

# The Apostle John's Message For Today

The elderly apostle John confronted many of the same problems in the Christian Church that we face today.

## The background to the apostle John's writings –

The rest of the apostles were gone.

The Church had deep problems.

Within the scattered and diminishing Church were heresy and apostasy.

False doctrines were being taught.

From without was persecution from Roman authorities.

Although the apostle John was cut off physically on the island of Patmos, banished evidently for some months about the year AD95 from Ephesus at the time of Emperor Domitian [AD90-95].

It seems that the Roman authorities had exiled the apostle John but he returned to Ephesus on the death of the Emperor Domitian.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit the apostle John writes and what he wrote more than 1,900 years ago gives us today an insight, not only into history of the Church, but also into affairs and events that are soon to happen.

Enthusiasm and dynamism marked the apostle John's character.

Apart from the apostle Paul, John was the most prolific New Testament writer.

John was the only surviving apostle at the end of the first century.

Through his late 20s and early 30s, John had been the close personal friend of Jesus Christ, they were about the same age.

Now, around AD90, John looked back to those years when Jesus Christ had been with them, through the perspective of 60 years of experience.

60 years of trials, 60 years of the history of the Christian Church.

And John saw some incredible things.

## The Church's problems –

John saw within those 60 years a gradual erosion of the truth as revealed by Jesus Christ. The truth held so dear by the early Church and the apostles had been "*changed*" and even rejected by former members of the Church.

**John lived to see an age when some churches even refused to read his letters, [3 John 9-10].**

John was truly a spiritual and physical elder to those he wrote to and those he served.

John called them "*my children*," [3 John 4], conscious of the unique responsibility that God had given him in his spiritual and physical maturity.

John knew that he had to give the Church the truth about the heresies that were rife at that time.

**The original Church of the early chapters of Acts was composed predominantly of Jews.**

This required Paul to address particular problems, as evidence throughout Paul's epistles.

**But the membership had changed drastically through the first century, by the time John wrote, it appears that he was dealing with a primarily Gentile Church in terms of race and culture.**

**The Gentiles had brought with them different problems, problems of liberalism, problems of pagan cultures, problems of a different nature than those of the Church's original members.**

Against this background of the new influences in the Church, it is no coincidence that we find a number of references to the law in John's writing.

It is also interesting that we find an equal number of references to "love."

To some, the words "law" and "love" seem to be contradictory.

However, John showed that the two were one and the same.

**1 John 5:3** [New King James] *"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome."*

**The law of God is love, the two words are synonymous.**

## **Where does John begin his writing? –**

Often, we can tell a lot about the scope and direction of a piece of writing by analysing the way it begins.

John wrote with a more personal and intense style than the first three gospel writers.

In John's advanced age, with the wisdom and experience of an apostle, it is interesting to see how he was inspired to begin his gospel.

**John 1:1** [New King James] *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."*

Now that is an interesting introduction. Why would a man of such depth begin in such an elementary, fundamental way?

Firstly, the Greek word "logos" translated "word" had two meanings in Greek, the "spoken word" but also "reason."

The Greeks understood what gives humans the power to think and plan was the logos of God dwelling within human beings, [**Job 32:8**].

**As John's readers mostly had a Greek background, this was one way he could connect with them from the start of his epistle.**

Having started at the beginning John introduced Jesus Christ as the Word, [**verses 14-16**].

John organised his first epistle as he progressed writing it.

**John 20:30-31** [New King James] “*And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.*”

These verses mention three themes that are expanded in the epistle.

## **Signs and miracles –**

There are seven miracles around which John organised the early chapters of his gospel.

Changing of water to wine, [**John 2:1-11**].

Healing the nobleman’s son, [**John 4:46-54**].

Healing the impotent man, [**John 5:1-9**].

Feeding the 5,000, [**John 6:1-14**].

Walking on water, [**John 6:16-21**].

Healing the blind man, [**John 9:1-11**].

Raising of Lazarus, [**John 11:1-44**].

## **Belief in Jesus Christ –**

**A second emphasis that John was inspired to include in his gospel is the teaching that we must believe that Jesus is the Christ.**

The signs and miracles are to help us to develop that faith in us, [**John 7:31; John 1:41; John 10:24-25; John 11:27; John 20:30-31**].

## **Attaining eternal life –**

The third emphasis is that believing we might have life, eternal life, [**John 1:4; John 3:36; John 5:26-29; John 5:39-40; John 10:9-10; John 6:33-35; John 6:47, 63; John 11:25; John 14:6**].

The lesson John is trying to communicate is clear.

