

Explore: The truth presented

May 22, 2015

• *The Explore the Bible lesson for June 7 focuses on 1 John 1:1-4.*

Introduction to 1 John

1 John is an astute and ever-relevant epistle that has encouraged generations of disciples over the past two millennia. The God-inspired letter obviously stands the test of time, and the author took up some of the great themes of daily Christian practice—love of neighbor, imitating Christ and forgiveness of sin. He intricately weaved together theology and ethics. Within a few short chapters, the author takes us under his paternal wing and creates an environment where we may find refreshment and encouragement along the narrow way.

The author of 1 John and the Gospel of John is one and the same. We say this not only based upon rhetorical connections between the writings, but the Greek grammar shows remarkable similarities. Further, by this point in his ministry, John spoke from the standpoint of a grizzled veteran. He asserted his apostleship, for he was an eyewitness and close friend of Jesus Christ.

Yet, he concerned himself with the next generations of Christians, referring to them as his own beloved children. John also stood firm against the merciless influence and infiltration of heretical philosophies—especially Gnosticism—into the first century church. Consider how many times John called out and tested the spirits of these heresies and how he educated us to do the same.

John also prompts us to add understanding to our faith. He consistently connected words like “knowing” and “believing.” For John, knowing and believing in Jesus Christ as both the truly divine and truly human incarnate

God leads to an active and righteous lifestyle. The first four verses or introduction to the letter serve as quite a thesis for the entire epistle and set the pace for our study. In fact, we find three main ideas regarding the person and nature of Jesus Christ within these verses. These ideas steer us toward right belief and right action.

Witnessed by many (1:1)

It isn't difficult to notice the similarities between this verse and the prologue of John's Gospel. John began both his epistle and Gospel by pointing directly to the nature of the Christ and thereby issued deeply important and resonant faith claims. For instance, notice John spoke clearly about "that which was from the beginning." Some scholars view this particular phrase differently, thinking the "beginning" either refers to Genesis 1:1 or to the beginning of Jesus' life.

Regardless of which interpretation we choose, we can rightly interpret John pointed to the eternity of Christ. Jesus Christ, being God, is timeless. John's insistence upon the eternity of Jesus would have flown directly in the face of Gnostic heretics who viewed Jesus in a temporal sense.

Notice, too, that John pointed out the truth of Jesus' full humanity, another direct charge against the false teachings of Gnosticism. John rightfully claimed to have seen, touched and interacted with the "Word of Life." Obviously, John referred to Jesus as the eternal and preexistent Word, or Logos—the One who both gives and personifies true life.

Revealed as life (1:2)

John incisively stated, "The life appeared." A more literal interpretation of the Greek translation posits, "The life was made known." In other words, John specifically pointed to Jesus' resurrection and to the truth of Jesus' fully divinity. John's life and witness gave testimony to the truth. Indeed, Jesus is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). In this way, verse 2

functions as an effective summation of Johannine theology that impacts one's reading of the entire epistle. According to John, Jesus Christ is preexistent and eternally God. He is God incarnate. Jesus is thus fully divine and fully human. Jesus resurrected bodily from death, and those who believe in him not only experience his life, but also bear witness to what they have seen and heard.

Provided True Fellowship (1:3-4)

John set the tone here for the rest of the epistle, giving a rather shortened but adequate thesis or corollary to the first two verses. One scholar suggests John wanted readers to move from revelation to declaration. The Christian witness, therefore, is the most viable and logical way to act upon the revelation of 1:1-2. Knowledge of the fully divine and fully human Jesus Christ ought to lead one to an active lifestyle of declaring Jesus as Lord and Messiah. The eternal life that follows is encapsulated in divine and human fellowship or "koinonia."

Accordingly, John wrote the epistle so brothers and sisters in Christ may experience lasting and abiding joy. The joy to which John referred is from the Lord and not from human contrivance. This joy continually is being fulfilled in intimate fellowship among believers. John's spirit would be dampened if the ones to whom he wrote rejected the revelation and therefore the comradeship which the gospel and hope of Christ provides.