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A0416 -- April 18, 2004 -- 1 John 1:1 – The Seed of Christ

INTRODUCTION

Today we will look at the introduction to the Epistle of 1 John. There is not a lot of historical background to the book, so what we have to do is determine the structure of the book: How John put the book together, his purpose for writing the epistle, and the logical argument He is making. Before we delve into all that, I want to give you the historical framework from which John is writing. This epistle was probably written while the other apostles were still alive (pre-67AD). Although many scholars think the book was written late (90s AD), a careful consideration of the internal evidence argues for an earlier date, particularly the exclusive plural pronouns John uses in 1 John 1:1-4 and 1 John 2:19.

BOOK OF MATTHEW

OFFER OF THE KINGDOM TO ISRAEL (1-11)

The epistle was written after Pentecost, so let's re-trace the origin and building of the Church. Turn to Matt. 3:2 READ. John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah, preached that the kingdom (Old Testament) was imminent at this time. Turn to Matt. 4:17 READ. Jesus also taught the imminency of the Kingdom to Israel. Jesus' ministry then flourished and He was doing signs and miracles that attested to His deity. But who was His ministry directed toward? Turn to Matt. 10:5-7. At this time the Lord is still offering the Kingdom promised in the Old Testament to Israel.

REJECTION OF THE MESSIAHSHIP OF JESUS BY ISRAEL (12)

In Matt. 12, the leadership of Israel rejected the miracles of Jesus, claiming that they were done by the power of Beelzebul (Lord of the Dunghill). This was the Israel's national rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus. This is the turning point in Jesus' ministry. Immediately, He begins to speak in parables (Matt. 13) rather than clearly.

PRONOUNCEMENT OF DIVINE JUDGMENT UPON ISRAEL (13-28)

He begins to pronounce a coming judgment on Israel which was fulfilled in 70 AD. Finally, He instructs His closest disciples about the future ministry they will carry on after He departs. He teaches them that He will send the Holy Spirit in His stead.

BOOK OF ACTS

DEATH AND RESURRECTION

Now let's look at the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2:22-24 READ. Here we have the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

ASCENSION AND PROCESSION OF HOLY SPIRIT

What then? Look at v. 33 READ. Here we have the ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit. Notice that He is Jesus Christ and He poured forth the Holy Spirit. It was not just God the Father who sent the Spirit, it was both the Father AND the SON (Filioque Clause). So, after the death and resurrection, we have the ascension and sending of the Holy Spirit.

SEPARATION OF KINGDOM FROM HOLY SPIRIT

Now turn back to the ascension itself in Acts 1:6-8 READ. Here is the first time in the Bible that the Coming of the Holy Spirit and the Coming of the Messianic Kingdom are separated. Back up to v. 3-5 READ. Jesus had been teaching for 40 days about the Kingdom. Now He reminds them of the promise of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the apostles have the Kingdom on their minds and they think Jesus is connecting the Kingdom with the Coming of the Holy Spirit. But did Jesus make this connection? It is true that there certainly is a connection in the Old Testament (Joel 2:28-3:2), but is that a connection Jesus is making, or the apostles? Jesus gives the answer in vs. 6-8 READ. No, Jesus is making a separation between the coming Kingdom and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

INTER-ADVENT AGE: UNIQUE

This unknown length of time between the Coming of the Spirit and the Coming of the Kingdom is what we call the Inter-advent Age. It is at this time that Jesus ascended to heaven. It is when He returns that He will set up His kingdom. And it is this time between the Coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and the Lord's Second Coming to set up the

Kingdom that John's epistle was written. So, here we have a unique dispensation of God between the two advents of Christ. It is during this Inter-advent Age that the Holy Spirit is come to indwell believers.

DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Here, we introduce the Doctrine of the Person of the Holy Spirit. Remember, the Holy Spirit is not an *it*. The Holy Spirit is a person, He is formally the third person of the Holy Trinity. He is God so He has all the attributes of God. God is one in essence and three in person.