It’s important to believe the Creator God, it is important to trust Him, and it is important to have faith in Him.

## **The seven “I am’s” –**

Another encouraging pattern in John concerns the way that Jesus Christ identified and described Himself.

Jesus Christ taught us about seven different aspects of Himself using the words “*I am*.”

“*I am that I am*” is the name the Creator God gave to Moses that would give credibility to his job of bringing the Israelites out of their captivity in Egypt, [**Exodus 3:1-14**].

“*I am that I am*” means “*I will be what I will be*” showing the Almighty, all-powerful Creator God Who is self-existing and is dependent on nothing or nobody. “*I am, I have been, I always will be.*”

Jesus Christ takes on this title and John records seven times that Jesus refers to it.

I am the bread of life, [**John 6:35**].

I am the light of the world, [**John 8:12; John 9:5**].

I am the door, [**John 10:7**].

I am the Good Shepherd, [**John 10:11, 14**].

I am the resurrection and the life, [**John 11:25**].

I am the way, truth and the life, [**John 14:6**].

I am the true vine, [**John 15:1**].

### **John had a unique vantage point –**

One of the major problems that John saw overtaking the first century Church was the fulfilment of one of Jesus Christ's prophecies.

**Matthew 24:12** [New King James] *“And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.”*

**As John observed what was probably this third generation of Christians, he could see this lack of enthusiasm settling in the Church.**

New converts to the Church, two generations removed from Jesus Christ, had **only** heard of Jesus Christ's teaching miracles and ministry.

New members were **not** eyewitnesses, as John had been.

**John was writing to many people who weren't even born when he shared these experiences with Jesus Christ.**

As a result these people had lost the love, dedication and enthusiasm for God's Church, some had begun to get entangled with the world and take on some of its pagan practices.

**1 John 1:1** [New King James] *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life,”*

When John said “we” he is probably referring to himself and the other apostles, who were all dead.

Perhaps a few remaining people in the Church were old enough to remember some of the things that Jesus Christ taught, but John was a hands-on eyewitness to these events.

**John never forgot the impact of Jesus Christ on his life.**

### **Sin and forgiveness –**

Among the important concepts John bequeathed to us involved what we would call today “*getting the Church back on the track.*”

As already mentioned, John emphasises that law and love are synonymous, and his concern that we understand this is evidenced.

**1 John 2:1** [New King James] *“My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”*

We have got to stop sinning, breaking the Creator God’s law of love.

**John was also a realist, he knew we were human. John did not in any way condone sin, but knew that we would sin because, even though converted, too often we succumb to our carnal human desires.**

**John pointed to Jesus Christ’s present role as High Priest, an advocate with the Father, interceding for us with God.**

**1 Timothy 2:5** [New King James] *“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,”*

We know from other scriptures that Satan accuses us of sin before God the Father’s throne, [**Job 1:6-12; Revelation 12:10**].

However, we can ask Jesus Christ to intervene on our behalf as our *“defence attorney,”* our *“propitiation.”*

**1 John 2:2** [New King James] *“And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”*

The Greek word refers to the Old Testament word that deals with the mercy seat covering the Ark of the Covenant.

Once a year on the Day of Atonement the blood of the sin offering was sprinkled on the mercy seat. The blood of atonement, propitiation, [**Leviticus 16:1-19**].

**Don’t misunderstand, John is not saying you can sin and sin again and Jesus Christ is going to continue to be your defence, He will not. But if you make a mistake and are truly repentant, Jesus Christ will continue to represent you before God the Father.**

## **John’s final exhortation –**

**1 John 5:21** [New King James] *“Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.”*

Again we have reference to John’s age, maturity and wisdom in this final exhortation.

As subtle and insidious as the problems, temptations, persecutions and idols of John’s age were, this apostle was given the insight to perceive Satan’s influences.

**1 John 5:19** [New King James] *“We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.”*

Satan has constantly been our adversary, our tempter and foe. Satan places before us the glittering, appealing idols of physical possessions, power in the community and to be idolised by others.

**Satan is a liar and murderer, [John 8:44].**

**Satan has deceived the vast majority of human beings, [Revelation 12:9].**

**1 John 2:15-17** [New King James] *“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”*

**We are not to love the society which is controlled by Satan.**

**1 John 2:18-25** [New King James] *“Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also. Let Truth Abide in You. Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us, eternal life.”*

John was **not** only writing to God’s people of his own day but to all true Christians throughout the ages.

**Will we listen and act on John’s message, and then receive what the Creator God has promised, the gift of eternal life?**