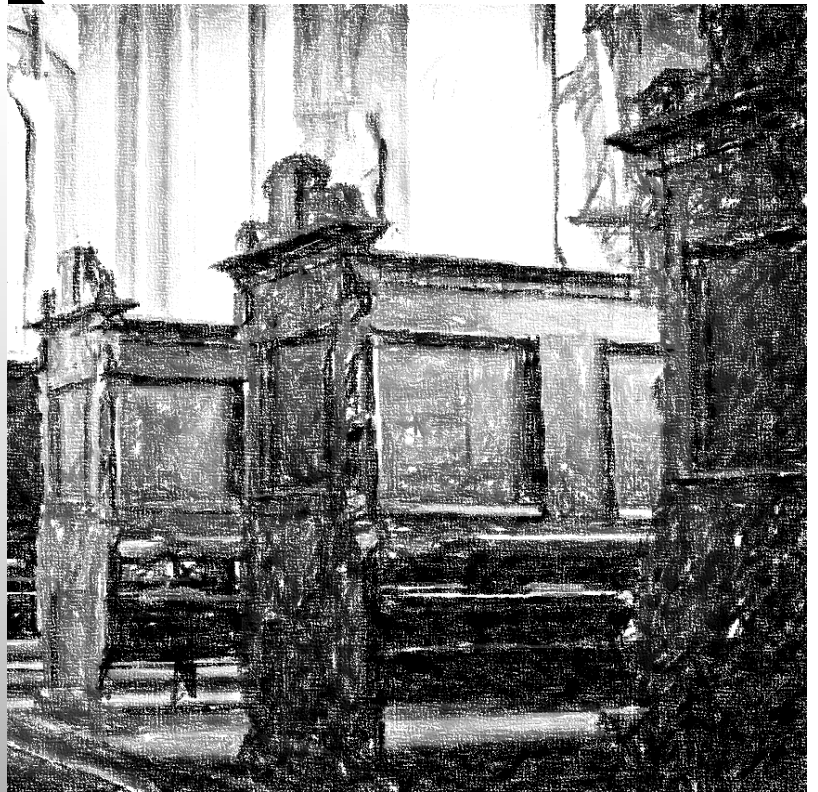




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# The Epistle of First John

Responding to Threats Against The Church's One Foundation

1 John 1:1-4

It is very important to understand that Christianity is not a philosophical movement. That is to say, Christianity did not come about from a set of theories, debates, or philosophical concerns. Christianity is not a school of thought, and it is certainly not characterized as a collection of moral ideas. Instead, Christianity is rooted in the person and work of Christ – namely his teaching, life, death, and resurrection.

Keep in mind that even apart from the Bible, we know that Jesus historically existed from the writings of Josephus (37-97 AD); Cornelius Tacitus (50-120 AD); Gaius Tranquillas (117-139 AD); Julius Africanus (221 AD); The Talmud (70-200 AD); and the Mara Bar-Serapion (Last First Century).

The Apostle John, in the beginning portions of his letter, tells us that he and the Apostles were firsthand witnesses of Jesus. Jesus was a real person, with a real body – the disciples heard Jesus with their ears, they saw Jesus with their own eyes, and they touched Jesus with their hands.

John is appealing to firsthand knowledge of Jesus – with the rest of the disciples – as his authority.

Not only is John confronting the Gnostic heresy that Jesus did not have a body, but he is connecting his epistle to Jesus as the source of authority.

And so, what this means is that John is advancing nothing imagined or derived from him. That is the way that it works with Christ's church. Churches are not places of new revelation. Pastors are not religious wizards who possess secret knowledge. Instead, churches and pastors derive their message to a greater authority, which is Christ. Pastors merely repeat and apply that which they have from Jesus in His Word and the Apostles in their Epistles.

Beware of churches and pastors who claim to have a special corner on the religious market, as if they have

an exclusive control of Jesus and His teachings. Beware of churches and pastors who claim to have new and improved secret Christian knowledge. The Bible is a closed book. Unlike the heretical Mormons, Christianity does not need further revelations from God. To the point, beware of churches and pastors that appeal to any other source of authority that is not Christ and His Word, as put forth in the Holy Scriptures.

But why does John appeal to Christ as his authority? He appeals to Christ not only because Christ rose from the dead, but because Jesus was from the beginning. Contrary to our modern way of thinking, the ancient readers gave greater authority to that which was older. In other words, in our American culture, newer is better. However, the ancients attributed greater authority to older things. More modern traditions were not necessarily supported or viewed with value. And so Christ was not some new religious person who arrived recently within history. Instead, He is from the beginning – no, He existed before the beginning, since He is the cause of the beginning. So whenever a person appeals to ancient teaching, Christianity is more ancient. Christianity has eternal origins because Jesus is God of God; through Him, all things were made.

Practically speaking, this is very applicable to the church today. We live in a time where there are religious opinions on everything. People will make things up regarding religion, they will appeal to silly stories they hear in the news, they will get religious teaching from quacks on nightly religious programming, and they will piece things together from different religions to suit their fancy. Like a smorgasbord, the average religious person picks and chooses from whatever they like. And when challenged or confronted, these individuals get extremely defensive because, quite frankly, they are relatively unaware of what they base their religious thoughts on and upon. But this is not true for Christianity. Christianity rests upon Jesus Christ, who was beheld by John and the Apostles and sits at the right hand of the Father. Christianity has its authority in Jesus, who not only was from the beginning, but the creator of the beginning. Thus, Christianity has its authority in the resurrected Jesus, who is eternal. Christianity is not derived from the opinions of man, the circumstances of culture, or schools of thought but has a divine eternal origin.

