

**Commentary on 1 John Chapters 1 and 2 by Chuck Smith 2.16.25**

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**January 2025 memory verse (NKJV)**

Luke 24:45 And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

**February 2025 memory verse**

Luke 24:46 (NKJV) Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day,

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With John MacArthur :: Bible Introductions - 1 John**

**Chapter 2**

That which [one who] was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon [That in the Greek is gazed, transfixed and steadfastly at, I mean, really studied, analyzed], and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) ([1Jo 1:1-2](#))

So, in the beginning God, in the beginning was the Word, that which was from the beginning was manifested, we saw, we stared, we heard, we touched.

John came, as did the other disciples, to the awareness of who Jesus actually was. They realized that when they heard Jesus talking they were listening to God talk. When they were watching Jesus, they were actually seeing God. And when they touched Him, they were actually touching God. Imagine what that must have done to them to realize that when I put my hand on His shoulder I was actually touching God. When He put His hand on my shoulder or patted me on the back, God was touching me. We handled, we touched, we heard, we saw the one that was from the beginning.

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ ([1Jo 1:3](#)).

Now, within the church we should have a fellowship of koinonia with each other. In the early church they had this sharing of resources, anyone had a need they could come to the church; there was a sharing of the resources of the people.

And these things [John said,] write we unto you, that your joy may be full ([1Jo 1:4](#)).

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Relating this fullness of joy to the fellowship with God. And, of course, when you come into a partnership with God, a friendship, a communion, or fellowship with Him, what a joy it brings into our lives, fullness of joy.

This then is the message [John is saying,] which we have heard of [from] him, [that which we have heard] and declare unto you ([1Jo 1:5](#)),

Now, this is basically the message that he told,

That God is light, [not God is a light, but God is light, this is the essence of His nature] and in Him is no darkness at all. [Therefore] if we say that we [are one with God] have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth [we're not telling the truth] ([1Jo 1:5-6](#)):

You cannot have fellowship with God if you are walking in sin, walking in darkness.

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, [then] we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin ([1Jo 1:7](#)).

And in the Greek it's present perfect tense, which should be translated, "Is continually cleansing us of all sin," and that to me is a glorious place to be walking. In the light as He is in the light, believing, trusting in Jesus, and as I do, the blood of Jesus Christ is continually cleansing me of all sin.

Now, If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth isn't in us ([1Jo 1:8](#)).

But in contrast, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness ([1Jo 1:9](#)).

So, the way of cleansing doesn't come by denial, the way of forgiveness isn't by way of denial or by trying to hide it. There is a proverb that says, "Whoso seeks to cover his sin shall not prosper, but whoso confesses his sin shall be forgiven." So if you try to hide it, cover it, and deny it, you're only deceiving yourself. But if you will confess your sin unto Him, that's all, just confess it, He's faithful and He is just and He will forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Now, I love that word *all* in this particular place. It means that it doesn't matter what the past may be, how black or dark or miserable or mean, it cleanses me from all unrighteousness. The blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanses me from all sin.

If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us ([1Jo 1:10](#)).

### Chapter 2

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not ([1Jo 2:1](#)).

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Now, he is talking about the purpose of writing is to bring you into fellowship with God, but the thing that breaks fellowship with God is sin. In [Isaiah 59](#), "God's hand is not short that he cannot save, neither is his ear heavy that he cannot hear. But your sins have separated you from God" ([Isaiah 59:1-2](#)). Always the effect of sin. God said to Adam, "In the day that thou sinnest thou shalt surely die." And Adam sinned, and God came into the garden, and He said, "Adam, where art thou?" Fellowship with God had been broken as the result of sin, always is. So, in order that you might have fellowship with God, it is necessary that we sin not. And John is writing that you might have power over sin. And the power over sin, of course, comes through the abiding of the Holy Spirit within our lives. "These things have I written unto you, my little children," or, "These things write I unto you that you sin not."

And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous ([1Jo 2:1](#)):

The Gospel, Christianity starts with a divine or heavenly base, "For God so loved the world." He reached down. The infinite God reached down to touch finite man. No problem there. Being infinite He can do anything. And so, starting then with a divine base, God reaching down to man, there is success, there can be a contact made. And He reached down to man through Jesus Christ. That which was from the beginning, which we have seen, which we have looked upon, which we have heard, which we have touched was manifested, we beheld Him, we heard Him, we saw Him, we declare. God became man.

