



25. 1–3 John

Authorship, Audience, and Intent: The Writings of John and the “Johannine Community. Areas of Dispute: Christology, Ethics, Eschatology, Pneumatology, and Ecclesiology. The Word of Life. Children of God in the world. God is Love. Warnings about False Teachers. The Struggle between Gaius and Diotrephes

“Love One Another” (hymn no. 308)

“Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” (1 John 4:11)

As I have loved you,
 Love one another.
 This new commandment:
 Love one another.
 By this shall men know
 Ye are my disciples,
 If ye have love
 One to another.

The Johannine Corpus

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*THE WRITINGS AND ISSUES FACING THE COMMUNITY
 ASSOCIATED WITH THE FIGURE OF JOHN THE APOSTLE*

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The Writings Attributed to John

- **The Fourth Gospel**
 - Author indirectly identified as “the disciple whom Jesus loved”
- **1 John**
 - Internal evidence does not explicitly suggest any particular known author
 - Style and topics, however, connect it closely with the Gospel
 - Probably written *after* the gospel to strengthen the faith of Christians who were being disturbed by false teachers
- **2 and 3 John**
 - Written by “the Elder”
 - Seem to be written *after* 1 John; apostasy is more evident, especially in 3 John
- **Apocalypse (Book of Revelation)**
 - John, the servant of Jesus Christ, a Christian prophet or seer
- All of these works were attributed by tradition to the apostle [John, son of Zebedee](#) and brother of James
 - *Latter-day revelation confirms this identification, at least for the Gospel and the Book of Revelation (1 Nephi 14:18-27; Ether 4:16; D&C 7; D&C 77:1-15; D&C 88:141)*

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Misunderstanding the Divinity of Jesus

- While the *logos* hymn of prologue of John's gospel made it clear that "the word was made flesh" (John 1:14), the emphasis on the divinity seems to have led some early Christians to understand that the mortal mission of Jesus was not critical
 - Groups of Christians in the churches of Asia Minor supervised by John seem to have rebelled (the literal meaning of "apostasy" or *apostasia*), teaching false doctrines and resisting John's apostolic authority
 - **I John suggests that rebels seceded or "went out" from the main body of Christians**
- **Dispute over Christology**
 - **Secessionists and False Teachers: *the human existence of Jesus, while real, was not salvifically significant***
 - Forerunners of the later "Gnostics" (those with special *gnōsis* or knowledge) who thought that secret doctrines ostensibly taught by Jesus were more important than what he did in dying as the Lamb of God
 - **Later heretics claimed that the divine Jesus never even became flesh, he only "seemed" to live and die**
 - The Johannine Epistles (see 1 John 4:2-3) stress that not only was **Jesus the Son of God**, but that in his earthly career of Jesus he actually lived and died as he did . . . **in other words, that he was the Lamb of God!**

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Other Areas of Dispute in the Johannine Letters

- **Ethics:** implications of Christology on Christian behavior
 - **secessionists claimed intimacy with God to the point of being sinless, they thought that they were not capable of sinning!**
 - Jesus had repeatedly taught "if you love me, keep my commandments" (e.g., John 14:15) and "as love one another" (John 13:34)
- **Eschatology: the study of "the last times" and question of Jesus' return**
 - Gospel of John was ambiguous, sometimes suggesting that the Kingdom of God was already present in Christ (realized eschatology)
 - **Secessionists did not think that Christ was necessarily coming again to literally rule and reign**
 - 1 John 3:2 promised that Jesus would come again, and of course Revelation focuses on Jesus' triumphant return (future eschatology)
- **Role of the Spirit** (Pneumatology)
 - Jesus had promised that the Comforter ("Paraclete" or Helper") would come to witness of truth, teach believers, and bring all things to their remembrance (14:25-26, 15:26-27, 16:12-15)
 - What controls are there on personal revelation? **Secessionists may have claimed revelation for their false beliefs**
 - **1 John 4:1-6 enjoins Christians to test revelations and spirits**
- **Role of the Church** (Ecclesiology): What is the source of authority in the church? How should the church be governed?
 - **Secessionists seem to have claimed authority for themselves**
 - 2 John is concerned about false teachers, 3 John deals with how rebels rejected John's authority

