

First Letter of St. John Lesson 1: Handout 1

And therefore while various points are taught in the different books of the Gospels, there is no difference to the faith of believers; for in all of them all things are spoken under the one guiding Spirit, whether concerning the nativity, the passion, the resurrection, conversation with His disciples, or His two advents, the first of which was in the humiliation of rejection and is already past, and the second in the glory of royal power, which is yet to be. It is no wonder, then, that John constantly returns to these things even in his Epistles, saying of himself, “What we have seen with our eyes and have heard with our ears and what our hands have touched, these things have we written to you.”

The Muratorian Fragment, c. AD 155 (quoting from 1 John 1:1 and 3 in the last line)

The blessed Apostle John wrote this letter about the perfection of faith and charity, praising the faithfulness of those who were persevering in the unity of the Church.

St. Bede the Venerable, *Commentary on the First Letter of St. John*

Summary Outline of the First Letter of St. John

BIBLICAL PERIOD	# 12 The Kingdom of the Church			
FOCUS	The nature of God		The nature of Christians	
COVENANT	New and Eternal Covenant			
SCRIPTURE	1:1-----1:5-----3:11-----5:13-----5:21			
DIVISION	Prologue	God as light	Love one another	Epilogue
TOPIC	Abiding in God’s light		Abiding in God’s love	
	The meaning of Christian fellowship		The manifestations of Christian fellowship	
LOCATION	Ephesus, the second most important city in the Roman Empire located on the western coast of Asia Minor			
TIME	It was probably written in the mid-first-century AD after John wrote his Gospel but before the great Roman persecution that began in AD 64, resulting in John’s imprisonment on Patmos and before the Jewish Revolt of 66, the end of the world as they knew it for the Jews that led to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in AD 70. The letter mentions none of those terrible events predicted by Jesus.			

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In the First Letter, like his Gospel, St. John never names himself as the writer, submerging his identity in his Holy-Spirit-inspired work. His First Letter divides into four parts:

Prologue (1:1-4)

God is Light (1:5-3:10)

Having Love for One Another (3:11-5:12)

Epilogue (5:13-21)

The three letters of St. John share many distinctively Johannine phrases and vocabulary with frequent contrasts of opposites as well as expressions and themes common to the letters and John's Gospel and the Book of Revelation. There are four main theological themes in 1 John:

- The first is the reality of the Incarnation of the Word of God.
- The second is the distinction between the "light" of Christ/God as opposed to the world.
- The third theme is understanding the "darkness" of sin and its consequences.
- The fourth and most predominant theme is the call to love both God and our brothers and sisters in Christ and the human family in our words and deeds.

Like the Second Letter of St. Peter and the Letter of St. Jude, the Letter of 1 John has a negative and positive emphasis. It refutes false doctrines and encourages Christians to walk in the knowledge of Truth. The contrasting theme to avoid false teachers who deny the reality of the Incarnation by saying that Jesus only appeared to have a human body. John affirms and defends that Jesus was not only fully God the Son, but He took to Himself a complete and genuine human nature (1 Jn 4:2-30). A major theme is love and fellowship with God with the assurance of the indwelling of God through an abiding relationship with Him. The word love appears 46 times in 105 verses.

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Handout 2: The First Letter of Saint John

Compare the four major themes and some verses from 1 John with the Fourth Gospel:

