

**I John**  
**An Introduction to I John**  
**I John 1**  
**September 12, 2021**  
*Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher*  
*Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas*

As we begin our study of John's first letter, I could think of no better way to begin than by letting you hear the words of one of my favorite commentators in the New Testament, D. Edmond Hiebert, and as he introduces the book of I John, this is what he writes:

The forceful simplicity of its sentences, the note of finality behind its utterances, the marvelous blending of gentle love and deep cutting sternness of its contents, and the majesty of its ungarnished thoughts have made I John a favorite with Christians everywhere. The plainness of its language makes it intelligible to the simplest saint, while the profundity of its truths challenges the most accomplished scholar. It's grand theological revelations and its unwavering ethical demands have left their enduring impact upon the thought and life of the Christian church. I John is indeed a singular irreplaceable gem among the books of the New Testament. I John is, in fact, an Everest among the peaks of the New Testament.

Today, we begin our study of this magnificent letter, but before we get to our verse by verse exposition which I hope to do next Sunday, Lord willing, there are some very important introductory matters that we need to consider. We need to see the forest before we're dropped into the trees. So, let me do that with us today.

The first matter that we need to consider that's important is obviously the author; who wrote this letter? The answer is John the Apostle. It's interesting to note that I John and Hebrews are the only two New Testament books that make no mention of their author's either names or titles. So, how do we know that John wrote I John if there's no mention of him in this letter? Well, you need to know that until modern criticism came along with its skepticism and liberalism, the unanimous consensus of the church has always been that this letter was written by John the Apostle. But, don't take my word for it; let me show you the evidence, the arguments for the fact that John wrote this letter.

First of all, consider the external arguments, that is the evidence outside the New Testament that this book was, in fact, written by John, and the evidence is overwhelming. All of the existing manuscripts, Greek manuscripts that we possess, unanimously identify John as the writer of this letter. Now, they don't tell us which John, but they tell us it was John. Many ancient copies of this letter label it as the first of John's letters.

Secondly, and this is where the external weight comes to bear, the unanimous testimony of the early church is that John the Apostle wrote this letter. Let me just give you the earliest examples. Irenaeus of Lyons, writing in about the year 185 A.D. quotes I John, attributes it to John, "The disciple of the Lord." And he goes on to say, "The author of the fourth Gospel." Clement of Alexandria, writing about 200 A.D., quotes often from this letter, and calls it, "The greater epistle of John." Tertullian, writing in the same timeframe, quotes from this letter fifty times and says that John was its author. Origin of Alexandria, writing a few years later in about 240 A.D., also attributes it to John. And in 325, Eusebius, the church historian, lists this letter among the acknowledged books and refers to it as the first letter of John. So, folks, the early church was completely unanimous that this was written by the Apostle John. And that, by the way, is why it was so universally accepted as part of the New Testament canon because the early church only accepted books and letters as part of the New Testament canon if they were written either by or under the auspices of an Apostle of Jesus Christ.

In addition to those external arguments, there are also some internal arguments. That is, evidence within the letter itself that confirms that John, in fact, wrote it. Now, I'm not going to spend a lot of time here because I don't think most of us here doubt that John wrote it, but let me just give you the evidence quickly.

First of all, the author writes with the authority of an Apostle; this is true throughout. Again, and again, he says, "This is true, and this is not, this is a lie, and this is the truth." But look at chapter 4, verse 6, he writes this, "We are from God," and here the 'we' is not all of us as Christians, but rather the Apostles, because notice what he says next. "He who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." You can see immediately the weight that he brings, the authority that he brings; he speaks as an Apostle as Wescott, one of the famous commentators says, "The writer of the epistle speaks throughout with the authority of an Apostle."

Secondly, the vocabulary and style of I John is very similar to John's Gospel. For example, in the Gospel of John, the Greek verb, 'believe,' occurs about one-hundred times, but the noun, 'faith,' doesn't occur once. You see that same pattern in I John. In I John, the verb occurs nine times and the noun, 'faith,' only occurs one time. Also, when you look at the style of Greek, it's simple koine Greek, not classical Greek but sort of common every-day Greek, koine Greek. And in fact, when you learn Greek in seminary, once you master the basics of the language, usually the very first book you translate as a new Greek student is I John because it's simple, straightforward Greek. The same thing is true, by the way, with the Gospel of John.

