

1 John 1

Author

The Apostle John is the author, according to numerous statements of Christian writers in the early second century and according to numerous similarities with his other books.

Readers

A “general” epistle, not addressed just to one congregation, but to all Christians in all centuries; probably it was delivered at Ephesus, possibly to Gentile converts (see *5:21* and *3 John 4*).

Date

Uncertain, but probably very late in the First Century, due to the material in *1 John* that refutes Gnosticism

-According to Guy N. Woods, possibly between 90-94 AD (shortly before the bitter persecution which was started under Emperor Domitian).

Theme

The main message is the joy and happiness we should have concerning Christian love; it is a letter of great joy

-However, interspersed with these comments are statements refuting the two prominent false doctrines of John’s day:

-The denial of Christ’s humanity by the Gnostics (*1:1-3*)

-The denial of Christ’s deity, by the unbelieving Jews (*2:22*)

Notice how John states his purposes in this letter:

-*1:4* – that our joy may be made complete

-*2:1* – that you may not sin

-*2:26* – concerning those who are trying to deceive you

-*5:13* – that you may know that you have eternal life

In all his writings, John tends to bring out certain contrasts:

-life and death

-light and darkness

-children of God and children of the devil

-love of God and love the world

-righteousness and unrighteousness

-Christ and anti-Christ

This tendency is very evident in the letter of *1 John*

Notice some of the similarities between the *Gospel of John* and *1 John*:

1 John 1.1 – John 1.1

1.2 – John 3.2

1.1 – John 1.1

1.6 – John 8.12

2.3 – John 14.15

2.5 – John 14.21

2.6 – John 15.5

2.8 – John 13.34

2.25 – John 17.2

Noel Meredith, *Spiritual Sword Lectures, 1976*, “1 John”:

First John was written by the inspired apostle John, probably between AD 90-95, from Ephesus

- The book was written to Christians, many of whom are second generation Christians, so they needed encouragement to have a strong personal conviction to the faith
- The Christians to whom John wrote were beset with the problems of lack of brotherly love, spiritual laxity, internal dissension, lessening of steadfastness in fellowship, the seductions of worldliness, and Gnosticism...
- Gnosticism was a false speculative philosophy.

Under such conditions the presence of false teachers created a powerful danger and was the immediate occasion for the writing of the epistle

- The false teachers are called liars, seducers, false prophets, deceivers, and antichrists
- Some sought to reinterpret their faith ‘in terms of modern thought’
- Such an attitude on the part of people today is still a source of much confusion and false doctrine
- The strong pull of the pleasures of sin and worldliness were everywhere
- So the false teachers were seeking to destroy both the faith and the morals of the Christians
- John thus writes to refute the false teachings which were prevalent and to establish them in the one faith and moral purity

1 John 1

Commentary used: *Gospel Advocate NT Commentary (Peter, John, Jude)*, Guy N. Woods

-What do we know about John?

-What books in the New Testament did John write? *Gospel of John, 1-2-3 John, Revelation* – about one-fifth (20%) of the New Testament

-We usually don’t consider John to be major writer of the New Testament, but he was

-Was John full of pride over his writing ability? No, his name is never mentioned in his books, except in *Revelation* (5 times there)

-What kind of writer was John? Very thoughtful and deep, with very simple words

-What do we know about John as a person? He came from rich family: his father Zebedee had hired servants (*Mark 1.20, Luke 5.10*)

-Mother: Salome (wealthy, supported Christ, had “substance”)

-Who was John’s brother? James (*Matthew 4.21*)

-Lived at Bethsaida – *Luke 5.10, John 1.44*

-What happened to him? Killed by Herod – *Acts 12.2*

-John had his own home – *John 19.27*

-At the crucifixion, John was personally acquainted with the high priest – *John 18.15*

-What else happened to John at the crucifixion? He was given charge of Mary

-Do we see John in Acts? Yes, being persecuted along with Peter

-Perhaps the greatest honor that John received in this life was in being given the writing of *Revelation* and thus to close the New Testament Scriptures

(*Revelation 22.21*) *The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.*

-In other words, the word of God was completed by John

Two problems that John had to deal with:

