



**Author:** The author of this letter is not identified within the text but is most likely the Apostle John (son of Zebedee: see **Mark 1:19–20**) who was also the author of the Gospel of John and Revelation. John was one of the closest friends of Jesus along with fellow Apostles James (his brother) and Peter (**Matthew 17:1**). John referred to himself in his gospel account as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (e.g. **John 13:23**).

The earliest identification John as the author comes from the early Christian writers: Irenaeus (c. A.D. 140–203), Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215), Tertullian (c. 155–222) and Origen (c. 185–253). All of these noted the writer as the Apostle John. In addition to their identification, there is ample evidence of John’s authorship within the letter itself:

1. The style of the Gospel of John is very similar to that of this letter. Both are written in simple Greek and use contrasting figures, such as light and darkness, life and death, truth and lies, love and hate.
2. There are many similar phrases and expressions between this letter and John’s Gospel. Consider...

<b>1 John</b>	<b>Gospel of John</b>
<b>1:1</b>	<b>1:1, 14</b>
<b>1:4</b>	<b>16:24</b>
<b>1:6–7</b>	<b>3:19–21</b>
<b>2:7</b>	<b>13:34–35</b>
<b>3:8</b>	<b>8:44</b>
<b>3:14</b>	<b>5:24</b>
<b>4:6</b>	<b>8:47</b>
<b>4:9</b>	<b>1:14, 18; 3:16</b>
<b>5:9</b>	<b>5:32, 37</b>
<b>5:12</b>	<b>3:36</b>

3. The emphasis on eyewitness testimony (**1:1–4**) is supported by the reality that John was a follower of Christ from the earliest days of His ministry (**Mark 1:19–20**).
4. The authoritative manner of the writing in this letter, seen in its commands (**2:15, 24, 28; 4:1; 5:21**), firm assertions (**2:6; 3:14; 4:12**) and pointed identification of error (**1:6, 8; 2:4, 22**) would be expected from an Apostle of Jesus.
5. The inference of a close relationship with Jesus (**1:1; 2:5–6, 24, 27–28**) fit the descriptions of “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (**John 13:23**).



**Occasion (Gnosticism):** The occasion for this letter is to defend the true Gospel message against an early form of the false teaching that would later be known as Gnosticism. The central teaching of Gnosticism was “dualism” which held that all spirit is entirely good and all matter is entirely evil. From this root came five core beliefs:

1. The human body is made of matter (flesh) and is therefore evil. God is wholly spirit and therefore good. Flesh and spirit do not intersect.
2. Salvation is the escape from the body, achieved not by faith in Christ but by special knowledge (the Greek word for “knowledge” is gnosis, hence “Gnosticism”). Note the times in John’s letter that he uses the phrase “we know” in presenting what true Godly knowledge is all about (**2:3; 3:2, 14, 16, 24; 4:6, 13; 5:2, 15, 18-20**).
3. Because all spirit is good and all matter is evil, Gnostics denied that Christ came to earth in the flesh (i.e. in human form). This belief is the background of much of the writings in 1 John (**1:1-4; 2:22; 4:2-3**). Some claimed the Christ only seemed to have a human body. This view was known as “Docetism”, from the Greek dokeo (“to seem”). Others said the divine Christ joined the man Jesus at his baptism and left before he died. This view was called Cerinthianism, named after its most prominent spokesman, Cerinthus.
4. Since the body was considered evil, it was to be treated harshly. This practice was called “asceticism”. The ascetic form of Gnosticism is the background of part of the letter to the Colossians (**Col 2:21, 23**).
5. Dualism also led to carnal (sinful) living. The reasoning was since matter was considered evil, and matter and spirit do not intersect, breaking God’s law while in the flesh was of no moral consequence. Consider John’s emphasis in this letter on sin and the keeping of God’s commandments (**1:5-10; 2:1-6; 3:4-10, 19-24**).

The Gnosticism addressed in the New Testament was an early form of this false teaching, and not the intricately developed system of the second and third centuries. In addition to that seen in Colossians and in John’s letters, acquaintance with early Gnosticism is reflected in 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Peter.

**Recipients:** The text makes it clear this letter was addressed to believers (**1 John 2:12-14, 19; 3:1; 5:13**); however, the letter does not indicate a specific recipient. Since no church or city is mentioned, it is possible this was intended as a circular letter sent to Christians in numerous places.

**Date:** The letter is difficult to date with precision, but factors such as evidence from early Christian writers (Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria), the early form of Gnosticism reflected in text, and indications of the advanced age of John suggest the end of the first century. Since John seems to build on concepts and themes found in his Gospel account (see **1 Jn 2:7-11**), it is reasonable to date the letter somewhere between A.D. 85 and 95, after the writing of the John’s Gospel (assuming it was written around A.D. 85).