

## **Bible Study – The letters of John Study 1 Chapter 1: verses 1 to 4.**

1 John is described as a letter in the New Testament but it is more like a paper than a letter. There is no reference to an author or who it is written to, so its purpose is more for teaching and instruction.

What is also clear is that 1 John is very similar to John's gospel as we will see below in the first study and most likely from the same author. Irenaeus, one of the early church fathers following the apostles, writes of John living in Ephesus and writing the gospel.

So it is fairly well accepted that the letters of John have come from John and his church that he worked with in Ephesus.

1 John like the gospel of John has a distinctive portrayal of Jesus. The background to the letter suggests that in John's time there were two rival thoughts of Jesus that needed to be corrected in order to have a balanced view of Jesus.

For example today we have the same problem where some like Jehovah Witnesses, Islam and people in general have a low view of Jesus in regards to his nature and cannot conceive of Jesus being equal with God. This was the error of mostly the Jewish side of the church that grew up believing in the oneness of God.

On the other side we have views of Jesus where his divine nature or an emphasis on the Spirit is so dominant, that humanity is seen in its weakness and sinfulness, and that the humanity of Jesus is denied. Some sections of the church in wanting to emphasise the spiritual side of our relationship with God, lose the important connection with the human side. In the early church some were influenced by Greek ideas and the dividing of the spirit and body into 2 unrelated realms.

This seems to be the main purpose of the instructions of John; to present a correct view of Jesus so that they can believe and live the appropriate way.

John starts his letter with a reference to Jesus almost identical to the gospel of John, "In the beginning", and a reference to the "Word of life". Jesus is also referred to as eternal life. His relationship and oneness with the Father is clearly articulated. John clearly states that Jesus has always existed and is the giver of life. Here John wants to lift Jesus to a status alongside of God.

As an eye witness, John emphasises then the humanity of Jesus, the one they have seen, and touched, that is, he was a human being just like you and I. John want to ensure his readers that they understand Jesus was a person, who shares our humanity, and is the one who is able because of both of his divine and human qualities, to draw God and us into a new relationship.

He concludes this opening section with a reference to the church or fellowship that gathers around this confession and who experience the joy this brings.

### ***Questions for reflection.***

- 1. Why is it important is it to have a balanced view of Jesus presented by John?*
- 2. Do you believe what John is saying?*
- 3. What reservations do you think people outside the "fellowship" have of this teaching?*