

Overview of 1 John

Why study this book:

John stresses God's love as an example for us to follow in our relationships with each other. He encourages us to live right, learning and obeying God's commands. Then, we can have an intimate relationship with God. Living in intimacy with God means change for us.

Author:

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. John is also the author of the fourth Gospel and the book of Revelation.

Date:

There is little information in the text that lets us know when John wrote this letter. However, since the author of 1 John seems to build on concepts and themes found in the fourth Gospel, 1 John 2:7-11, it is reasonable to date the letter somewhere between a.d. 85 and 95, after the writing of the Gospel.

Setting:

John lived in Ephesus, carrying out an extensive evangelistic program, overseeing many churches that had arisen.

Background:

1 John is more like a sermon than a letter, coming from "the disciple whom Jesus loved." John seemed to write the letter in order to combat the Gnostic heresy – where all matter is evil and only the spiritual is divine. This belief led to a rejection of morality and a focus on "special knowledge."

Main Point:

There are three main points we find in 1 John. First, John desired to combat the propaganda of the false teachers. John argues that these individuals are not true and genuine believers. Their lives do not display the moral values that Christ conveyed (2:3-6, 5:3). Second, John wanted to reassure believers. The assurance of salvation was a big issue even back during Biblical times. He wanted them to understand the reality of their faith so that they might know that they have eternal life (5:13). Finally, he writes to encourage believers toward a personal relationship with a God they can know (1:4, 2:1, 2:26, 5:13).

Outline:

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