

The First letter of John

True Knowledge

Course Outline

This study of 1 John will be composed of six sessions. Each week there will be some questions to think about and discuss with your study partner if you wish. I will offer some suggested answers and comments during the week following each session. All you need are your Bible, pen and paper. I will be working from the NIV again, but as we know, different translations sometimes shed new insights.

Sessions:

1. Introduction to the letter
2. The nature and Work of Christ 1:1-4; 2:1-6
3. God is love 1:5 -2:27
4. God is life 2:28 – 4:6
5. God is Love 4:7 – 5:12
6. Review and Impressions

As you study John's teaching keep in mind the three principles Rev. Stephen recommended:

1. What does this say about God?
2. How does this relate to the rest of the Bible, especially Jesus' teaching in the Gospels?
3. What does this text tell me I need to do?

Session One: Introduction to the Letter

Author: There seems to be little argument that the author is John son of Zebedee, one of the twelve disciples, apostle and author of the forth Gospel. It is also thought that he wrote Revelation and possibly the second and third letters attributed to him, but there is more debate about those letters.

Date: Most likely it was written late in the 1st century, around 90 AD from Ephesus, where, towards the end of his life, John lived in a Christian community. It is likely that John by this time is the sole survivor of the Twelve.

Although the rise of Gnosticism is associated mostly with the 2nd century, reading this letter it seems apparent that early Gnostic ideas were already appearing in the Church. John is writing in powerful defence against what he realises is a great threat to the faith; a threat from within the church itself.

Various heresies he addresses are:

1. That Jesus was a sort of spirit and never truly human. This denied both the incarnation and the resurrection.
2. That Jesus was born a normal man and that the spirit of Christ entered his body at his baptism and left him before the crucifixion.
3. That all matter is evil and all spirit good, so sin was unimportant as it concerned the 'evil' body. This teaching removed all moral restraint.
4. That there was a secret knowledge, known only to the Gnostic followers, which revealed the mysteries of Christ.

To whom it was written: The Christians in Ephesus and to all the churches in Asia Minor. It seems to be appropriate for Gentiles, as there are no quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures and few references. But its relevance applies to all Christians in all parts of the Empire at that time and has been relevant throughout the ages since, including today.

Style: We call it a letter, but it lacks the address and greetings we associate with Paul's letters. It reads more like a sermon, full of the love and concern a pastor has for his flock.

John uses shorter sentences and a much smaller vocabulary than Paul or Luke. So instead of building his arguments in the style of Greek logic he relies on repetition to get his message across. Perhaps this was learnt from the parallelism of the Psalmists; say something once and then repeat the same idea in different words and then sometimes even a third time to make quite sure the point has been understood and remembered.

Read the whole letter

1. What themes are there in the letter?
2. What reasons do you find in the text for John writing?
3. I've entitled the letter '*True Knowledge*'. Suggest your own title.
4. Which stands out as the key verse for you?

Compose your own prayer for use when you follow these Bible studies on 1 John. Perhaps include your chosen key verse in the prayer.

Mary Thomas
September 2020