

# 1 John

**WHAT'S THIS BOOK ABOUT?** The assurance of salvation, based on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

• **WHO WROTE IT?** The apostle John.

• **WHEN DID IT HAPPEN?** Around A.D. 85.

• **WHERE DOES THIS BOOK FIT?** John wrote at a time when Gnosticism tried to derail the church.

### THE BREAKDOWN

- Chapters 1-2: We have fellowship with God
- Chapter 3: We are children of God
- Chapters 4-5: Evidences of our relationship with God

### KEY CONCEPTS

- Fellowship
- Light
- Children of God
- Obedience
- Love

### READING TIME

1:1-1:11	1:12-1:20	1:21-1:28	1:29-1:42	1:43-1:52
1:53-1:62	1:63-1:72	1:73-1:84	1:85-1:96	1:97-1:104

**WHAT'S THE POINT OF  
1 John?**  
+++  
Love God  
intensely, and  
the rest of life  
straightens out.

### WORTH MEMORIZING

- 1:8-9 If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.
- 3:16 We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters.
- 4:7-8 Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.
- 4:19 We love each other because he loved us first.
- 5:13-15 I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life. And we are confident that he hears us whenever we ask for anything that pleases him. And since we know he hears us when we make our requests, we also know that he will give us what we ask for.

### THE MASCULINE PERSPECTIVE

- **STAY ON GUARD.** John identifies three types of sin we need to guard against: "a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions" (2:1-6). Take a look at magazines, commercials, and movies aimed at men, and you'll find a deliberate appeal to one of these three temptations. John's warning is as timely now as it was when he wrote it.

## INTRODUCTION TO 1 JOHN

### BACKGROUND

First John, like many other letters in the New Testament, tackles the issue of false teaching. Heresy at its root is a denial of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Although the letter does not disclose its author, Greek and Latin church fathers consistently identified the author as the apostle John, the son of Zebedee and author of the Gospel of John. The letter includes no salutation; more than likely, John wrote this letter from Ephesus to send to the seven churches in Asia Minor.

### MESSAGE

The apostle John is known as the "apostle of love" because of the emphasis on love in his writings. John shows his love for the recipients by addressing them as "little children" (2:1, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21) and "beloved" (3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11). Right in the first

### OUTLINE

- I. Walk in the Light
  - A. Greetings 1:1-4
  - B. Confess your sins 1:5-2:2
  - C. Obey God's word 2:3-17
  - D. Beware of false teachers 2:18-19
  - E. Abide in Christ 2:20-29
- II. Walk in Love
  - A. Love God 3:1-10
  - B. Love one another 3:11-24
- III. Walk in Truth
  - A. 4:1-21
- IV. Walk in Confidence
  - A. 5:1-21

verse, John testifies to the physicality and divinity of Jesus, "which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled." He uses the image of light to describe God (1:5) and as an admonishment that believers should walk and be "in the light" (1:7; 2:9). John's concern for the church also leads to the harsh words he uses for the false teachers (antichrists, 2:18-27) who are threatening the community. He calls for moral purity and exhorts readers to live and love as "children of God" (3:10; 5:2). John emphasizes the need to abide in Christ, who is the impetus of a believer's fellowship with God and others.

### TIME

The probable date of composition of this letter is between A.D. 85 and 95, as John appears to have written this letter after his Gospel, but before the persecution that occurred at the end of the reign of Emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96).





In a world of complexity, people crave simplicity. Retailers use simple slogans to sell us products, and the best teachers make complicated issues as simple as ABC. Steve Jobs, cofounder of Apple Computers, said, "Simple can be harder than complex. You have to work hard to get your thinking clean, to make it simple. But it's worth it in the end because once you get there you can move mountains."

That describes 1 John. It's deep as the ocean, yet simple enough for anyone to read with benefit. John didn't write in a linear way, so his book is hard to outline. But its circular style corresponds to the way we live and learn. John emphasized a number of subjects—love, light, knowledge, life—and kept circling back to them throughout his letter. He presents Jesus as the Son of God who came in flesh. Those who reject Him are heretics, antichrists, and liars. Those who receive Him are children of light with assurance of everlasting life. It's as simple as that, and as certain.

The purpose of 1 John is stated at the end of the letter: "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may *know* you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13).

Christian living isn't easy, but it *is* simple and certain—a matter of staying in the light, walking with Jesus, confessing sins, loving others, and knowing we have eternal life. That's the wonderful message of 1 John.



**KEY THOUGHT:**

Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh. Those who reject Him have the spirit of antichrist. Those who receive Him are children of light with the assurance of everlasting life.



**KEY VERSE:**

"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life."  
1 John 5:13



**KEY ACTION:**

He laid down His life for us, and we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (see 1 John 3:16).



**KEY PRAYER:**

Thank you, Lord, for the promise that if I confess my sins, You are faithful and just to forgive me of my sins and cleanse me from all unrighteousness.



## BASIC SURVEY

## 1 JOHN

**AUTHOR:** Not stated, but according to church tradition the apostle John.

**DATE:** Approximately AD 92.

## IN TEN WORDS OR LESS

Jesus was real man, just as He is real God.

## DETAILS, PLEASE

First John tackles the Gnostic heresy that claimed Jesus had been on earth only in spirit, not in body: “Every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist” (4:3 NIV). John wrote that he knew Jesus personally: “We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands” (1:1 NLT). And that knowledge leads to a saving belief in Jesus. Saving belief leads to obedience, but even when we sin, we know that God “is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” when we confess (1:9 KJV).

