

## Topic: The Essence of the Nature of God

Letter of 1 John: Background research:  
Author of the Gospel that bears his name  
Author of the 3 letters John 1,2,3  
Author of the book of Revelation

Q1. Why did the letters of John come to be written?-1Jn 2:26 & 5:13 tell us why.  
Q2. What about the author of the letters?

### Historical Setting:

- 1 John is a CIRCULAR letter. - Sent from Ephesus to the congregations of Asia Minor. The congregations were under his special care towards the end of the 1st century.
- after Christ's ascension John remained for some time in Jerusalem - one of the 'pillars' of the church (Gal 2:9)
- John must have been present at the council of Jerusalem tother with the other apostles (Acts 15:22)
- Perhaps he remained there until the persecution & destruction of the temple in AD70 when many fled the city in obedience to the command Christ had given (Mk 13:14)
- John made Ephesus his new base. Tradition claims that Jon took with him Mary the mother of Jesus who was under his care (Jn 19:26-27 nr. the cross)
- Irenaeus, a disciple of John's disciple Polycarp, tells us John continued in the church at Ephesus until the times of Trajan (AD98-117)
- Clearly John lived to a great age.
- His 3 Letters may well be the the last of the canonical Scriptures to be written, circa. AD85-95. Most scholars date the book of Revelation circa. AD95
- He must have commanded exceptional authority as the only remaining apostolic link with the earthly life & ministry of Jesus.

### The Moral Climate of the Time:

- Under persecution when, Christians fled from Jerusalem & from Rome, Ephesus became a natural place to which to gravitate. It was the greatest of all the Asian trade cities, situated on the Aegean coast of modern day Turkey.
- The church at Ephesus had been founded by Paul c.AD55 & pastored by Timothy (1 Tim 1:3)
- It was a natural focal point for the churches of Asia Minor eg the 7 churches in Revelation (NB. Ephesus being mentioned first in the list, followed by Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia & Laodicea)
- The Revelation letter to Ephesus (Rev 2:1-7) gives some indication of the moral pressures under which the church found itself eg. huge religious industry centred on the temple of Artemis (Diana) & the wealth it created for the locality; spiritual bankruptcy; gross immorality; pantheism; magic arts/sorcery.
- Many church believers had turned their backs on all this & come to faith in Christ (see Acts 19:19)
- With this background we can understand the emphasis found in John's letters towards right moral behaviour & not continuing to live in darkness (1 Jn 1:6); not to love the world (1 Jn 2:15); not to believe every spirit (1 Jn 4:1); & not to have anything to do with Idols (1 Jn 5:21)
- Love for God 'who is Light' means a radical break with every kind of evil.
- It was out of this 'moral climate' in which believers lived, that the issues of false teaching & erroneous theology arose and which are the major concern of John's Letters.

### Pastoral Concern:

- Three times in the opening verses :1-4 John says '....**we proclaim**':
- '**this we proclaim** concerning the Word of Life' (:1) .....and **we proclaim** to you the eternal life...' (:2) '**We proclaim** to you what we have seen....' (:3)
- John was setting out the ground on which to contradict & refute the heresy of the false teachers of his day known as 'Gnostics' (don't pronounce the letter G) which comes from the Greek word 'gnosis' = 'Knowledge'. They taught salvation was not by faith in Christ but by special or higher knowledge.
- The Gnostics made claim to a special 'anointing' (chrisma) of the Holy Spirit by which they had been given true knowledge of God.
- John confronts these false notions many times in his letters as we can see by the use of a phrase which occurs numerous times: '**We Know**' (eg. 2:3,5; 3:14,16,19,24; 4:13; 5:2) There were other aspects of their teaching including denial of both the deity & humanity of Jesus Christ simultaneously within the One Person.
- So the message that John '**proclaims**' is the true person & work of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God. He is the source & substance of the eternal life which John wants his readers/hearers to know, have & enjoy.

- He defines that life in terms of a fellowship, or relationship, with the Father & the Son. This is perfect alignment with the words of Jesus as recorded in Jn 17:3 'This is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, & Jesus Christ whom You have sent'. Believing the truth of God brings us into a living union with God - fellowship (koinonia) with the Father & the Son. This implies the most intimate bond of relationship. It is the same term applied to the fellowship between Christian believers.

#### The Prologue (1Jn 1:1-4):

- The pre-existence of the Son - the Word of Life. 'That which was from the beginning ...'. Echoes of the opening of the Gospel of John and beyond that to the opening verse of the Bible. And even further back before that & before anything was created and you will find God. And Jesus Christ - 'the word' - with God. Christ was the Agent of creation (Jn 1:3; Col 1:15-20) But I think John also has his focus on the Incarnation - the WORD which was made flesh in the womb of Mary & made His dwelling among us.
- 'which we' - John & the other apostles
- 'Heard.....seen..... looked at....touched....we have seen it.....& testify of it'
- 'we proclaim' - John & the other apostles first hand experience; which the false teachers are unable to claim.
- 'the life appeared' - 'the eternal life'; 'which was with the Father' - prior to His incarnation.
- 'We proclaim' x 3 - the faithful calling of the apostle to go and tell others what they have 'seen' & 'heard'.
- 'Fellowship' - Grk = 'koinonia': 1. the Christians personal relationship with Christ & union with God. 2. membership in the body of Christ.

