

First John

I. Author

- A. This book was written by John the apostle. (Matt. 10:2).
1. He was a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee who was the son of Zebedee and the brother of James. (Mk. 1:19,20; Lk. 5:10).
 2. His mother was Salome who was one of the women who followed Jesus even to His crucifixion.. (Matt. 27:56; Mk. 15:40).
 3. He was from Galilee. (Acts 1:11).
 4. John was a part of the inner circle of Jesus. (Matt. 17:1; Mk. 5:37).
 - a. Jesus loved all and had many friends, but He was especially close to Peter, James and John.
 - b. The special relationship Jesus had with them may have involved more than friendship.
 - c. There may have been some unique qualities in these men.
 5. This is the “disciple whom Jesus loved.” (Jn. 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7; 21:20). See John 21:24.
 6. The mention of the "hired servants" (Mk.1:20); of the "private means" of those women who supported Jesus, which probably included Salome, John's mother (Lk. 8:3); of "his own household" (Jn. 19:27), and of his acquaintance with Caiaphas the high priest (Jn. 18:15) implies a position of at least considerable influence and means.
 7. The early church writers, such as Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria, attribute this book to the apostle John. Polycarp and Papias, students of John, attributed it to him.
 8. The style of First John is very similar to the Gospel of John and Second and Third John.
 - a. This letter is the same style as gospel of John.
 - b. All but 69 of the 295 vocabulary words are in the gospel.
 - c. Second and Third John have same style.
 - d. The book of Revelation was written by John, but style is different. (Rev. 1:4, 5).
 - 1) There could be many reasons for the change of style.
 - 2) Subject matter and type of writing would explain some or all the differences.
- B. John wrote 5 books - Gospel of John, First, Second & Third John, and Revelation.

Note: James, the brother of John, was killed by Herod Agrippa who reigned 3 years in Palestine, 41-44 A.D. (Acts 12:1,2).

II. Date

- A. The date is uncertain, but was probably written when John was a older man.
- B. Many scholars would date this book about 80 to 95 A.D..
- C. Some scholars think it was written from Ephesus.
 1. Early church writers state that after the death of Paul (about 68 A.D.) John resided in Ephesus except for the time he spent on Patmos when exiled there by Domitian in 96 A.D..
 2. Revelation 1:11 makes mention of John on the “isle of Patmos.”

Note:

1. Most think it was written late in the 1st century. (1 Jn. 2:1), but the words “little children,” referring to his readers, do not mandate the interpretation that John was very old.
2. John could have written this letter earlier to these dearly loved Christians. See John 13:33

JOH 13:33 "**Little children**, I am with you a little while longer. You shall seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, I now say to you also, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'

- “tekni’a” [tek nee’ a] means “little children,” but it does not necessarily refer to literal “little children.”
 - One must study the context to determine the meaning of the word.
3. “Little children” is used here to refer to His disciples in general including the twelve.
 - a. See John 13:34, 35.
 - b. Peter was one who heard Jesus on this occasion. (Jn. 13:36-38).
 - c. These words were also spoken to the eleven of the apostles excluding Judas. (Jn. 13:21-31).
 - d. Jesus had been eating the Passover meal with His apostles.

III. Purpose

- A. It was written to stress the importance of godly living and brotherly love. (1 Jn. 1:7; 4:7-12).
 1. It is often called “The epistle of love.”
 2. No writer discusses love more than John in this epistle unless it be Paul.
 3. Paul also discussed love in his epistles. (1 Cor. 13:1-13; Eph. 5:22-33; Gal. 5:22; Tit. 2:4; Rom. 12:9, 10; 13:8, 10; 14:15; 15:30; 1 Cor. 8:1; 14:1; 16:14).
- B. John wrote this book to assure Christians that we can be confident of eternal life. (1 Jn. 5:13).

1JO 5:13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order **that you may know that you have eternal life.**

1. He used the word “oida” for “know.”
2. It means “to know” and expresses the idea of certainty.
3. The Christian can have “Blessed Assurance” of his/her salvation.

