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1 John (Introduction)



1 John - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg provides an introduction to the book of 1 John in this talk. He discusses the reasons for believing that John the Apostle is the author and the presence of false teachers in the churches. John is concerned with false prophets in the world and offers guidance on how to discern true teachings. He also presents four features of genuine Christianity: belief in Jesus as the Word made flesh, keeping the commandments, love for one another, and living in the Spirit.

Transcript

Alright, this is our introduction to the book of 1 John, the first epistle of John. If you read the Gospel of John and the first epistle of John in close proximity, you will get the profound impression that they are written by the same person. That impression is not limited to the fact that they both have the name of John at the beginning of them, the Gospel according to John and the first epistle of John.

Both the Gospel and the epistle are actually written anonymously. The name John is not upon them in the original. And once again, like most of the books of the Bible, the titles are traditional.

Now, there are many, many reasons for believing that John's Gospel was written by John. That is that the fourth Gospel was written by John the Apostle. I'm afraid I don't have time to go into all those reasons.

When we teach on John, I do go extensively into the reasons for believing that John the Apostle is the author. There has seldom been any doubt that the epistle of John comes from the same mind as the Gospel of John. It has the same concerns to a very large extent.

It has many of the same vocabulary and themes that are fairly unique to John's writings. Themes that are perhaps some of them found in other portions of the Bible by other authors, but themes that are very dominant in the writings of John and in his concerns. And many people feel that this epistle might originally have been a sermon based upon the Gospel of John, using the Gospel as its text.

Certainly, the Gospel of John, we read all the themes really that are found in this book, are found in the Gospel of John. However, it was clearly written for an occasion. Whereas the Gospel of John seems to have been written simply to encourage anybody who reads it to come to faith in Christ or to believe in Christ, this epistle is to a specific Christian congregation or congregations, and it is occasioned by the presence of false teachers in the churches and the fact that some of the persons in the congregations are confused.

Some of them have even left. And so John is writing this, we could say, as a sermon to these churches and using as his text his own Gospel, perhaps. Now, some think that this sermon could have been written by somebody else using John's Gospel and simply mimicking his themes and so forth.

This could not really be established from the internal evidence, but historically the Gospel and the three epistles of John have been attributed to the same person, and there certainly is no reason to seriously doubt that. Whereas the Gospel is addressed to unbelievers, it seems, because John says in his Gospel in chapter 20 that these are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that you might have life in believing. This is written to Christians who very clearly already have faith and are being encouraged to continue in the pure faith without being led astray by false teachers that may be in the church.

The common vocabulary you find in John's Gospel and in John's epistle are things like Word, where the Gospel itself begins with the expression, the Word, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Now, the thing here is that John is the only writer of the Bible who refers to Jesus as the Word. This expression is not used with reference to Jesus by other writers.

The title, the Word for Jesus, comes from John alone, and it seems likely to me that the book of Revelation, which is certainly believed to be written by the same author, came first before these books because in the book of Revelation in chapter 19, John saw a vision of Christ and said that his name was called the Word of God. That is, he got the insight through a vision that Jesus is the Word of God, and it seems likely to me that he wrote his Gospel and his epistles after that because he incorporates that knowledge. Now, it is possible, of course, that John could have already been thinking of Jesus in terms of the Word, and he'd written the Gospel and the epistles of John before he saw the visions of Revelation, but that would make it rather coincidental that John, the only person who ever called Jesus the Word, had already been using that expression, and then he gets a vision, and lo and behold, in the vision, it is revealed that Jesus is called the Word of God.

And I think it probable that John knew of Jesus as the Word because of the vision in Revelation 19, and then made reference to this fact in both the Gospel and the epistle because the Gospel of John says, in the beginning was the Word. The epistle, the first

epistle of John, begins, that which was from the beginning, and he talks about how we've seen and heard and touched this, and then he refers to it as the Word of truth. He's referring to Christ.

So, the epistle, as well as the Gospel, begins by talking about something about the beginning and Jesus being the Word. Very close connections between the epistle and the Gospel in that respect. In the Gospel of John, the Word is said to be, it says, in him is life, and the life was the light of men.

And the first chapter of John, in the prologue, goes on to say a number of things about Jesus being the light of men. So, we have the light as a main feature of Christ and of Christianity in the Gospel and in the epistles of John, and life, the Word, light, life, spirit of truth, are terms that are used in the Gospel of John and the epistle of John, but not really elsewhere. The Holy Spirit is referred to, but John alone refers to him as the spirit of truth.

The word witness and the word commandment are very frequent in both the Gospel and the epistles of John. So, there's some main themes that John has used in his Gospel that recur in his writing this epistle, applying these themes to people in an actual circumstance where they need some correction and some protection from false teaching. The occasion of teaching very clearly, or of writing I should say, is very clearly that there's false teaching introduced into these fellowships.

We read in chapter 2 and verse 26, these things I've written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. So, he tells us right off why he wrote the epistle. He's writing it because it is occasioned by people trying to deceive the Christians.

In chapter 3 and verse 7, he says, little children, let no one deceive you. So, again, he's concerned about deception in the church. In chapter 4, verse 1, he says, beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

So, he's concerned about these many false prophets that have gone out in the world, and he's teaching his readers how to discern between what is true and what is false because of these false teachers. Now, there are some, apparently, who had already embraced these false teachings and abandoned the church. That was part of the circumstance of his writing also.

