

ST ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH
SARASOTA, FLORIDA

COME, JOIN THE CONVERSATION!
ON
THE EPISTLES OF JOHN

Lesson Plan for Thursday – February 20, 2014

Conversations #3 – “*The Joy of Fellowship*”

I JOHN 1:1 – 2:2

Our objectives for this session:

- to share ideas, attitudes, and experiences relating to the message proclaimed by John; and, in doing so, strengthen our SAKLC fellowship;
- to introduce a relatively ‘new’ aide in biblical interpretation – THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE (1987)
- to make some comparisons showing similarities of thought and expression in John’s Gospel and I John;
- to more completely comprehend and understand God’s character using John’s concept: “GOD IS LIGHT;”
- to examine some ancient Greek words used in biblical texts, and thereby comprehend more completely John’s understanding about the “Personhood of Jesus Christ.”

AN OPENING PASTORAL PRAYER -

FACILITATOR’S OPENING STATEMENT: “*The Joy of Fellowship*” with God, experienced in the context of the early church to which John was addressing his message, was severely threatened by heresies. Those responsible for false teachings claimed to have a ‘superior’ knowledge of Jesus Christ and an ‘enlightened’ morality. They believed that human flesh and blood, as part of the physical world – the world of creation – was wrong. Only ‘Spirit’ was good. Therefore, they held to a position that the Son of God could not have become a *full* human being, because that would have meant that he was joining himself to evil. These heretics taught that Jesus Christ only appeared to be a human being; he took the form of a man, but was in reality a phantom. This form of heresy, as briefly touched upon in an earlier session, has been called DOCETISM.

These same false teachers further taught that ‘salvation’ was intended only as an escape from the present evil and material world. This meant that they were not concerned with purity and wholeness of life for the human body, since that body was inherently evil. So, immorality was

permissible. They concluded that living a holy life in the present body had nothing to do with salvation.

It was to meet this false teaching that John insisted on the reality of the humanity of Jesus Christ. The apostles, John being one of them, were eye-witnesses to this fact. They had lived with Jesus. They knew him to be fully human. The Son of God had wholly and completely entered into our human condition, living as a man amongst other men. He lived a perfect human life and died a human death. Through the Son of God, who became man, Christians have fellowship with God.

John's message is that this fellowship must be reflected in love for God and love for one another. Those who are united to God must keep the commandments of Christ. John emphasized that God is both light and love; he is pure, holy love. His character is to be the basis for the character of all Christians. They are to be pure, loving people!

A) I JOHN 1:1-4 – A PROLOGUE:

*We write to you about the Word of life, which has existed from the very beginning. We have heard it, and we have seen it with our eyes; yes, we have **seen** it, and our hands have touched it. ² When this life became visible, we saw it; so we speak of it and tell you about the eternal life which was with the Father and was made known to us. ³ What we have seen and heard we announce to you also, so that you will join with us in the fellowship that we have with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ We write this in order that our (your) joy may be complete.* GOOD NEWS TRANSLATION

ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ Α΄ 1:1-4 - Ὁ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ὃ ἀκηκόαμεν, ὃ ἐώρακαμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν, ὃ **ἐθεασάμεθα** καὶ αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν, περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς— ² καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη, καὶ ἐώρακαμεν καὶ μαρτυροῦμεν καὶ ἀπαγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον ἣτις ἦν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα καὶ ἐφανερώθη ἡμῖν— ³ ὃ ἐώρακαμεν καὶ ἀκηκόαμεν ἀπαγγέλλομεν ^[a] καὶ ὑμῖν, ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς κοινωνίαν ἔχητε μεθ' ἡμῶν· καὶ ἡ κοινωνία δὲ ἡ ἡμετέρα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ· ⁴ καὶ ταῦτα γράφομεν ^[b] ἡμεῖς ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ἡμῶν ἢ πεπληρωμένη. GREEK NEW TESTAMENT

Compare the versions which are above to that which is below. The AMPLIFIED VERSION provides some alternative meanings and a further expansion on the original Greek text; this can sometimes help to clarify the message that the author intended to convey!