And he is the propitiation for our sins ([1Jo 2:2](#)):

Or the one who has paid the price for the freedom from sin, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world.

You see, in the death of Christ, He received the pardon for every sin of every man in all of history. There is not a sin that was not atoned for in His death. Jesus said, "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven man, except the blasphemy of Holy Spirit, which will not be forgiven, neither in this world nor the world to come" ([Matthew 12:31-32](#)). Which is the rejection of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit's witness that Jesus Christ is the only answer to your sins. You see, Jesus said, "I didn't come into the world to condemn the world, but the world through Me might be saved, and he who believeth is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already, seeing he has not believed on the only begotten Son of God. This is the condemnation, light came into the world, but they would not come to the light" ([John 3:17-19](#)).

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments ([1Jo 2:3](#)).

In the fourteenth chapter of the gospel of John, Jesus said, "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me, and he who loves Me shall

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be loved of My Father and We will come and manifest Ourselves to him" ([John 14:21](#)). He that hath My commandments and keepeth them. It isn't enough just to have the commandments; it is keeping the commandments. Paul said, "Hey, just because you have the law, don't think that you're justified. It isn't the hearers of the law that are justified, but the doers of law that are justified" ([Romans 2:13](#)).

Now he that saith, I know Him, and keeps not His commandments, is a liar, the truth is not in him ([1Jo 2:4](#)).

Now, if I say I believe in Jesus Christ as my Lord and my Savior, then that very belief is going to bring about a certain style and manner of living. If I really believe it. Now, I can say I believe something that I don't really believe. And I may fool people into thinking that I believe something that I don't really believe, but I don't fool God. For true belief in Jesus Christ is going to be manifested my behavior. I cannot walk in darkness and possess the light.

But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him ([1Jo 2:5](#)).

And so, basically, the whole commandment comes down to this: love God and love each other. Love. "He that loves," Paul said, "has fulfilled the law" ([Romans 13:8](#)). And when he taught love, he said, "Against such there is no law" ([Gal. 5:23](#)). It all comes down to loving, loving God first, supremely, and loving one another. That's where it's at, you do that and you done 'em all; you've kept them all. And that's basically what he, when he talks about the commandment, he is talking about loving God and loving each other, and you can't do one without the other. They go together. He that loveth God ought to also love his brother. He that saith that he loves God and hates his brother is a liar. How can you love God whom you've not seen and hate your brother whom you have seen who was made in the image of God? It's all in love.

He that saith that he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked ([1Jo 2:6](#)).

He is our example. Look at His life; study His life. Jesus said, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me" ([Matt. 11:28-30](#)). Learn about Him, study Him, because if I abide in Him then ought to be walking as He walked. Giving my life in concern and care for others. How many times have we read in the New Testament, "And Jesus, looking upon them, had compassion upon them." Whenever He saw a person in need, He was always moved with compassion. He was touched in His heart to reach out and to help those that were in need.

Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. He that saith

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he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither [where] he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes ([1Jo 2:7-11](#)).

Love is like a light, no occasion of stumbling for that man who walks in love. Love lights the path. This basically is the whole teaching of Christ and the gospel all summed up in this concept of love, and loving God, and loving each other.

Now John said, I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. I write unto you, fathers, because you have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write unto, little children, because you have known the Father ([1Jo 2:12-13](#)).

I believe that John is here referring to spiritual development.

There are people who have just received the Lord and they are babes in Christ. "I write unto little children," little children in your experience, and what he has to say to them is that your sins are forgiven. And hey, that's great, that's where you start. And there are a lot of people who are new in the Lord, and about the only thing they know is that their sins are forgiven. You know, they are not really versed in Christian doctrine. They really don't know too much yet about the nature of God and the nature of man and the nature of angels. They don't know much about being a Christian yet, but at least they know the important thing, that their sins are forgiven. And how important it is that we know that fact, that our sins are forgiven. So that's sort of your infancy state. In your first realization as a child of God is the fact that my sins are forgiven.

