

FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Approximate date: anywhere from 70-90 C.E.

Time period: period of transition in the *ekklēsia* from Apostolic to post-Apostolic, with Believers facing threats from (proto-)Gnostic errors

Author: the Apostle John

Location of author: Ephesus or Asia Minor

Target audience and their location: Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in Asia Minor

People:

John the Apostle

People mentioned:

Yeshua the Messiah

Key Themes:

the eternal life available in Yeshua the Messiah / the need for Believers to confess sin and be forgiven / obedience to God's commandments / the strong need for Believers to love one another / warnings against antichrists / warnings against being led astray / the need to love others via our actions / the need to test the spirits / the need to believe God and believe in God

Key Scriptures: 1 John 2:4-7; 3:4; 4:2-3; 5:13 / **The Message Authenticated** (1:1-4); **The Principles of Fellowship Explained** (1:5-2:29); **The Children of God** (3:1-24); **The Spirit of Truth** (4:1-6); **More on the Theme of Love** (4:7-21); **Secrets of a Victorious Faith** (5:1-5); **God's Witness to the Gospel** (5:6-12); **Spiritual Confidence** (5:13-20); **Warning Against Idols** (5:21)¹

Theological Summary: One can usually find that conservative examiners are in general agreement that the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, is the author of the Epistles of 1, 2, and 3 John. The author communicates in an authoritative manner consistent with the Fourth Gospel, and it is detected that he was extremely close to the Lord (cf. John 13:23). The author well fits the description of the John we see in the Gospels as being a "son of thunder" (Mark 3:17). As is asserted, "When the Gospel and the letter [of 1 John] are compared, the conclusion is well-nigh irresistible that the two books are by the same person" (*NIDB*).² Yet, there are thoughts

¹ Cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 896-899.

² Steven Barabas, "John, Letters of," in *NIDB*, 536.

expressed that with John (*Yochanan*, יְחֻזָּנָן or *Iōannēs*, Ἰωάννης) being such a common name among First Century Jews, that a certain John the Elder/Presbyter might have instead been the author of 1 John, or at least 2&3 John. Widely speaking, the authorship issues surrounding the letters of 1, 2, and 3 John have been tied to those of the Fourth Gospel. While these texts, and the Book of Revelation, are traditionally held to have been written in the late First Century, in Asia Minor, and all bear indicators of common authorship—was the Apostle John really the author, or at least chief compiler (possibly with a secretary), of all these Biblical books?

The author of 1 John says how, “We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son *to be* the Savior of the world” (4:14), which may be regarded as him being an eyewitness of Yeshua the Messiah,³ possibly also implied by 1:1-4. This would be an internal indicator that John the son of Zebedee could very well be the author of 1 John, and given the size of this letter, the authorship questions of 2&3 John are understandably connected to 1 John. Furthermore, the same basic proofs offered for genuine Johannine authorship of 1, 2, and 3 John, tend to also be provided for the Fourth Gospel.⁴

Usages or allusions to the material of 1, 2, and 3 John are witnessed in the early Christian works of Clement of Rome (*1 Clement* 49:5; 50:3; cf. 1 John 2:5; 4:12, 17-18), the Didache (*Didache* 10:5-6; cf. 1 John 2:17), and the Epistle of Barnabas (*Epistle of Barnabas* 5:9-11; 12:10; cf. 1 John 4:2; 2 John 7).⁵ “[F]rom very early times the epistle was not only treated as Scripture but was assumed to be Johannine, in spite of the fact that no specific claim to this effect is made by the writer himself” (Guthrie).⁶ The Church Fathers of the Second Century C.E. all bore testimony to genuine Johannine authorship of 1 John. Most notable would be the works of Polycarp, who was a successor of the Apostle John from Asia Minor. He specifically quoted from 1 and 2 John, saying,

“For whosoever does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is antichrist [cf. 2 John 2; 1 John 4:2-3];’ and whosoever does not confess the testimony of the cross, is of the devil; and whosoever perverts the oracles of the Lord to his own lusts, and says that there is neither a resurrection nor a judgment, he is the first-born of Satan” (*Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians* 7:1).⁷

By the late Second Century C.E., we see an explicit attestation of 1 John and 2 John being products of the Apostle John, as they are all quoted by Irenaeus:

“...These are they against whom the Lord has cautioned us beforehand; and His disciple, in his Epistle already mentioned, commands us to avoid them, when he says: ‘For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Take heed to them, that ye lose not what ye have wrought [2 John 7, 8].’ And again does he say in the Epistle: ‘Many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come

³ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 860.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 861, especially pp 871-879 for a discussion on 1 John’s relationship to the Gospel of John.

