

1 John

“God Is...”

If a man asks, “What is God like?” the answer is “Look at Christ and see.”

Eternity is beyond our reach unless revealed. There are, in fact, many aspects that reveal God: nature, marriage relationships, father and child relationships, and love for one another, are all expressions of God. However, the only perfect revelation is in the person of Jesus. The character of Jesus is the character of God.

Therefore, the life, death, resurrection and teaching of Jesus, are the basis for all true religion. A religion is self-condemned that teaches relationship with God, other than through faith in Christ.

“No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” John 1:18

I. Setting

1 John is the 23rd book of the New Testament and 18th among the Epistles. They are the primary doctrinal portions of the New Testament.

It is not that the Gospels and Acts do not contain doctrine, but that the purpose of the Epistles is to explain to churches and individuals how to apply the teachings of Jesus.

Jesus' earthly life models ministry. In every area of ministry, we must apply the example of Christ. He was filled with the Spirit, sought to honor God, put a high value on people, and lowered Himself as the servant of all. Once He ascended to heaven, He poured His Spirit out on believers and the New Testament church was formed. Acts focuses on the birth, establishment, and furtherance of the work of God in the world, through the church.

The Epistles are written to the church, further explaining doctrine

A. 1 John is the 2nd New Testament book attributed apostle John.

1. Five New Testament books are attributed to the Apostle John including the Gospel of John, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John and Revelation.
2. This makes John one of the largest contributors of the New Testament.
 - a. Statistics can be made to say a lot of different things. Since the New Testament was not originally written with

chapters and verses, the best way to determine percentage of writing is through word count.

i. John –

- By book count wrote 18% of the New Testament
- By chapter count wrote 19% of the New Testament
- By verse count wrote 17% of the New Testament
- By word count wrote 20% of the New Testament

ii. Luke – wrote 27% of the New Testament

- By book count wrote 7% of the New Testament
- By chapter count wrote 20% of the New Testament
- By verse count wrote 27% of the New Testament
- By word count wrote 27% of the New Testament

iii. Paul – wrote 25% of the New Testament

- By book count wrote 48% of the New Testament
- By chapter count wrote 33% of the New Testament
- By verse count wrote 25% of the New Testament
- By word count wrote 23% of the New Testament

b. These statistics do not include the book of Hebrews although many attribute its authorship to Paul.

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II. Date

It is almost unanimously accepted that 1 John was written between 85-95 AD to believers dwelling in the city of Ephesus. At that time, John would have been the only surviving apostle. All others had met the sword of persecution.

This date provides ample time for the development of the false views of Christ that John counteracts.

It seems clear 1 John was written by an older man looking back on his experiences with the Lord and seeking to encourage the next generation.

We see in Scripture an emphasis on raising up the next generation to follow and serve Christ. However that generation must be careful not to dismiss those who have gone before them. This was the sin of Rehoboam that caused the dividing of the nations of Judah and Israel.

III. Author

- A. 1 John is one of only two New Testament books, which do not include the name of the author. The other is Hebrews.
- B. 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John, from earliest times, have been attributed to the Apostle John, who also wrote the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation.
- C. Tradition is unanimous among the early church fathers that the Apostle John was the author of 1 John.
 - 1. Clement of Rome (90AD) refers to 1 John.
 - 2. Polycarp of Smyrna (110AD) quotes 1 John.
 - 3. Justin Martyr (150AD) quotes 1 John.
- D. A brief synopsis of what we know about John.
 - 1. He was the son of Zebedee
 - 2. He and his brother James who in a lucrative fishing business with their father.
 - 3. He was a follower of John the Baptist.

4. He became a believer in Christ, later a disciple and finally an apostle.
5. He was one of three apostles who spent extra time with Jesus.
6. He was given responsibility to care for Mary after the death of Christ.
7. He was one of the pillars of the New Testament church.
8. He was one of the main characters of Acts.
9. He outlived the remaining apostles.
 - a. Tradition holds that after the death of Mary, John moved to Ephesus where he ministered to the churches there. Later he was arrested, exiled to Patmos (where he wrote Revelation) after his release he returned to Ephesus and died in his 90's.
 - b. Jerome wrote John lived 68 years after the crucifixion

IV. Recipients

- A. 1 John itself contains no hint of exactly to whom he was writing. Tradition holds he was writing to Christians in the city of Ephesus.
- B. What we know for sure about the original readers based on the content of the letter is:
 1. They were Christians.
 2. They appear to have been well-known to the author.
 3. They were facing a threat from false teaching, a threat which was both serious and appears to have arisen from within their Christian community (**1 John 2:18-19**).
 4. The false teaching was creating false living.
 - a. The Roman world in the 1st century was not unlike ours in many ways.
 - i. There was a sense of globalism – Roman peace, Roman roads and a common language and currency

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had united the world unlike any other time in history.

