

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN THE APOSTLE

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Background Information:

Called one of the “Catholic” or “General” Epistles, since it was not written specifically for a congregation or individual (cf. Pauline Epistles).

John would have personally known the members of the audience since he uses affectionate terms (“dear children,” “dear friends”).

Many feel that it was written from Ephesus and was probably first sent to the churches of Asia Minor (cf. Revelation 1:4,11)

Four reasons for the writing of letter:

1. to add to their joy (1:4)
2. to keep them from sin (2:1)
3. to warn about false teachers (2:26)
4. to strengthen faith in Christ, assure them of eternal life (5:13)

Central theme: **God is life, light and love**

May have been written to battle an early form of *gnosticism*. Gnosticism (from the Greek word “gnosis”=“to know [intimate knowledge, or to know by experience]”) taught that one needed to attain a certain knowledge about God before one could be saved. Jesus was merely an example from whom we learn this *gnosis*.

CHAPTER ONE

The Person and Office of Christ

A. John's qualifications to address his audience (1-4)

v. 1--That which was from the beginning (John 1:1-18; Revelation 1:1,8)

Which we have seen:

We have seen with our eyes:

Which we have looked upon:

Our hands have handled:

The Word of life:

v. 2--What Biblical concept does this convey?

v. 3--What does it mean to John to know Christ?

B. The message John will present (5-7)

GOD IS LIGHT (John 1:5-9; 3:1-21; 9:1-5,35-41)

Give the contrasts in our daily lives between darkness and light:

DARKNESS	LIGHT

What brings us into light?

Readings for the Eighth Sunday after Trinity:

Jeremiah 15:19-21

Romans 8:12-17

Matthew 7:15-23

How do these passages support John's claim in vv. 5-7?

C. Acknowledgment of Imperfection (8-10)

v. 8--How do we often fall into the trap that this verse warns against?

v. 9--Explain how we confess our sins:

What does this confession also bear with the Holy Spirit's help?

v. 10--How do we make God a liar?

What are the various forms that this offense takes?

Verses 8 and 9 are part of the confession and absolution of sins in the WELS Pastor's Agenda. What comfort these words bring us! The Gnostics taught that secret incantations and a mystical knowledge of God were necessary in order to be saved. But St. John reminds us that the mission of Jesus Christ was to die as the one and only payment for our sins. The blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin. This forgiveness then compels us to renew our lives with the help of the Holy Spirit. St. John reassures us that we have the light! Live without fear as children of the light, redeemed and forgiven in the blood of Christ.

CHAPTER TWO

Christ's Sacrifice for our Sins And its Influence on Us

A. Our advocate and propitiation (1-2)

Propitiation (from "propitiate--to cause to become favorably inclined; win or regain the good will of; appease or conciliate.")

v. 1—"that you will not sin"--What is John here saying?

"if any man sin, we have an Advocate...". How is this verse a comfort in our daily life?

v. 2—"Propitiation for our sins": Explain how this was carried out:

"not only our sins, but the sins of the whole world" (John 3:16)--Discuss the lessons for us in this verse:

B. Keeping Christ's Commandments (3-6)

How do we know Christ?

How will that knowledge be displayed?

How do we at times deserve the title "liar"?

v. 5--How is the love of God made complete?

v. 6--How do we walk as Jesus walked?

How do these verses reflect Matthew 7:15-23?

C. Abiding in the Light (7-11)

v. 7—"no new commandment unto you"--You have heard it your entire Christian life!

v. 8--Why does John now speak of a "new commandment"?

"Darkness is passing, true light is shining"

What does this say about our conversion?

What does this say about our Christian life?

v. 9--cf. Matthew 5:21-26; Matthew 23

John here speaks about the SPIRIT of the Law as opposed to the LETTER of the Law.

Explain the difference.

How do we still stumble in the darkness today?

D. An appeal to young and old (12-14)

Two sets of *triads*

children-fathers-young men

The intimate relationship between John and his readers can be seen in these verses. John reminds the various groups of their stations in life. He repeats the encouragement to reinforce in his readers their status as redeemed children of God.

E. Warning against the love of the world (15-17)

In what sense is the word "world" used here (as opposed to John 3:16)?

"The world will pass away"--Give some examples of when this happened:

What will ultimately happen?

F. Warning against Antichrists

The term “anti-Christ”--literally “one who takes the place of the Anointed One.” The Greek meaning of “anti” differs from the Latin meaning. (cf. Book of Concord.)

Marks of the Anti-Christ:

Types of Anti-Christ:

Why should we recognize, mark and avoid these antichrists (v. 24ff)?

What does John want his readers to be certain of?

G. Children of God (28-29)

What gives us the confidence to stand unashamed before God?

CHAPTER THREE

Children of God love each other

A. Children of God

What are we called?