⁵ Cf. Carson and Moo, pp 670-671.

⁶ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 859; cf. Carson and Moo, pp 670-672.

⁷ *BibleWorks 8.0: Schaff, Early Church Fathers.*

in the flesh is of God; and every spirit which separates Jesus Christ is not of God, but is of antichrist [1 John 4:1, 2].’ These words agree with what was said in the Gospel, that ‘the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.’ Wherefore he again exclaims in his Epistle, ‘Every one that believeth that Jesus is the Christ, has been born of God [1 John 5:1];’ knowing Jesus Christ to be one and the same, to whom the gates of heaven were opened, because of His taking upon Him flesh: who shall also come in the same flesh in which He suffered, revealing the glory of the Father” (*Against Heresies* 3.16.18).⁸

As Carson and Moo conclude, “Never is any of the three Johannine epistles attributed to anyone other than John the son of Zebedee.”⁹ Understandably, due to the size of 1 John (5 chapters), in comparison to 2 John (13 verses) and 3 John (14 verses), the latter two are rightfully concluded to somehow be connected to the composition and theological themes of 1 John. The addresses of 2 and 3 John are somehow aware of the issues addressed in 1 John (discussed further in the entries for **2 John** and **3 John**), and possibly even those in the Gospel of John.

Many liberals doubt genuine Johannine authorship of 1, 2, and 3 John, *and* a few conservatives are not totally convinced that the Apostle John wrote them, either. But if John the son of Zebedee is not the author of these letters, then who would it be? Some liberals do think that the author of 1 John is the same as the Gospel of John, and the author of 2&3 John is in all likelihood the same person.¹⁰ It is also thought by some that rather than the Apostle John being the author of 1, 2, and 3 John, that these letters are the product of some kind of a Johannine school or community, which continued his theological legacy by authoring or producing these materials.¹¹ In this regard, though, a writing like 1 John is not to be taken as an epistle or a letter, but rather some kind of sermon or tract, possibly linking several messages together¹² to address problems present among the early Believers. Liberals do not necessarily think that their not knowing who the author of 1, 2, and 3 John definitely was, means that their contents are to be ignored, or that these writings do not encourage proper living for people of faith.¹³

Of the specific, alternative candidates who are often considered for the authorship of 1, 2, and 3 John, or at least 2&3 John, is the proposal that there was a specific John the Elder/Presbyter. The Fourth Century Church historian Eusebius does attest to how “there were...two tombs in Ephesus, and that both are called Johns even to this day, which it is particularly necessary to observe,” noting the presence of a “presbyter John” (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.6, 7).¹⁴ It has been suggested that if there were indeed a John the Elder, who was a leader within the Body of Messiah in the late First Century C.E., that he could have been the author of at least the latter two of the Johannine letters.¹⁵ At the same time, the existence of

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Carson and Moo, 671.

¹⁰ David Rensberger, “John Letters of,” in *EDB*, 725; John Painter, “1, 2, and 3 John,” in *ECB*, 1512.

¹¹ Cf. Robert Kysar, “John, Epistles of,” in *ABD*, 3:907-908.

¹² Ibid., 3:902.

¹³ G.B. Caird, “John, Letters of,” in *IDB*, 2:946; Kysar, “John, Epistles of,” in *ABD*, 3:911-912.

¹⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, 104.