## QUOTABLE

> Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God. . . . God is love (4:7–8 KJV).

## UNIQUE AND UNUSUAL

First John includes none of the usual features of a Bible letter—greetings, identification of the author, etc. But it’s a very warm, compassionate letter nonetheless.

## SO WHAT?

“These things have I written . . . that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (5:13 KJV, emphasis added).

READ 1 JOHN 1; PSALM 5; AND PROVERBS 17.

- One-Month Course: your next reading is on page 274. →
- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 271. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 271. →

## HEART OF THE BOOK

## THE APOSTLE JOHN

John was the brother of James, and they worked in their father’s fishing business, together with Peter and Andrew (Luke 5:9–10). John, Peter, and James were

Jesus’ three closest disciples, constantly with Him (Mark 5:37; 9:2). And John and Peter were not only constant companions, but the two most outstanding leaders of the Jerusalem church (John 20:1–8; Acts 3:1; Galatians 2:9).

John was known as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23; 19:26 NIV), and this is very likely because, despite his youth, he was a deeply spiritual man. He would later write the Gospel of John, emphasizing that Jesus is the Son of God who is one with His Father—and John penned the words, “God is love” (1 John 4:8). John grasped these powerful facts and declared them more clearly than any of the other disciples.

Jesus named John and James *Boanerges*, which means “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17). This is probably a reflection of their quick tempers. For example, one day when a Samaritan village refused to receive Jesus, John and James wanted to call lightning down upon them, to destroy them (Luke 9:51–56). John eventually outgrew his rash temperament to write the epistle of 1 John, emphasizing love for God and fellow men.

In his later years, John moved north to Ephesus, where he served as an overseer and wrote the Gospel of John. He was later briefly exiled to the island of Patmos during Domitian’s persecution, and it was there that he received the book of Revelation (Revelation 1:9).

READ JOHN 18–19.

- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 274. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 274. →



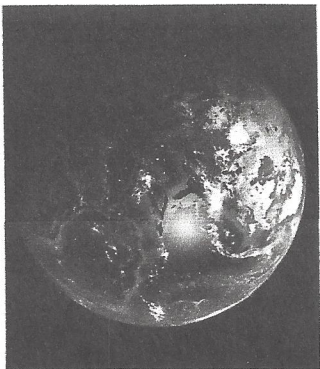
Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) painted the *Four Holy Men (John the Evangelist and Peter)*. John was a deeply spiritual man and was among Jesus’ closest disciples.



HIDDEN TREASURE

## DON'T LOVE THE WORLD

John wrote, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world” (1 John 2:15–16 NIV). But some people ask, “But doesn’t God *want* us to love the world? After all, doesn’t John 3:16 (NASB) say, “God so loved the world”? There’s a difference. In John 3:16, John is referring to God loving the *people* who live in the world, but in 1 John he’s talking about the corrupt societies and worldly values in which these priceless souls are trapped.



John warned us to avoid placing too much value in worldly possessions or beliefs.

READ 1 JOHN 2 AND ISAIAH 43.

HIDDEN TREASURE

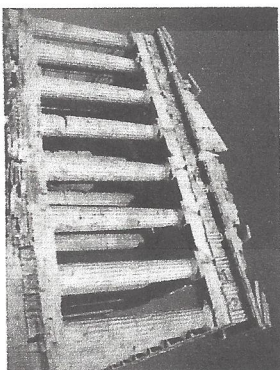
## LOVE YOUR BROTHER

John gives a startling message about loving our fellow man: “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also” (1 John 4:20–21 NKJV). Some people still have difficulty believing how important it is to love others, but John stated that it was a command and is inseparably linked to having faith in Jesus. He said in one breath, “And this is his commandment: We must believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another” (1 John 3:23 NLT).

READ 1 JOHN 3 AND ISAIAH 46.

HIDDEN TREASURE

## THE GNOSTIC HERESY



The Greeks, who built the famous Parthenon, did not believe that dead bodies would be resurrected. This is why they didn’t believe Jesus had risen from the dead!

Surely He must only have *appeared* to be physical. But John warned, “Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist” (1 John 4:2–3 NASB).

READ 1 JOHN 4 AND ISAIAH 48.

HIDDEN TREASURE

## GOD IS LOVE

Many people consider these three words to be the very heart of the Bible: “God is love” (1 John 4:8 KJV). And they are! They categorically define the *very nature* of God and are foundational to understanding what God thinks about us. It comes as no surprise to learn that God loves us—since He *is* love. And this explains why Jesus died for us: “For God so *loved* the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16 NIV, emphasis added). No wonder the greatest commandment is to love God in return. “We love him because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19 KJV; see also Romans 5:5 NIV).

READ 1 JOHN 5 AND ISAIAH 50.



# 1 John

BOOK INTRODUCTION

A part from what we learn about John in the Gospels, we know little else about the apostle. The fragments we do have make us yearn for the whole story of this remarkable man's life.

We know John was one of the pillars of the church in Jerusalem following the ascension of Christ to heaven (Gal. 2:9). We also know that he left Jerusalem sometime before the Roman legions under Titus destroyed the city in AD 70. After that, the picture becomes sketchy. Early church history gives credible evidence that he relocated to Ephesus, where he spent the last years of his life.

