



1 John

Tests of Fellowship with Christ



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WEEK 1 – TRUE AND FALSE



How can we tell a real Christian from a fake? How can we divide true teachers from false? How can we discern the Gospel of Jesus from a “different gospel – which is really no gospel at all” (Gal. 1:6-7)? This is the subject of John’s first letter, or general epistle to the Church. Unlike many of the other epistles in the NT, 1 John is not addressed to any specific person or location. He seems to be writing to the Church-at-large in response to Gnostic teachers who were attempting to draw believers away to follow them.

What is Gnosticism?

Gnosticism comes from the Greek word *gnosis*, which means knowledge. It permeated the philosophy schools of the Greek and Roman Empires. Its main teaching is that spirit is completely good and matter is completely evil. Gnostics defined salvation as escape from the body rather than escape from judgment for sin. They said this was achieved by special knowledge, not by faith in Christ. To get this knowledge you would need a teacher who possessed it, which allowed them to gather disciples and make a living from them. These false teachers denied Christ’s humanity in two ways. One group said that Christ only *seemed* to have a body, and the other group said that the divine Jesus came into his body at baptism and left it before he died.

They practiced asceticism, the severe self-discipline and avoidance of any form of indulgence by denying themselves physical comforts to display their holiness. They believed that the body itself is evil—not the breaking of God’s law—so they did not believe anything a person does is sin. The Gnostics worshipped hidden knowledge, but their doctrine was loveless. There are still ascetic communities of Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and others. They achieve a spiritual life—not by grace through faith—but by denying themselves comforts, activities, and relationships.



Antichrists

John writes against “the spirit of error” (4:6), which was opposing the Spirit of truth; and the “many false prophets [that] are gone out into the world” (4:1) from the Church itself. In 2:19 he says “they went out from us, but they were not of us.” He calls these false prophets “the antichrist” and “the liar” in 2:22, and “the deceiver and the antichrist” in 2 John 1:7.

Today there are cults offering special revelation, hidden knowledge, steps, degrees, offices, powers, priesthoods, names, tokens, signs, and ceremonies that promise equality with God to those deemed “worthy” by their religious leaders. This is blasphemy, the teaching of the snake to Eve as she contemplated the tree of knowledge.

What is Fellowship?

John begins Chapter 1 by affirming that the apostles (“we”) heard with their ears, saw with their eyes, and handled with their hands a very human Jesus who is the Word of life. They saw eternal life manifested in him when he died and rose again. John declares this so that we, the Church, may have fellowship (*koinonia*) with the apostles who heard, saw, and handled Jesus. He uses *Logos*, translated “the Word” in place of *Christos*, because he is writing to a mostly non-Jewish audience in Greek. *The Logos* was better understood to Greek readers as being divine than *Christos*, which means “anointed”.

Koinonia is a rich word that is translated “fellowship” 12 times, “communion” 4 times, “communication” once, “distribution” once, “contribution” once, and as the verb “to communicate” once in the NT. Thayer’s Greek Lexicon finds it used in other writings to mean “community”, “joint-participation”, and “intercourse”. It means the kind of relationship that a husband and wife or families enjoy, and implies entering a corporation in which many have become one.

The richness of this word allows John to say much in very few words. The Apostles’ intimacy with Jesus brought them into fellowship with the Father. John tells his readers that he is writing to them so they can enjoy this same fellowship, so that their joy will be full.

Three Comparisons

John uses three sets of opposites to show the difference between the true and false, the heavenly and the worldly:

- Jesus is light (1:5-7), contrasted with darkness (1:6). A child of the light confesses sins, but a child of darkness says he has no sin, making God a liar (1:5-10).
- Jesus is love (4:7-11), contrasted with hatred (2:9-11). A child of love does not hate his brother. The false Christian detests other believers, saying that his personal relationship with God is all he needs.
- Jesus is life (5:11-13), contrasted with death (5:12). Fellowship with him is eternal life, but fellowship with the world only brings death. Choose one.

Love in the above passages is *agapa’o*, which means to welcome, entertain, be fond of, or love dearly when said of persons; or to be well-pleased and contented when spoken about things. *Hate* in the above is *mese’o*, which means to hate, detest, or pursue with evil intent. The person who doesn’t admit to sin, detests other believers, and prefers the world’s goods and approval to Christ’s—that person is not just a fake, he or she is an antichrist.

IF WE SAY THAT WE HAVE NO SIN, WE DECEIVE OURSELVES, AND THE TRUTH IS NOT IN US. IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, HE IS FAITHFUL AND JUST TO FORGIVE US OUR SINS AND TO CLEANSE US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.

1 JOHN 1:8-9

Confession

Believers are to bring their sins to God in repentance and receive cleansing and forgiveness as a regular part of worship. In the first century churches people would stand and confess their sins to God in the presence of the congregation. This is what it meant to “walk in the light”. Hiding one’s sins (or pretending to have none) was walking in darkness. If any part of your body is sick, the whole body is compromised. They understood this and admitted their faults corporately before God.

The word John uses for “confess” is *homologeō*, which means to say the same thing, to agree, to assent, to declare openly, or to speak out freely. This was what they did. As the churches grew in numbers, strangers came to visit and public confession became more difficult. Out of mercy, priests began to witness confessions of sin privately in behalf of the whole Church.¹

Confession and turning away from sin is a much neglected sacrament of the Church that ought to take place before we partake of the bread and wine of our Lord’s body. In preparation for the feast of Passover, Jews carefully went through their houses and removed every speck of leaven or yeast. At the Last Supper, Jesus sent Judas away before he gave the emblems of his body and blood to the eleven, thus removing the hidden leaven from the house.

