

1 John 1:1-4 | Getting Jesus Right

The Book of 1 John was written by the Apostle John (Cf. **2 and 3 John**; **Gospel of John**; **Revelation**)

- One of the 12 Disciples; Brother of John (Sons of Thunder); Part of inner circle; Apostle of love
- “**There was reclining on Jesus’ breast one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved.**” (John 13:23; Cf. 20:2)
- Jesus’ Mother (John 20:26-27)
- The Epistle of Love (a main theme) (See: **3:14-18; 4:7-12, 15-21**)

John wrote this to a group of churches

- They were experiencing difficulty
- Many had left the community(s) because they (those who left) did not believe in the Incarnation (See **1 John 4:1-2**)

John is writing to (1) combat this error and to (2) comfort, reassure, direct those in the churches

Dealing with Early **Gnosticism**

- Matter was bad and meaningless (perhaps even an illusion)
- The goal of the Gnostics was release from the material body
- Esoteric (secret) knowledge led to redemption of the human spirit

An early form of **Docetism**

- The term comes from the Greek word *dokein*, which means “to seem”
- Belief that Christ’s body and humanity were not real and so neither were his sufferings
- They believed Christ was divine but only **seemed** to become human
- God being good could have nothing to do with evil matter so there could be no incarnation
- They held that Christ only “seemed” to have a genuine body of flesh and only “seemed” to suffer and die
- A spirit in a sort of phantom body
- The implications of this are profound:
 - If Christ did not really come in the flesh and did not really die on the cross
 - There is no atonement for sins
 - Heresy

If you are going to deny the atonement, you have to deny sin

- Some Gnostics did (document) and apparently some of that was happening here (See **1 John 1:8**)
- At least one Gnostic document contains the claim that Gnostic believers “**never sinned**” (*Second Treatise of the Great Seth*)
- In another Gnostic treatise (*The Gospel of Mary*) sin is seen not to be a moral issue but rather **an unfortunate function of that arises from the mixing of the spiritual and material realms**
- It seems people addressed in book in their eschewing of matter and the body developed an over realized concept of salvation in the here and now (what happened in the body did not really matter)
- They perhaps took the ideas of **imputed righteousness** and **being children of God** and **citizens of heaven** and **being born again** and **being seated in the heavenlies with Christ** to an extreme and errant conclusion
- I.e. Then this physical life does not matter (maybe it is a mere illusion)—the spiritual life we have in Christ has totally subsumed this physical life
- Taken to its extreme end such a view makes the need for current sanctification void and makes the doctrine of future glorification null
- They were either claiming to have no sin or saying that sin in this body did not really matter
- **1 John is telling us that sin is indeed a moral issue** and that sin and righteousness are manifested concretely in our behavior in these bodies now—in our daily conduct—**what we do in the flesh matters**

John is writing to combat these false beliefs

- (1) To affirm the Incarnation and right view of the atonement
 - That Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah who came in the flesh who suffered and died for sin
- (2) To affirm that what we do in the body matters and we ought not to sin
- **The Two Main Themes of 1 John—The Right View of Jesus and Right Christian Conduct**

How is this relevant to us today (*Docetism/Gnosticism*)?

Christian Science

- “The Spiritual Christ was infallible; Jesus, as material manhood, was not Christ.” (*Miscellaneous Writings*, 84)
- “The material blood of Jesus was no more efficacious to cleanse from sin when it was shed upon the ‘the accursed tree’ than when it was flowing in His veins as he went daily about His Father’s business.” (*Science and Health*, 25)
- They deny that Jesus died on the cross (S & H, 45-46) and say that **his disciples merely thought he did**
- They deny the existence of both matter and evil (*No and Yes*, 24)
- “Hence evil is but an illusion and it has no real basis. Evil is a false belief.” (*Science and Health*, 480)

Theosophy

- A pantheistic form of ancient Gnosticism
- “Theosophists are great admirers of the Gnostics... they have adopted much of the terminology and vocabulary of ancient Gnosticism **which looked with disdain upon the material properties of both the world and man...**” (Martin, 287)
- Theosophy declares that all men are innately divine, “so that in time all men become Christs.”¹

The New Age Movement

- **The New Age denies that Christ was a man**
- *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ* says “Christ is not man. The Christ is universal love... This Jesus is but man who has been fitted by temptations overcome, by trials multiform, to be the temple through which Christ can manifest to men... Look to the Christ within, who shall be formed in every one of you...” (Downing, *Aquarian*, 50)²
 - Exactly what 1 John is dealing with: Correct view of Christ and the correct view of love
 - **1 John 2:22** says:
Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.
- Anything is permissible to New Agers because sin and evil are not real. They are only illusions. Evil is “**basically the manifestation of a force that is out of place or out of timing, inappropriate to the needs and realities of the situation.**”³

1 John Matters Today!

KEYNOTE: Show the whole text of 1 John 1:1-4 (NASB) when we read it

What was from the beginning

- Gen 1:1 (Creation)
- John 1:1-2 (Before Creation)
- 1 John 1:1 (The Incarnation and the Gospel)

What we have **heard**, what we have **seen** with our eyes, what we have **looked at** and **touched** with our hands

- The Incarnation and Physicality
- Sensory witness
- **Seen** (horaō) versus **looked at** (*theaomai*)
 - Seen = To see, perceive with the eyes, look at. Implying not the mere act of seeing, but also the actual perception of some object, thus differing from *blépō*⁴
 - Looked at = To wonder. To behold, view attentively, contemplate, indicating the sense of a wondering consideration involving a careful and deliberate vision, which interprets its object.⁵
 - Many who had merely seen Him cried “crucify Him”

Concerning the Word of Life

- **Word**
 - Cf. The Gospel of John 1:1-2
1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
2 He was in the beginning with God.