The emperor Domitian (who reigned AD 81–96) was known to persecute Christians. Church tradition says John was taken to Rome and thrown into a vat of boiling oil in the Colosseum to entertain the crowds—but walked away without being harmed, and many believed in Jesus as a result of this miracle.

Domitian banished John to a lonely rocky island known as Patmos, just off the west coast of Asia Minor. John himself refers to his stay there in the opening verses of Revelation: "I... was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:9). In his later years, John became the last living link to Jesus Christ. His eyewitness accounts (1:1, 3) gave unparalleled credibility to his teachings and writing.

John's death came sometime around AD 100. He was the disciple Jesus loved (John 20:2; 21:7, 20), and a disciple who loved Jesus—and His church—in return.

## WHAT IT SAYS | *Hold to the Truth with All Your Heart*

Just as the account of Jesus in John's Gospel differs markedly from those in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, so his three epistles clearly differ from Paul's. If Paul's letters could be called linear, with an orderly exposition of themes that lend themselves to an outline, John's could be called circular. He entertains a subject for a few lines, discusses another topic, then circles back to the first subject, stressing again and again the themes of love, light, knowledge, life, and Jesus Christ.

John warns against false teachers who had caused division and then left (2:19). In the face of their teaching, he calls his readers to walk in the assurance of God's presence and renew their hold on the truth. Even though John moves from subject to subject, in no way does he skim the surface. The depth of theology found in the Gospel of John characterizes 1 John. The same zeal and passion that won him

1 JOHN

and his brother James the label "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17) surfaces as he uses 10 imperative (command) verbs in this short letter. As an "elder of thunder," he roared against heretics in the church, calling them antichrists (2:18), liars (2:22), and children of the devil (3:10).

Long life enabled John to witness much. His task late in life was to help the churches remain faithful and obedient against the rising tide of gnostic heresy, to walk in the light while living in a world of darkness, and to have certainty about who Jesus was and what He means to those who put their faith in Him. He wrote with a plain purpose for his readers then and now: "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God" (5:13).

## WHAT IT MEANS | *Return to What You Already Know*

Approaching the end of his life, the elderly apostle focuses his letter on these basics:

- **The Son of God:** The opening of this letter parallels the opening verses of John's Gospel account, stating that Jesus is the eternal Son of God and that He is greater than the devil (1:1–4; 3:8; 4:3, 4; 5:13, 19).
- **Heretical Teaching:** Whenever Satan cannot suppress or destroy the truth directly, he assaults it indirectly by deceit (3:8; 4:1; 5:19). The heresy of gnosticism—the belief that Christ did not really come in the flesh and that only those with superior, esoteric knowledge (Gk., *gnosis*) could be saved—developed in the first century. John counters this destructive teaching, focusing on his eyewitness experiences with Jesus (1:1). (See also 1:6, 8; 2:4, 18, 22, 26; 3:8–10). Because of the confusion and despair raised by the false teachers, John assures his readers that they indeed know the way to eternal life: through faith in the Son of God (5:1–13).
- **The Truth about Christ:** John's stature as an apostle enabled him to speak boldly. Who else had actually leaned his head against Christ's chest, listening to His every word and beating heart? From that position of authority, John calls to account those who were walking in darkness (1:5–10). He warns against antichrists (2:18–27), declares that Jesus is the divine Son of God who appeared in the flesh (1:1–4), and describes exactly what one must do to be saved (5:1–13).
- **Obedience:** John warns his readers that if they profess to be followers of Jesus, their "walk" must match their "talk." To avoid a lifestyle of sin includes loving Christ, loving one another as Christ loved them, and not loving the world. The word *love* in various forms occurs 46 times in 1 John (1:5—2:17; 3:7–24).

## WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU | *Keep It Simple*

As an old man who had followed Jesus from his youth, John called on the believers of his day to return to a simple, intimate, day-by-day, moment-by-moment walk with Jesus. "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another" (1:7). In other words: *Just walk with Jesus all day long.*

In John's day as well as today, the tendency is to get involved with the complexities of church responsibilities, Bible-reading programs, spiritual gifts inventories, and books that offer seven keys to this and 10 steps to that. Unfortunately, too much attention to these good things may prevent us from focusing on what really matters: Jesus Christ.

John says: Let me make it simple. Walk with Jesus. Cling to your faith. Stay in the light. When you sin, confess and move on. And show your love for Jesus by loving your brothers and sisters in His name.





# 1 John

Is that photo real, or has it been digitally altered?

Is that a real Coach purse, or a counterfeit?

Is that person who he says he is online, or someone completely different?

Does the candidate really believe that, or is he just saying it to get elected?

We live in a world that has an increasingly difficult time distinguishing what is real from what is fake. Online predators, digital changes to images, slick-talking opportunists running for political office, con artists trying to steal your personal ID info, CGI and other special effects—our culture is very confusing, and very confused.

It may surprise you to learn that, aside from the obvious technological differences, the Apostle John, perhaps the closest earthly friend of Jesus, also lived in a world that struggled to discern what was real and what was not. To Christians dealing with a culture like ours, John says, Jesus is the real thing. He should know. He had been one of Jesus' 12 disciples (see Mt 4:21-22). John begins his first letter with a glorious prologue (much like his Gospel, see Jn 1:1-18) describing Jesus as the One who "was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life" (1 Jn 1:1).

