

## Lesson for July 3, 2005

### Book of I John

Writer: The Apostle John  
Date: 90 A.D. (approximately)  
Theme: Virtue-Love

John's name means "whom Jehovah loves" and seems to be appropriate for this apostle. His experience with Christ corresponds to this meaning and he even calls himself "the apostle whom Jesus loved." (John 13:23) John's parents were Jewish believers. His mother followed Jesus and ministered to Him. His mother was at the Cross and was among those who went to anoint the body of Christ for burial.

John was not a poor person, as some suppose, since his family owned a ship and were prosperous enough to hire servants. John was the youngest of the disciples that Jesus called, but was, nevertheless, a part of the "inner circle" of Christ.

John wrote five books of the New Testament: The Gospel of John, I, II and III John and The Book of Revelation. John became a major influence in the life of the early Church as the pastor of the church at Jerusalem and later in Ephesus. He was a man of doctrine and wisdom. The theme of virtue-love is seen in all of his writing, but especially in his gospel and the book of I John.

John begins by teaching the doctrine of the Hypostatic Union of Christ, thereby refuting the false doctrine of Gnostic sects of his time. One sect of the Gnostics falsely taught that Christ was strictly a spiritual being that only seemed to be human. This sect, known as Docetics (derived from the Greek word "dokea" meaning to seem or to appear), taught that Christ did not suffer on the Cross (He only appeared to do so). The "logic" was that if Christ was divine He could not suffer and if He suffered He was, therefore, not divine. This false doctrine, of course, denies the Hypostatic Union of Christ. There was also a sect called the Arians that denied the deity of Christ, saying that He was merely a human being. The Hypostatic Union teaches us that Christ was both fully human and fully divine in one Person. John establishes the doctrine of the Hypostatic Union immediately in verse one. There can be no doubt of this theological position when reading verse one through verse three. Subsequent to establishing the basis for the doctrine, John proceeds to reveal the true nature and character of God's eternal attribute of love expressed in His Son, Jesus Christ. We call this love "virtue-love", because this love is based on God's character.

Chapter 1

Verse 1

“That which was from the beginning”

In verse one John uses the imperfect tense of continuous state of the Greek verb “*archo*” to show the eternal existence of Christ. “*Arche*” means *a beginning* or *the origin* and is used in reference to the deity of Jesus Christ. Christ is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He is undiminished deity for all eternity and has always existed (without beginning or end).

“which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled”

John continues to demonstrate that not only was Christ undiminished deity, He was also true humanity. John demonstrates this truth by relying upon his personal experience. It was John and the other disciples that traveled with Christ and heard Him speak. They looked upon Him with their own eyes and touched Him with their own hands. Jesus Christ was not merely a spiritual being; He was “flesh and bone” (true humanity).

“of the Word of Life”

In Greek *the Word* is “*logos*” and means a communication, a thought, an utterance. The inclusion of the definite article emphasizes the quality of the communication. This is not just any utterance; it is a divine expression and Jesus Christ is *the* Divine Expression. He is the living Word. Jesus said, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.”

Jesus Christ is the creator of all life. Apart from Jesus Christ life would not exist. He is the communicator of life. He is the way, the truth and *the life*. It is by means of the Hypostatic Union that Jesus Christ can offer His eternal life to mankind and new life to those who believe in Him as Savior.

As true humanity, Christ has an affinity with man. As undiminished deity Christ has an affinity with God. This unique union of human and divine is the only way that God’s plan of salvation could be carried out. Without sin of His own, Christ was qualified to make the payment for sin that the justice of God demanded – spiritual death. Born of a virgin, Christ did not possess a sin nature and through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit He did not commit personal sin. Jesus Christ is the perfect mediator between God and man.

Verse 2

“For the life was manifested”

The point in verse two is that the preexistent one, Jesus Christ, Who was with the Father in eternity, has now been revealed in a Person. Human eyes could gaze upon Him, He could be touched and could be heard as He spoke. It is “The Logos” that has revealed the Father. And the apostle points out that this knowledge was gained through empirical experience and observation (John saw, heard and touched Him). John is testifying of the historical Jesus, which refutes the Docetic doctrine denying the humanity of Christ. At the same time he is refuting the false doctrine of the Arians, which denied the deity of Christ.

“and we have seen it and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested to us”

Even though John and the other apostles had empirical knowledge of the humanity of Christ and saw Him perform numerous miracles, they still had to accept *by faith* the fact that He was God. Believing this to be true, the apostles endured much hardship and suffering to bring this message to the world. John fully understood that his role as an apostle was to reveal the Person and Work of Christ to all mankind. (I Timothy 3:16)

Verse 3

“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us”

In verse three John gives us a reason for revealing the facts of the Hypostatic Union, which he has been faithfully communicating to these fellow believers. His reason is so that he would be able to enjoy their fellowship in the truth. If they believed the false doctrine of the Docetics or the Arians, they could have no true fellowship with John. Fellowship in the body of Christ is based on accurate Bible doctrine. True Christian fellowship is not social activity - it is believing common doctrinal truth.

“And truly our fellowship is with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ”

If, as believers in Jesus Christ, we come together in unity and fellowship it must be on the basis of faith alone in Christ alone for salvation, in phase one. In phase two – the Christian Way of Life, we can also have fellowship (things in common) as we study and learn accurate Bible doctrine together. Our fellowship as believers is totally dependant on our fellowship with God. Lack of fellowship with God means lack of genuine fellowship with our fellow believers. Fellowship with God is maintained by the utilization of I John 1:9 – acknowledging our personal sins directly to God.

#### Verse 4

“And these things write we unto you, that your (our) joy might be full.”

The second reason for John revealing the doctrine of the Hypostatic Union to his readers is so that their joy and his joy might be complete. Joy is a synonym for happiness and by believing the doctrine being taught by John regarding Christ, the believer can share the happiness of God. Knowing that the hearer has inculcated this doctrinal information is a source of happiness for the teacher (John).

God’s happiness has always existed. There has never been a time when God was unhappy. Our failures do not make God unhappy. Even the rejection of Christ by the unbeliever does not make God unhappy. The eternal happiness of God can be shared only by those who are in union with Christ. And the believer must be executing the Christian Way of Life in order to share this happiness.

In these first four verses the Apostle John is laying the groundwork for the true theme of the book, which is virtue-love. Everything in the Christian Way of Life is based upon the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. Without the Hypostatic Union of Christ, there is no eternal salvation and no Christian Way of Life. Like a skilled apologist, the apostle presents his case for the humanity and deity of Jesus Christ before attempting to teach this group of believers further truth. John obviously feels, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that there are some among this group that need to be convinced that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God and truly a human being before he can move on to the important doctrine of virtue-love.