FOUR MINISTRIES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT: RIBS

When we talk about the Holy Spirit, we talk about at least four of the ministries or functions of the Holy Spirit; namely RIBS. There are others, but we at least have to mention these four ministries: Regeneration, Indwelling, Baptism, and Sealing (RIBS).

REGENERATION

This morning we are only going to look at regeneration. What is regeneration? The Greek word is *paliggenesia* (**paliggenesia**) and it means "to live again," "to begin again." As redemption has to do with the body, regeneration has to do with the human spirit. In the New Testament, the word may be defined as "the creation of Christ's life in the believer." It is the bestowing of eternal life in distinction from "soul life" (Heb. **nephesh**). It is the re-creation of the human spirit (Titus 3:5). The picture the Bible always associates with regeneration is creation. You are a new creation. The same power that created the universe in Genesis 1-2 is the same power that regenerated or re-created your human spirit.

REGENERATION OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT AND PERSONALITY

You see, we all have a specific shape of our human spirit. We don't all have an identical human spirit. There is a definite structure of your personality, and because each of us is unique, each of us has a unique structure to his/her personality. When an individual is regenerated, this does not change the structure of his/her personality. What it does is change the content that is expressed through that personality. Maybe before regeneration you were an excellent musician or artist, or were an analytical thinker. When one is regenerated, he does not lose his talent as a musician or artist. Nor does he become

disinclined toward analytical thinking. What does change is the fundamental disposition of the individual. Now he expresses his musical or artistic abilities in terms of Christian principles. Now the analytical mind is bent toward Christian doctrine. And how do we express our personalities? It is through our regenerated human spirit. Regeneration does not change the shape of your personality, but what it does is create in your human spirit the moral and ethical qualities of Christ so that your unique human spirit is now able to express itself in unique ways through that same personality. With this regenerated spirit in mind, I want you to turn to 1 John 3:9. This is a problem text.

THE PROBLEM OF 1 JOHN

READ

NASB 1 John 3:9 ⁹ No one who is born of God **practices sin**, because His seed abides in him; and he **cannot sin**, because he is born of God.

NIV 1 John 3:9 ⁹ No one who is born of God will **continue to sin**, because God's seed remains in him; he **cannot go on sinning**, because he has been born of God.

Problem: The problem here has to do with the translation of the verb “sin.” It is a present-tense verb. Most translations translate this present tense as “continuous sinning.” Sometimes the present tense can be translated that way, no doubt, but as you will see, if we translate it as “continual sinning” or “practices sin,” then you are going to have a contradiction.

CONCENTRIC CIRCLES OF INTERPRETATION

You must remember that when you interpret a passage, you interpret within the context. And the first context is the immediate context, the second context is the chapter, then the book, finally when you leave a book you first go to other books by the same author, you don't go to Paul, you go to other books by John (Concentric Contexts Illustrations).

Now look at 1 John 5:16. If you argue that the verb to sin means continually sinning, and the believer does not continually sin in 1 John 3:9, then what do you do with 1 John 5:16?

1 John 5:16 ¹⁶ If anyone sees his brother commit **a sin** that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that.”

The point I am making is that here in 1 John 5:16 the exact same verb “to sin” was used as in 1 John 3:9. So now we have a conflict in John’s writings; because John says here that if anyone sees his “brother continually commit a sin...” Clearly, the text is another brother, a believer. It cannot be talking about an unbeliever. The Greek word is **adelphoi** here, a believer, a brother. So, doing a straight, mechanical translation, we have a contradiction in John. We also have a problem with another verse in John, 1 John 1:8

1 John 1:8 ⁸ If we claim to be **without sin**, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

Which also contradicts with 1 John 3:9. 1 John 3:9 says “we do not sin” and 1 John 1:8 that “we can’t claim to be without sin.” One says, “We don’t sin,” the other says, “We can’t claim not to sin.” Well, the word of God cannot have conflicts in it. So, maybe we ought to back off and say, “Perhaps I don’t understand John’s writing. Maybe I ought to be more careful here.” So, let’s take another run at John’s writings.

