

## THE FIRST LETTER OF JOHN

1. Who wrote this book?

Despite several suggestions, including a guy named “John the Elder” it is best to understand the author as the same one who wrote the fourth Gospel, the Apostle John.

  - a. Because a great number of “early” church leaders (from Polycarp 110-150 to Irenaeus 130-202 to Augustine 5<sup>th</sup> century) credited John the Apostle as the author.
  - b. The writer himself claims to be an eyewitness to Christ (1:1-5) and carries many of the same themes, images, thoughts and style as the Gospel of John.
2. The purpose of the letter
  - A. To correct a prominent false teaching and expose present false teachers
    1. A form of “Gnosticism” that believed that Christ was not really a divine person in human flesh was being taught. Jesus only appeared or “seemed” to have real humanity. But was really a divine “spirit” playing the human role (1:1-5; 2:22)
      - a. What they taught
        - They denied the Son (2:23)
        - They denied Christ has come in the flesh (4:2)
        - They deny Jesus is Christ (2:22)
      - b. John’s corrections
        - Jesus is the Christ (5:1)
        - He has come in the flesh (4:2)
        - Jesus is the Son of God (1:3; 2:23; 3:8)
    2. The implications of this teaching were that “sins of the flesh/body” were no big deal because the “physical” doesn’t really matter (1:8; 10)
      - a. Their unethical behavior
        - they boast that they are “without sin” (1 John 1:8; 10)
        - they boast that they “have fellowship” with God but walk in the darkness (1:6)
        - they boast that they know God but nevertheless are disobedient (2:4)
        - they boast that they “love God” but hate their brothers and sisters (4:20)
        - they boast that they are “in the light” but hate their fellow Christians (2:9)

- b. John's ethical corrections
        - to abide in God is to obey him—it is to walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6)
        - to sin willfully show that one has not known God (3:3-6; 5:18)
        - whoever acts sinfully belongs to the devil (3:7-10)
        - we should love one another (3:11-12; 17-18)
        - refusing to love one's brother or sister means that one has not inherited eternal life (3:14-15)
        - God is love—and to know him is to love (4:8-10)
    - 3. False teachers who were once part of the congregation were now being exposed for their error (cf. 2:18-19; 2:26; 4:1)
  - B. To pastorally and theologically explain that fellowship with God and other Christians is dependent upon walking in the light and loving one another. (Not in believing the errors of the false teachers)
3. Two "approaches" to the letter's purpose and its readers.
- A. This letter is written to a "mixed" audience (true believers and mere "professors"). So John writes this letter "to destroy the false assurance of the counterfeit as well as to confirm the right assurance of the genuine." John Stott
  - B. This letter is written to believers by John pastorally "to certify believers of the truth and reality of the things in which they believe and to advance them in the carrying out of their practical consequences." Henry Alford
  - C. John seems to assume the salvation and authentic conversion of his readers (cf. 2:1; 2:12-14, 21). His call is for a "fellowship" and sanctification based upon obedience of faith, not for an ambiguity of salvation because of sin (1:8, 2:1). The "test" (cf. 3:10) is more for the false teachers than me.
4. We need each other  
 John's letter describes the fellowship of those who walk in God's light as manifested in Jesus Christ. John expands on how God's light, life and love fill our lives and fellowship as we live together as a community of believers. The concern of this letter is fellowship both vertical (with God) and horizontal (with each other). May we learn that in Christ we truly belong together and need each other.

## OUTLINE OF FIRST JOHN

- I. Prologue–Jesus, the Word of Life is presented in total reality, as the basis of fellowship with God and other believers (1:1-4)
  
- II. An explanation of true fellowship (1:5–3:24)
  - A. Fellowship with God is a relationship (1:5:2:11)
    - 1. It is walking in accordance with God’s character (in the light not in darkness) (1:5-7)
    - 2. It is both experiencing forgiveness and resisting sin (1:8-2:2)
    - 3. It is an intimate knowing of God reflected in an obedience to God’s commands. (2:3-11)
  - B. Fellowship with God avoids the allure of the world and continues in the teaching of the Holy Spirit (2:12-27)
    - 1. It is based on acknowledging different levels of Spiritual maturity each with unique blessings (2:12-14)
    - 2. It resists the allure of the world (2:15-17)
    - 3. It is not turned by the “antichrists” and world’s deception (2:18-25)
    - 4. It continues in the teaching of the Holy Spirit (2:26-27)
  - C. Fellowship with God gives confidence to live like God’s children (2:28–3:10)
    - 1. It gives us confidence to face Christ when he returns (2:28)
    - 2. It empowers us to live in righteousness, fellowshiping with God and other believers (2:29-3:10)
  - D. Fellowship with God is evidenced by loving other believers (3:11-24)
    - 1. This is not what love is (3:11-15)
    - 2. Here’s what love is (3:16-18)
    - 3. This love gives us confidence before God (3:19-24)
  
- III. Instructions for continued fellowship (4:1-5:12)
  - A. Beware of deceptive false prophets (4:1-6)
  - B. Love for divine reasons (4:7-21)
    - 1. Love one another (4:7-12)
    - 2. Love comes from abiding in God through his Spirit, confessing his Son (4:13-16)
    - 3. In so doing we have confidence before God and consistency of testimony (4:17-21)
  - C. Live obediently, overcome the world and maintain your testimony (5:1-12)
    - 1. Believe...love...obey...overcome (5:1-5)
    - 2. Don’t compromise your testimony (5:6-12)
  
- IV. Concluding encouragement and charges (5:13-21)
  - A. You can have confidence in prayer (5:13-17)
  - B. You can be assured of your unique position in Christ (5:18-28)
  - C. Avoid idols–that really messes up your fellowship with God (5:21)