

A Study of 1 John
“How Do You Know that You are REALLY Walking in the Light?”
By Doug Hamilton

The Introduction of 1John

Authorship:

External Evidence

- Of all the books of the NT, the letter of 1 John is the one with perhaps the greatest amount of evidence as to the authorship. The author is John the apostle, the disciple in whom “Jesus loved” (John 20:2; 21:7).
- Two of John’s pupils, Polycarp and Papias, both quote from this writing, giving the credit to John the apostle.
- Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, Origen, Cyprian and many of the other Apostolic Fathers also attributed it to the apostle.
- The Muratorian Fragment refers to it as connected to John the apostle.

Internal Evidence

- The general style of the writing is similar to the Gospel of John, inclusive to the usage in the Greek and specific words like Light, Love, Light, Darkness, Word, Fellowship, Death and Truth.
- From the very onset of the letter the writer claims to have been an eye witness to the Majesty Christ (1 John 1:1). John the apostle was with Jesus from the beginning. He saw, talked with, touched and heard Jesus directly.

Date and Place of Writing:

- Scholars typically date the writing to have taken place shortly before the great persecution of Domitian, being written around 90 AD. There is a perception that the writer is an old man, making references to the age levels of the men of the church in chapter 2 as much younger. This also carries over to 2 and 3 John, referring to himself as “elder”.
- The place of the writing appears to have taken place in Ephesus, the traditional location of the apostle John in the latter years.

Purpose of the writing:

- The church of the first century met many obstacles to the furtherance of the gospel. One of the greatest challenges was the infestation of Gnostic teachers that “crept in unnoticed” (Jude 4). This was a religion that combined Palestinian Judaism, Grecian philosophy, Persian mysticism and Oriental asceticism. It developed as a result of trying to reach out to the largest number of people, throughout the Roman Empire, a sort of PC Religion.
- The word for Gnostic in the Greek is *gnosis*, meaning “to know”. The secular world that the church was given birth into was one that took great pride in enlightenment. We see this attitude reflected in Paul’s initial visit to Athens, the city named after the goddess of wisdom. *Acts 17:18 And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, “What would this idle babbler wish to say?” Others, “He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.*

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- The ancient civilization of the day was filled with many great Gnostic orators whom made their living by going from town to town, “waxing eloquently” to demonstrate their wisdom.
- Because of this, they were an entertainment of the day and received great attention from the crowds. This is where the church entered the picture, for these Gnostic lovers of wisdom wanted to gain attention of the saints in their assemblies and classes, eventually trying to take over the congregations. They preyed upon knowledge-hungry Christians that just wanted to know more about their God and Father. The Gnostics tried their best to take advantage of this.
- The common elementary teaching of the Gnostics was their perspective on *spirit and matter*. They taught that all matter was evil and all spirit is good. Simply put, if it had any matter at all, i.e. this world, it was evil. If it was part of creation, it was evil. Dirt was evil; water was evil; animals were evil; clothing was evil; people were evil. They taught that anything that was of the spiritual realm was good, including the Holy Spirit, heaven and God. When they quoted the words of the apostle John in *John 4:24* “*God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*”, there was nothing left to interpretation. If it had matter = BAD. If it had spirit = GOOD. It was black and white to the Gnostic.

The Gnostic Dilemmas

Problem #1: A Warped View of Jesus

- Holding to this false teaching led to a major dilemma for the Gnostic seeking to influence the congregation. They naturally reasoned that Jesus was good for He was the Son of God. If Jesus was good, which He was and is, then He must have come in the Spirit and not in the flesh, for flesh is EVIL!
- From there they further reasoned that since He did not really come in the flesh, He could not have died because only matter could die, not spirit. Therefore the Gnostics reasoned that Jesus did not really die on the cross, but only appeared to die on the cross.
- From there they further reasoned that since Jesus did not really come in the flesh and did not really die, He really was not resurrected. Without Jesus coming out of the grave on the third day, there was no real miracle of the gospel (1 Cor 15:1-3)

Problem #2: A Warped View of Christian Living

- If all matter is evil and all spiritual is good, then how do we reconcile with the fact that we are evil matter? There were two types of Gnostic mindsets that evolved to try and answer that question.
- 1) Antinomianism
 - This was the mindset that taught that once a person was saved by God, they could live in any way they preferred. To this individual it did not matter what they did with their bodies for God “cleansed” their soul and that was all that mattered. They could “eat, drink and be merry” (Lk 12:19) and not really have anything to worry about, or so they taught.

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- The antinomian would actually teach that the Christians of the congregation had no code of ethic to follow, but to “get all you can and can all you get”. They actually thought that no matter what they did from the moment of salvation, sin simply could not and did not happen. It was “Once-saved, Always-saved” on steroids. To them there was no such thing as sin in their lives, even though they were neck-deep in it.

