

02. The Epistle of 1 John—1:2-4

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As we said last time, the theme of John's first epistle is **love**—the love of God as demonstrated to and thru His people.

To John, God's love was the chief characteristic that distinguished those who were truly born-again and children of God—from those who were phony Christians and children of the devil.

Those who claimed to know Jesus but hated other Christians (Gentiles hating Jews or Jews hating Gentiles)—John said were deceiving themselves:

1 John 3:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love *his* brother abides in death.

As we said last week, John starts out this epistle by coming against a heretical teaching that had made inroads into the church back then—a heresy known as Gnosticism.

The word 'Gnostic' comes from the Greek word 'gnōsis' which means 'knowledge' (mystical knowledge).

The Gnostics believed that *matter* (contained in the physical universe) was evil and therefore Jesus (as God) couldn't have been a flesh and blood human being because His physical body would have made Him *evil* and God is not evil—therefore, Jesus couldn't have come 'in the flesh'.

So most Gnostics claimed He must have come as a *spirit* and not as a physical *man* (a denial of His humanity). This doctrine (a part of Gnosticism) was called, *Docetism* which claimed that Jesus had no actual human body. He only *seemed* to have one (He was really a phantom).

That's why the apostle John opened his first epistle with the words—

1 John 1:1 (NKJV)

¹ 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--**

In saying this, he was coming against Gnostic heresy which taught that Jesus didn't have a physical body.

Other Gnostics believed that since Jesus *was* a physical man (too much evidence to deny that truth) and that since the physical was evil and God cannot be evil—they concluded that Jesus couldn't have been *God* in the flesh (a denial of His divinity).

And that's why John went on to mention Jesus' divinity in verse 2—

1 John 1:2 (NKJV)

² **the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life [speaking of the Word, Jesus Christ] which was with the Father and was manifested to us--**

And that's why Paul said—

Colossians 2:8-9 (NKJV)

⁸ Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,

And so, the New Testament states clearly that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man—or what the theologians have come to call the 'hypostatic union'.

One author—

"Jesus has two complete natures: one fully human and one fully divine. What the doctrine of the hypostatic union teaches is that these two natures are united in one person in the God-man. Jesus is not two persons. He is one person. The hypostatic union is the joining (mysterious though it be) of the divine and the human in the one person of Jesus."

As I said, Gnosticism had made its way into the church—primarily because it taught that if Christians practiced it (meditated a certain way or chanted the right way)—then all the secret treasures of hidden spiritual wisdom and knowledge would be unlocked to them.

And that would allow them to *know* Jesus (and the entire Trinity) in a deeper way than others who didn't get into Gnostic doctrine and practices—to which Paul went on to declare:

Colossians 2:9-10 (NKJV)

⁹ For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; ¹⁰ **and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.**

Paul is saying, *"You don't need all this esoteric, Gnostic nonsense to know God, for in Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily—and you are one with Christ and therefore complete in Him!"* (Needing nothing else in the way of supernatural knowledge)

There were other heresies floating around the early church that the writers of the New Testament came against—one of these was called *Cerinthianism*.

The founder of this doctrine, a man by the name of Cerinthus, had been an elder in the Church of Ephesus. Cerinthus taught that because the physical was evil (he bought into Gnostic teaching) that Jesus was only the Christ from his baptism in the Jordan by John the Baptist until his crucifixion.

That when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan, the "Christ anointing" (the spirit of the christ) came upon Him—but that Jesus Himself was not the Christ. This **"Christ anointing"** remained upon Him from His baptism thru the three and a half years of His earthly ministry and then left Him just prior to His crucifixion.

That sounds like Eastern mysticism (which it is because Satan is behind it)—and so that was another heresy John is dealing with.

But, as I said earlier, Gnosticism was the major heresy in the first century, which had made significant inroads into the church—the foundational teaching being that matter (the physical) was evil.

