

Current Bible Study

9/21/21

Prayer

- Levels of prayer:
 - **Vocal prayer**
 - As an individual
 - In groups (Corporate prayer)
 - The Our Father
 - Rosary
 - Novenas
 - Divine Mercy
 - Liturgy at Mass

Prayer (Cont)

- **Meditative prayer**
 - Meditate on
 - Scripture
 - Spiritual works
- **Contemplative prayer**
 - Becoming one with God
 - Foretaste of the Beatific Vision

Late 1st Century Gentile Christian

- You are a 30-year old, 1st Century Gentile Christian Convert, attending the Church in Ephesus in the year 90 A.D.
- You are married, with a family, working as a carpenter
- You are attempting to understand this “New Way,” as it challenges your Gentile beliefs

Setting the Stage for John's Writings

- Two words that had a tremendous impact in setting the stage for the early Church (33 A.D. to 90 A.D.) was:

Holy Spirit

- Pentecost and Peter's message (**Acts 2:37-42** ¹)
- The Apostolic teaching (the **Kerygma**)
- The 14 letters of Paul
- The Synoptic Gospels
- The **Apostles' Creed**
- The **Didache**
- Eucharistic and Baptismal liturgies

Summary of the Kerygma

- The **promises of God** made in the OT have now **been fulfilled** with the coming of **Jesus**, the Messiah
- Jesus was **anointed by God at his baptism as Messiah**
- Jesus began his **ministry in Galilee** after his baptism
- He conducted a beneficent ministry, **doing good, and performing mighty works** by the power of God
- The Messiah was **crucified** according to the purpose of God
- He was **raised from the dead**, and appeared to his disciples
- Jesus was **exalted by God** and given the name “**Lord**”
- He gave the **Holy Spirit** to form the new community of God
- He **will come again for judgment** and the restoration of all things
- **All who hear the message should repent and be baptized**

Apostles' Creed

- Then 12 articles of the **Apostles Creed** outline the fundamental doctrines of Christianity
- It is a faithful summary of the Apostles' faith
- It is considered the oldest Roman catechism
- A tradition from the Middle Ages holds that on Pentecost, while under the influence of the Holy Spirit, each Apostle composed a separate article
- This creed is used in prayers like the Rosary, and was expanded into the Nicene Creed

The 12 Articles of the Apostles' Creed

- I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
- I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
- He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and **born of the Virgin Mary.**
- He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
- He descended to the dead. On the third day **he rose again.**
- He ascended into Heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

The 12 Articles of the Apostles' Creed (Cont)

- He **will come again** to judge the living and the dead.
- I believe in the Holy Spirit,
- The holy catholic Church, the communion of saints,
- The forgiveness of sins,
- **The resurrection of the body,**
- And the life everlasting. Amen.

The Didache – The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles

- A brief early Christian treatise dated from the mid to late 1st century
- The Greek manuscript was rediscovered in 1873
- It is the oldest surviving written catechism containing 3 main sections:
 - Christian ethics
 - Rituals (Baptism and Eucharist)
 - Church organization (considered the first example of the Church Orders)

The Didache – The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles (Cont)

- Although anonymous, it is considered part of the category of second generation Christian writings known as the **Apostolic Fathers**
- It is a pastoral manual which reveals more about how Jewish-Christians saw themselves and **how they adapted their Judaism for gentiles**
- The contents can be divided into 4 parts:
 - Two Ways, the Way of Life and the Way of Death
 - A ritual dealing with **Baptism**, fasting, and **Communion**
 - The ministry and how to deal with traveling prophets
 - A brief apocalypse
 - *Read from: *The Hidden Manna* p. 18-19

The Teachings of the Apostolic Fathers

- What are the qualities that distinguish an Apostolic Father?
 - Those who came right after the Apostles and who were directly acquainted with them
 - They were instructed by the Apostles
 - Their writings coincide with the end of the writings of the NT (between 80-100 A.D.)
- Who were the Apostolic Fathers?
 - **St. Clement** – Peter and Paul
 - **St. Ignatius of Antioch** - John
 - **St. Polycarp** – John