1. The original enthusiasm of the church had died down

- Christianity had become a thing of habit and tradition to come Christians
- The church had become a burden to some
- Also, Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D.
- What effect would this have had on Jewish converts?** Maybe God doesn't love his people anymore (so this produced a loss of enthusiasm)

2. But another great danger: Gnosticism - from Greek word *gnosko* – meaning: *I know*

- Basic Gnostic belief: only spirit was good, all matter was evil
- How would that teaching conflict with Christians?** The coming (incarnation) of Jesus Christ would have been impossible
- In other words, God would never be found in a fleshly form - it would have been below his dignity
- Therefore, the Gnostics made a distinction between Jesus and Christ
- Gnostics: Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, the dove was the spirit of Christ, which entered Jesus and stayed until the crucifixion
- Then Christ left and went back to heaven and didn't go through pain and agony of crucifixion
- Jesus (the man) therefore died on the cross, but Christ (the Son of God) escaped to heaven during the crucifixion
- Lastly, many Gnostics believed that it did not matter what the body did, as long as the spirit was pure, so the body could sin all it wanted to
- Gnostics were also "antinomians" = against the idea of law under Jesus Christ
- Why is the philosophy dangerous?** It meant our actions do not count - **Read 2 Corinthians 5.10**
- The modern day version of Gnosticism is the Christian Science Church
- They generally do not believe in going to medical doctors, since it is only the soul (spirit) that is sick, and if the soul can be healed, that will take care of the disease of the body
- So they go their "practitioners of spiritual healing"

Date for the book:

- The book of *1 John* was probably written in 90's A.D.
- John was at Ephesus
- The book was probably written to be circulated around the congregations in Asia Minor
- It is not a traditional letter (no greetings, etc. - more like a sermon in written form)

1 John 1.1-4 - Prologue

V1 – Wonder why there are no words of greetings? John wanted to get right to the subject

- Notice: His first verse is a direct, frontal attack on the Gnostics
- **In what way does he attack the Gnostics in v 1?** Jesus was only phantom, a ghost
- Notice the order of the verbs: *heard, seen, beheld, hands handled* – progression to make it clear – no mistake

V1a– "*What was from the beginning*" – Does this remind you of another verse in the Bible?

John 1.1 - **Read John 1.1-4**

- John: Jesus was not a natural-born man, but was already in existence at the beginning

V2 – Meaning of "manifested?" Made known

- In other words, not just for a select group of people

V 3– When do we have fellowship with each other? When we also have fellowship with God the Father and his son Jesus Christ

V 4– Notice the emphasis on joy in believing what is right

1 John 1.5-10

V 5– Notice the distinction between darkness and light

V 6– The conclusion from above statement

-If we walk in darkness, we cannot have fellowship with God

-**What did John call those who lived in wickedness and claimed to be Christians?** Liars

-**Apostle of love?** To "love" means to speak the truth to people

V 7 – What do we have to do to have real fellowship with God? Walk in light

-**Meaning?** Do the best we can at the Christian way of life

-**When we walk in light, what are the two results?** Fellowship with one another and blood of Jesus (not just Christ) cleanses us of all sin

-**Implications of this verse (tremendous)?**

We must walk in light – not passive

-**If** – meaning that we can cease to walk in light

-We don't have to perfect, because the blood of Jesus still has the power to cleanse us

-Sometimes we get the question: Once we are baptized and then commit a sin, do we have to be baptized again? No, as long as we are "walking in the light" (doing the best we can, with a penitent heart), we are forgiven

-Guy N. Woods has said that it is like the windshield wipers on a car constantly removing the rain from the windshield

-As long as we are striving to please God, those wipers keep taking the rain away

V 8 – A direct attack on Gnostics

-**Describe person who says that he has no sin?** Deceived, has no truth

-**Does this happen today?** Yes, many people see no need to obey the gospel because they don't see themselves as sinners

V 9 – Different if John had said, “If we say that we have sinned ...”? Yes– “confess” implies admission of guilt and sorrow

-**Whom do we confess our sins to?** God (Christ)

-Christ is our mediator between us and God, and to the person we have offended

V 10 – John is very emphatic here – we have all sinned

Great truth from 1 John 1:

“The shot across the bow” – this Navy term means “surrender!” – That was John's message to the false teachers and the Gnostics!

-What a powerful piece of writing from the very beginning!

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