

Intro to 1 John

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Author

The author is John son of Zebedee (see Mk 1:19–20)—the apostle and the author of the Gospel of John and Revelation (see Introductions to both books: Author). He was a fisherman, one of Jesus' inner circle (together with James and Peter), and "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (Jn 13:23; see note there). He may have been a first cousin of Jesus (his mother may have been Salome, possibly a sister of Mary; cf. Mt 27:56; Mk 15:40 and note; 16:1; Jn 19:25—this view assumes that "his mother's sister" in Jn 19:25 refers to Salome; some further assume that "Mary the wife of Clopas" there stands in apposition to "his mother's sister," which would mean that this Mary and Salome were one and the same person).

Unlike most NT letters, 1 John does not tell us who its author is. The earliest identification of him comes from the church fathers: Irenaeus (c. a.d. 140–203), Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215), Tertullian (c. 155–222) and Origen (c. 185–253) all designated the writer as the apostle John. As far as we know, no one else was suggested by the early church.

This traditional identification is confirmed by evidence in the letter itself:

1. The style of the Gospel of John is markedly similar to that of this letter. Both are written in simple Greek and use contrasting figures, such as light and darkness, life and death, truth and lies, love and hate.
2. Similar phrases and expressions, such as those found in the following passages, are striking:

1 John	Gospel of John
1:1	1:1,14
1:4	16:24
1:6–7	3:19–21
2:7	13:34–35
3:8	8:44
3:14	5:24
4:6	8:47
4:9	1:14,18; 3:16
5:9	5:32,37
5:12	3:36

3. The mention of eyewitness testimony (1:1–4) harmonizes with the fact that John was a follower of Christ from the earliest days of his ministry.
4. The authoritative manner that pervades the letter, seen in its commands (2:15,24,28; 4:1; 5:21), its firm assertions (2:6; 3:14;4:12) and its pointed identification of error (1:6,8; 2:4,22) is what would be expected from an apostle.
5. The suggestions of advanced age (addressing his readers as "children," 2:1,28; 3:7) agree with early church tradition concerning John's age when he wrote the books known to be his.
6. The description of the heretics as antichrists (2:18), liars (2:22) and children of the devil (3:10) is consistent with Jesus' characterization of John as a son of thunder (Mk 3:17).
7. The indications of a close relationship with the Lord (1:1; 2:5–6,24,27–28) fit the descriptions of "the disciple whom Jesus loved" and the one who reclined "next to him" (Jn 13:23).

Date

The letter is difficult to date with precision, but factors such as (1) evidence from early Christian writers (Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria), (2) the early form of Gnosticism reflected in the denunciations of the letter and (3) indications of the advanced age of John suggest the end of the first century. Since the author of 1 John seems to build on concepts and themes found in the fourth Gospel (see 1Jn 2:7–11), it is reasonable to date the letter somewhere between a.d. 85 and 95, after the writing of the Gospel, which may have been written c. 85 (see Introduction to John: Date).

Recipients

1Jn 2:12–14,19; 3:1; 5:13 make it clear that this letter was addressed to believers. But the letter itself does not indicate who they were or where they lived. The fact that it mentions no one by name suggests it was a circular letter sent to Christians in a number of places. Evidence from early Christian writers places the apostle John in Ephesus during most of his later years (c. a.d. 70–100). The earliest confirmed use of 1 John was in the Roman province of Asia (in modern Turkey), where Ephesus was located. Clement of Alexandria indicates that John ministered in the various churches scattered throughout that province. It may be assumed, therefore, that 1 John was sent to the churches of the province of Asia (see map No. 13 at the end of this study Bible).

