

PDF version of the lesson notes.

I. The Prologue

- Read 1 John 1:1–4:

(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, of the Word of life; (2) (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) (3) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. (4) And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

- *Are there any surprising features to the prologue?*
- *How does the opening few verses of this letter compare to the openings of Paul, James, and Peter? How is it similar and how is it different? Do you think the differences are important or inconsequential?*
- Who is the "we" in these verses? What does it suggest about the authorship of the letter? How do we make sense of the "we" statements given verses like 2:1 (see also 2:12–14 and 5:13):

(1) My little children, these things write **I** unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

- *Why indicate that there is a "we?" What does it remind the audience of? Is this an important reminder given the content of the letter?*
- Also notice in these verses that the authors do not identify themselves by name (*Why would the authors not identify themselves specifically?*). This makes it different from the preceding epistles which usually clearly state the writers identity and the intended audience.
- *Why is the letter named after John?* The letters have traditionally been attributed to the author of the fourth gospel. 1 John begins to be cited at the end of the 2nd century.[1]
- *Do you see similarities and differences between the prologue of 1st John and the*

prologue of the gospel of John? Are these similarities and differences important or incidental?

(1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (2) The same was in the beginning with God. (3) All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. (4) In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

Is the "beginning" in these two passages the same or different?

- Should we take the view that all the authors (the "we" as opposed to the singular main author) are eyewitnesses of the ministry of Jesus? Does 1 John 4:14–16 shed light on other possibilities?

(14) And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. (15) Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. 16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

Do you think that these verses imply that all believers can make a similar claim as the prologue?

II. True and False Spirits

- Let's skip ahead to chapter 4. Read 1 John 4:1–6:

(1) Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. (2) Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: (3) And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. (4) Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. (5) They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. (6) We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

- *What does it mean to "try the spirits whether they are of God?"*
- *What does it mean that "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God?" do you think the emphasis is on confessing that Jesus is of God or is the emphasis on coming in the flesh?*
- *Do these verses help us understand what prompted the letter and what was going on in*

the Johannine community? Does verse 5 imply that these "antichrist's" probably had success in attracting converts? Do you think "antichrists" likely considered themselves Christian? If so what part of verse 3 are the most likely to be denying and what would be their alternative?

- *Does 1 John 2:18–19 give us important information about the "antichrists?"*

(18) Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. (19) They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

Also, is it fair to say that the Johannine community believe or thought they were living in the last days and that these "antichrists" were evidence of that fact?

- Is does seem possible to me that we can tell very little about what the "antichrists" were teaching about Christ. Yes, the phrase "come in the flesh" may be an important clue. It may be indicate that the "antichrist" denied that the Word could become human. They may have emphasized the divine side of Christ to the exclusion of the mortal side. This may be related to the theological concept known as docetism (later declared a heresy) which espoused the view that Jesus only *seemed human*.^[2] On the other hand, Judith Lieu points out that the "flesh" is not a major concern of the letter and that contrast is important in these verses:

Jesus Christ's having come in the flesh is partly an antithesis to the false prophets having come out into the world; it is no less real but of directly opposing significance. The schismatics do not invest Jesus with the significance the author does, but the latter's love of contrast and concern to avoid real debate with alternative ideas exclude any certain recovery of their views.^[3]

- Read 1 John 1:8–10:

(8) If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

- ◆ *Do these verses give us insight into why this schism is such a big deal? How could the irrelevance of moral behavior be related to the idea that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (the non–humanity of Jesus)?*

III. God is Love

- Read 1 John 4:7–13:

(7) Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. (8) He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. (9) In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. (10) Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (11) Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. (12) No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. (13) Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

- *Why doesn't John launch into a discourse or an argument about the teachings of the schismatics? Why launch into a discourse about love? Where does this leave the need for right belief or doctrine? Isn't the problem with schismatics that they taught a false Christological claim? How does an emphasis on love address this issue? Do verses 14–16 help answer these questions?*

(14) And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. (15) Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. 16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

- *What is meant by "knoweth" in verse 7? What does it mean to know God in this context?*
- *What does it mean that "God is love?" Is it fair to say this is how God is experienced?[4]*
- *Is the emphasis on love for God or love from God? Or maybe even the love that originates from God?*
- *What is verse 12 about (notice the JST change)? Even given the change, how does it fit in this context? Jim Faulconer points out that the Old Testament emphasizes hearing God rather than seeing God (see Deuteronomy 6:3–5). Is that an important backdrop to these verses? How might seeing God and loving God be related? How might hearing God and loving God be related?*

- IV. Love Made Perfect

- Read 1 John 4:17–21:

(17) Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. (18) There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. (19) We love him, because he first loved us. (20) If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love

God whom he hath not seen? (21) And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

- *What does the phrase "their is no fear in love" mean? How widely does that apply. Is the context future judgment? Or is it more widely applicable?*
- *Is it fair to say that John reduces the 2 great commandments to one commandment?*

Endnotes

1. Brown, Raymond E. (editor), Joseph A. Fitzmyer (editor), and Roland E. Murphy (editor), 1990, *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, Prentice Hall, 986.
2. Mays, James L. (editor), 2000, *The HarperCollins Bible Commentary*, HaperCollins, 1181.
3. Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 1279.
4. Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 1279.