

LET Us Teach the New Testament !

First Epistle of John

Introduction and Background

For preachers, teachers and small group leaders

Presenter: Dr Galen Currah, July 2019, rev. 2024

Download site: 1john.currah.download

Introduction

This video series presents 15 lessons that may help you to prepare messages, lessons or discussion guides on 1 John for your pastoral, teaching or small-group ministry.

In this introduction, you will find:

- A brief description of the 15 lessons
- Who was John?
- Date and purpose of the 1 John
- Importance 1 John
- Analytical outline of its contents
- Advice for teachers and group leaders
- Greek manuscripts of 1 John
- Philosophies that may lead Christians astray

Description of 15 lessons

These 15 lessons are intended for those who teach others. Each lesson, video or module, will provide the following kinds of material:

1. The SBL Greek text for the module
2. Greek manuscript variants
3. The English Standard Version
4. An analytical outline of the text
5. Historical background facts
6. Comments on various interpretations
7. Word definitions from Bauer's Lexicon
8. Parallel texts in John's Gospel
9. Culturally-sensitive applications
10. Replies to your queries

The modules will not promote the following:

- Rationalistic speculation (Atheism, Documentary hypothesis, Evolutionism, etc.)
- A particular systematic theology (Arminian, Calvinist, Covenant, Dispensational, Feminist, Liberation, Queer, Reformed, etc.)
- Denominational interpretations (Adventist, Baptist, Catholic, Ecumenical, Lutheran, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Unitarian, etc.)
- Arguments for a preferred Greek text or Bible translation (KJV, , NRSV, Textus Receptus, Nestle)

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That said, the author admits to subscribing to the Evangelical World Alliance Statement of Faith (<https://www.worlddea.org/howeare/statementoffaith>).

Obtain notes on this introduction and on each lesson from our download site at 1john.currah.download

Background to John's First Epistle

Who was John?

John was son of Zebedee, who was a Judean Jew, a fisherman by trade, and of his wife Salome, a relative of Jesus' mother, Mary (Jn 19:25; Mt 27:56; Mk 15:40).

Nearly all tradition and historical inquiry affirms that John was one of Jesus' twelve disciples. For example, Polycarp (69-155 CE), a 2nd-century Christian bishop of Smyrna, who had been a disciple of John, cited 1 John 4:2-3 when he wrote: "Everyone who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is an antichrist."

Πᾶς γὰρ ὃς ἂν μὴ ὁμολογῇ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθέναι, ἀντιχριστός ἐστιν. *The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians* 7:1 (Apostolic Fathers I, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1975, 292-3.)

Thus, John was an ear and eye witnesses to Jesus' travels, teaching, discourses, deeds, death and resurrection. John was the author of the Gospel of John, in which he recounts several of Jesus' discourses that are not reported elsewhere.

Late in his life, John became a leader of churches at Ephesus and Asia Minor, where he penned this Epistle. John lived to about age 90, dying around the year 100 CE.

Date and Purpose of 1 John

Near the end of the first century CE, the Christians of Asia Minor were in their second and third generations, and the population had become tolerant of their new religion. Thus, their main opposition came not from persecution (Acts 19:29; Rev. 2:13) but from the appeal of Greek philosophy and the allure of Roman wealth.

John probably wrote this epistle near the year 100 CE, to steer young generations of Christians towards the original Good News about Jesus, whilst affirming his love for them. He states the aims of his epistle to be:

- To gain full joy 1.4
- To urge them not to sin 2.1
- To remind Christians of their spiritual advantages 2.12-14, 21
- To warn them about deceivers 2.26
- To assure them that they have eternal life 5.13

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Importance of 1 John

This book stands as an authentic document written by one of Jesus' apostles. As such, it provides Christians everywhere with the basic principles by which to lead their life correctly:

- It tells us the main teachings that the apostles taught to early Christians.
- It shows how to practice Christian faith, hope, love and obedience.
- It makes a every clear distinction between truth and error.
- It explains the promises that God has made to Christians.

