

Introduction To First John

1 John 1:1-4

(Not entirely original with me)

INTRODUCTION:

1. When Jesus to earth, He came not only to **live** a life, but to **give** life... *“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” - Jn 10:10*
2. The **Gospel** of John was designed to produce faith so that we might have life - cf. **Jn 20:30-31**
3. However, it is the **First Epistle** of John which discusses the nature of that life in greater detail - e.g., **1 Jn 3:14**
4. That we might be sure to live the sort of life God offers through His Son Jesus Christ, a careful study of **First John** is in order

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A. THE AUTHOR...

1. It will be assumed in the course of this study that the author is John, the beloved disciple of Jesus
2. Similarities between this epistle and the Gospel of John certainly suggests **internal** evidence for this conclusion
3. There is also **external** evidence that this John is the author:
 - a. Polycarp, a close associate of John, appears to make reference to this epistle at the beginning of the second century, in a letter to the Philippians
 - b. Irenaeus, a student of Polycarp, quoted from it and attributed it to John

B. THE RECIPIENTS...

1. No one is specifically mentioned
2. John may have been in Ephesus at the time, and that this was a general epistle to Christians throughout Asia Minor
3. However, John's comments in **1 Jn 2:20,27** suggests that John may have been addressing a particular group of Christians possessing certain spiritual gifts

C. DATE...

1. Estimations range from **60 A.D.** to **100 A.D.**
2. Most modern scholarship places it around **95 A.D.**, but there are also good reasons for believing it was written prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in **70 A.D.**

D. PURPOSE...

1. As declared by John throughout his epistle, he wrote it...
 - a. “that your joy may be full” - **1 Jn 1:4**
 - b. “that you may not sin” - **1 Jn 2:1**
 - c. “that you may know that you have eternal life” - **1 Jn 5:13a**
 - d. “that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God” - **1 Jn 5:13b**

2. While these reasons may state the “positive” side of John’s purpose, it appears he was also responding to errors that were prevalent at the time - cf. **1 Jn 2:26**
 - a. If not fully developed in John’s day, there was at least a precursor to **Gnosticism**
 - b. Those who came to be called “Gnostics”...
 - 1) Claimed to have a superior knowledge (Grk. word for knowledge is “gnosis”)
 - 2) Believed all matter was evil
 - a) Therefore God did not create or have anything to do with the material universe
 - b) Therefore Christ could not have come in the flesh - cf. **1 Jn 4:1-3**
 - 1] One branch of gnosticism, **Docetism** (dokein, “to seem”), said that Jesus only “seemed” to be physical - cf. **1 Jn 1:1**
 - 2] **Cerinthus** taught that “Jesus” was physical, but that the “Christ” came upon him at his baptism, and left before his death, so that the “Christ-spirit” never suffered - cf. **1 Jn 5:6**
 - c. Their application to everyday living took two different directions; since all matter was thought to be evil...
 - 1) Some thought one should abstain altogether from anything that would satisfy the flesh
 - 2) Others claimed it did not matter what one did in the flesh (it was evil anyway), and to have full knowledge it was proper to explore everything

II. JOHN’S AIM IN WRITING THIS EPISTLE (1:1-4)

A. CONCERNS THE “WORD OF LIFE”... (1)

1. Which was “from the beginning”
 - a. John may have reference to the creation of the world - cf. **Jn 1:1**
 - b. Or he may have reference to the beginning of the gospel - cf. **1 Jn 2:7,13,24; 3:11**

2. This “Word of life” was...
 - a. “heard”
 - b. “seen with our eyes”
 - c. “looked upon”
 - d. “handled”

-- All emphasizing that this “Word” was “real, in the flesh”; an obvious reference to Jesus- cf. **Jn 1:1,14**

B. TO DECLARE THE “ETERNAL LIFE”... (2)

1. Which was...
 - a. With the Father
 - b. And then manifested to the apostles, who had seen and were bearing witness

2. Again, this is an obvious reference to Jesus Christ
3. But notice the use of the neuter gender throughout this passage
 - a. The emphasis appears to be on the “life” which Jesus had, especially that is “eternal”(“that eternal life”)
 - b. It is this same “life” which we can possess if we truly believe in the name of the Son of God -
cf. **1 Jn 5:11-13**
4. Thus John is focusing on the “eternal life” which Jesus offers and made possible by His coming in the flesh

C. THAT YOU MAY HAVE “FELLOWSHIP” WITH US... (3)

1. Here is the reason for declaring the “Word of life”, the “eternal life”
2. By declaring this “life” (revealed by Jesus and through Jesus), “fellowship” is possible
 - a. Fellowship involves the idea of “sharing, communion”
 - b. The “sharing, communion” that the apostles have is with the Father and His Son
3. John wanted his readers to participate in this same sharing...
 - a. “that you also may have fellowship with us”
 - b. I.e., that you can experience what we are experiencing!
4. Why does John desire this?

D. THAT YOUR “JOY” MAY BE FULL... (4)

1. It is “fellowship” with the Father and Son that makes the “life” of a Christian so full of joy!
2. And just as Jesus came to give us “abundant life” (Jn 10:10), so John now writes...
 - a. That we may be sure to have fellowship with the Father and His Son, in Whom is “eternal life” - cf. **Jn 17:3**
 - b. So that our joy may be full!

CONCLUSION:

1. From **1 Jn 1:1-4**, then, we learn that fullness of joy comes only when we are in fellowship with the Father and the Son
2. Only then do we have that “eternal life”, which was first manifested in the flesh by Jesus Himself, and now given only through Jesus - cf. **1 Jn 5:11-13**

(Material from Mark A. Copeland)