

1 JOHN - WHY DID THE APOSTLE JOHN WRITE IT?

A Survey of the Epistle

Intro: 1 John is probably one of the best known and best loved of all of the books of the Bible. It is not really a book, but an epistle, a letter. I have taught it several times, but I want you to know that I am not going back to some notes that I have when I have taught it before, but I intend to do some fresh study on this delightful letter, and I am doing that for my sake as much as for yours. Obviously there will be some repetition because the epistle of 1 John has not changed. But I want to prepare my messages for this series just like I have never taught it before. And I am going to ask you to prepare for this study just like you had not studied it before, or even read it before.

Now I know that none of us who have studied 1 John before, or some of you have probably taught it before, can actually do that. We know what we know about it, and we wouldn't want to forget it. Many years ago Lucille and I heard just one message that Dr. William Pettingill taught at a Bible Camp in Dallas, Texas, Camp El Har to be exact, but I will never forget his message, and in particular how he emphasized 1 John 2:19 and how he quoted it: (Quote 1 John 2:19.) We have always wished that we could have heard all of his messages on 1 John, but that was not possible for us.

Now you might know that I am building up to something, and I am. Although you may know many verses from this epistle. Some of you I know have memorized it all. Yet I am going to ask you to read through this epistle at least once each week as we study it together. It only takes 30 to 35 minutes if you read it aloud and slowly. In fact, if you could read it several times each week, that would be better. That is what I intend to do. But I want us, you and I, to read it thoughtfully and prayerfully asking the Lord to open our minds and hearts to the wonderful truths that we have here in this epistle.

To provoke some thought along this line of Bible reading, I am going to ask you to turn to the second chapter of Proverbs in the OT, and I want to point out some truth in that chapter which I have been enjoying at least since I read it last month, and probably a little before that.

(Read and comment on Proverbs 2.) Is this how we feel about our Bibles and the truth it contains which has been given to us by God?

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Now let's apply this to Zechariah, and to the epistle of James, and to Ephesians, and to whatever book of the Bible you have to be reading. But let's apply it to our study of 1 John. Pray before you read. Stop reading for a few moments and pray while you are reading. And then pray after you read. Believe the truth that you find in the Word. Ask the Lord to make it clear to you. And if there is anything in what you read that the Lord wants you to do, do it! Ask Him to make the truth clear to you. This is how we learn and how we grow.

But my subject for this morning is, What did the Apostle John write this epistle? We will talk about him later, and who may have been the people that he wrote this letter to. But I am concerned this morning about WHY? Why did he write it?

The first answer to this question is the same as the answer would be if we asked that question about Genesis, or one of the Psalms, or Isaiah, or any of the books of the NT. The people who wrote the books of the Bible were all, as the Apostle Peter wrote in 2 Peter 1, verses 20 and 21, not writing on their own, but they wrote as they were directed by the Holy Spirit to write. Or as the Apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God"! Sometimes they had to study what they wrote for themselves. This is the Word of God from cover to cover. I have no doubt about that at all.

But I can also give a second answer to the question, "Why . . . ? They all wrote *willingly!* *Many of them preached what they wrote!* *And they wrote because what they wrote was to be miraculously preserved, and translated into the various languages as time as gone on because the Lord knew that we all would not be speaking the same language. And yet written over sixteen hundred years, there are no contradictions in this book. In the strongest meaning of the term, **this is one book!** **The Bible all has the same Author, and He is the Holy Spirit.***

The Apostle John, when he was an old man, wrote this book under the direction of the Holy Spirit, but he put it into writing just like it was all coming from him.

But basically, why did he write what he wrote, and what was it that he wrote.

Those of you who have read 1 John know that over and over again in his

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letter he says. For example, look at 1 John 1 verses 3 and 4. And then look at 2:1, and then at verses 7 and 8, and then 12 and 13 and 14. And you will find other times when he wrote what he wrote.

But I think among godly men who have studied the word of this epistle long and prayerfully and carefully, on the basis of what is in this letter it would seem that in the last chapter, chapter 5, and we have the Holy Spirit's purpose and the Apostle John's purpose (which were the same) for the writing of this letter. (Read 1 John 5:11-13.)

The Apostle John firmly believed that people who were saved should know that they were saved.

But let me make another point that may not have occurred to you. If this epistle contains a message that would enable those who believe in Christ to know that they have eternal life, then it would be the means of making people who thought that they had eternal life, know that they did *not* have it.

Remember how earlier I referred to 1 John 2:19 and the way Dr. Pettingill read it? Evidently in the early church, the professing church, there were those who claimed to be Christians who really weren't Christians. (Read 1 John 2:19 again.)

What does the Apostle John talk about in this epistle as the evidence that a person is a Christian?