John wrote his Gospel and these three letters much later than all of the others, in fact, several decades later. The world had changed much. Rome had destroyed the city of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and murdered millions of Jews. Christians had not been spared from persecution from outside or false teaching from within. John had been sent to exile. But the Christian faith was thriving even as decades

passed. Nearing the end of his life, John wrote some letters that give us insights into the concerns weighing on his heart.

First, John wanted his readers to know that *Jesus was really God*. When John says in 1 Jn 1:1, "What was from the beginning . . . the Word of life," he was making two very loaded statements.

His Jewish readers would hear those first words and would think of Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." For them, John was addressing the issues of creation and existence itself.

When his Gentile readers heard the words, "the Word of life," they would hear something else. The word we translate "Word" is the Greek word *logos*. It's where we get words like logic, logistical, etc. To the Greek, the Word or the *logos* was the organizing principle of the universe; to the Hebrew, creation and existence; to the Gentile, order and intelligence. John explained that they both came together at one place and time—and were born in a manger outside Bethlehem. Jesus is really God. He's God in the flesh, a living, breathing incarnation of God as a human being, Jesus of Nazareth. He's not a creed to memorize or a theology to subscribe to. He's a Person to love, follow and obey.

Second, he wanted his readers to know that *Jesus is really man*. It's a mystery: how Jesus could be God and man at the same time, the same Person. And yet that's what John tells us: I heard Him, I saw Him, I touched Him with my hands . . . I even took care of His mother for Him (see John 19:25-27).

God became flesh and took up residence among us. We observed His glory. He became a real man, with real hands and feet and eyes and ears. He worked a real job, got real cuts working in the carpentry shop, real calluses from the wood and the tools. He was no stained-glass apparition. He got tired and hungry and sick and lonely. He went to weddings and celebrated. When His friends died He cried real tears. He was one of us.

Third, John wanted his readers to know that *Jesus gives real fellowship*. Notice what John says in 1 Jn 1:3. "What we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may have fellowship along with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." The world offers some pretty lame substitutes for real fellowship—in the malls, the clubs, and chat rooms. Jesus offers the real thing. People who know Him have a bond that goes beyond the superficial, beyond language, culture, economics, education and politics. People who belong to Jesus belong to each other, too.



Finally, Jesus gives real joy. "We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete" (1 Jn 1:4). That's why John had to write these letters; he couldn't keep it all to himself! He had to tell others about his Lord and Savior Jesus. It wasn't just his "duty"; it was his delight.

And that's why he got angry when the truth was obscured by false teaching. You can read about that in the letters of 2 and 3 John.

The gospel is good news! The good news is that at the heart of the universe is not a cold, lifeless, mechanistic force called Fate; in the center of the universe is a loving, laughing, joyous God who is willing to be your Father.

That's the reality John writes about in these little letters. Who wouldn't want to tell that?

**Author:** John, the disciple

**Date:** First John was written between A.D. 85–90 in Ephesus; 2 and 3 John were written around A.D. 90 in Ephesus

**What in the world is going on?**

A.D. 26–30 Years of Jesus' ministry

A.D. 64 Fire breaks out in Rome and burns for nine days, destroying most of the city

ca.A.D. 64–67 Peter is martyred

A.D. 64–65 Christians experience great persecution in Rome

ca.A.D. 64–65 Paul the apostle is executed in Rome

A.D. 66–73 The Jews revolt against the Romans

A.D. 66 Gessius Florus, the governor of Judea from A.D. 64–66, allows a massacre of Jews in Caesarea

A.D. 70–72 The Colosseum is built in Rome, but dedicated a decade later

A.D. 70 Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple comes to pass when the Romans destroy Jerusalem and burn the temple

A.D. 73 The Jewish fortress at Masada is captured by the Romans

A.D. 75–78 Historian Josephus, who participated in the Jewish revolt, writes *The History of the Jewish War*

A.D. 79 Mount Vesuvius (Italy) erupts and destroys the cities of Pompeii and Stabiae

A.D. 81–96 Domitian is the emperor of Rome

ca.A.D. 90 John writes his Gospel and later, the books of 1, 2, 3 John and Revelation

A.D. 95 Domitian, the emperor of Rome, exiles John to the island of Patmos

A.D. 100 Ptolemy, Egyptian mathematician and scientist is born

ca.A.D. 105 Paper is invented in China

# THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

GOD IS LIGHT, GOD IS LOVE, and God is life. John is enjoying a delightful fellowship with the God of light, love, and life, and he desperately desires that his spiritual children enjoy the same fellowship.

God is light. Therefore, to engage in fellowship with Him we must walk in light and not in darkness. As we walk in the light, we will regularly confess our sins, allowing the blood of Christ to continually cleanse us. Two major road-blocks to hinder this walk will be falling in love with the world and falling for the alluring lies of false teachers.

God is love. Since we are His children we must walk in love. In fact, John says that if we do not love, we do not know God. Love is more than just words; it is actions. Love is giving, not getting. Biblical love is unconditional in its nature. Christ's love fulfilled those qualities, and when that brand of love characterizes us, we will be free of self-condemnation and experience confidence before God.