I JOHN 1:1-4 - *[WE ARE WRITING] about the Word of Life [IN] Him Who existed from the beginning, Whom we have heard, Whom we have seen with our [OWN] eyes, Whom we have **gazed** upon [FOR OURSELVES] and have touched with our [OWN] hands. ² And the Life [AN ASPECT OF HIS BEING] was revealed (MADE MANIFEST, DEMONSTRATED), and we saw [AS EYEWITNESSES] and are testifying to and declare to you the Life, the eternal Life [IN HIM] Who already existed with the Father and Who [ACTUALLY] was made visible (WAS REVEALED) to us [HIS FOLLOWERS]. ³ What we have seen and [OURSELVES] heard, we are also telling you, so*

that you too may realize and enjoy fellowship as partners and partakers with us. And [THIS] fellowship that we have [WHICH IS A DISTINGUISHING MARK OF CHRISTIANS] is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (THE MESSIAH).⁴ And we are now writing these things to you so that our joy [IN SEEING YOU INCLUDED] may be full [AND YOUR JOY MAY BE COMPLETE].

Facilitator's Comment: To gain insight into John's teaching, compare that which is above with the opening of John's Gospel. Clearly, John wants his readers to enjoy the same fellowship with God the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Spirit, in which he and other apostles receive joy!

John 1:1-18:

In the beginning the Word already existed; the Word was with God, and the Word was God.² From the very beginning the Word was with God.³ Through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him.⁴ The Word was the source of life, and this life brought light to people.⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out.⁶ God sent his messenger, a man named John,⁷ who came to tell people about the light, so that all should hear the message and believe.⁸ He himself was not the light; he came to tell about the light.⁹ This was the real light—the light that comes into the world and shines on all people.¹⁰ The Word was in the world, and though God made the world through him, yet the world did not recognize him.¹¹ He came to his own country, but his own people did not receive him.¹² Some, however, did receive him and believed in him; so he gave them the right to become God's children.¹³ They did not become God's children by natural means, that is, by being born as the children of a human father; God himself was their Father.¹⁴ The Word became a human being and, full of grace and truth, lived among us. We saw his glory, the glory which he received as the Father's only Son.¹⁵ John spoke about him. He cried out, "This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'He comes after me, but he is greater than I am, because he existed before I was born.'" ¹⁶ Out of the fullness of his grace he has blessed us all, giving us one blessing after another.¹⁷ God gave the Law through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. The only Son, who is the same as God and is at the Father's side, he has made him known. GOOD NEWS TRANSLATION

POINTS FOR OUR DISCUSSION:

1. What is the overriding 'aim' stated in the Prologue of I John that motivates the Apostle? (hint-see vs.3)
2. What wish, for the people, does John express? (vs. 4)
3. By what 'right' does John speak? (heard, seen, gazed, touched)
4. The expressions "THE WORD OF LIFE" and "ETERNAL LIFE" in the prologue refer to Jesus Christ. What important aspects of Jesus do these phrases convey to us?

5. Notice that in the Amplified translation of I John 1:1 the word “gazed” is properly used.
- In Greek, the verb for “to see,” as with physical sight = **HORAN**
 - In Greek, the verb for “to gaze,” = **THEASTHAI**, means to take a long look at someone or something; that is, until the meaning and/or significance of that person or thing is really perceived.

What is the difference between “seeing Christ” and “gazing” upon him?

B) I JOHN 1:5 – “GOD’S CHARACTER”

Now the message that we have heard from his Son and announce is this: God is light, and there is no darkness at all in him. GOOD NEWS TRANSLATION

And this is the message [THE MESSAGE OF PROMISE] which we have heard from Him and now are reporting to you: God is Light, and there is no darkness in Him at all [NO, NOT IN ANY WAY]. AMPLIFIED BIBLE

Facilitator’s Comment: For the theme of ‘light’ elsewhere in the Holy Bible, read Genesis 1:3; Psalm 27:1; Psalm 104:2; John 1:4, 9; 8:12; 12:35 ff.

