

The First letter of John

True Knowledge

Answers to Session One: The Introduction to the letter

Caution: These are my suggested answers; some are speculative and some are individual opinion.

1. Themes to the letter:

- a) The identity of Jesus
- b) Love
- c) Fellowship with God
- d) Sin
- e) True knowledge of God
- f) Assurance of eternal life

2. Reasons for writing:

- a) To remind people of the true Gospel; e.g. 1 John 2:18-23.

Most would be second or third generation Christians and the initial excitement was fading and people were looking for something that would spice Christianity up a bit, perhaps bring it into line with contemporary thinking and Greek philosophical ideas and this is what Gnostic teaching was offering.

Docetists taught that Jesus had not had a physical body. Eusebius writes in his *Ecclesiastical History* of a man called Cerinthus, who taught this late in 1st century in Ephesus. (Apparently John wouldn't even enter the bath-house if he heard that Cerinthus was there).

If you look at Revelation 2, there is mention of Nicolaitans; these were the people who claimed special knowledge of Christ's 'mysteries'. "Gnostic" comes from the Greek word for knowledge and this is why John constantly says, "*we know*", reminding people to think about what they were taught when they first came to believe in Christ and not to be seduced by these new, false ideas.

The real danger was that these heresies came from within the Church. John had heard Jesus when he warned the disciples about these people. In Matthew 24:11 he warns, "*...many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.*" In verse 24 he adds, "*...even the elect – if that were possible.*"

- b) To repeat and reinforce the message of love and fellowship; e.g. 1 John 2:10.
- c) To warn against sin; e.g. 1 John 2:1-2
- d) To bring joy to the Christian experience; 1 John 1:4
- e) To give assurance of the promise of eternal life; 1 John 5:13.

Overall you could put all his reasons into one; he wrote to defend the faith against great danger.

I was never very good at picking out themes, reasons, aims, objectives etc. so it is likely that your ideas are both different and more accurate. But the important thing is that we have all been pouring over the text.

3. Have you thought of your title for the letter? Another one I thought of is, *'Fellowship with God'*.

4. For me the key verse, thinking of the whole message of the letter, is 1 John 5:13: *"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."*

Compare it to John 20:31, which tells us why he wrote his Gospel: *"But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."*

There are some wonderful verses in this letter and I remember learning quite a few when I was young, so they stand out as familiar old friends. I think I'm particularly drawn to: 1 John 3:1 and 19. In them we are reminded, that God's love is *"lavished"* upon us and of, *"how we set our hearts at rest in his presence"*.

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