The major themes of I John are very similar to John's Gospel. For example, both focus on Christ being at the same time fully human and fully divine. Both focus on the priority of love. Eighty-percent of the verses in I John contain concepts that are found in the Gospel of John. There are similar phrases and expressions in both John's Gospel and I John. One scholar lists fifty-one references in this letter that have a parallel in John's Gospel. He loves contrast, so you find in both of these books contrast between light and darkness, life and death, truth and lies, love and hate. Both books refer to Christ as the Word, the Eternal Word who was "In the beginning with God." Both speak of a new commandment to love one another.

And then finally, the internal evidence culminates with this, the author claims to have been an eyewitness of Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry, and that fits perfectly, of course, with the Apostle John. We just read it in our Scripture reading I John 1, verses 1 to 4, where again and again, he says, "I saw, I heard, I touched, and that's what I'm reporting to you." So, when you put all of the evidence together, honestly, it's overwhelming, and there's never been any serious doubt until modern skepticism.

That brings us then to a brief biographical sketch. If John is the author, let me just make sure you know who this man is. We know so much about the Apostle Paul, but I think most Christians know very little about John. Jesus chose the brothers, James and John, as two of His first disciples. Their father was a man named Zebedee. He was a very successful commercial fisherman, had a number of hired servants, enjoyed a good social standing in Capernaum. In fact, this fishing family from Galilee was, actually, a well-known and respected in Jerusalem even in the high priest's house according to John 18:15. James and John, the brothers,

eventually took over and led the family business, and they formed a partnership with a man named Simon, otherwise known as Peter, according to Luke 5, verse 10.

James and John's mother was a woman named Salome; she was one of the women who supported Jesus and His Apostles according to Luke 8:3; she was a woman of ambition and intensity. You'll remember she's the one who came to Jesus and asked Jesus to have one of her sons sit on the left and the other on the right in His kingdom. She was also the sister of Jesus's mother, Mary. That means that James and John were Jesus's first cousins. Jesus gave these two brothers the Aramaic nickname, "Boanerges," which means 'Sons of Thunder.' That's a reflection of their temperament. When you read the gospel record, you see that come out again and again.

Now, these two brothers became two of Jesus's most trusted and intimate disciples along with Peter. The three of them, of course, were the inner circle. Not only were they partners in the commercial fishing business, but once they came to Christ and became His disciples, that partnership continued by Jesus's design as the inner circle of the Apostles.

James, by the way, is always mentioned first in the New Testament with two exceptions. So, he was probably the older of the two brothers. In Acts, chapter 12, James was the first Apostle to die, beheaded by Herod Agrippa. John's name comes from the Hebrew, '*Johanan*,' which means, 'Yahweh graciously gave.' John was first a disciple of John the Baptist according to John, chapter I, and then John directed his disciples, including John, the Apostle, to Jesus there in John I.

John was very close to Peter, not only in their business, but in the work of ministry; he was with Peter as they prepared the Last Supper, he was with Peter and James, witnessing the agony in Gethsemane, he was with Peter at the trial until Peter denied our Lord and left, he was known as the disciple whom Jesus loved, part of the inner circle. He was the only disciple who was with the women at the cross; and Jesus, you remember in that situation, charged John with caring for His mother, Mary.

On the morning of the resurrection, three days later, John came with Peter to the tomb, and he saw and witnessed the resurrection, and he was the very first one to believe its reality. Forty

days later, John was at Pentecost in the upper room according to Acts, chapter 1. In the early chapters of Acts, he is still closely associated with Peter. He's there for the healing of the lame man in chapter 3, before the Sanhedrin in chapter 4, and the ministry in Samaria in chapter 8. John became one of the pillars of the church in Jerusalem, and he even was involved in vetting Paul after Paul's conversion; you can read about that in Galatians 2, verse 9.

What happened after that? Well, there's evidence from multiple sources, dating to the second century, that the Apostle John left Israel shortly before 67 A.D. when Paul was martyred in Rome and just three years before the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem.

