

Subject: Know Your Bible – Part 31

Scripture: 1 John 1:1-10

Time, Place, and Purpose of 1 John

1. The epistles of 1, 2, and 3 John were written by the apostle John, one of Christ's inner circle of disciples (with Peter and James). John wrote five books of the Bible (Gospel of John, three epistles of 1-3 John, and the Revelation). He is known as the apostle of love, but can also be described as the apostle of truth. He wrote with a fatherly concern for his "little children" (2:1, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 5:21) and "beloved" ones in the faith (3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11).

2. This first epistle of John contains similar words and phrases to the Gospel of John. Similar words include: Father, Son, Spirit, beginning, Word, believe, life, keep (obey), light, love, commandment, and abide. In addition these phrases are found in both books: to do truth; to walk in darkness; children of God; children of the devil; to be born of God; to pass from death to life; the Spirit of truth; the only begotten Son; no man has ever seen God; the Savior of the world; and the water and the blood.

3. John wrote this epistle as an eyewitness of Christ's ministry (1:1-3). To refute the false teaching of Gnosticism, John stated that he actually heard and saw Christ and he even looked upon and touched His body (1:1-3; 5:6-10; Jn. 19:34-35).

4. John wrote this epistle in a direct and clear-cut style. He refers to the contrasts of light and darkness, truth and error, saying and doing, love and hate, life and death, Christ and antichrist, God and Satan, righteousness and sin, children of God and children of the devil, love of the world and love of the Father.

5. John wrote this epistle from Ephesus around 90 A.D. At this time he was in his senior years and served as overseer of area churches in Asia Minor (Turkey). This epistle was probably written as a circular letter intended for several churches in the region. It was likely written after the Gospel of John and before persecution broke out during Domitian's reign in 95 A.D.

6. John wrote to counter false teaching about Christ. False teachers denied that Jesus was the Christ (2:22; 5:1) and that He was God in human flesh (4:2-3). This was a denial of Christ's two natures, human and divine, into one person. This heresy, known as Gnosticism, undermined the person of Christ, especially His incarnation, and therefore the value of His atonement.

7. John interwove a few basic themes through this epistle (love, obedience, faith, and assurance), and he had several clear reasons for writing:

- A. To present the reality of Christ's physical body (1:1-4)
- B. To show the relationship of sin and the believer (1:5—2:6)
- C. To stress the necessity of love for the brethren (2:7-11; 4:7-21)
- D. To call for separation from the world (2:12-17)
- E. To warn against false teachers (2:18-29)
- F. To encourage moral purity (3:1-12)

- G. To provide tests to determine true salvation (3:13-24)
- H. To distinguish between truth and error (4:1-6)
- I. To show the results of genuine faith in Christ (5:1-12)
- J. To give assurance of salvation (5:13-21)

8. John highlighted four purposes for writing this epistle, using these words: “These things write we unto you.”

- A. The joy of spiritual fellowship with Christ (1:4)
- B. The challenge to stop sinning (2:1)
- C. The warning against spiritual seduction (2:26)
- D. The certainty of eternal life (5:13)

9. The major theme of this epistle is Christian assurance. The phrase “we know” is found 13 times (2:3, 5, 29; 3:14, 16, 19, 24; 4:13, 16; 5:15, 18, 19, 20). While the Gospel of John was written to cause faith and bring eternal life (Jn. 20:31), the first epistle of John was written to give certainty of faith and eternal life (1 Jn. 5:13). John offers these tests or templates by which we can determine if our Christian faith is genuine:

- A. Do I experience spiritual fellowship with God and others (1:3-4)?
- B. Am I aware of and sensitive to sin (1:5-8)?
- C. Have I experienced forgiveness, cleansing, and restoration after confessing sin (1:9)?
- D. Am I keeping God’s commands (2:3, 5)?
- E. Am I doing God’s will (2:17)?
- F. Am I living a righteous life (2:29)?
- G. Am I looking forward to Christ’s coming (3:1-3)?
- H. Am I involved in habitual sin (3:9)?
- I. Do I have genuine love for Christian brothers and sisters (3:14)?
- J. Am I free from moral guilt (3:21)?
- K. Do I experience answered prayer (3:22)?
- L. Do I have the inner witness of the Holy Spirit (3:24)?
- M. Do I hear the word of God in the messages of men (4:5-6)?
- N. Do I truly love God (4:19)?
- O. Do I believe that Jesus is the Christ (5:1)?
- P. Do I believe God’s record of Christ (5:10-11)?

10. This epistle contains a warning about worldliness and the nature of temptation (2:15-17).

11. This epistle focuses on God as light, love, and life. Fellowship with God involves walking in light, not darkness. It involves walking in love that is practical and revealed in actions, not just words. It also involves eternal life that begins with new birth. Spiritual birth occurs through faith in Christ and eternal life is actually God’s life in the believer. The antichrists (false teachers) failed these tests of righteous living, love for the brethren, and faith in Jesus as the Christ, the incarnate God-man.

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