Gnosticism

One of the most dangerous heresies of the first two centuries of the church was Gnosticism. Its central teaching was that spirit is entirely good and matter is entirely evil. From this unbiblical dualism flowed five important errors:

1. The human body, which is matter, is therefore evil. It is to be contrasted with God, who is wholly spirit and therefore good.
2. Salvation is the escape from the body, achieved not by faith in Christ but by special knowledge (the Greek word for “knowledge” is *gnosis*, hence Gnosticism).
3. Christ’s true humanity was denied in two ways: (1) Some said that Christ only seemed to have a body, a view called Docetism, from the Greek *dokeo* (“to seem”), and (2) others said that the divine Christ joined the man Jesus at baptism and left him before he died, a view called Cerinthianism, after its most prominent spokesman, Cerinthus. This view is the background of much of 1 John (see 1:1; 2:22; 4:2–3 and notes).
4. Since the body was considered evil, it was to be treated harshly. This ascetic form of Gnosticism is the background of part of the letter to the Colossians (see Col 2:21,23 and notes).
5. Paradoxically, this dualism also led to licentiousness. The reasoning was that, since matter—and not the breaking of God’s law (1Jn 3:4)—was considered evil, breaking his law was of no moral consequence.

The Gnosticism addressed in the NT was an early form of the heresy, not the intricately developed system of the second and third centuries. In addition to that seen in Colossians and in John’s letters, acquaintance with early Gnosticism is reflected in 1,2 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Peter and perhaps 1 Corinthians.

Occasion and Purpose

John’s readers were confronted with an early form of Gnostic teaching of the Cerinthian variety (see Gnosticism above). This heresy was also libertine, throwing off all moral restraints.

Consequently, John wrote this letter with two basic purposes in mind: (1) to expose false teachers (see 2:26 and note) and (2) to give believers assurance of salvation (see 5:13 and note). In keeping with his intention to combat Gnostic teachers, John specifically struck at their total lack of morality (3:8–10); and by giving eyewitness testimony to the incarnation, he sought to confirm his readers’ belief in the incarnate Christ (1:3). Success in this would give the writer joy (1:4).

Outline*

- Introduction: The Reality of the Incarnation (1:1–4)
- The Christian Life as Fellowship with the Father and the Son (1:5–2:28)
 - Ethical Tests of Fellowship (1:5–2:11)
 1. Moral likeness (1:5–7)
 2. Confession of sin (1:8–2:2)
 3. Obedience (2:3–6)
 4. Love for fellow believers (2:7–11)
 - Two Digressions (2:12–17)
 - Christological Test of Fellowship (2:18–28)
 1. Contrast: apostates versus believers (2:18–21)
 2. Person of Christ: the crux of the test (2:22–23)
 3. Persistent belief: key to continuing fellowship (2:24–28)
- The Christian Life as Divine Sonship (2:29–4:6)
 - Ethical Tests of Sonship (2:29–3:24)
 1. Righteousness (2:29–3:10a)
 2. Love (3:10b–24)
 - Christological Tests of Sonship (4:1–6)
- The Christian Life as an Integration of the Ethical and the Christological (4:7–5:12)
 - The Ethical Test: Love (4:7–5:5)
 1. The source of love (4:7–16)
 2. The fruit of love (4:17–19)
 3. The relationship of love for God and love for one's fellow Christian (4:20–5:1)
 4. Obedience: the evidence of love for God's children (5:2–5)
 - The Christological Test (5:6–12)
- Conclusion: Great Christian Certainties (5:13–21)

1 John Chapter 1

1. In reviewing the beginning of the Gospel of John, what similarities do we see in this first part of 1 John?
2. Why does John indicate he writes these things?
3. John describes God as light and then contrasts walking in the light with walking in darkness. How do the following passages help provide a little more understanding of walking in the light?

- John 8:12

- John 14:15-18

- John 16:5-13

- Galatians 5:16-17

4. What does John indicate is true about us if we say we have no sin?

- What is our promise if we are faithful to confess our sins?

