

The Book of 1st John

Introduction

I am using the New King James Version as a foundation for our studies. I will make corrections to the text where something isn't too clear in its understanding, or if there is some sort of translator bias in the text that needs to be exposed. All translations have errors. The original text, as was given down by God, is inerrant in its original (Greek and Hebrew) forms. All subsequent translations have either intentional or unintentional errors, but can be uncovered with diligent study through comparing manuscripts and following the Rules of Interpretation, which can be found under the "Beliefs" tab, in "The Bible" explanation.

In this book, the book of 1st John, is the **"Doctrine of Christ"**. John wrote this book in order to combat the Gnostic doctrines that were infiltrating the assembly (church) at that time. He wrote it late in his life, as with the book of John, somewhere between 85-95 AD. The Gospel of John, much more than the other three Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, is a theological book. In other words, it is much more concerned about Christian doctrine than just the events that occurred in Jesus' lifetime. 1st John is kind of a commentary on the Gospel of John. These two books (John and 1st John) are companion books. In writing 1st John, John quite often refers back to his Gospel, the book of John. So it might be best to study these two books together. This will be a study of 1st John but will repeatedly reference the Gospel of John.

John wrote the Gospel of John from the viewpoint of Jesus as Deity coming into His own creation by becoming flesh and bone. God to man, Deity to humanity. In writing 1st John, that viewpoint is reversed. A group called the Gnostics maintained that flesh was corrupt and the goal was to achieve enlightenment by means of becoming a spirit being. Here John is stressing Christ's humanity, which they denied, in opposition to that line of thought. Man to God, humanity to Deity.

A little about Gnosticism to better understand why John is writing this letter...

Gnosticism was an esoteric religious movement, like Freemasons or other secret societies, that really peaked around the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. *(And I know that by today's standards, AD and BC are considered "improper". It's supposed to be CE, and BCE. That is just another "potshot" at Jesus, in my opinion. And one I won't be taking. If you have a problem with that, JW seem to, there's a little "x" up in the corner.)* Anyway, It, that is, Gnosticism, started invading the doctrines that Christ had laid down for the Apostles to pass on to the world. They presented a serious challenge to orthodox Christianity. Most Gnostics professed to be Christians, but their beliefs quickly and aggressively diverged from those of the vast majority of Christians in the early church. As most everyone knows by now, the term gnosticism is derived from the Greek word gnosis (γνῶσις). It is roughly translated to mean "revealed knowledge". Gnosticism promised a secret knowledge of the divine realm to those who practiced it. They believed that "sparks" or "seeds" from some divine being fell from some transcendent realm into this material universe and then "somehow" became trapped in human bodies. They believed the whole creation was evil, although God said that the creation was, in fact, "very good" in Genesis 1:31. They desired to leave the body, but it was necessary to accumulate enough knowledge that would allow them to return to their transcendent spiritual realm. They believed that they could and should experience as many pleasures and pains as possible. It was permissible to commit acts of adultery or homosexuality, and the like, because it was just the body that was doing the evil deed. The spirit didn't do it, so it couldn't be held responsible for any of these acts. They believed they were the "elect" of God. Just like the Calvinistic perspective of the "elect". And you can see a lot of Gnosticism in the doctrines of Calvinism as you learn more about it.

In order to explain the origin of this material universe, the Gnostics developed an extremely complicated mythological paradigm. They believed that the God of the universe was unknowable. But that there were some lesser “gods” that were generated by something called emanation, which is an outpouring of the transcendently (beyond and outside the ordinary range of human experience or understanding) divine that accounts for the origin of the universe. An example of emanation from the Christian perspective would be the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father, at say, Pentecost in Acts chapter two. Of these “lesser gods”, the final god, called Sophia, which is a transliteration of the Greek word for ‘wisdom’ (σοφία G4678), conceived a desire to know the unknowable God. Out of this illegitimate desire was produced a deformed demiurge, a subordinate deity, an evil god, who created this universe.

The Gnostics said the demiurge, evil god, was the God of the Old Testament. They concluded that this evil god of the Old Testament was keeping humanity in ignorance and held in this material world to punish their attempts at acquiring knowledge in order to be smart enough to break free of the mortal body and become spirit beings. So the Gnostics saw the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise, which is a transliteration of the Greek word meaning ‘garden’, Noah’s flood, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, as a way of this God of the Old Testament keeping them down, so to speak.

Gnostics refused to identify God the Father in the New Testament, with the Old Testament God. They were different entities. They also had a mangled notion of Christ’s ministry. They wrote several apocryphal books to try to validate their claims. Apocryphal just means hidden. They wrote titles like, the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Mary, and many others. They claimed to have been given special secret knowledge from the Christ, which, in the mind of the Gnostic, was a divine spirit that descended and inhabited the man Jesus upon his baptism. Then just before his death on the cross, this Christ spirit left the body of the man Jesus. They touted that Jesus and the Christ were two different beings. In so doing, the Gnostics denied Christ’s atoning suffering, as well as His actual death, because of course, deity cannot die. They also rejected the Resurrection because the whole idea of the body was in fact repulsive to them. The idea was to leave it behind. They believed in reincarnation, but not resurrection.

Unfortunately, most modern Christians actually believe in reincarnation, and not resurrection, and they don’t even know it. It is almost laughable, if it weren’t so sad. Christians think they will go to heaven as soon as they die, by leaving behind their bodies while their conscious spirits ascend. Then somehow they will get some kind of “glorified” or “ghostly” body that has both attributes of spirit and body in one. That is the very definition of reincarnation. That is not resurrection at all. The Bible speaks of the Resurrection in both Old and New Testaments. And that isn’t it.

Not to mention, if Christian’s understanding of death and resurrection were correct, why is there a judgment for anyone? If believers are in heaven when they die, and unbelievers go to hell, what is the real need for the judgment? Believers and unbelievers alike are already at their prospective destinies. Modern Christian theology is actually called “immortality of the soul”, yet most have never even heard the term. Modern Christian thinking actually does away with their own resurrection, which is the biblical method of entrance into the Kingdom of God, as well as the Judgment.

And Lord help you if you try to show them, with Scripture alone, how everything actually works. I’ve tried for thirty years. I do admit, as time gets closer to the Second Coming, more are beginning to open their eyes. Like Daniel said, in the last days “knowledge will increase”. Still, with the vast majority of so-called Christianity, to open your mouth about sound doctrine is to be looked at as if you have four right arms sticking out of your head. But I digress.

Within the Gnostic communities, there were many sects with many different, you might call them, denominations. And although most of the Gnostics considered themselves to be Christian, the doctrines that Jesus left to the Apostles were all but missing. The moral commandments of the Old Testament were generally rejected by the Gnostics as well. These commandments, or laws, were considered part of the evil god's efforts to entrap humanity. These many different Gnostic sects, and denominations led to a wide range of ethical values from asceticism to hedonism. So much of the "doctrines of men" had crept into the Christian assemblies that John now had to address the issue directly.

Gnosticism is far from being extinct today. Most simply do not recognize it. There were both Christian and non-Christian sects of Gnosticism. There are still non-Christian Gnostic sects in both Iran and Iraq to this day. They are called Mandaean. The actual origin of Gnosticism is still debated as to whether or not it came from strict twisting of Christian teachings, or derived from Jewish mysticism. Regardless of its actual origins, it serves as a cancer to true Christianity, which is today, nothing like the Christianity of the Jesus' time. Still, John wrote the book of 1st John to correct these false heretical teachings.