

# First John

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| <b>FIRST JOHN</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>85 AD</b> |
| <i>"This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith." 5:4</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |              |
| <b>Author:</b> John<br><b>Written From:</b> Ephesus<br><b>Sent To:</b> A circular letter sent to the churches and their leaders in Asia                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |              |
| <b>Purpose:</b> Combat false teaching and assure believers of their salvation in Christ. False teachers were denying the humanity of Christ and teaching that sinful practices did not affect fellowship with God. John writes for five reasons: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Promote true fellowship (1:3)</li> <li>2. Fulfill his ministry and have full joy (1:4)</li> <li>3. Promote holiness (1:6-2:2)</li> <li>4. Combat false teaching (2:18-27)</li> <li>5. Provide assurance of salvation for believers (5:13)</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |              |
| <b>Theme:</b> Fellowship with God through Jesus Christ who is the light (revelation) and life (power of godliness).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |              |
| <b>Basic Outline:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1:1 – 2:2, Sound Doctrine: Incarnation of Jesus and Biblical view of Sin</li> <li>• 2:3 – 17, Obedience and love that is consistent with fellowship with God</li> <li>• 2:18 – 27, Doctrinal Test for true fellowship</li> <li>• 2:28 – 3:24, Holiness Test for true fellowship</li> <li>• 4:1 – 6, Test for false teachers and doctrines of demons</li> <li>• 4:7 – 21, Characteristics of fellowship with God through Jesus Christ</li> <li>• 5:1 – 5, Victory of fellowship with God through Jesus Christ</li> <li>• 5:6 – 12, Christology: Credentials of Jesus Christ</li> <li>• 5:13 – 21, Three assurances of fellowship with God through Jesus Christ: assurance of salvation (5:13), assurance of answered prayer (5:14-17), assurance of victory over sin (5:18-21)</li> </ul> |              |

True spirituality is based on faith in the true doctrine concerning Jesus, obedience to the true commands of Jesus and love for God and believers. When believers walk in fellowship with God as described above they will experience joy, holiness and assurance of their salvation.

| True Spirituality                                                                                                                                |                                         |                                                                                                                                  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faith in true doctrine</li> <li>• Obedience to true commands</li> <li>• Love for God and man</li> </ul> | <p>→</p> <p>... produces</p> <p>...</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joy (1:4)</li> <li>• Holiness (2:1)</li> <li>• Assurance of Salvation (5:13)</li> </ul> |

John 7:24 – "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

### **Memorable Verses:**

#### **Purpose of Letter:**

- **Promote Fellowship:** "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us." 1:3
- **Fulfill Ministry and so have full joy:** "We write this to make our joy complete." 1:4
- **Promote Holiness:** "I write this to you so that you will not sin." 2:1
- **Provide Assurance of Salvation:** "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." 5:13
- **Expose False Teachers:** "I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray." 2:26

#### **Problem of False Teachers:**

- "Even now many antichrists have come." 2:18
- "Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist – he denies the Father and the Son." 2:22
- "Do not let anyone lead you astray." 3:7
- "Do not believe the spirits, but test the spirits." 4:1

#### **Other Verses:**

- "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of Life." 1:1
- "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." 1:8
- "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." 1:9
- We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him." 2:3,4
- "Do not love the world or anything in the world." 2:15
- "Now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." 3:2
- "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us." 3:16
- "If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God." 4:15
- "Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith." 5:4
- "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." 5:12
- "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us." 5:14