Now as we grow and mature, then He addresses the state of the young man, "You're strong." "I write unto you, fathers, because you know Him who was from the beginning." Now again, here is the declaration of the fact that Christ has always existed. This is something that the Bible does teach. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. And the same was in the beginning with God" ([John 1:1-2](#)). Now, there are those who would try to reduce Christ to a created being and put Him in an angel category. The Jehovah Witnesses try to equate Him to Michael, one of the archangels, a created being of God. They deny the eternal existence of Jesus. But you know Him who was from the beginning. When Micah announced His birthplace in prophecy, he said to Bethlehem, "Out of thee shall come He who is to rule my people Israel, whose going forth has been from old, from everlasting" ([Micah 5:2](#)).

And then, "I write unto you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one." So those who are really in the battle against the enemy and have experienced God's victory. God doesn't put the babes, in the front lines. He sort of holds them back and lets them learn and lets them develop, and we grow through the testing's and the trials that we have. But as we begin to mature, many times, God then allows increased trials to the strengthening of our faith and our trust in Him. And that is why the Scripture exhorts us, "Count it all joy when you fall into these diverse testing's" ([James 1:2](#)). It's part of our

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growth, part of the development of our relationship with God. It's the thing that causes our roots to go deeper in Him and in the Word.

We've heard, and it's not a scripture, but it probably should be, "Man's extremities are God's opportunities." I thought that was a scripture for a long time, because I heard it so much. But there's a lot of truth to that. God works, so often, when we come to the end of our resources, our genius, our devices. And when we give up is often when God then does His work, and oftentimes He does not do it until we get to that point. For the reason that if He would act prematurely, we would be apt to attribute it to our device that we had worked out. And then we would write success formula books. For we know how to do it now. We've got it all set out in a formula and we can teach people how to work the right combination and open the doors of everything, you know. And so God lets us get to that place of desperation, hopelessness in ourselves, that when He works, all we can say is, "I can't believe what God did today."

"I write unto young men because you've overcome the wicked one."

Then he goes back and he goes through the same progression again and saying the same thing to the little children, only declaring unto them this time, "I write unto little children because you have known the Father." And then

I write unto you, fathers, because you have known him that was from the beginning ([1Jo 2:14](#)).

Just declares the same thing to them, but then with the young men he changes.

I have written unto you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one ([1Jo 2:14](#)).

So, first of all, he just says, "You've overcome the wicked one." Now he gives you the secret of their strength and how it is that they overcame the wicked one. "I write unto you, young men, because you are strong, because God's Word abides in you." And that is always our strength against the enemy. **None of us are immune from the attacks of the enemy. I don't care how far you progress in your spiritual experience and your relationship with God. You will, as long as you are in this body, not be immune from Satan's attacks. You never grow beyond temptation, in fact, many times the more you grow, the greater is the temptation that the enemy lays before you. You never grow beyond the point of being tempted. You never grow beyond the point of struggling with the enemy, being in conflict with Satan. But, "I write unto you, young men, because you are strong, because the Word of God abides in you." And that's the secret of my strength in overcoming the enemy is the Word of God abiding in my heart. "Thy Word," David said, "have I hid in my heart, O Lord, that I might not sin against you" ([Psalm 119:11](#)). The power of the Word in my heart against temptation, against sinning against God.** **Please read this again and let it sink in: Pastor John**

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When Satan came to Jesus with the temptations, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, Jesus answered those temptations with the Word. "It is written," Jesus said. And the secret of His strength in overcoming the temptations of Satan was the Word of God abiding in you.

Now, there are many times when a person gets tripped up by the enemy and it is the time when there is a dearth of God's Word within your heart. Satan likes to see us so busy in so many things that we don't have time for the Word. And our soul becomes sort of parched for the Word of God. And I'll tell you, at that point you are very vulnerable to the attacks of the enemy. Oh, how we need to be strong in the Word, that we might be able to overcome the wicked one, because God's Word abides in us.

Now John enjoins us,

Love not the world, [that is, the materialistic world around you,] neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him ([1Jo 2:15](#)).

Now, this is a pretty strong statement, and we better give it careful attention. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hold to one and despise the other, or he will love the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" ([Matthew 6:24](#)). You cannot, not you should not, you cannot. And mammon, of course, is that worldly materialistic things, the monetary system of the world. You can't serve them both.