- ii. This created an eclectic spiritual environment where religion became a potpourri, combining many differing systems of thought.
- iii. Essentially people were defining Christ and Christianity through the eyes of culture rather than culture through the eyes of Scripture.
 - From this, a belief system commonly known as Gnosticism, was formed. While this term is quite broad and covers a lot of different thought, the basic principles were:
 - Spirit is good
 - Matter is evil
 - Their teaching included:
 - Christ could not be God because spirit and matter must be separate. Some suggested that Christ came upon Jesus at His baptism and left prior to His death.
 - Two other contradictory teaching also birthed out of Gnosticism:
 - ***Aestheticism** – since matter is bad we must stay away from all things earthly. This is much of the same thinking as those who developed monasticism.

Even today it is common for people to believe that God is angry at them and they must please God by suffering. While it is true God will use suffering as a tool in our life, suffering for the sake of suffering is not a means to spiritual growth. You do not need to punish yourself, because Christ was punished for you.

***Licentiousness** – others taught, since matter and spirit are separate what you do in the flesh does not affect who you are in the spirit.

- The spirit of this teaching permeates the person who lives however they want during the week, then comes to church and greets, sings, serves etc.
- Don't stop coming, but do stop sinning
- John hit this head on when he wrote:

1 John 2:15-17 “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life-is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”

5. Some Christians were interested in Gnosticism because they were attracted by the promise of exciting mystical experiences.
 - a. In John 5 we are told the story of the paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda. He thought he needed a miracle for his life to change. When Jesus arrived, he ignored the miracle pool and simply called the man to obey His word. This is a vital lesson for all of us. If we want our lives to change, we do not need to be looking for a mystical experience instead we need to put His word into our lives and into practice, daily.
 - b. There are mystical experiences that are necessary. For instance:
 - i. **The baptism of the Holy Spirit**-This is a supernatural work that happens to every Christian who asks for it.

Every Christian needs to be baptized with the Spirit, and to be daily filled with the Spirit, in order to live out the Word.

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- ii. **Communion**-While we reject the idea that the bread and cup become the body and blood of Christ, we do understand there is a special mystic aspect to communion when we reflect upon the cross.

This same experience can be found whenever we take the time to approach the throne of grace whether privately in devotions or publicly in worship.

- c. The problem is, too many run from one experience to the next, thinking the next worship concert or revival meeting will change their life. To quote a contemporary commercial, “It doesn’t work that way, none of this works that way”
- d. The underlining principles of the gnostic heresy are alive today:
 - i. The same heresy is present today when people try to combine Christian truth with other systems of thought.
 - ii. The same heresy is present today when we try to conform Christianity to fit culture.
 - iii. The same heresy is present today when people emphasize “correct” doctrine to the exclusion of personal relationship and lifestyle faith.
- e. John clearly had no time for these false teachers.
 - i. He denounced their beliefs and opposed their practices in every section of his letter.
 - ii. Sometimes we can be overly concerned with the feelings of those who are espousing false teaching and not concerned enough with the truth itself. Sound biblical teaching will transform lives and lead to proper living. It is the duty of the church to teach the truth regardless of how culture or individuals may react.

V. Message

When writing his account of the Gospel of Christ, John explained his reason for writing:

John 20:30-31

“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

- A. John’s goal was to win people to Christ so they could have eternal life.
- B. In a similar manner, John gives the reasons for writing this first Epistle.
 - 1. It is important to keep in mind that John is writing to believers. It is a continuation of the message he gave in his Gospel account.
 - a. 1:4 – “These things I write that your joy may be full.”
 - b. 2:1 – “These things I write so that you may not sin.”
 - c. 2:12-14 – Is a detailed description of those to whom he was writing and is designed to reveal the spiritual growth John is hoping to see develop in each of them.
 - d. 2:21 – I have written because you know the truth – serves as a reminder of true doctrine.
 - e. 2:26 I have written concerning those who try to deceive you.
 - f. 5:13 I have written that you might know you have eternal live and that you may continue to believe.
 - i. This is perhaps the key reason for this book.
 - ii. It was designed in heaven to teach us the things that well give us assurance of salvation.
 - 2. People trust in very untrustworthy things.
 - a. Baptism.