C. John also wrote this book to defend Christ’s humanity as well as His Deity. (1 Jn. 2:23; 4:2).

1JO 2:23 Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.	1JO 4:2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;
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1. It would appear that the second century gnosticism had its early roots even in John’s time.
 - a. The docetic [Gr. doke’o] gnostics denied Christ’s humanity. They claimed that Christ appeared to be flesh, but was not.
 - b. They claimed that matter was evil and therefore the sinless Christ could not have been flesh.
 - c. This led them to deny the resurrection and that the Supreme God created the universe.
 - d. The Supreme, Holy, Sinless God could not create evil matter.
2. John affirms over and over again that Jesus came in the flesh.
3. His affirmation is in full agreement with the four gospels.
4. Those who denied Christ coming in flesh are the Antichrist or antichrists.

1JO 2:18 Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour.

1JO 2:22 Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the **Antichrist**, the one who denies the Father and the Son.

1JO 4:3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the **Antichrist**, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

2JO 1:7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the **Antichrist**.

- See notes on “gnosticism” at the end of this lesson.

IV. Recipients

- A. This epistle is called a “Catholic” (general) epistle.
- B. It was written to Christians at large.

C. Books that are classified as “catholic” epistles are James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1,2,3 John, and Jude.

1. Some of the books classified as “catholic” epistles are not truly “general” epistles.
2. Second and Third John were written to individuals, but are classified as “catholic epistles” because of their natural grouping with First John. (2 Jn. 1:1; 3 Jn. 1:1)
 - a. Second John was written “to the chosen lady and her children.”
 - b. Third John was written to “Gaius.”

D. This book is also called a Minor epistle - named because of its size, not importance.

Chapter 1

The Eternal Word Became Flesh

1JO 1:1 What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life--

we heard,
we saw with our own eyes,
we watched,
we touched with our hands.

1. Jesus is called “the Word.” (Jn. 1:1,14).
 - a. It is not known for sure why Jesus is called “the Word.”
 - b. It may be because a word communicates and Jesus communicates and reveals God to man. (Jn. 1:18; 10:30; 14:9; Col. 1:15).
2. The “Word” became flesh. (Jn. 1:14). See 1 Timothy 3:16.
3. The gnostics denied Jesus had come in the flesh because they had the false belief that matter is evil.
4. They reasoned that since Jesus was not evil therefore He could not have been flesh.
 - “What” is a neuter relative pronoun and is probably used because John is writing of the things concerning Christ, and not about Jesus as a Person only.
 - The neuter gender is used of Christ in Luke 1:36. Lit. “the Holy thing [One] being born will be called Son of God.”
 - The One who created “all things” is before all created things and is Eternal.
 - Christ was a real human who lived in this world as flesh, and He was seen and heard and touched.

Notes:

1. Jesus is “from the beginning.” See 1 John 2:13, 14.
 - a. It points to a time before creation.
 - b. The Father is eternal. (Deut. 33:27; Psa. 90).
 - c. Christ is eternal. (Isa. 9:6; Mic. 5:2; Jn. 1:1-3; 8:58; 17:5). Note 1 John 1:2 “eternal life”
 - d. We are “everlasting,” but Christ is eternal.
2. Christ is called the “Word of Life.”
 - a. He is elsewhere called “the Word.” (Jn. 1:1, 14).
 - b. He is called “the Word” because He reveals the Father. (Jn. 1:14, 18; 14:9).
 - c. Jesus imparts spiritual life and He will raise us from the dead. (Jn. 11:25).
3. The words “what,” “that which” refer to Christ, but it is uncertain why the neuter gender is used here.
4. Some conjecture that John is writing about things concerning Christ and about Christ as a Person only.

