

Living with Assurance: John's Epistles

Session 1: Introduction and 1 John 1:1 – 2:3

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John's Epistles help us:

- know that Jesus is the real deal,
- know that we are the real deal if we believe in Christ,
- be the real deal in our daily life,
- live with assurance.

Background Facts

1) The author is most likely the Apostle John, however, these epistles are anonymous. From the earliest days, Christian tradition has affirmed that John the apostle of Jesus wrote all three.

The biblical information about John is slim.

- a) His name means "the Lord has been gracious."
- b) He was the son of Zebedee and Salome.
- c) Jesus called John and his brother James to leave their fishing business on the Sea of Galilee and follow Him (Mark 1:19-20).
- d) The family was prosperous enough to be known by the Jerusalem elite (Mark 1:20, John 18:15-16).
- e) Jesus placed John in a privileged position. John was one of the inner-circle of three disciples within the twelve - Peter, James, and John. These men are permitted by Jesus to witness certain crucial events (Luke 8:51; Mark 9:2, 13:3, 14:33).
- f) Assuming John referred to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved, he appears to have been extraordinarily attached to Jesus.
- g) In Acts, John appears alongside Peter in providing strong leadership to the Church (Acts 4:13).
- h) John is said to have outlived all the other apostles and was the only one to die of natural causes rather than as a martyr.

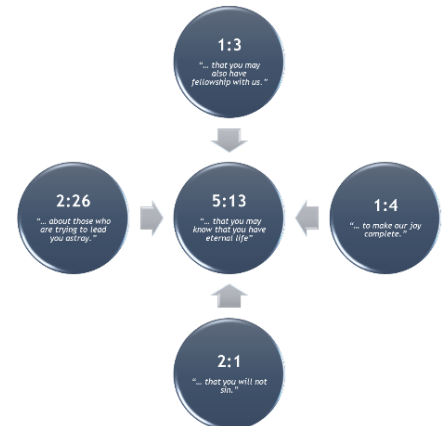
2) John wrote five of our NT books. He wrote the Gospel of John to convert sinners, the epistles of John to confirm the saints, and the Revelation of John to coronate the Savior. To say it another way, he wrote the gospel for salvation, the epistles for sanctification, and the Revelation for glorification (Danny Akin).

3) John probably wrote the epistles between the early to mid-90s AD, after his gospel (late 80s to early 90s). Although it is quite plausible that 1 John was written as a companion to his gospel. He wrote from Ephesus to churches in and around Ephesus. Though Paul had been the first to evangelize this area, John apparently knew these Christian communities well for he calls them "little children" and "dear friends." Most Bible students believe that these were the last NT epistles to be composed.

4) 1 John is an epistle. Though it does not have many of the distinguishing marks of a 1st century epistle (named author, designated recipients, personal greetings), it is best viewed as such. John likely expected this epistle to be read to many different congregations; therefore, no specific congregation or greetings to that congregation are mentioned.

John's Purpose

John wrote his gospel to show us how we might receive eternal life. He wrote the epistles to assure to assure those who have believed that they have eternal life. 1 John 5:13 is John's ultimate purpose. However, he expresses four other purposes in 1:3, 1:4, 2:1, & 2:26 which point to the ultimate purpose.



The Problem

First century Christians needed guidance in distinguishing truth from falsehood and heresy from orthodoxy. These Christians were dealing with an intellectual heresy known as Gnosticism (Greek word *gnosis*/ “knowledge”). Gnostics viewed the material and physical world as intrinsically evil; the spiritual and heavenly world as inherently good. Salvation came by gaining knowledge about how a person could escape the material world and enter the good spiritual world. Salvation was not about gaining forgiveness from sin.

Two chief groups come to the surface for John in this epistle:

- 1) Docetics - rejected the incarnation of Christ. They assumed that flesh was evil by nature and rejected that Christ, who was good, could ever assume a nature with the presence of any evil. John wrote something like 4:1-3 to counter them.
- 2) Cerinthians - Cerinthian was a false teacher who distinguished between an immaterial, divine Christ-spirit and a human Jesus with a physical body. Cerinthian taught that the divine Christ-spirit ascended upon the human Jesus at his baptism and left him sometime before the crucifixion. John could have written 5:6 to counter this group.

John's Tests for the Real Life

Test #1: How are you living? The test of obedience to God.

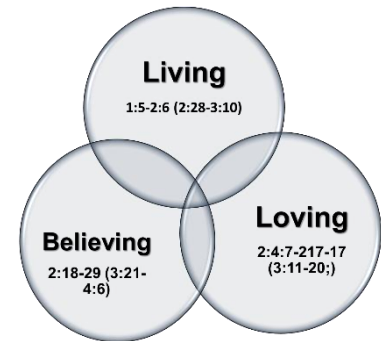
1: 5 -2:6 //Expanded in 2:28-3:10

Test #2: How are you loving? The test of love for God and fellow humanity.

2:7-17 // Expanded in 3:11-20, 4:7-21

Test #3: What are you believing? The test of truth and belief in that truth.

2:18-29 // Expanded in 3:21-4:6



Why did John use these particular tests? Each of these three goes to the essence of who we are. We have:

- a will with which to make decisions (will = living)
- a heart with which to feel (emotion = loving)
- a mind with which to think (intellect = believing)

1 John 1:1-4: Yes, He's Real

Before we can be real and have assurance in our faith, we must know if the One we follow is real. John answers this question by unquestionably declaring the fact of Christ's reality in the prologue of 1 John.

John begins by demonstrating two truths: (1) Jesus is God and (2) Jesus is human. He is the God-man. He is no phantom. Because He is real, the life He offers and calls us to live is real. John demonstrates that this life was real in four ways:

1. This life was experienced (1:1)

- John piles on the senses - heard, seen, touched, proclaim - 4 of the 5 senses!

2. This life can still be experienced (1:2)

- John had a personal encounter with Jesus.

3. This life needs to be experienced (1:3)

- Fellowship - “to be together,” “to have in common.” To help one another out, to be there for one another, and to know one another enough to do so. Fellowship is “loving one another with the love of Christ.”

4. When fully experienced, this life brings complete joy (1:4).

- Joy is not something that we manufacture for ourselves. Joy is a byproduct of our fellowship with God.
- Real joy is found in Christ alone.
 - We should enjoy our salvation (Ps. 51:12).
 - We should enjoy the scriptures (Jer. 15:16).
 - We should enjoy His strength (Neh. 8:10).
 - We should enjoy serving (Ps. 100:2).
 - We should enjoy the Spirit (Gal. 5:22; 1 Thess.1:6).
 - We should enjoy soul-winning (Ps. 126:5).
 - We should enjoy suffering (Acts 5:41).
 - We should enjoy sharing (1 John 1:4)

1 John 1:5-10 and 2:1-3: Real Christians Walk in the Light

In 1 John 1:5-10, John asks his first probing question concerning our life as believers: **how are you living?** This test begins in this passage and continues through 2:6. It is then expanded in 2:28-3:10.

John shares with his readers a foundational statement in v. 5: “God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all.” This is a statement about God’s character. This statement is given both *positively* and *negatively*.

Positive: *God is light.*

Negative: *In Him there is no darkness at all.*

The nearer we come to God, the more terrible our sin should be to us. The light of God is revealing. It reveals all sinfulness in us. The world gives three useless options for attempting fellowship with God:

- 1) We could claim to have fellowship with God and yet continue in sin. (“I’m good”)
- 2) We could pretend to be holy and sinless. (“I’m better than . . .”)
- 3) We could claim that we have never sinned and, therefore, are holy. (“I don’t sin.”)

John addresses each of these options in our text. They are probably options which the Gnostics were presenting. We can find each by the introductory statement, “If we . . .”

Option 1: *We claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in darkness.*

- **Result of Option 1:** *We and do not live by the truth.*
- **Antidote to Option 1:** v. 7

Option 2: *We claim to be without sin*

- **Result of Option 2:** *We deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us*
- **Antidote to Option 2:** v. 9

Option 3: *If we claim we have not sinned*

- **Result of Option 3:** *We make God out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.*
- **Antidote to Option 3:** *Not given.*

What do we do with all of this? We take care of our sin! And this is where John takes us next.

2:1a *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin.*

- “My dear children” - close and affectionate spiritual relationship.
- “So that” - third statement of purpose. We still have not reached his ultimate purpose in 5:13.
- “May not sin” - implies committing specific acts rather than living in a pattern of sin. A true believer

cannot continue in a habit of sin. He has the power to step away from sin. The high goal is to never sin again. However, the reality is a believer will still sin.

When we do sin, we have an Advocate who acts on our behalf (2:1b).

- Our advocate does not plead that we are innocent. He says, “Dad, this person is guilty. But I’m standing by this person.”
- Our defense is based on nothing but us, but only upon the merits of our Advocate.

Why is Christ our perfect advocate? (Wiersbe)

- 1) He is uniquely related to Deity: He is our advocate “with the Father.”
- 2) He is uniquely related to us.
- 3) He is perfectly sinless. He is Jesus Christ *the Righteous One*.
- 4) He is the propitiation for our sins.