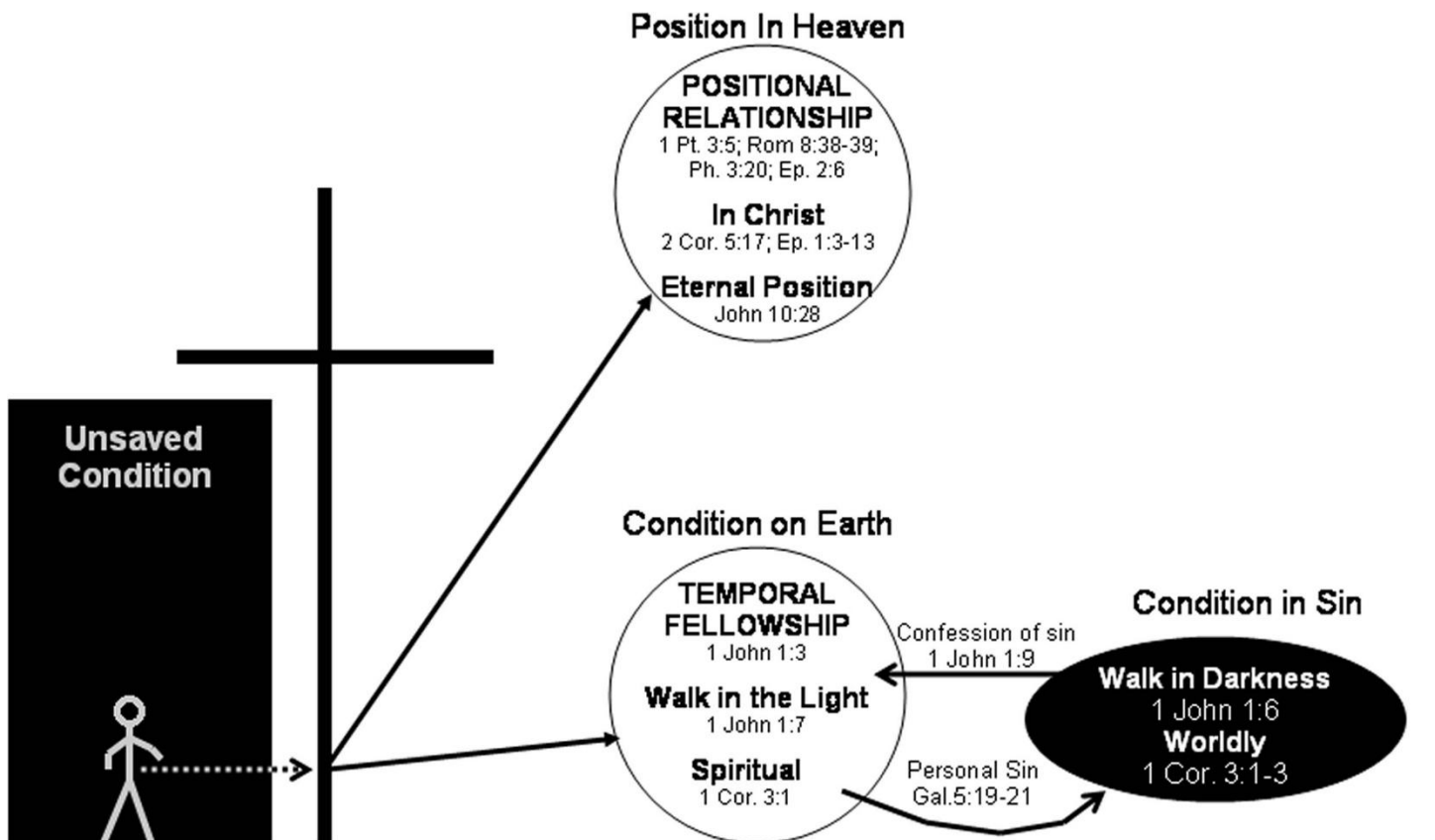
Full archive of video classes, audio classes with notes for **First John** taught **verse by verse**:

[www.generationword.com/audio\\_series/first-john.html](http://www.generationword.com/audio_series/first-john.html)

## Heretical Doctrines Confronted by John

- Denial of the person of Christ (1:1-4; 2:22).
- A form of antinomianism (1:6; 2:15-16; 3:4-6). (See The Healthy Doctrine Glossary)
- Knowledge of God and godly character are seen as separate issues (2:4).
- The doctrine that perfection or ultimate sanctification is attainable (1:8, 10).
- There are new "revelations" and new "commands" coming from God (2:7).
- Teachers had been sent by John either from Ephesus or, in earlier years, from Jerusalem. They had not maintained correct doctrine, which indicates they never really embraced it nor understood it even while with John. They had become false teachers (2:19).
- Claims to anointings and positions of authority that were counterfeit (2:27).
- Desire to live "as children of God" today in "glory" and "victory" in the world instead of recognizing that these eschatological events will occur at Christ's return (3:2).
- Rejection of the hope of the future for satisfaction today (3:2).
- Living like the world today instead of purifying oneself from the world today (3:3).
- Rejection of the apostolic authority of the disciples (4:5, 6). Seen today in the denial of the apostolic gift in the early church and the denial of the written Scriptures.
- Salvation through some means other than Jesus (5:12-13).

| Light, Love, Life |                |
|-------------------|----------------|
| God is light      | 1:5            |
| God is love       | 4:8, 16        |
| God is life       | 1:1-2; 5:11-13 |