This led to two philosophical schools of thought—

- The first said that since the physical body was evil it had to be punished constantly (starved, flagellated, and denied basic hygiene).
- The other group said, *“Since only the spirit of man is important—the physical can be indulged with sex, food and other excesses—because it’s irrelevant. It doesn’t matter what you do to it—so indulge it with every form of debauchery because only the spirit of man matters.”*

So, you had false teachers going around teaching Christians that they could do whatever they wanted to do—live in sexual sin, get drunk etc. because none of that really mattered since only the spirit of man was important—so go ahead and give the flesh whatever it wants!

These teachings made their way into the church and were greatly influencing how many Christians were living their lives. And that’s why so many times in this epistle, John challenges believers to keep the commandments of God as a way of demonstrating their love for Him. Not to mention showing their love for their fellow Christians by being good examples in the area of morality and holiness.

Now, many commentators have said that this epistle almost ‘defies’ any attempts to outline it.

They say that it is so jam-packed with various themes and exhortations that any attempt to outline it would be like laying one ‘strand’ of truth upon another and then another until you’d wind up with something resembling a plate of doctrinal ‘spaghetti’!—so, don’t even go there.

However, I think John may have helped us with that because, he seems to have built his epistle around ‘4 reasons’ for writing’ this letter (might I call it a ‘love letter’ to the people of God).

Four times in this epistle John says, **“These things I write to you...”** or **“These things I have written to you...”**—

1. **“That your joy may be full” (1:4)**
2. **“That you may not sin” (2:1)**
3. **“That you be not deceived” (2:26)**
4. **“That you may know you have eternal life” (5:13)**

John wrote his Gospel so that people might be saved (20:30-31)—and he wrote his first epistle so that they, who have received Jesus as their Savior, might *know* (have the assurance) they are saved.

Now, John’s Epistle is *universal* in that it’s not addressed to a person, group or church—he wrote it for the Body of Christ in general and not to anyone in particular.

You will notice how similar the language is in 1John as compared with the gospel of John—and that’s one of the main reasons’ scholars believe the same man wrote both.

John opens his first Epistle with the words, **“That which was from the beginning...”**

As I said in our last study:

“This was John’s way of presenting the eternality of Jesus Christ.”

John also opened his Gospel with this truth that Jesus Christ never had a beginning (was not a created being) but has always existed as the **“Word”**— God Almighty, Second Person of the Trinity:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1)

1 John 1:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ That which was from the beginning...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--

The word **manifested** is the Greek word *phanerao* and means *“to cause to become visible, to make appear, to cause to be seen.”*

It reminds us of what Paul said about Jesus in Colossians 1:15, *“He is the image of the invisible God”*.

The Greek word translated **image**, was used of an image made by *impression*—as when Caesar’s image was stamped on a coin. Paul is telling us that God the Father “stamped” His image on human flesh in the Person of Jesus Christ.

This allowed man to see what God is like—God is Spirit and is therefore *invisible* but through the incarnation the invisible God became a visible flesh and blood man.

John 1:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him* [made Him known].

John 14:9 (NKJV)

⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

Author Warren Wiersbe—

“God has revealed Himself in creation (Rom. 1:20), but creation alone could never tell us the story of God’s love. God has also revealed Himself much more fully in His Word, the Bible. But God’s final and most complete revelation is in His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus said, ‘He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father’ (John 14:9).”

And so, Paul declared here in Colossians 1:15, that Jesus is *“the image of the invisible God”* or in other words—He is the perfect manifestation of the Father in human form.

But John goes on to tell us *why* Jesus (God) was manifested among us (apart from revealing what the invisible God was like)—using the same Greek word for **manifested** in verse 2, he uses again in chapter 3:5—

1 John 3:5 (NKJV)

⁵ And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin [affirming Christ’s deity].

We’ll have a lot to say about this when we get to Chapter 2.

1 John 1:2 (NKJV)

² the life [Jesus Christ] 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--

The word **witness** comes from the Greek word *martus*.

A “witness” is someone who gives testimony in a trial of what they have seen or heard.

