

The First Epistle of John

...so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ (1John 1:3)

1John 1:1-4

Background

What literary *genre* (category) does 1John belong? (Bookstore example)

Epistle – but what features are lacking?

It lacks a greeting and salutation\doxology (e.g., Rm 1:1; Rm 16:25-27)

It is probably best understood as a sermon or tract written to a church or group of churches going through a crisis of faith

What was that crisis?

A group of teachers were advocating an understanding of Christianity very different from that of John and his colleagues.

We have already discussed *docetism* and how its adherents taught that Jesus only **appeared** to come in the flesh.

They had gone so far as to leave the church and presumably established a rival church (or churches – 1John 2:19), but were still in contact with its members.

They were causing considerable uncertainty among them regarding the true character of Christian belief and whether members of the church could truly regard themselves as Christians.

John's responds by clarifying the basics of Christianity.

Where was 1John written?

Probably in Ephesus (see Eph 1:11-17; Rev 2:2-5)

A strong church, but had lost its "first love"

When was 1John written?

It is difficult to say precisely when it was written (as Barry taught last week).

I lean towards an earlier date for GJohn than most scholars, because I'm persuaded that John did not know about the destruction of the Temple in AD70 (at least, when he wrote his Gospel).

But in any case, we simply don't know which came first: GJohn or 1John.

It is tempting to think that 1John is a kind of theological commentary on GJohn, and that it came several years later, but the evidence for this is far from clear.

We know that there is a tradition that GJohn and 1John were sent together and were viewed as a kind of set.

But against this view is the fact that 1John stands in its own right as an eyewitness testimony of the Lord's teaching written to a specific audience at a specific time, addressing specific concerns.

To repeat something I said in another context, we need to make a distinction between John's purpose and the effect of his writing. His purpose may well have been to re-state the Gospel message, but his effect has been to reach generations with what has been taken to be a commentary on GJohn.

Evidence from the early church

There is a strong tradition (recorded in Ireneaus, attributed to Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna) of a certain heretic living with John in Ephesus by the name of Cerinthus.

John is said to have so detested Cerinthus that he once fled a bathhouse when he found out Cerinthus was inside, yelling "Let us flee, lest the building fall down; for Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is inside!"

Ireneaus was a disciple of Polycarp, who was in turn a disciple of the Apostle John. He died circa 200ad.

There are possible allusions to 1John in Ignatius, esp. "God having become in flesh." Compare 1Jn 4:3-4. (Letter to the Ephesians). Ignatius was martyred c. AD110)

And Polycarp quotes these same verses in his Letter to the Philippians:

"For whosoever does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is antichrist;" (Chapter 7)

Papias, Polycarp's contemporary, was said by Eusebius (died in AD339) in his Church History "to have made use of testimonies of the former epistle of John."

Other 2nd Century witnesses are Justin Martyr, the anonymous

writer of Diognetus, (*The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus*) and the Gnostic Valentinus.

Interestingly, Mathetes (=”disciple”) used the word “Word” for Christ or Jesus. He was possibly one of John’s disciples.

Late in the 2nd Century, it was included in the Muratorian Canon.

What does “canon” mean?

List or rule – a means of determining what’s in and what’s out.

It is important to note that the church did not pick and choose arbitrarily which books to include and which to exclude. (contra *The Da Vinci Code*).

It merely recognized what was commonly accepted in the church as a whole.

The Muratorian Canon (named after its discoverer and publisher) contained all the NT books, except James, Hebrews, 1 & 2 Peter.

Early in the third century, we see frequent use of 1John in the writings of Ireneaus of Lyons and Tertullian or Carthage.

Interestingly, all attribute 1John to the Apostle John, the Beloved Disciple.

So, 1John has a pretty good pedigree from the very beginning of the church, to say the least!

Outline

It is difficult to outline 1John! I give you one example (Stott), but there are almost as many outlines as there are Commentaries.

The Prologue

Someone read 1John 1:1-4

This passage has been termed the Prologue of this Epistle. What other book of the Bible has a Prologue? What verses does it contain?

The Apostolic Message & Its Moral Implications (1:5 – 2:2)

The denial that Sin breaks our fellowship with God (1:6,7)

The denial that Sin lives in our nature (1:8,9)
The denial the Sin shows itself in our conduct (1:10 – 2:2)

If we say that we have not sinned, we ⁽³¹⁾ make Him a liar and ⁽³²⁾ His word is not in us. (1:10)

“Advocate with the Father”

Paraklēton – literally, “one who comes along beside to help.”
Some common translations:

NASB, NET, ESV: Advocate; Wuest’s: One who pleads our cause we constantly have facing the Father; NIV: One who speaks in our defense.

This term is applied to what other member of the Trinity? By whom? In which book?

Jn 14:16 (26; 15:26; 16:7) Interestingly, though it is the same Greek word, the NASB translates it “Helper”

The Three Tests introduced (2:3-27)

Does anyone remember what they are?

Obedience, or the moral test (2:3-6)

Love, or the social test (2:7-11)

A digression about the church (2:12-14)

He address 3 groups “little children, fathers, and young men
Literal or figurative?

A digression about the world (15-17)

Belief, or the doctrinal test (2:18 – 27)

1st time John uses the term “antichrist” of the heretics

Children, (48) it is the last hour; and just as you heard that (49) antichrist is coming, (50) even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. (1 John 2:18)
(51) They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, (52) so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.
(1 John 2:19)

Does anyone remember who the “Holy One” is in v20?
It is never used of the HS in the entire NT. Only 1Pet refers to the Father

Mk 1:24; Luk 4:24; Jn 6:69; 1Pet 1:15; 1Jn 2:20

Second Application of the Tests (2:28 – 4:6)

An elaboration of the Moral Test: Righteousness (2:28 – 3:10)

An elaboration of the social Test: Love (3:11-18)

A digression about assurance and our condemning heart (3:19 – 24)

And does anyone remember a key teaching from this section?

That our consciences are part of our sin nature, but God is more powerful than our hearts!

An elaboration of the doctrinal test: belief (4:1-6)

You are from God, (10) little children, and (11) have overcome them; because (12) greater is He who is in you than (13) he who is in the world. (1 John 4:4)

Third Application of the Tests (4:7-5:5)

A further elaboration of the social test: Love (4:7-12)

A combination of the doctrinal and social tests (4:13-21)

A combination of the three tests (5:1-5)

The Three Witnesses and our Consequent Assurance (5:6-17)

The three witnesses (5:6-12)

Can someone name the three witnesses?

[2] the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. (1 John 5:8)

Our Assurance (5:13-17)

(22) These things I have written to you who (23) believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have (24) eternal life. (1 John 5:13)

Three Affirmations and Concluding Exhortation (5:18-21)

Three Affirmations (5:18-20)

What are these?

1. No one who is born of God (continues to) sin
2. We are of God
3. The Son of God has come

Exhortation (5:21)