TRADITIONAL OUTLINES AND PURPOSE OF 1 JOHN

Traditionally, the epistle of 1 John causes commentators to "hit grease" right from page one. The problem is that they don't outline the book. For example, Augustine says, “There is no continuous order in 1 John.” Westcott says, “No single arrangement is able to take account of the complex development of thought which it offers, and of the many connections which exist between its parts.” F.F. Bruce says, “Attempts to trace a consecutive argument throughout 1 John have never succeeded.”

Well, I don’t think John is so illogical as these great Bible scholars suggest. Let’s admit that they are basically saying, “John lost me, I don’t understand John’s writings.” The reality of the situation is that John is really a very profound thinker. What has happened is that people read the Gospel of John and fasten in on John 20:31 as the purpose of John’s gospel, “...these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.” Then they say, the purpose of John’s first epistle is found in 1 John 5:13, so turn there. “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.” And they interpret this to mean, “I have written to you who CLAIM to BELIEVE.” Maybe you do, maybe you don’t, “in order that you may know that you have eternal life.” In other words, these are Tests for Salvation; that is, Tests to see whether you really have eternal life. And that is what 1 John is all about. Are you really a true believer? Do you really have eternal life?

TRUE OUTLINE OF 1 JOHN

Now, I beg to differ with this approach to 1 John and that 5:13 is the purpose of this epistle. Let me show you why. What did we say about interpreting the text? One of the best tools we have as Bible students is a good concordance. What did we read in 1 John 5:13 at the beginning of the verse? “These things I have written...”. Now, wouldn’t you agree it would be wise to take a little time and check that phrase to see if it is used anywhere else in John’s epistle before we conclude that 5:13 is the entire purpose of the epistle?

Lo and behold, what do we find? The first time John uses “these things we write” is in 1 John 1:4, READ; Chapter 2:1, READ; 2:26, READ; and, of course, we have 5:13. Isn’t it a little odd to say that the whole purpose of the book is found in 5:13 when we have these other statements? We have got the statement used four times in the book. Let’s go back to 2:1 once again. What is he talking about? What are the “these things”? They are the things he just finished talking about in 1:5-10. What about 2:26? There he is talking about Deceivers, and he has just finished talking about 2:18-25. To summarize, what we are saying is, whenever you find these phrases in John’s writings, he is summarizing what he just wrote about. He is telling you the purpose of the previous context, not the purpose of the whole book. They are Johannine signals that summarize the point he just made. “These things” are pronouns, and pronouns always have antecedents. What are the antecedents? When John says, “these things,” he is referring to what he has just written. He is finished writing them, so they always refer to what he has just written. So, right away we find out that 1 John 5:13 is not really the purpose of the whole book, and such a tact is misleading. Now that we have generated a loose outline, let’s look at the Purpose of the Book.

TRUE PURPOSE OF 1 JOHN

1 John 1:1-4 has a very interesting structure. Look in your text at the end of vs. 1 and vs. 2. What you ought to see is two little dashed lines, one at the end of vs. 1 and one at the end of vs. 2. Translators were right to put those little dashes in there. Vs. 2 sticks in between 1 and 3 like a sandwich. The translators are trying to tell us something with those dashed lines. And what they are trying to tell us is that vs. 2 is parenthetical, it is additional information. What this means is that we can read v. 1, skip v. 2, and continue reading v. 3 and the sentence should make perfect sense. Let’s try it. We are going to read as if v. 2 wasn’t even there. READ. Makes perfect sense, nothing missing grammatically, no oddities. So, what is verse 2 doing there? Verse 2 is set off to answer the questions raised in v. 1. What are the "whats" in verse 1 and 3 referring too? “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen.” Just what is John referring to? It is hard to say

that they refer to the person of Jesus. Why? Because these relative pronouns are neuter not masculine. If he was referring to the person of Jesus, he would have said “WHO was from the beginning, WHO we have heard, WHO we have seen, etc.” Obviously, John has Jesus on his mind, but is Jesus the antecedent of the “whats”? To make a long story short, if you do an analysis of this you will find that what John has in mind is the "message about Jesus," the message concerning "the word of life." And what is that message? The message is verse 2. Verse 2 is in there to explain the content of the phrase, “word of life.” It is about Jesus. We would say it is doctrine. Doctrine that was from the beginning.