Now John defines for us what he is meaning by the world.

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 ([1Jo 2:16](#)).

When Satan comes to tempt, you can be sure that the temptation will fall in one of three categories. Either in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or in the pride of life. Those are the three areas where Satan will attack.

Basically, when he came to Jesus, "Command the stones to be turned to bread," the lust of the flesh. The promise of all the kingdoms of the world, the pride of life. And of course, "Cast yourself down, he will give His angels..." again, the pride of life, do something spectacular, draw attention to yourself. These are the areas where Satan will attack you. These are the areas of the world.

Now, he gives to us then the rationale. The world passes away, and the lust thereof ([1Jo 2:17](#)):

Hey, if your life is bound up in worldly things, the lust and the desires and the love for the world, if that's where your life is, know that it's gonna pass away. "The world passes away and the lust thereof." You're investing in things that are gonna perish.

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but he that doeth the will of God abides for ever ([1Jo 2:17](#)).

That's great rationale. You see, our problem is that we so often lose sight of eternity. As we are in this world we get so involved in the worldly things, that our vision becomes clouded and we lose the sense and the consciousness of the eternal. And when you lose the consciousness of the eternal, then Satan can just really do a trip on your mind.

Now there's where, of course, our problems lie as God deals with our lives. Because as God deals with our lives, He always has the eternal in view. And when I have only the temporal in view, many times my view differs from God's. And I say, "God, what are You doing? God, how can You say You love me? God, if You love me, why is this happening to me?" It's because I have my eyes on the temporal, material advantage and God is looking at the eternal plan and the eternal advantage. It's important that we step back and we get the long view and realize that the world is gonna pass away and the lust thereof. He who does the will of God abides forever.

Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that the antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time ([1Jo 2:18](#)).

Jesus said, "In the last times there will be many false christs that will arise." Many men declaring themselves to be the Savior. Now, that happened in John's day, and John took that as the sign that they were in the last times. But you know, I am convinced that it is God's desire that we all, in every generation, believe that ours is the final generation. I think that that is something that God wants to keep in the consciousness of the church. That this is it, that the Lord is coming soon. Because I really believe that this is one of the most purifying influences within the church and one the things that helps us to keep perspective almost more than anything else, is the realization that the Lord is coming soon. What difference does it make that the Lord is coming? Hey, He's coming soon. I'm very convinced that the Lord is coming within the next twenty years for me. I'll be extremely shocked if He doesn't come within twenty years for me. And hey, that's getting pretty soon, almost shockingly soon. The Lord is coming soon, sooner than what we realize or think.

So there were antichrists in those days. We are looking for the antichrist to soon come, but here it is plural, there were many antichrists.

Now John says concerning a lot of these who had turned against Christ that,

They went out from us, [some of them had even become a part of the fellowship of the church for a time,] but they were not of us; for had they been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us ([1Jo 2:19](#)).

You know, it is a healthy body that is able to purge the poisons from its system. And when a body gets so weak that it can no longer purge the poisons, it will soon die. So it



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is a healthy body that is able to purge itself of poison. "They went out from us, but they weren't of us, for had they been of us, they no doubt would have remained with us, but they went out from us, that it might be made manifest that they were not of us."

But you have an unction [anointing] from the Holy One, and you know all things ([1Jo 2:20](#)).

You have this anointing of the Holy Spirit and you know all things. There is a intuitive knowledge of the Spirit that comes to us. And it's an interesting thing, and almost a difficult thing when you have the intuitive knowledge of the Spirit and you're dealing with a person that doesn't. You are absolutely amazed that they can't see it, because it's so clear.

I have not written unto because you know not the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth ([1Jo 2:21](#)).

And again, both of these words are *oetis* in Greek, knowledge by intuition. We know the truth. How do we know the truth? Because the Spirit of God has planted the truth in our hearts. We know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. We know that He died for our sins. Try to explain that to someone who hasn't had the work of the Spirit within their heart. And all of the doubts and all of the misgivings and everything. So you know, thank God you know. You know by the work of the Spirit within your heart, thank God the Spirit worked in your heart, or you wouldn't know. You'd be just like the others, lost in the darkness of your own ignorance. "I have not written unto you because you don't know the truth, but because you do know it, and that no lie is of the truth."

