

## **'LOVE FROM ABOVE'**

### ***('What the World Needs Now Is.... 'Agape' Love)***

#### **Studies in 1 John**

#### **Background:**

**The author:** Although the apostle John's name does not appear in the epistle bearing his name, the testimony of the early church is accepted without serious question of its authorship. Although John humbly remains anonymous in the text, early Church Fathers unanimously ascribe its content to him (Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius). These patriarchs of Christianity followed the apostolic period of the first century and indicated in their writings that John lived out his days ministering in and from Ephesus in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). From there he served as minister in Ephesus, carried on extensive evangelistic programs overseeing many other churches in the area and writing (the *Gospel of John*; *1st*, *2nd* and *3rd John* and *Revelation* from the nearby island of Patmos). His writings of scripture date around AD 85 to 95, thus requiring him to be quite elderly as the last living apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ (if John was a young man of 18-20 years old when Christ died, arose and ascended in AD 30, he would be in his mid-80's to mid-90's when he wrote his gospel and epistles. John and his brother James were among the very first disciples picked by Jesus Who gave them a nickname, *Sons of Thunder*, because of their feisty personalities (*Mark 3:17*).

Of the twelve, John and James, along with Simon Peter, were the three most intimate followers of the Lord Jesus. Over the 65-year period of time following Jesus' ascension, John's faithful, consistent, sacrificial *walk* in the Spirit changed him from a *Son of Thunder* to the *Apostle of Love*. His 'love' was not a fluffy, gushy kind of worldly love lacking in principle and purpose; the *love* of God that flowed into and through the apostle John was *the love from above*, *agape* love (Greek for altruistic, holy, sacrificial). John's first general epistle shows what real love from above is like – it is passionate for righteousness, holiness and godliness, but it hates with a passion unholiness, unrighteousness and ungodliness. Love from above was what changed the apostle John and it is the only thing that will change people, churches, and nations today.

**The letter:** Ephesus, the probable location of this letter's composition, was the 'gateway to Asia Minor' (modern day Turkey). It was not only the hub and center of Mediterranean trade and business. It was the intellectual center thriving with philosophical and religious world views permeating the Roman Empire in the first century AD. Greek philosophers such as Plato had deeply influenced the Greco-Roman world with theories called *dualism* that taught there was a great divide between matter (physical things) and spiritual things. Society had therefore generally accepted the idea that matter was bad and things of a spiritual nature were good. As a result, extreme views prevailed of *asceticism* (extreme physical restraint and deprecation of things related to the body) or, on the other hand, *lasciviousness* (no restraint of physical passions since it had no eternal significance).

When the philosophy of *asceticism* merged with theology the result was *Gnosticism* which false teachers sought to amalgamate with Christian theology. The result was the false teachers' tendency to deny that Jesus was fully human with a normal physical body (called *Docetism* from a Greek word meaning *not real, only appearing to exist physically*). This false teaching that sought to merge worldly philosophy with biblical theology undermined doctrines such as: the incarnation, atonement for sin, bodily resurrection, etc. This explains John's emphasis upon Jesus' 'coming in the flesh', his having 'heard, seen, touched and handled' Him. The *Gnostic* view also threatened the believer's view of the Christian life and the importance of not only believing correctly but also living a holy life as well, but not trusting one's own holiness for salvation either.

In his epistle, John, the apostle of love, stresses that 'the love from above' is both a spiritual matter of the heart and mind, but it also must be expressed outwardly by a gracious and holy lifestyle that pleases God. Although we are many centuries removed from the Greek philosophers and Gnostic theologians, their influence is seen today in many Christians who compartmentalize their faith and their lifestyle. Either they seem to think that what I believe is all that matters and I use my body in a worldly way, or the body is bad and therefore I will punish it with reclusive living and self-denial to be holy. Neither of these dualistic extremes is true and both of them will detour souls away from God's grace in Christ toward judgment and eternal destruction. The former omits repentance, while the latter replaces faith with one's own efforts of merit. The 'love from above' is found in the Son of God Who both punishes the sins of the flesh and forgives the repentant sinner by His once and for all, forever work for us on the cross. The first epistle of John gets the believer's heart and mind off of philosophically tainted religion and back on the Person of the God-Man, Jesus Christ the Lord.

## 1 John Chapter Overview:

- Chapter 1 = Back to the basics of true *'fellowship with God'*
- Chapter 2 = Back to the basics of true *'fellowship with others'*
- Chapter 3 = Back to the basics of true *'love and moral purity'*
- Chapter 4 = Back to the basics of true *'love and doctrinal purity'*
- Chapter 5 = Back to the basics of true *'love and spiritual maturity'*

## Knowing The True Jesus

*(The essential, biblical view of Who Jesus was and is)*

1 John 1:1-4

## The Historically Correct 'Jesus'

*(Vital statistics of 'the Word of life')*

1:1-2

*"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life – the Life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us - "*

The followers of other famous religious founders carry on and promote the teachings of their 'founder' – what is different about the original disciples of Jesus? What is the lesson disciples of Christ in any period of history should remember from this?

Why do you think Jesus, the Son of God's Name is *'the Word of life'*? (John 1:1-2, 14;  
1 John 5:7, Revelation 19:13)

The Bible is known as 'the written Word of God' or sometimes 'the spoken Word of God', but Jesus is to be regarded as 'the living Word of God'. Why is this fact about the Lord Jesus Christ so vital to having a personal relationship with Him?

John's recollection of Jesus has not faded over the 60 years since he last saw Him. An apparition or ghost wouldn't make so vivid of an impression. What factors about the Lord Jesus in John's memory prove that Jesus was both God and Man in one Person?

## The Literally Correct Apostles

*(Vital statistics of 'biblical fellowship')*

1:3-4

*"...that which we have seen and heard we declare to you that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ, and these things we write to you that your joy may be full."*

This letter suggests that the reader can have fellowship with the apostles through believing correctly what they taught about Jesus. Ponder how this works for believers today.

How does good Bible study produce fullness of joy in a Christian?