#### Walking in the Light:

- John begins his letter proper by launching into one of the greatest theological statements: '**GOD IS LIGHT**'.
- a 2nd similar great theological statement in Jn4:8: '**GOD IS LOVE**'
- Perhaps not surprising then that the early Greek church referred to John as 'the Theologian'.
- **Attributes**: the whole of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation show us God's Attributes as they are revealed in His words and actions.
- **Essence & Nature**: However, John alone seeks to expound the **ESSENCE of the NATURE of God** in the form of prepositions which use the simplest language to convey the most profound concepts. Note: John alone of all four gospel writers was the one who tells us about Jesus' meeting & conversation with the Samaritan women at the well, in which he records Jesus saying: '**GOD IS SPIRIT**' (Jn4:24) 'and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth' - true worship must be in keeping with God's nature, which is Spirit. A particular location (or building) is irrelevant. Paul said: 'For it is we (the true believer) who worship by the Spirit of God & who glory in Christ Jesus...' (Phil 3:3)
- '**Light**' & '**Love**' are **God's very essence**, just as **Spirit** is. They describe not His characteristics, **but His very Essence & Being**.
- The revelation that God is Light was not a discovery of self-intellect by John. It is a message John 'heard' & had received (or believed) 'from Him' - a clear reference to Jesus Christ.
- The task of the Apostles was to announce to others what they had 'heard' or 'received' from the Lord. (Remember Paul: '**I received** from the Lord what **I also passed on** to you....') The Churches task is just the same & to continue with the apostolic gospel - as Paul had commanded his disciple Timothy to do.
- **Non-negotiable**: the church today, is no more at liberty to redefine, the message ie to modernise or adapt the truth of the Gospel anymore than the apostles were after Christ had left the scene & returned to heaven. '**God's truth is non-negotiable**'.
- **GOD IS LIGHT**; in Him there is no darkness at all'. Note: the positive part of the statement is equally reinforced by a negative, which in the original Greek language is literally; '**no darkness, in Him, no, not any at all !**'.

#### What does 'Light' suggest to us?:

1. **Creation**: Gen 1:3 The earliest expression of the nature & will of God in His creation work. 'And God said "let there be Light". This is the primary expression of the eternal being of the Godhead. From this comes order out of chaos - Light out of darkness - Life out of nothing. From this everything else grows. Without light there would be no plant or animal life; no growth, no activity, no beauty, none would be possible. All creation owes its existence and its continued sustenance to the God who is Light. And also to Christ who said of Himself 'I am the Light of the World' (see Jn 8:12 & Col 1:16-17).
2. **God's Presence**: Light is a frequent symbol of God's presence in the OT & NT:
  - Exodus where the Lord went ahead of his people in a pillar of cloud & pillar of fire to give them Light so they could travel by day and night (Ex 13:21)- illumination & guidance
  - Tabernacle: the oil lamp was to burn all through the night. (Lev 24:2)
  - Psalms: 119;105 'a lamp to my feet & a light to my path'; 'the Lord is my light & my salvation'
  - Prophets: Isa 2:5 'let us walk in the light of the Lord'; 'Arise shine, for your light has come'

- Matt 17:2 Mt Transfiguration: 'his clothes became as white as light & His face shone like the Sun'
  - Jn 1:4 'that life was the light of men'
  - Jn 8:12 'I am the Light of the World, if anyone follows me, they shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life'.
  - Rom 13:12 'put on the armour of light'
  - 2 Cor 4:6 'who made His light shine in our hearts'
  - 1 Thes 5:5 'you are all sons of the light'
3. **Moral Righteousness & Holiness:** God is flawless, blameless, irreproachable, pure, holy, perfect. John's thoughts parallel those of Paul in 1 Tim 6:16: 'who (God) alone is immortal & who lives in unapproachable light, whom no-one has seen or can see'. And Jn 1:18 'No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only (Son) who is at the Father's side, has made Him known.' Also Hab 1:13 'Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; You can not tolerate wrong'

#### What does Darkness suggest to us?:

- That when Scripture speaks of 'Darkness' it represents the complete opposite of all that God is in His essence & His nature. Darkness = Night; Light = Day.
- Darkness is a description of fallen human nature: independent from the life of God and in consequence is: flawed, blameworthy, reproachable, impure, immoral, unholy and imperfect, when judged by the nature of God.
- Darkness is a status devoid of the Light & Truth of God.
- Darkness is a condition of alienation from the life of God.
- Darkness is a realm - the kingdom of darkness, as opposed to the kingdom of light (the kingdom of God)
- Ultimately, the realm or land of darkness is the grave (Job 10:21)

#### The Nature of Light:

- It is the nature of light to scatter darkness and to penetrate everywhere unless it is deliberately obscured or blocked.
- The Light of God is the Truth against which all other claims must be tested.
- The light reveals the reality, and when dispelling darkness, it exposes what the darkness would hide.

