

Introduction to 1 John

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I. Relation to the Gospel of John

- A. The epistle may have been a sermon using the Gospel as a text
- B. Gospel is addressed to unbelievers; the epistle is addressed to believers
- C. Common vocabulary : Word, Light, Life, Spirit of Truth, witness, commandment

II. Occasion of writing

- A. False teaching had been introduced (2:26/3:7/4:1)
- B. Some who embraced the error had left the Christian assembly (2:19/4:1)
- C. Stated reasons for writing:
 - 1. That you may have fellowship with us, with God and with Jesus (1:3)
 - 2. That your joy may be full (1:4)
 - 3. That you might not sin
 - 4. Because of what you already know and have faithfully defended (2:12-14, 21)
 - 5. That you may know that you have eternal life(5:13)

III. The nature of the error addressed

- A. Denial that Jesus
 - 1) was the Son of God (2:23/4:15)
 - 2) was the Christ (2:22)
 - 3) had come in the flesh (4:2ff)
- B. Denial of sin (1:8-10)
- C. Resembles “Gnosticism”
 - 1. Two leading principles:
 - a. The impurity of matter
 - b. The supremacy of “knowledge”
 - 2. Two branches:
 - a. Docetism: Christ only *seemed* to be tangible
 - b. Cerinthianism: Distinguished between the man Jesus and the “Christ *aeon*”
 - c. Asceticism and antinomianism were alternate ethical responses to Gnostic beliefs

IV. John’s approach to addressing the problem

- A. Appeals to the authority of his first-hand experience with Jesus (1:1-4)
- B. Urges loyalty to that which had been taught “from the beginning” (1:1/ 2:7, 24/ 3:11)
- C. Emphasizes the certainty of the believers’ “knowledge” — probably as a contrast to the Gnostics’ “knowledge” (2:3, etc., etc.)

V. True salvation described as follows:

- A. Born of God (2:29; 3:1-2, 10; 5:1, 4, 18-19)
- B. Knowing God (2:3-4; 4:7)
- C. Having fellowship with God (1:3, 6)
- D. Abiding in Him (2:6; 3:24; 4:13, 15-16)
- E. Christ is in you (4:4)
- F. Having an anointing—the Holy Spirit (2:20, 27; 5:10)
- G. Righteous (2:29; 3:7)
- H. Have eternal life (3:15; 5:11-13)

VI. Four Tests of true Christian life

- A. Beliefs about Christ (2:22-23/ 4:2-3, 15/ 5:1)
- B. Righteousness (2:3-5, 29/ 3:6-10/ 5:3, 18)
- C. Love (2:10-11/ 3:10, 14-16, 18-19/ 4:7-8, 12, 16-21/ 5:1)
- D. The Spirit (2:20, 27/ 3:24/ 4:13/ 5:6, 10)

Introduction to 2 John

I. Authorship

Same as the author of 1 John and 3 John, and, probably, of the fourth Gospel

II. Recipient

“The elect lady” — A woman, or a church?

III. Occasion of writing

Having encountered some “children” of this “lady,” John wrote to encourage her and to warn of false teachers.

IV. Content

Teachers who deny that Jesus has “come in the flesh” were troubling the churches. The “lady” should not entertain them or encourage them in any way.

Introduction to 3 John

I. Authorship

Same as the author of 1 John and 2 John, and, probably, of the fourth Gospel

II. Recipient

John’s friend “Gaius” (otherwise unknown)

III. Occasion of writing

John received a good report about Gaius and wrote to congratulate him for his faithful hospitality, to warn him about Diotrophes (an ambitious man trying to control the church) and to commend Demetrius (who might have been a local member of the church, or else the bearer of the epistle).

IV. Content

Gaius is commended for showing hospitality to John’s messengers, whom Diotrophes refuses to receive. Gaius should imitate people like Demetrius, and not imitate people like Diotrophes.