Where did he go? Well, John spent the rest of his life and ministry, about thirty years, ministering to churches in Asia minor, modern Turkey, where Paul had planted churches and where Paul had ministered for three years in Ephesus. John the Apostle, around the time of Paul's death, John, the Apostle, leaves Jerusalem, leaves Israel, moves to Asia minor, moves to modern Turkey, and makes his base of operation in the city of Ephesus. There he evangelized, he taught, he oversaw the ministry of the churches there, and appointed leadership, and he wrote extensively.

We know that the Apostle John was eventually under the reign of Domitian and the persecution that came with that, was exiled to the island of Patmos, and tradition says to work in the salt mines, and we know from the New Testament, the Book Revelation, that's where he wrote the Book of Revelation. We also know that he was eventually released; he was returned to Ephesus, and that's where he lived out his last days; he died in Ephesus, and we're told he was buried in Ephesus by several of the church fathers. He was the last Apostle to die at the end of the first century after his exile and release from Patmos.

Now, think about that. James, his brother, was the first disciple martyred as were all the rest; the one exception was John. John was the only disciple to die a natural death. James was the first disciple in heaven; John, his brother, was the last. To the very end, John channeled his passion as a 'Son of Thunder' towards the kingdom of Christ. And yet, that thunder was tempered by a genuine love. John spoke the truth in love. That's the one who wrote this letter that we begin today.

Now, that brings us to a second important introductory issue and that is the date and audience of I John. When was it written and to whom? In general terms, this letter was written somewhere between 90 and 95 A.D. to the churches there in Asia Minor. During his ministry in Ephesus, John wrote five New Testament books. He wrote the gospel of John, most agree that was the first, probably in the years 85 to 90 A.D. Then he wrote his three epistles probably in the years 90 to 95 A.D. and the reasons for those dates are these. First of all, when John wrote the first letter that we call I John, he was obviously much older than his readers. In chapter 2, verse 1, he says, “My little children.” Chapter 2, verse 18, “Children.” Chapter 2, verse 28, “Little children.”

Also, since John doesn't refer to the persecution that began under Domitian in 95 A.D. when he was himself sent to Patmos, this letter was likely written before that happened. And the false teaching that John confronts in this letter as we'll see, began in the last third of the first century. So, put all those two things together; it points to the years 90 to 95. Also, we know that he wrote Revelation, the last book around 95–96, near the end of Domitian's reign, while he was still exiled, before that ended, and he was released.

Now, John wrote all five of these books originally for the primary benefit of the churches that he served in Asia Minor during those final thirty years of his life. The seven churches addressed in the Book of Revelation, and the other churches in surrounding cities, towns, and villages that had been planted. In other words, think of I John as a kind of circular letter; that's why there are no specific people addressed because it was going to all of these places where he served and loved these people. But ultimately, as an Apostle of Christ, John also knew that he was writing this letter for all of those who would believe through the witness of the Apostles.

You remember in John 17, verse 20, in John's Gospel, we have the record of Jesus's high priestly prayer in which Jesus says to the Father, “Father, I'm not just praying for the Eleven, but I'm praying for all of those who will believe in me through their word.” So, John understood that there were going to be others. Remember the great commission? There were going to be others at other times and all around this planet who would become disciples of Jesus Christ, who would need to know and understand these things. Folks, what that means, at a very personal level, is John wrote this letter for you and for me.

That brings us, thirdly, to the occasion of I John. What were the circumstances that prompted John to write this letter? Well, the answer is the defection of a group of false teachers and their followers from these churches that John served and loved. Remember John was in Ephesus; that's where he lived, that's the base of his operation, and Ephesus was the most important city in that part of the world in Asia Minor, and it was the intellectual center as well. Years before, Paul had predicted that false teachers would arise from within the Ephesian church, even from within its leadership who would distort the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. Read Acts, chapter 20. He says, "From your own selves there are going to arise those who will bring false teaching to bear." And, he warned Timothy again, who was pastoring in Ephesus, in 2 Timothy, chapter 3 and chapter 4, of this same danger.