## First John Introduction

**Author:** Apostle John, son of Zebedee and brother of James

- Church history never suggested anyone other than John wrote 1 John.
- Overwhelming evidence credits John with writing 2 and 3 John, though at some point an unknown elder also named John was suggested.
- Claims to be an eyewitness of Christ in 1 John 1:1-3
- The author separates himself from the readers by using "I" and "you" language which shows apostolic authority, but at other times speaks of himself as a man on the same level as his readers using "we" to refer to their similar humanity.
- In 2 and 3 John the author is the "elder" which can easily be consider an apostolic reference.
- The similarities between the Gospel of John and First John are numerous including theology and vocabulary.
- The word *parakletos* is found in Scripture 5x, but are all only in John's letters.
- The word *monogenes* which is used to identify the Son's unique relationship with the Father is also only found in John's letters: John 1:14, 18; John 3:16, 18 and 1 John 4:9
- Others:
  - "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" in 2 John 7 and 1 John 4:2
  - "deceiver" and "antichrist" in 2 John 7 and 1 John 2:22
  - "those who love and do good are "from God" in 3 John 11 and 1 John 3:10; 4:4, 7
- In early church history John was assumed to be the author, even by those who knew John and knew John's disciples
  - Didache (90-120 AD) mentions 1 John 2:17 in Didache 10:5
  - Clement of Rome (96 AD) mentions 1 John 2:5 and 4:12, 17, 18 in 1 Clement 49:5 and 50:3
  - Epistle of Barnabas (130 AD) mentions 1 John 4:2 and 2 John 7 in 5:9-11 and 12:10
  - Polycarp (135 AD) mentions 1 John 2:22; 4:2-3 and 2 John 7 in his letter to the Philippians 7:1
  - Papias (born 60 AD and wrote 130 AD) knew John and makes reference to one of John's letters and credits John the apostle as the author.
  - Irenaeus (wrote 180 AD) refers to both 1 and 2 John and credits John the apostle as the author.
  - Clement of Alexandria (180 AD) indicates that he knew of one letter of John's and recognized John the apostle as the author.
- Papias does recognize the author of 2 and 3 John to be the "elder" (most likely indicating the apostle John. But Eusebius writing during the days of Constantine and desiring to reject the Millennial reign of Christ mentioned in Revelation used Papias' reference to "elder" to discredit 2 and 3 John and Revelation.

### Date and Location

- Not clear, but logically inferred to be around 85 AD (85-100 AD) from Ephesus to Asian churches (for example the seven churches of Revelation)
- This is based on the content of the letter, the issues addressed in the letters and early church history records.
- Church history provides strong evidence that John finished his years in Ephesus overseeing the churches of Asia.
- Irenaeus wrote (180 AD), "John, the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia." AND John was at Ephesus "remaining among them permanently until the time of Trajan." (Trajan reigned the Roman Empire from 98-117 AD.)

- Most scholars believe the Gospel of John was written first, but at a very close time to the three letters.

### **Reason for Writing Letters**

- First John is sent to a group of churches (likely a circular letter like Revelation) that had been infiltrated with false teaching by people who were trying to adjust the Christian Truth to match their culture and philosophy. (2:18-28 and 4:1-6 and 5:6-7)
- People (leaders, elders, pastors, speakers?) involved in the church(es) (Christians? Believers?) had accepted heretical doctrine concerning the person and work of Jesus (Christology and Soteriology). These "leaders" had left the church and started their own "church" or "organization". (2:19)
- The leaving of these "leaders" upset the apostolic church in several ways:
  - Members of the church left to follow leaving behind people who wondered if maybe they should also follow to the new meeting place with the improved doctrine.
  - Those that left actually organized, trained and sent out teachers/preachers/evangelist/philosophers to promote their teaching among the believers and the Pagans. The goal was to convert not only individuals, but entire churches that John was overseeing. (2:26; 4:1-3; 2 John 7)
- John responded by writing First John (and likely sending it to several of the churches) to contest, refute and diffuse the false teachers influence on the true church.
  - Doctrinally the false teachers had attacked the person and work of Jesus.
    - John is extremely (but accurately) critical of teachers who did not confess
      - the man Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ (Messiah) (2:22)
      - the man Jesus, the Christ, had come in fullness of the flesh of man (4:2-3)
    - The false teachers were influenced by Greek philosophy and attempted to compromise the Christian truth. This is early Gnosticism in some form which accepted the Christian concepts with several adjustments which included Jesus was a spirit or a man whom the spirit of the Christ had come and left at his baptism and crucifixion.
    - This error would have drastically changed the work of atonement on the cross (2:2 and 4:10)
  - Morally
    - False teachers erred concerning the seriousness of sin (1:6-10)
      - Fellowship with God, they taught, could be maintained even while practicing sin (1:6). John contradicts this teaching with 2:3-6 and 5:3
  - Relationship
    - The false teachers did not have brotherly love (2:9-11). John insisted that love for other believers is a manifestation of genuine faith (3:14 and 4:7-21)
- John writes to reassure believers that they have the Truth. He provides them several tests for their assurance. There was confusion and doubt in the churches, but John writes to provide them a means of testing themselves and confirming their true faith. (5:13). The tests include:
  - 1 John 1:5-2:2
  - 1 John 2:3-11
  - 1 John 3:7-10, 14-15
  - 1 John 4:4-6, 7-8, 13-15
  - 1 John 5:13, 18-20

