

1 John

General Introduction

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 - Traditionally he has been identified as the Apostle John, son of Zebedee (c.f. Mat. 4:21, Mark 1:19, and Luke 5:10).
 - John, son of Zebedee, was a Jewish fisherman.

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 - It is addressed in the first instance to the seven churches in Asia in which Jesus himself, within the vision, addressed doctrinal, moral, and social problems and calls for repentance. (Rev. 1-3)
 - This is followed by strange visions of the overthrow of all evil and the final victory of the Lamb, including the redemption of all who belong to him and who will inherit eternal life with him.

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 - It is commonly believed that all of the Johannine books were written around the end of the First Century, and that the epistles were written after the gospel.
 - Some think that the Revelation was written last of all, but others give it an earlier date, before the fall of Jerusalem, in which case it could have been the first of these books written.

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 - Traditionally the “beloved disciple” has been identified as the Apostle John, son of Zebedee.
 - However this identification is never made within the gospel itself, not even where such an identification would seemingly have been likely --- compare 21.2 and 21:7.

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Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30-31)

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- But such differences imply only a different writing process, it seems to me, as suggested in John 21.

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- The strange apocalyptic visions of Revelation do tend to make us look ... forward ... to imagine the second coming of Christ and his final victory over all evil.
- But Revelation is also and perhaps even primarily concerned with the presence of Christ among his churches and how they are called to doctrinal and moral purity and patiently to endure present hardships.

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- But Jesus also speaks of going to prepare a place for his disciples and of returning ... to bring them to where he is (John 14:2)
- To me neither style nor content make the common authorship of the Revelation and the Gospel unlikely

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- My point is this: as we approach our study of the Johannine Epistles, I am already inclined to view the Revelation to John and the Gospel According to John as proceeding from the same source (John) and proceeding to the same destination (the churches in Asia) with the same ultimate purpose --- that as many as possible may believe and have life in Christ.

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 - the word “apostle”
 - the phrase “beloved disciple” (or even the word “disciple”)
- In 2 and 3 John the author identifies himself as the Elder.
- In 1 John the author is not given any name or title at all.

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 - This word is used elsewhere in the New Testament to describe leaders in the church and Peter uses the term to describe himself (1 Peter 5:1).
 - John may also have been very old when these documents were written and perhaps also the only remaining one of the original disciples --- hence the Elder.

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- Because of the similarities between them, in terms of both style and content, most would agree that they were both written by the same person --- i.e. the one who calls himself the Elder.
- 1 John is not a letter.
- Historically it has been classed among the so called Catholic Epistles, because it is not addressed to any specific person or group.

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 - Etc.

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- Some have called it an “exhortation,” meaning something written to encourage / discourage those who would read or hear it read --- encourage or discourage them from a certain way of thinking or behaving.

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- It is rather an emotional/spiritual appeal directed to a group of Christian believers by one who has substantial pastoral authority over them.

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- Maybe this gets us close to describing what 1 John is.

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 - Social problems

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- He maintains that I – You – We pattern throughout.

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- Commentators have tried to infer from this sermon which particular heresies the pastor is up against, and what particular moral and social problems.
- There is, however, no consensus on these matters, so I think it is difficult and potentially misleading to read 1 John with too much confidence in some preconceived notion of what issues the pastor/preacher is speaking to in his time and place.

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- I think Revelation may be helpful as well.