

INTRODUCTION TO 1 JOHN
Theme: Knowing and Living the Truth
February 4, 2018

HPK: sense the Spirit of God leading me to preach through the book of 1 John.

I also want to encourage the memorization of Scripture. At the back you will find a sign-up sheet, where the book of First John is divided up into sections. These are the divisions I will use in preaching through the book. This week will be an introduction to the book and then next week we will begin the 1st four verses – I will memorize those.

I want to also encourage you to read this book in one sitting and do it many times.

It will take you about 13 minutes to read through it.

There will be a test next week from your reading.

INTERESTING FACTS:

1. **Tenderness and Boldness:** The first impression on reading this letter is that we find a lot of tenderness and encouragement to love one another. Yet as you read this letter closely one becomes amazed at the boldness and the strong convictions of the writer. He does not beat around the bush. Black is black and white is white. He does not only talk about love and light but about hatred, liars, the evil one and darkness.
2. **Antichrist:** How many times do you think the word “Antichrist” is found in the Bible? It is not found in the book of Revelation. It is not used by Jesus in any of His teaching. Actually it is found only 5 times. 4 times in the book of 1 John and once in the book of 2 John (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7).
3. **His abrupt Conclusion:** He concludes this letter in a very unusual way: *Little children keep yourselves from idols.* Seems like a very unusual way to conclude a letter. However when you look at the second last verse we can make sense of it: *And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true. And we are in Him who is true - even in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal Life. Everything else is false and if you place your faith in anything other than Him who is true that becomes an idol. John encourages them to keep themselves from trusting, obeying, revering, and following – in effect worshiping – anyone or anything other than God Himself, and His Son, Jesus Christ (ESV, 2437).*

This 2nd last verse reminds me of the key verse in John’s Gospel – *John 20:31: But these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in His name.*

AUTHOR:

No name is attached to this letter in our Bibles.

Manuscript evidence is unanimous that someone named “John” wrote this letter (ESV, 2425).

The earliest church fathers also affirm this.

But which John?

The most likely candidate would be John the son of Zebedee the writer of the Gospel of John.

Some of the language is very similar to the Gospel of John:

“the beginning”; darkness; life, light, truth; we demonstrate love for God by obedience. Don’t be surprised if the world hates you.

1 John 5:13: I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

John 20:31: But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Written by someone who dearly loves the recipients of this letter.

Dear children/friends – 15 times.

DATE:

The testimony of church fathers is that John joined other Christians in leaving Jerusalem shortly before A.D. 67 and before the destruction of the city by the Romans. Sometime after that he migrated to Asia where he began a successful ministry to the Gentiles, in the vicinity of the great but highly idolatrous city of Ephesus (MAP). He likely wrote 1 John as an elder statesman of the faith in the last third of the first century, perhaps to churches in the surrounding region. This could have included towns mentioned in the opening chapters of the book of Revelation alongside Ephesus: Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

He would have composed this letter no later than the 90’s A.D. (ESV, 2425).

At the time of writing the writer would have been an old man. Just as today older people can’t travel as easily it would have been that way for John, so instead of trying to visit them he took paper and pen and relied on younger men to bring these letters to the churches.

1 John is more like a sermon rather than a letter – there is no introduction and no greeting in the conclusion – he starts right in.

OCCASION: WHY DID HE WRITE THIS LETTER?

The better we can understand the problems that were facing these first-Century believers the better we can understand how to deal with similar problems in the church today.

He uses the phrase “I Write to You” 12 times:

1:4 – we write this to you

2:1 – I write this to you so that you will not sin

2:7 – I am not writing you a new command

2:8 – I am writing you a new command

2:12 – I write to you dear children

2:13 – I write to you fathers

2:13 – I write to you young men

2:13 – I write to you dear children

2:14 – I write to you fathers

2:14 – I write to you young men

2:21 – I do not write to you because you do not know the truth

2:26 – I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.

