

## An Introduction to the 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle of John

### Details of the Epistle

#### Authorship

The Apostle John is the attributed author, but like the book of Hebrews has no internally specific author. There are several reasons why 1<sup>st</sup> John is believed to be by John, the disciple of Christ:

**Attribution** – The earliest written manuscript that we have is from Irenaeus in a work entitled “Against Heresies” [Against Heresies] which was written about 180AD and which states the book as being written by John the disciple of the Lord and the author of the fourth gospel<sup>1</sup>. Also Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen<sup>2</sup>

**Internal Witness** – The author claims eyewitness to the life of Christ, something John would most definitely have had. He also takes an authoritative position that would be proper for an apostle.

**Language** – The author follows a simple writing style to the author of the gospel, the other two letters and the book of Revelation. Further, he references the Old Testament similar to the gospel of John, which is initially heavy with references to Genesis. This lends itself to explain the very Jewish thinking in the book’s writing style.

#### Timeframe of Letter

While no specific time is given in the letter and we don’t have exact information it is reasonable to guess it is from approximately 70A.D. (or possibly later), but before the book of Revelation.

#### Audience

Given John’s general location of Ephesus (modern Turkey) and the churches mentioned in Revelation there seems to be a hint that it was primarily to believers in the western Asian region.

#### Themes

John appears to be concerned with truth in the gospel, God’s character, the life of the believer and in the believer’s witness to the world. The book’s translation contains the following words with the greatest repetition:

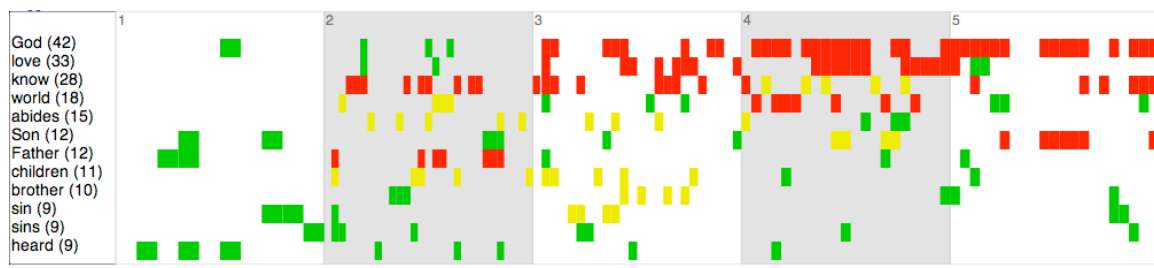
1. God (42)
2. love (33)
3. know (28)
4. world (18)
5. abides (15)

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://bible.org/seriespage/authorship-1-john>

<sup>2</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Pg 861, Zane Hodges

6. Son (12)
7. Father (12)
8. children (11)
9. brother (10)
10. sin (9)
11. sins (9)
12. heard (9)



### Cultural Bias

Because of the language of the book of 1<sup>st</sup> John it appears that the Jewish author is writing to a primarily ethnically and culturally Jewish audience. John writes about things with the Jewish perspective that is known as the Semitic Totality Concept. This concept implies that if something is true, then you do it. Greek or western thinkers tended towards things being true, but unapplied. Philosophy even means love of truth, but often philosophers in a western context ignore the truth because it is culturally acceptable. Jews, being bound by the Law and tending towards legalism, are focused in on truth and literal application.

When the student comes into contact with the text of 1<sup>st</sup> John it is clear that there is an apparent tension between Pauline epistles and Johannine epistles, but this is not an actual conflict, but instead a cultural difference that reveals itself in the language of the letters. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles and John was writing the mostly Jewish believers he was ministering to. Instead of simply pointing to an understanding of the doctrine from a Pauline perspective it is good for the student to observe the Jewish culture and context to pull out the richness of the intended meaning and recognize that the logical imperatives of Paul are matched by the Semitic Totality concept that John writes of.

### Outline of the 5 chapters

- I. Prologue (1:1-4)
- II. Introduction: Basic Principles (1:5-2:11)
  - a. Basic principles of fellowship (1:5-2:2)
  - b. Basic principles of knowing God (2:3-11)
- III. The purpose of the Epistle (2:12-27)
  - a. In the light of the reader's spiritual conditions (2:12-14)
  - b. In light of the world's allurements (2:15-17)
  - c. In light of the deceptions of the last hour (2:18-23)
  - d. In light of the reader's responsibilities to abide (2:24-27)

- IV. The body of the Epistle (2:28-4:19)
  - a. The theme stated (2:28)
  - b. Discerning the children of God (2:29-3:10a)
  - c. Discerning love for the brethren (3:10b-23)
    - i. What love is not (3:10b-15)
    - ii. What love is (3:16-18)
    - iii. What love does for believers (3:19-23)
  - d. Discerning the indwelling God (3:24-4:16)
    - i. Discerning the Spirit of truth (3:24-4:6)
    - ii. Discerning the God of love (4:7-4:16)
  - e. The theme realized (4:17-19)
- V. Conclusion (4:20-5:17)
  - a. Love clarified (4:20-5:3a)
  - b. Love empowered (5:3b-15)
  - c. Love practiced (5:16-17)
- VI. Epilogue (5:18-21)