He didn't want the church to be losing anymore to this heresy. In chapter 2 and verse 19, he says, they went out from us, but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would have, no doubt, continued with us, but they went out that they might be made manifest that none of them were of us.

So, some people have left the congregation, have left the church fellowship. He says,

actually, they were probably not really, you know, the real deal anyway, but we've lost some people over this controversy. And in chapter 4, he's already said, many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Gone out from where? Presumably, out from the church into the world. And so, the church has lost some members, some of them following in some teaching a false doctrine, which we will consider in a moment what that false doctrine may have been. So, there were some who had left, and the ones who remained really needed to be encouraged because they weren't sure if they should go with the others, no doubt.

And perhaps those who had left, the nature of the heresy may have been such that those who embraced the heresy were accusing those who were orthodox of being not on the cutting edge, not really, you know, enlightened, just believing old, stale stuff, and there's new sexy truths being taught by these teachers that you really want to be in on. And he says in chapter 5, in verse 13, to the readers, the ones who have remained in the church, these things I've written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. He wanted to encourage them to continue in the orthodox teaching they had received, and to be assured that they, in fact, were saved and had eternal life.

Now this, that you may know that you have eternal life, is a very important theme in 1 John. It is sometimes called the Epistle of Assurance. If we're interested in knowing whether we are saved or not, and by the way, there are people who think they are and are not, how would we genuinely know if we are saved or not? Jesus said in Matthew chapter 7, many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name? And he said, I'll say to them, I never knew you.

Depart from me, you workers of iniquity. So here's a, Jesus said, many will think that they were Christians, will even have had some rather remarkable evidences of being Christians, having prophesied and cast out demons and done mighty works in Jesus' name, but he'll say, no, you weren't the real deal. Well, then how in the world can you know that you are? That certainly is a valid question.

If people like that can be mistaken, how can I be sure I'm not mistaken? How can I make sure that I'm really saved? Well, the true means of knowing that you're saved is the subject of this book because apparently the false teachers were accusing those who were not following them of not really being the true Christians, not being really saved, not really having eternal life, not really knowing God. And so the book is filled, as you find reading through it, with many expressions that say, by this we know that we abide in him. By this we know that we have passed from death into life.

By this we know that we, you know, are born of God. Those kinds of things. By this we

know, or some equivalent phrase is found many, many times in the book of 1 John, though it doesn't always end the sentence the same way because there's a number of things that John says are the indicators that we really are Christians.

Four things in particular he mentions and keeps repeating them, but the point here is he wants his readers to be able to know how to test their own profession of faith and know whether they're real Christians or among those who are self-deceived. Obviously he believes that the false ones who've left the church, who think that they are saved, are in fact deceived. And therefore the features that he tells his own followers to observe in themselves to know that they really are saved must be features that those who've left do not exhibit in their lives.

So let's try to identify as much as we can what the false teaching was. And the reason for that is because John says some things which I think have to be interpreted in light of the false teaching he's trying to refute. If you take statements in a vacuum, some of them won't make... you won't get the right impression from them.

For example, when he says, Whosoever says that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God. Every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. What do we mean that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh? Doesn't everyone believe that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh? Are there any people even on the planet who don't believe there was a man who walked around in a human body named Jesus? Whatever else they believe or deny about him, the idea that Jesus was a man walking in the flesh among us at some point in history, that hardly seems controversial.

And yet John makes that confession the very pivot for whether a spirit is of God or of the devil. Do you confess that Jesus came in the flesh? Well, when we understand what the heresy is he's discussing, we realize that the confession that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh has some very specific surrounding thought that we need to be aware of so we'll know what he's really saying people need to be able to believe about that. And so let's consider what the nature was of the error that he's concerned about and that he's trying to protect his readers from.

First of all, it does seem clear that the false teachers were denying certain things about Jesus. There are apparently three things they were denying. First, that he was the Son of God.

We get this impression from 1 John 2.23 where John says, Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either. He who acknowledges the Son has the Father also. That is acknowledging that Jesus is the Son.

In chapter 4 and verse 15, he says, Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God. And so confessing that Jesus is the Son of God is a necessary thing to make sure you're not one of these false teachers and that you've got

the real beliefs. Also, they may have been denying that Jesus was the Christ.

That is, the Messiah. In chapter 2 and verse 22, he says, Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. So they deny that Jesus is the Christ.

They deny that Jesus is the Son of God. And they also clearly deny that Jesus has come in the flesh. In chapter 4 verse 2, he says, By this you know the Spirit of God.

Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God. And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of antichrist, which you have heard was coming and is now already in the world.

Now, we've seen in both of these passages the reference to antichrist. When you think of the word antichrist, it may be that you commonly think, first of all, of the book of Revelation, or Daniel, or maybe 2 Thessalonians, or maybe the Olivet Discourse. If you do think of those passages when you hear the word antichrist, you're thinking of passages that do not use that term because the word antichrist is not found in the book of Revelation, or the Olivet Discourse, or the book of Daniel, or in 2 Thessalonians 2, or anywhere else except in 1 John.

And 2 John, the 2nd epistle of John also one time uses the word antichrist in a statement that's just an echo of a similar statement in 1 John. John is the only person who uses the word antichrist in the Bible, and he only uses it in his first two epistles. We've already encountered a couple places where he's used it here.