1JO 1:2 and the life [Christ] was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life [Christ], which was with the Father and was manifested to us—

- “manifested” speaks of the incarnation of Christ.
1. Jesus is described as “the eternal life.”
 - a. Literally the Greek has “the life, the eternal.”
 - b. All men and even angels are “everlasting”[never ending].
 - c. Only Deity (God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) are eternal (without beginning or end).
 2. Jesus is not a created being.
 - a. He has always been and always will be. (Jn. 1:1, 2; 17:6; 1 Jn. 2:13).
 - b. He “created all things.” (Jn. 1:1-3; Heb. 1:2; 1 Cor. 8:6; Rev. 3:14).
 - 1) Jesus is the “beginning” (cause, agent) of God’s creation.
 - 2) NIV has the word “Ruler” here. “arche” is translated “ruler” in Luke 12:11.
 - 3) Marshall has “chief,” and McCord has “first cause.”
 - c. Since Christ created everything, He Himself is not created and was before creation. (Col. 1:15-17).

3. The Old Testament spoke of the eternity of Christ. (Isa. 9:6,7; Mic. 5:2).

ISA 9:6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, **Eternal Father**, Prince of Peace. Lit. "father of eternity."

ISA 9:7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.

MIC 5:2 "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, **From the days of eternity.**"

4. The fact Jesus claimed equality with God proves His eternity. (Jn. 14:9; 10:30).

1JO 1:3 what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

1. The Christian has "fellowship" [Gr. "koinoni'a"] with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."

2. You cannot have fellowship with One without the Other.

- The "we" surely includes the apostles and perhaps other Christians.
- It is not certain how many apostles were alive when John penned this epistle.
- "We" may be an editorial "we."
- The pronoun "we" could also include reliable eyewitnesses who had died.
- Our religion is based on reliable eyewitnesses who lived centuries ago.

1JO 1:4 And these things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.

King James: And these things write we unto you, that **your** joy may be full.

New King James: And these things we write to you that **your** joy may be full.

American Standard: and these things we write, that **our** joy may be made full.

New International: We write this to make **our** joy complete.

Revised Standard: And we are writing this that **our** joy may be complete.

- The Alexandrinus, Vaticanus and Sinaiticus have "our joy."
- The KJV version translate "your" which is a rendering from an Alexanderian manuscript that scholars believe has been corrected or changed. The Ephraemi Rescriptus (5th cent) and manuscript K (9th cent) manuscripts contain the reading "your."

- Evidence favors “our joy,” but salvation is not affected by “your joy” versus “our joy.”

Special Note:

1. Some Greek manuscripts read “your” (humon’) and others read “our” (hemon, hay mon’) in verse 4.
2. The word “our” would include the apostles and others closely associated with them.

God Is Light

1JO 1:5 And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all (none).

- “message” is from “aggelia” [an ge lee’ a] meaning “message, instruction, directive.”
1. “God is light” (absolute moral perfection).
 - a. God is absolutely pure and sinless.
 - b. God cannot even be tempted. (Jas. 1:13).
 2. The words “at all, none” literally mean there is not even a little bit of darkness in God.
 - a. “oudemia [ou de mee’ a] means “none.”
 - b. God is absolute Holiness.
 3. God is “the Father of lights.” (Jas. 1:17).
 - a. The vast universe was created by God through His Son. (Jn. 1:3; Heb. 1:2).
 - b. He is also the Father of all spiritual light.
 4. God “dwells in unapproachable light.” (1 Tim. 6:16).

1TI 6:16 who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

5. Jesus was and is “the light of the world.” (Jn. 8:12).
 6. Christians are to be “the light of the world” and “children of light.” (Matt. 5:14-16; Phil. 2:15; Eph. 5:8).
- **John affirms God is light, Spirit, faithful, righteous and love.** (1 Jn. 1:5, 9; Jn. 4:24; 1 Jn. 4:8).
 - He reveals much to us about the nature of our God and Father.