Thus, this epistles helps to strengthen new Christians, and to teach new churches, and to bring erring Christians back to true faith and love.

Philosophies that lead Christians astray

In the 1st and 2nd centuries, the Christian movement was often challenged by a philosophy called Gnosticism, which taught that:

1. All matter is evil, and the spirit-realm is good.
2. God remains unknowable, but there are lesser spirit beings called Aeons.
3. The material world was created by an inferior spirit called a Demiurge.
4. Humans do not have to deal with "sin," only with ignorance.
5. To achieve salvation, one needs knowledge (gnosis, γνῶσις).

Other philosophies included:

- Stoicism, which taught that everything is god, and that humans should live free of passion, joy and grief, by keeping rigid rules of self-discipline.
- Epicureanism, which believed in many gods, but degenerated into seeking pleasure over truth.
- Docetism, which taught that Jesus was a human being, and that Christ was a divine spirit.

1 John teaches Christians how to believe and how to live in the way that Jesus lived and taught.

Structure (outline) of 1 John

It is generally acknowledged that First John does not present a formal, logical argument, comparable to Paul's *Epistle to the Romans*, but it does have a recognizable structure.

Using the methods of "discourse analysis," observing clusters of vocabulary words, recurring phrases, themes and topics, we suggest four divisions of the book, which are further divided into fifteen sections. Each section easily breaks down into three main points.

Please, download our complete outline of 1 John from 1john.currah.download

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- Part 1: Our Fellowship with God 1.1 - 2.17
 - A.1. I. The Word of Life 1.1-4
 - A.2. II. The Original Message 1.5 – 2.2
 - A.3. III. The New Commandment 2.3-11
 - A.4. IV. The Will of God 2.12-17
- Part 2: Our Adversaries 2.18 - 3.18
 - B.1. V. Antichristian teachers 2.18-29
 - B.2. VI. Lawless sinners 3.1-10
 - B.3. VII. Those who Hate Christians 3.11-18
- Part 3: Our Christian Faith 3.19 – 5.5
 - C.1. VIII. We Have Assurance 3.19-24
 - C.2. IX. We have the Spirit 4:1-6
 - C.3. X. We Have God’s Love 4.7-13
 - C.4. XI. We Have the Saviour 4.14-21
 - C.5. XII. We have the Christ 5.1-5
- Part 4: Our Confidence with God 5.6-21
 - D.1. XIII. God’s Testimony 5.6-13
 - D.2. XIV. Answered prayers 5.14-17
 - D.3. XV. Reasonable conclusions 5.18-21

The Greek manuscripts of 1 John

Bible versions are translated from ancient Greek manuscripts, that is, hand-written copies.

The oldest Greek manuscript of 1 John (called Papyrus 9) dates from the 3rd century. Two manuscripts (X and A) date from the 4th and 5th centuries, three others (B C and 048) from the 5th century. 23 others date from the 7th century and later.

Through the centuries, scribes or copyists sometimes tried to make slight improvements. To obtain a list of those “textual variants,” go to the download site: 1john.currah.download

Advice for preachers, teachers and group leaders

If you preach sermons on First John, then try to follow the outline from these videos, using your own words. Teach all of the doctrines from the lesson, illustrating them with little stories. Preach in your usual manner. Have the congregation form little groups and to pray one for another.

If you teach the book to a large group, then allow someone else to read aloud from First John. Invite everyone to pose queries, allowing others to reply to those queries, before you give your own answer. Tell anything from the lesson, and share your own insights. Allow time for learners to discuss how to apply the lesson, and to pray one for another.

If you lead a small group or a house church, then have others read aloud from First John, and invite everyone to tell what they have learned from the reading. Invite queries about the lesson’s verses, and let everyone discuss the verses and how they will apply John’s teaching in their daily life. Finally, share your own insights and understanding.