

ST ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH
SARASOTA, FLORIDA

COME, JOIN THE CONVERSATION!
ON
THE EPISTLES OF JOHN

Lesson Plan for Thursdays – February 6 & 13, 2014

Conversations #1 & #2 – “*An attempt to more fully understand
John and his (ancient) world*”

Our objectives for this session:

- to share personal ideas, attitudes, and experiences relating to The Johannine Epistles; and, in doing so, strengthen our SAKLC fellowship;
- to understand these books as important theological statements of the early NT church;
- to illustrate the heresies about Christ which came from within the church;
- to show the relevancy and value of these books for 21st century Christians.

AN OPENING PRAYER

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN and THE PERSON OF ITS AUTHOR

FACILITATOR’S OPENING STATEMENT: For the purpose of this introductory session, it is assumed (*with 70% certainty*) that a single author, the Apostle John, is responsible for the Epistles/Letters of John (I, II & III); plus, the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation. Ancient and modern scholars have conducted exhaustive studies; some of these studies have suggested that another John – one identified as “*The Elder*” or “*Presbyter*” – actually wrote II & III John and Revelation. Scholarship on this point remains inconclusive. The suggestion that the Apostle John probably wrote the entire body of material usually attributed to him is heavily influenced by the historical testimony provided by some of the earliest “*church fathers*.”

I - AUTHORSHIP:

- a) The First Letter of John is clearly anonymous.
- b) Second and Third John are written by an author who identifies himself as “*The Elder.*”
- c) External evidence:
 - allusions to I John are found in writings of I Clement (95-97 AD) – an apocryphal book - written to Christians at Corinth
 - further references in the Didache – a late 1st century type of “catechism”
 - Papias of Hieropolis (mid-2nd century AD) references John’s authorship; also
 - Irenaeus (Bishop of Gaul; 130-200 AD)
 - Tertullian (Bishop of Carthage in Roman Province of Africa 160-225 AD)
 - Origen of Alexandria (died c. 255 AD)
 - The Muratorian Canon (Rome 170 & 215 AD) attributes letters to John’s authorship
 - Eusebius (Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine; 325 AD) lists I John as an “acknowledged book” of Scripture
- d) Internal evidence for single authorship by the Apostle, John
 - style of writing in all these documents, as evidenced in the Greek text, points to single authorship
 - same author wrote Gospel of John
 - author claims to be an eye-witness to events of Jesus’ life
 - author writes with a self-conscious authority (*as might an apostle!*)
- e) Conclusions about I John:
 - although anonymous and not in typical letter format (*as per the epistles of St. Paul*), it is clear that this is not just a theological treatise written for a general audience, but a very personal document
 - the author knows his readers; many references to them as “*dear/little children*” “*beloved*” “*dear friends*”
 - some scholars have suggested that I John, in distinction to II & III John, is more like a *sermon* or *tract* designed to instruct believers in the Johannine churches and help them refute the teachings of the adversaries.

II – THE MINISTRY OF THE APOSTLE JOHN

- a) Called - along with his brother, James - by Jesus; whom Jesus nicknamed “Sons of Thunder”; father was Zebedee, a local fisherman
MARK 3 - ¹⁷ ***James and John, Zebedee’s sons, whom he nicknamed Boanerges, which means “sons of Thunder”***