And, that's exactly what happened. Turn to I John 2 and look at verse 18. This gives us the occasion, the setting in which this letter is written. "Children, it is the last hour (That, by the way, is John's way of describing the period of time between the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ.) it's the last hour and just as you have heard that antichrist is coming." Now here, John is using that phrase antichrist to refer to a literal historical person, the last great world ruler who will rule this world at the end before Christ comes. He says, "You know that he's coming but even now many antichrists (Many who reflect his character in other words.) have appeared. From this we know that it's the last hour."

And then notice what he writes in verse 19; he's describing **an** historical event that happened, that occasioned this letter. "They," that is these antichrists, these false teachers and their followers. "They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us." But, as John writes this, he's not talking about, you know, a few true believers who, for whatever reasons, decide to leave the church.

You know, some people pull this this verse out like a sword to use against somebody who leaves a good Bible-believing church and who still believes the gospel. That's not what's going on here. No, what you have in verses 18 and 19 is this, these false teachers that he calls antichrists here, and their followers were, at one time, part of the churches to which John wrote, that's what he's saying. But what happened is in those churches as these false teachers and their followers tried to gain other followers, there were loyal faithful followers of Jesus Christ who

said, “No, I don't believe that, I don't believe this innovation your teaching.” And so, what happened? These false teachers and their followers left the churches they were a part of, and chapter 4, verse 1 says, “They went out into the world.” In other words, they go out to gain a fresh following; that’s what they always do, you know, “Let's get some others; these backward people, they won't listen to us, so let's find somebody who will.” And so, they leave the church with that intention.

If only it had stayed that way, and they would've stayed away, but they didn't stay away because these false teachers and their followers, even though they left these good churches, continue to try to convince the loyal followers of Jesus Christ to follow their bad example, their bad theology, and their immoral lifestyles. Look at chapter 2, verse 26, “These things I have written to you concerning those (Notice this.) who are still trying to deceive you.” So, they were gone, they were out of churches; but boy, they got the social media thing kicked up and they're sending out emails and they're having, you know, private dinners and trying to talk these people into embracing their progressive ideas.

Now, what was the effect on the true believers who were still part of these churches? Well, think about this for a moment; put yourself back in that setting. Here were all these people who were a part of your church and they left in mass, and the leaders were, boy they were charismatic, compelling personalities, who were very intelligent who talked about these progressive ideas that we just need to embrace, and what happens if you're still there, still holding to the same old truths that you believed at the beginning? You begin to question your confidence in the gospel that you’ve been taught, it begins to weaken, and you wonder, “You know, am I right, or are they right?”

Now, who were these false teachers and what were they teaching? Well, we don't know exactly, but there are two main possibilities. The first is what we will call pre-Gnosticism. In other words, it's not full-blown Gnosticism, but it's an early version. After the Judaizers of Galatians and other places in the New Testament, Gnosticism was the most dangerous heresy to threaten the church during its first three centuries. But it didn't reach its mature form until the second century. However, most scholars believe that it already existed in embryonic form at the end of the first century. In fact, it's interesting, Irenaeus, the early Church Father, says this whole idea of Gnosticism began from a name you recognize, a man named Simon the magician in Acts,

chapter 8. We don't know if that's true or not, but that's what he said. Regardless, this Gnosticism was pagan in its background, influenced by Greek philosophers such as Plato, and its proponents combine this paganism in a syncretistic way, first with Judaism, and then eventually with Christianity.

Now, what did Gnosticism or in its embryonic form pre-Gnosticism teach? Well, there were a couple of main ideas you need to know about. First of all, they taught matter is inherently evil and spirit is good. Now, the way this played out practically is the false teachers were happy to affirm some version of Jesus's deity, but they denied His humanity in order to protect Jesus from being influenced by the evil of a body which was matter. This led some to embrace the heresy of Docetism, as it's called from the Greek word meaning 'to seem or to appear.' Docetism taught that Jesus only seemed or appeared to have a real body, but He didn't really have one because that would've contaminated His pure spirit, His pure soul.

