

The First Epistle Of John



**A Study Guide With Introductory Comments,
Summaries, And Review Questions**

Student Edition

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The outlines were developed in the course of my ministry as a preacher of the gospel. Feel free to use them as they are, or adapt them to suit your own personal style.

To God Be The Glory!

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This study guide was designed for adult Bible classes, though it might be suitable for junior and senior high classes as well. Some have used it for personal devotions, and others in small study groups. In whatever way it can be used to the glory of God, I am grateful.

- **Points to ponder** for each chapter are things I emphasize during the class.
- **Review questions** are intended to reinforce key thoughts in each chapter. There is a “teacher’s edition” available with answers included.

The First Epistle Of John

Introduction

When Jesus to earth, He came not only to **live** a life, but to **give** life:

"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**). However, it is **The First Epistle of John** which describes the nature of that life in greater detail (e.g., **1Jn 3:14**). 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. Irenaeus, a student of Polycarp, quoted from the epistle and attributed it to John.

Recipients

No one is specifically mentioned by name. John may have been in **Ephesus** at the time, 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.**, but there are also good reasons for believing it was written prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. (**Re-dating The New Testament, John A. T. Robinson**).

Purpose And Theme

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" - 1Jn 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 to **Gnosticism**.

Those who later came to be called **Gnostics** claimed to have a superior knowledge (the Greek word for knowledge is *gnosis*). A fundamental presupposition 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"), taught that Jesus only seemed to be physical (contrast that with John's statement in **1Jn 1:1**). Cerinthus, a contemporary of John, taught that "Jesus" was physical, but that the "Christ" came upon Him at his baptism, and then left before His death, so that the "Christ-spirit" never suffered (cf. **1Jn 5:6**).

The Gnostics' application to everyday living took two different directions. Since all matter was considered evil, some taught one should abstain altogether from anything that would satisfy the flesh. 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**)

As the **theme** of this epistle, may I suggest:

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?**

The First Epistle Of John

Chapter One

John begins his first epistle like he does his gospel: with a prologue regarding the Word of Life (Jesus Christ) who dwelt in the flesh among men and made fellowship with the Father possible (1-4). Fellowship with God is maintained as we walk in the light and confess our sins that we might enjoy continual cleansing through the blood of Jesus (5-10).

Points To Ponder

- The witness of John concerning the Word of Life
- The nature of the evidence for faith in Jesus
- The basis of our fellowship with God

Review Questions

- 1) **What are the main points of this chapter?**
- 2) **How is John's beginning in this epistle similar to his gospel? (1-4, cf. Jn 1:1-14)**
- 3) **How does John describe the pre-incarnation of Jesus? (1)**
- 4) **What empirical evidence does John provide concerning the Word? (1)**
- 5) **What does John declare? What does he want to share? Why does he write? (2-4)**
- 6) **What message has John heard that he now declares to us? (5)**
- 7) **If we say we have fellowship with God but walk in darkness, what are we? (6)**
- 8) **What do we enjoy as we walk in the light together with God? (7)**
- 9) **What if we say that we have no sin? (8,10)**
- 10) **What's required to be forgiven of sin and cleansed of all unrighteousness? (9)**

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Chapter Two

We have an Advocate who is also the propitiation for our sins and to truly know Him we must keep His commandments (1-6), especially to love one another (7-11). Describing his original readers' spiritual state (12-14), John cautions against loving the world and being deceived by antichrists (15-23), by letting truth abide in them and they in Christ (24-29).

Points To Ponder

- The true test of knowing Jesus as our Advocate and our propitiation
- Things in the world we cannot not love
- The identity of antichrists in the writings of John

Review Questions

- 1) **What are the main points of this chapter?**
- 2) **How can Jesus be of aid to us when we have sinned? (1-2)**
- 3) **What are two proofs that we know Jesus and that we abide in Him? (3-6)**
- 4) **What commandment is both "old" and "new"? (7-11)**
- 5) **List three groups of people and how John describes their spiritual state. (12-14)**
- 6) **What three things in the world should we not love? (15-17)**
- 7) **What does John reveal about antichrist? (18-23)**
- 8) **How can we be sure that we will abide in the Son and in the Father? (24-29)**

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Chapter Three

John describes God's wonderful love for us, how hope as His children should motivate us to pure lives. Righteous living should be expected when we know what sin is, that Christ came to destroy it, and that one truly born of God will not persist in sin (1-9). True righteousness includes loving one another, even as Christ loved us, which in turn gives us confidence and assurance that we are abiding in Him and are of the truth (10-24).

Points To Ponder

- God's love for us, and our love for one another
- The definition of sin, and the meaning of "does not sin" (6,9)
- The outworking of love, and the assurance it gives of our salvation

Review Questions

- 1) **What are the main points of this chapter?**
- 2) **What should motivate us to live pure lives? (2-3)**
- 3) **How is sin defined by John? (4)**
- 4) **What is true of one who abides in Jesus? Who has been born of God? (6,9)**
- 5) **What distinguishes children of God from children of the devil? (10)**
- 6) **What serves as evidence that we have passed from death to life? (14)**
- 7) **How do we know what true love is? How then should we love? (16-18)**
- 8) **What gives us assurance and confidence that we are of the truth? (19-23)**
- 9) **How can we know that He abides in us and we in Him? (24)**

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Chapter Four

John cautions his readers not to believe everyone who claims to be led by the Spirit, but to test them (1-6). He then exhorts them to manifest brotherly love in keeping with the character and example of God's love as demonstrated in the sacrifice of His Son (7-21).

Points To Ponder

- Distinguishing the spirit of truth from the spirit of error
- How God's love should impact our love for one another

Review Questions

- 1) **What are the main points of this chapter?**
- 2) **Why should one not believe every spirit? (1)**
- 3) **If one is truly led by the Spirit of God, what will they confess? (2)**
- 4) **What did John say about the coming of Antichrist? (3)**
- 5) **What did John write about their ability to overcome? (4)**
- 6) **How does one discern between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error? (6)**
- 7) **Why should we love one another? (7-8)**
- 8) **How was God's love for us manifested? (9-10)**
- 9) **How can we ensure that God will abide in us? (12-16)**
- 10) **When we love one another as we should, what does it give us? (17-18)**
- 11) **If we claim to love God, but hate our brother, what does that make us? Why? (20)**

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Chapter Five

John writes of faith in Christ, loving God, and overcoming the world (1-5). He then reviews God's witness that gives us certainty regarding eternal life in Christ (6-13), and concludes with teaching on prayer (14-17) and the sure knowledge found in the Son of God (18-21).

Points To Ponder

- The importance of faith, love, and obedience
- The nature of eternal life as a present possession
- Sin which does not lead to death versus sin which does lead to death

Review Questions

- 1) What are the main points of this chapter?
- 2) To be born of God, what is absolutely necessary? (1)
- 3) How can be sure that they love the children of God? (2)
- 4) How can one overcome the world? (4-5)
- 5) What three things bore witness concerning Jesus Christ? (6-8)
- 6) What does one receive as they believe in the Son of God? (10)
- 7) What has God give us? Who has this? (11-12)
- 8) Why did John write these things in his epistle? (13)
- 9) What confidence do we have in prayer? (14-15)
- 10) What is described as the true God and eternal life? (20)