



1 John

1 John is a testimony about who Jesus was and is and what this means for those who seek to follow him. There is a strong emphasis on living out what you say – not just declaring that you belong to Christ, but living it out in practice. Woven throughout the book is the command to love God and each other.



How long will it take?

Reading time: 16 mins
Short of time? Just read the whole thing!



Genre

Epistle or sermon



Anything tricky?

The train of thought is not always easy to follow – but that's okay, because most themes loop around again.



Inspiring quotes

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

(1 John 1.8)

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.

(1 John 3.1)

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

(1 John 4.7-8)



About the Author

The author is not identified in 1 John. The letter begins and ends abruptly. Christian tradition associates the author of 1 John – and 2 and 3 John – with John the author of the fourth Gospel and the book of Revelation. Church tradition further identified that John as John, son of Zebedee, one of the 12 apostles.

Debates about the authorship of the Johannine material (i.e. John's Gospel, 1, 2 and 3 John and Revelation) are extensive and marked by a lack of agreement;

- Some, though not many, think the same author wrote all five books.
- Others think that one author wrote the Gospel and letters, but another wrote Revelation.
- Others again think that one author wrote the Gospel and 1 John; another wrote 2 and 3 John and another again wrote Revelation

It is interesting to read all five books together and see what you think!

What do we know about him?

If the author of 1 John is John the apostle, then, he was the brother of James, called by Jesus to follow him early in his ministry. He is often thought to be the beloved disciple of John's Gospel (see introduction to John's Gospel for more on this); if he was, then when he was on the cross, Jesus handed over care for his mother to him. Christian tradition states that he took her to live in Ephesus, where he lived to a ripe old age (around 100).

If the author is a different John, then we know much less about him. If the same person wrote 2 and 3 John then he was an elder in the church.



About the times

The problems with authorship make it hard to date these letters but most think they come from the end of the first century, around the ad 90s.

What were people feeling?

Despite the differences between 1, 2 and 3 John the thread that joins them all is the question of what it means to live out the love of Jesus in their everyday lives.



How is it structured?

1.1-4	Witness to the nature and life of Jesus
1.5-3.10	Walking in the light
3.11-5.12	Living in love
5.13-21	Do not sin



What kind of Book is it?

1 John is often called an epistle, but it doesn't read much like one. It has no opening or ending like most letters. So it may have been a sermon,

or reflection or testimony (the word bear witness occurs a lot) about Jesus and how to follow him.



Look out for...

Throughout the letter there is a vital connection made between knowing God and doing good works. Look out for it as you read.

Also look out for light and love and notice how the two are intertwined in what the author says.

Again important are the themes of witnessing or what you say. Notice this strand as you read.



What could this mean for me?

Reflect on the connection between knowing God and doing good that is so important in this book. Is the movement from one to the other an easy one do you think?



Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- The author talks a lot about sin, what do you think he means? What do you mean by the word sin? Is it a word you find easy or hard?
- ‘...whoever says, “I abide in him,” ought to walk just as he walked!’ (1 John 2.6) talk about this, what do you think it means in practice?
- 1 John also says that you cannot be in the light while you hate a brother or sister (2.9), do you agree?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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