The one who denies the Father and the Son is antichrist. What does it mean to deny that Jesus is Christ? Well, if we're talking about Jewish people denying that he's the Messiah, that would simply mean that they're expecting a Messiah, but they don't recognize him as the one. But I don't know that the false teachers here were getting into Jewish denials of Christ's Messiahship.

It seems very possible when you take the total picture of what they are denying about Christ, that there is something like Gnosticism that is behind this. What is Gnosticism? Well, there were two guiding principles or leading principles of Gnosticism. Gnosticism was a philosophy that took elements of Greek philosophy and mixed them with religions of other cultures, Judaism and Christianity in particular.

So there was Jewish Gnosticism, there was Christian Gnosticism. Gnosticism was sort of like a parasite that attached itself to an existing religion and corrupted it. And it did so, especially in the 2nd century AD, the Church was very much afflicted with Gnosticism.

And some of the 2nd and 3rd century Church Fathers wrote whole treatises against Gnosticism. Irenaeus, in particular, wrote against heresies. And Gnosticism was a real

blight and a trial to the Church in the 2nd and 3rd centuries.

Now, John isn't writing quite that late, but it appears that some of the elements of Gnosticism were already invading the Church, possibly near the end of the 1st century. And Gnostics believed, as all Greeks did, that matter is evil and that spirit is good. Now, you might say, well, I can sort of see a way in which that could be true, but it isn't.

It isn't true. Matter is not itself evil. Of course, the material world has been, we could say, fallen, we could say it's shot through with sin or something like that, but it's not really the biblical teaching that matter is evil.

Or that spirit is good. Of course, God is spirit and angels are spirit, but so are demons and the devil. They're spirits too.

Spirits can be good or bad. Matter is neither good nor bad in itself. Greek philosophy taught that anything spirit is good and anything material is evil.

Well, it's obvious then that they have to account for the fact that the world exists as a material entity and thus an evil entity. And so they believe that the true God, the highest God that we want to know, the Father Jesus, did not create the world. They believed that the world, because it is matter, is itself evil.

God is by definition good, and therefore he couldn't have direct contact with the material world at all or create it. So the Gnostics taught that the true God, who is good, had these various emanations that came out from him. And sort of like the ripples in a pond that come when you throw a rock in and these ever-expanding ripples move out from the center of the splash.

And that if God is seen as the center of that, these different ripples come out from him, they emanate from him, and they get progressively further away from him until eventually there's one that's far enough away from him that it can have contact with matter. And God himself is not defiled by the contact, but this emanation is so far from him that it's really the opposite of him. In fact, they believed there was a particular conscious emanation from God called the Demiurge.

The Demiurge in Gnosticism is what we call the devil. However, they believed he was the God of the Old Testament. They believed he was the creator of the heavens and the earth.

They believed that he is the only emanation from God that could really have contact with this world. And they believed the world is corrupt. Now, then how could we be freed from this corruption? What's salvation? Salvation is rising above the world in various ways and above your physical body through revelation, through knowledge.

The Greek word for knowledge is Gnosko. And Gnostic, the word Gnostic has a G in front

of it, it's silent, so it's G-N-O-S-T-I-C. It's from the word Gnosko, knowledge.

A Gnostic is someone who basically says, I'm a knowing person. And it's not just knowing things like we all know, but it's knowing mysterious things, things that the Gnostics alone said the elite have to be initiated into. You have to go through certain rituals and you have to go through certain orientations to know these deep mysteries that everyone can't know.

But through knowledge of these mysteries, you transcend these various emanations. You get above the Demiurge and move closer and closer to the core of all those emanations, which is God. So you ascend to God, as it were, or closer to God, through knowing mysterious things.

And you can imagine this could lead to a certain elitism among those who believe that they know these mysterious things and they look at everyone else as ignorant and lowly and lost. Now this may be why there's so much emphasis in 1 John on knowledge. Because he keeps saying, we know, we know, we have knowledge, we know.

And he's no doubt emphasizing to his readers that the Gnostics who claim that they know what needs to be known, well, I don't know what they know, but we know what we need to know. We know who God is, we know Jesus, we know that we're saved. And so the emphasis on knowledge, which is very frequent in 1 John, is perhaps a way of sort of coming against the idea that the Gnostics are the ones who know so much.

But, of course, salvation isn't through knowledge like that. Salvation is by grace. Salvation is from God.

And God is the creator of the universe. And matter is not evil. When God, on the sixth day, had made all the material universe, what did he say about it? He said, it's very good.

And it was made of matter. It was material. And he looked at it and said, it's very good.

In fact, every time he made a material thing in the creation week, he said, it's good, it's good, it's good. And finally, at the end, when it was all done, he said, it's very good. The teaching of scripture is not that matter is evil, but matter is good.

Or, at the very least, it's God's will that matter exists, and it can be turned to good or to evil, obviously. You can use your body for good or for evil. But your body is not itself evil.

The Gnostics said the body is evil. That's why they didn't believe in the resurrection from the dead. They believed that for our one lifetime, we are trapped.

Our spirit, which is pure and good, trapped in a physical body of evil. At death, we are released. The Greeks thought this, too, and Gnosticism bought into it, too.