The Explosion of Christianity

- 12 Apostles
- Grew to over
- 2.2 Billion Christians
- In the World by
 - 2010

Introduction to the Johannine Literature

Johannine Literature

The Gospel of John

The three Epistles John

The Book of Revelation

Introduction to the Johannine Literature (Cont)

- **Authorship:**

- John the Evangelist
 - Young teenager at the time of Christ
 - Outlived the rest of the Apostles
 - An elderly man at the end of his life who had a lot of time to meditate on Christian theology

- **Composition:**

- Written from Ephesus in the 90s (the end of the 1st Century)

- **Audience:**

- Primarily first and second generation Gentile converts in the seven churches of Asia Minor (listed in the Book of Revelation)

Introduction to the Johannine Literature (Cont)

- After living in **Jerusalem** initially, John eventually moved to Asia Minor and settled in ***Ephesus***, a pagan city filled with pagan temples
- *Jerusalem* was destroyed in 70 A.D. and the center of Christianity moved to ***Antioch***
- It was not until *St. Helena*, mother of *Constantine*, went in search of the holy places that *Jerusalem* returned to being partly Christian city
- It was from this region that most of early Christian literature was produced
 - Ignatius of Antioch
 - Clement of Rome
 - The Gospels
 - The Epistles

Introduction to the Johannine Literature (Cont)

- There were Christians in *Alexandria Egypt, Rome, and Asia Minor*
- *Ephesus* was a logical place for John to settle as it was the capital city of that region (all roads led to Ephesus)
- Most of the churches in the region contained a few Jewish converts, but most members were Gentile converts
- Father reminded us that the Gentiles came into the church with two pieces of baggage: *Dualism* and *Gnosticism* which we would expect to see being addressed in the Christian literature of the day
- This means that John's writings were apologetically written against *Dualism* and *Gnosticism*
- Like *Paul*, who had to write against the ***Judaizer heresy*** (the letter to the ***Galatians 1:6-9*** ₂), John had to deal with that same fervor against the *Dualists*

The Judaizer Problem

- The Judaizer problem in the early church
 - All of the first converts to the “New Way” were Jews
 - As the church grew, a powerful group of people believed that since they practiced the teaching of the Law of Moses (to include circumcision and Kosher), all members joining the “New Way” if they were not practicing Jews, had to become a Jew
 - As Paul began to convert Gentiles into the Church, this became a problem as most Gentiles did not want to take on the baggage of Judaism to become a Christian
 - This issue was resolved at the Council of Jerusalem in 49 or 50 AD when James, Bishop of Jerusalem proposed a remedy from the Book of Leviticus

Leviticus

- **Leviticus 17-22** contains the “**Holiness Code,**” which was very important for the Old Testament, but also played a major role in the New Testament
- The “Holiness Code” is located right in the middle of the Law (Torah)
- The **Book of Leviticus** was seen as the central “**scroll**” of the Law and understood as the “heart of the Torah”
- At the very center of the Holiness Code is **Leviticus 19:2** which states: “*You shall be holy for I the Lord your God am holy*”

Acts 15 The Solution to the Judaizer Problem

- James provided the solution by quoting from the “**Holiness Code**” from **Leviticus 17:8 -18:30** stating that the Gentiles could be baptized into the Church so long as they abstained from:
 - What has been sacrificed to idols
 - Blood
 - What has been strangled
 - *Pornea*
- The council agreed
- Paul, Barnabas Judas (called Barsabbas), and Silas were instructed to take a letter containing this decision and read it to the Church in Antioch
- Unfortunately, this problem persisted for many years (**Galatians 1:6-12***)

Introduction to the Johannine Literature (Cont)

- Unfortunately, the heresies of Gnostic Dualism are still relevant for us today, as Satan has certainly entered the church
- Father said that he was hard pressed to find a Christian who was not somewhat a dualist
- Thus, much of John's writing was aimed at these major heresies, that were developing with the churches at that time
- Within Johannine literature you will find *anti-Dualism* and *anti-Gnosticism* themes
- He wrote his Gospel, Epistles, and the Book of Revelation for a specific audience to include what he needed to educate them about
- Many today completely misunderstand John's imagery or historical setting

