

1, 2, & 3 JOHN

THIS IS HOW WE KNOW

AN INTRODUCTION

TABLE TALK

- ▶ Introduce yourselves around the table:
 - ▶ Name, family, vocation
 - ▶ What brings you to this study of 1-3 John?

AN INTRODUCTION

WHY STUDY THESE LETTERS?

- ▶ Close connection to the Gospel of John
- ▶ 1 John - Significant text for Wesley's sermons, exploring themes of sin, salvation, and repentance
- ▶ Dealing with false teachers
- ▶ Defining Christian love

1-3 JOHN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

- ▶ Part of the cluster of documents known as the "Catholic" or "General" epistles (James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude)
- ▶ Ordering and arrangement
 - ▶ James and Jude = brothers of Jesus
 - ▶ Peter and John = "pillar" disciples
- ▶ There appears to be a close relationship between 1-3 John and the Gospel of John - but what is it, and which came first?

AUTHORSHIP

- ▶ Gospel of John - the "Beloved Disciple"
- ▶ Revelation - John of Patmos
- ▶ 1-3 John - *presbyteros* - "the elder"
- ▶ Are any of these the disciple John, son of Zebedee?

AUTHORSHIP

- ▶ No self-identification as "apostle"
- ▶ Little mention of Galilean ministry of Jesus
- ▶ There is only one named person in the Gospel of John identified as "the one whom Jesus loved" and that was Lazarus
- ▶ Could it be that Lazarus was the "Beloved Disciple?"

VOCABULARY AND STYLE

- ▶ Suggests a common author of the Gospel of John and 1-3 John
- ▶ Revelation not seen as coming from same author
- ▶ Genre -
 - ▶ 1 John - a homily or rhetorical exhortation
 - ▶ 2 & 3 John - personal letters

CHARACTER OF THE AUTHOR

- ▶ "Old man" = authority figure in the early church
- ▶ Somewhere in the 80s AD addressing congregations with internal difficulties
- ▶ Authority to address communities in different locations
- ▶ Claims eyewitness testimony about Jesus, though never suggests he is one of the twelve disciples

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

- ▶ Not likely part of Paul's missionary circle
- ▶ A Jewish writer addressing a largely Jewish audience in a way reminiscent of Jewish wisdom literature
- ▶ References to "Gentiles" and "pagans" suggest that neither the author or his audience fits those categories

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

- ▶ A Jewish Christian community that reached out to other Jews in the area around Ephesus
- ▶ Some of those Jews stayed in the church a long time, but later it became clear that they differed with the Beloved Disciple on their views of Jesus. Schism occurred, with the schismatics leaving
- ▶ Homily (1 John) written in response, insisting on a particular Jewish view of Jesus: Messiah, Son of God, Savior, who died for the sins of the world
- ▶ Author also insists on the ethic of Jesus as they repair wounds

1 JOHN

MAJOR THEMES

- ▶ Shoring up the boundaries of Christian community after opponents have left
- ▶ About damage control and healing, not debating or refuting
- ▶ An "epideictic" homily - discourse not aimed at a specific action or decision, but seeks to enhance knowledge, understanding, or belief through praise or blame, whether of persons, things, or values.
- ▶ It is designed to increase adherence to the fundamental values already accepted –an appeal to the faithful
- ▶

A BRIEF OUTLINE

- ▶ Prologue - 1:1-4
- ▶ Probatio - 1:5-5:17 - exploring several key doctrinal concepts - love, sin, and Christology
- ▶ Summary - 5:18-21

PROLOGUE - TABLE TALK

- ▶ Read 1 John 1:1-4 silently to yourself.
- ▶ Now read at least two different translations at your table
- ▶ What are some repeated words or concepts?
- ▶ Why do you think the writer begins the homily in this way?
- ▶ How would you summarize it in your own words?
- ▶ Compare 1 John 1:1-4 with John 1:1-18. What parallels do you see? What evidence do you see that the same writer could have written both? What differences do you notice?

1 JOHN 1:1

- ▶ Understanding the prologue in light of the Gospel
- ▶ "Word" and "word of life" - "life" = Jesus (John 1:4)
- ▶ "Word" is also the gospel message - good news about Jesus Christ and salvation
- ▶ "Word of life" refers both to Jesus and the message about him
- ▶ Verbs - declare, heard, seen, looked at, touched with our hands = Word became "flesh"

1 JOHN 1:2

- ▶ Description of the "life"
- ▶ "revealed" as eternal life that existed with God
- ▶ Eternal life is a theme in the Gospel of John
- ▶ Jesus is the revelation of the eternal life, revelation of the Father
- ▶ Christological thesis statement - important for what follows

1 JOHN 1:3

- ▶ Reason for Christological statement
- ▶ "So that you may have fellowship with us" - Christological boundaries of community
- ▶ True fellowship is with the Father and the Son
- ▶ True fellowship is vertical and horizontal
- ▶ *Koinonia* - mutual indwelling - ref. Jesus' prayer in John 17

1 JOHN 1:4

- ▶ "Joy" is a typically Johannine idea
- ▶ Abiding in Jesus' love (John 15:7-11) leads to real joy that is eternal life, the goal of human existence

1 JOHN 1:1-4 AS COMMENTARY ON JOHN 1:14

- ▶ Jesus, the Word, was a real human being, real "flesh"
- ▶ Those who refuse to affirm this are later called "antichrists" (4:2-3)
- ▶ Opposition may have led John to more precisely define the human and divine nature of Christ explicated in the Gospel prologue
- ▶ 1 John 1:1-4 makes it clear that the portrait of Jesus held by the Johannine community is one of full divinity and full humanity, not setting aside the latter for the former
- ▶ At stake for John is the doctrine of the incarnation

1 JOHN 1:5-10

- ▶ Focused on the message brought by Jesus and how John and fellow preachers have proclaimed it.
- ▶ Read the passage together: What is the message brought by Jesus and proclaimed by John?