C S Lewis made the point when he said: 'we believe the sun has risen, **not** because we see it, but because by it we see everything else'. - There are no twilight zones in God. The Light of God exposes sin for what it truly is.

- The Divine Light of God: 'The light shines in the darkness but the darkness has not overcome it' (Jn1:5)
- 'In Him (Jesus Christ) was life, and that life was the light of men' (Jn 1:4)
- 'Jesus said: "I am the Light of the World. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have **the light of life**" (Jn 8:12) - [What I heard for the first time in 1966!]
- 'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation....that you may declare the praises of him who called you **out of darkness** into His **marvellous light**' (1 Pet 2:9)
- Christ's command to Paul: 'I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them **from darkness** to light and from **the power of Satan** to God' (Acts 26:8)
- **So what is the nature of the Light to which John is drawing our attention?** - It is nothing less than the manifestation of God as revealed in the life and person of Jesus Christ - God is Light and that Light has come into the world - it has penetrated the darkness of sin, evil & moral blindness, and shone the life of God into the hearts of all who will hear and receive His Son Jesus Christ - who is fully God in His very essence & nature (Phil 2:6)

#### Hymns expressing the Light of God:

**Eternal Light!** Eternal Light!  
How pure the soul must be,  
When placed within Thy searching sight  
It shrinks not, but, with calm delight,  
Can live and look on Thee

Oh, how shall I, whose native sphere  
Is dark, whose mind is dim,  
Before the Ineffable appear,  
And on my naked spirit bear  
The uncreated beam?

There is a way for man to rise  
To that sublime abode:  
An offering and a sacrifice,  
A Holy Spirit's energies,  
An Advocate with God,-

These, these prepare us for the sight  
Of Holiness above:  
The sons of ignorance and night  
May dwell in the Eternal Light,  
Through the Eternal Love!

.....

**And can it be** that I should gain.....

Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;(ie spiritual darkness)  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light:  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

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#### **The 'Claims': (1 Jn 1: 6, 8 & 10 & 1Jn 2;6,9)**

John now begins to address the underlying issues within the churches.

1. **The reality of fellowship with God & with each other:** There can be no fellowship with God & fellowship with Darkness at one and the same time (eg. 'one leg in the boat & one leg on the land'- the splits!) Such a life is 'a lie' says John, and is not living in the Truth (:6)
  2. **The Evidence of Walking in the Light of God:** will be seen in a changed lifestyle - a different & distinguishable life - a holy life. A person who persists in sin - walking in darkness - can not be in a right relationship with God. ***The idea of 'walking' indicates a persistent movement in a particular direction - what we might call 'lifestyle'. Which ultimately culminates in heaven - the glory & presence of God.***
  3. **Living in Community: *Living a lie or living by the Truth.*** 'BUT' ....(PTL) Note the emphasis on 'fellowship with **one another**' - the horizontal dimension of walking in the Light of God! (Note: 1 Jn 2:9-11) Truth (right doctrine) is the basis on which true fellowship is experienced between believers.
2. **Living/Abiding in Christ:** '.....and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin'. Purifies Grk = is in the continuous tense '**keeps on purifying**'. As we walk in the Light of God, in His Word, the Light reveals our sin. The nearer I come to God the more conscious I become of my own sin & rebellion. But we can continue to appropriate the cleansing & forgiveness which Christ's death on the Cross has made possible for us - through our repentance & faith. When as Christians we fail, it can stop us dead in our tracks. We don't know what to do. Where shall we go. Our sin overwhelms us. But this can be a genuine work of the Holy Spirit - we have grieved Him. But notice the word '**ALL**!' Don't believe the enemy of our soul when he tells you there is no way - no way back. He is a liar. The only place to go with our sin is the Cross. The cleansing blood of God's Son extends to **ALL - EVERY** sin - past, present & future! Christ died **ONCE - A *once & for all never to be repeated*** offering for sin. So there is no other remedy for sin - its efficacy to cleanse & forgive is unsurpassed!
1. **Not Guilty? - a denial of the inherent sinful nature: '*If we claim*'** to be without sin, we deceive ourselves...' - **a denial of the sinful nature** - "I'm not a sinner". This was an aspect of the doctrine taught by the false teachers that John was warning against.
  2. **Sinless? - a denial of sinful actions/behaviour: '*If we claim*'** we have not sinned.....' - "I haven't sinned" is a denial of me being cable of committing behaviour which is offensive to God.

**Confession:** 'If we confess our sins....' acknowledge my condition in the Light of God's Word - confession is the beginning of repentance towards a change in behaviour. 'Who ever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did' (2:6) - there must be a persistent willingness to walk (live) as Jesus did.