## WATCH WORDS

- blood (substance signifying life)—1:7
- love (unselfish, self-giving purpose)—2:15
- propitiation (redeeming sacrifice; sacrificial atonement)—4:10 (also 2:2)
- world (all the aspects of the created order that are hostile to God and His purposes)—5:19

## FIFTEEN KEY INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO TREAT ONE ANOTHER • 3:11

1. Love one another	3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; John 13:34, 35; 15:12, 17; Rom. 13:8; 1 Thess. 3:12; 4:9; 1 Pet. 1:22; 4:8; 2 John 1:5
2. Be of the same mind/like-minded toward one another	Rom. 12:16; 15:5
3. Do not judge one another	Rom. 14:13; Col. 2:16
4. Admonish one another	Rom. 15:14
5. Serve one another	Gal. 5:13
6. Bear with one another in love	Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:13
7. Be kind to one another	Eph. 4:32
8. Submit to one another in the fear of God	Eph. 5:21
9. Forgive one another	Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13
10. Comfort one another with these words	1 Thess. 4:18; 5:11
11. Exhort one another daily	Heb. 3:13; 10:25
12. Do not speak evil of one another	James 4:11
13. Do not grumble against one another	James 5:9
14. Confess your trespasses to one another	James 5:16
15. Pray for one another	James 5:16



# 1 JOHN

## THE BIG PICTURE

False religious teachers were a major problem in the early church. Because the complete New Testament was not available for believers to refer to, many churches fell prey to pretenders who taught their own ideas about the gospel and advanced themselves as spiritual leaders. John wrote this letter to set the record straight on some important issues, particularly concerning the identity of Jesus Christ.

Because John's letter concerned the basics of faith in Christ, it helped his readers reflect honestly on their beliefs. It helped them determine if they were true believers. John told them that true believers could be recognized by their actions: If they loved one another, that was evidence of God's presence in their lives. But if they bickered and fought all the time or were selfish and did not care for one another, they did not know God.

Yet John acknowledged that a true believer wasn't always perfect. Believing in Christ did not remove temptation from the believers' lives. John recognized that the believers would slip and fall. But John also told his readers that a key part of true faith in Christ involves admitting our sins and seeking God's forgiveness. Depending on God for cleansing from guilt, admitting our wrongs against others and making amends were also important keys for getting to know God.

John's letter challenges us to treat others with respect and dignity as we grow spiritually. This is essential to true spiritual growth. A person transformed by Christ will reflect that transformation in their treatment of others. The keys for spiritual renewal also involve making restitution whenever we can to those we may have hurt along the way. Our spiritual growth will progress only as far as we right the wrongs we have committed against others. It takes humility and commitment to live at peace with others, but it is a price worth paying as we seek God's blessing.

## SPIRITUAL RENEWAL THEMES

### GOD'S DESIRE FOR OUR SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

One of the ways God cares for us is by listening to us. When Satan (called "the accuser" in Revelation 12:10) plants accusations in our minds, telling us that we have sinned too much for God to forgive us, John urges us not to give up hope. Jesus Christ, our advocate, has already paid the penalty for any and every wrong we have done or could do. We do not need to shy away from asking him to plead our case; he has already won it.

#### A. INTRODUCTION (1:1—2:2)

#### B. FREEDOM FROM FALSE THINKING: OBEDIENCE (2:3—27)

#### C. FREEDOM FROM FALSE THINKING: THE WORK OF CHRIST (2:28—4:6)

#### D. FREEDOM FROM FALSE THINKING: THE GIFTS OF GOD (4:7—5:5)

#### E. CONCLUSION: ASSURANCE OF SPIRITUAL RENEWAL (5:6—21)

### Essential Facts

#### PURPOSE:

To set boundaries on the content of faith and to give believers assurance of their salvation.

#### AUTHOR:

The apostle John.

#### AUDIENCE:

An unnamed group of early churches.

#### DATE WRITTEN:

Probably between AD 85—96.

#### SETTING:

John was possibly the only surviving apostle when he wrote this letter, which circulated among the churches of Asia Minor. He lived in Ephesus at the time, supervising the churches of Asia Minor.

#### KEY VERSE:

"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).

#### KEY PEOPLE AND RELATIONSHIPS:

John with the believers to whom he wrote.

### THE INVITATION TO LOVE

One of the evidences of salvation in a person's life is their love for others that is shown in their actions, not just their words. We must be willing to love others as God has shown his love toward us. He loved us while we were living in disobedience to his commands—we did not have to clean ourselves up to get him to love us. God also wants to love others who are disobedient to him by using us to share his love and forgiveness with them. God loves us enough to free us from bondage. And he loves us enough to use us to show his love toward others in need of spiritual renewal.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF BOUNDARIES

Apparently the false teachers whom John corrected believed that they could throw off all moral restraints because their physical actions did not violate their faith (see 1 John 3:8–10). Those who believed this message became indifferent to sin and lived immorally, thinking it was all right. John pointed out that there must be boundaries for our behavior and that we are called to imitate Jesus Christ. Anything that leads us away from Christ is outside the boundaries of proper behavior. Staying focused on Christ is an essential part of our ongoing spiritual growth.

### FOR REFLECTION Don't Give Up the Joy! 14—22

John wrote so that his readers would have abundant joy in their walk with God. In this passage, he warns about three things that will keep Christians from experiencing the full benefits of their birthright in Christ. We forfeit our joy when we . . .