5:13 – I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God...

Key Words:

Love – 45; Know – 40; Sin/Sinning – 38; Abide – 23; Dear children/friends - 17
Falsehood/lie/deceive/counterfeit – 16; True/Truth – 14; Eternal Life – 14; Commands – 13;
Knowing Him – 11; Evil one/devil – 10

False teaching:

Most believe that this book was written after the Gospel of John and sometime after that some members of the community left to form a rival group. It was a heretical faction that had developed in the church, one that promoted false teachings concerning the person of Christ. John, the elder, who had pastoral responsibility over the larger community, writes 1 John in order to deal with this crisis, by encouraging the believers to remain in Christ and to remain in the truth and by denouncing those who had not remained.

Already in those early days of the church false teaching had crept in.

A lot of it centred around the person of Jesus Christ – His human nature; the union of both the divine and human nature, and about His suffering and death. There was a tendency to minimize the humanity of Jesus (Thompson, M. M., The IVP NT Commentary Series, 1-3 John, 16-18).

Some made a difference between Jesus and Christ.

Jesus was merely a human being like others although noted for His righteousness and wisdom. Christ, the Messiah, was a heavenly and spiritual being who descended on the merely human Jesus at His baptism and departed at the crucifixion.

Another group derided the reality of the incarnation. They claimed that Jesus only “seemed” to be human.

Another group called Gnostics. Gnosis is the Greek word for “knowledge.”

The word “know” is found about 40 times in this sermon. These folks felt that they had a special kind of spiritual knowledge that just a few elite had by way of special revelation.

A group of them had left the church and were seeking to undermine the truth of what they had been taught by people like John – seeking to persuade the people to follow them.

They claimed that it was not necessary to accept Jesus as the Son of God in order to have knowledge of God. It was possible to live without sin and they had no need of the Christian doctrine of forgiveness through the death of Christ. They based their views on spiritual revelations for which they claimed divine authority.

No doubt some in the fellowship were tempted to accept this teaching. It seemed like the general effect was that people began to doubt some of the things that they had been taught. There were questions in the mind of these believers and in view of this we can see the purposes for this letter.

These folks needed to be reassured that they were true followers of Jesus: *I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life (5:13).*

Summary: John outlines basic Christianity. The true Christian has eternal life; he is in close fellowship with God and has received the gift of the Spirit.

The whole of the book contains John’s full explanation of Christian life and doctrine as a model for all orthodox believer to emulate (Comfort and Hadley, 323).

John MacArthur: Begin by reading I John. Read it once a day for 30 days and you will grasp the basics of the Gospel.

Just from the way that John writes it is evident that he knew the community well and that the believers accepted his teachings as, "the truth." The believers seemed so close that he considered them his spiritual family. They were believers of all ages (children, young men, and fathers; 2:12-14) who needed to be affirmed as a community in love, life and truth. The readers of this first epistle must have known John's Gospel well, especially the upper-room discourse of John 13-17, because there are so many close connections between the 2 writings. Some suggest that 1 John is, in effect, a commentary on his Gospel, particularly John 13-17 – more like an application commentary. "In view of the teachings that you know from my Gospel here is how I want to encourages you to live it out." (Comfort, P. W. And Hadley, W.C., Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Vol. 13, 320-323).

RELEVANCE:

What I really want to understand and get across is what God the Holy Spirit was saying to these first-century believers. Once we understand that, it should help in getting a greater understanding of what the Holy Spirit wants to say to us in 2018.

Is this book relevant today? Is there false teaching in the churches today?

There are various types of Christianity – orthodox, catholic, main-line churches, Evangelical, cults etc. which one of these is right? Various ones deny the virgin birth; the denial of the incarnation (that Jesus came in the flesh), some deny the atonement of Christ on the cross. Some don't believe in the Resurrection; some think it was a spiritual body and not a physical body in which Christ rose (Doukhobors).