¹⁵ Caird, “John, Letters of,” in *IDB*, 2:951; cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 862-863.

an independent John the Elder has been challenged or doubted¹⁶ (even by Eusebius who noted, "...it if be not allowed that it was the first..." [*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.6]),¹⁷ most especially because the Apostles themselves were described to be elders (cf. 1 Peter 5:1). "[T]here is nothing anomalous about an apostle designating himself as an elder...If the author is John the son of Zebedee, the last of the apostles, it is [surely] not inappropriate" (Carson and Moo).¹⁸ While an independent John the Elder, who probably personally knew John the Apostle, being the author of 1-3 John is surely preferable over these letters being anonymous, Morris points out how "It cannot be demonstrated beyond doubt that a John the elder, distinct from John the apostle, ever existed" (*NBCR*).¹⁹

Whether one is conservative or liberal, it is very difficult to separate out the writing style and theological themes of 1 John from the Gospel of John. A liberal resource like *IDBSup* indicates, "the Johannine letters, especially I John, stand closer in language, style, and conceptually to the Fourth Gospel than to any other extant document or body of literature."²⁰ A more conservative interpreter like Marshall is apt to direct us, "There is no doubt that Revelation is closely related to both the Gospel and the Epistles by a wealth of theological concepts which mark the five Johannine books as a distinct group. The theory of common authorship of all five books has found some powerful support..." (*ISBE*).²¹

Some have claimed that John, as a Galilean fisherman, would not have had the ability to compose a piece like 1 John (and by extension 2 and 3 John). However, the testimony we see in the Gospels (as well as ancient Christian history)²² is that he was a man strongly empowered by the Spirit to deliver a powerful word to the faith community. According to Church tradition, John the Apostle spent time in Ephesus (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.23; 3.31.3; 5.24.2-4), having relocated there during the time of the Jewish War in Jerusalem (66-70 C.E.). Irenaeus records that "John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon [Jesus'] breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia" (*Against Heresies* 3.1.1).²³ In the estimation of a theologian like Burge, "While the early church was well-known for its fanciful traditions about the apostles...many scholars do not count this story of John among them. John was a leading pastor whose memory of Jesus and whose recollection of his teachings gave him unique stature in antiquity."²⁴ We should see no quantitative reason to deny genuine Johannine authorship of 1, 2, and 3 John.

¹⁶ Cf. I.H. Marshall, "John, Epistles of," in *ISBE*, 2:1097.

¹⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, 104.

¹⁸ Carson and Moo, 674.

¹⁹ Leon Morris, "1 John," in *NBCR*, 1259.

²⁰ D.M. Smith, "John, Letters of" in *IDBSup*, 487.

²¹ Marshall, "John, Epistles of," in *ISBE*, 2:1097.

²² As Eusebius attests, "What shall we say of him who reclined upon the breast of Jesus, I mean John? who has left one gospel, in which he confesses that he could write so many that the whole world could not contain them. He also wrote the Apocalypse, commanded as he was to conceal, and not to write the voices of the seven thunders. He has also left an epistle consisting of very few lines; suppose, also that a second and third is from him..." (*Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.9-10; *Ecclesiastical History*, p 215).

²³ [BibleWorks 8.0: Schaff, Early Church Fathers](#).

²⁴ G.M. Burge, "John, Letters of," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, 588.

A broad dating for the composition of 1 John, and also 2&3 John, would likely fall anywhere from 70-90 C.E., with 85-90 C.E. being a bit more likely. Some, though, have placed these letters as late as 96-110 C.E.²⁵ Much of this is obviously dependent upon whether genuine Johannine authorship is believed, or if someone else wrote these letters. It is also debated, by both conservatives and liberals, whether or not 1 John, and also 2&3 John, were written before or after the Gospel of John. Many are in agreement that 1 John was probably written after the Gospel of John.²⁶ The author of 1 John (and 2&3 John) could very well be of advanced age, as he addresses his audience as “children” (2:1, 28; 3:7). This points us in the direction of genuine Johannine involvement.

No Hebrew or Aramaic origin for 1 John has ever been proposed by scholars. An intended audience in Asia Minor, non-Jewish *and* Jewish, would have been Greek speaking,²⁷ even though one finds both Hellenistic and Jewish ways of communicating in the letter.²⁸

