

New Testament Survey—1 John

It's amazing the variety of human authors that the Holy Spirit used to give us the Bible. Moses was raised in a palace. Amos was a farmer and herdsman. Paul was a brilliant attorney, a rabbi. Luke was a medical doctor. Peter and John were fishermen.

We've spent the last couple of weeks looking at Peter's epistles. Now we turn to John's epistles.

Discuss: What stands out to you about John's writing (he wrote the Gospel of John, three letters, and then the book of the Revelation of Christ)?

To do: Mark and count all the appearances of the word "know" in 1 John.

[about 37 found in NIV] What is the significance of the repetition of this word? The theme of this book is *confidence*, assurance. John is writing to believers and wants them to "know" with certainty some things.

- **Who wrote the book?**

--John (although not named in the book itself, which is unusual in the NT)

What John? What do we know about him?

1. He was an apostle, and the author of the Gospel of John.
2. He may have been a first cousin of Jesus (his mother may have been Salome, a possible sister of Mary--see Mt 27:56; Mk 15:40; 16:1; Jn 19:25)
3. He was a member of Jesus' inner circle (with James and Peter)
4. He's referred to as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (Jn 13:23).

Extra-biblical support of John: Irenaeus (140-203), Clement of Alexandria (150-215), Tertullian (155-222), and Origen (185-253) all attributed this epistle to John (*NIVsb*).

Discuss: What internal evidences in the book would suggest that John wrote this letter? [from *NIVsb*]

1. The mention of eyewitness testimony (1:1-4) indicates the writer knew Jesus personally.
2. The suggestions of being an older man (he refers to his readers as "children" 2:1, 28; 3:7).
3. The style and vocabulary are similar to the gospel of John.

- **"When was the book written?"**

--between A.D. 85-95

Since 1 John seems to build on the material in the gospel of John, and since the Gospel was possibly written around 85, this date seems plausible for 1 John.

Discuss: What was happening at this time? Describe what the Church was like by the 90's? To help, answer the following...

--What are the differences between John and his readers in terms of their Christian experience? John saw Jesus some 60 years earlier. His readers were second and third generation Christians.

--What was the attitude of Roman society towards Christianity? Clue--What happened in Rome in the 60's under Nero?

--The church began 60 years earlier with 120 followers of Jesus meeting in an upper room for prayer in Jerusalem. What was true of the Church by this time?

--What internal attack was threatening the Church? Early gnosticism [see below]

- **Why was the book written?**

--1 John was written to give Christians assurance of their relationship with God.

Key Verse: 5:13

Discuss: Why would such teaching even be necessary? For two reasons...

1. As the church grew, the possibility increased for people to call themselves Christians who indeed were *not*, and thus had no right to have assurance.

2. As the church expanded, the threat of false teaching creeping into the church expanded as well.

For instance...*NIVsb* (1905), "One of the most dangerous heresies of the first two centuries of the church was Gnosticism. Its central teaching was that spirit is entirely good and matter is entirely evil." Gnosticism taught dualism.

Discuss: The Gnostics would (may) have called themselves Christians, but believed what?
1) Man's body is evil, so it doesn't matter what you do with it [which led to two extremes: asceticism, or licentiousness]. 2) Salvation is the escape from the body. It is achieved, not by faith in Christ, but by special knowledge (the Greek word for "knowledge" is *gnosis*, hence Gnosticism). 3) The gnostics denied Jesus' humanity.

Recipients of the Epistle:

--written to Christians (acc. to 2:12-14, 19; 3:1; 5:13)

--since it mentions no particular recipients, it may have been a circular letter which was intended to be circulated among Christians in a variety of places.

Note: Evidence from early writers suggests John was ministering in Ephesus during most of his later years (A.D. 70-100).

- **What is the outline of the book?**

(from Gromacki, 371-2)

- I. The Moral Bases of John's Message (1:5-2:2)
- II. The Tests of Assurance Introduced (2:3-27)
- III. The Tests of Assurance Developed (2:28-4:6)
- IV. The Tests of Assurance Reviewed (4:7-5:5)
- V. The Witnesses of Assurance (5:6ff).

- **What is the message of the book in one sentence?**

1 John teaches Christians how they can know they are God's children.

- **What contribution does the book make to biblical theology (that is, how does this book relate to the rest of the Bible)?**

1. *1 John addresses the subject of assurance of salvation.*

Key Texts: 5:11-13; 2:3, 4

In 1 John, we learn some key insights.

- a. A person can know and have assurance of salvation (5:11-13).
- b. I cannot give you assurance, nor is it my responsibility to do so. This is the task of the Holy Spirit (2:20; Rom. 8:16).
- c. The Holy Spirit uses His Word to give assurance (2:20-21, 27-28).
- d. John gives us a checklist of things that must be true in order for a person to have assurance of salvation [see other sheet].

To do: How would you use the book to help the following individuals...

#1: Jane is a 40 year old mother of three who you met at Little League practice. According to her, she's been in church all her life. Her dad was a deacon, her mother a Sunday School teacher. She says she "prayed to receive Christ" when she was 6, but never really experienced the type of joy she saw in her parents. Now she tells you she's wondering if she's even a Christian...

#2: Bobby is 9 years old, and you see him sitting on a pew by himself after church one

Wednesday evening. He seems discouraged, and when you ask him how he's doing he replies, "I'm afraid to die. I don't know for sure if I'd go to heaven. I asked Jesus to be my Savior last year, but I still have fear at night."

2. *1 John helps us know how to deal with Gnostic teaching.*

See: 2:18-9; 4:1-6

Discuss: What are some modern evidences of Gnosticism in the church?

3. *1 John teaches us about key aspects of Christian living.*

- a. What to do when we have blown it (1:8-10)
- b. Prayer (5:14-15)
- c. Obedience to the Lord's commands (2:3-4)
- d. Biblical separation from the world (2:15-17)
- e. Brotherly love (3:11-20)

Discuss: What questions does 1 John raise for you? What challenge stands out to you from 1 John that should affect your life this week?