- b) his mother likely was Salome, who may have been Jesus' mother's sister
MATTHEW 27 - ⁵⁶ ***Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.***
JOHN 19 - ²⁵ ***Jesus' mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene stood near the cross.***
MARK 15- ⁴⁰ ***Some women were watching from a distance, including Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James (the younger one) and Joses, and Salome.***
- c) John, therefore, may have been Jesus' cousin
- d) an "unschooled, ordinary" man
ACTS 4 - ¹³ ***The council was caught by surprise by the confidence with which Peter and John spoke. After all, they understood that these apostles were uneducated and inexperienced. They also recognized that they had been followers of Jesus.***
- e) when called as a disciple, he immediately followed Jesus
MARK 1 - ¹⁹ ***After going a little farther, he saw James and John, Zebedee's sons, in their boat repairing the fishing nets. ²⁰ At that very moment he called them. They followed him, leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired workers.***
- f) During Jesus' ministry, John isn't usually mentioned alone by name, but most often with his brother, James, or with Peter. He was one of Jesus' inner circle – Peter, James & John – and thus was present at the transfiguration, at the raising of Jairus' daughter, and in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- g) Early in his discipleship, John seems to have struggled with pride; Jesus rebukes him (sometimes his brother, too) for:
- seeking to sit on his right/left in the Kingdom (MARK 10:35-40) ³⁵ ***James and John, Zebedee's sons, came to Jesus and said, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask." ³⁶ "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. ³⁷ They said, "Allow one of us to sit on your right and the other on your left when you enter your glory." ³⁸ Jesus replied, "You don't know what you're asking! Can you drink the cup I drink or receive the baptism I receive?" ³⁹ "We can," they answered. Jesus said, "You will drink the cup I drink and receive the baptism I receive, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left hand isn't mine to give. It belongs to those for whom it has been prepared."***

- trying to stop a man who is casting out demons in Jesus' name (LUKE 9:49-50)
⁴⁹ John replied, "Master, we saw someone throwing demons out in your name, and we tried to stop him because he isn't in our group of followers."⁵⁰ But Jesus replied, "Don't stop him, because whoever isn't against you is for you."
 - wanting to call down fire upon a Samaritan village that didn't welcome Jesus (LUKE 9:51-56)
⁵¹ As the time approached when Jesus was to be taken up into heaven, he determined to go to Jerusalem. ⁵² He sent messengers on ahead of him. Along the way, they entered a Samaritan village to prepare for his arrival, ⁵³ but the Samaritan villagers refused to welcome him because he was determined to go to Jerusalem. ⁵⁴ When the disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to consume them?" ⁵⁵ But Jesus turned and spoke sternly to them, ⁵⁶ and they went on to another village.
 - John's brother James was the first martyr among the apostles (ACTS 12:2) ***He had James, John's brother, killed with a sword.***
- h) If John, the Apostle, is the author of the Gospel of John, et al., then he is *"the disciple whom Jesus loved,"* a disciple particularly close to Jesus.
- he leaned on Jesus' breast at the Last Supper (JOHN 13:23)
³ One of the disciples, the one whom Jesus loved, was at Jesus' side
 - he was appointed to care for Jesus' mother at the foot of the cross (JOHN 19:26-27)
²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son."²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that time on, this disciple took her into his home.
 - he recognized Jesus at the miraculous catch of fish (JOHN 21:7)
⁷ Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It's the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard it was the Lord, he wrapped his coat around himself (for he was naked) and jumped into the water.
 - he may also have been the "other disciple" who knew the high priest (JOHN 18:15-16)
¹⁵ Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Because this other disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard. ¹⁶ However, Peter stood outside near the gate. Then the other disciple (the one known to the high priest) came out and spoke to the woman stationed at the gate, and she brought Peter in."

