

# The First Epistle of John

## (Week 1)

### I. Introduction

#### A. Author:

1. John, the Apostle
  - a. Although his name is not mentioned as the author, we see the following that supports John as being the writer of this book:
    - i. External evidence:
      - Early Church apologists such as Irenaeus, mention John, the Apostle, as the author
    - ii. Internal evidence:
      - The writing style in 1John is similar to the Gospel of John
        - For example, compare 1John 1:1,2 to John 1:1, 14
      - The mention that the author was an eye-witness to Christ (1John 1:1-4) harmonizes with the fact that John had been with Jesus from the beginning of His ministry (Matt. 4:18-22)

#### B. Why did John write this book?

##### 1. Reason #1: To expose the false teachers that were going around telling people that Jesus had not come in the flesh (1John 4:1-3)

- a. This group is believed to be “*the Gnostics*”
  - i. The word “*Gnostic*” comes from the Greek word “*gnosis*,” which means, “*knowledge*”
  - ii. They taught the following:
    - There is an ultimate, all-good deity known as the “Father/Mother” who lives in the ultimate heavens, called the “pleroma”, a place where there is no evil, no passions, and no physical matter
    - There was a female being that came from the Father/Mother named Sophia, who gave birth without her male partner, producing an evil lesser “god,” who was cast from the “pleroma,” and, in turn, created a corrupt, material world – This would be the OT God. This evil being is referred to as “*the demiurge*,” meaning, the worker of people. This god created the physical universe.
    - When the demiurge created Adam and Eve, he breathed on them the breath of life, not knowing that the breath contained a portion of the heavenly divine world of the Father/Mother.
    - The demiurge kept back the knowledge of this from Adam and Eve, causing them and all other humans to believe he was the only, true god.
    - The Father/Mother decided to send the true son, Jesus, to make humans aware of the truth of their origin and relationship to the true divine being!
    - When Jesus came, he did not come in the flesh, because that would acknowledge the work of demiurge

- There was a branch of Gnosticism called “The Docetists,” (a word that comes from the Greek word, “*dokeo*”, meaning, “*to seem*”)
  - They said that Jesus took on the illusion of flesh, not actual flesh.
- This “Jesus” came to give a “secret knowledge” to free the souls of those trapped by the demiurge’s creation, so that they can return to the pleroma.
  - Certain words had to be said in order make it to the plaroma, otherwise, you will be doomed at death.
- These Gnostics taught two forms of lifestyles
  - Some taught celibacy (abstinence from marriage) and asceticism (extreme self-denial) – since the flesh is evil, do not entertain any fleshly pleasures.
  - Some taught libertinism – since the flesh is evil, you should defile it (live an unrestrained life)
- Iraneaus, a second-century Christian apologist, wrote a work called “Against All Heresies” explaining the Gnostic belief system:
  - One of the things he wrote was that they denied baptism as being essential to salvation
  - It is interesting to know that teaching baptism as unnecessary for salvation is a Gnostic teaching, thus, it is an anti-Christ doctrine.
  - Iraneaus also indicated that the Gnostic held to the teaching of eternal security, that a Christian cannot lose his salvation.
  - Isn’t it ironic that what was considered a heresy in the early second century is considered orthodox today, and, what was considered to be orthodox back then is a heresy today?

### iii. Class Suggestion:

- You may want to do your own research of the Gnostics of the first and second centuries!

### iv. Why discuss the Gnostics?

- Knowing the teachings of the Gnostics will help us better understand some of the points in 1John.

## 2. Reason #2: To give the true disciple the assurance of salvation (1John 5:13)

- a. There is no “secret knowledge” that is needed to be saved
- b. What saves us is believing that Jesus came in the flesh, that He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and that true belief in Him brings about a new way of living
- c. This assurance, of course, is given to those who obey Jesus (1John 2:4-6).

## **C. A Brief Overview of 1John: Identifying those who are truly born again**

- 1. Introduction (1:1-4)**
  - a. Revealing the biblical Christ
- 2. The Test of Fellowship (1:5-2:27)**
  - a. Walking in the light
    - i. Taking sin seriously
    - ii. Walking in obedience
    - iii. Walking in love
    - iv. Being an encourager
    - v. Being separate from the world
    - vi. Living in truth
- 3. The Test of Son-ship (2:28-3:23)**
  - a. Practicing righteousness
- 4. The Test of Abiding Faith (3:23-5:12)**
  - a. Loving God
  - b. Testing the spirits
  - c. Confidence on the day of judgment
  - d. The assurance of victory over the world
- 5. Conclusion (5:13ff)**
  - a. Christian certainties
    - i. The assurance of salvation
  - b. Instructions on prayer
  - c. Keep away from any form of idolatry