the light. If we confess these, there will be cleansing and forgiveness. To experience this forgiveness, confession is absolutely essential.

E. CHAPTER TWO:

1. **JESUS, OUR ADVOCATE:** (I John 2:1-2).

An advocate is one called to the aid of another. It is a judicial term and used only in the writings of John (I John 4:10). In the gospel of John, the word is translated "comforter" (John 14:16).

Having shown the assurance of the forgiveness, John warned against having a light view of sin. He admonished his readers to sin not. Yet if any man sin, there is a righteous advocate to plead his cause. It is a single act of sin, not an abiding in sin, which is referred to here. Jesus is righteous and this given Him the right to plead the cause of the child of God who fails.

Propitiation is satisfaction. Jesus Christ, through His death on Calvary, was able to satisfy the justice of God for all men. While His advocacy is for believers only, propitiation is for all men.

2. **KNOWING GOD:** (I John 2:3-6).

There is a true test that will prove whether or not we know God. It is that we keep his commands and live as Christ himself lived. If a man says, "I know Him" and disobeys His commands, he is a liar and a stranger to the truth.

3. **THE OLD AND NEW COMMANDMENT:** (I John 2:7-8).

John stated that he was not writing a new commandment for it has been here from the start. Yet it becomes new as they obey the commandment to love one another. The darkness in their lives disappears and Christ's light shines in.

4. **LIGHT AND DARKNESS:** (I John 2:9-11).

John emphasized the connection between love and hatred with light and darkness. If we love our brother, we are walking in light and there is nothing in us to cause us to stumble.

However, if we hate our brother, we do not know where we are going because darkness has blinded us.

5. EXHORTATION TO ALL: (I John 2:12-14).

The term "little children" is applied to the entire church. The believers are divided between fathers and young men, those of maturity and experience and youth with their strength and vitality. The reason of addressing them separately is given:

- a. Fathers - Because you have known Christ who is from the beginning.
- b. Young Men - Because you have overcome Satan and because you are strong and the Word of God abideth in you.

6. LOVE NOT THE WORLD: (I John 2:15-17).

The "world" (kosmos) is that system which acts as a rival of God. God loves the world of men (John 3:16), but we are not to love the system which opposes God. Friendship with the world is enmity with God (James 4:4).

No man can serve two masters. The world is the same as darkness, therefore God, who is light, is excluded. John gave two reasons for not loving the world: a) The things of the world are not of the Father, and b) The things of the world pass away.

John named three things which constitute the things of the world: a) Lust of the flesh; b) Lust of the eyes; and c) Pride of life.

This trinity of evil desire is evident both in the temptation of Eve in the garden and Christ in the wilderness. It is clear that: a) One cannot love God and the world at the same time; and b) Eternal life is evident in doing the will of God.

7. THE ANTICHRIST:

The word "antichrist" only appears in John's epistles. It is identified with the man of sin (II Thessalonians 2) and the beast (Revelation 13). John uses the word as applying to all those false teachers who deny that Jesus is the Christ. They at one time belonged outwardly to the church but they left. This separation proved their false profession. However, the true Christians have an unction or anointing, which permit them to discern between the true and the false.

One statement should be especially noted here in verse 23. A person who doesn't believe in Christ cannot have God the Father, but he who has Christ has God the Father also.

8. ABIDING IN CHRIST: (I John 2:24-29).

Emphasis is placed upon the necessity of remaining steadfast (abiding) in Christ. One can prove whether or not he is abiding in Christ by whether he is living righteously (II John 2:29). The unction (anointing) will teach them all truth, which is to abide in Christ.

LESSON EIGHT

SELF HELP TEST

A. Name the FIVE books of the New Testament which John wrote.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

B. Define the philosophy of Gnosticism.

C. Name TWO things that John declared God is.

1. _____
2. _____

D. Explain the meaning of fellowship.

E. Why cannot a sinner have fellowship with God.

F. Name the THREE things which constitute the things of the world.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

G. What is a true test of whether or not one knows God?