

1John

Introduction: A letter

"Dear Elder in Patmos,

Greetings in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God. I hope this letter finds you well. Since you were last with us, we have been studying the scroll, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that you brought with you. However, although we find it very helpful to read this, as we do not have you here with us, we still have a number of issues that we are struggling with. We hope that you can write to us and explain a number of things that we have been struggling with, for instance:

1. Some of us compare God the Father with the our old Greek and Roman (so called) Gods. They were good as well as evil. And as we see the evil around us does it not make sense that God also must have some of this darkness in him?
2. Some of us struggle to believe in Jesus - as none of us have really known him - what was he like?
3. Some of us feel they have been waiting too long! Will Jesus really return? As we are now really persecuted and some want to leave our Christian faith because of it.
4. Some of us do not believe that Jesus was truly a human being, but that as the Son of God - he is only divine. As you have seen him for real, can you enlighten us please?
5. Some of us claim that because Jesus has died for our sins, that we have no sin and are automatically forgiven. Then again some see all too clearly the sin in each other - and want to introduce stricter discipline. What is the right way?

All in all this causes a great upset in our congregations! People are arguing with each other about the right interpretation and some have even come to blows about it! We as a leadership team find it hard to help them to see what is right, as there are even divisions among us. It really would be better if you were here, but we know you can't, as you are imprisoned there on Patmos. Is there something you can teach us more?

Yours in Christ - Elders of the churches in Syria.

Imaginary Letter

Assumptions on historical questions

Authorship

John the beloved disciple?

The elder of 2 John and 3 John?

However the medieval church attributed all these to John the Son of Zebedee

The Gospel of John

1,2,3 John

Relation to Gospel of John

Recurring theme

To know of walk in the truth

to love one another

completion of joy

believers as little children

Jesus / Holy Spirit as advocate (Pareaclete)

World as a place of disbelief and hostility

The need to "abide" in God or in Christ

But then there are clear differences too

So instead of one authors, scholars are now presuming a Johanite community

Churches and Scholars started by the apostle John and his disciples - using the same theological words and phrases

Genre

1John seems a commentary on Gospel of John

It is not a true letter: it does not have a from and a to, no greetings at the beginning and the end

But the contents read as a letter

So my fancy took me and I imaged that the churches in Syria wrote this letter to John the Elder of Patmos, who as the beloved disciple had known Jesus intimately and could speak about him with authority

And that this Apostle John wrote 1John as an essay or a sermon, answering the questions of the congregations, based on the contents of the Gospel of John

So that unlike a letter it could be distributed to all the churches without favouring one.

Themes

The themes of 1John are as the letter indicated:

The Nature of God: "God is Light and is without darkness at all"

Eyewitness Testimony: "What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you"

Future outlook: "Children it is the last hour"

Who Jesus is: "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh"

What Jesus does: "He is the expiation for our sins"

What we have to do: "Beloved, let us love one another"

1John 1: 1-4

Just as the prologue in John's Gospel - but not the same!

Echoes (see slide)

Structure less harmonious in Greek

One long sentence

Clumsy or intentional verb tenses

Is it almost as the author says

This is not fancy theology

These are real life/messy experiences

Not a nice clear cut package

But real life - messy - but therefore more true?

With an emphasis on

Physical body of Jesus

The physical experience of the witnesses

Jesus is not only the **Word** become flesh

Theological concepts

Of Jesus being with God the Father in Creation

And how the world reacted to Jesus

And how Christians responded to him

If you were inclined to read this with a pure spiritual lens

Then the large concepts of creation, of being one with the Father, of light in the darkness

you could make the mistake to think that Jesus was a spiritual being only.

But 1John: We have experience Jesus as a physical person

v1

what we have **heard**

What we have **seen** with our eyes

what we have **looked at**

touched with our hands

v2

this word of life was **revealed**

seen it

testify to it

declare it to you

The eternal life with the Father

revealed to us

v3

Declare to you

what we have **seen**

what we have **heard**

Not theological but practical

Not an exercise of the mind: but a real presence of the real Word of God as a real person

Really! We have seen him! He is alive!

Jesus is a real human being - as well as the Son of God!

It is almost like the author is recasting John's gospel prologue

In this is real - this is the real thing. Please. listen to us!

John is starting to answer some of the questions of the imaginary letter

Some of the themes of 1John:

Who Jesus is: "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh"

The Nature of God: "God is Light and is without darkness at all"

Eyewitness Testimony: "What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you"

But he finishes on a slight tangent

Why does he write this?

So that you may also have fellowship with us

△ v3c

and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ

△ v3d

He says that they can only have fellowship with him and his group - if they can believe that this is true: Jesus Christ is fully divine and fully a human being

So that we can have a full relationship with him

We cannot have a human relationship with a divine being

That's why God in Jesus became human

But a true relationship is not 1:1.

It is 1:1:1:1:....:1

It is many to many

It is a relationship in community

The community of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit is extended to include us

not 'me', 'me', 'me', but us together

So he says: have fellowship with us and therefore with the Father and the Son! As they are mutually inclusive!

So that our joy may be complete

John is calling them to be part of his community

Which is a community with Jesus

And then the community is more complete, more fulfilled, more whole

And John's joy is complete

and he starts to answer already what it means to be in community

What we have to do: "**Beloved, let us love one another**"

Postscript: we

To be consistent with the tradition that 1John is written by the apostle John

You may have noticed that I addressed the author as a single person

And also because writing tends to be a singular activity

But John himself, uses 'we' as the pronoun

and he means the community.

One community is calling another community to have fellowship with them

By accepting Jesus Christ as the Son of God

Divine

Human

Jesus Christ binds communities together

"**Beloved, let us love one another**"

Amen