Does he say that if you were born in America, you are a Christian? Or does he say that if your parents are Christians, then you are too? Or does the Apostle talk about going forward in a meeting? Or signing a card? Or joining a church? Or does he say that if you live a good, moral life, then you are a Christian, a child of God? Or what about baptism? Does that make you a Christian? What about giving? Does giving to a church or to some charitable institution indicate that you are on the road to heaven? What did the Apostle John say in 1 John 5:13? "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life . . ."

You would think that people would realize that the word Christian has something to do with Christ. It does! It has everything to do with Christ! Actually the word Christian appears only three times in the Bible, twice in

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the book of Acts (11:26 and 26:28), and once in 1 Peter 4:16. Instead they are called saints, or believers, or the people of God, as well as other terms.

What did the Apostle John call the people to whom he was writing? In chapter 2, verse 1, he called them. "My little children." In verse 7 he called them, "Brethren." In verses 9, 10, and 11 he spoke of their relationship to each other as *brothers*. Also in verses 13 and 14 of chapter 2, he called them fathers, young men, and children.

Now one thing that we soon learn about the Apostle John in his epistle, is that he does not deal with a subject, and then drop it and go on to other things. He deals with subject, and then he comes back to them again, and then he comes back to them again. Some have likened this first epistle of John to a spiral staircase where you climb and come to a subject, and then climb some more and come to that same subject again, and then you find as you continue to climb that you come to that same subject another time.

Some attribute this to his old age. But my opinion is that John was emphasizing the importance of our fellowship with God, so he repeats himself again and again, and often uses very strong language in doing so because he wants to impress his readers with the tremendous importance of what he is saying. Repetition in the Bible is often for emphasis. The subject of our fellowship with God is extremely important, and the Apostle John wanted to make as sure as he could as to what fellowship with God is.

He makes it clear also that we have enemies to contend with. We still as the people of God have to contend with sin and the temptation to sin. Then there is the Devil. There is also the world in which we live.. And to complicate things and make them difficult even more, there are false teachers. The Christian life is a wonderful life, but it is not an easy life. It is warfare, spiritual warfare. We are living in enemy territory, and so we have to be constantly on our guard. And the way we do that is through our God, through our Savior, through the Holy Spirit, through the Word of God, and through our obedience to the Word of God. Pray also is a major part of living in fellowship with the Lord.

So as you read this epistle, note how the Apostle John emphasizes a holy life characterized by obedience to the Word of God, love for each other as the people of God. There is no such thing in the Christian life as going it

alone! We need, desperately need all Three Persons of the Godhead. We need the people of God which means that we need the Church. And we need the Word of God. When we are saved we are brought into fellowship with God, but we also are brought into fellowship with the people of God.

But we also learn from 1 John that God loves us and sent His Son to die for us. But we learn that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming again. And we learn also that when He comes, He is going to make us like He is which is the ultimate purpose of salvation. And the Apostle John did not wait until the end of this epistle to let his readers know this. See 1 John 2:28-3:3. And we need to notice as we go through this epistle that this old apostle, the lone survivor of the apostles, does not speak of himself as separate and above the people of God, but, as in this passage he uses the first person plural pronoun “we” to show that he is looking forward to the same event, the return of Christ, that he wants them to anticipate every day of their lives.

See the Devil in verses 13 and 14 of chapter 2, where he called the Devil, “the wicked one.”

After dealing with the problem of sin in the latter part of chapter 1 and the first part of chapter 2 (vs. 1-2), we realize that this is the first of the problems that every child of God is going to have in this life. But then in chapter 2, verses 15 through 17, the Apostle John made it clear that a second major problem that the people would find in their fellowship with God, was “the world.” And to complicate matters even more and to show us how much we continue to need the Lord and our fellowship with our Savior, the Apostle John went on to speak of false teachers. And the Apostle got back to the subject of false teachers in chapter 4, verse 1, and following.

The Lord is our life. That is very clear from the very beginning of the Epistle. See the first four verses of chapter 1. And there is a very strong emphasis in this epistle on the love of God, the unchanging and unfailing love of God. And the Apostle also tells us that God has given the Holy Spirit to us, and he tells us this, not just once, but twice: in 1 John 3:24 and 4:13.

Concl: What a wonderful letter this is! Read it like it was just written for you. And I can do the same because it is for us. Read it as often as you

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can, but read it. Read it prayerfully. The more you read the Bible, the more you will understand it. And the more you will read it, the more you will love it.

Illus: People who are reading the Bible who attend the First Baptist Church in Chehalis, Washington – and it made the front page of the local newspaper! Think about that: it is major news that church people are reading the Bible – and enjoying it!