

Introductory Notes on 1 John

Before we begin, let's answer some questions you might have about John and this epistle!

1. Who wrote 1 John?

There is no doubt among bible scholars that John is the author of this letter – although his name is never given.

One reason that scholars give to prove this is that there are several striking similarities between this letter and the Gospel of John. (Compare 1 John 2:8 with John 13:34, 3:1 with John 1:12, 3:2 with John 17:24 just to give a few of the many examples).

2. Who was John?

John was the brother of James, the son of Zebedee the fisherman and Solome, Mary's sister. Since John's aunt was Mary, Jesus was John's cousin.

John was one of the three closest friends of Jesus. He was part of the "inner circle" within the twelve apostles. The other two were James and Peter. These three were with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-2) and at many other times (Matthew 26:37). You might remember that it was only John that remained at the cross while Jesus was crucified. John stood by Mary's side (John 19:26-27) and Jesus told John to take care of Mary as though she were his own mother. It was John (and Peter) who ran to the tomb to see that the Master had risen from the dead on the morning of the Resurrection (John 20:2-8).

John called himself, "the disciple whom Jesus loved" in his gospel (John 13:23, 19:26). He knew Jesus as well as anyone could, after walking daily with Him for three years, witnessing countless miracles and hearing His teachings (Luke 5:3-15).

3. When did John write this epistle?

Scholars believe that John wrote this letter (and afterwards, 2 John and 3 John) between the years AD85 and AD95 while he was living in the city of Ephesus. It is believed that he wrote it after his Gospel, but before he was exiled on the Isle of Patmos, where he would write his final book, Revelation.

4. To Whom was the letter written?

1 John is a “general” epistle, meaning that it was written for all believers. Paul wrote specific letters to different churches such as Ephesians, Galatians, Philippians, etc., but John wrote to all believers, both those who he knew personally, and those who would read his letter later.

John was concerned about the young believers and saw that they could easily be deceived and led astray. There was a new false teaching called, “antinomianism”. This teaching stated that because salvation is by grace, God’s people were not under the law, and therefore were not required to keep the Divine commandments. John uses the word “commandments” 13 times to highlight the point that yes, salvation is by grace alone, but because we love our Father and our Savior, Jesus Christ, we choose to obey and keep His commandments.