

## General Comments 1 John

John is addressing dissension and apostasy within the ecclesia, encouraging the remaining members to live what they know is true. The ecclesia is being pulled apart by Judaism (ch. 1-2, specifically cf. 2:18-29) and by Hellenism (ch. 3-5, specifically cf. 3:1-5:21). The Hellenism is in the form of [Docetism](#), the predecessor of [Gnosticism](#). Underlying the religious differences pulling people out of the ecclesia is the temptation of worldliness (cf. 2:15-17, 3:10, 5:4, see also discussions on "sin" in 1:7-10, 3:4-9, 5:16-18). The ecclesia is under attack from outside influences, and John is telling them how to deal with it.

John's concern isn't over those who have left (cf. 2:19), as he is trying to protect those who remain (cf. 2:24), so they neither engage in self-deception (1:18) nor are being deceived by those who would lead them away (cf. 2:26, 3:7). John is warning the remaining members to focus on the knowledge and love of God by living Jesus Christ's teachings.

John doesn't engage in polemics. He isn't interested in attacking the opposition. Instead, he identifies what the disciple of Christ must focus on to remain faithful. As such, his advice is timeless, regardless of the source of opposition. John's lack of interest in polemics makes it difficult to identify exactly who the opposition is being addressed at any point in the text, but there are subtle clues.

John addresses the faithful members of the ecclesia in 1:5-2:17 in a more Jewish context and 3:1-24 in a more Hellenized context, specifically addressing the Jews who have left the ecclesia in 2:18-2:29, and the Hellenists who have left in 4:5. Note the Jews reject Jesus is the Messiah in 2:22, where the Hellenists reject the Messiah was born into the flesh in 4:2.

Among the New Testament letters, this one is likely quite late, as it is addressing the ecclesia being pulled at by both Jews opposed to the idea of Jesus as their Messiah and Hellenists opposed to the idea that the spirit of the Messiah could be united with a mortal human. The ecclesia is separating from Judaism and becoming Christianity, and being attacked as something other.

This letter also includes a number of symbols developed in John's Gospel, suggesting this letter was written after the Gospel.

With respect to rhetorical style, John presents symbolic themes as binary opposites: light versus darkness, love versus

hate, Jesus versus the Adversary, the love of God versus the love of the world through both the Jewish section of ch. 1-2 and the Hellenist section of ch. 3-5. This is intentional on John's part, as he wants to emphasize to the ecclesia that regardless of the threat, their response should be the same. They should remain faithful to Jesus' teachings, remaining in the light and love of God.

The text of this letter is also highly structured, see Lynn Johnson's [arrangement](#). Even a casual reading of the text suggests John uses repetition quite a bit (cf. 2:12-14), suggesting something larger at work.

The theological content of this letter is quite similar to that of Mosiah 26, where Alma has to deal with apostates within the Church, and prays for inspiration over how to manage the situation.

### Comments on 1 John 1

<sup>1</sup> That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life; <sup>2</sup> (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

v1-4 John bears witness of what he has witnessed firsthand, namely Jesus Christ, the incarnation of the Law of Moses (v. 1). The Son was made by the Father and made to live after death by the Father, and they have seen the resurrected Jesus Christ (v. 2). John bears testimony of what he himself has seen, so the reader may be united with him, the Father and the Son (v. 3). John writes these things so the reader may be filled with joy (v. 4), as he is.

v1 "from the beginning...the Word of life", recalling John 1:1-2.

v2 The verse is obtusely worded, but what John is saying is that because the Father gave life to the Son, and the Son succeeded, the Son now gives eternal life to those who believe in Him. John saw the resurrected Jesus Christ, so he is a

firsthand witness of the resurrection and the eternal life that is granted by the Father to the Son, and is now available to us through the Son's sacrifice.

v3 See 2:25-29 for a longer explanation of what the fellowship relationship is.

v4 John's goal is to keep the faithful members of the ecclesia in fellowship together with the rest of the ecclesia in the joy of the gospel.

<sup>5</sup> This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup> If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: <sup>7</sup> But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

<sup>8</sup> If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

v5-10 The message that John has heard from Jesus Himself is God is the light that banishes the darkness of evil, as there is no evil in Him at all (v. 5). If anyone says they are close to God and engage in evil acts, they are liars (v. 6). But, if a person is doing good and avoiding evil acts, then they are close with the ecclesia and have had their sins forgiven because of the blood Jesus Christ shed (v. 7).

If we say we are sinless, we are deceiving ourselves, and are liars (v. 8). If we confess our sins, the Lord will forgive us and help us repent of them (v. 9). If we say we have not sinned, this is the same as saying the Lord is a liar, and it contradicts the Scriptures (v. 10).

v5 "God is light", cf. Ps. 27:1, Isa. 50:10, Micah 7:7-8, also cp. John 1:4-9, John 3:19-21, John 8:12, John 9:5, John 12:35-46 and 2 Cor. 4:4-6.

The light versus darkness themes clearly have a general context of good works being done in the light of day and evil works being done darkness of night, because the one doing them doesn't want to be caught. The more specific context is that of Jesus' mortal ministry being public, and those opposed to him secretly conspiring against him and colluding with Romans to have Him executed.

v8-10 John appears to be countering the argument that if one faithfully obeys the Law of Moses, then they are without sin. However, it is clearly impossible to fully observe the Law of Moses, or any of the commandments, flawlessly.

The underlying argument being addressed is that the Messiah of Judaism isn't a spiritual deliverer that saves His people from their sins, but is solely a physical deliverer who will reestablish the kingdom of David to the political, economic and military power it once was. This flatly contradicts scriptures which present the Messiah as one who suffers on behalf of his people, cf. Isa. 53.

v8 "we deceive ourselves", cp. 2:26, 3:7. Having a firsthand knowledge of the ministry of Jesus, to allow oneself to be persuaded otherwise is just self-deception.

v5 Recalling John 1:5.

"This then is the message", this phrase is repeated in 3:11 when John changes the target to the Hellenists.

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