

INTRODUCTION TO THE EPISTLE OF 1 JOHN

This letter is probably the most intimate letter we find in the New Testament. It has been said, outside of the Song of Solomon, it is the most intimate in the Word of God.

In this letter, the Apostle, as moved by the Holy Spirit, deals with God's family, his children. Although it deals with the issue of sin, it does so as a Father would deal with the sons and daughters of his household and not with all the children in the neighborhood outside of his home. In this epistle, John deals specifically with the family of God.

As we begin reading this first of the three letters penned by John, we note there is neither a greeting nor a salutation in this letter from the Apostle. Someone has said the reason for this is that this letter is more of a sermon than a letter. This is plausible especially when we remember that John was at one time the Pastor of the Church of Ephesus at some point of time late in his life.

TIME OF WRITING

There are two different views of when this letter was written by John. One thought is that it was written before his experience on the isle of Patmos and the other is that he wrote it following that experience. I think either one is possible although I lean toward the latter.

The Apostle Paul founded the Church at Ephesus and spent a lot of time in that city investing in the hearts and lives of those early believers. By the time John came, that city and the Church were occupied by a second and in some manner a third generation of Christians and things, spiritually speaking, had changed. If you take note of the letter John scribed in Revelation 2 addressed to the Church at Ephesus as dictated by our Lord, the decline and condition of that Church that was once bounding and full, is all too obvious.

THE WRITER

The human author of 1 John is the same John that penned the Gospel that bears his name as well the two epistles that follow as well the Book of the Revelation. John was the brother of James and was, actually, a cousin of Jesus. From what I have been taught his mother, Salome, was actually the sister of Mary, the virgin mother of Jesus. He resided at Capernaum in Galilee and was a fishing business partner with a man known as Simon Peter. He had a brother by the name of James as well.

John is known as being the “disciple whom Jesus loved.” He belonged to an intimate trio of apostles’/disciples (Peter, James, and John) that had special privileges extended to Him by the Lord during His years of public ministry and was allowed to see the power of God displayed in a manner others was not.

We find, in Mark 3:17, John was called by our Lord one of the “sons of thunder.” To some degree, at least to me, that is hilarious! It must be that this “son of thunder” had mellowed quite a bit by the time he writes this letter (probably with the Gentile world in mind.)

PURPOSE FOR WRITING

John always wrote with a purpose in mind. For instance, in the Gospel that bears his name, in chapter 20 verses 30-31 we find that John wrote so people could know that Jesus was the Christ and that believing they could be saved and have eternal life. In his Gospel he laid out a pattern of presentation of our Lord that he followed in his first epistle. In both his Gospel and his first letter, he presents Jesus first as light, then love, and finally life.

In this first epistle, John sets forth at least five reasons for his writing and they all are remarkably significant and important for the believer to grasp and understand.

1. That we may have fellowship with other believers and with the father: 1:3
2. That our joy may be full: 1:4
3. That we sin not: 2:1
4. That we may know we have eternal life: 5:13
5. That we may believe on the Son of God: 5:13

The letter is intimate as I have already said. It differs in that the other letters penned by Paul or the other writers are written to the Church for which Jesus died. This letter is penned specifically with God’s family in mind. The is His children, His “bairns” or born ones.

INTERESTING THINGS IN THIS LETTER

There are a few key things in this letter worthy of our notice. For instance, John uses the word **know** or one of its cognate (or other verb forms) at least 39 times.

know is found 27 times

knoweth is found 6 times

known is found 5 times

knew is found 1 time

The word **born** is found 6 times and John has a desire to make certain great truths about Christ manifest or clearly known. John wanted his readers to have no doubt about who Jesus truly was and is! In fact, this epistle is an amazing defense of the

identity of Jesus as being, without any doubt, God incarnate. And that being God incarnate, he wanted his readers to know that Jesus was truly both divine and human. He was so Divine it was as if He was not human and He was so human that is was as if He was not Divine. He was very God of very God and He was very man as very man. He was truly the God/man.

In this letter we will find that John differentiates between “sin” (the nature of fallen man) in the child of God and the “sins” they commit as a child of God and how God the Father has taken care of those things. Remember, in this letter God is dealing with His family that is “in the world” but that is “not of the world.”

In this letter we will learn something about the words that end with the suffix “eth” and what that connotes...it’s pretty good stuff by the way!

We will also find that John is a pretty black and white thinker. In fact we will see that John doesn’t know what it means, as we find too often in our present generation, to straddle the fence. When it came to truth, revealed truth, John was all in. There are no shades of grey in his writings. This Apostle saw, as should any and all believers, things to be right or wrong, true or false, light or dark, life or death, love or hate, good or bad. For him, there was no middle ground.

Allow me to note one other interesting thing about this epistle. There is no quotation from the Old Testament appears in this epistle of John or actually, the other two that bears his name. Why that is I cannot say but as I said, it is interesting.

As we study through this wonderful part of the Word of God we will find how man, without the Spirit of God residing within, can miss the purpose of God and His Son whom He sent into this world to seek and save those which are lost and be guilty of forming opinions that truly unbiblical.

Everyone has an opinion about Jesus, who He was/is, and what He came to accomplish. The only way to discover the truth about Him is by reading and trusting what we find revealed about Him in the unadulterated Word of God.