

1 John Series

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The form and structure of John's first epistle

Discussion of Framework and the Bible as a totality from pamphlet on Framework with application to the issue of language and ultimate authority. Modern idea of reading literature looks at the process of reading your view into the text, not as trying to find out the author's intent and message. Note that this view is self-refuting since its proponents insist that we follow their intent and message!

God designed language to communicate thoughts and emotions from someone to someone—not to provide a verbal playground for interpreters caught up in their narcissism. So we must look carefully at one of John's epistles with the aim of discerning the thoughts God communicated through His apostle for our edification.

I. The form of the epistle.

I discuss a few commentators' views of this epistle.

John's writing style is a rhetorical form of public speech = written to be read (cf. 1 Tim. 4:13)

An ancient writing style called deliberative oration seems to give a pattern to look for (Slide 2)¹

- preface
- thesis
- supporting material
- epilogue

"Deliberative orator" structure	John's structure
Preface – introduction to the deliberation	1:1–4 Prologue—call to sharing eternal life with God through the apostles 1:5–2:11 Preamble—daily interacting with the Triune God
Thesis – central proposal of the speaker	2:12–27 Purpose—to exhort believers to maintain the fellowship of eternal life while in a hostile environment
Supporting material – a sequence of headings that group various arguments to support the thesis	2:28–4:19 Arguments—how to attain ultimate confidence and avoid shame before God through sharing eternal life with fellow believers “under fire”—“bracketed” with the word for having confidence before God at his coming and in prayer
Conclusion & Recapitulation	4:20–5:17 Repetition and exhortations
Epilogue – a review of the argument and closing motivation for audience	5:18–21 Review—three foundational truths that underlie successful experience of eternal life

¹ Here I am following the research of Zane Hodges who taught exegesis of this epistles for many years at Dallas Theological Seminary. See his commentary, *The Epistles of John* (Irving TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999) 31–33.

II. The Purpose of the Epistle

Apparently a crisis had occurred of false teachers entering the flocks with doctrines that were modifications of the original apostolic doctrine “from the beginning.” The spiritual damage they caused resulting in broken fellowship between believers and the Triune God.

What was the false teaching? Some form of Greek idealism?

The 3 Great Questions

We all go through life with answers to at least three fundamental questions—usually not thought through in any disciplined way. However, to appreciate our self-revealing Creator, Judge, and Savior we should seek answers to these three questions from His Word and learn how these Word-derived answers differ profoundly from the unbelieving culture around us. (Slide 3)

metaphysical aspect—reality [Do you think life has a purpose? Do you think human lives are uniquely valuable? Has the universe been designed?]²

Greek answer: [where do you locate *unchanging* truth? In some “Ideal” world if you don’t accept the Creator/creature distinction and divine revelation?]

epistemological aspect—truth [Do you think there are absolute truths that hold for all time, for all people? Do you think that all religious beliefs teach basically the same thing?]

Greek answer: [Universal truths that hold for everyone are generic not particular so all religions at bottom strive for the same knowledge; sort of like contemporary pressure not to pray in public meetings in Jesus’ name because the courts want a “generic deity” approach]

ethical—conduct [Do you believe that some things are either right or wrong for everyone?]

Greek answer: [Since our material bodies change, our flesh can’t be bound to unchanging rules like the Jewish 10 commandments]

1 Jn 5:21 general culture around all believers at bottom involves a denial of the Creator/creature distinction which is idolatry (Slide 4).

Does John tell us the purpose of his writing this epistle like he does of his writing his Gospel (as in **John 20:31**)?

² Remember the quote from Lesson 1 concerning the unbelieving alternative to biblical revelation: “That Man is the product of *causes which had no prevision* of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hope and fears, his loves and beliefs, are but the *outcome of accidental collocations of atoms*; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can *preserve an individual life beyond the grave*; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius are *destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system*, and that the whole temple of Man’s achievement must inevitably be *buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruin* – all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy that rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul’s habitation henceforth be safely built.” Bertrand Russell, “A Free Man’s Religion” (1903) essay in Mysticism and Logic (1917) pg. 45–46.

1 John 5:13 is this the purpose for the *entire* epistle or just for the immediate context? To what do “these things” refer?

Text	“these things”, etc. refer to local context, or entire epistle?
1:4	
2:1	
2:7–8	
2:13–14	
2:21	
2:26	

What is the local context of **5:13**?