

1 John

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1 John

1. **Who was the author?** God is the ultimate author; the apostle John was the writer. Although the book doesn't specifically mention John, there is much terminology that is very similar to the gospel of John. The writer also mentions his own eyewitness testimony of Jesus -- 1:1-3. Early church tradition along with internal evidence of early gnosticism places the writing to the end of the first century -- C. 90 A.D.
2. **Who were the original recipients?** It is clear that this letter was written to Christians -- see 1 John 3:1. There is no specific congregation to whom it was addressed. Early Christian writers maintain that John lived in Ephesus during most of his later years. It is probable that this letter was circulated throughout the churches of Asia Minor. One of the purposes of the letter was to dispel the false doctrine of gnosticism, which claimed that the spirit is entirely good, and the body is entirely evil. One major point flowing from this false doctrine was that Jesus couldn't really have come in the flesh or else He would have had sin. John disproves this false claim throughout the book -- 1 John 1:1-3, 4:2-3. Another point that follows from the basic tenet of gnosticism is the idea that since the body is entirely evil, a Christian has to sin as long as he is in the body. John also refutes this point throughout the book -- 1 John 2:1, 3:6, 3:9, 4:4, 5:4, 5:18.
3. **The author appears to have a set of special words. What do they mean?**
 - a) Abide -- We usually think of abide as meaning to dwell or live there (abode). The Greek word *menw* (*meno*) translated throughout the letter as "abide" literally means to remain. Thus, we can think of "abide" as meaning "to continually live or dwell." -- e.g. 1 John 2:28, 3:24
 - b) Truth -- *alhqeia* (*aletheia*) -- The opposite of deception and lies. Truth is in the open; it is reality. Not just pretense, but actuality -- doers of the word, not delusional hearers -- e.g. -- 1 John 2:4, 3:18
 - c) Commandment -- *e]ntolh* (*entole*) -- an authoritative prescription; command; charge. Throughout the book of 1 John, "commandments" refers to specific precepts given by God -- e.g. -- 1 John 3:23, 5:2-3. Although the New Covenant isn't a covenant of laws such as the Old Testament was, it is apparent that God has still given commandments to us -- these are precepts of life, not of death.
4. **What darkness was passing away? (2:8)** Earlier in this letter, the light was already defined as the character or nature of God -- see 1 John 1:5. There is an obvious parallel with John chapter 1, especially verse 9. Prior to the coming of Christ, the whole world was really in darkness; there was no full fellowship with God, even for the Jew. However, Christ made known the glory of God -- first to a limited degree in the flesh, and then ultimately through His ascension to the throne. In a big picture the darkness that was still prevalent under the Old Covenant was passing away with the nearing completion of the New Testament Scriptures. At a personal level, the darkness of sin that

once had dominion in our lives is overpowered and eradicated by the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ – see 2 Corinthians 3:18, 4:3-6.

5. **When was the “last hour”?** (2:18) The “last hour” in this context appears to be a description of the days of the New Testament. Both Hebrews 1:2 as well as Acts 2:17 and following make it clear that the “last days” refer to the time of the New Testament. John’s thought seems to be consistent with that with the possible added concept of the early stages of the apostasy.
6. **What is the “anointing”?** (2:20) The “anointing” seems to be a reference to the indwelling Holy Spirit. First of all, this terminology is used in reference to the Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus in the form of a dove following His immersion in the Jordan River – see Acts 10:38. Secondly, this “anointing” abides in us, as does the Spirit – see John 14:15-16. Thirdly, the “anointing” helps teach us, just as the Spirit does – see John 14:26, Acts 5:32. Finally, the letter of 1 John confirms that God has given us His Spirit – see 1 John 4:13.
7. **What bad teaching does the author mention?** There seem to be two aspects of the same false doctrine of gnosticism that John really refutes in this book. We touched on these earlier under question 2. Let’s quickly look at the verses where this false doctrine is mentioned: 1 John 2:18-23, 26; 3:7-8; 4:1-6.
8. **How do you “test a spirit”?** (4:1) In our day, we test the spirits by examining their teachings in light of the teachings of the New Testament. Anyone who teaches something different than the doctrine conforming to Godliness is not from God -- see 1 Timothy 6:3-5. This really can be summed up by examining the teachings concerning Jesus Christ. Is He really the Son of God? Did He really come in the flesh? Was He truly tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin? Most false doctrine will attempt to subtly deny some of these Scriptural truths. Since John’s audience wouldn’t have the opportunity to peruse the complete compilation of New Testament Scriptures, John goes straight after the materializing heresy of his day. Anyone that would teach that Jesus truly came as the Son of God in the flesh was from God; everyone else wasn’t.
9. **Do Christians sin?** In this letter, John, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, carefully and correctly teaches us about this question. Let’s start where he does. According to 1 John 1:8 - 2:2, it is making God a liar to deny the times that we have and maybe still do fall short of God’s glory. However, it is important to note that the reason that John brings this up is so that we may not sin -- the goal of this teaching is to help us be true overcomers. As we follow the teaching through this book we see that if we don’t believe that we can overcome sin, this is a denial of the power of God. See 1 John 3:5-9; 4:4, 5:4.

10. What is the theme of the letter? The theme of 1 John is that real Christianity is based on knowing Christ by truly abiding in Him and walking as He walks -- see 1 John 2:3. This is in stark contrast to the gnostics who claimed to have a "special knowledge" distinct from any actual practice in this body. In 1 John, there is a special emphasis on love -- again the emphasis is on an actual practicing love, not love in theory -- see 1 John 3:18-19.

11. What else jumped out to the saints in Billings?