Assuming that the Apostle John wrote this letter from Ephesus, or at least somewhere in Asia Minor, this would have meant that his initial audience included Believers living in the Roman province of Asia.²⁹ 1 John should not be regarded as a literary “epistle,” employing the basic functions of an ancient letter.³⁰ Instead, it is most likely that even with genuine Johannine involvement present for 1 John, that it was “a general treatise aimed at wide distribution. Some prefer to call it a sermon or an address. Perhaps it is a pamphlet, a brochure or an encyclical. Some prefer to think of it as a tractate engaged in some sort of polemic, a kind of manifesto that addresses specific theological issues across a general front” (Burge).³¹ 1 John has even been proposed as a kind of introduction or explanation to the Gospel of John, as Burge notes how “it is widely accepted that the problems addressed in the letters are reflected in the Fourth Gospel itself.”³² He goes on to detail, “A common compositional theory argues that an early edition of the Fourth Gospel was followed by a theological crisis in the community. The crisis prompted a revision of the Gospel and the writing of 1 John...Finally, 2 John and 3 John were penned to address a subsequent local problem.”³³ Carson and Moo, though, simply prefer 1 John to be viewed “as a pastoral letter to a congregation or to a number of congregations,”³⁴ without trying to specifically classify it.

Readers can certainly detect a pastoral theme to 1 John, although this letter was also intended to answer claims issued against the author’s authority, as well as some significant problems that had erupted within, or were at least known by, the audience. Many of these problems doubtlessly included significant sin and disobedience to God’s commandments, even including the ever-imperative requirement to love (1:5-2:2; 2:28-3:10; cf. 5:16-18). Also

²⁵ Cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 880; Carson and Moo, pp 676-677.

²⁶ Cf. Barabas, “John, Letters of,” in *NIDB*, 536; Robert Kysar, “1 John,” in Walter J. Harrelson, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, NRSV (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 2195.

²⁷ Cf. F.F. Bruce *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 13.

²⁸ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 875-876.

²⁹ Gundry, “The Catholic, or General, Epistles,” in *A Survey of the New Testament*, 448.

³⁰ Marshall, “John, Epistles of,” in *ISBE*, 2:1092; Kysar, “John, Epistles of,” in *ABD*, 3:900.

³¹ Burge, “John, Letters of,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, 596.

³² *Ibid.*, 588.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Carson and Moo, 669.

detailed was a failure on the part of many to confess Yeshua the Messiah as having come in the flesh (2:18-27; 4:1-6). A general conclusion seen about the thrust of 1 John is that this piece combated “An aberrant Christianity, which teaches salvation by esoteric knowledge, excites an enthusiasm devoid of moral concern, and nourishes a spirituality contemptuous of all things material” (*IDB*).³⁵

1 John was a text written to answer claims against the Apostle’s authority, and was composed in a very pastoral manner. Whether 1 John is considered by interpreters to be an epistle, a letter, or a tract—it was not written to the opponents of true teaching, but rather *to affirm* true teaching to the faithful. Trying to reconstruct the events behind the text, examiners are in widespread agreement that there was a group of sectarians that had seceded from the mainstream of the Johannine assembly that its author taught, nurtured, and served.³⁶ This letter was written to denounce a false teaching which promoted strange beliefs. The false teaching is believed to compose elements of (proto-)Gnosticism, antinomianism, a docetic Christology, and possibly even the views of the ancient heretic Cerinthus. Yet, whether a concentrated and definitive false teaching, or an assortment of varied false teachings and ideas are addressed, can probably be debated.

Whether the false teaching(s) encountered in 1 John was promoted by ancient Jewish Messiah followers or not has also been rightly debated. While arguments have been made favoring some kind of Jewish-promoted false teaching, noting how by the late First Century the Believers were being distanced from the Synagogue, it is instead more probable that non-Jewish outsiders “interpreted [John’s teaching] tradition from the context of their own religious experience, which was influenced by the mystery cults” (*ECB*).³⁷ It is important for us to be aware that “there is nothing to lead us to suppose that the readers generally were Jewish Christians” (Guthrie),³⁸ as by the late First Century C.E. the majority of Yeshua Believers would not have been Jewish. Jewish Believers would have been a part of a *broad* audience of those who would have encountered 1 John.

What were the errors encountered in 1 John?

In the Second Century, the philosophy of Gnosticism would advocate a radical separation between a person’s body and spirit, which did affect much of emerging Christianity. One of Gnosticism’s underlying currents was the errant belief that what one did physically did not affect a person spiritually, and vice versa. 1 John, in all probability, refutes teachings that had their roots in what would develop into Gnosticism, which were gaining ground in the late First Century C.E. Purported Believers who adhered to this bad form of dualism were not obeying God’s commandments as they should have been, leading to immoral and inappropriate behavior. The author of 1 John has been said by a few radical liberals to actually be influenced by Gnostic ideas of light and darkness, life and death, truth and lies, and love and hate, as these themes are common in Gnostic literature and the Nag Hammadi

³⁵ Caird, “John, Letters of,” in *IDB*, 2:947.

