

1 John

Introducing John's Materials in the NT	In our New Testament, we have five books from John: The Gospel of John, 1-3 John, and Revelation. When you read them together, two things stand out: (1) <u>all of them deal with different subject matter</u> : Gospel (the Divine Word); 1 John (assurance of salvation); 2 John (watching out for deceivers); 3 John (importance of hospitality); Revelation (the apocalypse). (2) John ties them all together around one word: <u>love</u> . The fact that he can tie these materials around the concept of love is a miracle in and of itself.
The Miracle of John	John is referred to often by church historians as John "the beloved." That's an interesting designation because when we are introduced to him in the Gospels, Jesus refers to John and his brother James as " <i>bonarges</i> ." This is an Aramaic word that translates as: "Sons of Thunder." We see this most clearly in the Gospels when James and John want to call fire down from heaven (like Elijah) on those in Samaria and in the surrounding regions of Judea who rejected Jesus. A radical change took place, however. Consequently, the disciple who Jesus "loved" became less synonymous with "thunder" and more synonymous with love (agape). John could love because he knew that Jesus first loved him. That's an important factor for understanding <u>all</u> of John's materials in the NT.
Introducing 1 John	John wrote 1 John between the years 85-95 AD. We know this because when the temple was destroyed in 70 AD, Jews and Christians scattered to the various areas of the Roman Empire. When they did, the Christians had a major problem on their hands (a) because Christianity was relatively new and (b) because the philosophical ideas throughout the Roman Empire were great threats to Christians in terms of "redefining" Jesus based on those philosophical ideas instead of the historic confession. And towards the end of the 1 st century and the entirety of the 2 nd century, no heresy was a greater threat than Gnosticism.
Understanding 1 John Requires Familiarity with a Specific Kind of Gnosticism.	At a basic level, Gnosticism (from the Greek word "knowledge) is a secret type of knowledge that others aren't privy too. Peter dealt with that attitude that manifested itself in the form of false teachers in 2 Peter. 20 to 30 years after Peter wrote, Gnosticism had become more advanced. The Gnostics in John's time believed that matter (including the human body) was evil, but the spirit was good. Consequently, they believed that Jesus could not have come in the flesh (because it was evil). He could only have come in the form of spirit (which is good). This specific form of Gnosticism was called Docetism. John writes <u>all</u> Christians (remember it's a General Epistle) to say "whoa. Wait just a minute." He's got a real problem on his hands, and he has to correct it.
Theme of 1 John	This type of Gnosticism threw Christians into confusion at a most fundamental level: it confused them regarding their salvation and their assurance of it. As a result, John wrote 1 John to tell them, essentially, what assurance of salvation looks like.
Comparing Opposites Helps	John loves to take opposite concepts like light and darkness, love, and hate, etc. in order to teach people what Christianity looks like. That will help you when reading 1 John especially.
Key Verse	"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1:9)
Outline	How can I know that I'm saved? That's an important question for all believers. John gives us 3 tests in 1 John to help us answer that question: (1) The Belief Test (what do you believe about Jesus?); (2) The Obedience Test (do you keep his commands?); (3) The Love Test (do you have agape love for other believers?). These tests are interspersed throughout 1 John. So, it will help to think about all of 1 John being arranged around those tests, just not in consecutive order.

Test One: The Belief Test

What I believe reveals.

1. **Jesus Came in Bodily Form:** 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. ²The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴We write this to make our joy complete (1:1-4)
2. **Jesus Had a Specific Message:** ⁵This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. ⁸If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us. (1:5-8)
3. **The Incarnation Matters:** Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus

Christ has come in the flesh is from God,³ but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. (4:1-3)

4. **Accepting God's Message on God's Terms Matters:** ⁹We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. ¹⁰Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. ¹¹And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹²Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life (5:9-12).
5. **Testing Spirits Matters:** Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world... ⁶We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood. (4:1, 6)

Test Two: The Obedience Test

My obedience or disobedience reveals.

1. **Obedience Doesn't Save. But It Is Proof of It:** ³We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. ⁴Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. ⁵But if anyone obeys his word, love for God^[a] is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him:⁶Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did. (2:3-6)
2. **Obedience Implies Loving God, Not the World:** ¹⁵Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father^[d] is not in them. ¹⁶For 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. ¹⁷The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever. (2:15-17)
3. **What You Do with Sin Matters:** ⁴Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. ⁵But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. ⁶No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. ⁷Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. ⁸The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. ⁹No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. ¹⁰This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister. (3:4-10)

Test Three: The Love Test

My love or hate reveals.

1. **A Person Filled with Wrath, Hatred and Rage Towards Neighbor as a Life Pattern Doesn't Know Jesus:** ⁹Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. ¹⁰Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. ¹¹But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them. (2:9-11)
2. **Love Is How You Know You Have Passed from Death to Life:** ¹¹For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. ¹²Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. ¹³Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters,^[b] if the world hates you. ¹⁴We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. ¹⁵Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him. (3:11-15)
3. **God Is Love. We Love Because He First Loved Us. Anyone Who Doesn't Behave in this Manner as a Lifestyle is Still in Darkness and Is Lost:** God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. ¹⁷This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. ¹⁸There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. ¹⁹We love because he first loved us. ²⁰Whoever 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.²¹ And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister (4:16-21)