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Studies in 1 John
by Bill Lockwood

First John, written by the “apostle of love,” is actually a strongly worded answer to false teachers of various brands. Note the following background material dealing with 1 John.

1. *John's Style is Unique in the Bible.* John does not merely content himself with affirming a truth and allowing the reader to make application on his own. Rather, he affirms a truth and then denies its opposite in unmistakable condemnatory fashion. “*Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God*” (4:2). But now he adds, “*every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God.*” Then, he adds the label to this denier: “*Antichrist.*” Again, “*Hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments*” (2:3). Then he turns it around: “*He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him*” (2:4). John apparently did not subscribe to the plan common today which instructs us to preach in broad generalities and never make specific application, lest people grow offended.
2. *One of John's Stylistic Features is the Use of the Pronoun “This.”* “This is the message” (1:5). “This is the promise” (2:25). “This is the commandment” (3:13). “This is the love of God” (5:3). For the same usage in his gospel, see John 1:19; 3:19; 6:29; 6:40; 6:50; 17:3.
3. *John Claims to Have Been an Eyewitness to Jesus Christ.* Though he does not mention himself by name, the authorship is obvious from comparisons to the gospel of John. In John 19:35 the writer says, “*he that hath seen hath borne witness, and his witness is true.*” Here John speaks of himself in the third person. As B.F. Westcott, who specialized in John's writings, mentioned: “no ordinary reader would have doubted that the writer was appealing to his own experience, recorded in the history” (*The Speaker's Commentary*, ed. F.C. Cook, p. xxvii). Note also how John utilized the term “witness.” The sense is “eyewitness” which is connected with miraculous gifts (see John 15:26). At odds with this is the manner in which the religious world uses the word “witness” today. Those who have had a “subjective” experience with the Holy Spirit refer to themselves as “witnesses.” This is something about which the apostles never dreamed. No subjective whims John had in mind! Instead, “*that which we have heard, that which we beheld, and our hands handled concerning the Word of Life*” (1 John 1:1-2).