

FIRST, SECOND,
AND THIRD
JOHN

By Frank Jamerson

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Spiritual "equipment" for the contest of life.

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Lesson 1

1 John 1:1-4

A. The Author:

The most plausible reading of 1 John 1:1-4 is that the author is claiming to be an eyewitness of the early life and ministry of Jesus...*Since we know also that the Gospel of John was attributed to one of Jesus' early disciples (John 21:24), there is a very natural tendency to look to the apostle John, the son of Zebedee and brother of James, as the author of both the Gospel and these Epistles (Truth Commentaries - The Three Epistles of John, by Daniel H. King, Sr).*

B. The Date:

Both external and internal evidence indicate the epistle was written toward the end of the first century A.D. 90 - 97. Dan King commented: *If the absence of any reference to persecution means that the church was not being actively persecuted by the state, then the time of composition would appear to be either before the regime of Domitian or at the close of his reign. This suggests either an early date around A.D. 80 or a later date of about A.D. 97, after Domitian's death. The references to the heresy which John so ardently contests, however, will not allow the earlier date. So, the date of A.D. 97, or a bit later, is probably the best suited to all the facts. This conforms perfectly with the observation of Irenaeus that John remained among the Ephesian Christians permanently until the time of Trajan (Against Heresies III.3.4). The Emperor Trajan came to power in A.D. 98 and continued until A.D. 117 (King, page xvi).*

C. The Background:

The particular error which 1 John was intended to combat seems to have been an early form of Gnosticism, a heresy

...that you may know

which was the most dangerous enemy of the church up to the close of the second century. Gnosticism was a philosophy of religion rather than a single system. It was built on the premise that spirit is good, that matter is evil, and that the two can have no enduring relation with each other. Salvation consists of escape from the realm of matter into the realm of the spirit. The means of this escape are numerous. Chief among them is knowledge, by which men can rise above the earthbound chains of matter into the heavenly apprehension of truth. This knowledge, or gnosis to use the Greek term which gave the philosophy its name, could be attained only by those who were initiated into the inner secrets of the group...

*The conflict of this type of philosophy with Christianity was most acute at the point of the person of Christ. How, asked the Gnostics, could the infinite, pure spirit called God have anything to do with the material body? A complete union would, on their premises, be unthinkable. They proposed two solutions: either Christ was not really human, but only apparently so; or else the Christ-spirit did not actually inhabit the human Jesus until the baptism, and left Him before His death on the cross. The former theory was called Docetism, for the verb dokeo, meaning to seem; the latter was called Cerinthianism, from Cerinthus, its chief advocate in the first century (**The New Testament: A Survey**, by Merrill Tenney, page 394).*

D. Brief outline:

1. Introduction: The Life Eternal Revealed in Christ, 1:1-4.
2. The Life of Fellowship with God, 1:5-2:29.
 - a. Tested by Righteousness, 1:5-2:6
 - b. Tested by Love, 2:7-17
 - c. Tested by Belief, 2:18-29
3. The Life of the Children of God, 3:1-4:6
 - a. Tested by Righteousness, 3:1-10
 - b. Tested by Love, 3:11-24

- c. Tested by Belief, 4:1-6
 4. The Source of Love, 4:7-21
 5. The Triumph of Righteousness, 5:1-5
 6. The Grounds of Belief, 5:6-12
 7. Conclusion: Christian Certainties, 5:13-21
- (The General Epistles, by Charles Erdman)**

E. Introduction, 1 John 1:1-4.

1. *From the beginning* - has been interpreted to refer to the beginning of Jesus' life on earth, but probably refers to His eternal existence. *In the beginning God created* (Genesis 1:1), and *in the beginning was the Word* (John 1:1, 2) imply that when time began, God and the Word already existed. God's plan for man was from eternity, Ephesians 1:3-6.
2. John's gradation of testimony: (a) we heard (would not necessitate personal contact), (b) we have seen (may be a casual look), (c) we have looked upon (indicates gazed upon Him), and (d) our hands have handled (we touched Him, Luke 24:39; John 20:24-29).
3. The Word was *manifested* (verse 2) - *corresponding with the word was made flesh*, John 1:14. *The two phrases, however, present different aspects of the same truth. The Word became flesh, contemplates simply the historic fact of incarnation. The life was manifested, sets forth the unfolding of that fact in the various operations of life. The one denotes the objective process of the incarnation as such, the other the result of that process as related to human capacity of receiving and understanding it* (**Vincent's Word Studies, Vol. II**, page 307).
4. The purpose of the manifestation, verses 3, 4.
 - a. The hearers may have fellowship with the revealers. Fellowship cannot exist without the message, 2:3-5, 24; 4:6.
 - b. They also have fellowship with the Father and the Son, 4:6-8.
5. Fellowship is used in two senses:

- a. Relationship - all who have obeyed Christ are in a relationship with the Father, the Son, and all who have obeyed, 1:4-7; Galatians 3:26, 27.
- b. Joint participation - Peter, James, and John were *partners (koinonos)* in the business of fishing, Luke 5:7-10. The Philippians shared with (*koinoneo*) Paul by participating in his support, Philippians 4:15. Others were in a spiritual relationship with Paul, but only the Philippians were jointly participating in this action. We are not to have joint participation with false teachers, 2 John 9-11; 3 John 5-8.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Who was the author of this book, and what is the evidence?

2. What was the approximate date of writing?

3. What was the basic premise of Gnosticism?

4. Explain the difference between Docetism and Cerinthianism.

Written to believers...

5. What three senses did John use to prove that Christ was in the flesh?

6. What was the purpose of declaring the message?

7. Define the word *fellowship*.

8. In what sense are we in fellowship with Christ and all believers?

9. In what sense was the church at Philippi in fellowship with Paul, and who could they not fellowship?

10. Contrast how the Bible uses the word fellowship and its common use today.