

"THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN"

Introduction

"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." - [Jn 10:10](#)

The Gospel of John was designed to produce **faith** so that we might have **life** ([Jn 20:30-31](#)).

And ^dtruly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ^{31 e}but these are written that ^fyou may believe that Jesus ^gis the Christ, the Son of God, ^hand that believing you may have life in His name.

However, it is **The First Epistle of John** which describes the nature of that life in greater detail ([1 Jn 3:23](#))^{1 jn 3:23}

That we might be sure to live the sort of life God offers through His Son Jesus Christ, a careful study of The First Epistle Of John is in order.

AUTHOR

It is assumed in this study that the author is **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.

Polycarp commentary: chapter 7 written @ 110 – 140 AD

"For whosoever does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is antichrist;" compare [1 Jn 4:3](#);

Read more –

<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/polycarp-roberts.html>

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

Irenaeus – Book against Heresies (Book 3, Chapter 11)
commentary written from @ 175 – 185 AD

John, the disciple of the Lord, preaches this faith, and seeks, by the proclamation of the Gospel, to remove that error which by Cerinthus had been disseminated among men, and a long time previously by those termed Nicolaitans, who are an offset of that "knowledge" falsely (Gnosticism jf) so called, that he might confound them, and persuade them that there is but one God, who made all things by His Word; and not, as they allege, that the Creator was one, but the Father of the Lord another; and that the Son of the Creator was, forsooth, one, but the Christ from above another, who also continued impossible, descending upon Jesus, the Son of the Creator, and flew back again into His Pleroma (divine realm jf); and that Monogenes was the beginning, but Logos (Word jf) was the true son of Monogenes; and that this creation to which we belong was not made by the primary God, but by some power lying far below Him, and shut off from communion with the things invisible and ineffable. The disciple of the Lord therefore desiring to put an end to all such doctrines, and to establish the rule of truth in the Church, that there is one Almighty God, who made all things by His Word, both visible and invisible; showing at the same time, that by the Word, through whom God made the creation, He also bestowed salvation on the men included in the creation; thus commenced His teaching in the Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made. What was made was life in Him, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not."

Read more -

<https://archive.org/details/SaintIrenaeusAgainstHeresiesComplete>

RECIPIENTS

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

Comments in [1Jn 2:20,27](#) could imply that John was addressing a specific group of Christians that possessed certain spiritual (miraculous) gifts.

DATE

Estimates range from 60 A.D. to 100 A.D.
Most modern scholarship places it around **95 A.D.**
Probably written before 110 AD, see Polycarp commentary.

PURPOSE AND THEME

Eternal life is in Jesus Christ, who has come in the flesh

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**" – [1 Jn 2:1](#)
- "these things I have written to you...that you may know that you **have eternal life**" - [1Jn 5:13](#)
- "these things I have written to you...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 of thought and reasoning to **Gnosticism**.

Comes from the Greek word **gnosis / "To Know , knowledge"**

Those who later came to be called **Gnostics** claimed to have a superior knowledge.

A fundamental presupposition of their teaching 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")**, Their reasoning would be ; If material things are evil then Jesus (who is holy, pure and without sin could not be material, but only seemed to be physical (contrast that with John's statement in [1Jn 1:1](#)).

That ^awhich was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have ^bseen with our eyes, ^cwhich we have looked upon, and ^dour hands have handled, concerning the ^eWord of life

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

Compare that the thought present by John ([Jn 1:1](#); and [Jn 1:14](#))

The Gnostics' application to everyday living took two different directions.

1. Since all matter was considered evil, some taught one should abstain altogether from anything that would satisfy the flesh.
2. 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](#))

An appropriate theme of the epistle may be:

Eternal life is in Jesus Christ, who has come in the flesh

OUTLINE

Here is an outline of the book, 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)

REVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) Who is author of The First Epistle Of John?**

- 2) Who were the original recipients of this epistle?**

- 3) When was it written?**

- 4) List four reasons John stated for writing this epistle. (1:4; 2:1; 5:13)**

- 5) List another reason John wrote this epistle. (2:26)**

- 6) What doctrine later found in Gnosticism is addressed in this epistle?**

- 7) What has been suggested as its two-fold purpose?**

- 8) What has been suggested as its theme?**

- 9) What are the main divisions of this epistle as outlined above?**