³⁶ Marshall, “John, Epistles of,” in *ISBE*, 2:1092.

³⁷ Painter, “1, 2, and 3 John,” in *ECB*, 1513.

³⁸ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 866.

writings.³⁹ However, as more studies have been conducted in Rabbinical literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls, these were common terms also used throughout the Jewish world.⁴⁰

The material in 1 John addresses a more developed errant ideology, which is not present in Paul's refutations to mystical ideas seen in his letter to the Colossians (cf. Colossians 2:8) or Timothy (cf. 1 Timothy 6:20). Whether this is the full-blown Gnosticism of the Second Century C.E. can be contested. Marshall directs our attention, though, to how "The false teachers appear to have been forerunners of the heretics who were responsible for the developed Gnostic systems of the 2nd century. The seeds of Gnosticism were already to be found in the NT period, although it is a confusing use of terminology if we apply the actual term 'Gnosticism' to the incipient Gnosticism or pre-Gnosticism of this period" (*ISBE*).⁴¹ While one is likely to find conservative theological works that refer to the Apostle John refuting "Gnosticism" in 1 John, it might be safer to describe the false teaching as warning against incipient proto-Gnostic ideas.

A second problem countered in 1 John was to address those who promoted a docetic Christology, which held Yeshua to *only* be God, or at least some kind of supernatural entity, but not be authentically human as well.⁴² (The term "docetic" is derived from the Greek verb *dokeō*, δοκέω meaning "to seem.") As 1 John 4:2 says, "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Yeshua the Messiah has come in the flesh is from God" (cf. 2 John 7; John 1:14). Any false teachers refuted in 1 John did not deny that Yeshua was the Messiah, per se. They did, however, deny that He was come in the flesh (4:2), that He was pre-existent as the Son of God (1:1; 4:15; 5:5, 10), and consequently that He was the Savior (4:9). A docetic Christology stands against the doctrine of Incarnation, meaning that God could never take on human form.

A third problem probably countered in 1 John is discernible from the late Second Century writings of Irenaeus (i.e., *Against Heresies* 3.11.1). The error of Cerinthianism was taught by John's major rival in Ephesus, Cerinthus. Irenaeus records, "John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming, 'Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within'" (*Against Heresies* 3.3.4).⁴³ The Cerinthians did not believe in the full Divinity of the Messiah, but rather that when Yeshua was immersed by John the Divine Messiahship fell on Him, but then left Him at the time of His death (cf. Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 1.26.1).⁴⁴

1 John refutes the positions of doceticism and Cerinthianism, by asserting that one must confess that Yeshua the Messiah is come in the flesh from God (4:2, 14), and the fact that if one is to spiritually overcome the Adversary, a person must believe that He is the Son of God (5:5). As Yeshua is the "Son of God" coming in the flesh *from God*, He must be regarded as God

³⁹ Cf. Caird, "John, Letters of," in *IDB*, 2:947.

⁴⁰ Caird, "John, Letters of," in *IDB*, 2:948; Glenn W. Barker, "1 John," in *EXP*, 12:300.

⁴¹ Marshall, "John, Epistles of," in *ISBE*; cf. Burge, "John, Letters of," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, pp 592-593; Carson and Moo, 780.

⁴² Burge, "John, Letters of," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, 591.

⁴³ BibleWorks 8.0: Schaff, Early Church Fathers.

⁴⁴ Cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 865-866; Marshall, "John, Epistles of," in *ISBE*, 3:1092.

