

Mount Pisgah A.M.E. Church

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Bible Study, Wednesday, May 25, 2016

Survey of the Bible

Lesson 64: 1 John

The Book of 1 John

The book of 1 John is a general epistle – written to a broad audience of believers throughout a region. Like 2 Peter, the book has a dual focus: It is written to (a) Encourage believers to hold onto and walk in the doctrine that the apostles have been teaching, and (b) refute the multiplicity of new and false teachings that threaten to undermine their understanding and weaken their walks with Christ. Like Ephesians and Hebrews, 1 John is written from the perspective that false beliefs lead to bad behaviors.

Author

The author of the book is almost broadly accepted as John, the son of Zebedee. He is the apostle John who also wrote the gospel of John and the book of Revelation. Some have suggested that there was one named “John the Elder” or “John the Presbyter” who is to be distinct from John the apostle and could have written it, however there is limited evidence to support this position.

The Times and context of 1 John

In Acts 8:14, John is associated with “the apostles that were at Jerusalem,” and Paul calls him one of the “pillars” of the Jerusalem church. However in 70 AD, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans and after that John left Jerusalem and ministered in Asia Minor, around Ephesus, until the time of his death. The churches named in Revelation 2 and 3 are all churches in Asia Minor (including Ephesus). It is likely that John wrote this letter from Ephesus to the churches in Asia Minor, sometime during his latter years (possibly in the late 80’s or early 90’s, AD). His use of “beloved” and “dear children” betrays an intimate, long standing relationship with them.

The believers in the congregations John was writing to were well established in the Christian faith, and John wrote to them not as novices but as those who were well grounded in historic Christian teaching. It appears that their faith was being tested by the appeals of the world and the introduction of new ideas. One such idea was the Gnostic heresy, which taught that spirit was inherently good, and matter was inherently evil. Therefore the idea of an incarnation was impossible. It also taught that there was “hidden knowledge” (*gnosis*) that was only revealed to some, and those that had it became sort of a “spiritual elite” who were above any sort of blame or reproach and could get away with anything. Many people were being seduced by such beliefs.

Overview

John writes this letter to believers to help them to understand the basis of fellowship and communion with Christ, what that says about behavior, and the assurance that it provides for the believer. John shares that the bases of fellowship in the family of God is are three understandings – God is light (and is thus inconsistent with darkness or the behaviors that characterize it), God is love (and thus those that love God must walk in genuine, self-giving and practical love), and God is life (and those who fellowship with God must possess new life by being born of God through Jesus Christ).

Outline

- I. Fellowship with God Who Is Light (1:1-2:27)**
 - A. The message of the incarnation (1:1-1:4)
 - B. Walking in the Light (1:5-1:7)
 - C. Cleansing from Sin (1:8-2:2)
 - D. Tests for fellowship with God (2:3-2:14)
 1. Obedience as a condition of fellowship (2:3-2:8)
 2. Sincere love as a condition of fellowship (2:9-2:14)
 - E. Cautions (2:15-2:27)
 1. Love of the world (2:15-2:17)
 2. The seduction of false teaching from “antichrists” (2:18-2:27)

- II. Fellowship with God Who is Righteous (2:28-4:6)**
 - A. Growth in purity of life (2:28-3:3)
 - B. Practice of righteousness (3:4-3:10)
 - C. Practical love (3:11-3:18)
 - D. Conscience (3:19-3:24)
 - E. Test the spirits by The Word (4:1-4:6)

- III. Fellowship with God Who is Love (4:7-5:1)**
 - A. God’s Love should make us love (4:7-4:12)
 - B. Living in God and Living in Love (4:13-4:16)
 - C. Love that displaces fear (4:17-4:18)
 - D. Love summary(4:19-5:1)

- IV. Fellowship With God Who is Truth (5:2-5:21)**
 - A. Victory through obedience (5:2-5:5)
 - B. Assurance of Salvation (5:6-5:13)
 - C. Guidance in Prayer (5:14-5:17)
 - D. Freedom from Habitual sin (5:18-5:21)

Keys to Understanding 1 John

- Many heresies (opinions that differed from orthodox Christianity) began arising after Jesus death and resurrection, especially after the generation of apostles died out. Some (such as the one that John is refuting) started springing up even before the apostles passed from the scene. After Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD, decentralization brought about legends, rumors, and adaptations of the actual gospel that developed into entire belief systems.
- The Gnostic heresy taught that
 - Matter is inherently evil, spirit is inherently good
 - There was a distinction between the man Jesus and the spiritual Christ
 - The two came together at baptism, but separated before the crucifixion
 - Gnostics were those who possessed “the secret teachings of Jesus.” They were above normal distinctions of right and wrong. What they did “in the flesh” had nothing to do with who they were spiritually. Some used this license to indulge in all kinds of behavior. Others tried to separate themselves from all kinds of contamination.
- Docetism, another variation, taught that Jesus only *appeared* to have a normal body. He was actually a sort of demi-god. Other Docetists taught that when Jesus rose, he rose only spiritually, not bodily.

- The notion of God coming in human flesh is incompatible with many traditions, and is one of the primary departures between Christianity and Judaism (along with the notion of the resurrection). For some, it is tantamount to idolatry. However Christians argue that the coming of a “God-man” is the only means by which sin could be perfectly atoned for and new life provided.

Some Lessons from 1 John

- The main witness for faith that believers have, before experiencing the presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit, is that *we believe* the good news that the apostles testified – that they actually saw Jesus, touched Jesus, and experienced being in His presence. The Holy Spirit uses occasions where THAT STORY is LIFTED UP to draw more people to a faith that can transform them from the inside out. It’s all about the testimony. The main question is, “Do you believe it?”
- Light means the banishing of darkness. This necessarily means exposure of all falsehood, deception and even shades of the truth. Light is uncomfortable for us because it gets below all of our veneers, all of our disguises, all of our masks, and calls us out for who we really are. “Walking in the light” means growing in TRANSPARENCY. If we are always seeking to see “what we can get away with,” or “masking hidden agendas” we are not walking in the light. But walking in the light is the only way to real fellowship, real intimacy, real transformation.
- All of us have darkness, no matter how long we have been walking with the Lord. The issue is whether or not we are *dealing* with our darkness. Jesus’ blood-washing through confession is the way that our darkness gets dealt with.
- Obedience to God’s word is the true test of our love for God. Not even our thankfulness and praise for what God has done substitutes for obedience. We ought to be continually growing in obedience if we want to be the people who God wants us to be.
- It’s hard to love EVERYBODY, especially those who act unlovely. However, sometimes love means simply “doing the right thing” by everyone, regardless of whether we necessarily feel close to them. Feelings fluctuate, but love is a determination to do right by those in our lives.
- God has us on the road to transformation toward “being like Him.” That means a continual process of change. Those that feel that they are unable to change are denying the Holy Spirit the opportunity to work in their lives. Let’s let God do “a new thing” in our lives. We will find that our faith gives us great victory in Christ’s name!