Who is a liar but he that denies that Jesus is the Messiah? ([1Jo 2:22](#))

As I say, you know that, you know that Jesus is the Messiah. How do know that? Because the Spirit of God has borne witness to your heart of this truth. A lot of people don't know this; they believe a lie. Those that deny that Jesus is the Messiah,

He is an antichrist, that denies the Father and the Son ([1Jo 2:22](#)).

"Well, I believe in God, but I don't know why Jesus is necessary. You know, I believe that Jesus was a good man, a prophet and all, but... " No, you can't pass Him off as good man. There's too many inconsistencies there. You see, if He wasn't the Son of God, then He was a liar, and how can you say that a liar is a good man? He was a fraud, He was a deceiver, how can you say that He was a good man? You see, He was either God manifested in the flesh, or He was a deceiver and a liar and a fraud, and thus, He wasn't a good man. He was one of the worst charlatans who ever came down the road. If you deny the Father and the Son.

Whosoever denieth the Son, the same has not the Father ([1Jo 2:23](#)):

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"Well, I believe in God, but I don't believe in Jesus." No, you don't really believe in the Father. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life and no man comes to the Father but by Me" ([John 14:6](#)). Now a lot of people claim to believe in God, and I don't doubt their claim, I just don't know what god they believe in. You see, there are a lot of gods.

So there is a bond between the Father and the Son that you cannot have one without the other. To deny one is to deny the other; to receive one is to receive the other. They go together as a package and you can't separate them.

he that acknowledges the Son has the Father also ([1Jo 2:23](#)).

Let that therefore abide in you, which you have heard from the beginning. For if that which you have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father ([1Jo 2:24](#)).

So in the beginning of their faith they were taught that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. He came to be the Savior of the world. Now hold fast to that, let it abide in you, for you will continue both in the Son and in the Father.

And this is the promise that he has promised to us, even eternal life ([1Jo 2:25](#)).

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" ([John 3:16](#)). And Jesus said there in [John 3:36](#), "He that hath the Son of God hath everlasting life, and he that does not have the Son of God shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." "I am the resurrection, and the life. He that believeth on Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And if you live and believe in Me you'll never die" ([John 11:25-26](#)). So the promise that He has promised us is eternal life with Him in God's kingdom, that's the hope that I have now. I plan to spend my eternity with Jesus Christ, to forever be with the Lord. Wherever He is, there's where I'm gonna be.

These things I have written to you concerning them that would seduce you. But the anointing [that unction, same word] that you have received of him abides in you: and you need not that any man should teach you: but as the same anointing teaches you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it has taught you, ye shall abide in him ([1Jo 2:26-27](#)).

Now, in the declaration that, "you have need that no man should teach you, but the Holy Spirit would teach you," and Jesus promised that. He said, "But the comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, in which the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have commanded you" ([John 14:26](#)). And for you to really learn anything takes the work of the Holy Spirit within your heart. Now, the interesting thing is, though I may be teaching you God's Word and God's truth, and some of you are seeing it and understanding it, and it is being clarified, and you are saying, "Wow! Yea, man."

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And now, little children, what does the Spirit of God teach you? Abide in Him. That's the message--abide in Christ.

And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming ([1Jo 2:28](#)).

Now if you abide in Christ, then you will be walking as He walked. I wonder just what I will be doing when the Lord, suddenly, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye calls me home. Raptures His church. What will I be doing?

For if you know that he is righteous ([1Jo 2:29](#)),

Do you know that He is righteous? How do you know that He is righteous? We know that He is righteous by the Spirit, intuitively.

then ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him ([1Jo 2:29](#)).

How do I know that? Because I can see them, and by experience, I know those that do righteousness are born of Him. So you have the oetis and the ginosko, both in one verse there.

### John MacArthur :: Bible Introductions - 1 John

#### Title

The epistle's title has always been "1 John." It is the first and largest in a series of 3 epistles that bear the Apostle John's name. Since the letter identifies no specific church, location, or individual to whom it was sent, its classification is as a "general epistle." Although 1 John does not exhibit some of the general characteristics of an epistle common to that time (e.g., no introduction, greeting, or concluding salutation), its intimate tone and content indicate that the term "epistle" still applies to it.

