

**John 1-2-3**  
**Lesson 1 – The Word of Life**  
**September 9, 2020**

**Introduction**

Author – John, the apostle

- The actual text does not identify its author, but from the earliest history of the Church, there has never been any doubt about who wrote it.
- He was an eyewitness of the ministry of Christ from the beginning (1:1).
- He wrote with the authority of an apostle.
- He used the same term for Christ, *the Word*, that appears in John’s Gospel (1:1) and the Revelation of John (19:13).
- Son of Zebedee and Salome, who was possibly the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus (John 19:25); brother of James.
- Galilean fisherman by trade, nicknamed by Jesus, along with his brother, “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17).
- Part of Jesus’ inner-circle among the apostles along with Peter and James.
- Referred to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” in his Gospel.

Recipients – unidentified in the letters

- Tradition says these letters were originally written to congregations surrounding Ephesus in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey).
- Revelation 2 & 3 mentions seven letters to seven churches in the area (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea).

Date – 85-95AD

Occasion – false teachings brought about by Satan himself

- Gnosticism – claimed “secret knowledge”; no incarnation of Christ; all material things are evil; Bible not the source of all true spiritual information; Gospel of Judas
- Attacks on Christian congregations concerning their authority, especially of their leaders to distinguish truth from error.

Major Themes – Truth and Love

**Setting the Stage**

John devotes much of what he writes to refuting false teachings that are circulating among the churches in the area. Before launching into his refutation of error, John establishes his credentials as an eyewitness to the Word of Life.

1. What is the value of eyewitness testimony? In what setting is eyewitness testimony important today?
2. Does having to refute of error (apologetics) make you uncomfortable? Why or why not?

**We Have Touched the Word of Life**

**Read 1 John 1:1-4**

Although the term “word of life” is not a particularly common designation in the New Testament, it forms the foundation of the message of 1 John. “Word of life” can mean the word about life, but it can also mean the Word that gives life. The second sense is probably what John had foremost in his mind. Jesus is the “Word of Life.”

3. What examples from the Gospels can you think of where John or the other disciples saw or touched the Word of Life?
4. John uses physical language to describe the Word of Life, saying that he has seen, heard, and handled that Word. Imagine how Christianity would be different if the Word had not become flesh (John 1:14). How would this affect our view of
  - a. Creation, and especially our own bodies?
  - b. What happened on the cross?
  - c. What we receive in the Lord's Supper?
  - d. The resurrection of the Last Day?

### **John Opponents – Gnostics**

These adherents claimed to have secret knowledge about God and the universe that no one else had. From 1 John we can piece together some of what John's opponents taught.

5. What do the following verses imply about the supposed "knowledge" of John's opponents?
  - a. 1 John 1:8
  - b. 1 John 2:4
  - c. 1 John 2:22
  - d. 1 John 4:2-3

The Gnostics claimed to have no sin and, therefore, had no need of the Commandments. They believed that the physical world was not created good, but was in fact evil. Since they believed physical creation was evil, they denied that Jesus came in the flesh. They also claimed that what they did in their earthly lives did not matter since their bodies were evil.

6. Can you think of any people today who hold any of the positions of John's opponents?

### **Fellowship**

John states that the purpose of his Letter is to create fellowship between him, his reader, the Father, and Jesus Christ. Fellowship (*koinonia* in Greek) is a union, or communion, between Christ and believers, and also between believers.

7. How is this fellowship, or union, concretely expressed in worship? See 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, and note that the word *participation* is translating the Greek word *koinonia*, the same word John uses for "fellowship" in 1 John 1:3.
8. John says in 1 John 1:4, "We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete." How does fellowship with Christ bring joy to your life? How does fellowship with other Christians also bring joy?