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- b. Church attendance.
 - c. Warm feelings.
 - d. Coming forward after church
3. John gives 5 chapters on how to live so that we can be certain that we have a relationship with God and that we have eternal life. Perhaps the clearest example of this is found in:
- 1 John 2:3** “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.”
- a. The real evidence that you have eternal life is if you are living to please God by doing what He says.
 - Step One-following Jesus is asking, “What do you want me to do?”
 - Step two-doing it
- C. The main message of 1 John may be stated simply as ‘God is... ‘
1. John uses the phrase to reveal critical aspects regarding the nature of God.
 - God is light
 - God is love
 - God is life (not directly stated this way, but referred to as Life and eternal life)
 2. We also read regarding Christ that:
 - Jesus is the Christ
 - He is righteous
 - Jesus is the Son of God
 - Jesus is the Savior
- D. Clearly, the purpose of this letter is to reveal what God is really like. This was and remains particularly important in a sea of spiritual confusion.

1. God Is Light.

John begins this letter by explaining that He has been sent by Christ with a message to declare.

- a. Declare – is from the root for angel and speaks of a message that has come from heaven.
 - b. This message is stated in **1 John 1:5** “God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all”
 - i. Regardless of the translation you choose to read from the message is the same; God is light and there is no darkness in Him.
 - Greek reads: “The God light is and dark in Him not there is but not one”
 - c. Light and darkness are used metaphorically to speak of holiness and sin. God is a holy God and has no part with sin. This is not due to a weakness in God that He somehow cowers at the sight of sin, but rather speaks to the intensity of His holiness that sin cannot remain in His presence.
 - d. There are many applications that can be drawn from this truth. Not the least of which is, God is perfect. We often accuse God of wrongdoing when things do not go our way. It would do us well, rather than trying to find fault with a holy God, to instead take inventory to be sure we are living in a manner well pleasing to Him.
2. The purpose of the message is to bring us into fellowship with God.

1 John 1:3

“That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ”

- a. Fellowship is a Christian word that speaks of companionship and relationship; it comes from a Greek word that means to share in common.

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- i. God wants to have relationship with each of us so HE sent John with a message so we could know what is required.
 - ii. 1 John answers the question regarding how a Holy God can have a relationship with sinful people.
- b. This message is a continuation of his Gospel where he declared that if we believe Jesus is the Son of God and savior we are saved.
 - c. Now he will add the things that we must do to maintain a healthy relationship with God.
 - d. The idea that works must follow salvation does not suggest we are saved by works, but show that true salvation is seen in a transformed life.
3. Maintaining Fellowship with God –
- a. 1 John 1:7 “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”
 - i. Walk is an idiom used to express the way we live our lives. The Greek word *peripateo* means to walk about and might be like our word meander or loiter.
 - ii. A person who knows what they are doing wrong and continues to do it is walking in darkness. A person who chooses to get things out of their lives, because they are not acceptable to God, is walking in the light.
 - Notice, to walk in the light does not mean to be perfect, John refers to us sinning while walking in the light and that Christ’s blood offers a continual flow of forgiveness
 - b. **1 John 1:9** “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

- i. The word, confess, is a very important theological word. It comes from a compound Greek word *Homo* – the same, *Legeo* – to speak.

It means to say the same thing or to agree. To confess is to agree with God.

- ii. Confess is used in a number of important contexts:

- **Romans 10:9**

“. . . if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

It is when we agree with God that we are sinners and that He is the savior that we enter a relationship with the Lord.

- **1 John 1:9**

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

It is when we agree with God, that what we have done is wrong, it can be forgiven and we can be restored into a right relationship with God. Instead of making excuses for sin or blaming others, we must take responsibility for it. That is the first step to having it removed from our lives

- **James 5:16**

“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. “

There are some sins we have a more difficult time letting go of; these must be targeted, in order to have victory over. We target them through dependence upon the Spirit of God, and enlisting other believers to aid us in our campaign to live a victorious Christian life.

- **Hebrews 10:23**

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.”

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Finally, we must be determined to remain faithful to the commitment we made to Christ. Holding fast is to not let go, we are in this for the long haul.