Now, the idea that the body is evil led some who followed this to treat the body harshly in asceticism; that's what you get at the end Colossians 2. You know, they made all of these rules about keep your body under control, and beat it, and all of these things. Ironically, others, holding the very same view, concluded that since sin committed in the body has no effect on your spirit, you can indulge in sin as much as you want. The body is corrupt, the body is temporary, the body is irredeemable; so, indulging its desires has no spiritual or eternal consequences, go ahead and sin. And some went so far as to say it's not sin because that's just the body. By the way, that's why you get the end of chapter 1, those saying, "We have not sinned."

Pre-Gnosticism also taught, secondly, that a special few, the initiated, have a higher knowledge of truth, a knowledge that's gained mystically. Now, you can see how this works. Again, use your sanctified imagination. If you hold this view, how do you look at all of the plebes, you know, the unenlightened, the uninitiated? You don't have the time a day for them; they are ignorant, they're uninformed, they're not into the progressive ideas, the new ideas, and so this is what prompted their distance from other believers and that's why John brings up the test of loving your brothers.

Thirdly, pre-Gnosticism also taught that salvation is escape from the body. Remember, all matter is evil and spirit is good, so salvation is escape from the body accomplished not by faith in the work of Christ, but by this higher knowledge in this life and eventually by death when you're not imprisoned in your body anymore, which was pure Greek philosophy. So, you can see this is not the Christian gospel, this is not the Christian faith.

A second possible source for the teaching that John is combating here is what's called Cerinthianism, it's named after a man named Cerinthus. Cerinthus was a Jewish false teacher who lived in Ephesus during the same time as John the Apostle. Irenaeus claims that what Cerinthus taught about morals had been previously called the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, the immoral group that we meet in Revelation. They were, Cerinthus and his followers, were grossly immoral.

Now, Polycarp told the now famous story maybe you've heard, that John was going into the Roman bath there in Ephesus; and as he was going in, he was told that Cerinthus was already in the bathhouse. In which case, without getting his bath, John rushed out saying, "Let us fly lest even the bathhouse falls down because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within."

What in the world did Cerinthus teach? Well, he taught that the spirit of Messiah descended upon the human Jesus at His baptism and left Him just before His crucifixion. In other words, you have a fully, human non-divine person, Jesus of Nazareth, that's all He was, and when you come to the baptism, He gets this divine Messiah spirit that stays with Him through His ministry but leaves just before His crucifixion. Why? To protect, remember, to protect the idea that you don't have God dying, you don't have the divine spirit dying, and so this is what Cerinthus taught. By the way, this is contradicted by John in chapter 5, when John says, "Let me tell you what, there's the witness of the water, that's Jesus baptism; and there's the witness of the blood, that's His crucifixion, and the same Jesus who was baptized is the same Jesus who was crucified."

Now, we can't be sure what the false teaching was that prompted I John, but most are in agreement that it likely included elements of both of these groups, and a combination of these new ideas. Folks, don't miss this, heretics always claim to be progressives with new ideas, with modern ways of thinking, that's how they always come. Don't be surprised when that happens

in our day when somebody comes along and goes, “Look, look, don't believe that's, that's what's always been taught, but we have a new insight, we have a fresh idea.” So, how does John the Apostle responded to that? Look at chapter 2, verse 24, “As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning.” Don't be looking for some new fresh idea; don't be looking to be a progressive when it comes to the Christian faith; just stay with what you've learned, that's what he says. And he goes on to say, “...If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.” Stick with the Scripture; stick with the gospel you've been taught.

Now, that brings us to the purpose of I John. If that's the occasion, if that's what prompted him to write, then what's the purpose of the letter itself. By the way, I've just called it a letter. Know that it does lack some of the characteristics of a first century letter; it doesn't have an introduction, doesn't have a greeting, doesn't have a closing salutation like we see in all of Paul's letters. So, how do we know it's still a letter? Well, it's personal in its tone and content; he uses the Greek verb “I write,” thirteen times, he directly addresses his readers throughout the letter, and several of the early church fathers who knew what Greek letters were, all called it a letter and so it's a letter.