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1 John

“IN THIS WAS MANIFESTED THE LOVE OF GOD TOWARD US, BECAUSE THAT GOD SENT HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON INTO THE WORLD, THAT WE MIGHT LIVE THROUGH HIM. HEREIN IS LOVE, NOT THAT WE LOVED GOD, BUT THAT HE LOVED US, AND SENT HIS SON TO BE THE PROPITIATION FOR OUR SINS. . . WE LOVE HIM, BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US.” (1 JOHN 4:9–11, 19)

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Overview of 1 John

- **Authorship:** *No direct internal evidence*
 - Style, vocabulary, and subject matter tie it very closely to the Gospel of John, the witness of the “Beloved Disciple”
 - External evidence (from patristic authors) identified the writer as the apostle John
 - *Some outside scholars posit an author from the Johannine tradition rather than John himself.*
- **Date:** Unclear, but probably **after the writing of the Gospel of John** (which may have reached its final form c. A.D. 90), hence **c. A.D. 100**
- **Place:** No evidence from the text but traditionally from Ephesus
- **To:** *Johannine Christians who have suffered a schism over internal struggles over doctrine*
- **Integrity:** The “Johannine Comma” (5:7–8) is clearly an interpolation stemming from a Latin theological gloss
- **Genre:** **A theological treatise or a doctrinal homily** rather than a letter in format, **although it was sent to a “general” audience and is usually termed an epistle**
- **Message:** **Stay with the gospel that was preached “from the beginning”**
 - **Christ was the Word in very flesh**
 - **Christians must follow his teachings**

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Overview of 1 John

- **Prologue: The Word of Life (1:1-4)**
- **The Test of Light (1:5-2:17)**
 - God is Light (1:5-10)
 - Christ Our Advocate (2:1-2)
 - Walking as Jesus Walked (2:3-6)
 - Love: The New Commandment (2:7-11)
 - Reasons for Writing to the Faithful (2:12-14)
 - Do Not Love the World (2:15-17)
- **First Warning Against the Antichrists: Testing Faith (2:18-27)**
- **The Test of Righteousness (2:28-3:24)**
 - Children of God (2:28-3:3)
 - Avoiding Sin (3:4-10)
- Love One Another (3:11-18)
- Confidence before God (3:19-22)
- Faith, Love, and Obedience (3:23-24)
- **Second Warning against the Antichrists: Testing Spirits (4:1-6)**
- **The Test of Love (4:7-5:12)**
 - God is Love (4:7-21)
 - Being Begotten of God (5:1-5)
 - The Testimony of the Son (5:6-12)
- **Epilogue: Final Charges and Warnings (5:13-21)**

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Prologue: the Word of Life (1:1-4)

- “We declare to you what was **from the beginning**, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning **the word of life**—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us . . .” (1:1-2 NRSV)
- Compare with the *Logos Hymn* of John 1:1-18
- Emphasis on physical nature of the **witnesses experiences**—they have heard, seen, and touched
 - *This countered the assertions of the secessionists, those who were leaving the Johannine community, or the false teachers that were teaching incorrect doctrines about Christ*
- **The Word of Life**—not just the Word (*logos*) of John 1:1-18 in which there was life, but a *Living Word*

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The Test of Light (1:5-2:17)

“This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.”

- **God is Light (1:5-9)**
 - “If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1:6-7)
- **Christ Our Advocate (2:1-2)**
- **Walking as Jesus Walked (2:3-6)**
- **Love: The New Commandment (2:7-11)**
 - “Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word that you have heard . . . Whoever says, ‘I am in the light,’ while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness. Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates another believer is in the darkness . . .” (2:7-11)
- **Reasons for Writing to the Faithful (2:12-14, next slide)**
- **Do Not Love the World (2:15-17)**

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Reason for Writing

- “I write unto you, **little children**, because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake. I write unto you, **fathers**, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, **young men**, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.” (2:12-14)
- **Little children** (Johannine Christians); **fathers** (long-term, knowledgeable Christians); **young men** (new Christians who have recently been cleansed of sins)

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Testing Faith (2:18–27)

