

Assurance: Launch Pad for Righteous Living

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1 John

This inductive Bible study is designed for individual, small group, or classroom use. A leader's guide with full lesson plans and the answers to the Bible study questions is available from Regular Baptist Press. Order RBP0046 online at www.regularbaptistpress.org, e-mail orders@rbpstore.org, call toll-free 1-800-727-4440, or contact your distributor.

REGULAR BAPTIST PRESS
1300 North Meacham Road
Schaumburg, Illinois 60173-4806

The Doctrinal Basis of Our Curriculum

A more detailed statement with references is available upon request.

- The verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures
- Only one true God
- The Trinity of the Godhead
- The Holy Spirit and His ministry
- The personality of Satan
- The Genesis account of creation
- Original sin and the fall of man
- The virgin birth of Christ
- Salvation through faith in the shed blood of Christ
- The bodily resurrection and priesthood of Christ
- Grace and the new birth
- Justification by faith
- Sanctification of the believer
- The security of the believer
- The church
- The ordinances of the local church: baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper
- Biblical separation—ecclesiastical and personal
- Obedience to civil government
- The place of Israel
- The pretribulation rapture of the church
- The premillennial return of Christ
- The millennial reign of Christ
- Eternal glory in Heaven for the righteous
- Eternal torment in Hell for the wicked

ASSURANCE: LAUNCH PAD FOR RIGHTEOUS LIVING, 1 JOHN

Adult Bible Study Book

Vol. 59, No. 4

© 2011

Regular Baptist Press • Schaumburg, Illinois

www.regularbaptistpress.org • 1-800-727-4440

Printed in U.S.A.

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RBP0049 • ISBN: 978-1-60776-369-7

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Preface

Am I really saved? What are the evidences of salvation?
Can I count on eternal life?

Questions like these are critical for all believers to answer. Believers who never find assurance of eternal life are doomed to spiritual stagnation. Assurance of eternal life becomes a believer's launch pad for righteous living.

John knew the importance of assurance of eternal life as he penned the first of three epistles that bear his name. His recipients were under pressure from false teachers to change their beliefs about Christ in particular. The false teachers caused them to question their salvation. John's words helped the recipients of his letter gain assurance of eternal life so they might grow spiritually as God intended.

As you study 1 John, you will consider issues such as fellowship, obedience, love, truth, discernment, faith, and confidence. All these are presented from the perspective of one who lived close to Christ on earth. These issues are of practical concern to you as you live a "faith life" each day.

This study of 1 John will also reveal to you the marks of an authentic Christian. Those marks will help you evaluate your life for genuine faith as well as give you insight into how God expects a believer to live.

Approach this study with an open heart. And be ready to be respond to the Holy Spirit as He speaks to you through His Word.

Lesson 1

Certain of Salvation

God wants His children to know that they are truly saved.

1 John Overview

“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5:13).

Most people who consider growing to be 100 years old would like to do so only if they could still take care of themselves and carry on a lucid conversation. Marion Fields Wyllie has exceeded that expectation. She did more than carry on a conversation at 104 years old; she actually wrote a book of short stories and had it published. Marion was first published in 1919 when her poem was printed in the *Toronto Globe*. Decades later she is still continuing to write. She is known now as Canada’s oldest living published author.

Getting Started

1. What is the value of reading the writings of an author who has lived a full life?

2. What is the most valuable lesson you learned from an elderly person?

The Bible advises great value is found in the wisdom of godly elders. The apostle John fits that description. Late in his life, he penned three short letters giving direction for Christian living. The book of 1 John is not only divinely inspired, it also conveys the wisdom this Christian statesman had gleaned over many years.

Searching the Scriptures

The Writer

The letter of 1 John has historically been attributed to the apostle John. It is one of the few epistles in the New Testament that does not have an explicit statement of who wrote it. Because of this, many scholars, particularly in the last century, have questioned whether the apostle John was really the author of this letter.

Consider these five reasons for concluding that 1 John was indeed written by John.