But the question is why did John write it? What was the purpose? Well, as we just saw, because of the recent defection of that group of false teachers and their followers who pulled out of the churches, the believers who stayed in these churches, who remained faithful to the New Testament gospel had been seriously shaken and John wrote this letter to protect them, to reassure them, to urge them to remain faithful to Christ and His gospel. John, and don't miss this, John wants them and us to be able to distinguish the difference between genuine Christians and false Christians. And so, John writes this letter with two closely related purposes in mind.

First of all, spiritual protection, spiritual protection. Look at chapter 2, verse 26, “These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.” He says, “Look, I'm trying to keep you from being sucked into this deception, trying to protect you.” Go over to chapter 3, verse 7, “Little children, make sure that no one deceives you.” Do you understand the world is full of satanic deception about the Christian faith? Everything you read on the Internet isn't true. That's true in every way; it's certainly true spiritually. It's full of deception, and John says, “I'm trying to protect you.”

But, it's interesting, as the letter unfolds, John refers to the false teachers in these ways, listen to this, “Liars, those who are trying to deceive, antichrist, children of the devil, and false prophets;” that’s pretty clear. In chapter 4, he says the ultimate source of all of this is “demonic.” To protect us from that, he does identify some of the elements of the false teaching. But you know what’s interesting is this isn’t a polemic letter; he doesn't spend the entire letter writing to the false teachers, nor does he spend the entire letter just contradicting error. To protect us, he teaches us the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Wescott writes, “John's method is to confute the error by the exposition of the truth.” That's what we’re **going to** see together, spiritual protection.

The second purpose that he had in writing is personal assurance, personal assurance, the assurance of eternal life, or we could say the certainty of Christian assurance. Look at chapter 1, verse 3, he says, “...what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, (Notice this.) so that (Here's his purpose; we’re proclaiming this to you...) so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and His Son Jesus Christ.”

Now, Lord willing next time, we'll look at this verse more closely and we’ll define what John means by fellowship, but don't miss this, whatever it is, it's something every Christian already has. Go down to chapter 1, verse 6, he says, “If we say that we have fellowship with Him and ...walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” In other words, unbelievers don't have fellowship. But verse 7, all believers do, “...if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus...cleanses us from all sin.” So, in verse 3 then, John is not saying that he wrote this letter to initiate a believer’s fellowship with God. Instead, he's writing to give true Christians assurance that they already have fellowship with God. It's about having assurance that you are, in fact, a Christian.

Now, this theme is stated even more clearly at the end of the letter. Go over to chapter 5, verse 13. I love the fact that John tells us why he writes; it makes it so much easier for those of us who teach. I mean, at the end of his gospel he says, “Listen, there's a lot of things I could've told you about Christ, but I've written these so that you might know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His name.” I don't have to wonder why John wrote his gospel, and I don't have to wonder why I wrote I John because look at what he

says in chapter 5, verse 13, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.” ‘Know’ is have confidence, assurance.

Folks, John wrote his gospel for unbelievers to bring them to faith; he wrote this letter to believers to give them assurance. The gospel he wrote that they might receive eternal life, I John that they might know that they have it. The gospel, therefore, gives evidence to produce faith; this letter gives tests to evaluate it. This is so important, so important assurance.

Early in my own Christian life, I struggled with periodic and, at times, consistent doubts about whether or not I was a Christian. I’ve counseled so many with similar doubts. You understand that having assurance is vital to both spiritual growth and effective ministry? I love the way Spurgeon put it. He says, “It’s one thing to hope that God is with us and another thing to know that He is,” and then he adds, “Faith saves us, but assurance satisfies us.”

You see, it’s possible to actually be a Christian and to doubt that you are, but God doesn’t want that to continue. God wants us who are truly believers to know that we are, and it’s possible to know with certainty. Chapter 2, verse 3, “By this we know that we have come to know Him.” Chapter 3, verse 14, “We know that we have passed out of death into life.” Chapter 4, verse 13, “By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us.” Chapter 5, verse 13, “These things I have written to you...so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

Do you understand God even commands you to pursue assurance? 2 Corinthians, chapter 13, verse 5, “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith.” Peter puts it more positively in 2 Peter, chapter 1, verse 10, “Therefore, (brothers), be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling (in) choosing you.” How do you do that? How do you gain assurance?