2) Monasticism

- On the other side of the Gnostic spectrum was the monastic. They would adopt a lifestyle that was isolated, restrictive and neglectful. From this word comes *monastery*, the location of monks, the people of isolation.
- They taught that if you tried hard enough, you could actually come to the point of not sinning anymore. Through a series of “restrictions of matter”, “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” (Col 2:21), they could actually not sin. At the end of the day they could boast, “I made it through the day SINLESS!”
- History tells us that they would go into the closet and pray for days at a time, often standing the entire time in the same position. They even refused to bathe, for water was evil. There are accounts of early monastic Gnostics that had so many lice that “vermin constantly dropped off of them” (Barclay).
- They would abstain from certain foods, marriage and personal involvement with others outside of their small circle. Paul warned years prior that these types of individuals would try to enter the church and lead people astray. *1 Timothy 4:1-3 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, ² by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, ³ men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.*

Problem #3: A Warped View of Christians

- Because the Gnostics believed that they received a special anointing of knowledge from God through the process of hundreds of emanations from a distance location, they portrayed themselves as better than the Christians in the congregations.
- When Christians would try to confront the false teaching, they were belittled and made to feel stupid and inferior. John reminded the Christians in 1 John 2:27 that they are the ones that were enlightened by God, not the Gnostics. *As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.*
- Paul addressed these false teaching Gnostics in *1 Timothy 6:20-21 O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called “knowledge”—²¹ which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith.*

They had a warped view of Jesus, Christian Living and Christians in general. All three of these were great dilemmas for the Gnostics and left them wide-open to criticism by John. They had

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used this false teaching to upset the church and left broken-hearted Christians wondering if they were even saved. They had forgotten their salvation and were robbed of their joy as a result. This is why John was writing to them.

- 1 John 1:4 These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.
- 1 John 5:13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

All the salvation is no good if you cannot know that you have it. This was the problem that the Christians that John was writing to were facing. They had been bullied into lies and had momentarily forgotten the salvation bestowed on them from Jesus. At the time of the writing the recipients did not even know where they stood with God. John the apostle was not going to stand for this and dealt with it with full-force.

Walking in the Light

1 John 1:5-7 This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; ⁷ but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

- John reminded them of the message that from Jesus about their salvation. He introduced us to a concept that will be used over and over again in the letter, LIGHT and DARKNESS. John uses the description of pure light to describe God and His holiness.
- Those who claim fellowship with God and walk in darkness, just like the Gnostics among them, are liars and do not practice the truth.
- The word that John uses for “we walk” is *περιπετομεν*. It is a word that encompasses direction, destination and progression. In the same way that a person can identify walking to a location in our everyday life, we can also know if we are walking for Jesus. He wanted them “to know” that they are right with God and defined it as “walking in the light”.

Question #1: Is it possible “to know” if we are walking in the light with Jesus?
Yes, of course.

Question #2: If so, then is it also possible to “not know” we are walking in the light with Jesus?
Absolutely!

This is what this series of five lessons is about, “How do you REALLY know that you are walking in the light?” Anyone can “say” they are walking in the light, but a Biblically-based good conscience is present only in the hearts of those that use the Bible.

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Litmus Paper

- There is something called litmus paper and it is used to determine the PH of a solution. I remember being in charge of a swimming pool as part of a job years ago. One of the tests that I had to do on the water was a PH reading to determine whether the pool was acidic or alkaline. Pure water is a 7.0 reading. I would take a water sample of the pool water and dip a piece of litmus paper to determine what the rating of it was.
- The optimal PH for pool water is slightly alkaline at 7.4 to 7.6. If it is below 7.0 and acidic, the results were burning eyes, weakened pipes and disintegrating drywall around the pool. If there was not a way to accurately test using the litmus paper there could be many problems down the road.



“Light-mus” Paper

- In our Christianity we could have problems down the road if we do not “KNOW” where we stand in our “walking in the light” process with God.
- John has given us a piece of not “litmus paper”, but “Lightmus Paper” in the form of a five chapter letter called 1 John. He wants us to dip it into our soul and make sure that we are PH “Pure and Holy” Balanced when it comes to God. He wants us to know whether we are acidic and alkaline toward the Father.
- There are many ISMS that are surrounding us today. Communism, socialism, atheism, humanism, terrorism, evolutionism, elitism, agnosticism and even Gnosticism. They have been throwing us off the path and have left many in the Christian scratching their heads and asking, “Am I walking in the light?”
- Over the next four lessons we will cover what those “Lightmus Tests” are from the letter of 1 John and how to apply it to our thinking. They will be covered in the order of the correct perspective of Jesus, of Sin, of the World and of the Brethren. These are the four Lightmus Tests that will let us know where we stand in our walk in the light.

You can have your “Joy Full” and “Know that you have eternal life”. That is the aim of the next four lessons.