

# Current Bible Study

9/28/21

# Late 1<sup>st</sup> Century Gentile Christian

- You are a 30-year old, 1<sup>st</sup> 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

# A Christian Gnostic Dualist “Understanding of Death”

- They possessed “secret knowledge” concerning end-of-life issues
- They believed in two gods:
  - The good gods who created man’s spirit which needs to be freed from the material body and float up to the sky to be with their spiritual parents
  - The bad gods who hate humans and created the material world to hold them down and prevent their spirit from being released at death

# 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**

# Introduction to John's Epistles

# 1<sup>st</sup> John 1

- **1<sup>st</sup> John 1:1-4** *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard,....And we are writing this that our joy may be complete”*
  - What John was saying (about Jesus) was that they not only saw Him, and heard His words, but they actually touched Him for Jesus had a real body
  - When we look at the **Gospel of John** (especially the prologue (**John 1:1-18**), we will hear much of the same imagery

# 1<sup>st</sup> John 1 (Cont)

- **1<sup>st</sup> John 1:5** *“This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all”*
  - Father pointed out that we will discover over and over how John will set a trap for a Gnostic dualist
  - He always begins his writings with this kind of language
  - Father said that that if John was talking to a Baptist, he would not begin with a message that would offend him
  - He would speak to them in their own language and try to find some common ground, and then draw them in before showing them the problem
  - Paul did the same thing in his *thanksgiving sections*

# 1<sup>st</sup> John 1 (Cont)

- Father asked us to think of how we would respond as a Gnostic pagan to the words about how they had heard, seen, looked upon, and touched the resurrected Jesus with his hands (this last part always comes at the end)
- Then, he tells them of the message they had heard from Him and now proclaim to them that, “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all!”
- The Gnostic Dualist would be happy with that idea for God would be a light like the stars at night which they considered to be the spirit gods!



# 1<sup>st</sup> John 1 (Cont)

- **1<sup>st</sup> John 1:6-10** *“If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness,...and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin...and his word is not in us”*
  - This is a great example of how John ends with the message about the “blood of Jesus,” when he presented his anti-Dualism message
  - He usually started his messages with something that the dualist could deal with, and then closed the trap
  - This first section (**1<sup>st</sup> John 1:1-7**) is very like John’s prologue to his gospel (**John 1:1-18**)

# 1<sup>st</sup> John 2

- **1<sup>st</sup> John 2:1-11** *“My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin;...because the darkness has blinded his eyes”*
  - Notice the commandment “to love”
  - John was stating that Jesus was giving them a new commandment (**John 13:34**)
  - Also, notice the reference to light and darkness (Again, we will see this in the Prologue to John’s Gospel)

# 1<sup>st</sup> John 2 (Cont)

- **1<sup>st</sup> John 2:12-17** *“I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his sake...but he who does the will of God abides for ever”*
  - John was addressing his audience which consisted of little children, young men, and elders who were Christians of different stages of faith (within the various church communities)
  - The dualists would be happy with this section, as John led them into his trap
  - But then, look at how he ends this chapter

# 1<sup>st</sup> John 2 (Cont)

- **1<sup>st</sup> John 2:18-29** *“Children, it is the last hour;...you may be sure that every one who does right is born of him”*
  - John tells his listeners that the antichrist is not only coming, but has already arrived and that this is the last hour
  - Many of the Dualists would have been okay with the message of their anointing thus far
  - They might even have begun to accept a hint of the fleshiness of Jesus when John told them he touched Jesus
  - John was presenting some common ground here with the idea that God was light and Satan was passing away

# 1<sup>st</sup> John 2 (Cont)

- John was stating that because the resurrection of the body was coming, there will be a new heaven and a new earth (**Revelation 21:1**)
- When people today hear of the Antichrist, they think of the Book of Revelation (but, it **does not appear in that book**)
- Many see the Antichrist in people of modern times
- But, the Antichrist actually came 2000 years ago at the time of John, and most people missed him
- At this point, Father moved on to **1<sup>st</sup> John 4**

# 1<sup>st</sup> John 4

- **1<sup>st</sup> John 4:1-3** *“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God;...and now it is in the world already”*
  - Once again, much of this message would be okay to a 1<sup>st</sup> Century dualist
  - Father said that “testing the spirit” for John might have meant that there were different ideas and different movements within the early Church (but, we do not know for sure what he meant)
  - John identified the Antichrists who left the church as those Dualists and Gnostics who would not accept his teachings