- he may also have been the one who ran with Peter to the empty tomb (JOHN 20:3-9) ³ *Peter and the other disciple left to go to the tomb. ⁴They were running together, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and was the first to arrive at the tomb. ⁵Bending down to take a look, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he didn't go in. ⁶Following him, Simon Peter entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. ⁷He also saw the face cloth that had been on Jesus' head. It wasn't with the other clothes but was folded up in its own place. ⁸Then the other disciple, the one who arrived at the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹They didn't yet understand the scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead.*
- i) In the life of the early church, John is associated with Peter –
- in healing the lame man at the temple (ACTS 3:1-10)
 - in appearing before the Sanhedrin for bold teachings about Jesus and the resurrection (ACTS 4)
 - he was arrested, released by an angel, later flogged with the other apostles (ACTS 5:18-41)
 - he is mentioned by St. Paul as a “pillar” of the Jerusalem church (GALATIANS 2:9) ⁹ *James, Cephas, and John, who are considered to be key leaders, shook hands with me and Barnabas as equals when they recognized the grace that was given to me. So it was agreed that we would go to the Gentiles, while they continue to go to the people who were circumcised.*
- j) Early church historians are agreed on fact that John lived and ministered in Asia Minor
- toward the end of his life. He was exiled to Island of Patmos (REVELATION 1:9) ⁹ *I, John, your brother who shares with you in the hardship, kingdom, and endurance that we have in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and my witness about Jesus*
 - John was on Patmos during a period of Roman persecution, but returned to Ephesus after the assassination of Emperor Domitian in 96 AD.
- k) John is believed to have died after 98 AD. His tomb is thought to be located at Selcuk, a small town 2 miles northeast of Ephesus. He is thought to be the only disciple of the original twelve who died of natural causes, as alluded to at the end of John's Gospel. (JOHN 21:20-24) ²⁰ *Peter turned around and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them. This was the one who had leaned against Jesus at the meal and asked him, "Lord, who is going to betray you?" ²¹When Peter saw this disciple, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" ²²Jesus replied, "If I want him to remain until I come, what difference does that make to you? You must follow me." ²³Therefore, the word spread among the brothers and sisters that this disciple wouldn't die. However, Jesus didn't say he wouldn't die, but only, "If I want him to remain until I come, what difference*

does that make to you?" 24 This is the disciple who testifies concerning these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

III – THE INTENDED AUDIENCE: (*To whom was I John written?*)

- a) John's recipients are probably not Palestinian Jews, but rather converted Diaspora Jews living in Ephesus, and gentiles who had been converted from the polytheism that was rampant at the time in Asia Minor.
- b) If you believe that the author of I John is the same as the author of Revelation, then you may find it instructive to consult a map of the churches that are addressed in Revelation 2/3: ***Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia*** and ***Laodicea***. They constitute communities grouped around Ephesus, capital of the Roman province of Asia. It is highly probable that these churches constituted a "circuit" to which John regularly travelled and in which he taught.
- c) The Christian population in Ephesus during the 1st century AD, was significant. In St. Paul's time (*c. 40 years prior*) Christians were so significant that the silversmiths tried to run Paul out of town for hurting their idol-making business.
- d) For teaching purposes, Paul had temporarily secured the use of a lecture hall in Ephesus; seemingly, an indication of a significant number of Christians. (ACTS 19:9) *"Some people had closed their minds, though. They refused to believe and publicly slandered the Way. As a result, Paul left them, took the disciples with him, and continued his daily interactions in Tyrannus' lecture hall."*
- e) Evidence points to the fact that in John's time, Christians met in each other's homes – a whole network of *house-churches* that, together, constituted the Church in Ephesus. These churches were probably led/supervised by elders. Some scholars refer to these as the Johannine community (*those that recognized John's authority and adhered to his apostolic teaching*).
 - I John may have been written to guide these house-churches in and around Ephesus.
- f) Even though I John is addressed to "dear friends" in Christ, those who heard it must not have been "thrilled" by its message!
 - intent was to stop heretical teachings about Christology
 - to strengthen in practical ways the faith of readers/hearers
 - to promote more faithful discipleship in the name of Jesus Christ (*serious ethical problems existed within the church & society*).

IV – **THEOLOGICAL ERRORS IN “CHRISTOLOGY”** - (the study of the nature of Jesus Christ)

a) John’s opponents – (affirm “the idea of Christ” but doubt that Christ became human flesh, and if the man called Jesus was really the incarnation of God.)

