

The First Epistle of John

...so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ (1John 1:3)

1John 5:19-21

Review

Where is John writing from?

What heresy was he addressing?

What flavor of Gnosticism was John specifically dealing with?

What did the heretics teach?

How does John deal with this false teaching?

1John 1:6-10

Someone read vv5:13-17

Someone read vv5:18-21

Perhaps the most striking thing about the close of First John is the threefold occurrence of the phrase *we know* in the last three verses. Verses 18, 19, and 20 of the fifth chapter all begin with those words, *we know*. That is a phrase that has a bite to it in these days when we are told that we cannot know anything for sure. There is a quiet ring of assurance about it; especially when you discover that the apostle uses a word in the original Greek which refers not to knowledge gained by experience, but to an inward learning process.

Eidw = to see, either literally or figuratively. The same word as Paul uses in 1Cor 2:2, in the same sense.

Someone please read 1Cor 2:5ff

That is the kind of knowledge John is talking about here. Revealed knowledge, taught by the Holy Spirit.

This knowledge is the secret of Christian poise which Christians ought to be manifesting in any situation. That is one of the great things about Christianity. Christians know secrets that other people do not know. Because they know them, they can act differently in a situation than others. They can react differently to what happens to them. It is this kind of knowledge that John refers to here.

Billy Graham was quite right in saying, "*Conversion is a revolution in the life of the individual.*" If you are converted, you have changed your whole direction; you have turned around 180° and

you are going another direction than you were before. Otherwise, it is not a conversion at all because that is fundamentally what the word *conversion* means, "to change completely."

Story about Colby.

If Colby were to come to belief in Christ, if he were indwelt by the HS, this would bring him into circumstances and pressures that will make him realize what he is doing, and the mess he is making, and make him hunger to go on and be free. Otherwise he is not a Christian.

And the result is, as John says, the evil one can never repossess him. The evil one, of course, is the devil. John says that the stronger One has now come and the bonds of the strong man have been broken and he can never repossess the Christian. That is so encouraging!

The enemy can frighten us, as he often does. He can harass us, he can threaten us, he can make us believe that we are in his power and that we have to do certain things that are wrong. He can create desires and passions within us that are so strong that we think we must yield to them. But that is a lie, because he is a liar. We do not have to yield to them. He can lure us, he can deceive us, as we have seen, he can even temporarily derail us, and make us fall, but the great declaration of this Scripture is, the devil can never make you sin! Once you know Jesus Christ, the devil can never again make you sin. There is never any excuse for giving in because it is all bluster on his part, all a bluff. He is trying to make you believe that you must sin, but you do not have to.

Obedience is the key, as John has made very clear in this letter. The Apostle Paul also put it very plainly.

2 Timothy 2:19.

We often quote only the first part of it saying, "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are his,'" We say, "Well, I know he's not behaving like a Christian and hasn't for years. There's not a change ever since he said he came to know Christ, but 'The Lord knows those who are his.'" No, that is only part of it. "And, let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." That is the visible mark—anything less than that is mere appearance.

We know that we are of God, and the whole world is in the power of the evil one. (1 John 5:19 RSV)

There is the certainty of relationship that any Christian can declare. "We know that we are of God." "Well," someone says, "what smug presumption. That's the trouble with you Christians. You think you're so much better than everybody else. You think you're so superior!"

"No, not superior; just separated! Not better; just blessed—with a blessing that is open to anyone who wants to receive it.

This is what makes Christians talk this way. "We know," John says, "that we are of God;" that a fundamental separation has occurred between us and the world system to which we once

belonged; that we now are "of God," we are walking in his direction, we are going on with him. The world, on the other hand, "lies in the power of the evil one." The whole world is going a different direction.

You can see how this touches at every point our relation to the busy, complex world in which we live. We live in this world. We were born in it, we grew up in it. But now that we have become Christians, we no longer can be like it. A fundamental separation has occurred. We are no longer in the same relationship. We now see that the world lies in the power of the evil one.

How many Scriptures declare this! Remember in Ephesians 2:2 What does Paul say?

"You all once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air. You were once darkness in mind and alienated from God,"

This is the truth about the world. It is satanically controlled. Jesus called Satan, "The ruler of this world."

Now, you will recognize that this is what is called in Scripture, "the offense of the cross," (Galatians 5:11 KJV). The world does not like to be told this. As long as you leave this truth out of the Christian proclamation, the world will welcome it and say, "it is wonderful." Those who are of the world, love to hear the great and glorious declarations of the Christian gospel concerning God's love for man and his desire to make him into his image. Men love this. There is no offense to that aspect of the gospel. When they hear that God loves this world, came into it, and gave himself in order that he might take human nature and mold it, fulfill it, bring it to perfection, and the experience of the full possibilities of its powers, they love that. But what they do not want to hear is the additional word that, apart from coming to know Jesus Christ, they are all in the grip of certain unseen powers of darkness. If you leave this unsaid you will be popular.

But if you tell the truth—that every individual is confronted with only two choices—either he is of God, or he is of the devil, either he is led by the Spirit of God, or he is in the control of the devil, bound by satanic forces, and following satanic philosophies. When you say that, you will discover that faces begin to grow cold and hard around you, and there is resistance to the gospel. People say, "I was attracted to it at first, but, the more I look into it, the less I like it. I think I'll go my own way." And they refuse to believe that what they fondly imagine is their "own" way is only the way of the devil.