And therefore, they didn't believe in the resurrection, because why would, once you've been released from a body, why would we be trapped again? Why would God do that? That doesn't make sense. That's not advanced. You want to transcend matter, not live forever in a material body.

And yet, the Bible teaches the resurrection of the dead, and a new heaven and a new earth. Jesus said, the meek shall inherit the earth. So, this was a very spiritual philosophy that tried to incorporate some Christian words and Christian concepts, but was really Greek paganism, mixed with some Christian flavoring.

We have lots of cults like that. The New Age, for example, movement, has many of the elements of Gnosticism in it. In fact, if you study Gnosticism and study the New Age movement, you'll be amazed at how much of Gnosticism has reemerged in New Age thinking.

Or, for that matter, in the Word of Faith movement, where knowing and confessing the right things causes you to transcend sickness and poverty and the curse of the fallen world. Now, of course, the New Age movement, I'm not saying it's the same as Gnosticism, but like Gnosticism, it has Christian words and Christian concepts and gives them really a pagan cast. The Word of Faith movement came out of the Mind Science cults, which are not Christian, but by attaching Christian ideas, Christ, faith, confession, the Word.

These are words that are found in the Bible, and then they put these non-Christian meanings into them. So you've got the Word of Faith. We've got all kinds of cults that do this kind of thing.

They don't want to dissociate themselves from Christianity because it's too popular or too good to just do away with it or compete with it. But they want to corrupt it. They want to change the ideas into non-Christian ideas and still retain Christian language and try to still pretend to be the true Christianity after all.

Now, there were in the early church two branches of Gnosticism that were troublesome. They both had these ideas about matter is evil. There was a demiurge who made the world.

Spirit is good. Even demons are good because they're spirit. One of these branches followed a teacher named Dositus.

And Dositism is named after him. And that view was that Christ did not come in the flesh. He was truly God's Son and truly... Well, I don't know if they used the term God's Son, but they believed He was divine.

But they didn't believe He was physical. They didn't believe He was really human. Dositus taught that when Jesus walked, He didn't leave footprints because He was really

just a phantom.

He looked like a physical person, but you couldn't touch Him. He really wasn't physical. And this was a very persistent form of Gnosticism.

It seems like many of the things that John says in this would be directed against them. In fact, he begins by saying, that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen, which are hands of Handel, of the Word of Life, we've touched Him. You can't tell us He wasn't material.

We've touched Him with our own hands. And then, of course, his statement is about whoever denies that Jesus has come in the flesh. What they're referring to is probably Dositism, where the Dositics believed that Jesus was important and divine or whatever, but because He was, He couldn't be physical because physical is evil and Jesus wasn't infected with physicality.

And so they would deny that Jesus was really a physical human being at all. And that's one of the problems within Gnosticism, was Dositism. There was another Gnostic teacher named Serinthus and his branch of Gnosticism was called Serinthianism and he was contemporary with John.

In fact, he lived in the same town, Ephesus, with John. There's stories that are told by the church fathers of this hostility between John and Serinthus and a very famous story about how John and some of his disciples went into a public bathhouse in Ephesus and he heard that Serinthus was in there and he said to everyone, quick, all of you, save yourselves, get out of this bathhouse before the roof caves in because the heretic Serinthus is here. And he fled and his disciples fled from the place.

I think just trying to make a point. But if the story is true and it is reported among church fathers that this actually happened, then we can say that John saw Serinthus as his chief nemesis there in Ephesus and Serinthus was a Gnostic teacher. Serinthus was not Dositic, though.

He didn't follow Dositism, but he did agree that matter is evil and he believed that Jesus was an ordinary man, that he was not born special. He was just a man, but at his baptism, the Christ essence came upon him. And then just before his crucifixion, or at his crucifixion, before he died, the Christ essence left him.

So Jesus wasn't exactly the Christ. The Christ was something that transcended him, that came upon him at his baptism and left him at the point of his death. And some people believe that there are statements in 1 John that are directed specifically against Serinthianism.

And that is a possibility, denying that Jesus is the Christ, for example. Now, see, a Jew would deny that Jesus is the Christ, but mean something else. They'd say, we're looking

for the Christ, the Messiah, but he's not him.

We're looking for a different kind of Messiah than that. And so a Jew denying that Jesus is the Christ is making a different kind of a denial than what a Serinthian would. A Serinthian would say, yeah, Jesus wasn't the Christ.

Jesus is a man. The Christ thing came on him, but wasn't him, because it left him also. He's not the Christ himself.

And by the way, many New Age people say that very same thing too. So you can see that there are elements of Gnosticism, especially Serinthianism in the modern New Age movement. But John emphasizes that Jesus is the Christ, and anyone who says he isn't is anti-Christ.

Okay, one of the things that had to be sorted out within Gnosticism is what is the attitude toward bad behavior. If you're a Gnostic, how do you take the thought that the body, because it's physical, is incorrigibly evil, and work that into behavioral ethics? And there were two ways that Gnostics did this. Some of them were ascetics, and some of them were antinomians.

The ascetics were those who thought you need to deny the body and its lusts. Because the body is evil, you need to punish it. It's like people who'd sleep on a bed of nails or who'd whip themselves in later times in church history in order to punish their bodies.

The Gnostics, some of them, were ascetics, feeling you have to punish your body in order to conquer its evil. But the other approach to it was the opposite. They said you can't conquer its evil.