- deny “that Jesus is the Christ” (1 JOHN 2:22) ***Who is the liar? Isn't it the person who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This person is the antichrist: the one who denies the Father and the Son.***
- deny Jesus Christ as coming “in the flesh” (2 JOHN 7) ***Many deceivers have gone into the world who do not confess that Jesus Christ came as a human being. This kind of person is the deceiver and the antichrist.***

b) The correct Christology - John affirms the following: (in opposition to the heresies cited above)

- ***“JESUS IS THE CHRIST” (5:1; 2:22) 1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born from God. Whoever loves someone who is a parent loves the child born to the parent; 22 Who is the liar? Isn't it the person who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This person is the antichrist: the one who denies the Father and the Son.***
- We are to ***“BELIEVE IN THE NAME OF HIS SON, JESUS CHRIST” (3:23) This is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love each other as he commanded us.***
- ***“ETERNAL LIFE . . IS IN [GOD’S] SON ...” (5:11) And this is the testimony: God gave eternal life to us, and this life is in his Son***
- ***“THE BLOOD OF JESUS . . HIS SON . .” (1:7) But if we live in the light in the same way as he is in the light, we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from every sin.***
- ***“THE SON OF GOD” (3:8) The person who practices sin belongs to the devil, because the devil has been sinning since the beginning. God's Son appeared for this purpose: to destroy the works of the devil.***
- ***“HIS SON, JESUS CHRIST” (3:23) This is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love each other as he commanded us***
- ***“JESUS CHRIST HAS COME IN THE FLESH” (4:2) This is how you know if a spirit comes from God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come as a human is from God,***
- ***“HIS ONE AND ONLY SON” (4:9) This is how the love of God is revealed to us: God has sent his only Son into the world so that we can live through him***

- **“JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD” (4:15)** *If any of us confess that Jesus is God's Son, God remains in us and we remain in God.*
- **“THIS IS THE ONE WHO CAME BY WATER AND BLOOD – JESUS CHRIST” (5:6)** *This is the one who came by water and blood: Jesus Christ. Not by water only but by water and blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.*

V. **DUALISM and DOCETISM** (“Docetism” from Greek verb ‘*dokein*’ “seem, appear”)

- a) Docetists were strongly influenced by an element of Greek philosophy, which teaches a “dualism” of being ...
- **flesh** is bad
 - **spirit** is good
- b) Using this logic, someone who was “*in the flesh*” could **not** be divine
- c) Since Christ was considered divine, then he only “*seemed*” or “*appeared*” to be in a human body
- d) This heresy struck at the foundations of Christian faith and doctrine - - *to wit.....*
- **THE ATONEMENT** – *John’s opponents asserted that the divine Christ could not have died on the cross; he only appeared to be in a physical body; the divine Christ could not have borne human sin either; so he only appeared to die for our sins.*
 - **THE RESURRECTION** – *John’s opponents taught that the Easter event was not a true physical resurrection; it was only spiritual; therefore, our physical bodies won’t rise from the dead either.*
 - **HOLY LIVING** – *John’s opponents taught that since Jesus “only appeared” to live a holy life in a physical body; but, this can’t be the case since flesh is inherently sinful. Therefore, God does not expect us to live a holy (ethical) life in our physical bodies; Jesus is not our example of holy living . . . so you can pursue all of the passions and pleasures of the world!*

VI. **CERINTHUS** – John’s #1 Opponent

- a) In the writings of the ancient church father, **Irenaeus**, Cerinthus is identified as one who taught that:
- Jesus was an earthly man from Nazareth, well-known for his wisdom and piety
 - Christ was a heavenly deity who descended upon Jesus at his baptism and left him before his crucifixion

- Thus, the man Jesus, not the Son of God, died on the Cross.
 - **Adoptionism** – Cerinthus was the earliest proponent of this heresy which taught that Jesus was born a human and became divine later in his life. This stands in opposition to our belief that Jesus is eternally God.
- b) **Polycarp** – another ancient church father (c. 69 – 155 AD), Bishop of Smyrna and a contemporary of John provides an insight into the contempt in which Cerinthus was held:
- “John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming – ‘*Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within.*’”
- c) Danger is perceived about this heresy. John describes his opponents as:
- False Prophets (4:1)
 - Deceivers (2 John 7)
 - Antichrists (2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7)

DISCUSSION BREAK:

At the present time there seems to be a troublesome tendency among theological liberals to distinguish between the historical Jesus, who is viewed as being totally human, and the Christ figure that is given almost mythical proportions. This ‘new’ depiction of Christ effectively removes him from the *messiness* of death on the cross to atone for sin; it also explains away the unbelievable quality (*in their minds*) of our physical resurrection from the dead, by saying that the Easter event did not really occur.