First, this was the stated belief of many of the earliest Christian writers. These writers, typically called the church fathers, lived only a few generations after John. Not all of them spoke directly to the issue, but Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian all stated clearly that John the apostle wrote 1 John. Although their testimony may not be conclusive evidence, it certainly is a strong witness that should not be ignored.

Second, in 1:1–3 the writer declared that he was an eyewitness of Jesus Christ during His earthly life. Certainly the apostle John fits this description. John was one of the earliest disciples whom Jesus called to follow Him (Matthew 4:21, 22). Throughout Christ's ministry John was in the disciples' inner circle. He was one of the few who witnessed the full range of Christ's actions. Because 1 John was written by a significant eyewitness of Christ's incarnate ministry, John has to be considered

one of the most likely possible writers.

3. What significant events in Christ's life did John witness? (See Matthew 17:1–3; 26–36; Mark 5:22–24, 35–43; John 20:1–10.)

Third, there are frequent and detailed parallels between 1 John and the Gospel of John, in particular, John 13–17. Because of the great similarity between the two books in writing style and content, scholars who deny that John wrote this epistle even argue that it was written in conscious imitation of the Gospel of John. But it seems more likely that the same person wrote both books.

Fourth, the epistle has a tone of spiritual authority. John was one of the leading apostles, whom Jesus commissioned to serve in His place. Throughout 1 John, the apostle spoke with confident authority of the truth he had received and proclaimed.

4. Read John 19:26 and 27. What deeply personal commission did John receive from Jesus?

Fifth, the writer often referred to his readers as “my little children” (2:1). This is the kind of expression that a grandfather might use. His firm apostolic tone was tempered with deep compassion and affection. This language implies that the writer was an elderly, revered Christian leader. In addition, it matches portrayals of John as an old man who ministered in Ephesus.

5. Why might critics want to deny that John wrote 1 John?

The Setting

The historical setting for John's letters is hard to determine. The

book of Acts details his involvement in only four episodes early in his ministry (Acts 1:13; 3:1; 4:19; 8:14). Consequently, the setting must be drawn from inferences in 1 John and the few references found in the writings of the church fathers.

Hanging heavily over 1 John is the threat of false teachers. By using John's teachings, scholars have attempted to identify these false teachers. At least three brands of error can be inferred: gnosticism, Docetism, and an erroneous view separating the human Jesus from the divine Christ.

6. Look up "gnosticism" in a dictionary. Why would gnosticism undermine Christianity at its very core? Think about the incarnation of Christ.

Gnosticism insisted that the Son of God could not have become human because that would bring the spiritual and material realms together. This false teaching would rule out Christ's incarnation and thus His substitutionary death on the cross and future reign on His millennial throne as a descendant of David.

7. How might gnosticism have affected the early Christians' assurance of salvation?

The Docetists claimed that Jesus' humanity was not real—that instead of being truly human, Jesus only appeared to take on a physical body. This false teaching emphasized the deity of Christ to the extent that it denied His humanity. In other words, He did not genuinely enter the human race and identify Himself with sinful humanity.

8. Based on Philippians 2:5–8, why was it important for Christ to become a human?

The third error stated that when Jesus was baptized, the divine Christ descended upon him but that Christ left Jesus before the crucifixion. Therefore, when Jesus died on the cross, He died as a mere human, not as the perfect God-man offering the substitutionary atonement for sin.

It is impossible to know precisely which false teaching John was countering in a given verse. In fact, it could well be that his readers were facing a mixture of overlapping and contradictory false teachings. So the focus must be kept on the truth which John set forth.

9. What was the common denominator of all these false teachings?

10. What false religions today threaten to shake a believer's understanding of and trust in Jesus Christ?

According to 1 John 2:19, some people within the Christian community had already defected to falsehood. They had moved away from the solid truth into false speculations, which had produced a spirit of arrogance in their hearts. In their self-deceit they claimed to have arrived at a state of moral perfection, in which they were no longer contaminated by sin. They doubtless urged genuine Christians to forsake simple belief in Christ to achieve a supposedly higher level of spirituality.

11. Why do false teachers bother with trying to influence believers?

Theological error often results in ethical error, because wrong belief typically produces wrong behavior. This was certainly the case with the false teachers against whom John wrote. John used strong terms such as "seduce" (2:26) and "deceive" (3:7) to describe what they were teaching.