It's physical. You're not going to change that. You can't be possibly expected to make your body better by self-control or by self-punishment.

So they said you really are most enlightened if you realize that the body is never going to be any better, and you just give it free reign. Just let it do what it's going to do, and you concentrate on perfecting your knowledge so that you rise above it all. In fact, one of the evidences that you have risen above it all is that you don't even care about sin and righteousness.

You just do whatever your urges are. Just let your body do its thing and, in a sense, divorce yourself from the body and make your own journey into the realms of knowledge separately. The fact that you don't even worry about what your body does would be an evidence that you've really attained the revelation of how the body is incorrigible, and only people who don't understand that would make the foolish error of trying to reign it in or trying to make it better.

So antinomianism is a word that means... Anti, of course, means against. Nomian comes

from the word *nomos*, the Greek word for law. An antinomian basically means there's no law or no restrictions.

And this was probably the most popular form of Gnosticism. The Gnostics had to, in one way or another, deal with the fact that they believed the body was incorrigibly evil by virtue of its physicality and still come up with some ethical rationale for some kind of ethical behavior. And it's obviously more popular to take a libertine antinomian approach and say, it doesn't matter what you do, just do it.

And it doesn't matter because you're saved by something other than what you're doing anyway. And you can't change yourself, your physicality. And there are actually some forms of Christianity that seem to have that kind of an attitude, although they're not Gnostic in the sense of saying it's what you know that saves you, and therefore it doesn't matter what you do.

But there are some forms of Christianity that almost seem to say it's just believing in Jesus is what saves you, and therefore it doesn't matter what you do. And there are forms of once-saved-always-saved teaching that give the impression that it doesn't really matter if you sin, don't even bother trying to stop sinning. Just believe in Jesus and rejoice in the fact that you're forgiven.

Christians aren't perfect, they're just forgiven, right? And so this is kind of an antinomian attitude that is in some churches. But Gnosticism was that way, only it wasn't, you believe in Jesus and so you're saved, so go ahead and sin. It's you are pursuing knowledge as your salvation through these different layers of revelation and insight that ordinary people don't have, that you receive through the rituals and the secret teachings of Gnosticism.

And once you're initiated to those, that's what saves you, and it doesn't matter what your body's doing, so have fun. And so those are two different ways that Gnostics approach it. But there were those who took the other approach, the ascetic approach, and said, no, the body is evil, we need to punish it.

And by punishing it, we show that we sincerely believe it is evil. So these are like totally opposite approaches to the application of their belief about the body to ethical choices they made in their living. Obviously John was teaching that, you know, obedience to God is absolutely necessary.

It's absolutely necessary to show that you are a Christian. Because he didn't believe the body is incorrigibly evil. Matter is not evil in itself, and the body can be brought under.

Like Paul said, you present your body as a living sacrifice to God, holy and acceptable to Him, which is a reasonable service, Paul said in Romans 12.1. In Romans 6.13, Paul said, don't yield your members, your body, as instruments of sin and unrighteousness, but

yield them as instruments of righteousness, as servants of God. And so Paul believed, and so did John, that your body can be reigned in, your body can be controlled. If you walk in the spirit, you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh, Paul said in Galatians 5.16. So this was very different than what Gnostics thought.

They thought you can't fix the body. You either have to punish it, or just ignore it, let it run, let it run, whatever it wants to do, and just pursue your spirituality in another direction, other than in morality. But John makes it very clear.

Morality is a very essential thing in Christianity, and someone who doesn't obey God, and doesn't live a moral life, isn't a Christian. It's not popular teaching in modern evangelicalism, but it's very clear teaching in John, when he says, he that says, I know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar. That is, they're lying when they say they know Him.

They don't know Him. That's why Jesus will say to them, I don't know you. I've never known you.

But we did all these things, but I never knew you. But we believed in you. Well, you said you knew me, but you didn't keep my commandments.

Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, Jesus said, but he that does the will of my Father in heaven. So, any form of Christianity that says, it doesn't matter how you live, is not the Christianity you find in any of the books of the Bible. It's another corruption, which actually resembles Gnosticism in some respects, more than Christianity.

So, it looks like the errors that John is concerned about are the errors that are known to have been associated with Gnosticism, and we know from John's history, his personal history, that he was in conflict with Gnosticism in his later years, and with Sorinthus in particular. And so, most scholars agree that Gnosticism, although it may not have been full-blown Gnosticism yet, because we know it became a real problem to the church in the 2nd and 3rd century, but this was written in the 1st century. But, incipient Gnosticism, rudimentary Gnosticism, beginning to infect the church.

John sees it and addresses it early on. He wants to nip it in the bud and keep the church from losing any more of its membership to this heresy. Now, how does he approach the problem in his epistle? First of all, he appeals to his own authority and his first-hand experience as an apostle.

He had spent time with Jesus. That should count for something. In the first four verses I mentioned, he says, That which was from the beginning we have heard, we have seen with our eyes, which our hands have looked upon, our hands have handled, concerning the word of life.

He says, The life was manifested, we have seen it, and bear witness, and declare to you the eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us. This repeated reference to how Jesus, the true life, the true word, was manifested to a group of people of whom John was one. He makes it very clear that he was one of those who touched Jesus.

He's the apostle. And then he says, That which we have seen and heard we declare to you that you also may have fellowship with us. Now, we've seen and heard.

