

1 John “Overview”

I. Intro

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The Bible, as literature, can be compared to great architecture; mathematical and sequential, where each brick, stone or board is placed upon another precisely fitted to enhance the structure and encase the beauty of the building. This is noticed in all the types of writings in the Bible be that narratives, prophetic, poetry or letters. The Bible student is benefited by understanding this and noticing the type of building so that they can investigate and interpret properly ensuring the right personal application. With that said 1st John is not your normal letter and isn't built like great architecture instead it is more like a great work of art with over lapping and layered brush strokes of differing hues painted upon a blank canvas. When you look at this letter you will note many different points of interest and color throughout the whole painting only to see them repeated in other parts of the portrait all perfectly fit. Read it through and you will marvel at its depth of truth while being amazed by its simplicity of structure. This morning we will examine seven points about this masterpiece:

- 1. Who was used to paint it**
- 2. Who were the original viewers**
- 3. Why was it painted**
- 4. What is the subject matter of the painting**
- 5. When was it painted**
- 6. What are the key pigments used in its construction**
- 7. Where was it painted**

The purpose of these questions is so we can understand what the writer was conveying in his work of art! This overview will equip us, ***I hope***, in our study in the richness of this masterpiece, so that we can get his paint all over us. While I've employed the normal letter outline and it is available; however, I do so in complete understanding that this isn't architecture but a work of art and there are far better scholars than I who may come up with far more useful outlines! I will use the above questions as the basis of this morning's study as if we were in a fine art gallery looking at the painting hung on the wall of Louvre!

Who was used to paint it

While this isn't the ONLY letter that doesn't introduce the readers to the writer it is nonetheless one in which the artist didn't sign the artwork. That being said ***the internal and external evidence*** points to the Apostle John and is not doubted by any true scholar. **The internal evidence** supports this tradition as the writer's use of words of identification such as verse 1:1-3 where he uses the word "WE" in describing apostles and "YOU" as identifying his readers and "THEY" false teachers, 4:14. The vocabulary of this letter is uniquely similar to those found in the gospel that bears his name, John, as a style of brush stroke is to a painter. They both share phrases not found anywhere else in the Bible. The word "***Logos***" found in this letter only appears in two other locations when describing Jesus, the Gospel of John and Revelation and serves as a strong indication of the author. The author also is the only New Testament writer to use the expression found in the gospel that also appears in 1st John 1:8 "***have no sin***". This uniqueness of this phrase is in the verb "***HAVE***" in connection with sin. Other writers write on the action of "committing sin" but say nothing on "HAVING SIN" as he does in John 9:41, 15:24. What the writer means by this phrase is that ***sin isn't something that we do, it is part of us as we possess it!*** Interestingly, John declares the opposite of Jesus in 1 John 3:5 saying in HIM (Jesus) is NO

SIN! Another word that is common to both the gospel and this letter is the Greek word used for the Holy Spirit “***Parakletos***” translated “*comforter*” in the gospel and “*advocate*” in 1st John but in both cases it identifies “*One called alongside to help*” the only difference in the interpretation of this Greek word is how the person experiences the Holy Spirit’s actions in His help. **The external evidence** is no less convincing, as two of the Apostles disciples, Polycarp and Papias, attribute it to him by quoting as being from John. It is also helpful to compare the first chapter of the gospel of John with the first chapter of the letter 1st John as both similarly lay a strong foundation to the Person and Work of our Lord:

The Gospel: 1:1-5 Christ’s relationship to God the Father. 1:6-3 Christ’s historical manifestation. 1:14-18 The personal appropriation of Christ.

1st John: 1:1 Christ’s relationship to time and eternity. 1:2 Christ’s historical manifestation. 1:3 The personal results.

The main difference is that the gospel of John is concerned with personal faith in Christ whereas 1st John is concerned with our assurance because of our personal faith in Christ.

Who were the original viewers / When was it painted / Where was it painted

There is no clear indication to whom John wrote this letter too. The prevailing view has been to the churches in the province of Asia while not impossible I find it unlikely as Peter addressed those churches in his letters around AD 64 and now 25 to 30 years John writes to the same area but I’m certain that in that length of time much has changed in those churches as well as the gospel had expanded and increased the number of fellowships. In 66 AD John and other apostles were forced to leave Jerusalem because the imminent destruction by the Romans’. In John’s case

he relocated to Ephesus. Nowhere in this letter does he say he is the founder of this fellowship, but it is clear by reading 1st John that he was very familiar and found of these saints and the feeling was mutual as he address them 7 times as “little children”. Multiple times he refers to them as young men and fathers. Six times he calls them “beloved” and all of this implies his affection for them as he speaks to them like a “Grandpa” would as John was quite advanced years perhaps close to 100.

Why was it painted / What is the subject matter of the painting

A careful reading of this letter indicates that it was written to counter a dangerous heresy as it emphasizes the deity of Christ as well as judges those that deny His deity three times calling them “liars”. John also frequently refers to the “blood of Christ” as well as referring to Him as the “Son of God”. According to the early church who received their information from John’s disciple Polycarp, this letter was written to those in the faith in a “general letter” address them tenderly to counter the false gnostic teaching of Cerinthus who was active in Ephesus during this time. Among his lies and false teaching was that Jesus was the physical son of Joseph and that He became deity at His baptism when the heavenly Jesus came united with him only to depart before his suffering and death. Cerinthus, rejected all the gospels, all of Paul’s letters and only accepted parts of Matthew and Mark. He was a former Jew from Egypt and combined ideas that spiritualized “*system of laws and rituals established by Moses*”. Cerinthus maintained circumcision and keeping the Sabbath as essential for salvation. Another aspect of this letter is upon to encourage those who are loved by God while being hated by the world, as John

repeatedly tells them to stay the course in their affection to God. Love is also a central theme of this letter.

What are the key pigments used in its construction

The Apostle John had discovered in his 20's that life was best experienced not in experiences or things but in a relationship with Jesus Christ, whom he came to understand was the Son of God. He had lived his life for over 70 years in that "reality" without any regrets. First in 1:1-4 reveals to his readers "**The Basis of Fellowship**". Then John throughout the letter through the phrase "*These things we write to you*" found four times in this little letter reveals "**The Objectives of Fellowship**" which is fourfold:

1. 1:5 "*Fullness of joy*"
2. 2:1 "*Freedom from sin*"
3. 2:26 "*Foresightedness against deception*"
4. 5:13 "*Faith filled assurance*"

From there throughout the main body of the letter will deliver *four important truths about our fellowship*:

1. 1:5-2:14 *Conditions of fellowship*
2. 2:15-27 *Cautions to fellowship*
3. 2:28-5:3 *Characteristics of fellowship*
4. 5:4-21 *Consequences of fellowship*

Next week will dig into the first 4 verses of chapter one as we take on "**The Basis of our Fellowship**"