#### Author and Date

The epistle does not identify the author, but the strong, consistent and earliest testimony of the church ascribes it to John the disciple and apostle (cf. [Luke 6:13, 14](#)). This anonymity strongly affirms the early church's identification of the epistle with John the apostle, for only someone of John's well known and preeminent status as an apostle would be able to write with such unmistakable authority, expecting complete obedience from his readers, without clearly identifying himself (e.g., [4:6](#)). He was well known to the readers so he didn't need to mention his name.

John was one of the 3 most intimate associates of Jesus (along with Peter and James—cf. [Matt. 17:1; 26:37](#)), being an eyewitness to and participant in Jesus' earthly ministry ([1:1–4](#)). In addition to the 3 epistles, John also authored the fourth gospel, in which he identified himself as the disciple "whom Jesus loved" and as the one who reclined on

## Commentary on 1 John Chapters 1 and 2 by Chuck Smith 2.16.25

Jesus' breast at the Last Supper ([John 13:23](#); [19:26](#); [20:2](#); [21:7](#), [20](#)). He also wrote the book of Revelation ([Rev. 1:1](#)).

Precise dating is difficult because no clear historical indications of date exist in 1 John. Most likely John composed this work in the latter part of the first century. Church tradition consistently identifies John in his advanced age as living and actively writing during this time at Ephesus in Asia Minor. The tone of the epistle supports this evidence since the writer gives the strong impression that he is much older than his readers (e.g., "my little children"—[2:1](#), [18](#), [28](#)). The epistle and John's gospel reflect similar vocabulary and manner of expression (see [Historical and Theological Themes](#)). Such similarity causes many to date the writing of John's epistles as occurring soon after he composed his gospel. Since many date the gospel during the later part of the first century, they also prefer a similar date for the epistles. Furthermore, the heresy John combats most likely reflects the beginnings of Gnosticism (see [Background and Setting](#)) which was in its early stages during the latter third of the first century when John was actively writing. Since no mention is made of the persecution under Domitian, which began about A.D. 95, it may have been written before that began. In light of such factors, a reasonable date for 1 John is ca. A.D. 90–95. It was likely written from Ephesus to the churches of Asia Minor over which John exercised apostolic leadership.

### Background and Setting

Although he was greatly advanced in age when he penned this epistle, John was still actively ministering to churches. He was the sole remaining apostolic survivor who had intimate, eyewitness association with Jesus throughout His earthly ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension. The church Fathers (e.g., Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius) indicate that after that time, John lived at Ephesus in Asia Minor, carrying out an extensive evangelistic program, overseeing many of the churches that had arisen, and conducting an extensive writing ministry (e.g., epistles, The Gospel of John, and Revelation). One church Father (Papias) who had direct contact with John described him as a "living and abiding voice." As the last remaining apostle, John's testimony was highly authoritative among the churches. Many eagerly sought to hear the one who had first-hand experience with the Lord Jesus.

Ephesus (cf. [Acts 19:10](#)) lay within the intellectual center of Asia Minor. As predicted years before by the Apostle Paul ([Acts 20:28–31](#)), false teachers arising from within the church's own ranks, saturated with the prevailing climate of philosophical trends, began infecting the church with false doctrine, perverting fundamental apostolic teaching. These false teachers advocated new ideas which eventually became known as "Gnosticism" (from the Gr. word "knowledge"). After the Pauline battle for freedom from the law, Gnosticism was the most dangerous heresy that threatened the early church during the first 3 centuries. Most likely, John was combating the beginnings of this virulent heresy that threatened to destroy the fundamentals of the faith and the churches (see [Interpretive Challenges](#)).

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Gnosticism, influenced by such philosophers as Plato, advocated a dualism asserting that matter was inherently evil and spirit was good. As a result of this presupposition, these false teachers, although attributing some form of deity to Christ, denied his true humanity to preserve Him from evil. It also claimed elevated knowledge, a higher truth known only to those in on the deep things. Only the initiated had the mystical knowledge of truth that was higher even than the Scripture.