We must seek assurance through the Scripture alone. It’s not about talking yourself up, it’s not about encouraging yourself, it’s not about, you know, somehow thinking good thoughts, it’s not about looking at the date that’s written in the front of your Bible. Where is assurance found? It’s found in the Scripture alone. Listen again to what he writes in verse 13 of chapter 5, “These things I have written...so that you may know.” Assurance comes from the Spirit of God working in and through the Word of God, and the book of I John was designed by Christ, was

inspired by the Spirit, was written by the Apostle John in order to help you have assurance if you're truly in Christ.

How does John go about doing that? How does he go about giving his readers this confidence, this assurance that they possess eternal life? Well, he does so by giving us the tests of eternal life. In this letter, John lays out a series of three recurring tests. Now, I'm just **going to** give you the thirty-thousand-foot level, because we're to see this again and again as we work our way through. But I want you to get the overview. Here are the three tests to determine whether or not you are truly a Christian.

Test number one is doctrinal. Do you believe in Jesus Christ and His gospel? Do you believe in Jesus Christ and His gospel? First of all, do you believe the right things about the person of Jesus? Let me show you this. Go back to chapter 2, verse 22:

Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus (That is, the human Jesus of Nazareth.) is the (Christos the) Christ (the divine Messiah)? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.

You have to believe that Jesus of Nazareth, the historical person, was the divine Messiah, not for a few years of His life, but who He was in His person.

Look at chapter 4, verse 2, "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus (the Messiah) has come in the flesh." Now see, he adds something here. Not only do you have to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was a divine Messiah, promised in the Old Testament, but you also have to believe that He has come in the flesh, that He's not only fully divine, the Messiah, but He is also fully human. Everyone who believes this is from God; "...every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and...is...now...already in the world." Look at verse 15, "Whoever confesses," and here he adds another layer. "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God." Chapter 5, verse 1, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the (Messiah) is born of God." Verse 5, "Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" Verse 10, "The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made (God out to be) a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony God has given concerning His Son."

You see, you have to believe, to be a true Christian, there are things you have to believe about Jesus Christ. My question to you today is, “Do you believe that? Do you believe those things are true about Jesus of Nazareth?”

But you not only have to believe those things about His person; you have to believe certain things about His work. Go back to chapter 1, verse 7, “...the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.” In other words, you have to believe that the sacrificial death of Christ as John described it in John 1, “The Lamb of God who carries away the sin of the world,” you have to believe that His sacrificial violent death as a sacrifice is what deals with sin. Look at chapter 2, verse 2, “...He Himself is the propitiation;” the satisfaction of God's just wrath against our sins. Is that why you believe Jesus died? Chapter 3, verse 5, “...He appeared in order to take away sins.” How did He do that? Verse 16, “...He laid down his life for us.” Do you believe that's how He took away your sins, that's how he accomplishes it? Chapter 4, verses 9 and 10:

By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation (the satisfaction of God's wrath against) our sins.

Do you believe that about the work of Jesus Christ? Do you believe that's what He accomplished?

Look at chapter 4, verse 14: “We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.” Chapter 5, verse 11:

And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, (How?) ...this life is in His Son. He who has the son has the life; he who does not have the son of God does not have the life.

Do you believe that about the work of Jesus Christ?

Now, I think most people, sitting here this morning, and most people attending churches across North Texas this morning, pass the doctrinal test. There are probably very few here that don't check that box. But folks this is a three-legged-stool; take one leg away and it collapses along with your profession of faith. So, don't stop taking the test yet.

Test number two, the moral test. Do you obey Jesus Christ and His Word, do you obey Jesus Christ and His Word? Look at chapter 1, verse 6:

If we say that we have fellowship with (God) and yet (are walking) in the darkness, (In other words, the pattern of our life is characterized by sin.) we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light (if the pattern of our life is to walk in obedience to Christ) as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son (keeps on cleansing) us from all sin.

Look at chapter 2, verse 3:

By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

Look at chapter 3, verse 7:

Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as Jesus is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil.