John, therefore, used a twofold approach when writing against false teachers. On the one hand, he firmly countered the false teachings by raising solid logical and theological objections. On the other hand, he encouraged Christians to stay with the truth they had received by giving them warm pastoral reassurance.

12. Which approach to writing against false teachers did John use in 1 John 2:21–23: firm countering or pastoral reassurance?

13. Which approach is John using in 1 John 3:1–3?

The Purpose

In John 20:30 and 31 the apostle stated clearly his purpose for that entire book, but he had a fourfold purpose in writing 1 John.

14. According to 1 John 1:3, what was John's purpose in writing First John?

15. What purpose does he give in 1:4?

16. What purpose does he list in 1 John 2:1?

17. Was does 1 John 5:13 say about John's purpose?

Clearly, John was addressing faithful Christians, not false teachers. So his purpose was pastoral and constructive. He spent most of his time in reassuring and warning the faithful. Knowing they were under attack, John came alongside to encourage and support them. He also warned them of the false teachers' serious threat.

Just as the threat was a mixture of false teachings, so John's response had a combination of purposes. He reassured his readers of theological truths, especially about the identity of Jesus Christ. In addition, he reminded them of the reality of sin and of God's provision for forgiveness. He also reminded them of the need to maintain fellowship with God and one another. In doing all of this, John countered the false teachers' doctrinal and practical errors.

Key Themes

First John is a very difficult book to outline, because it was not written as a theological treatise. Instead, John was responding to the urgent threat posed by the false teachers. He spoke as a spiritual father to his children. In warm yet firm tones, he repeated several key themes.

Throughout the book John brought his readers back to the foundational truths of the Christian faith. He wanted to remind them of "the old, old story" to defend them from the brand new erroneous views of the false teachers.

18. What common phrase in 1 John 1:1; 2:7, 24; and 3:11 points out John's emphasis on the foundational truths?

John wanted his readers to stand on the firm bedrock of God's truth, rather than slipping on the shifting sand of human speculations.

Numerous times John spoke of knowledge and certainty. The false teachers had raised doubts about the person of Jesus Christ, as well as other central tenets of the faith. To counter these doubts, John reminded them of what they could truly know about Christ.

The false teachers claimed to be Christians even though their teach-

ings diverged greatly from the teachings of Christ. John devoted much of 1 John to describing three distinguishing marks of authentic Christianity: theological, moral, and social. The theological mark is belief that Jesus was truly the Son of God in the flesh. The moral mark is consistent obedience to the commandments of God. The social mark is love for one another in the family of God.

These three marks are not set forth as the way to become a Christian. Instead, they are already true of genuine Christians. Each mark requires the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit teaches God's truth, including a proper understanding of Jesus Christ as the unique God-man. It is the indwelling Spirit Who enables Christians to obey God and love others, because these actions and attitudes are contrary to the natural sinful bent of humans.

19. Which of these marks is the most important? Why?

The false teachers were wrong in their understanding of Jesus Christ, and their lives were characterized by disobedience and lack of love. John's readers, however, were true Christians. As they evaluated their lives in the light of the three marks of Christians, they would be reassured of their own spiritual status in Christ. This renewed confidence would in turn blunt the arrows of doubts that the false teachers shot at them.

Another prominent theme in 1 John is the vital connection between faith and love. John had little patience for people who claimed to love God but at the same time did not love their Christian brothers and sisters. He argued that godly belief must produce godly behavior. Because of that, godly behavior that expresses love for others is an accurate indicator of true belief in God. The Holy Spirit Who indwells all genuine Christians teaches them both what to believe and how to behave.

Making It Personal

20. Do you believe that Jesus in the flesh is truly the Son of God? If so, how does that belief affect your life?

21. Is your life characterized by consistent obedience to the commandments of God? On what do you base your answer?

22. Would your fellow believers describe you as a genuinely loving person? Why or why not?

If you are not sure you are saved, then take care of the matter today. Seek the help of a believer or a pastor who can tell you more about putting your trust in Christ as your Savior.

23. Memorize 1 John 5:13.