1. *Deny the power of sin* (1:5–7). We often claim one thing by our words but are condemned by our lives. Walking in fellowship with Christ results in being continually cleansed from sin. And when we are cleansed from the guilt and stain of sin, we have fullness of joy in the Lord.
2. *Deny the presence of sin* (1:8, 9). The cure for sinfulness is not denying our sin but relying on the faithfulness of God to forgive us on the basis of Christ's death on the cross. To confess our sin and remain in fellowship with God is the way to maintain the joy of our salvation.
3. *Deny the practice of sin* (1:10—2:2). The person who denies that he or she has, in fact, sinned is quick to label their actions as anything but sin. Unfortunately, to take such a stance costs both the joy of forgiveness and restoration with the Father.

If you lose your joy in the Christian life, examine these three statements. Chances are, you will find the reason your joy has been short-circuited. Then simply reconnect with the source of all joy, and your spirit will be restored.



Throughout history, including our present time, "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (5:19). Satan's goal is to have dominion over the earth, and where he cannot gain an advantage by sheer force, his preferred strategy is to deceive—to make people doubt God and His plans.

He deceived Adam and Eve by twisting God's Words in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1-5); he tried to stop the Exodus by giving supernatural power to Pharaoh's magicians (Ex. 7:11; 8:7); he tempted Jesus in the wilderness with God-like offers (Matt. 4:1-11); and he used counterfeit apostles in Corinth to undermine the ministry of the apostle Paul (2 Cor. 11:13, 14). But we have yet to see Satan's grandest attempt at deception. It will come near the end of this present age, during a seven-year period called the Great Tribulation (2:18-22; Matt. 24:21).

In the absence of the church and the Holy Spirit—both of which will be removed from the earth at the Rapture—Satan will empower a political leader (the "beast") and his religious assistant (the "false prophet", Rev. 19:20) to gain dominance in world affairs. This leader is also called "Antichrist" (2:18), "man of sin," and "son of perdition" (2 Thess. 2:3) in the NT. He will oppose "all that is called God or that is worshiped" and will exalt himself "so that he sits as God in the temple of God" (2 Thess. 2:4). This individual will rise to power, claiming to speak for God, and will eventually claim to be God Himself. He will attempt to raise doubts about the reality of Jesus and His atonement for sin. And much of humanity will be deceived, in part because Satan will enable this man and his associate to work apparent miracles (Rev. 13:13).

The Tribulation will be a time of intense judgment on the unbelieving world, but the focus of the Antichrist's evil will be toward the nation of Israel and any Gentiles who, out of newfound allegiance to Christ, refuse to submit to the Antichrist's demands to be worshiped. During the Tribulation, the Antichrist will unite the nations of the world in a grand alliance to destroy Israel forever. This will create yet another period of discipline and cleansing for Israel in preparation for Christ's return (Zech. 12:10)—what the prophet Jeremiah called "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7). Yet Satan's plan to destroy Israel will fail through God's miraculous intervention (Ezek. 38-39).

Even though the Tribulation will be terrible for the Jewish people, "the [Israel] will be saved out of it" (Jer. 30:7). The prophet Daniel writes: "And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered" (Dan. 12:1). And as the apostle Paul writes: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom. 11:26).

Because the spirit of lawlessness is at work even now, discerning Christians should be alert to signs of the times—such as geopolitical developments that call for a unified system of world government or reveal increasing antipathy toward God and Israel. Both developments foreshadow the coming of the Antichrist and the Tribulation. But Christians should never use these signs to set dates or predict Christ's coming. As Jesus warned, no one knows the day or the hour (Matt. 24:36).

Students of the Word know the triumphant conclusion of events because of what the Bible says: When Jesus returns at the end of the Tribulation to reign forever as King of kings and Lord of lords, He will destroy the Antichrist "with the breath of His mouth and . . . the brightness of His coming" (2 Thess. 2:8). Although the Antichrist and the kings of the earth will unite again in a vain attempt to oppose him, they will be defeated, and the Antichrist will be cast into the lake of fire for eternity (Rev. 19:19-21).

For Further Reading: Dan. 8:23-25; Matt. 24; 2 Thess. 2:7, 8; Rev. 13

## GRIEVE, FORGIVE AND LET GO

### Letting Go of Hatred

1 John 4:14-21

Sometimes we find it easy to love God, but have difficulty loving other people. Yet true spiritual renewal means that we must grow to love God and others. God has so intertwined our love for him with our love for others that when we seek God and surrender to him, he requires us to give up our hatred and prejudice. We must love others with his love. And we can only do this through forgiveness.

The apostle John wrote, "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them . . . Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister" (1 John 4:16,20-21).

If we love God, God doesn't give us the option of hating our brothers and sisters. He doesn't even give us the option of hating our enemies. Jesus said, "To you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (Luke 6:27-28). When we surrender to God, we must release our hatred, our prejudice and our bitterness to him. Surrender to God means forgiving and living a life of love.

Turn to Revelation 22.

### Picture This

#### Loving the World • 2:15

World is used in three different ways in the Bible. It can refer to the:

1. World of creation (Acts 17:24).
2. World of human beings (John 3:16, 17).
3. System of this world, which aligns with Satan and opposes both God and Christ (John 12:31; Eph. 6:11, 12; James 4:4).

Here, John warns readers not to love the false values, false standards, and false gods of society, because whatever things are involved in the world's system are under the authority of the evil one.