He keeps saying we've touched, we've seen, we've heard. And so he appeals to his personal experience and his authority based on his personal experience as reason for them to heed his understanding of the matter. He also urges loyalty to that which has been taught from the beginning.

That is, don't go for novelty just for novelty's sake. There are times when people are attracted to a new doctrine just because it's new. And they've been well acquainted with the old teaching of their church, but it's just getting kind of old now, and they're looking for something to excite them again, something that's different.

And just the novelty of it attracts them. And John warns against that human tendency, referring to what he did see and hear in 1 John 1 as that which was from the beginning, the original gospel, the original Jesus that they heard about. In chapter 2 and verse 7, he said, Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you had from the beginning.

You know, this isn't new. You need to be loyal to what you knew already from the beginning because it was true in the first place. In chapter 2 and verse 24, he says, Therefore, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning.

If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you will also abide in the Son and in the Father. You'll continue to be in Christ. Otherwise, apparently not.

In chapter 3 and verse 11, he says, And again, he's continually saying, This is not new stuff. I'm not trying to be new and dazzle you with fancy new ideas that you haven't heard before like these Gnostics are, these false teachers are. I'm just trying to stick with what we said from the beginning.

It was true at the beginning. We're not changing it. That's our story.

We're sticking with it. You know, the original thing we said. It hasn't changed.

History doesn't change just because opinions about it do. And so, his appeal to his own authority, his urging that they stay loyal to what they knew was true from the beginning, and also his repeated emphasis on the believer's knowledge. Remember I said that.

Because the Gnostics boast of having unique and elite knowledge, he emphasizes again and again that the disciples that he's writing to are the ones who really know what needs to be known. The first instance of that is chapter 2, verse 3, and there were many, many cases after that. But in chapter 2, verse 3, he says, that we know him if we keep his commandments.

Now, this is one of those many passages where he says, this is how we know we're saved. We know that we know him because we keep his commandments. That's one of the ways.

There are actually four different ways that he says we know these things, and these are enumerated in the bottom of your notes. We could call them four tests of true Christian conversion or true Christian life. How do you know if you're a real Christian? Well, these tests identify four features of genuine Christianity which he says if you have this, you can know you're saved.

Now, the way he presents these, he treats them individually. It's not common that he'll take two or more of them in one sentence and say, we know because we have these two or these three or these four things. He only names one at a time.

Obviously, we know that we have passed from death into life because we love the brethren. That's one of them. Whoever loves is born of God.

Whoever doesn't love is not of God, for God is love. He says these kinds of things. Love is obviously one of the tests, but he speaks about it as if it's the only test.

But then you read a little further and there's another test. We know because of this other thing. We know because of this other thing.

Obviously, we're supposed to take the whole book as a unit rather than take individual verses out and say, I know I'm a Christian because I believe Jesus has come in the flesh, so I'm good, you know. Well, you are good if you believe that. And you have the other tests coming up positive too.

All four of these things obviously need to be in place, although when he speaks about any one of them, he might speak as if it's the only one. But he expects you're going to read, you know, the passages before and after that too. So that when you get, what you get from the book is four separate things.

And he repeats all of them several times, which all tell you, if you have them all four, that you are what a Christian is supposed to be. The first of them is your belief about Christ. Of course, what is a believer but one who believes in Christ? But they have to believe something specific about Christ.

I mean, everybody believes that Jesus lived. Even the devil believes that and trembles,

James said. And so, we have to believe something specific about Jesus that is true.

If we believe things that are not true about him, we fall short of this genuine Orthodox Christianity. In chapter 2 and verses 22 and 23, he says, Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either.

He who acknowledges the Son or believes in Him has the Father also. This makes it very clear that believing the truth about Jesus is certainly one of the tests rather than believing heretical things. We already saw some of this in chapter 4 verses 2 and 3. By this you know the Spirit of God.

Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God. Every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. So, what you confess and believe about Christ are definitive.

You have to believe he is the Christ. You have to believe he is the Son of God. You have to believe he came in the flesh.

All the things that the false teachers apparently were denying about him come up as things that need to be believed. In chapter 4 verse 15, he says, Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him. That is, in that person who confesses that Jesus is the Son of God.

In chapter 5 verse 1, he says, Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. Now, notice these are different things. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.

But you also have to believe that he is the Son of God. Not just that you believe he is the Christ, also the Son of God, also that he has come in the flesh, also that he is these other things that are mentioned. So, you get, only by taking the whole book in a single reading, as he expected they would, you get the whole picture of what you have to believe about Christ.

But these beliefs about Christ, having correct and true beliefs about Jesus, is the first test. If you don't have true beliefs about Jesus, then you don't pass that test. You can't be sure that you're saved.

The second test has to do with practical behavior, practical righteousness, which has to do with obedience to God, keeping his commandments, living the way a Christian is supposed to live, avoiding sin, and living pure and godly and righteous life. Believing Jesus without having this righteous life is of very little use. Even James had said that.

Faith without works is dead. And by works, James means behavior. Your behavior has to conform to a certain standard in order for it to be genuinely Christian behavior.

And if you have only the mental faith, but you don't have the behavior, you don't pass this test. And so, we read in chapter 2, verses 3 through 5, 1 John 2, 3 says, Now by this we know that we know him if we keep his commandments. He who says, I know him and does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

But whoever keeps his word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. And by this we know that we are in him. Again, one of the ways we know we're saved.

