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What You Need to Know About First John

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT FIRST JOHN

This book describes that personal and intimate spiritual fellowship God the Father desires to exist between Him and His children, and between the children themselves. It presents the reasons and requirements for, plus the enemies and results of this coveted fellowship.

BOTTOM LINE INTRODUCTION

INTIMATE INSIGHTS ON THE FATHER, FELLOWSHIP, AND THE FAMILY OF GOD.

John the Apostle writes his first epistle to develop this wonderful theme.

"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" (3:1).

FACTS REGARDING THE AUTHOR OF THIS BOOK

1. Who? **John.** Known as the "beloved disciple" (Jn. 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20, 24), and brother of James (Lk. 5:10). John was a follower of John the Baptist (Jn. 1:35-37), before being called to become one of Jesus' twelve apostles (Lk. 5:10, 11; Mt. 10:2).
2. What? The books of John, First, Second & Third John, Revelation
3. When and where?
 - a. John: 90 A.D., from Ephesus
 - b. First, Second, Third John: 92 A.D., from Ephesus
 - c. Revelation: 95 A.D., from Isle of Patmos
4. Why?
 - a. John: To present Christ as the eternal Son of God
 - b. **First John:** A family letter from the Father to His children concerning the subject of fellowship
 - c. Second John: To an elect lady concerning the subject of truth
 - d. Third John: Concerning right attitudes in the local church
 - e. Revelation: The final action on the stage of divine prophecy
5. To whom?
 - a. John—to the world
 - b. **First John**—to the Father's children
 - c. Second John—to the elect lady
 - d. Third John—to Gaius
 - e. Revelation—to the seven churches in Asia Minor

KEY EVENTS

1. Christ, the Life and Light of believers
2. Relationships between Christ and His people; warnings against worldly systems and the spirit of antichrist

3. The confirmation of our salvation
4. How to distinguish between false spirits and the Holy Spirit
5. Tests to determine our salvation

KEY INDIVIDUALS

1. **John**, former fisherman, brother of James, and author of five New Testament books (including First John)
2. **Cain**, Old Testament apostate who murdered his brother Abel, referred to here as a frightening example of an individual belonging to Satan's kingdom

KEY PLACES

1. None referred to

UNIQUE FEATURES

1. First John contains no salutation or signature.
2. It has no direct quotations from the Old Testament.
3. It highlights three characteristics of God:
 - He is light (1:5)
 - He is righteous (2:29)
 - He is love (4:8, 16)
4. John was known as the beloved disciple (Jn. 13:23), but also as a "Son of Thunder" (Mk. 3:17). This letter, with its gentleness and severity, justified both names:
 - Repeatedly throughout the letter, John addressed his readers as "my dear children."
 - Yet he was adamant in warning of apostasy and in maintaining the division between the absolute light of God and the absolute darkness of the Devil and his works (1:5).
5. The epistle has been described as containing the most profound thought in the simplest language.
6. It is said a small child can wade in it, but the most accomplished scholar can never probe its depths.
7. It may be the most topical biblical New Testament book.
8. One of its key characteristics is repetition, that is, the writer keeps coming back to certain ideas and terms.
9. It has more to say about the Father than does any other epistle. He is referred to 12 times.

The *New Scofield Bible* suggests: "It [1 John] is a family letter from the Father to His 'little children' who are in the world. With the possible exception of the Song of Solomon, it is the most intimate of the inspired writings. The sin of a Christian is treated as a child's offense against his Father, and is dealt with as a family matter (1:9; 2:1)" (p. 1,342).

The word *love* is found 37 times, more often in this epistle than in any other Old or New Testament book, with the single exception of the Psalms.