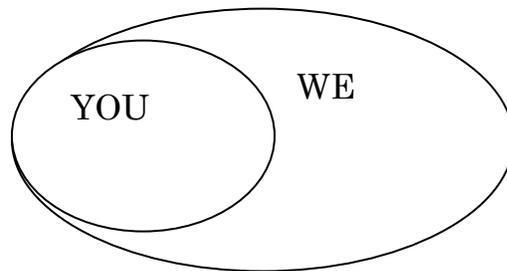
WHAT IS “THE BEGINNING?”

Now, if you take this as Jesus, then the tendency is to make “the beginning” refer to creation, like John’s gospel begins, “In the beginning was the word...”. But I want you to keep in mind our rule: When we see something in John, where is the first place you go to find out the meaning? Do you skip to John’s gospel (1:1)? No, first you look in the immediate book before you step outside the book. Turn to 2:7; READ. Now, what is the meaning of the word “beginning” there? Beginning there is from the time they became Christians. It is not from the time of creation. Now look at 2:24; READ. What did they hear from the beginning? From the beginning of the time, they heard the gospel. This isn’t creation either. Now go to 3:8; READ. Here, obviously John is talking about creation, but now skip down to 3:11. Again, John is not talking about creation but he has switched back to using it in terms of the beginning of the Christian experience. Is the term “beginning” a technical term always used of the beginning of the universe? No, that does not fit. The word “beginning” is not even used here as a technical term, he is using it in terms of his context, either of creation or of the beginning of their Christian experience. Let's go back now and see if we can find out the purpose of John’s epistle: 1 John 1:1-4.

“What was from the beginning = the doctrine of the incarnation, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life-- ² and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us-- ³ what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.”

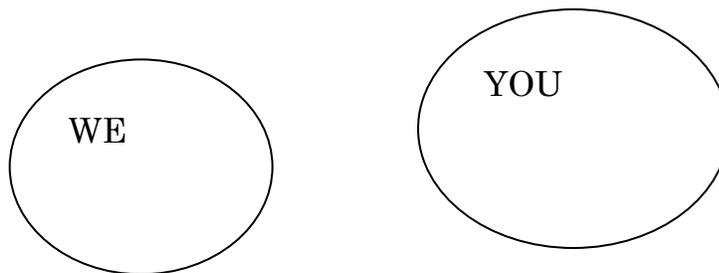
TEXTUAL PROBLEM OF V. 4

We have another textual problem in v. 4, the “we” and the “you”. Who is the “we” and who is the “you”? There are two ways those pronouns can be related. One is like this:
Inclusive Use



and the other is like this:

Exclusive Use



The key to this one is found in v. 3; READ. Obviously, John is using the exclusive use here. Two different groups. The “we” refers to John and the other apostles and the “you” refers to the believers. So, the epistle is addressed to believers. How do we know that, by the way? Turn to 2:12; READ. Does that sound like believers or unbelievers? READ v.13, etc. So, the “we” is John and the other apostles, and the “you” is referring to the believers.

We come now to the purpose of the Epistle in 1 John 1:3-4. There are two purposes:

First v. 3 READ. 1) Having fellowship. The question is, what is fellowship? If they are already believers, then this can't be talking about salvation. So, what is John talking about? He is talking about fellowship. Fellowship really means fellowship. He is talking about promoting fellowship among believers. Everything in the book is geared toward how to have fellowship with believers. This is the main theme of the book. It is not a test to see whether or not you 'are saved. These are instructions on how to maintaining fellowship.