We know we're in him because we keep his commandments. And there's more on the same subject, of course. In the same chapter, in verse 29, he says, Now if you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of him.

Practices righteousness, not just imputed righteousness, but practices righteousness. That's a test of genuine conversion. In chapter 3, verses 6 through 10, says, Whoever abides in him does not sin.

Whoever sins has neither seen him nor known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as he is righteous.

He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for his seed remains in him, and he cannot sin because he's been born of God.

Now we'll talk about, you know, exactly what that means and what it doesn't mean. It sounds a little bit, as a stand-alone teaching, it sounds a little bit scary. Because obviously Christians do sometimes sin, and yet he says, if you're born of God, you don't sin.

That has to be understood in its proper context, and we're going to go through the book and deal with those things. But obviously the focus there is, are you sinning? Are you living a righteous life? Are you obedient? Are you keeping the commandments? This is the second test. In chapter 5, in verse 3, it says, For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome.

And in chapter 5, verse 18, We know that whoever is born of God does not sin, but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. Again, there will be commentary on these verses as we go through the book. I'm just pointing out that this is another category that John gives us of proof that you really are a Christian, or not.

Your righteous life, your obedient life, keeping the commandments, not sinning. So, these two are very important. What do you believe about Jesus, and do you live like a Christian? If you've got those two going for you, you're pretty good.

But there's more. Because there's also the love test. The love test.

And this one seems to be the one most frequently mentioned in John. Remember, it was John who recorded the command of Jesus. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another.

It's in John 13, 34. And in the next verse, John 13, 35, he said, By this all men will know that you are my disciples, or Christians, if you love one another. So, Jesus said, and John recorded Jesus' words, that loving one another is the proof that we are his disciples.

So, certainly this can't be omitted, and it certainly is not from 1 John. In chapter 2, verses 10 and 11, he says, He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause of stumbling in him. He who hates his brother is in darkness, and walks in darkness, and does not know where he's going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

And over in chapter 3, verse 10, he says, In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest. That is, you can tell the difference between a child of God and a child of the devil. How? Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, as we were saying earlier, nor is he who does not love his brother.

That's the third test. Whoever doesn't practice righteousness, that's the second test. Whoever doesn't love his brothers, the third test, is not of God.

In the same chapter, verses 14 and 15, he says, We know that we have passed from death unto life. That means we know is saved, right? How? Because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.

He has not been born, he has not passed from death to life. He remains in death. And you can tell because he doesn't love his brother.

Whoever hates his brother is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, because he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren, he says.

A couple of verses later, verses 18 and 19, he says, My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth. That is, by the fact that we love, we know we are truly of God, of Christ, of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

Chapter 4, verses 7 and 8, very important verses. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

Very clearly a true test of whether you know God or not. In verse 12 of chapter 4, it says, No one has seen God at any time, but if we love one another, God abides in us, if we love

each other. And his love has been perfected in us.

And it goes on. Chapter 5, verse 1, it says, Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves him who begot, that is the Father, whoever loves God, the begetter, also loves his kids, loves him who is begotten of him. If you love God, you do love his kids.

And so this love test, in fact, there's quite a few verses we skipped over on the same subject. This is probably the most prominent test in 1 John, and anyone who studies 1 John can't help but come away thinking that John is all about this matter of love. In fact, there's an apocryphal story from the church fathers about John.

In his old age, he was very weak. He lived to be very old and was carried into the church in Ephesus every service on a pallet or a cot. And they'd set him down in the church, and before the service was over, they'd say, Brother John, do you have a word for the church? And he'd try to lift himself up on one elbow and put his finger up and say, Children love one another.

And then he'd, you know, that's all he could do. He didn't have energy for it, and they'd carry him on out after that. But every service, he'd say the same thing, love one another.

John was the apostle of love, although he was also one of the sons of thunder, as Jesus called him, because he wasn't always eminent for love in the early days. But he apparently was impressed by Christ's command, by this all men will know you're my disciples. He put it in his gospel.

The other gospels don't mention it. And he also certainly makes it a prominent feature in this epistle. Then there's the final test.

What is the final test? If you have the Spirit of Christ, if you have the Holy Spirit. In other words, being a Christian isn't just adopting certain views, adopting certain patterns of living, and being nice to people who you weren't nice to before. You have to have something internal that is Christ's Spirit.

You have to be, Christ has to be living his life in you. Being a Christian, a genuine Christian, is a supernatural phenomenon where the Spirit of God comes to dwell in you and births you into a new species of human being, a son of God. You're born again.

And the presence of the Holy Spirit is visible in you by the fruit of the Spirit in you. Paul talked about what the fruit is, and it's really basically love, and joy, and peace, and gentleness, and self-control, and things like that. But these are the character of Christ.

Christ's character is produced in those that have his Spirit. His Spirit lives his life out through us. Paul made some interesting statements about this in 2 Corinthians 4 that I very rarely hear commented on because they're so, I don't know, they sound kind of

mystical.

They're certainly different than the emphasis of most Christian teaching. Paul's talking about his suffering. And he says in 2 Corinthians 4, 8 and following, he says, We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed.

We are perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed, always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus. Notice that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. We're suffering these things, carrying around the sufferings and dying of Jesus in our physical experience so that the life of Jesus will be manifested in our bodies.