John addresses these areas of theology that have been distorted by the false teaches and those who followed them out of the church, and must be reaffirmed for the True believers that remained behind:

**1. Theology - Doctrine of God –**

- a. God is Light (1:5) – To walk in the light (Truth) is to walk in the life of God
- b. God is Love (4:8) – To live in love is to manifest the nature of God
- c. John contrasts God's light and love with Satan's:
  - i. Lies
  - ii. Hatred
  - iii. Evil
- d. God the Father is revealed in Jesus so that to love Jesus (the Son) is to love the Father:
  - i. 1:2-3 -
  - ii. 2:22-24 -
  - iii. 4:14 -
  - iv. 5:1 -
  - v. 2 John 9 –

**2. Hamartiology – Doctrine of Sin –**

- a. 3:8 – The devil is the source of sin
- b. 3:8 – The devil has been sinning since the beginning (Genesis 3, beginning of creation)
- c. John 8:44 –
- d. 1 John 3:12 –
- e. 5:19 – Because of Satan the whole world (every person) sins
- f. 2:2 – Christ was a propitiation for the sins of the whole world
- g. 1:5-7 – sin is darkness
- h. 3:4 – sin is lawlessness, rebellion
- i. 5:17 – sin is unrighteousness
- j. 1:8, 10 – Sin is universal. Every person is a sinner. Every person sins.

**3. Christology – Doctrine of Christ –**

- a. The historical man Jesus is:
  - i. The Word of Life (1:1)
  - ii. The Christ (4:2)
  - iii. The Son of God (5:5)
- b. Jesus is called the Son 21 times in 1 John; 2x in 2 John
- c. The Son:
  - i. was with the Father (1:1-2)
  - ii. is the life of God (1:1-2)
  - iii. is the true God (5:20)
  - iv. is eternal life (5:20)
  - v. is sinless (3:5)
  - vi. made atonement for sins of the whole world (2:2; 4:10)
  - vii. destroyed the devil's work (3:8)
- d. The Son made atonement and destroyed the devil's work with his death on the cross
- e. The Son bled blood doing the Father's work of salvation because he was real flesh.

- f. Without being flesh and blood the Christ could not have done what he did and salvation would be something different. Thus, the teacher's/believer's understanding of this is crucial. If a person separates the eternal Son of God and the Christ (Messiah) from the man Jesus they no longer have Christianity or the Gospel. They are a false teacher, the anti-Christ and deceived. (4:1-3)
4. **Pneumatology** – Doctrine of Holy Spirit –
- a. The Holy Spirit enables the believer to understand the Truth (2:27; 5:7)
  - b. The Holy Spirit is a person and is not the Father or the Son (2:27; 4:2, 13; 5:7)
  - c. The Holy Spirit is God (2:27; 4:2, 13; 5:7)
  - d. The believer has been given the Holy Spirit (3:24)
  - e. The Holy Spirit empowers the believer to overcome the world (4:4)
  - f. The Holy Spirit enables the believer to recognize the false teacher/false prophet because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth (4:6)
5. **Soteriology** – Doctrine of Salvation –
- a. Jesus work on the cross makes our salvation possible (1 John 2:2; 3:16; 4:10)
  - b. By believing and receiving the Son (5:10-13):
    - i. A person is born again (5:1)
    - ii. Becomes a child of God (3:1-2)
    - iii. Receives eternal life, which is now, but not yet. Eternal life has already begun in the believer (2:25; 5:11)
  - c. Because of the new birth the believer can now do what is right (2:29). But, yet they can still commit sin (1:8, 10; 2:1), but they will not habitually live in sin (3:6, 7-9)
  - d. God lives in the believer and the believer lives in God (4:15-16)
  - e. Believers can know God and love others (4:7)
6. **Eschatology** – Doctrine of End Things –
- a. John referred to his time as “the last hour” (2:18)
  - b. Jesus Christ had began the Messianic Age which is approaching it fullness (Now, but not yet.)
  - c. There were already “many anti-christs, but yet John was anticipating the future appearance of the Antichrist. (2:18; 4:3)
  - d. The is already passing away (2:17)
  - e. The day of judgment is coming (4:17), but those who are living in God will have confidence on that day (4:18)
  - f. When Christ appears our transformation will be complete and we will be made like him (3:2)

