
THAT YE MAY KNOW THAT YE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE

1 John 5:13

AN OVERVIEW OF 1 JOHN

Adeoye, Emmanuel (Evangelist)

PLACE OF WRITING

Reliable tradition places John at Ephesus in the latter years of his life IN AD 60 to over a number of churches in Asia minor.

AUTHORSHIP.

The style of 1 John is so close to that of the author of the Gospel of John that no one questioned that they were written by the same person until the twentieth century. Some writers have pointed to minor stylistic differences and have proposed that 1 John was written by a different member of the "*Johannine school*."

Sometimes disciples of famous teachers would seek to imitate their teachers' works (often even their style). The author claims to be an eyewitness (1:1) but does not claim to write in another's name (he provides). The form is more like a homily than a letter (except **2:12-14**).

That the epistolary prescript (opening) and conclusion are missing need not surprise us; they were sometimes removed when letters were incorporated into collections (although 2 and 3 John retain standard elements of letters). But the whole document flows more like a sermon, It thus resembles the form of letter known as a "letter-essay," although it nevertheless addresses the specific situation of the readers.

■ PURPOSE

John write that you may know that ye have eternal life(**John 5:13**) In a sense he seek merely to strengthen the faith of the reader, yet he write also to combat a specific threat to his reader's faith. Gnosticism, this was a deviant form of Christianity.

It adherent particular view varied but they tended to value knowledge as the means of salvation rather than the cross to assert that physical matter was evil and to reach that the son of GOD could not, therefore, have come in the flesh. These and other aberrant teaching seem to be the target of many of John's avowals.

SITUATION.

If the setting of 1 John is the same as that of the Fourth Gospel, it is meant to encourage Christians expelled from the synagogues, some of whose colleagues have returned to the synagogue by denying Jesus' *Messiahship (**2:19,22; 4:2-3**). But John was concerned about situations in cities, other than those addressed in his Gospel.

While Christians were expelled from synagogues and betrayed by the Jewish community in Smyrna (**Rev. 2:9-10**) and Philadelphia (**Rev. 3:7-9**), they were tempted with the heresy of compromise elsewhere, including compromise with idolatry advocated by false prophets (**Rev. 2:14-15,20-23; cf. 1 John 4:1; 5:21**).

The form of idolatry may have especially been the imperial cult, to which people in the East needed to show their loyalty or pay serious consequences (cf. **Rev 13:14-15**), possibly including death (**1 John 3:16**). First John could address a community like Ephesus, where the church had expelled the false teachers but needed love for one another (**Rev 2:2-4**). On the one hand, the issue in view might be simply some false prophets (**1 John 4:1-6**) advocating compromises with the imperial cult to save one's life.

On the other hand, the issue might be one of the heresies that was developing toward full-blown *Gnosticism. Docetists believed that Christ was divine but only seemed to become human (cf. 4:2); Corinthians (followers of Cerinthus) believed that the Christ-*Spirit merely came on Jesus, but denied that he was actually the one and only Christ (cf. 2:22).

Gnostics also tended to define sin in various ways, hence some Gnostics believed that they were incapable of committing real sins, although their bodies could engage in behavior non-Gnostic Christians considered sinful. John advocates testing the spirits by two main tests: A moral-ethical test (keeping the commandments, especially love of the Christian community) and a faith test (the right view of Jesus).

This BOOK mention only the two main characteristics of the false teachers which the author wishes to condemn in his Letter. Those main points are,

(a) Their denial of the testimony about Jesus Christ that has been given from the beginning their feeling that it did not matter whether they did good or did evil, or with a more learned term in their ethical indifferentism.

(a) In the Christian congregations of the first centuries there were many who denied the original testimony about Christ.

Their teachings show a great diversity of form, but somehow all of them belong to one and the same system of thought, usually called "gnostic" (from Greek gnosis "knowledge," especially religious knowledge for the initiated and enlightened).

This system started from a basic opposition between spirit, the good principle, and matter, the bad principle. To the former belonged the divine world, absolutely pure and not polluted by matter, and to the latter this earth and all that is in it.

The adherents of this view held that the deity and things divine could not be involved in the material world, since such involvement would mean the destruction of their purity and holiness.

Therefore, the incarnation, the unity of God and man in Jesus, was a detestable doctrine in their eyes. They drew a sharp distinction between the divine Christ, on the one hand, and the man Jesus, on the other. They taught that the two were only temporarily and externally connected; and that the Christ descended upon Jesus at some point in his life.

The writer has specifically in mind in 5:6, where he states that Jesus Christ came "not with the water only but with the water and the blood:" With this he may have meant to say that Jesus is not only Christ through his baptism, but also through his death.

Salvation, reconciliation, and forgiveness cannot have any reality, if Jesus and Christ were not the same, and if Christ himself was not nailed on the cross in the person of Jesus. John's main purpose is to refute these speculations as being incompatible with the original testimony about Christ.

Therefore he refers repeatedly to the fact that Christ, the Son of God, really "has come in the flesh" to the identity of Jesus and the Christ and to the reality of Jesus' suffering.

(b) If this world and man's life in it have neither value nor meaning because they belong to the sphere of matter, it is unimportant how man acts and behaves in life.

This view of the universe thus leads to ethical indifferentism. There are several allusions to this point of view in the Letter: John's opponents seem to have boasted of a "spiritual" fellowship with God and his Son of their being guided by the Spirit (4:1-6), and of their spiritual knowledge of God.

And because of these "spiritual gifts" they felt no need for brotherly love, closely bound to earthly life as it is. On the contrary, they hated their brothers (2:9,11). But the writer had more to criticize in the ethical views of his opponents. They held that he who already lives in the Spirit is lifted out of the earthly sphere. Therefore they claimed sinlessness in principle (1:8), and in practice (1:10).