What evidences have you encountered where the term “Christ” is being substituted for the term “Jesus?”

How has the rise of “feminism” in the modern church, and the push to using non-gender specific language, de-emphasized Jesus’ title as Son of God? Ladies: Is this an “*unfair*” question for your “*male*” facilitator to ask? What is your viewpoint?

VII. **ETHICAL ISSUES AMONG JOHN’S OPPONENTS:** In addition to the errors of “Christology” explored above, there also appears to have been a ‘falling away’ from Christ’s commands and ethical teachings, because people saw themselves as sinless. In their view, ethical behavior was of no consequence for the Christian.

- a) These ethical accusations that are made by John:
- They “claim to be without sin” (1:8) ***If we claim, “We don’t have any sin,” we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.***

- They “have not sinned” (1:10) ***If we claim, "We have never sinned," we make him a liar and his word is not in us.***
- They “claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness” (1:6) ***If we claim, "We have fellowship with him," and live in the darkness, we are lying and do not act truthfully***
- They say “I know him, but do not do what he commands” (2:4) ***The one who claims, "I know him," while not keeping his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in this person***

b) John’s ethical assertions:

- ***1 John 3:6 – Every person who remains in relationship to him does not sin. Any person who sins has not seen him or known him.***
- ***1 John 3:7-8 - Little children, make sure no one deceives you. The person who practices righteousness is righteous, in the same way that Jesus is righteous. 8 The person who practices sin belongs to the devil, because the devil has been sinning since the beginning. God's Son appeared for this purpose: to destroy the works of the devil.***
- ***1 John 2:6 - The one who claims to remain in him ought to live in the same way as he lived.***
- ***1 John 2:15-16 - Don't love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in them. 16 Everything that is in the world—the craving for whatever the body feels, the craving for whatever the eyes see and the arrogant pride in one's possessions—is not of the Father but is of the world.***
- **Facilitator’s Summary Statement – John is here addressing a heresy that does not take obedience to Jesus seriously! The persons being addressed no longer view disobedience to Jesus’ teaching in terms of sin.**

c) **Love**, as a hallmark of the Christian Church, is no longer being practiced. Instead, there are those who hate members of the orthodox church.

- ***1 John 2:9 - The one who claims to be in the light while hating a brother or sister is in the darkness even now***
- ***1 John 4:20 If anyone says, I love God, and hates a brother or sister, he is a liar, because the person who doesn't love a brother or sister who can be seen can't love God, who can't be seen.***

- **I John 3:14 We know that we have transferred from death to life, because we love the brothers and sisters. The person who does not love remains in death**

VIII – **THEMES IN FIRST JOHN** (*The Epistles of John should not be thought of as being written only for the purpose of attacking heresy. Primarily, they were written to encourage and strengthen believers and urge them to practice a healthy spiritual life.*) Some of the themes of I John that we will study, either alone or in combination with one another, are listed below: (*also, consult the course outline!*)

Fellowship with God
Righteousness
Forgiveness and cleansing
Obedience
Love
Overcoming
Relation to the world
Antichrist
Holy Spirit
Denying/acknowledging Jesus' incarnation
The devil
Spiritual birth
Eternal life vs. eternal death
Fear vs. assurance
Remaining/abiding
Prayer

IX – **PICTORIAL PRESENTATION ON ANCIENT EPHESUS and PATMOS** (*reserved for 2-13-2014, plus any further discussion necessary to complete this lesson plan.*)

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