

## **The First Epistle of John**

### **Introduction**

First John has been called the family epistle. Paul's epistles and all the other epistles are church epistles, but this is a family epistle and should be treated that way. The church is a body of believers in the position where we are blessed "... with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). We are given that position when we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Believing on the Lord Jesus brings us into the family of God.

In the family we have a relationship which can be broken but is restored when "we confess our sins." Then "he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

There is a strong connection between belief and life. The Gospel of John was designed to produce faith so that we might have life (Jn 20:30-31). However, it is The First Epistle of John which describes the nature of that life in greater detail (e.g., 1Jn 3:14).

### **Author**

The epistle does not identify the author, but the strong, consistent and earliest testimony of the church ascribes it to John, the beloved disciple of Jesus (Jn 13:23; 19:26-27; 20:2; 21:7,20). Similarities in style, vocabulary, and themes in both this epistle and the Gospel of John certainly offer internal evidence for this conclusion.

There is also external evidence that John is the author.

Polycarp, a close associate of John, appears to make reference to this epistle in a letter to the Philippians at the beginning of the second century.

Irenaeus, a student of Polycarp, quoted from the epistle and attributed it to John.

### **Recipients**

No one is specifically mentioned by name. John may have been in Ephesus at the time, and some think this was a general epistle to Christians throughout Asia Minor (modern day Turkey).

### **Date**

Trying to date the writing of 1 John can be difficult. Much of the scholarship and study concerning the date can place the writing before AD 100 with certainty.

## **Purpose**

In his epistle John frequently states why he was writing:

- “these things we write to you that your joy may be full” - 1Jn 1:4
- “these things I write to you, that you may not sin” - 1Jn 2:1
- “these things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you”- 1Jn 2:26
- “these things I have written to you...that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God ” - 1Jn 5:13

While these reasons may state the positive purpose for John's letter, it appears he was also responding to errors prevalent at the time (“these things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you” - 1Jn 2:26).

If not fully developed in John’s day, there was at least a precursor to Gnosticism.

Those who later came to be called Gnostics claimed to have a superior knowledge (the Greek word for knowledge is gnosis). A fundamental presupposition was that all matter was evil. Therefore they believed that God did not create or have anything to do with the material universe (rather, it was created by a demi-god). Also, that Christ could not have come in the flesh (cf. 1Jn 4:1-3).

One branch of Gnosticism, Docetism (dokein, “to seem”), taught that Jesus only seemed to be physical (contrast that with John’s statement in 1Jn 1:1).

Cerinthus, a contemporary of John, taught that “Jesus” was physical, but that the "Christ" came upon Him at his baptism, and then left before His death, so that the "Christ-spirit" never suffered (cf. 1Jn 5:6).

The Gnostics’ application to everyday living took two different directions. Since all matter was considered evil, some taught one should abstain altogether from anything that would satisfy the flesh. Others claimed it did not matter what one did in the flesh (it was evil anyway), and to have “full knowledge” it was proper to explore everything.

John’s purpose therefore appears to be two-fold:

- Assure Christians that they have eternal life (1Jn 5:13)
- Counter those who denied that Jesus had come in the flesh (1Jn 4:1-6)

## **Theme**

Believers are to have faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made flesh, and are to live a life of love and discipleship in the unity of the Spirit.

## **OUTLINE**

From the **Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary...**

### **Prologue: The Word of Life (1:1-4)**

#### **1. God Is Light (1:5-3:10)**

- a. Walk in the Light (1:5-2:2)
  - 1) God is Light (1:5-7)
  - 2) Resist sin (1:8-2:2)
- b. Obey the command to love (2:3-11)
  - 1) Know God and keep His commands (2:3-6)
  - 2) Learn the new command and love others (2:7-11)
- c. Know your spiritual status (2:12-14)
- d. Be warned of enemies of the faith (2:15-27)
  - 1) Beware of the world (2:15-17)
  - 2) Beware of the antichrists (2:18-27)
- e. Live like children of God (2:28-3:10)
  - 1) Be confident and ready for His coming (2:28-3:3)
  - 2) Be righteous and do not sin (3:4-10)

#### **2. God Is Love (3:11-5:12)**

- a. Love one another: part one (3:11-24)
  - 1) Love in action (3:11-18)
  - 2) Live in confidence (3:19-24)
- b. Test the spirits (4:1-6)
- c. Love one another: part two (4:7-21)
  - 1) Love others because God loves you (4:7-10)
  - 2) Love others because God lives in you (4:11-21)
- d. Obey God and experience the victory of faith (5:1-5)
- e. Believe in the Son and enjoy eternal life (5:6-12)

### **Conclusion: Confidence and Characteristics of the Child of God (5:13-21)**

- a. Know you have eternal life (5:13)
- b. Be confident in prayer (5:14-17)
- c. Do not continue in sin (5:18-20)
- d. Keep yourself from idols (5:21)

**RESOURCES** - Used in the writing of the introduction:

J Vernon McGee - *Thru The Bible* 1 John Study Guide.

Mark Copeland – *I John Study Guide*.