



## Lesson 1: 1 John.... A Long Letter Exhibiting a Loving and Enlightening Sermon/Addressed to a Congregation of “Born-Again” Believers

- *Written to the people of the congregations by a pastor who loved his flock dearly.*
- *The letter was sent out to the various churches over which he has charge.*
- *The letter was written in Ephesus (Probably around 85-90 A.D.; before he was exiled to the Isle of Patmos).*

*By A.D. 85-90, certain events had almost inevitably happened within the Church, especially in a place like Ephesus.*

**What events are we speaking of?**

- ✓ Christianity was considered an evil or depraved religion during Nero's reign (64 A.D.). Until the conversion of Emperor Constantine and the Edict of Milan (313 A.D.), whereby Christianity was made legal, the Christian faith was officially regarded as a “religio prava” (evil/depraved religion).
- ✓ **Christianity began as a movement within Judaism.** Much of the earliest proclamation of the Gospel took place in the synagogues.
- ✓ The Christians did not side with the Jews in their revolt against Rome beginning in 66 A.D. So, by the end of the first century the church had largely separated from the synagogue.
- ✓ **These early believers did not have church buildings to meet in.** They met mostly in homes. The first church buildings did not start to appear until the early 200s.
- ✓ **The early church did not have denominations as we think of them today.**

But that does not mean they had no serious disagreements within the ranks. They did. And they did not find this surprising. They felt they were dealing with matters of ultimate truth and error - matters to be taken

with the utmost seriousness even when it meant dissension.

### **THIS IS WHERE THE PREACHING AND TEACHING OF JOHN, THE APOSTLE, BECAME SO VERY IMPORTANT.**

#### **Facts and Probabilities When John's letter was written:**

- **Many converts were second-or even third-generation Christians.**

The thrill of the first days had, to some extent at least, passed away. In the 1<sup>st</sup> days of Christianity, there was a glory and a splendor...but now Christianity had become a thing of habit, "traditional, and half-hearted, nominal."

People had grown used to it, and some of the wonder had been lost. Jesus forewarned the disciples, "The love of many will grow cold." Matthew 24:12

- **Some of the members of the Church found that the standards which Christianity demanded were becoming a burden and they became tired of making the effort.**

They did not want to be "saints" (hagios = holy); different.

The distinct difference between Christians and the world was their love for things of the world.

**Jesus said, "If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you." John 15:19.**

**(Jesus praying to the Father) "I have given them your word and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world." John 17:14.**

**Jesus' words are true....and penetrates to the marrow of our bones (literally to the quick...to the deepest part of our soul and spirit).**

**This involved an ethical demand.**

**It demanded a new standard of purity, a new kindness, a new service, a new forgiveness....**

**And this was difficult.**

Once the thrill and the enthusiasm of being a Christian wears off, it became and becomes harder and harder to stand out against the world and to refuse to conform to the generally accepted standards and practices of the age.

**Why do you suppose this is the norm then and even today?**

**This is a “HOWEVER” Note: 1 John shows no signs that the church to which it was written was being persecuted. The peril...and the hardships was not persecution...but seduction.**

**Seduction...came from within.**

**The trouble which 1 John seeks to combat came not from people who were out to destroy the Christian faith but from those who thought they were improving it.**

**It came from people whose aim was to make Christianity intellectually respectable (secular philosophy and contemporary thought sermons). It came from people that stood in the pulpit and stated.... “To get the people to think like we think we must accept some of their thoughts....but steer them to a higher thought by loving them just the way they are, with all the baggage they carry, and bring them to our way of thinking when they know that they don’t have to give up their lifestyles to be ‘one of us’.....”**

**Note: Jesus said, “Many false teachers prophets and teachers will arise, and lead many astray.” Matthew 24:11 Paul said, “I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them.” Acts 20:29-30.**

**One group was the Gnostics:**

**Gnosticism = basis belief...only spirit was good and that is all that matters; the material world was essentially evil.**

**This belief is the conviction that the one real aim in life is to liberate the human spirit from the vile prison house of the body.**

**They believed:**

**Any real incarnation is impossible.**

**Jesus was not human...He was only spirit.**

**Docetism = taught that Jesus only seemed to have a body (Jesus was purely spiritual and had nothing but the appearance of having a body).**

**Gnosticism...Gnostic belief had certain practical consequences in the lives of those who held it.**

**1. The Gnostic attitude to matter and all created things produced a certain attitude to the body and the things to do with the body.**

**There were 3 different attitudes:**

- **It might take on the form of self-denial** (fasting, celibacy and rigid control), even ill treatment of the body. The idea that celibacy is better than marriage and sex is sinful.
- **It might take the form of assertion that the body did not matter and that, therefore, its appetites might be satisfied without restraint.** Since the body was in any event evil, it made no difference what was done with it.  

There were even people that believed that it was highly knowledgeable and relevant to know the best and the worst of life...they must enter into every experience of life at its highest or deepest level...

In this context, they believed that it was the highest level of knowledge to know every kind of sin.

John countered this with... “God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all.” (1 John 1:5).
- **It might take the form of pure spiritual state...and that these people have reached spiritual perfection (Separating them from the rest of the world).** They felt themselves as “above and beyond sin.”

## **2. Destroyed fellowship between the Christian believers:**

**This belief divided the people into two (2) classes:**

1. Those who were capable of a really spiritual life,
2. Those who were incapable of a really spiritual life.

**The Gnostics produced a spiritual “aristocracy” who looked with contempt and even hatred on lesser mortals.**

**The Gnostic heretic:**

*They talked of being born of God, of walking in the light, of having no sin, of dwelling in God, of knowing God.*

*They had no intention of destroying the Church and the faith; their intentions were to cleanse the Church of dead wood and make Christianity an intellectually respectable philosophy, fit to stand beside the great systems of the day.*

**The false teachers: They had been within the Church, but they had withdrawn from it.**

*1 John 2:19, “They went out from us, but they did not belong to us.” They were people of influence, for they claimed to be prophets. Although they had left the Church, they still tried to disseminate their teaching within it and to deceive its members and lead them away from the true faith (1 John 2:26)*

**The questions we must ask ourselves:**

- **Do we want to live like the world...or live a life that is pleasing to the Father?**
- **When confronted with evil, do we want to stand firm against it?**