1 JOHN 1:5

- ▶ God is light - freedom from darkness or death
- ▶ Evokes John 1:5 - "light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it"
- ▶ Allusion to the coming of Jesus as light (John 1:4)
- ▶ Jesus' light has shown in such a way as to illuminate human life

1 JOHN 1:6

- ▶ Begins a series of "if" clauses with ethical implications
- ▶ "If we say" (someone is saying it!)
- ▶ To speak correctly but not act correctly is not "true"
- ▶ "Walking" = a typically Jewish way to describe one's way of life

1 JOHN 1:7

- ▶ Walking in the light (walking in the way of Jesus) is the key to *koinonia* between believers
- ▶ Jesus' sacrificial death makes this "walking" and fellowship possible
- ▶ Cleansing by the blood of Jesus enables believers to "walk" into eternal life
- ▶ Underscores point of John 3:16 - 1 John develops theology more than the Gospel, specifically how Jesus' death cleanses from sin and enables eternal life

1 JOHN 1:8

- ▶ Jesus' sacrifice presupposes sin as an enslaving force on the human condition
- ▶ To deny sin is to undercut the seriousness of the human condition and the necessity for salvation
- ▶ We not only deceive ourselves, we will deceive others - "the truth is not in us"
- ▶ We also make God a liar (v. 10)

1 JOHN 1:9

- ▶ Confession of sin leads to forgiveness and cleansing
- ▶ Ongoing confession and forgiveness is a part of Christian life and worship

SIN IN BELIEVERS

- ▶ Tension in 1 John: Christ died for our sins, so that sin would be defeated in believers. It's continued existence should be unthinkable
- ▶ And yet, sin still does exist, even in the Christian
- ▶ Nevertheless, sin must be conquered and rooted out
- ▶ John and John Wesley both agree that sin can indeed be rooted out and overcome via growth in perfection (2:5, 4:17, 18)
- ▶ We are not to surrender to sin or deny its power, but grow in our ability to overcome it in the power of the Spirit

THE EVANGELIST'S HOMILY

- ▶ Notice how John begins - with an explication of who Jesus is and how Jesus represents God's grace. He begins with good news.
- ▶ He saves the bad news for later, contrasting human brokenness with God's movement of grace
- ▶ The only way people are convicted of sin is by comparison with one who is greater than themselves. Our sin stands out clearly in contrast to Christ's righteousness
- ▶ Wesleyan preaching - leading with grace, not condemnation; moving toward perfection

1 JOHN 2:1-6

- ▶ Read the passage together.
- ▶ How does this passage illuminate or further explain what has come before?
- ▶ How does this passage describe the relationship of sin to the believer?

1 JOHN 2:1

- ▶ "Little children" - same way Jesus addressed disciples in John 13:33
- ▶ John explains further reason for writing - not only *koinonia* but also "that you may not sin" - to have power over it
- ▶ But if anyone still does sin (it is a malevolent power) it need not rule them; they have an "advocate" with the Father: Jesus
- ▶ Ref. "Advocate" in John 14:16 - Spirit of God/Spirit of Christ

1 JOHN 2:2

- ▶ How is Jesus our Advocate?
- ▶ Through his "atoning sacrifice for our sins" - not only for ours but for the sins of the whole world
- ▶ The sinless one became sin for us to defeat its power over us (2 Corinthians 5:21)
- ▶ Therefore, he stands in the gap as one who is both human and divine, advocating for us because he has become one of us and yet without sin

1 JOHN 2:3

- ▶ How can we be sure that we “know him?”
- ▶ Knowledge = reassurance, faith
- ▶ Not merely believing testimony, but “obey his commandments”
- ▶ John 7:17; 14:15-17, 21, 23-24

1 JOHN 2:4

- ▶ If, on the other hand, we claim to know Jesus without obeying him, we are liars
- ▶ “in such a person the truth does not exist”
- ▶ In the Gospel, Jesus speaks of “commandments” (plural) but only explicates the commandment to love (which will be fleshed out in 1 John 2:7-11)

1 JOHN 2:5

- ▶ Obeying Jesus’ command to love is evidence that the “in this person the love of God has reached perfection”
- ▶ “Perfect love” is a major theme of this letter and of Wesleyan theology
- ▶ It’s not about perfect performance (John does not assume that) but rather pure and perfect intention to love as God loves. “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34; 15:12)

WESLEY'S DEFINITION OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

"In one view, it is purity of intention, dedicating all the life God. It is the giving God all our heart; it is one desire ruling all our tempers. It is the devoting, not a part, but all our soul, body, and substance to God. In another view, it is all the mind which was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ walked. It is the circumcision of the heart from all filthiness, all inward as well as outward pollution. It is the renewal of the heart in the whole image of God, the full likeness of Him that created it. In yet another, it is the loving God with all our heart, and our neighbor as ourselves."

- *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*



QUESTIONS?