In this age of tolerance does it really matter what one believes? Are there not many paths to God? Can we know God apart from knowing Jesus? (Some of this comes from I. Howard Marshall, NICNT, The Epistles of John, 4-8).

This letter has much to say to those today who have gnostic tendencies in the sense that they claim to have superior spiritual knowledge (or even experience) beyond that which ordinary Christians have. Indeed some may even claim to have found the "secret" to the deeper spiritual life; "secrets" which others can never know unless they become part of their special group. This superior knowledge often leads to an elitist attitude and disdain for other Christians. Some of this superior knowledge leads to rejection (a form of hatred) of other believers. John's epistle exposes this. If one truly knows Christ and lives in Him, that person should be loving all fellow Christians. Love, not "superior knowledge" is the proof that one has a genuine spiritual life (Comfort and Hadley, 327).

Talk is cheap; reality must be tested by one's relationship with the members of the church community. John urged the believers to know the truth and to live in it.

ILLUSTRATION:

"We no longer come on Sundays and we also do not attend any other church.

We've chosen to explore the relational church instead. We believe that we ARE the church regardless of where we spend our time on a Sunday morning. We have found it to be very freeing to pursue Jesus outside of these confines, and don't worry, we also still find

Opportunity for community even without attending on Sunday mornings.
We just want to get to know Jesus without the performance based teaching that we see within the church.
We're definitely happy with our choice!"

Thought I'd send this out to you to be aware of certain trains of thoughts out there. A lovely young family has left the church for the reasons they've stated. My heart aches for them as I feel they have bought into a subtle lie yet personally don't know how to address it except to pray that our Lord will continue to pursue them and give them discernment.

1. People were making claims but their lives did not back up those claims (1:6, 8, 10).
2. Knowledge was very important to these false teachers – they promoted a special kind of knowledge. The word “know” is found 40 times in this book. However, if this knowledge does not affect our lives there is something wrong – if we don't obey God then we are liars (2:4).
3. He writes to them about those who are trying to lead them astray (2:26; 3:7), False prophets (4:1); spirit of falsehood (4:6).

John is very blunt, black and white: If people claim something but their lives don't back it up then he calls them “liars.”

Who you are speaks so loud I can't hear what you are saying.

We too need to love God and love others, and also speak strongly against evil, falsehood, deceit, hypocrisy and the evil one.

What this letter makes very clear is that people can talk all they want but if their actions don't back up their words they are liars.

Hold your tongue and live your faith.

Let's look at only 4 examples: 1:6, 8, 10; 2:11
2:9; 3:7-8, 10, 15, 17; 4:2-3, 4-8, 19; 5:10, 12

THEME: KNOWING AND LIVING THE TRUTH

It is very important to know what the truth is but just as important to live out that truth.

Themes: the Character of God; The Centrality of Jesus Christ; Knowing and Discerning the Truth

SENTENCE SUMMARY:

John writes this letter to challenge his readers to demonstrate their love for God and their knowledge of the truth by walking as Jesus walked.

KEY VERSES:

2:6 – Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did.

3:16-19: This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in His presence...

Loving God and knowing the truth will result in a life of lived-out love toward others.

Song: And they'll know we are Christians by our love

We are one in the Spirit
We are one in the Lord
We are one in the Spirit
We are one in the Lord
And we pray that all unity
May one day be restored

CHORUS:

And they'll know we are Christians
By our love, By our love
Yes, they'll know we are Christians
By our love.

We will walk with each other
We will walk hand in hand
We will walk with each other
We will walk hand in hand
And together we'll spread the news
That God is in our land

CHORUS:

We will work with each other
We will work side by side
We will work with each other
We will work side by side
And we'll guard each man's dignity
And crucify our pride

CHORUS:

All praise to the Father
From whom all things come
And all praise to Christ Jesus His only son
And all praise to the Spirit
Who makes us one

CHORUS