First Warning against the Antichrists

- “Little children, **it is the last time**: and as ye have heard that **[an] antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists**; whereby we know that it is the last time. **They went out from us**, but they were not of us; for if they had 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.” (2:18–19)
 - “**it is the last time** (*eschatē hōra estin*),” literally “it is a final hour” (before an apostasy?)
 - “[**an**] antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists,” one who fights against Christ, tries to replace Christ, here, teaches falsehoods about Christ
 - In the NT *antichristos* only appears in the Johannine letters (not Revelation!)
 - “**They went out from us**,” the secessionists who left John’s churches
- **The false teaching of the antichrists**
 - “Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? **He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father . . .**” (2:22–23a)
- **The faith that saves**
 - “. . . **but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.**” (2:23b)
 - Christians must accept not only that Jesus is divine, **but that he came in the flesh and died as “a propitiation for our sins”** (2:2)

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The Test of Righteousness (2:28–3:24)

“For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.” (3:11)

- **Children of God (2:28–3:3)**
 - God’s children and the Parousia: “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, **that we should be called the sons of God**: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. **Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.**” (3:1–3)
 - Cf. Moroni 7:48
- **Avoiding Sin (3:4–10)**
 - Children of God and Children of the Devil (3:4–10): “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law . . . **He that committeth sin is of the devil**; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.” (3:4–8)
- **Love One Another (3:11–18)**
 - “. . . **And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.**” (3:18)
- **Confidence before God (3:19–22)**
 - “And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.” (3:23–24)
- **Faith, Love, and Obedience (3:23–24)**

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Testing Spirits (4:1-6)

Second Warning against the Antichrists

- **Countering false revelation** (false pneumatology; exegesis and exposition)
 - “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God . . . **Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist . . .**” (4:1-3)
- **Testing spirits in the Restoration** (exposition)
 - “When a messenger comes saying he has a message from God, offer him your hand and request him to shake hands with you. If he be an angel he will do so, and you will feel his hand. If he be the spirit of a just man made perfect he will come in his glory; for that is the only way he can appear—Ask him to shake hands with you, but he will not move, because it is contrary to the order of heaven for a just man to deceive; but he will still deliver his message. If it be the devil as an angel of light, when you ask him to shake hands he will offer you his hand, and you will not feel anything; you may therefore detect him. These are three grand keys whereby you may know whether any administration is from God.” (D&C 129:4-9)

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The Test of Love (4:7-5:12)

- **God is Love** (4:7-21)
 - “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because **that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.** Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” (4:9-11; cf John 3:16)
 - “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear . . . **We love him, because he first loved us.**” (4:18-19)
- **Being Begotten of God** (5:1-5)
 - “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. **By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.** For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.” (5:1-3)
 - **The ethics ignored by the secessionists were important!**
- **The Testimony of the Son** (5:6-12)
 - “This is he that came by **water and blood**, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.” (5:6)
 - Cf. John 19:34 and blood and water from Christ’s side on the cross
 - **Johannine Comma** (5:7-8)
 - *Not in the early manuscripts, this appears to be a “Trinitarian reflection” that was glossed in from later Latin texts*

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Epilogue: Final Charges and Warnings (5:13–21)

- **The Knowledge of Eternal Life (5:13–15)**
- **The Sin Unto Death and Bringing a Brother Back to Life (5:16–17)**
- **Those Begotten of God Remain In Jesus Christ (5:18–21)**
 - “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” (5:21)
 - *Idols: false gods, in this case the false Christ of the secessionists!*

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2 and 3 John

COUNSEL FROM THE ELDER

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Overview of 2 John

- Author
 - Identified only as “**the Elder**,” but clearly a general leader with authority over many congregations
 - Points of style and the theme love connect it closely with 1 John and support the assumption that it was the apostle John
- Date and Place: Similarities with 1 John suggest that it was also **written late (perhaps about A.D. 100, probably from Ephesus)**
- To: Written to “the elect lady and her children,” probably a church and its members
 - Seemingly Johannine Christians distant from the elder who are **threatened by traveling teachers preaching schismatic doctrines**, probably the same as those contested in 1 John
- Unity and Integrity: Not disputed
- Genre: **A true letter**
 - Short, the length of a single papyrus sheet

Structure and Content of 2 John

- **Opening Formula: Address and Greeting to the Church (1:1-3)**
- **Body (1:4-12)**
 - Expression of Joy (1:4)
 - Love and Obedience (1:5-6; Picks up a Major of Theme of 1 John “As Ye Have Heard from the Beginning)
 - **Warning Against False Teachers (1:7-11)**
 - ***Deceivers Deny That Christ Came in the Flesh (1:7)***
 - Watch Yourselves and Abide in the Doctrine of Christ (1:8-9)
 - **Reject False Missionaries (1:10-11)**
- **Concluding Formula (1:12-13)**