Those who were eye witnesses of the risen Christ went around proclaiming what they had seen and heard—often to their own peril:

Acts 4:18-21 (NKJV)

¹⁸ And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. ²⁰ For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." ²¹ So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done.

Acts 5:29-32 (NKJV)

²⁹ But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men. ³⁰ The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. ³¹ Him God has exalted to His right hand *to be* Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him."

Eventually, the persecution against Christians who went around testifying (we would say today, ‘who went around witnessing’) to others of the resurrection of Jesus Christ escalated and the Roman government began to kill them for their testimony.

So much so that the very word *martus* (witness) became synonymous with dying for the faith—which is where the word martyr came from.

However, what the devil intended for evil (to stamp out the Christian church)—God used for good.

As the ancient Christian writer Tertullian said, *“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”*

1 John 1:3 (NKJV)

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.**

The word ‘**fellowship**’ is a very important word in the New Testament—and especially in 1 John.

The Greek word for ‘**fellowship**’ is *koinonia* and simply means “to have in common.”

The word speaks of—

- *"a sharing, a communion*
- *a common bond and common life.*
- *It speaks of a living, breathing, sharing, and loving relationship with another person."*

The use of the word in Acts 2:44-45 is very helpful—*"Now all who believed were together and had all things in common [koinonia], and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need."*

What we Christians have in common, the thing that really binds us together and makes us one—is our relationship with God thru the new birth. When we receive Jesus and are saved—we become “*partakers of the divine nature*” (2 Peter 1:4).

The term translated “*partakers*” in Peter’s Epistle is from the same Greek root that is translated “**fellowship**” in 1 John 1:3 and speaks of our oneness with Him.

Our fellowship with God is both ‘**positional**’ and ‘**practical**’ fellowship.

We enter into **positional fellowship** (oneness) with Him at the moment of salvation—that fellowship can never be broken because it is eternal and unconditional.

However, **practical fellowship** with the LORD can be broken through sin and can only be restored through confession and repentance.

Isaiah 59:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. ² But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden *His* face from you, So that He will not hear.

1 John 1:9 (NKJV)

⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

This fellowship with God allows us to have fellowship with other Christians—who are all bound together as one in the Body of Christ.

Think of Jesus’ own disciples for a minute—and see how these men became one with each other by following Jesus—men who were very different and difficult to get along with.

One pastor put it this way—

“Look at the men Jesus chose to start the most important religious movement in the history of mankind: A man who was impulsive and unstable (Peter); a couple of hot heads (John and James); a skeptic (Nathaniel); a doubter (Thomas); a traitor/extortioner (Matthew); a political rabble-rouser/assassin (Simon the Zealot)—I mean come on! How do you get such a diverse group of men to love each other, have unity with each other and work together? How? By saving them, filling them with the Holy Spirit and making them a part of one Body—the Body of Christ—that’s how!”

Our fellowship (unity) as believers with each other is very important to the LORD—

John 17:11, 13, 20-23 (NKJV)

¹¹ Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as *We are*...

¹³ But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves...²⁰ "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word;

²¹ that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²² And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as *We are one*: ²³ I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

Our fellowship with God is a vital, living connection that allows us to be partakers of His divine nature—to literally be one with Him:

1 Corinthians 6:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*.

Ephesians 5:30-32 (NKJV)

³⁰ For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. ³¹ *"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."* ³² This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

This connection with Him (communion/oneness) allows the life of God to flow into and thru our lives in the Person of the Holy Spirit.

As the Holy Spirit flows through us—the fruit of the Spirit begins to grow in us and from us—

John 15:5 (NKJV)

⁵ I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

Galatians 5:22-23a (NKJV)

²² ...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control....

1 John 1:3-4 (NKJV)

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.** ⁴ **And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.**

John is telling us that our fellowship with God and other Christians produces wonderful fruit in our lives—the first one he lists is, fullness of joy!

John 15:7-13, 17 (NKJV)

⁷ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. ⁸ By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. ⁹ "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. ¹⁰ If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full. ¹² This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends...¹⁷ These things I command you, that you love one another.