- “God is Light”** - - - what it tells us about Him:
 - “**Light**” is the Great Revealer
 - total purity
 - self-revealing
 - implies absolute holiness
 - One who provides unquestioned guidance
 - other attributes?
- “no darkness in Him at all”**
 - darkness is hostile to light
 - darkness stands for a life without Christ
 - darkness implies an ignorance of life apart from Christ
 - darkness stands for chaos of life without God
 - darkness stands for immorality in the life of some Christians
 - darkness is connected with lovelessness and hate

Facilitator’s Comment: St. Paul used similarly vivid imagery in his preaching and writings (see Romans 13:12 – ***“The night is nearly over, day is almost here. Let us stop doing the things that belong to the dark, and let us take up weapons for fighting in the light.”***)

POINT OF DISCUSSION – Unlike John’s 1st century world, persons living in the 21st century have an abundance of light – both natural and artificial. Does the image of God as “Light” reduce the divine being in these modern times to the ordinary level, or is this terminology still meaningful in our highly technological society?

C) **I JOHN 1:6 – 10 “Three False Claims”** (Notice that each of these is introduced by the words “*If we say...*”) John’s answer to each false claim made by erring church members is clear, and should be carefully noted:

Vss. 6,7 - *If, then, we say that we have fellowship with him, yet at the same time live in the darkness, we are lying both in our words and in our actions.* ⁷ But if we live in the light—just as he is in the light—then we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin.

John insists that to have fellowship with the God who is light, a person must walk in the light, *and that if that person is still walking in the moral and ethical darkness of the Christless life, that person can no longer have fellowship with God.* **Leviticus 19:2 “Say to the whole community of the Israelites: You must be holy, because I, the LORD your God, am holy.”**

1. The Church (*the new Israel*) is a community, which, believing in a God of pure goodness, accepts the obligation to be good like that God; Christians will never think that sin does not matter.
2. John insists that the mistaken thinkers have the wrong idea of truth.
3. Truth is never only intellectual truth; it is something that embraces the whole personality.
4. Truth is not only thinking; it is acting.
5. Truth is at the basis of fellowship and that which destroys fellowship cannot be true.
6. In vs. 7, the word καθαρίζει or “purifies” can be read translated differently: i.e. “...**and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from every sin.**” (CEB)
 - a) the word in Greek for “**to cleanse**” is KATHARIZEIN
 - b) originally, it was a ritual word, describing the ceremonial washings which qualified an individual to approach the gods
 - c) however, over time, the word developed a moral sense to describe the ‘goodness’ enabling someone to enter into the presence of God
 - d) your facilitator believes John to be saying: “*if you really know what the sacrifice of Christ has done ... if you are experiencing its power ... you will be adding holiness to your life and will be becoming more capable of entering God’s presence.*”
 - e) thus, the sacrifice of Christ not only atones for sin, but is something which equips us for greater holiness in life!
 - f) Conclusion: true Christianity results in fellowship with God, and fellowship within the church; it is impossible to have one without the other!

Vs. 8 - *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us.*

This is John’s further description and condemnation of a mistaken idea.

1. it may describe a person who believes that she/he has no responsibility for sin – it is characteristic for us commonly to blame other persons and/or things (*heredity, environment, etc.*) and not ourselves for sin
2. it may describe the person who claims that sin has no personal effect upon him/her – one who claims that one can engage in ‘sinful actions’ and emerge without tarnish!

3. John's insistence is that making defenses, providing excuses, attempts at self-justification are all irrelevant
4. The only thing that will meet the situation head-on is humble confession to God, and if required, to our fellow human beings!

Vs. 10 - *If we say that we have not sinned, we make a liar out of God, and his word is not in us.*

Finally, John condemns the person who says that he/she in actual fact has not sinned.

1. that attitude from the 1st century, is not so uncommon in our 21st century
2. there are those in our society who deeply resent being labeled "sinners"
3. they think of sin as the kind of thing which everyone sees, does, and is acceptable
4. care to provide your own examples?

D) I JOHN 2:1-2: JOHN'S PASTORAL CONCERN - *I am writing this to you, my children, so that you will not sin; but if anyone does sin, we have someone who pleads with the Father on our behalf—Jesus Christ, the righteous one. ² And Christ himself is the means by which our sins are forgiven, and not our sins only, but also the sins of everyone.* GOOD NEWS TRANSLATION

Τεκνία μου, ταῦτα γράφω ὑμῖν ἵνα μὴ ἀμάρτητε. καὶ ἐάν τις ἀμάρτη, **παράκλητον** ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον, ² καὶ αὐτὸς **ἱλασμός** ἐστὶν περὶ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, οὐ περὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων δὲ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου.