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views that the writer takes his stand in such passage. He knows that God is interested in and associates himself with this material world, and that his Son has gone so far in his love for the world as to let himself be crucified. Therefore he is convinced that a Christian cannot possibly keep aloof from this world, or shirk the claims of brotherly love.

CHARACTER AND CONTENTS –

In this Epistle - probably the last inspired utterance of the New Testament excepting the two brief missives that follow it - we have the translation into the Christian life of those great truths, regarding the fellowship of God with man, that are found in the Fourth Gospel in connection with the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. That Gospel is doctrinal as well as historical, but its doctrines are here applied to the lives of Christ's followers.

The Epistle is thus in advance of the Gospel, being designed to lead Christians to a conscious realization of the new life to which they are called in fellowship with Christ (**1 John 5:13** and 14 with **John 20:31**). Its thought springs mainly out of a twofold conception of the Divine Nature as "light" (1-2), and as "love" (**1 John 4:7-5**), united by a bond of righteousness (**1 John 2:29-4:6**).

Although lofty and spiritual, the teaching in the Epistle is at the same time intensely practical. It was evidently intended to counteract the growing tendency to magnify knowledge at the expense of practice. One form of this incipient Gnosticism was associated with the name of Cerinthus, who lived at Ephesus in the time of the apostle.

Cerinthus, like many others, denied the reality of Christ's humanity, maintaining, in particular, that the Divine Being only entered into the man Jesus at His baptism and left him on the eve of His passion. Hence the emphatic statement of the apostle (**1 John 5:6**), "*This is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood*" - that is to say The Saviour fulfilled His Divine mission in His death upon the Cross as well as in His baptism.

Again and again, in other passages, the apostle insists on the reality of the union between Jesus and the Christ, as an essential element of the Christian faith (**1 John 2:22; 4:2-3,15; 5:1,5; cf. 1:1-4**). While it gives no quarter to evil and falsehood, the Epistle overflows with exhortations to the love of God and man.

TEACHINGS OF THE EPISTLE –

Out of this Epistle we may gather an abstract of the things to be known, and that concerning God, ourselves, and Christ.

1. Concern God: We may hence be instructed in His nature, attributes, and person: as to His nature, that "He is light, and in Him no darkness"; His attributes, that He is faithful, just, holy, righteous, pure, invisible,

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knowing all things, and love itself; the persons, that "there are three which bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, the Holy Ghost; and these three are one."

2. CONCERNING OURSELVES: We may here learn what we are by nature, namely, "lying in wickedness"; what we are by grace, to with, "born of God"; and what we shall be in glory, "like to Him, seeing Him as He is."

3. CONCERNING CHRIST: We have Him here characterized in His natures, offices, acts, and benefits.

(a) **IN RESPECT OF ITS NATURES:** He is as to His Deity called "true God," and yet more distinctly, with reference to His Personality, "the only begotten Son of God"; as to His humanity, He is said to be "sent into the world," and so truly man, that He was "seen, heard, and handled" by the apostles.

(b) **AS TO HIS OFFICES:** He is here asserted in general to be the Christ, and so anointed to those offices; and in particular, as priest, "to take away sin," to be "the propitiation for our sins," and "our advocate with the Father"; as prophet, by His Spirit to "teach us all things"; and as a king, to "*destroy the works of the devil.*"

(c) **MOST OF HIS MEDIATORIAL ACTS ARE HERE SPECIFIED:** His incarnation, where He is said to "come in the flesh"; passion, in that He "layeth down His life for us"; His resurrection, inasmuch as "eternal life" is said to be "in Him"; and His ascension and intercession, because He is affirmed to be an "advocate with the Father," and His coming again in the day of judgment to appear as Judge of the world.

4. Lastly, we need not go further than this Epistle to meet with those benefits we obtain by Him, in that **HE "GIVETH HIS SPIRIT TO US:"** whereby, "we dwelling in Him, and He in us, have fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ," and by virtue of this "forgiveness of our sins for His name's sake"; "adoption," whereby we are called the "sons of God"; finally, justification by blood, sanctification by water, and eternal life.

This book TEACHES us in general to eschew all sin, both describing what it is, a transgression of the law, and Deporting us from the commission of it; in particular, to expel the love of the world, to abandon hatred, malice, and envy, to keep ourselves from idols, and especially to beware of the sin unto death. We are called upon to "believe in the name of Jesus Christ," to "love God who hath begotten us, and to love those who are begotten of Him";

to have the "hope of glory" fixed in us, to declare our repentance, by "confessing our sins, and purifying ourselves"; to "overcome the wicked one and the world"; to conquer the "lusts of the flesh"; to "walk as Christ walked," by imitation of Him, and to "abide in Him" by perseverance! to "hear the word preached by the ministers of Christ;"

OUTLINE

- **Key theme:** The tests of reality in the Christian life

- **Key verse:** 1 John 5:13

I. INTRODUCTION - 1:1-4

II. THE TESTS OF TRUE FELLOWSHIP: GOD IS LIGHT - 1:5-2:29

- A. *Obedience* - 1:5-2:6 ("saying" VS. "doing")
- B. *Love* - 2:7-17
- C. *Truth* - 2:18-29

III. THE TESTS OF TRUE SONSHIP: GOD IS LOVE - chapters 3-5

- A. *Obedience* - 3
- B. *Love* - 4
- C. *Truth* - 5

CONCLUSION

J The author speak with authority to Christians of a generation that is, historically speaking, farther away from the events of Jesus' life and death than he is himself. He is passing on and interpreting these events to "his children." And he feels the more strongly compelled to do so because of the appearance of the false teachers, who are attempting to seduce "his children" and to draw them away from the true Life in Christ.