

1 John

Purpose: “To expose false teachers (2:26) and to give believers assurance of salvation” (5:13).

Outline: 1:1-10 – Jesus, the Word of life; and walking in the light

2:1-29 – Old & new commandment; do not love the world, warning against Antichrists

3:1-24 – How we know we are the Children of God; Love one another

4:1-21 – Now test the spirits; God’s love and ours

5:1-21 – ONE faith – in the Son of God

Author: John, the apostle and the author of the Gospel of John and Revelation

Date: 85-95 AD

Highlights:

He was also a first cousin of Jesus (his mother, Salome, was Mary’s sister). A fisherman by trade, he became one of Jesus’ “inner circle” (along with James and Peter) and was called “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23). While John does not identify himself as the author, early identification of him comes from the church fathers (Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen. No one else seems to have even been suggested by the early church. Also, the content and style of the letter is very similar to the Gospel of John.

Many believe that the “false teaching” that concerned John was an early form of Gnosticism (which became, perhaps, the most dangerous heresy of the next century). Gnosticism suggested that matter was evil and spirit is good. Thus, Gnostics taught that God was only spirit; that salvation was an escape from the body through “special knowledge” (*gnosis* – Greek word for knowledge); that Christ was not human (since humans were evil because they had a body, which was evil); since the body was evil it was to be treated harshly; – or used to indulge extremely, because sins of the flesh were not considered sinful since matter – and not the breaking of God’s law – was considered evil.

The false teaching of “docetism” (from the Greek word *dokeo* meaning “to seem”), that was often associated with Gnosticism, said that Christ only appeared to be human; but that there was no real incarnation and no divined Savior who was able to die for sinners – He only seemed to die.

John is said to have been in Ephesus during most of his later years (70-100 AD); and that this letter was addressed, generically, to all believers.

This letter is simple in language (among the easiest Greek to read and translate), but very profound in thought. However, the themes seem to be linked loosely together making the letter notoriously difficult to outline. The best way to read 1 John is to read a few verses until you just sort of say, “hmmmm.” And then ponder and meditate on those thoughts.

Common themes in this letter are purity, love, God being revealed in Christ, God as light, truth, and love; and the virtues of believers made possible through being born again and through the forgiveness of sins.

The first chapter covers God being revealed in Christ (God in a Bod); and the forgiveness of sins through the light of Christ (the Shoeshine Guy).

Chapter two talks about Christ who speaks to the Father in our defense (Mr. I.M. God – Attorney at Law); that everything in the world will eventually pass away (Has anyone seen my Keys?); and the Antichrists vs. the power of Christ (Trash Talkin’).

The end of chapter two and beginning of chapter three talk about being Children of God (Oh, To Be a Child); and then goes on to talk about what loving one another really means (Don’t Myth the Point).

Chapter Four encourages us to test the spirits in order to discern truth from deception (Test! But I Haven’t Studied); and then goes back to talking about love (Summer Reruns).

The final chapter begins with the encouraging words that everyone born of God overcomes the world because of the victory of Jesus over the evil one (And the Winner is...); and then tells us that while there are some mysteries, we can absolutely know that we have eternal life (Okay, Here’s What We Do Know).

NOTE: The titles in parentheses are the sermon titles for the sermon series I preached on 1 John.

2 John

Purpose: “Do not be deceived, but keep the great commandment”

Outline: 1-3 – Salutation

4-11 – Teaching

12-13 – Final Greeting

Author: John, who also wrote 1 John, the Gospel of John, and Revelation

Date: 85-95 AD

Highlights:

This letter is written to “the chosen lady and her children.” This may refer to an actual woman and her family, or to a woman and the fellowship of believers associated with her, or as a metaphor for a church (though such usage is otherwise unknown).

There are obvious similarities between this letter and 1 John. To welcome traveling evangelists was a common courtesy of believers. There was a concern, though, that believers might welcome and provide for false teachers. John is writing, in part, to urge discernment in supporting traveling teachers; otherwise, someone might unintentionally contribute to the propagation of heresy rather than truth.

The church, today, must also show discernment in who we support.

3 John

Purpose: “Do not imitate evil, but imitate good”

Outline: 1 – Salutation

2-12 – Teaching against Diotrephes and for Demetrius

13-15 – Final Greeting

Author: John, who also wrote 1 & 2 John, the Gospel of John, and Revelation

Date: 85-95 AD

Highlights:

While 1 & 2 John celebrate truths that unite all Christians, 3 John laments the petty rivalry that sets Christians against one another. In particular, this letter, was occasioned by a sharp conflict between Diotrephes (apparently an elder in a congregation under John’s care) and others in the congregation over hospitality shown to traveling missionaries.

This letter is written to John’s friend, Gaius, commending to him Demetrius – a traveling missionary in need of temporary lodging.