**30 AD** – Acts 1:13 – John is at the Ascension and in the Upper Room

**31 AD** – Acts 3-4 – John is with Peter going to pray on the Temple Mount when the lame man is healed. John then appears with Peter before the High Priest and the council for that healing.

**34 AD** – Acts 8:14 – Peter and John go to Samaria after the Holy Spirit came on the Samaritans when Philip was preaching. They face Simon the Magician

**44 AD** – Acts 12:2 – Herod Agrippa I beheads John's brother James. Herod then arrests Peter.

**48 AD** - Galatians 2:1, 7-10 – Paul writes mentioning John as “a pillar” of the church:

*“Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me...when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised 8 (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), 9 and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.”*

**66 AD** – the Christians leave Jerusalem due to the Jewish revolt against Rome to cross over the Jordan to the east side into the city of Pella (east side of Jordan opposite of Samaria in Decapolis) Eusebius, Church History 3, 5, 1-3 – “Such was the condition of the Jews. Meanwhile the holy apostles and disciples of our Savior were dispersed throughout the world. Parthia, according to tradition, was allotted to Thomas as his field of labor, Scythia to Andrew, and Asia to John, who, after he had lived some time there, died at Ephesus.”

**66-98 AD** – John lives in Ephesus with Jesus' mother Mary. Mary dies and is buried in Ephesus.

### **Ignatius' Letter to the Smyrnaeans** – link

[https://www.generationword.com/notes/first\\_john/03-Ignatius%20to%20the%20Smyrnaeans.pdf](https://www.generationword.com/notes/first_john/03-Ignatius%20to%20the%20Smyrnaeans.pdf)

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The last books of the Bible were written by descendants of Judah (tribe of the kings) and Levi (tribe of the Levites and priests):

- From tribe of Judah: **James** and **Jude**
- From tribe of Levi: **John** (1,2,3, John and Revelation)

James and John were likely from the Tribe of Levi through Zebedee (father) who according to tradition was a priest. This is why John was known to the guards at the high priests home the night of Jesus' trial and asked them to let Peter in. John's mother Salome is from the tribe of Judah based on tradition and scholarly analysis.

**Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* book 3, chapter 3, verse 4**

(Irenaeus was born in Smyrna in 130 AD and died in 202 AD. Irenaeus became bishop in Gaul. He wrote extensively as an apologist and refuted heresies.)

**“Polycarp** also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed this life, having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true. To these things all the Asiatic Churches testify, as do also those men who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time, a man who was of much greater weight, and a more steadfast witness of truth, than Valentinus, and Marcion, and the rest of the heretics. He it was who, coming to Rome in the time of Anicetus caused many to turn away from the aforesaid heretics to the Church of God, proclaiming that he had received this one and sole truth from the apostles, that, namely, which is handed down by the Church. There are also those who heard from him that **John**, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving **Cerinthus** within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming, “Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within.” And **Polycarp** himself replied to **Marcion**, who met him on one occasion, and said, “Dost thou know me?” “I do know thee, the first-born of Satan.” Such was the horror which the apostles and their disciples had against holding even verbal communication with any corrupters of the truth; as Paul also says, “A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.” There is also a very powerful Epistle of Polycarp written to the Philippians, from which those who choose to do so, and are anxious about their salvation, can learn the character of his faith, and the preaching of the truth. Then, again, the ***Church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, and having John remaining among them permanently until the times of Trajan, is a true witness of the tradition of the apostles.***”

(Cerinthus was alive in the first century during the days of John. According to Irenaeus, Cerinthus was a man educated in the wisdom of the Egyptians, claimed **angelic** inspiration. Cerinthus came to Asia and spread his false teaching in the Asian churches. Cerinthus taught an early form of Gnosticism.)