1 John 2:12-14

NASB	NIV2011	NKJV	HCSB	KJV	ESV	NLT2
<p>12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake.</p>	<p>12 I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.</p>	<p>12 I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.</p>	<p>12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven because of Jesus' name.</p>	<p>12 I write unto you , little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.</p>	<p>12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.</p>	<p>12 I am writing to you who are God's children because your sins have been forgiven through Jesus.</p>
<p>13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning . I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father.</p>	<p>13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.</p>	<p>13 I write to you, fathers, Because you have known Him <i>who is</i> from the beginning. I write to you, young men, Because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, Because you have known the Father.</p>	<p>13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you have come to know the One who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have had victory over the evil one.</p>	<p>13 I write unto you , fathers, because ye have known him <i>that is</i> from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.</p>	<p>13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father.</p>	<p>13 I am writing to you who are mature in the faith because you know Christ, who existed from the beginning. I am writing to you who are young in the faith because you have won your battle with the evil one.</p>
<p>14 I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning . I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.</p>	<p>14 I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.</p>	<p>14 I have written to you, fathers, Because you have known Him <i>who is</i> from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one.</p>	<p>14 I have written to you, children, because you have come to know the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you have come to know the One who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, God's word remains in you, and you have had victory over the evil one.</p>	<p>14 I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him <i>that is</i> from the beginning . I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.</p>	<p>14 I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men , because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.</p>	<p>14 I have written to you who are God's children because you know the Father. I have written to you who are mature in the faith because you know Christ, who existed from the beginning. I have written to you who are young in the faith because you are strong. God's word lives in your hearts, and you have won your battle with the evil one.</p>

1 John Chapter 2 (part 2)

7. How does John define what consumes the worlds' interests?

8. What does John indicate is passing away and what remains or lives on – and what does this mean?

9. Read verse 19. This is a text used by many to support the idea that once you have become a believer, you will persevere and cannot reject Christ. Is that what this verse is indicating or something else in the context?

10. John indicates that there are many antichrists even in his generation. How does he indicate that we are able to identify antichrists?

11. How is John making it clear that those who indicate they serve Yahweh (God the Father) but reject Christ as the Messiah are not really serving Yahweh?

12. Read 1 Corinthians 12:27-31 and Romans 12:3-7. Now read 1 John 2:27. Is John indicating that the gift of teaching is no longer necessary or is he indicating something else from the context?

13. Christ has proclaimed that when He returns again, it will be like a thief in the night (meaning, of course, that it will be when you least expect it). In looking throughout 1 John 2, what, in context, appears that John may have thought that Jesus could return in His generation?

14. What is a sure way we can know that others have been born again?

1 John Chapter 3 (Part 1)

1. Read John 1:10-13. What similarities does that passage have with 1 John 3:1-2?

2. In 1 John 3:2-3, why is there a reason for us to rejoice?

3. Read John 15:1-6. In comparing this with 1 John 3:4-6, what commonalities are in these passages, and what is John teaching?

4. Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and compare with 1 John 3:8-9. What is the message being conveyed in both passages?
 - a. Though the idea developed in the 3rd century A.D. that the Devil was once an angel called Lucifer, which means morning star (which later became part of the Catholic doctrines) who was the most beautiful angel of all, in looking at 1 John 3:8 and also John 8:44, how do both John's teaching and Jesus' words point to the possibility that the Devil and the morning star (Isaiah 14) are not one and the same?

5. What reason does John point out as to why Cain murdered Abel?
 - a. What point does that reflect about how the world will often feel about us?

6. Read John 5:24-27 and compare with 1 John 1:14. What is being conveyed in both passages?

1 John Chapter 3 (Part 2)

7. Read 1 John 3:15. Some have interpreted this verse to mean that anyone who is guilty of murder will not be saved. Is that what this verse means or does it mean something else?
 - a. Read Matthew 5:21-23. What is Christ conveying about anger and its consequences?

8. Read 1 John 3:16 and Romans 5:8. How are these passages similar and how are they different?

9. Read 1 John 3:17-19 and James 2:14-17. What is being conveyed in both of these passages?

10. Read 1 John 3:20-22. What is John explaining here?

11. Read 1 John 3:23-24 and John 6:28-29. How are these passages similar and what is both Jesus and John trying to help them understand?