Themes in the First Letter of John	Themes in the Gospel According to John
<p>The theme of “the Word”: 1:1-2 ~ <i>What was from the beginning ... concerns the Word of life, for the life was made visible</i></p>	<p>The theme of “the Word”: 1:1 ~ <i>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.</i></p>
<p>The theme of “Light”: 1:5, 7 ~ <i>God is light ... 7 But if we walk in the light as he is in the light...</i> 2:8-10 ~ <i>The true light is already shining. Whoever says he is in the light, yet hates his brother, is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother remains in the light...</i></p>	<p>The theme of “Light”: 1:4, 5, 7, 9 ~ <i>4 and this life was the light of the human race; 5 the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it... 7 He came for testimony, to testify to the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. The light that has come into the world...</i> 3:19 ~ <i>And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world...</i> 8:12 and 9:5 ~ <i>I am the light of the world...</i> 12:46 ~ <i>I came into the world as light ... and that life was the light of men ... the true light that give life....</i></p>
<p>The theme contrasting the “Light” of Christ with the “Darkness” of sin: 1:5 ~ <i>in him there is no darkness at all.</i> 2:10-11 ~ <i>Whoever loves his brother remains in the light ... Whoever hates his brother is in darkness</i></p>	<p>The theme contrasting the “Light” of Christ with the “Darkness of sin”: 1:5 ~ <i>The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it.</i> 3:19 ~ <i>And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light...</i> 8:12 ~ <i>I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. Also see 12:25 and 12:35-36.</i></p>
<p>The theme of “Love”/“Fellowship”: 4:11-12 ~ <i>My dear friends, if God loved us so much, we too should love each other. No one has ever seen God, but as long as we love each other, God remains in us, and his love comes to its perfection in us. 12 No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us.</i> 3:16 ~ <i>This is the proof of love, that he laid down his life for us, and we too ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.</i> 4:9 ~ <i>In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only [monogenes = only begotten] Son into the world so that we might have life through him.</i></p>	<p>The theme of “Love”/Fellowship: 3:16 ~ <i>For God so loved the world that he gave his only [monogenes = only begotten] Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.</i> 15:9-17 ~ <i>9 As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. 10 If you keep the commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love... 12 This is my commandment: love one another as I love you ... 17 This I command you: love one another.</i> 15:13-14 ~ <i>No one has greater love than this, to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.</i> The word “love/loved/loves” appears about 54 times in 21 chapters.</p>

The word “love/loved/loves” appears about 37 times in 5 chapters.	
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A Few Examples of Similar Vocabulary and Concepts	
The First Letter of John	The Gospel of John
1:1 ~ <i>What was from the beginning</i>	1:1 ~ <i>In the beginning</i>
1:1 ~ <i>what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon</i> 1:3 ~ <i>what we have seen and heard</i>	3:11 ~ <i>Amen, amen, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen</i> 3:32 ~ <i>He testifies to what he has seen and heard</i>
1:4 ~ <i>We are writing this to you so that our joy may be complete.</i>	16:24 ~ <i>Until now you have not asked anything in my name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy will be complete.</i>
2:9-11 ~ <i>Whoever says he is in the light, yet hates his brother, is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother remains in the light ... Whoever hates his brother is in darkness and is walking about in darkness not knowing where he is going, because darkness has blinded him.</i>	12:35-36 ~ <i>The light will be among you only a little while. Walk while you have the light, so that darkness may not overcome you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light so that you may become children of the light.</i>
2:15 ~ <i>Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone does love the world, the love of the Father is not in him</i>	15:18-19 ~ <i>If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, and I have chosen you out of the world, the world hates you.</i>
4:9 ~ <i>In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only [monogene = only begotten] Son into the world so that we might have life through him.</i>	1:18 ~ <i>No one has ever seen God. The only [monogene = only begotten] Son, God, who is at the Father’s side, has revealed him.</i> 3:16 ~ <i>For God so loved the world that he gave his only [monogene = only begotten] Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.</i> Also, see 1:14 and 3:18.

See a more extensive list in the lesson. The title “Son of God” appears ten times in the Gospel of John (1:34, 49; 3:18; 5:25; 9:35; 10:36; 11:4, 27; 19:7; 20:31) and seven times in 1 John (3:8; 4:15; 5:5, 10, 12, 13, and 20) while the title “only begotten (*monogenes*) Son” appears for Christ once in 1 John (4:9) and four times in the Gospel of John (1:14, 18; 3:16, and 18) but nowhere else in the other New Testament books. See the list of titles for Jesus and their significance in Lesson 1. Michal E. Hunt Copyright © 2020 www.AgapeBibleStudy.com