## MORE THAN FORGIVENESS— ACCEPTANCE

1 John 1:9

"I just can't forgive myself..." How often have we heard or spoken these words? Many of us struggle with a lingering sense of guilt in our hearts even after we have repented of our sin and know in our minds that we are forgiven.

What we need to learn in this situation is that acceptance is also a part of the discipline of repentance and confession. We must say to ourselves by faith, "In Jesus Christ, I am forgiven." As feelings arise that contradict this statement, we must affirm it again and again.

Another key to acceptance is understanding that absolute moral perfection will only be attained in heaven. We are fallible people. Scripture reminds us that "as a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust" (Psalm 103:13–14). We are people of dust, and often we are covered with the grit and grime of sin. But no physical body is in perfect health at all times. A body's vitality can be seen even in sickness as it fights to overcome infection or heal wounds. This self-repair is itself a sign of life and health. In the same way, our sensitivity to sin and our willingness to repent signals that our spirituality is alive and well.

Human limitations need not only be sources of shame; they can also be avenues for grace. In Jesus Christ, God loves us, and he is constantly transforming us into his image. When we are tempted to despair, we should remind ourselves at that very moment that Christ came for situations just like this!

As human beings, we have potential and limitations. Both are to be managed by the Holy Spirit. We should not let weaknesses or failures disqualify us or discourage us from making an effort in the first place. Our attitude should say, "Though I may fail in the attempt, I will go forward." And as we take steps of faith, we can trust that God will use each failure to bring us new growth, with his grace and acceptance undergirding us.

### PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

When do you find it most difficult to accept God's forgiveness? Review what the Bible says about forgiveness and then write a letter in your journal of what you would do to say to a person who does not feel forgiven. When you finish, read that letter aloud to yourself.

For more on repentance and confession, turn to Exodus 20.

### **FVI** How to Love One Another • 3:11, 23

Christians are to love:

1. *Unconditionally.* God calls His sons and daughters to love people as they are and to pray that He will do a work in their lives (Rom. 5:7, 8).
2. *Sacrificially.* We should not merely tell others of God's love but show them that God loves through our demonstrations of love (3:16–18).
3. *Personally.* The only Christ most people will ever see is the Christ they see in us (4:20, 21).

### SPEAK THE TRUTH

#### Calling for Transformation

1 John 5:11–15

Spiritual renewal involves being transformed into the person God planned each one of us to be. Whenever we confess our sins, we can be confident that God will forgive us, grant us power to change and transform our lives.

The apostle Paul wrote, "He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Ephesians 1:4). God wants to make us holy—that is, to form his character in us. Looking through the eyes of love, God already sees us as we will look when his work is done. Spiritual renewal is God's process of correcting our lives to match what he has planned them to be. Paul also tells us: "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). It is God's will for us to be made holy, and he will make sure it happens. We need only to repent and surrender to him.

And when we ask God to develop holiness in us, he will eagerly respond to our request: "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him" (1 John 5:14–15).

Move on to Key 4 and turn to Luke 19.

### Picture This

Birthmarks of a Believer • 5:1–5

John presents five tests that will help to determine if a person is really a Christian. These tests are given as birthmarks to assure true believers of their salvation.

1. *Faith Test.* What do we believe? Is our doctrine in line with the Word of God? (4:15; 5:1)
2. *Life Test.* How do we live? Do we keep God's commandments? (5:2, 3)
3. *Love Test.* Do we love our brothers and sisters? (4:7–11, 20, 21)
4. *Growth Test.* Are we overcoming more and more as we walk with the Lord? (5:4, 5)
5. *Sin Test.* Do we avoid sin, or do we continue sinning and consider it acceptable? (1:5–10; 3:4–9)



## Developing the Habit of Love

Read: 1 John 4:8 | Habit: Habit Formation

**B**efore reading this article, read or review “4 Steps to Creating Virtuous Habits” on page 759 and “Developing Mini-Habits” on page 781.

As John writes, “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4:8). God alone is the source of love, and he uses his believers as conduits to express his love in the world. Because we have received God’s love, we are called to carry out that love into the world by loving our neighbors.

But what does it mean to love our neighbor? As Dallas Willard explains,

Because we have received God’s love, we are called to carry out that love into the world by loving our neighbors.

We love something when we are devoted to its good or well-being. This applies to God, our “neighbor,” our flower garden, or our bank account. Love is will-to-good. Not the same as desire. And not always directed rightly or ordered rightly. Love involves compassion.<sup>1</sup>

Here are four mini-habits that help us develop love for our neighbor:

1. Spend one minute at a set time every day asking God to increase your ability to show your neighbors the same love he shows you.
2. Memorize and meditate on 1 John 4:19: “We love because he first loved us.”
3. Once a month, read aloud 1 Corinthians 13 and replace the words “Love is” with “I am” and “It does” with “I do.” Which phrases seem most untrue about you? For example, hearing yourself say, “I am patient, I am kind” (v. 4) might make you aware of times when you are neither patient nor kind.
4. Make a list of three groups: In the first group list three to ten of your closest family and friends. In the second group, list five to ten other people you engage with regularly. In the third group, choose one to three people who are far outside your circles of engagement (such as a missionary or an orphan in another country). Think of ways to show compassion to each person on the list.

**PRACTICAL TAKEAWAY:** By practicing habits of love, we show the world the love of our Creator.

## How We Come to Know God Through Obedience

Read: 1 John 2:3 | Habit: Obedience

**H**ow do we know God? In 1 John 2:3 we find the surprising answer: “We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands.”