(cf. John 1:18). An incarnational Christology is necessary in order to affirm the reality of the gospel. Holding Yeshua to be supernatural alone, while extremely important, is not enough. Yeshua came into the world as a human being to die for human sinners, and also to show all of us how to love others and obey the Father. 1 John is a masterful defense of both Yeshua's Divinity *and* His humanity.⁴⁵

Another significant problem confronted in 1 John is antinomianism. Antinomianism is the denial of the place of any Divine law in the life of a person. Adoption of antinomianism within the false teaching(s) addressed, which could definitely be one of the results of seeing proto-Gnostic views promoted among the Believers in late First Century Asia Minor.⁴⁶ John refutes this idea by telling his readers, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1:8). Such unacceptable behavior is plainly identified: "sin is lawlessness" (3:4).⁴⁷ John also says that "the one who practices sin is of the devil" (3:8). At the same time, while the extreme error of actively sinning is addressed in 1 John, the need to obey the Lord (2:6) is true of *any group* of Believers, regardless of how much error may be circulating at any given time. Much of 1 John is spent addressing the reality that Believers who are truly abiding in the Lord are not to sin, and their nature must be in the process of being conformed to His nature, especially in terms of love (4:8-10).

For today's Messianic movement, the Epistle of 1 John, very similar to the Epistle of James, has a great deal of importance as it includes many proof texts which support a life of Torah obedience for followers of Yeshua. When John talks about the commandments of God (2:3) and living in the truth (2:4), he writes about the commandments of God contained in the Torah. When he writes that "sin is lawlessness" (3:4), John is talking about the disobedience to the Torah or Law of Moses. When John writes about light and darkness (2:8-10), and truth and lies (1:8; 2:4), he makes a reference to worldly teachings that lead to lawlessness, and the high standard of the Creator God laid forth in His Instruction. 1 John is highly geared to those who need to be put on the appropriate path, conducting themselves properly according to what God considers acceptable and unacceptable—not any errant human teachings.

It is, of course, most imperative for Messianic readers to know that the main commandments John is concerned for his audience to always be observing, surround the imperative to love God and to one another (2:10; 3:14; 4:20-21; 5:2), something naturally manifested by good deeds (3:10, 18). As the emerging Messianic movement improves in its relationship with the text and message of 1 John, we will need to learn to similarly improve ourselves with demonstrating *more and more* good deeds via the power of God's love within us. Also incumbent upon us will be a need to fairly join in with those past voices in history, which have taken 1 John (as well as 2&3 John), extremely seriously in their Christian faith

⁴⁵ Barker, "1 John," in *EXP*, 12:293; Carson and Moo, pp 679-680.

⁴⁶ Marshall, "John, Epistles of," in *ISBE*, 3:1092 informs us,

"They may have thought of sin as a spiritual matter, and hence saw no inconsistency in claiming sinlessness while at the same time indulging in selfishness and lovelessness. A [later] Gnostic would have argued that, since the body (composed of matter) was evil and only the spiritual part of man was ultimately important, bodily behavior was irrelevant to Christian belief."

⁴⁷ Grk. *hē hamartia estin hē anomia* (ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνομία); "sin is violation of Torah" (CJB).

practice—and have always held what it has considered the so-called “moral law” of the Old Testament to be valid for all time.

In terms of the variety of errors confronted by the Epistle of 1 John, the Messianic community today, sadly, has some of those who promote similar ideas that are encountered. There are definitely fringe Messianic teachers who promote aberrant ideas about the Father and the Son, and largely dispense with the morality and ethics of the Torah. These people do not concern themselves with the good deeds required from the Torah, relating to loving and helping others. Even in more of what might be considered the “mainstream” of the Messianic movement, there are more and more questions being asked about the nature of Yeshua. 1 John and its message against a docetic Christology and Cerinthianism will undoubtedly have to be consulted for future theological analyses, and how the Apostolic Scriptures present the Savior as being *both* Divine and human.⁴⁸

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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON 1 JOHN:

1. Why do you think John makes a serious point to emphasize love throughout his entire epistle? Do you think some in his audience forgot this critical commandment? Do you ever forget this critical commandment? Explain your thoughts.

2. According to John, what are *all* of the requirements that one must have to be considered “a child of God”?

⁴⁸ This will include an evaluation of the textual witnesses surrounding 1 John 5:7-8a, or what is commonly regarded as the Johannine Comma.

3. Do you agree with the historical assertion that John was countering some kind of Gnosticism, or proto-Gnosticism, in his epistle? If so, explain why. If not, explain why. (Do not hesitate to look up “Gnosticism” in a Bible encyclopedia if you need to.)

REFLECTION ON 1 JOHN'S PLACEMENT IN THE CANON

Write two short paragraphs about what struck you about reading the Epistle of 1 John: