





# Contents

	<b>Background to 1 John</b>	4
1 John 1:1-4	<b>The Confident Life</b>	6
1 John 1:5-2:2	<b>How to Deal With Sin</b>	7
1 John 2:3-14	<b>Being a Jesus Freak</b>	8
1 John 2:15-29	<b>Not Being Deceived</b>	9
1 John 3:1-10	<b>Knowing Who You Are</b>	10
1 John 3:11-18	<b>Having a Faith That is Real</b>	11
1 John 3:19-4:6	<b>How You Can Be Certain</b>	12
1 John 4:7-21	<b>Knowing God Loves You</b>	13
1 John 5:1-12	<b>Being a World Beater</b>	14
1 John 5:13-21	<b>Does God Listen to You</b>	15

## Background to 1 John

First John was written between A.D. 85 and 95 by the apostle John, the author of the Gospel of John and Revelation. Evidently the letter was circulated among a number of churches in Asia that were threatened by false teachers. These false teachers embraced an early form of heresy known as Gnosticism. They taught that matter was entirely evil and spirit was entirely good. This teaching resulted in two fundamental errors.

1. A 'new' theology. This centered in a denial of the incarnation. Since God could not be contaminated by a human body, these false teachers did not believe God became a man in Jesus Christ. Some taught that he merely seemed to have a body, a view known as Docetism. Others claimed that the divine Christ descended on Jesus at his baptism but departed before the crucifixion, a view known as Cerinthism. This latter view seems to be in the background of much of 1 John.
2. A 'new' morality. These false teachers also claimed to have reached such an advanced stage in spiritual experience that they were 'beyond good and evil'. They maintained that they had no sin, not in the sense that they had attained moral perfection but in the sense that what might be sin for people at a less mature stage of inner development was no longer sin for the completely 'spiritual' people. For them ethical distinctions had ceased to be relevant.

What intensified this problem was that these false teachers had once been an active part of the fellowship which John's readers were continuing to enjoy (see 1 John 2: 19). But because their 'new' teaching was so contrary to the apostolic truths of the gospel, they had to part company with the faithful. As you can well imagine, those who remained in the true fellowship were unsettled and shaken by the defection of these new teachers and needed to be reassured. But in the process, the others also needed to be exposed for what they truly were - unbelieving heretics.

In order to accomplish both purposes, John provides a series of three tests for distinguishing between genuine Christians and those who falsely claim to know Christ. In response to the 'new' theology, he provides us with a doctrinal test: What does the person believe about Christ? In response to the

'new' morality, he provides us with a moral test: How does the person respond to the commandments of Christ? Finally, he provides us with a social test: Does the person love other Christians?

In fact, John's entire first letter is structured around these three tests, each of which appears in three separate groups, or cycles, in the letter. After the prologue (1: 1-4), there is the first cycle (1:5-2:27), followed by the second (2: 28-4:6) and third (4:7-5:12). Then in the conclusion (5:13-21) John again emphasizes his theme of Christian assurance.

In view of this purpose and structure, it is important to realise that the contrasts in John's letter are not between two types of Christians but between genuine Christians and those who merely claim to be Christians. For in the words of John Stott, 'John's argument is double-edged. If he seeks to bring believers to the knowledge that they have eternal life, he is equally at pains to show that unbelievers have not. His purpose is to destroy the false assurance of the counterfeit as well as to confirm the right assurance of the genuine.'

# The Confident Life

1John 1:1-4

Recall a time when you have been uncertain about your salvation or uncertain that Jesus really was the means to eternal life?

What reasons does John give us to be confident that his testimony is reliable? (vv1-3)

Who is it that John is referring to as the Word of Life?

What are the characteristics of the Word of Life that John describes in the first 3 verses. How does John's description of the Word of Life address the concerns the false teachers had created?

How does knowing Jesus bring us life? In what way do people who ignore Jesus miss out on life?

John says he is telling the readers about the Word of Life so they can have fellowship with him. In what way is believing the Word of Life the basis of Christian fellowship?

Does this in any way change your understanding about what fellowship is?

# How To Deal With Sin

1John 1:5-2:2

What does John mean by declaring God to be Light? (v. 5)

What is the difference between walking in the light and walking in the darkness?

Are there times you are tempted to think that you are not sinful? In what way is this type of thinking not living by the truth?

What is hard for you about confessing your sins to God?

How does the promise of vv. 9-10 encourage you in your struggle with sin?

What do you understand “atoning sacrifice” to mean? See Lev 1:1-5. How is Jesus our atoning sacrifice?

What is the defense which Jesus speaks to the Father?

How does understanding this provide assurance and comfort when you sin?

# Being a Jesus Freak

1John 2:3-14

According to John how can we tell whether we truly know Christ or merely claim to know him?  
(vv.3-6)

How do these statements make you feel? Is your Christian confidence strengthened or weakened?

Discuss how verses 3-6 fit with the biblical concept of “justification by faith alone”. Look up Rom 3:27-28, Galatians 2:15-16, Ephesians 2:8-9 and James 2:14-24. Sum up the Bible’s teaching on the relationship between faith and works.

For which particular areas in life do you find it hard to remain obedient to Jesus?

What does it mean practically to “walk as Jesus did”? (v. 6)

How can the command to love one another be both an old command and a new one?

What do these verses teach us about living in the light?

Are there certain things that need to be rectified to bring you from living in darkness to living in light?

Who is represented by the three groups being addressed in vv.12-14?

How are you encouraged by what God is saying to each group?



# Not Being Deceived

1John 2:15-29

What are the two reasons John gives us for not loving the world more than God? (vv.15-17)

Does knowing this, lessen the appeal of the world in your life?

The three worldly desires of verse 16 point us to the problem of the enemy within. What are some practical ways we can go about overcoming these temptations in our lives?

What was attractive about what these false teachers were telling followers concerning Jesus and what he requires? (Compare 1 John Background p4)

Knowledge of the truth is the best defense against error. What is the anointing we have that gives us knowledge of the truth? (vv.20-21, 27)

Why is John so harsh towards those who deny that Jesus is the Christ (God in the Flesh)? (vv.22-23)

Why is continuing to believe in the truth of Jesus so important ? (vv.24-25)

What are some actions or attitudes you could develop (or continue) that would help you not be deceived by either the world or false teachers?

# Knowing Who You Are

1John 3:1-10

How does understanding that God has made you his child affect your appreciation and knowledge of God's love?

What other ways are you aware of God lavishing His love on you?

Are there things that make it hard for you to accept God's love for you?

How does the hope (confident assurance) of Jesus' returning and you becoming like him act as a purifying influence in your life? (v.3)

In what way is it impossible for any child of God to keep on sinning? (v. 6)

In verses 7-8 John is combating those teachers that said their sinful actions were not sinful. In what ways today do people justify or rationalise their sinful behaviour?

What is the test John gives for those who are children of God? (vv.9-10)

Are there things you need to change in your life so you are living as a child of God? How can you do such a change?

# Having a Faith That is Real

1John 3:11-18

When had the message to love one another been preached previous to John's letter?

What reason does John give as to why we should expect the world to despise us?

John gives another test of true Christian faith. What is it?

What is the relationship between hate and murder? See Matthew 5: 21-30

With your relationships, is there any particular one in which you need to be more loving?

In verses 16-17 what is the motivating factor to be in our love for our brothers and sisters?

How is the command to follow Jesus' example to be obeyed by us.

Think through some practical implications of this and pray for each other.

# How You Can be Certain

1John 3:18-4:6

How can we have assurance when our hearts condemn us?

What blessings are associated with a heart that does not condemn us?

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian assurance?

What are the two tests that John describes to discern false prophets from the truth?

How do these tests relate to the particular heresy that John was addressing?

(Compare 1 John Background p4)

Can you think of modern worldviews or teachings which these tests have implications for?

How does this passage make us confident and more certain in our faith?

# Knowing God Loves You

1John 4:7-21

Discuss the statement “God is Love”. How does this affect our picture of God?

How has God shown his love to us? What is the natural response to God’s demonstration of love?

In what sense is God’s love made complete in us as we love one another?

What is the true test of God’s Spirit in us?

John speaks about the day of judgement? How do you feel when you think about standing before God?

Discuss how it is that we can be confident and without fear on that day?

Pray that God would help us to love each other.

# Being a World Beater

1John 5:1-12

Re-read what John has said previously about the world from 2:15-17

Discuss what it means to overcome the world.

Think about it by considering the following questions:

- i) What is the victory?
  
- ii) What has won this victory?
  
- iii) How has the victory been won?
  
- iv) Why then are the commands of God not burdensome?

What is the five-fold witness of verses 6-12? Discuss what each of these mean.

How does each witness testify?

What is the testimony they proclaim?

What is the role of Christians today concerning the testimony about Jesus?

How are you going with this?

## Does God Listen to You?

1John 5:13-21

What is John's purpose in writing this letter?

What truths in 1 John have made you more certain of eternal life?

Discuss God's promise about hearing and answering prayer? In what way does your prayer life reflect believing or a lack of believing in this promise?

What is the sin that leads to death?

John speaks of 5 things that "We know".

List them and discuss them as a suitable summary of John's letter.

Spend some time praying concerning the things you have been challenged about and the things you have learnt.