We tend to think of “knowledge” as purely intellectual activity, but in Scripture knowledge is often gained through experiences. It’s the difference between *knowing about* someone or something because we’ve gained understanding through an *experiential encounter*. Think of the way we can have knowledge *about* swimming through books, but we don’t really know what swimming is like until we are immersed in water and flailing our limbs in an attempt to stay afloat. We only fully gain “knowledge” of swimming by swimming.

Similarly we don’t come to know God through abstract speculation but through living our lives the way the Lord requires. Specifically, we come to know God by *understanding* and then *doing* what he commands.

We gain the first part by searching Scripture to understand exactly what God commands of us (see, for example, “32 Commands of Christ” on page 1300). Once we know what God wants us to do, we then come to know God by *doing* what he wants us to do.

What that means, in light of 1 John 2:3, is that the process for Christians to know God occurs through the following steps:

- Step #1—We learn what God requires through reading and meditating on his Word.
- Step #2—Powered by God’s grace, we obey and keep his commands.
- Step #3—Through keeping God’s commands, albeit in our flawed way, we gain experiential knowledge of the One who kept the commands perfectly, Jesus Christ.
- Step #4—By increasing our knowledge of Christ, we grow in communion with the Father.
- Step #5—This knowledge, gained through the experience of keeping God’s commands, gives us assurance, as John wrote, that “we know that we have come to know him.”
- Step #6—This knowledge reveals God’s beauty and glory, motivating us to delve deeper into Scripture so we can gain a better understanding of how to obey him even more.

Obedience thus becomes not just our means for knowing God but a motivation that drives us to know him more.

**PRACTICAL TAKEAWAY:** We only truly come to know God when we obey his commands.



## 1 JOHN IN REVIEW

### MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

1. Which of the following does John not say about those who claim to be without sin?
- A. They deceive themselves.
  - B. They make God out to be a liar.
  - C. They sin by saying they are sinless.
  - D. The truth isn't in them.

### HOT SEAT

2. I am what John says sin is. What am I?

### MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

3. What does John say all who hope in Christ do?
- A. Walk blamelessly
  - B. Speak the truth in love
  - C. Purify themselves
  - D. Reject false teachings

### TIME TRAVELER

4. You are the reason we know that we live in God and He in us. What are you?

### MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

5. What is the last command in 1 John?

## 3 JOHN IN REVIEW

### MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

1. What does John say we ought to do?

### MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

2. Who is "well spoken of by everyone—and even by the truth itself"?
- A. Demetrius
  - B. Diotrophes
  - C. Gaius
  - D. John

### TIME TRAVELER

3. You are Diotrophes. What does John say you love?

- A. To be first
- B. To keep quiet
- C. To gossip
- D. To hide

### MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

4. What is the last thing John says to do in the final greetings?

### HOT SEAT

5. I am what John refers to himself as. What am I?

- A. The father
- B. The teacher
- C. The elder
- D. The messenger

## 2 JOHN IN REVIEW

### TIME TRAVELER

1. You are God's command from the beginning. What are you?
- A. Walk in love.
  - B. Walk in the truth.
  - C. Walk in wisdom and understanding.
  - D. Walk in peace.

### MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

2. "Whoever continues in the teaching [of Christ] has both the \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_." (Fill in the blanks.)

### HOT SEAT

3. I am what John says anyone who doesn't acknowledge that Jesus came in the flesh is. What am I?

### ANSWERS:

1. A. Walk in love. (2) B. Walk in the truth. (2) C. Walk in wisdom and understanding. (2) D. Walk in peace. (2)  
 2. A. Love. (2) B. Truth. (2) C. Fellowship. (2) D. Christ. (2) E. The Father. (2) F. The Son. (2) G. The Holy Spirit. (2) H. The Word. (2) I. The Life. (2) J. The Light. (2) K. The Truth. (2) L. The Love. (2) M. The Grace. (2) N. The Peace. (2) O. The Joy. (2) P. The Fellowship. (2) Q. The Unity. (2) R. The Oneness. (2) S. The Wholeness. (2) T. The Perfection. (2) U. The Holiness. (2) V. The Righteousness. (2) W. The Sanctification. (2) X. The Redemption. (2) Y. The Forgiveness. (2) Z. The Mercy. (2)

## Worth Repeating

In this letter, John repeated the popular message found in his Gospel: "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him" (4:9; see John 3:16).

### BY THE NUMBERS

5 CHAPTERS  
105 VERSES  
2,525 WORDS

# 1 JOHN

## KEY VERSE

"God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them" (4:16).

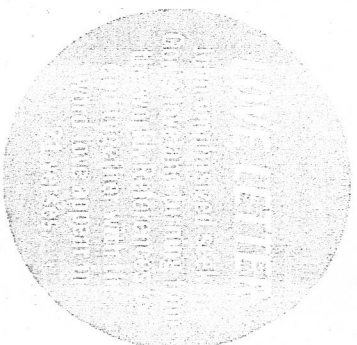
### Did You See That?

John began his testimony by appealing to human senses:

"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).

### Life in Christ

John wrote about eternal life in Christ, referring to the word life 15 times.



LIFE LESSONS: Actions speak more about your character than words (1:6). Sincerely confess sin to God (1:9).

LIFE LESSONS: The Bible truthfully and accurately reveals God and the things of God (4:1).