He goes on to say, verse 9, "No one who is born of God practices sin, (As the pattern of life, unbroken, unrepentant, his life is characterized by sin.) because (God's) seed abides in him." In other words, he's been made new; he's been born of God, as the verse goes on to say. Verse 10, "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother." Look at verse 24, "The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him." Chapter 4, verse 5, "They are from the world; (the false teachers and their followers) therefore they speak as from the world, (And guess what?) the world listens to them." But the Apostles are from God and the one who knows God listens to the Apostles. In other words, they listen to this Book and obey it, do it.

So, let me ask you, "Do you obey Jesus and His Word?" I'm not talking about perfectly, but I'm talking about is there clear incontrovertible evidence in your life that you care about what Jesus cares about, and while you don't do it perfectly, you are committed to obeying Him, to following Him; that's the pursuit of your life and you do that more often than you don't because there is a love of Him and a desire to follow Him. That's the moral test.

Thirdly, there's a social test. Do you love God and His people? There are so many places we're **going to** run into this in this Book. Let me just give you a couple. Look at chapter 2, verses 9 and 10:

The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.

Look at chapter 3, verse 10, "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: (The end of the verse, based on whether or not you love your brother.)" Verse 11, "For this is the message which you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." Verse 14, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, (Here's how you know.) because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death." And he goes on to talk about loving very practically.

So, my question to you this morning is, "Do you love these people?" Or frankly, are you just here to get what you can get and you're happy to be done with them and to leave and never interact with them again until the next time you're forced to sit next to them? That's not how Christians are. Christians love God and His people. So, there you go.

Let me put it as straightforwardly as John does, if you claim to be a Christian, and your life is marked by a continual rejection of what the Bible teaches about Jesus Christ and His gospel; or chronic disobedience to Jesus Christ and His Word; or a persistent lack of love for God and His people, if any one of those three legs is missing, the stool collapses and so does your faith, and you are not a Christian. I don't care what you wrote in the front your Bible, don't care the prayer you prayed many years ago, don't care what your parents told you, don't care how many sticks you've thrown in the fire at camp. This is the Apostle John, this is Christ; He's looking out for your soul, and he says, "Don't be deceived, don't be deceived."

On the other hand, if your life is marked, not perfectly, but in its direction by persevering faith in Jesus Christ and His gospel, consistent obedience to Jesus Christ and His Word, and a genuine love for God and His people, then John says, "You're in, you're a believer, you're a follower of Jesus Christ."

Now, when you pass the three tests of eternal life and you gain that kind of assurance of your salvation, guess what results? Joy! Go back to chapter 1, verse 4, “These things we write, so that our,” and I think “our” here, as we’ll see next time or maybe the time after that, “our” includes his own joy, John's joy, and his readers’ joy. So, he’s talking about all believers. “These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.” That, folks, is why John writes this letter; that's what he wants. If you're in Christ, he wants you to know that you are, and he wants your heart to be filled with joy. And if you're not, because he loves you, he wants you to know that too.

So, over the next couple years as we study this letter, I hear those chuckles, what can you expect to gain from our study of I John? Three things. You can expect to gain an understanding of the basic truths of the Christian faith because John lays them out here. Secondly, you can expect to gain an assurance of your own personal participation in the Christian faith if, in fact, you pass the tests. And, therefore, you can expect to see an increasing and enduring joy as you know that you're truly His. It’s going to be a great journey.

Let's pray together. Father, thank you for revealing this so clearly to us through the Apostle John. Lord, I pray that you would help each of us who've set under your Word today to take the tests. Father, I pray for those who didn't pass. Lord, don't let them deceive themselves; help them to be honest with your Word and with their own souls. But, Lord, thank you that that doesn't mean it's hopeless for them, you still invite them to come, to come in repentance and faith and find true salvation and true change, true forgiveness. Lord, I pray that today would be that day.

And, Father, for those of us who passed the tests, not perfectly. Lord, there are so many things we wish were differently, but, Lord, those tests mark our lives. Lord, I pray that you would help us over our time together to see an increasing level of assurance that we truly belong to Christ; and with that increasing assurance, an increasing and enduring joy. We pray in Jesus’s name, Amen.