Overview of 3 John

- Author: “**The Elder**” of 2 John, presumably the apostle John late in his open Old World ministry
- Date and Place: Reflecting continued attempts to deal with the situations described in 1 and 2 John, it was *probably written sometime after those letters* (perhaps shortly after c. A.D. 100)
- To: **Gaius, a friend of the Elder, who has suffered from the usurpation of Diotrephes**
- Genre: **A true letter**
 - Short, the length of a single papyrus sheet

Structure and Content of 3 John

- **Opening Formula: Address and Greeting to Gaius** (1:1-2)
- **Body** (1:3-14)
 - Expression of Joy (1:3-4)
 - Commendation of **Gaius** for his hospitality (1:5-8)
 - **Recalcitrance of Diotrephes, who rejected the elder’s messengers but seems to have accepted the secessionists** (1:9-10)
 - Whatever is good comes from God (1:11)
 - Commendation of Demetrius (1:12)
- **Concluding Formula** (1:13-14)

Additional Material on the “Johannine Community”

THE FOLLOWING SLIDES ARE FOR BACKGROUND AND ENRICHMENT ONLY; THEY REPRESENT SCHOLARLY PROPOSITIONS ON THE SUPPOSED COMPOSITION AND PRESERVATION OF THE WRITINGS ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN

The “Johannine Community”

- A scholarly construct proposing that **a particular group of Christians identified with the Beloved Disciple developed during the first century A.D.**
 - Palestinian Jewish and Samaritan Christians were the first “Johannine Christians”
 - *conflict with “orthodox” Jews leads to expulsion from the synagogues*
 - Johannine Christians moved into the Diaspora
 - *Subsequently rejected by the “world”*
 - Internal divisions over **Christology** and **pneumatology** (the role of the spirit)
 - Divisions with other Christians over **ecclesiology** (nature of the church, particularly its government)
- Proponents of this view try to “read into” the texts the problems of the community
 - E.g., the “expulsion from the synagogue” spoken of in John 9 and elsewhere supposedly represents the expulsion of early Jewish Christians
 - *Divisions within the community explain the conflicts suggested in the epistles* – but it could just be plain apostasy!

Development of Johannine Texts

- Proponents of the Johannine Community see a multi-stage development
 - The Beloved Disciple was the leader of the community; his ideas were preserved, written, and expanded upon by a “Johannine School”
 - Beloved Disciple (BD, source)
 - Fourth Evangelist (FE, original author of Gospel, perhaps 1 John)
 - the Elder (author of 2 and 3 John)
 - Final redactor (editor)
- Compare to the Book of Mormon
 - Amulek preaches to the Zoramites > missionary companion Alma records Amulek’s sermon in his records > Mormon abridges Alma’s record > Joseph Smith translates
 - *Difference: We know each stage of the Book of Mormon’s development and transmission, and prophets are involved in every stage*
- Perhaps some later editing, **but no reason not to identify the Disciple with the Evangelist of the Fourth Gospel and author of 1 John**
 - Perhaps also with the Elder who wrote 2 and 3 John, but this could be the work of a successor, such as the editor who added the concluding remarks (John 21:23–25) to the Gospel

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On Dating the Johannine Epistles

- **Early Dating (pre Gospel)**
 - Early-Christian motifs in Epistles not in Fourth Gospel: final eschatology, humanity of Jesus, sacrificial quality of his death
 - Early “Jewish” features: parallels to Dead Sea Scrolls; categories like false prophets, antichrists, idolatry
- **Later Dating**
 - Opponents of 1 John unduly emphasize higher Christology and teaching of the Spirit, causing author to de-emphasize these elements
 - Opponents are exploiting the *Logos* Hymn of John 1:1–18, so 1 John 1:1–4 is an anti-gnostic corrective
- **Brown, Community of the Beloved Disciple, 97**
 - Gospel concerned with outsiders (the world)
 - Epistles with internal strife (the secessionists)
 - Brown dates gospel to c. A.D. 90, epistles to c. A.D. 100
 - *Huntsman and Wayment date the gospel early, even as early as c. A.D. 60 and the epistles later*

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