

# Outline of 1 John

This outline of 1 John is intended to help you study God's Word. May you discover Him as you read.

Although the author never gives his name, up until the fourth century no one ever questioned that John the Apostle was the author. It was quoted by Polycarp in the early part of the second century, by Justin and Irenaeus in the middle part of the second century, and by Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen in the later part of the second century. Apparently this epistle, together with second and third John, was written in the later part of the first century while John was in Ephesus. They may have been written to the churches in Asia Minor, over which John apparently took oversight.

The book is essentially a lesson on distinguishing true Christians from those who were not Christians. There are at least 14 tests. They can be used as a self-evaluation test. They also can be used to evaluate others. Here are the tests:

1. **1:8** — we confess sin as a principle within
2. **1:10** — we confess to having sinned as a practice
3. **2:3,4** — we keep His commands; 5,6 — His word
4. **2:9-11** — we love our brothers; 3:11-18; 4:7-12, 20
5. **2:15** — we do not love the “world”
6. **2:19** — we remain in fellowship
7. **2:22,23** — we confess who Jesus is; 4:15
8. **2:24** — we remain in the teaching
9. **2:29-3:10** — we practice righteousness
10. **3:24** — we have the witness of the Spirit
11. **4:5,6** — we listen to the teachings of the apostles
12. **5:1** — we believe that Jesus is the Christ; 5:13; see 3:23
13. **5:11,12** — we have the Son
14. **5:18** — we keep ourselves

The book majors on Jesus Christ. There are 73 direct references to Jesus in 105 verses. In addition, there are at least 14 references to the Father, and 10 to the Holy Spirit. Besides these, there are 87 references to God. All total, there are at least 184 references to God in the 105 verses. No book has such a high concentration of references to God.

Linked to this high usage is the word “love.” This word as a noun and verb appears 46 times in 1 John out of 257 times in the New Testament, or around one in every six appearances. Only the Gospel of John has more uses. Interesting, while the Gospel of John uses the verb form more, no book uses the noun form more than this short book.

Another important concept, as it was in the gospel of John, is the concept “to know”, found 35 times. We are to know in our intellect. As 1 John 5:20 tells us, He has given us a mind that we might know the truth. Almost opposite of this concept is the use of the phrase “little children” which is found nine times in the New Testament. Seven of those times are in this book.

The word “abide” — or, as I translate it, “exist” — occurs 23 times. This word appears 41 times in John and in the rest

of the New Testament only 55 times. Finally, one out of every five uses of the term “fellowship” appears in this book.

I find it noteworthy, while 5:7,8 in some versions state a strong affirmation of the Trinity, the textual support of this alternative reading is scarce. The NIV, in the copy I have, states that this language is not found in any Greek manuscript before the 16th century. The NIV does not mention that the language is found in Latin manuscripts dating back to the sixth-seventh century. Nevertheless, given that we have manuscripts and portions of manuscripts of this passage dating back to the second and third century, the paucity of support for the reading is a problem for using this text to support the Trinity. The book as a whole, however, is strongly Trinitarian, mentioning each member of the Trinity multiple times, as noted above. And though some would argue otherwise, the most natural reading of 1 John 5:20 is a strong affirmation of the deity of Christ.

**Date:** 85 A.D.?

## **I. Introduction 1:1-4**

- A. We are witnesses of Christ 1:1,2
- B. Fellowship for joy 1:3,4

## **II. The Fellowship of Light 1:5-2:11**

- A. The nature of God 1:5
- B. Fellowship with Him requires fellowship with His nature 1:6,7
- C. Fellowship with Him requires truth about sin 1:8-10
- D. Don't sin 2:1,2
- E. Fellowship with Him requires us to keep His word 2:3-6
- F. Fellowship with Him requires love 2:7-11

## **III. Interlude of Confidence 2:12-14**

## **IV. Avoid the World's Evils 2:15-17**

## **V. The Fellowship of Truth 2:18-27**

- A. Departure from fellowship is error 2:18,19
- B. You know truth 2:20,21
- C. Truth is based on the person of Jesus 2:22,23
- D. Truth is based upon the written word 2:24-26
- E. Truth is based upon the Spirit of God 2:27

## **VI. The Fellowship of Righteousness 2:28-3:9**

- A. The hope of righteousness 2:28-3:3
- B. The basis of righteousness 3:4-9

## **VII. The Fellowship of Love 3:10-24**

- A. Love is the test of life 3:10-15
- B. Love means action 3:16-18
- C. Love brings assurance 3:19-24

## **VIII. The Test of Truth and Error 4:1-6**

- A. Based upon confession about Jesus 4:1-3
- B. Based upon obedience to the true teaching 4:4-6

## **IX. The Fellowship of Love II 4:7-5:5**

- A. Love is linked to God 4:7-11
- B. Love is linked to intimacy with God 4:12-18
- C. Love gives confidence 4:17-19
- D. Love toward God is linked to love to one another 4:20-5:3
- E. Our victory 5:4,5

## **X. The Witness of God 5:6-13**

- A. The Spirit, the Water, and the Blood 5:6-9
- B. The subject of the witness 5:10-13

## **XI. Confidence in Prayer 5:14-17**

- A. With respect to our petitions 5:14,15
- B. With respect to others' sins 5:16,17

## **XII. Things we know 5:18-21**

- A. We do not continually sin 5:18
- B. We are of God 5:19
- C. The whole world lies in the wicked one 5:19
- D. Jesus has come 5:20
- E. He has given us a mind to know 5:20
- F. We are in the Truth 5:20
- G. Keep away from idols. 5:21

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**Key Idea:** The assurance of salvation.

**Key Passage:** 5:13

**Key Lesson:** Test truth, follow love.