

Southwest Life Groups

A Place to Belong...A Place to Transform

March 2, 2008

Focus: To understand the background of what was going on in this church when John wrote his letter and to explore how we are similar to that church.

Lesson 1 Introduction to I John

Introduction: Below is some background information of the church that John was writing to in I John. Begin the evening reading each statement and having a conversation on how we as the SW church compare to this body in Ephesus. What are the implications of our similarities with this church?

- This was a church of second and third generation Christians (around 100AD). The wonder and amazement had been lost and Christianity had become more of a habit than a passion
- The standards of being a Christian had been found to be too difficult. They had been called to be different; it was hard and they were struggling with that!
- There was no physical persecution of this church that we know of. However, there was dangerous heresy in the church. People were trying to make Christianity more intellectually respectable. They did not want to stand out but wanted to blend into the culture. Christ was being lost and culture was being found. These people were not being persecuted, but the message of Christ was.

Text: Overview of I John

This letter was being written because of the Gnostic thought there. We need to define that. Gnosticism...General belief that all matter is evil and that only Spirit is good. So of course the body is hated but the spirit within us is good. So the purpose of life is to liberate the spirit from the vile prison it is in. This could only be done through an elaborate ritual which only true Gnostics could supply.

Practical Consequences of Gnosticism

1. **It destroyed Christian fellowship**...ordinary people didn't have the "right" knowledge. It divided people into two classes...the haves and the have nots. Gnostics believed "ordinary" people were worthless and had no value or hope. The Gnostics, however, saw themselves as akin to God. This created a spiritual aristocracy. The mark of true religion for a Gnostic was contempt for ordinary man while the Christ follower's mark of true religion was love for everyone.
2. **It created a false view of sin and self**...Since Gnostics believed that the body was evil... 1. Some believed that they could do whatever they wanted with this

body. 2. Some treated the body harshly and inappropriately. 3. Some believed they had already reached perfection so sin was not even possible for them.

Application

- If you were writing to this church, what would be the major themes you felt you needed convey?
- Spend the next few minutes scanning the book and looking for themes you see John bringing out. Make a list.
- How does your themes in question 1 compare to John's?

Conclusion: We get to spend the next few weeks exploring and digging into what John has to say to us through this church. Finish with allowing people to share their hearts about this next quarter.