Fellowship With God

1JO 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship [joined, united, a close relationship] with Him and yet walk [live] in the darkness [sin], we lie and do not practice the truth;

- **Gr. “koinoni’a”-** fellowship, participation, share

1. One lies when he claims fellowship with God and Christ, but lives in the darkness.

2. **John was a very loving man, but he could be quite harsh with Christians who were living ungodly lives.**

1JO 1:10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him **a liar**, and His word is not in us.

1JO 2:4 The one who says, "I have come to know Him,"and does not keep His commandments, is **a liar**, and the truth is not in him;

1JO 2:22 Who is **the liar** but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the Antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.

1JO 4:20 If someone says, "I love God,"and hates his brother, he is **a liar**; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

1JO 5:10 The one who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him **a liar**, because he has not believed in the witness that God has borne concerning His Son.

3. We cannot have fellowship with God if we walk [abide] in darkness.

a. We all are sinners, but sin should be the exception rather than the rule.

b. Satan influences all of us, but we must not let him be our ruler.

c. We must always “resist” him. (Jas. 4:7).

d. Those having fellowship with God seek to please Him and do what is pleasing to Him.

e. They do not walk (live) in darkness.

God’s Children Walk In The Light

1JO 1:7 but if we walk [live] in the light as He Himself is in the light, we [Christians] have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

- We are to walk as “children of light.” (Eph. 5:8).

- “Children of light” do what is pleasing to God. (Eph. 5:9).

- God’s word is light. (Psa. 119:105).

1. The blood of Jesus continually cleanses those who walk in the light of all sin, not just some sin.

a. The word “cleanses” is present tense in the Greek denoting continuous action.

b. The blood of Christ constantly “cleanses” those who walk in God’s light.

2. John does not teach “once saved always saved,” but teaches we must be forgiven by God to be saved.

a. Being forgiven is an ongoing process.

b. We must always confess our sins.

3. How the Christian lives affects his salvation.

- This verse refutes antinomianism [opposition to law and restraints of God] that taught God is evil and evil can have fellowship with God.
- Jesus in our “Advocate” and “Expiation.” (1 Jn. 2:1,2).
- The mention of the “blood” affirms the reality of the incarnation. Spirits do not bleed.
- Jesus was flesh and blood. (Heb. 2:14; 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Jn. 4:2; 5:6, 8).

All Christians Sin

1JO 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

1. Some of the gnostics declared that since the body is evil it was not important what the body did.
2. One could practice “the works of the flesh” according to them.
3. It was what “the spirit” did was what counted.
4. “The truth” is God’s word. (1 Jn. 1:10).

Note:

1. It seems incredible that a Christian could claim to be above sin.
 - a. Observation of any and all Christians would kill this idea.
 - b. Even the best of Christians sin in words, thoughts and actions.
 - c. Godly people are quick to admit their sins.
2. This view perhaps came from the gnostic view that it didn’t matter what the body did since it is flesh (evil), but only what the spirit did.
3. One who is around Christians should see people striving to please God, but who are far from perfect (sinless).

Forgiveness By Confession

1JO 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful [dependable] and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness [wrongdoing].

- “homologe’o” means “to confess, admit, acknowledge.”
- **We must confess our sins to God.**

1. God is able and willing to forgive us “from all unrighteousness” (sin).
2. The unpardonable sin is a sin we will not confess.
3. Some Christians refuse to believe that God cleanses of all sin, and live a life of guilt.
4. Some give up thinking they cannot be forgiven.
5. God is faithful. (1 Cor. 10:13).
6. He will keep His promise to forgive our sins (Heb. 8:12).