That in our mortal life, in our mortal behavior, when people encounter us in this lifetime, they will encounter a manifestation of the life of Jesus in our mortal bodies. And he says it again, just in case we wondered whether he meant it, in verse 11, For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So, while we are alive in this body, God desires for the life of Jesus to be lived out and manifested in our physical body as a result of his spirit that is in us.

His spirit produces his attitudes, his demeanor, his, I don't know, his vibes, I guess we have to say. I mean, when you're around somebody, there's so many people, I don't know how to describe them, except they have the spirit of Christ. And so many people who have Orthodox doctrines, I can say with great assurance, they don't have the spirit of Christ.

I don't sense the life of Christ manifested in their body or in their language or in their dealings with people. They just don't seem to, the spirit of Christ doesn't seem to be the spirit that's animating them because they aren't like Christ. And John said having the spirit of Christ is one of the tests also.

He says in chapter 2 in verse 20, he says, but you have an anointing, he means the Holy Spirit is our anointing, from the Holy One and you know all things. Unlike the Gnostics who think they know a lot, you actually know all that you need to know because of the Holy Spirit that's been given to you. And he elaborates on that in verse 27.

But the anointing which you have received from him abides in you and you do not need that anyone teach you. But as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things and is true and is no lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in him. Now the anointing teaches you, remember Jesus said in the upper room to his disciples, when the Holy Spirit comes, he will lead you into all truth.

He will teach you of things to come. And so this is a reference to the Holy Spirit being in the believer as the indwelling teacher. But he says in chapter 3 in verse 24, now he who keeps his commandments abides in him, that's the second test, and he in him.

And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us. We know we're Christians because of the Spirit he's given us. It's the Holy Spirit, it's the Spirit of Christ, it's not some other spirit.

It's not a spirit of antichrist, it's not a bitter and angry spirit, it's not a spirit of bondage again to fear, it's not a spirit of legalism. Those are different spirits than the Spirit of Christ. The fact that we have the Spirit of Christ is how we know.

Paul said the same thing in Romans 8 and 9. He said, if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he's not one of his. So John is on the same page with Paul about that. If you don't have the Spirit of Christ, you're not a Christian.

You may have Christian beliefs, you may mimic Christian behavior. You might even be able to feel love toward people. After all, lots of people are lovable and everybody, you know, succumbs once in a while to feeling affectionate toward people.

You might even learn how to be nice to people so you feel, and people think that you love them. But if you don't have the Spirit of Christ, you fail the final test of the four. In chapter 4 and verse 13 he says, by this we know that we abide in him and he in us.

Notice again the assurance there, we know this. We know we're Christians. We know he's in us and we're in him.

Because he has given us of his Spirit. That's how we know. In chapter 5 and verse 6 he says, this is he who came by water and by blood.

He says, not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. And he elaborates on that in verse 10.

He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself. Now whose witness is this? It's the Spirit that bears witness. And anyone who's really born of God, who believes in the Son of God genuinely, has this witness of the Spirit in himself.

Paul said in Romans 8, the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. John says the same thing. Whoever's really a Christian has this witness inside.

I know I'm a child of God. Because God's confirming that to me by the communication of his Spirit to my spirit. And he says, he who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself.

So the Holy Spirit dwells in a true Christian. And that's how we know we're Christians. Actually we know by all these things.

By all these things we know. Because we believe, because we obey, because we love, because we have the Spirit. Now these things are all pretty intermixed.

Because really when you think about it, the fruit of the Spirit is love. So if you really love in the way John's talking about, it's an evidence that you do have the Spirit. Because it's the Spirit who produces that love in us.

The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, Paul said in Romans 5.5. And in Galatians 5.22 he said, the fruit of the Spirit is love. So if the Spirit of God is in us, the Spirit of Christ will produce in us a loving disposition and it will dominate our lives. And that will result in what? Our obeying.

Jesus said, if you love me, keep my commandments. And obviously he said, love is the fulfilling of the law. So you'll live a righteous life if you love.

And you'll love if you have the Spirit. So these three, after the first test, these other three are all kind of interwoven and inseparable. But they're even inseparable with the first one.

It's all, it's not as if Christians have one of these things and develop a second one along the way and a third one later on in their life. These four things combine as a multiple witness that an individual is or is not a Christian. If you pass the faith test, the righteousness test, and the love test and the Spirit test, then you pass.

You are indeed a true Christian. If you fail those tests, I suppose even any one of them, if you abysmally fail them, then you're not a Christian. Now, again, lots of these verses that talk about them require a little exposition because they're stated in a very absolute, very stark manner.

But when you take them all in their context, you see that, you know, they are, it smooths out some things there. I mean, we read some rather severe statements and they are, you know, we don't want to water them down at all, but we do want to understand what they do and don't mean because some of those statements would give any Christian cause to despair. And that's not what John intends.

John didn't write to make anyone despair. He didn't write, in fact, to make anyone doubt their salvation. He wrote to encourage them and give them assurance of salvation.

But you can only have that assurance if you understand these statements he makes, you know, in their context well enough to know exactly what he is and what he is not saying about it. And so that will be our task as we study the book of 1 John in the coming evenings. And that's where we're going to lay this off right now and come back next evening and we'll talk about, we'll start at chapter one and we'll work through the book.