Introduction to the Johannine Literature (Cont)

- Some today see John's writings as being so sacramental because of all the focus on the material, the flesh, and water
- But, it really is Christian, as it challenges the *Dualistic* and *Gnostic* images of these things
- Jesus resurrected body was real and we are called to chew on his flesh (**John 6**)
- It was not written for apologetics to be used to convert our Protestant friends
- So, if we put ourselves in John's world, his writings will come alive

Introduction to the Johannine Literature (Cont)

- Just as Paul dealt with the ***Judaizer problem***, John had to deal with the problems of ***Gnosticism*** and ***Dualism***
- Many today, when reading his writings (without placing it in its historical context), completely misunderstand his imagery
 - Some today use **John 6** as a means of attacking their Protestant friends about the *Sacrament of the Eucharist*
 - That was not why he wrote **John 6**
 - We need to forget about “apologetics,” and look in context at the problems of *Gnosticism* and *Dualism*

Gnosticism

- The word Gnosticism means “secret knowledge”
- Father described a typical encounter with a group of Gnostics
 - Someone came up to you and whispered about something you needed to know
 - He might invite you to come that evening to a specific place where they would reveal the information
 - They might lead you into a dark room blindfolded where they would present all sorts of secret stuff and then invite you to join the cult
 - This went hand and hand with the Gnostic philosophy concerning the evil of the material world and the good of the spiritual world
 - Unfortunately, much of this is still around today in groups like the Masons and the new age movement, and movies like the *Da Vinci Code*

Dualism

- The typical pious Gnostic dualist in *Ephesus* at that time believed in many gods because there were countless gods in the universe to choose from
- He usually favored and offered sacrifices to a selected number of national gods at the local temple (Zeus or Venus) and perhaps a dozen of lesser and local gods of his liking
- Almost all pagan groups shared the common ideas of Dualism, in which they believed that at the beginning of the universe, there were two groups of gods
 - The good gods who created people as their spiritual children
 - The bad gods who did not like human beings and were at war with them

Dualism (Cont)

- The bad gods created the earth as a big prison to weigh down the spirit by the gravity of the earth, and the human body to capture and enclose a person's spirit
- Salvation was understood as the freeing of the spirit from the material world and body (created by the bad gods), and allowing it to fly up into the sky to push the planets around with the good gods
- This meant that the material world and all in it was bad and the spirit world was good
 - The goal of life was to free the spirit from the body
 - There would never be a reason to "save the flesh"
- Look at the contrast this had with the Christian truth that God created everything and it was all good (including the body)

Introduction to the Johannine Literature (Cont)

- Father pointed out that today many seem to still have these concepts concerning death (modern *Gnostic Dualism*)
 - They believe that at death, the soul leaves the body, and floats up to the clouds where it plays a harp for eternity!
- Salvation, for a Christian, should mean that if one dies before the second coming of Christ, and if they are baptized in Christ and have received his body and blood (in the Eucharist), you will be raised (body and soul) on the last day
- Thus, if a person dies with the promise of Christ (who cannot lie), he will be raised from the dead
- When Jesus comes back, death will be no more

Introduction to the Johannine Literature (Cont)

- For a Gentile with this background, it was not easy to accept the resurrection of Jesus
 - How could a great spirit, God, take on human flesh
 - They might wonder if He was forced to do this by the bad gods
- Thus, from the beginning, the concept of the Trinity (three persons, one of who had human flesh), was a challenge
- They could not conceive that God actually took on human flesh, dwelt on the earth, ate, and drank real material stuff
- This problem became even more profound when they heard about the end of Jesus' life being the resurrection from the dead (for them death was salvation)
- Throughout John's writings, we will find emphasis on the fleshiness of the body of Jesus
- We see in our study of the synoptic gospels that Luke had to deal with these same issues

Introduction to the Johannine Literature (Cont)

- Most scholars believe that John wrote three Epistles to the Gentile Christian audiences in the **churches of Asia Minor**
- They may be understood to be similar to today's: emails, text messages, or post-its
- John also wrote a full-length, well-developed preaching of the Good News of Jesus (The Gospel of John)
- We will now begin a quick overview of John's three Epistles