To what do we owe this honor?

What sense is the word “world” here used?

What does verse 2 tell us about our life here on earth?

What is the hope expressed in verse 3?

Describe this hope:

Verses 4-6: Does this teach justification or sanctification?

Do verses 7-10 talk about sins of weakness or intentional sins?

B. Love one another

The Greek language has three words for “love” that we find in the New Testament. The three are **PHILEO, ERAO and AGAPAO**. The meanings of the three words are:

PHILEO: brotherly love; love expressed because of a bond (filial, parental, spousal, etc.)

ERAO: Romantic love, has come to be associated with eroticism. Usage popular to the Greek cults which had prostitution and fulfillment in life as prime goals.

AGAPAO: A love of self-giving. One need not have a bond with someone in order to display this love. Someone who rescues another from danger displays AGAPAO. Is placed in apposition to ERAO (which in its extreme form of eroticism is a “self-taking” “love”).

John here uses AGAPAO. Why?

cf.: John 3:16
John 13:34,35
John 15:9-17

Recount the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-13)

What is John’s commentary (by the power of the Holy Spirit) on the incidents in this account:

Why does the world hate us?
John 1:10-13

John 3:19-20
John 15:18-16:4
Matthew 10

Verse 15: Distinguish between the “letter of the Law” and the “spirit of the Law.”

How does John define “love” in verse 16?

How does that love manifest itself?

Verse 18: **Creeds With Deeds**

Verses 19 and 20 acknowledge the “*opinio legis*” (opinion, or judgment, of the Law). Our hearts condemn us because the knowledge of the Law which resides in our hearts. Our consciences can err--what is *adiaphora* can make us guilt-ridden. We may feel that we have fallen short of perfection--we have--but through the Gospel message we are comforted with the knowledge that God is greater than the Law.

Explain how God is greater than the Law:

Verses 21-24 at first glance may seem work-righteous. But what are the “commands” and what lies behind these commands?

How does verse 24 tell us that John does not speak of work-righteousness here?

James 2:14-26: The relationship between faith and works...

CHAPTER FOUR

Test the Spirits: God is Love

A. Test the spirits

How does verse one pick up on chapter 2?

How do we test these spirits?

Explain “spirit of antichrist:”

When will the antichrist come? Explain.

Verse 4: How can we overcome false spirits?

Verse 5: What is the domain of false spirits?

Explain verse 6

For Discussion

Many today say that “all churches believe the same thing anyway.” Analyze.

There are also many who say “all people worship the same God, just in different forms.” Analyze.

B. God’s love and our love

God is Love (vss. 8,15)

Verse 9: How is God’s love demonstrated:

Verse 10: How is God’s love defined:

The comfort verses 9 and 10 gives to all:

The comfort in the words “God is love”:

Verses 13-16a: How does God’s love work in us and through us:

What do we have because of love in verse 17?

How does love drive out fear?

What is the “fear” here discussed?

How does God’s love drive out fear?

Who took the initiative in love (v. 19)?

What is the practical message in verse 20?

For Discussion

How does 3:11-4:21 follow a progression of thought? Discuss John's progression here.

CHAPTER FIVE

Remain in the faith

A. Faith in the Son of God

The title “Christ:” What it is and what it means--

“Born of God”--Explain.

Explain how verses 2-4 do not speak of an open tolerance of all lifestyles and beliefs.

Verse 5--Do we overcome the world because we believe?

“Came by water and blood”--Jesus received the seal of approval from the Father at his baptism and Passion (Resurrection).

How does the Spirit testify? (John 15:26-27)

What are the Spirit, water and blood?

Discussion of verses 7 & 8 on textual matters--King James has “Father, Son & Holy Spirit.” Very obviously an addition as only four Greek manuscripts have this phrase (and these versions were influenced by the Latin). Erasmus leaves it out of an early edition of his Greek text, but vows to replace it if anyone could come with a Greek manuscript that contained it. One was brought forward, but Erasmus and many others were leery of its authenticity (even though Erasmus did include it in the next edition which he published). If that phrase were part of the original, no doubt these verses would have been cited during the Trinitarian controversies of the first four centuries.

If we accept the testimony of men, then why should we accept God’s testimony even more?

How is God’s testimony often ignored?

Verse 10: How do we make God a liar?

1 John 1:10

John 6:44-47

John 8:54-59

What is the testimony of the three (v. 11)?

Is there any place for Universalism in verse 12?

B. Conclusion

Verse 13: John's purpose for writing:

Verse 14: The assurance we have: (John 14:13-14)

Verses 16-17: What is John distinguishing here in regard to sin?

What is the "sin that leads to death?"

How do our prayers keep one from sinning?

What purpose do our prayers serve for the one who is sinning?

Enumerate the comforts John expresses in verses 18-20:

Verse 21: What is John's implication?