My little children, I'm writing these things to you so that you don't sin. But if you do sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one. ² He is God's way of dealing with our sins, not only ours but the sins of the whole world. COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ² and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. NEW KING JAMES VERSION

1. Note the variations of this text from several translations
2. Then, note the special affection (*even tenderness*) in the apostle's speech
3. John says 2 things about sin:
 - a. just above [vs. 8] he concluded that Sin is universal; no person escapes from it; all humanity is involved
 - b. but, there is forgiveness of sins through what Jesus Christ has done

4. Considering statement #3, directly above, there could be sufficient impetus to conclude “Why worry about sin?” ... “Does sin really matter?” ... “Sins will be forgiven, regardless...”
5. Christians are persons who have come to know God; the inevitable accompaniment of knowledge must be obedience; so, as John sees it – knowing and obeying are twin parts of the same total experience!

FACILITATOR’S SUMMATION: John has an overriding concern to stress that Christianity is an ethical religion; but, so often, humans are ethical failures. Confronted with God’s demands, we humans admit to them; accept them; then, fail to keep them! So, a barrier is erected between us and God. How can humans, henceforth, come into God’s presence? The problem is solved in Jesus Christ and John uses 2 words to describe this situation

E) JESUS = (THE) PARACLETE

1. In Greek, the word is “PARAKLETOS” (see its use marked in ‘red’ in text above).
2. A word frequently used in the Gospel of John and elsewhere meaning “to comfort”
 - a. Genesis 37:35 - **All of his sons and daughters got up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted, telling them, “I’ll go to my grave mourning for my son.” And Joseph’s father wept for him.**
 - b. Isaiah 61:2 – (the prophets function is...) **to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and a day of indication for our God, to comfort all who mourn**
 - c. Matthew 5:4 - **Happy are those who mourn; God will comfort them!**
3. But, the most common and frequent use of the word PARAKLETOS, especially in non-biblical Greek, is “to call someone to one’s side in order to use that person in some way as a helper or counsellor.”
4. In early Christianity, the word came to be used to describe one who pled the case of those Christians, who for reasons of faith, were about to be fed to lions!
5. Use of the term in this textual context is to convey the idea of Jesus as being the ongoing friend, the advocate, the defender of humans.
6. To those promoting the heresy that Jesus – the man – was forever dead, John’s message is that Jesus lives and still bears his concern for all human beings!

F) JESUS = (THE) PROPITIATION

1. In Greek, the word is “HILASMOS” – (also, marked in ‘red’ in Greek text above)
2. comes from the practice of ‘sacrifice’
3. purpose of Jewish sacrifice was to maintain a ‘right relationship’ or maintain ‘fellowship’ with Jehovah. (think of the Temple offerings regularly made every am & pm)
4. The Greek verb “HILASKESTHAI,” derived from “HILASMOS,” has 3 meanings:
 - a. “to placate” or “to pacify” someone who has been injured or offended or insulted, and especially to placate a god.
 - b. However, if the subject of this verb is GOD, then the verb means “to forgive” – meaning that God Himself provides the means whereby the lost relationship (with humans) is restored

- c. The verb can mean “*to perform some deed, some ritual,*” by which the guilt is removed – [somewhat allied to meaning in #a]
- 5. When John writes that Jesus is the HILASMOS for our sins, your Facilitator thinks that he is bringing all of these different meanings into one!
- 6. JESUS IS THE PERSON –
 - a. through whom guilt for the past and present is removed
 - b. through his action on the Cross, the penalty of eternal death is removed
 - c. who brings us forgiveness for the sins we have committed
 - d. who clothes us with a new purity that takes away all defilement
- 7. JESUS IS THE ONE – through whom our fellowship with God is first restored, and then maintained!
 - a. intended not only for us – but for the whole world! (*remember John 3:16!*)

SOME FINAL QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION and CONVERSATION:

- 1. Why was it necessary for the Son of God to be united with a complete and full humanity? Do we minimize His humanity in our devotion to him?
- 2. How does a person come to have fellowship with God, and how is this fellowship deepened and reflected in his life?

FOR OUR NEXT CONVERSATION: “LOVE and OBEDIENCE”

read: I John 2:3-17

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