# 1<sup>st</sup> John 4 (Cont)

- The idea of the Incarnation and the Resurrection of Jesus caused them to eventually leave the churches within John's community
- John hammered them over and over again about the fleshiness of Jesus and the goodness of the material world
- He presented the idea that God was going to renew and re-create the world
- Many eventually left the church because they could not accept the fact that God took on flesh
- He told them that if they wanted to have the Father and the spirit God, they had to have the fleshy God of the Son

# 1<sup>st</sup> John 4 (Cont)

- Father said that in Joannie literature, we will see emphasis over and over again upon the material world and the material nature of the body of Jesus (before and after the crucifixion)
- This is why in the Prologue of John's Gospel, we will hear about the Word became flesh and dwelt among us
- We will see much of this same theme in the second Epistle of John



# 2<sup>nd</sup> John

- **2<sup>nd</sup> John 1-3** *“The elder to the elect lady and her children,...in truth and love”*
  - The “elect lady” (based on the teachings of the Fathers of the Church) referred to a particular church to whom he (John, the elder was writing)
  - He calls her this because the church was often referred to as the “bride of Christ,” or a chosen lady
  - Thus, he is writing to one or all of the churches in Asia Minor
  - He was telling them that if they wanted the Father, they had to have the Son
  - Because he spoke of his knowledge of this lady, he may have recently visited this church or all of them, and now he is back in *Ephesus* writing this letter

## 2<sup>nd</sup> John (Cont)

- **2<sup>nd</sup> John 4-11** *“I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children following the truth,...for he who greets him shares his wicked work”*
  - *Father pointed out that during this time, churches were in the homes of the faithful*
  - *Usually, the Christians gathered in the home of one of the wealthy members (the church at Capernaum met in the house of Peter)*
  - *This was often the case because it was the biggest house and had a large room where they could worship*
  - *Since Christianity was illegal until after the 90s, these were the only places they could gather safely*

## 2<sup>nd</sup> John (Cont)

- Eventually, after a generation or two, the house was converted into the church building itself
- We can see this discussed in **1<sup>st</sup> John 4:2**
- Next, we hear that many false prophets had gone into the world of that day
- Father discussed how difficult it was back then to know if someone came proclaiming to be a priest or deacon, and wanted to share in the liturgy as a true believer

## 2<sup>nd</sup> John (Cont)

- The Bishop would have to interrogate the visitor concerning the Faith before he would let him in
- He might ask him:
  - Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ?
  - Is He the Father who has come in the flesh?
  - Did He rise from the dead?
- There were two types of Christians running around the area at that time:
  - Those who had accepted the true faith and were under the governance of the church
  - Those who had left the church to establish Gnostic Christian communities

## 2<sup>nd</sup> John (Cont)

- Father said that we can read about this problem in the writings of the early Church Fathers, as it was plaguing the church for the first couple of centuries
- All sorts of new churches were popping up that were not under the authority of the local bishop or apostles
- Some were teaching Gnosticism and Dualism
- One had to discern what kind of spirit they had: The spirit of the Antichrist (with demonic influences), or the Spirit of God with the true doctrine

# 3<sup>rd</sup> John

- This was a specific letter written to a specific individual living within a church with a problem
- Father said that it is hard to know exactly what was going on, but whoever was in charge was giving John a hard time
- It would appear that he was not submitting to John as an apostle or as the primary bishop in the region
- Because of this, John was going to replace him
- This is the primary theme of this letter

# Summary of the Catholic Epistles

- The Catholic (universal) Epistles:
  - James
  - 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter
  - 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> John
- Even though they contain the a variety of different kinds of literature, based on the writings of James and Peter they are pretty straightforward and easy to understand
- As long as you understand what was going on at the time of John related to Dualism and Gnosticism, these Catholic Epistles should also be easy to understand

# Summary of the Catholic Epistles (Cont)

- Father pointed out that if you do not read them within this context, you will wonder what in the world John was so excited about concerning Jesus' coming in the flesh
- Today, most modern Christians have no problem with the bodily resurrection of Jesus
- However, today, we often deny our own bodily resurrection and the goodness of the world
- As long as Christians do whatever they want with the world and with their bodies, we will have problems



# Summary of the Catholic Epistles (Cont)

- We must learn that God created this world to be good, and our bodies for good, so that someday it will be recreated into a heavenly body
- Father concluded by stating that this is a very important message for the world today
- We will now begin an overview of the **Gospel of John**