



Introduction to 1 John

Author

- Although the book does not mention the author, it is clear from early Christian sources as well as internal evidence from the epistle itself that the Apostle John was the author.

Date

- Although difficult to date, this epistle was probably written AD 90-95, after the Gospel of John was written, and before the book of the Revelation.

Place

- Probably written from Ephesus where history tells us that John lived.

Readers

- Perhaps written to a group of churches in Asia. Many of the readers were probably Gentile, but not exclusively. The contents of the epistle also indicate that at least some of John's readers had been believers for some time and were advanced in their doctrinal knowledge. Hiebert writes, “There is no intimation that the writer had taken any part in their original evangelization.... Yet he writes to them as one who has been intimately acquainted with them for a considerable time and has been active in their midst as a teacher and acknowledged leader.” This would be consistent if these were Asian believers (Ephesus is in Asia...modern Turkey).

Theme

- The Joy of Fellowship

Occasion

- John is extremely concerned about the spiritual welfare of these believers. The book does not seem to indicate any outstanding persecution at this time. John's concern is that the believers are able to remain spiritually stable, and are equipped to withstand the false teachers who were seeking to influence the churches in the area. Hiebert: "They had already achieved a victory over the false teachers (2:19), but John was concerned that the personal faith of the readers be deepened and established in order to assure their stability. This strengthening of the faith would prepare them to resist the seductions of the world and equip them to detect and refute the speculative false teachings bidding for their acceptance....'He is urging them not to lose the warm vital experience they now enjoy (2:24, 27).' John's pastoral heart taught him that his readers needed to be warned and strengthened against such a spiritual declension."

Purpose

John has two basic purposes:

- 1. To Edify and Exhort Them**

Hiebert

- “They must firmly realize that their Christian faith is based on positive, demonstrable, proven facts and that the reception of eternal life in Christ Jesus lays upon them the responsibility of a conduct consistent with their position as children of God. This mode of conduct calls for a life motivated by the indwelling power of Christian love. The epistle emphasizes this fact by stressing the strong combination of faith and love. It is not certain whether the exhortations addressed to the readers are intended to be corrective or preventative, but probably both functions are actually involved.”

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- 1. To Edify and Exhort Them**
- 2. To Refute Doctrinal Error**

Hiebert

- He points out that “the false teachings confronting them are to be exposed and refuted by the very tests which establish the nature and validity of the Christian faith to which his readers adhere. By their nature the revealed truths of the Christian gospel, which save and assure the true believer, also expose and condemn the errors of the heretic.”

Identity of the Doctrinal Error

- There were three elements mixed together in this false teaching:
 1. A **Jewish** element that emphasized legalism, ritualism, and the observance of holy days.
 2. A **pagan** element. It was a mix of myths, philosophy, and false religions.

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- “The intellectual pride of the Gnostics refined away the gospel into a philosophy. The clue to the understanding of Gnosticism is given in the word from which it is derived--Grk: *gnosis*, 'knowledge.' Gnosticism puts knowledge in the place which can only rightly be occupied by Christian faith. To the Gnostic the great question was not the intensely practical one, 'What must I do to be saved from sin?' but 'What is the origin of evil?' 'How is the primitive order of the universe to be restored?' In the knowledge of these and of similar questions, and in the answers given to these questions, there was redemption, as the Gnostic understood it.”

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 - **Docetic Gnostics** that believed that Christ only *seemed* to be human: He was a phantom . . . an angelic spirit (emanation, aeon).
 - **Cerinthian Gnostics** that taught that the Christ spirit (emanation, angel, aeon) came upon the human man Jesus at His baptism and left before the cross.

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 3. A “**Christian**” element. It wore the mask of Christianity. This is what could have made it so attractive to believers. They believed in redemption through Christ (their own brand, of course).

Outline

Here is a basic one condensed from Hiebert:

Prologue: The Reality of the Incarnation (vv. 1-4)

I. Assurance through the Test of Fellowship (1:5 – 2:17)

II. Assurance from the Conflicts of Faith (2:18 – 4:6)

III. Assurance from the Evidence of True Love (4:7 – 5:5)

IV. Assurance through the Witness of the Spirit (5:6-12)

Epilogue: The Confidence and Certainties of Believers (5:13-21)