Requirements For Forgiveness

- The context is discussing how Christian who have already experienced the new birth are forgiven.
 - John is not discussing how the alien sinner is saved. (Jn. 3:5; Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Gal. 3:26, 27; 1 Pet. 3:21).
1. One must “walk in the light.”
 - a. This is living according the will and commandments of God.
 - b. The “light” is God’s word - not human opinions, rules, wisdom, etc.
 2. One must “confess” his sins.
 - It is not enough to say that “God knows my heart, and therefore I do not need to confess my sins to Him.”
 - Jesus taught us to pray for forgiveness. (Matt. 6:12; Lk. 11:4).
 - The cleansing is not automatic.
 - It involves confession (1 Jn. 1:9), and repentance. (Lk. 13:3,5; Acts 2:38; 3:19).
 - It involves keeping God’s commandments. (1 Jn. 2:3).
 - It is not by some secret knowledge or by denying we have sin or by human merit.
 3. The blood of Christ cleanses us of “all” sins.
 - a. The blood of Christ will cleanse any sin if we repent and do what Jesus requires.
 - b. The blood of Christ is precious (1 Pet. 1:19), and it is the only way our sins are forgiven. (Heb. 9:22).

Note:

1. God knows if our hearts are truly penitent.

2. God knows if our confession is genuine or a mere pretense.
3. No one will ever deceive or trick the all-knowing God.
4. It is utter foolishness to think we can fool or deceive God. (Gal. 6:7,8).

1JO 1:10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him [God] a liar, and His word is not in us.

1. God affirms we all have sinned. (Rom. 3:11, 23).
2. We call God a liar when we say we have no sin, and we clearly manifest that the word of God does not dwell in us.
3. The Christian must strive to live above sin, but he can never achieve absolute perfection. The best of Christians fall short of God's will. (Rom. 3:23; 1 Jn. 1:8).
4. Christians are those in whom the word of God abides. (1 Jn. 2:14; Jn. 8:37). See Col. 3:16.

Note:

1. John was an apostle of love, but he did not hesitate to denounce hypocritical Christians. (1 Jn. 1:8,10).
2. We must not be afraid to resist or denounce evil.

Gnosticism

1. The word "gnostic" comes from the Greek "gnosis" meaning "knowledge."
2. The "gnostics" claimed to have special, mysterious, saving knowledge apart from the word of God.
 - a. This knowledge was given to them alone.
 - b. It was given to them as special disciples by Christ and written in letters the church did not have.
3. The "gnostics" believed that matter is evil.
 - a. This led them to deny that the Supreme God created the world. The Supreme, Holy God could not create an evil world.
 - b. They held that it was created by an inferior god (demi-urge, angelic emanation) generally identified as Jehovah of the Old Testament.
 - c. This led them to deny the humanity of Christ. Since matter is evil, the sinless Christ could not be matter.
4. Some gnostics believed that since the body is evil it is to be abused.
 - a. They practiced rigid asceticism.
 - b. They tried to reduce all contact with matter to a minimum.

- c. They lived on bread and vegetables, abstained from marriage, meat, wine, and did not anoint the body with olive oil.
5. Some gnostics believed that since the body is evil it does not matter what the body does.
6. They argued it only matters what the spirit does.
 - a. They argued that since evil matter is everywhere that it cannot be avoided.
 - b. One should then not give matter any thought, but follow the impulses of the flesh.
 - c. They argued that one was saved by his superior knowledge.
7. Gnostics denied the bodily resurrection because matter is evil and God would not raise up an evil body.
 - a. Some believed the only bodily resurrection was the one experienced at baptism.
 - b. They believed that on the basis of the gnostic gospel that the spirit went to the spirit world (the pleroma or fulness) at death.
8. There were two basic kinds of gnostics.
 - a. You have the “docetic gnostics” which comes from the Greek word “dokeo” which means “seems, appears.”
 - 1) They contended Jesus only appeared to be flesh.
 - 2) He was in reality a spirit.
 - b. You also had the “Cerinthus gnostics” who claimed there was a difference between the man Jesus and the Christ.
 - 1) They argued that “the spiritual Christ” descended on “the man Jesus” at His baptism.
 - 2) They further assert that “the spiritual Christ” parted from “the man Jesus” before His death on the cross.
 - 3) Thus the man Jesus was flesh, but not the holy Christ [the anointed one] of God.