10. It contains perhaps the Bible's best and most concise description of worldliness (2:15-17).
11. It is the first of but two biblical books referring to the coming world dictator, the antichrist (see 1 Jn. 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 Jn. 7).
12. It is the only biblical book containing the phrase, "*sin unto death*" (5:16), describing what had already taken place in Acts 5:1-11 and 1 Cor. 11:29-30.
13. It is the only biblical book classifying sin and temptation into three categories (2:15-17). It has more to say about a Christian's sin and confession than any other biblical book for its size.
14. It records the final of seven great scriptural hopes:
 - Enduring hope (Titus 3:7)
 - Glorious hope (Col. 1:27)
 - Blessed hope (Titus 2:13)
 - Better hope (Heb. 7:19)
 - Reassuring hope (1 Pet. 3:15)
 - Living hope (1 Pet. 1:31)
 - Purifying hope (1 Jn. 3:3)
15. First John is an epistle of great contrasts. Its colors are black or white with no gray. Some of these antitheses are:
 - Light and darkness
 - Truth and falsehood
 - Love and hate
 - Life and death
 - Children of God and children of Satan
 - Antichrist and true Christ
 - Sin and righteousness
 - Christ deniers and Christ confessors
16. The words for knowledge (*ginōskō* and *oida*) occur 41 times.
17. It is perhaps Scripture's greatest book regarding the assurance of salvation. The phrase, "we know" can be found 13 times. To cite but one example:
"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, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God" (5:13).
18. First John may have been the earliest New Testament book quoted from by a church father. Papias refers to it around 95 A.D.
19. The final two of six occasions where that great theological word *hilasmas* (meaning *satisfaction*) are found in First John, here translated *propitiation* (2:2; 4:10).
20. This is the only biblical reference describing Jesus as our Advocate. The Greek word, *paraklētos* is elsewhere translated *comforter* and always refers to the Holy Spirit (see Jn. 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). The term speaks of someone coming along someone else to help and comfort.
21. The Greek word, *nikaō*, here in First John translated "overcoming" can be found more times (6) than in any other biblical book with the exception of Revelation. It literally means, "to gain the victory."

22. The contrast between the old commandment and new commandment appears only two times in the Bible:
- As spoken by Jesus (Jn. 15:10, 12)
 - As written by John (1 Jn. 2:7, 8).

COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS

1. The Gospel of John, the Epistles, and the Book of Revelation:

The Spirit of God directed John the Apostle to pen five of the New Testament books. Apart from Paul, no other author would write as many books in the New Testament as he did. His five books are: the Gospel of John, the three epistles of John, and the Revelation. The following distinction between these books is offered:

- Gospel of John
 - a. Speaks of salvation
 - b. The past
 - c. Christ the Prophet
 - d. The cross
- Epistles of John
 - a. Speaks of sanctification
 - b. The present
 - c. Christ the Priest
 - d. The *koinonia* (fellowship)
- Revelation of John
 - a. Speaks of glorification
 - b. The future
 - c. Christ the King
 - d. The crown
- All three
In the Gospel, John describes believers as sheep in God's fold; in the epistle as members in his family; and in the Revelation as priests in his kingdom (Jn. 10; 1 Jn. 2; Rev. 1).

2. A comparison can be made between John's Gospel account and the epistle of First John:

- John begins his gospel account by proving the *deity* of Christ (Jn. 1:1).
- John begins his epistle account by proving the *humanity* of Christ (1 Jn. 1:1-3).
- John ends his gospel account with the following words: "*But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name*" (Jn. 20:31).
- John ends his epistle with the following words: "*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, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God*" (1 Jn. 5:13).

TITLES FOR AND TYPES OF JESUS

1. The Word of Life (1:1)
2. The Eternal Life (1:2)
3. God's son, Jesus Christ (1:3)
4. Jesus Christ, God's son (1:7)
5. The advocate (2:1a)
6. Jesus Christ, the righteous (2:16)
7. The propitiation (2:2; 4:10)
8. The Son of God (3:8)
9. The incarnate Son (4:2, 9)
10. Savior of the world (4:14)
11. The true God (5:20)

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