¹ Annie Besant, *is Theosophy Anti-Christian?* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1899),16.

² Martin, 344.

³ David Spangler, *Revelation*, 123.

⁴ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, electronic ed. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

⁵ 11-14

- Logos = Refers not merely to a part of speech but to a concept or idea
- Ancient Greek philosophers in pondering the relationship between Creator God and the universe proposed that there must be some revelation, concept, mediator that bridges the gap between an infinite God and finite creation—they called this possible mediator “Logos”
- John tells them that this mediator unknown to them is Jesus
- Jesus is the Logos in the sense that He is the total expression of an infinite God
- God communicating to creation not in mere parts of speech but in the human life of a divine Person
- Hebrews 1:1-3^a
 - 1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,
 - 2 in these last days **has spoken to us in His Son**, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.
 - 3 And He is the radiance of His glory and **the exact representation of His nature**, and upholds all things by the word of His power...
- The Gospel of John 14:9
 - He who has seen Me has seen the Father
- The Gospel of John 1:18
 - No one has seen God at any time; **the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.**
- *Exēgéomai*: To tell, lead forward. To bring or lead out, declare thoroughly and particularly. To unfold, reveal, make known⁶
- Jesus is The Logos of God in that He is Deity told out⁷
- The definite article is here which means that Jesus is not merely a concept of God among many others... He is THE concept of God, the only true one, the unique one
- **In the beginning was the Word**
 - He existed before all things (uncreated and eternal)
- **the Word was with God**
 - with = from a preposition meaning literally “facing”
 - Speaking of the eternal fellowship of the Son and the Father
 - Which was never broken until “Eloi...”
- **the Word was God**
 - was God = Jesus posses the same Deity as the Father— He is one with Him in nature and attributes (Very God)
- **“In the begging was the Word (total concept of God), and the Word was in constant fellowship with God (the Father), and the Word was (as to His essence or nature) God.”⁸**

Concerning the Word of Life

- Life
 - Cf. The Gospel of John 1:3-4
 - 3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.
 - 4 **In Him was life**, and the life was the Light of men.
 - John 14:6 & Jon 11:25-26
 - John 10:27-28
 - 27 “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;
 - 28 **and I give eternal life to them**, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.”
 - John 5:26
 - For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also **to have life in Himself**

John 1:14 (NASB)

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

HIS POINT: THIS ONE WHO IS THE PREXISTENT LOGOS AND THE VERY GOD, WHO HOLDS LIFE IN HIS HANDS, BECAME FLESH AND DWELT AMONG IS... AND IN HIM IS SALVATION

⁶ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, electronic ed. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

⁷ Kenneth Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament, Volume 3* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1973), 51.

⁸ Ibid., 51.

Verses 2-3

- **That you may have fellowship with us**
 - In light of those who are leaving, John reminds them of the basis of their fellowship—the right understanding of Christ
 - The word **fellowship** is from the Greek word that means “to have on common with”
- **And indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ**
 - John said that the believers had fellowship together because they had this correct view of Christ in **common**—The Son of God who came in the flesh
 - Now he says, we have fellowship with the Son and the Father
 - **Fellowship** is from the Greek word that means “to have on common with”
 - What do we have in common with them?
 - We can speak of the fellowship of man (same nature)—the basis of human fellowship is common nature
 - Fine artist and a bulldozer driver (artist to artist = fellowship)
 - Christ took on humanity!
 - Hebrews 2:14
Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, **He Himself likewise also partook of the same...**
 - But through faith in Him, we also become partakers in His divine nature!
 - 2 Peter 1:3-4
3 Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence,
4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, **so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.**
 - A believing sinner is made a partaker of the divine nature, thus having a common nature with God (**New Creation—Christ in us**)
 - Not by having the essence of your humanity changed into the essence of divinity
 - But by having Christ the divine Savior continually dwelling within us
 - We are born again—born of God in Christ
 - In us and we in Him; Remade in His image; We are His body
 - We are the bride of Christ; Co-heirs with Christ
 - United with Christ and so the whole Trinity!
 - God is truly our Father!
- What this means is that we can have real fellowship with Him!
 - He took on flesh and we participate in His divine nature
 - A true commonality
 - Hebrews 4:15-16
15 For we do not have a high priest **who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses**, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.
16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
 - Romans 8:29 = we are meant to be **conformed to the image of God’s Son**
 - Ephesians 4:24
Put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

Next week (and whole book) we will be told what that fellowship looks like in practical

- But right now we are told:
- **These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.** (v. 4)