

# 1 John

John, the “beloved” apostle with a pastor’s heart, writes to his “little children” (2:1,18,28; 3:7,18; 5:21) and “beloved” ones in the faith (3:2, 21; 4:1, 7,11). His letter has at least five purposes: to promote fellowship (1:3), to produce happiness (1:4), to protect holiness (2:1), to prevent heresy (2:26), and to provide hope (5:13). Fellowship with God is not a vague, confusing experience. It can be a daily reality. John sets forth at least three tests which can act as a “fellowship barometer” for his spiritual children in their daily walk with God:

- Have I confessed all known sins to God? (1:9)
- Am I walking in obedience to the light of God’s Word? (2:4–5)
- Am I demonstrating a love for other followers of Jesus? (2:9–10)

## INTRODUCTION

God is light. God is love. God is life. John is enjoying a relationship with that God of light, love, and life, and he desperately desires that his spiritual children enjoy the same beautiful relationship.

God is light. Therefore, to engage in fellowship with Him we must walk in light and not in darkness. As we walk in the light, we will regularly confess our sins, allowing the blood of Christ to continually cleanse us. Christ will act as our defense attorney before the Father. Proof of our “walk in the light” will be keeping the commandments of God and replacing any hatred we have toward our brother with love. Two major roadblocks to hinder this walk will be falling in love with the world and falling for the alluring lies of false teachers.

God is love. Since we are His children we must walk in love. In fact, John says that if we do not love, we do not know God. Additionally, our love needs to be practical. Love is more than just words; it is actions. Love is giving, not getting. Biblical love is unconditional in its nature. It is an “in spite of” love. Christ’s love fulfilled those qualities and when that brand of love characterizes us, we will be free of self-condemnation and experience confidence before God.

God is life. Those who fellowship with Him must possess His quality of life. Spiritual life begins with spiritual birth. Spiritual birth occurs through faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in Jesus Christ infuses us with God’s life - eternal life. Therefore, one who walks in fellowship with God will walk in light, love, and life.

## AUTHOR

The external evidence for the authorship of 1 John shows that from the beginning it was universally received without dispute as authoritative. It was used by Polycarp (who knew John in his youth) and Papias in the early second century, and later in that century Irenaeus (who knew Polycarp in his youth) specifically attributed it to the apostle John. All the Greek and Latin church fathers accepted this epistle as Johannine.

The internal evidence supports this universal tradition as well John’s name was well known to the readers, and it was unnecessary for him to mention it. The style and vocabulary of 1 John are like those of the fourth Gospel and most scholars acknowledge these books to be by the same hand. Both share many distinctively Johannine phrases, and the characteristics of limited vocabulary and frequent contrast of opposites are also common to them.

Although the apostle John’s name is not found in this book, it was given the title *Ioannou A*, “First of John.”

## DATE & SETTING

In Acts 8:14, John is associated with “the apostles who were at Jerusalem,” and Paul calls him one of the “pillars” of the Jerusalem church in Galatians 2:9. Apart from Revelation 1, the New Testament is silent about his later years, but early Christian tradition tells us that he left Jerusalem (probably not long before its destruction in A.D. 70) and that he ministered in and around Ephesus. The seven churches in the Roman province of Asia, mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3, were evidently a part of this ministry. Although there is no address in 1 John, it is likely that the apostle directed this epistle to the Asian churches that were within the realm of his oversight.

The believers in these congregations were well established in Christian truth, and John wrote to them not as novices but as followers of Jesus grounded in doctrine (2:7, 18–27; 3:11). The apostle does not mention his own affairs, but his use of such terms of address as “beloved” and “my little children” gives this letter a personal touch that reveals his close relationship to the original recipients. First John was probably written in Ephesus after the Gospel of John, but the date cannot be fixed with certainty. No persecution is mentioned, suggesting a date prior to A.D. 95 when persecution broke out during the end of Domitian’s reign (A.D. 81–96).