Instead of divine revelation standing as judge over man's ideas, man's ideas judged God's revelation ([2:15–17](#)). The heresy featured two basic forms. First, some asserted that Jesus' physical body was not real but only "seemed" to be physical (known as "Docetism" from a Gr. word that means "to appear"). John forcefully affirmed the physical reality of Jesus by reminding his readers that he was an eyewitness to Him ("heard," "seen," "handled," "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh"—[1:1–4](#); [4:2, 3](#)). According to early tradition (Irenaeus), another form of this heresy which John may have attacked was led by a man named Cerinthus, who contended that the Christ's "spirit" descended on the human Jesus at his baptism but left him just before his crucifixion. John wrote that the Jesus who was baptized at the beginning of His ministry was the same person who was crucified on the cross ([5:6](#)).

Such heretical views destroy not only the true humanity of Jesus, but also the atonement, for Jesus must not only have been truly God, but also the truly human (and physically real) man who actually suffered and died upon the cross in order to be the acceptable substitutionary sacrifice for sin (cf. [Heb. 2:14–17](#)). The biblical view of Jesus affirms His complete humanity as well as His full deity.

The gnostic idea that matter was evil and only spirit was good led to the idea that either the body should be treated harshly, a form of asceticism (e.g., [Colossians 2:21–23](#)), or sin committed in the body had no connection or effect on one's spirit. This led some, especially John's opponents, to conclude that sin committed in the physical body did not matter; absolute indulgence in immorality was permissible; one could deny sin even existed ([1:8–10](#)) and disregard God's law ([3:4](#)). John emphasized the need for obedience to God's laws, for he defined the true love of God as obedience to His commandments ([5:3](#)).

A lack of love for fellow believers characterizes false teachers, especially as they react against anyone rejecting their new way of thinking ([3:10–18](#)). They separated their deceived followers from the fellowship of those who remained faithful to apostolic teaching, leading John to reply that such separation outwardly manifested that those who followed false teachers lacked genuine salvation ([2:19](#)). Their departure left the other believers, who remained faithful to apostolic doctrine, shaken. Responding to this crisis, the aged apostle wrote to reassure those remaining faithful and to combat this grave threat to the church. Since the heresy was so acutely dangerous and the time period was so critical for the church in danger of being overwhelmed by false teaching, John gently, lovingly, but with unquestionable apostolic authority, sent this letter to churches in his sphere of influence to stem this spreading plague of false doctrine.

## Historical and Theological Themes

In light of the circumstances of the epistle, the overall theme of 1 John is “a recall to the fundamentals of the faith” or “back to the basics of Christianity.” The apostle deals with certainties, not opinions or conjecture. He expresses the absolute character of Christianity in very simple terms; terms that are clear and unmistakable, leaving no doubt as to the fundamental nature of those truths. A warm, conversational, and above all, loving tone occurs, like a father having a tender, intimate conversation with his children.

First John also is pastoral, written from the heart of a pastor who has concern for his people. As a shepherd, John communicated to his flock some very basic, but vitally essential, principles reassuring them regarding the basics of the faith. He desired them to have joy regarding the certainty of their faith rather than being upset by the false teaching and current defections of some ([1:4](#)).

The book’s viewpoint, however, is not only pastoral but also polemical; not only positive but also negative. John’s refutes the defectors from sound doctrine, exhibiting no tolerance for those who pervert divine truth. He labels those departing from the truth as “false prophets” ([4:1](#)), “those who try to deceive” ([2:26](#); [3:7](#)), and “antichrists” ([2:18](#)). He pointedly identifies the ultimate source of all such defection from sound doctrine as demonic ([4:1–7](#)).

The constant repetition of 3 sub-themes reinforces the overall theme regarding faithfulness to the basics of Christianity: happiness ([1:4](#)), holiness ([2:1](#)), and security ([5:13](#)). By faithfulness to the basics, his readers will experience these 3 results continually in their lives. These 3 factors also reveal the key cycle of true spirituality in 1 John: a proper belief in Jesus produces obedience to His commands; obedience issues in love for God and fellow believers (e.g., [3:23](#), [24](#)). When these 3 (sound faith, obedience, love) operate in concert together, they result in happiness, holiness and assurance. They constitute the evidence, the litmus test, of a true Christian.