In v. 4, we have the second purpose READ 2. (Aside on Critical Text/Oldest Manuscripts vs. Majority Texts: Majority text says, "our joy" not "your joy"; so, it is “our joy,” the

Apostles' joy.) In other words, the apostles enjoy it when believers are in fellowship. Why are we stressing all this?

ANSWERING THE PROBLEM

Once we know that it is written to believers, and it is written to promote fellowship, now we can answer the problem we initially discussed. 1 John 1:6; READ. See, a believer can be out of fellowship. READ vv. 7-8. Notice it is possible for the "truth" not to be in a believer. READ v. 9. Not referring to salvation, it is referring to an adjustment that we make when the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin in our conscience. READ v. 10. John is fond of using this terminology, "in us." READ 2:1. See, John is not talking about sinless perfection, he is trying to minimize sin in the congregation by teaching them these truths. I hope you don't sin, but if you do, READ 2b. Now come over to 3:9. The immediate context of that troublesome v. 9 is found in v. 7 READ. Now v. 9. Now back up to v. 5-6. We have just gotten through all this stuff about the one who sins and the ones who do not sin. READ v. 5. In whom? "In HIM." Continue reading v. 6 No one who is where? No one who is "in HIM" sins. Finish reading v. 6b. John is antithetical. And these are his words for someone who is either in fellowship or out of fellowship. Abiding in Him is walking in the light, it is having fellowship with Him. No one who abides in Him sins. So, what does that teach? That whenever we sin, we get out of fellowship. When we "acknowledge" or "confess" our sins he puts us back in fellowship. Now we have a little tool that John has given us to promote fellowship and to minimize sin in the congregation. This is taking personal responsibility and taking it before the Lord. Now we can say that 3:9 is saying nothing more than what he is saying in v. 6 and 7. You cannot confuse the way Paul writes with the way John writes. You have got to understand John and the way he thinks. However, this distinction of abiding in Christ or not abiding. Whether eternal life has dominion is also found in Paul but he uses a different vocabulary to express it.

PAUL'S ABIDING TERMINOLOGY

If I John 3:9 is a problem then, Galatians 2:20 is also a problem; READ.

Now doesn't that sound a little like what John was saying in I John? Paul says, "I'm not living now." What do you mean you are not living now? Come on Paul, give me a break, you expect me to really believe you are not living now? Paul says "No, it is not me who lives..." Huh, you are not living now. No, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I [Paul] now live in the flesh I [Paul] live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me." READ v. 20 again. Especially look at

the second half of v. 20. There Paul says, “I now live” and he is referring to himself; but in the first part of the verse Paul says “I don’t live,” “Christ lives in me.” Well, if you have got a problem with 1 John 3:9, then you are going to have a problem with Gal. 2:20. You see, this is not easy stuff. I am not trying to make light of it. What I am trying to point out is that you cannot come to the text at 60 miles per hour. We have got to think about these things and try to figure out what the word of God is saying. This is not easy stuff. Now if that wasn’t bad enough, let’s conclude by looking at Romans 7:20.

READ 7:20. Now, if that doesn’t sound like a cop out. But it is in the text, it is the Holy Spirit’s text. READ v. 20. This is not an easy subject and you cannot just whiz by it in 5 minutes and conclude that Paul is teaching sinless perfection. Anyone who does hasn’t listened too carefully to what John and Paul are saying. Sinless perfection is not being taught by the apostle John, sinless perfection is not being taught by Paul, but something else IS BEING TAUGHT! What is it? What is being taught? **That there is a regenerate nature and that somehow this regenerate nature shares the impeccability of its source, which is the Lord Jesus Christ.** Now how you marry those two things together is difficult because our souls are a lot more complicated now after regeneration than we thought. Our model of who we are inside, our model of who we are as regenerate people is challenged by these texts. Maybe our understanding of who we are is far too simple, and the Holy Spirit is challenging us to realize that our insides, who we are as regenerated people, is much more complicated than scholars across church history have thought.

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