

1st John

Lesson 1 “Background of 1st John”

I. Introduction - Over the last year, we have studied one of largest and most influential churches in the first century, which was the church in Ephesus.

A. God opened a door for Paul to travel there and began to minister and with the help of Apollos, Aquilla, and Priscilla a great work was started. Paul left and went to Corinth and after he came back, he baptized 12 disciples in the Holy Spirit and then taught in the school of a man named Tyrannus for 2 years. **Acts 19:10** says all who dwelt in Asia Minor heard the word of God. This was probably do the the signs and wonders that broke out. People began to take the handkerchiefs and aprons that touched Paul and lay them on others and they were healed. This caused a huge revival to break out as many were born again. The people of Ephesus then took their magic books and silver idols and burned them. It is estimated that 100,000 people were saved during this revival.

B. After the revival, Paul met with the Ephesians elders at Miletus and gave them warnings about things which were to come. **Acts 28:28-32**

1. After this meeting, Paul installed Timothy as the bishop (pastor) over the church in Ephesus. We have most recently studied Paul’s letters to Timothy. Both focused on church leadership and how to run a healthy church.
2. A major theme of the letters was raising up leaders who would be able to teach and ensure they would teach sound doctrine. This is important because the canon hadn’t been established yet and false teachers were seeking to creep in and teach doctrinal error in the early church. **2 Timothy 2:16-18.**

C. This is all important to understand as background to **1st John**. John became the Apostolic authority in Asia Minor after Paul was executed. He wrote **1st John** from Ephesus to combat the first in the early church, which is called Gnosticism.

1. This is important because certain portions of **1 John** will not make sense and seem very abstract unless you know what this heresy is.
2. Other portions could come off legalistic unless your understand the error John was combatting. Example:

D. What Is Gnosticism? Collection of religious ideas and systems which originated in the first century among early Christians and Jewish sects. These groups emphasized personal knowledge (*gnosis*) over orthodox teachings, traditions, and the scripture.

1. They considered the principal element of salvation to be direct knowledge of the supreme divinity, experienced as intuitive insight.

2. Gnosticism presents a distinction between a supreme, transcendent **DISTANT GOD** and an evil demiurge (skilled worker) responsible for creating the universe, thereby trapping the **divine spark** within matter.
3. **Believed the Spirit is good, the world/matter is bad. Personal transformation was therefore unnecessary.**
4. Believed Jesus didn't come in the flesh, but was a spirit being. God just made him look real. Jesus was a missionary sent to bring knowledge to the earth. Save us from ignorance. Some gnostics said he was God, other gnostics said He was not. **1 John 4:1-3.**
5. Goal wasn't a transformed life, it was about acquiring knowledge. **1 John 3:10-15** - The person who reads the Bible with a law/grace lens might think these verses are legalistic because aren't we saved by grace and not our works? **We are, but legalism isn't the error John was combatting. He was combatting gnosticism, which said everything material or in the flesh was bad so there is no point in trying to live holy so we can keep hating, stealing, etc.**
6. Morality - These are generalizations, but they tended to have rigorous standards about food and sex (withdraw), but lax in other areas of behavior. Different from Christianity about food and sex (moderation) but had standards in other areas of behavior: work ethic, don't steal, lie, etc. **The gnostics weren't concerned about personal morality and how we treat each other, they were too busy with more important "spiritual matters."**
 - a. Some gnostics got into asceticism which is severe self-discipline and avoiding all indulgence - food, sex, pleasure, etc. to get **gnosis**.
 - b. Other gnostics thought they can do whatever because the body and all matter is evil so why try to live holy?
 - c. Very similar responses to the ditches some Christians find themselves in: Legalism or Greasy Grace.
7. Big Idea of Gnosticism is the World is Evil and No Value for Humanity.

E. Modern Examples of Gnosticism

1. Some modern grace Christians who know they have been changed in the spirit and say, "It doesn't matter what I do in the flesh." Ex: Guy who told me and Marcus tithing was a sin.
2. Modern asceticism - People who deny themselves in order to merit God's favor for deeper knowledge. **It's fine to deny your flesh to become more sensitive to the spirit. We just shouldn't do it because we think the physical world is evil or we are earning revelation from God.**

II. Counter To Gnosticism

A. **1 John 1:1-4**

1. *Verse 1* John is writing to counter gnosticism. He said we saw, touched, and handled Jesus. He had a physical body and He identified with humanity.
2. *Verse 2-3* While it may seem crazy that within a generation people could believe Jesus didn't come in the flesh, we now live in a generation that believes that just because you are born with 2 X chromosomes you aren't a girl. If you repeat a lie enough, people will believe it. **John is emphatic that he and the other apostles interacted and had fellowship with Jesus.**
3. *Verse 4* People's joy becomes full when they know they are believing the truth.

III. Conclusion - As simple as it sounds, there is nothing more powerful than knowing truth. Truth protects us from lies, which is why we must endeavor to continue to learn and know truth. Jesus came to restore and transform humanity because what originally made was good and Jesus wanted to restore us to His original image.

A. Pray Closing Prayer

B. Sign Off For Online Audience

IV. Discussion Questions

1. What was your top takeaway?
2. Do you think the physical world is good or evil? Why? How does your answer fit with what God said in **Genesis 1:31**?
3. What are some things you could tell an atheist or agnostic who isn't sure Jesus ever existed as to why Jesus was God, but also real person who came in the flesh?
4. How do we keep from falling into the "I'm saved spiritually and I'm a new creation, therefore it doesn't matter what I do ditch?"
5. Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels said, "If you tell a lie frequently enough it will be accepted as the truth." Have you ever seen this in your own life?
6. What are practical things we can do to combat the lies of the enemy?