Yet, who can really doubt this statement when they look around them? The marks of the evil one are everywhere. If we believe what Jesus said about him, that he is a murderer and a liar, do you not see the signs of murder and lying everywhere? Think of the violence, the terrifying tension that have been gripping our cities these past weeks, and that seethe constantly below the surface. Our cities are nothing but seething pools of human misery, ready to erupt in a moment into riot, violence, and death in the streets. Think of the hate, the horror, and the bitterness that is rampant in human life today: in family circles, breaking up families and separating between husbands and wives, mothers and fathers and children. Think of the brutal wars and the even more brutal weapons of nuclear death that are hiding in the closets of the world today; all the product of man's cleverness and evil ingenuity. You can see the mark of the murderer everywhere: in the

Americas, in the Far East, and particularly in Iraq, Afghanistan, and all over the Middle East; in the awful burning and mutilating of the bodies of fine young men, children and women. We literally gag at this terrible destruction of human life. It is all the work of a murderer, Jesus said. See how he holds the world in his grasp? The history of the human race is one unending story of brutality, violence, murder, war and death.

That murderous passion is manifest in other ways as well. Think of the smog that chokes our cities, the filth that pollutes the waters, and the waste that destroys the beauty of the countryside so that slowly but surely, this world is being turned into one vast garbage heap, threatening human existence. The leaders of our nations are now wondering what to do about this, and how to arrest this inevitable decay.

Think of the deceit that is everywhere in public life—the lying, the cheating, the twisting and distorting of truth, in homes and classrooms, in the Congress and our courts, and the highest offices of the land. We are faced with the spectacle of men who have been elected to office and trusted to perform their public duties honestly, who openly, flagrantly, misuse funds and mistreat their powers, and then defend themselves in so doing.

Think about the moral decline we see all around us.

Why does this happen? It is the work of the liar, the deceiver, the one who makes things look beautiful and good when they are really sordid and vapid.

Isn't this statement of John's the truest statement about human life you have ever read? "The whole world lies in the power of the evil one," and that power cannot be broken by merely telling people they are in trouble.

Well, then, what can bring them out of it, since you cannot argue them out of it? The only answer is the Christian message, the proclamation that a Stronger One has come who binds the Strong Man and sets his goods free? There is nothing else. There cannot be anything else. How this highlights the revolutionary character of the Christian message. Here is a message which can actually set men free from the delusions of a world which lies helpless and hopeless, lulled to sleep, deceived by the wicked one. But, by God's grace, we Christians can say, "We are of God." It is not superiority that says that, it is gratitude.

Do you ever stop to give grateful thanks that God has taken you out of the power of Satan and brought you under the power of God? That is the position we are in. How grateful we should be for it. Now, look at the last certainty here, the certainty of reality:

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. (1 John 5:20-21 RSV)

Notice how many times the word, *true* occurs: "to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true... This is the true God and eternal life."

Greek: *Alēthinos*

Thayer: that which has not only the name and resemblance, but the real nature corresponding to the name, in every respect corresponding to the idea signified by the name, real, true genuine

The word *true* is actually "reality." Here is reality. Here is the great rock upon which everything rests. Our faith does not rest upon men's guesses, not upon those explorations of human knowledge called philosophy; not on clever ideas, or on untested theories. It rests solidly upon the great events of God's actions in history. It rests on facts.

2Pet 1:16

There is an historical process here. "The Son of God came," John says, we saw him, we felt him, we lived with him. We can testify in every possible way that the Son of God came in the historical process of time. Further, the practical result of that is, "he gave us a new understanding."

We began to see life as it really is. He stripped it of its veils, took away its illusions, dispelled the mists and vagueness which cause men to grope through life like blind men. He clarified life, he gave us an understanding, he told us what was true. The glorious privilege that follows is, "we are in him who is true." We not only know him, we live in him. We are part of his life. We share his thinking, we have the mind of Christ. (1Cor 2:16).

What tremendous privilege! I wonder if it ever remotely dawns on many of us just what it means to be a Christian. How far we have come, how much we have, how tremendous are these great, unshakable, fundamental, foundational truths on which we rest our faith. The glory of Christ's love and his comfort, the warmth of his presence and his peace in our hearts. "This," John says, "is the true God." We are in his Son Jesus Christ; therefore, we are in him." This is the true God and, therefore, eternal life—abundant and continual life.

"This is the true God and eternal life..."

The question is: Who is meant by "this." Jesus? The Father? Both? What do you think?

This argument has raged ever since Arius (the early 4th Century), and probably even before. Scholars and students of the Bible have wrangled over this issue, and no resolution seems decisive.

#1 – It is a reference to God the Father

Jn 17:3 – the true God is distinguished from Jesus

The Father is the only source of life (Jn 5:26) and is the giver of life (1 Jn 5:11)

He is the “one who is true” in the previous sentence, mentioned twice.

#2 - It is a reference to Jesus

This is consistent with Greek Grammar, which almost always considers the nearest antecedent to be the intended referent (the nearest noun preceding the pronoun – “Jesus Christ” in this case).

But, cf., 1Jn 2:3

The second noun phrase is “eternal life” is without the article and so is joined with the first (the true God), and “eternal life” fits better with Jesus (John uniformly attributes “eternal life” to the Son, but see 5:11).

It is a fitting climax to the letter, in which full deity is ascribed to Jesus, as it is in 1:2, and in the Gospel of John (1:1; 20:28).

If it refers to the Father, it results in a tautology: “This (true one) if the true God.”

But this may be no more than an element of John’s style.

Each of these arguments has counter-arguments, and counter-counter arguments and so on and on. Each have “guns” in support of them (**Father** – Thomas, Stott, Westcott; **Son** – Hiebert, Marshall, Bruce, Luther, Calvin).

I am persuaded (barely) by the contextual argument that since John calls Jesus “the eternal life that was with God from the Beginning,” in 1:2, it most likely refers to Him here, as well.