JUDAS WAS AN ANTICHRIST. HE WALKED IN DARKNESS WHILE
POSING AS A LOYAL FOLLOWER AND JESUS KNEW IT. WHEN A
PERSON COMES TO THE LORD’S TABLE WITHOUT ACKNOWLEDGING
HIS BETRAYALS, JESUS SENDS HIM AWAY EMPTY.

What do you think would happen to churches today if we returned to the practice of corporate confession of sins before God?

- How would it affect the Church as a whole?
- How would it impact communities surrounding churches?
- How would it change you?

¹ Orthodox Study Bible, Notes on 1 John by the editors, page 1698.

HOMEWORK FOR WEEK 2

Take an overview of the entire study by reading 1 John, and then re-read the first chapter. If the language seems difficult, try reading it in a paraphrase version such as the New Living Translation, Contemporary English Version, or The Message. I found all three to be helpful.

Next week, you (the group) will write your own homework questions and share your research on them. Write down any questions or patterns that occur to you as you re-read Chapter 1. Choose two of them to research and share with the group.

Question 1:

Your research:

Question 2:

Your research:

Here are two of my questions:

- How is the Gnostic teaching similar to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?

- How is this chapter similar to the first chapter of John's Gospel?

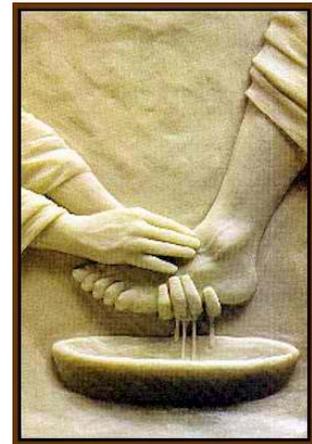
WEEK 3 – THE NEW COMMANDMENT

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

John 13:34-35 NKJV

If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.

John 14:15-17 NKJV



What Did He Command?

Jesus' commandments were not like the first Law. There was no lightning, thunder, or trumpets blaring as he spoke them. They are the tender words of a father to his family:

- Believe
- Follow Me
- Do not be afraid
- Bless those who hate you
- Do not be like the Pharisees and rulers of this world
- Wash each other's feet
- Take the lowest place
- Love each other
- Forgive

John imitates Jesus in the way he writes this letter, calling us his "little children". He reiterates the instruction Jesus gave, and is careful to do it in the same manner. From this list of Jesus' "commandments", it seems clear that He does not define obedience in the same way we do.

THE WORLD THINKS WE NEED MORE RULES, BUT JESUS DID NOT GIVE
RULES. HE GAVE US AN EXAMPLE.

Our Advocate

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

1 John 2:1-6 NKJV

An advocate is an attorney. This is a legally-appointed person who takes your side when you are charged with breaking the law. He has—by virtue of his office, reputation, and understanding of the law—more influence with the court than you have. He may even be a friend of the Judge. Can you imagine having a better attorney than his only-begotten and beloved son?



The accuser says, "The wages of sin is death. The defendant has confessed his guilt in Your presence. He must die."

Jesus then says, "I was horribly executed, but innocent of any wrong. I gave my life in exchange for the defendant's."

The Father raises his gavel and says, "I am well-pleased with what You did for him. The full penalty for his sins has been satisfied."

The gavel falls with a resounding "boom" and the courtroom pillars shake. He says to Jesus,

"He is the body and bride of Him that bought his life. Whoever belongs to You is My beloved also."

- How is Jesus more to us than is possible for any attorney?
- We are not only redeemed from sin. We are joined to Jesus as His bride and body. Can you think of anyone in the Bible that illustrates this?
- If this is the case, what response would you expect to be evident in the lives of true believers?
- What would you expect to be absent in the hearts of true believers?

Responding to God's Love

My dear friends, I am not writing a new command to you but an old command you have had from the beginning. It is the teaching you have already heard. But also I am writing a new command to you, and you can see its truth in Jesus and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.

1 John 2:7-8 New Century Version

If we claim to be in the light and hate someone, we are still in the dark. But if we love others, we are in the light, and we don't cause problems for them.

1 John 2:9-10 Contemporary English Version

Back on page 7 we read, "Whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him." *Perfected* is a word that means that something has become what it was meant to be, or that the tree is now mature enough to bear fruit.

- How can we see the light of truth in Jesus and in us?
- Does this “true light” shine right away when we believe, or does it take time for the darkness to “pass away”?
- How should we treat believers who are just getting started?

Responding to the World

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you. These are the ways of the world: wanting to please our sinful selves, wanting the sinful things we see, and being too proud of what we have. None of these come from the Father, but all of them come from the world. The world and everything that people want in it are passing away, but the person who does what God wants lives forever.

1 John 2:15-17 New Century Version

- Based on what John has said so far, what does God want us to do?
- How does the world expect religious people to act?
- What’s the difference?

HOMEWORK FOR WEEK 4

Read 1 John 2 slowly, letting it sink into your heart and stretch you. It may help to read more than one version. Next week, you (the group) will give the lesson by sharing what you have learned.

1. Place the following in the order of importance that you think God places them:

- Prayer & Bible study
- Doctrinal purity
- Church activity
- Generous tithes and offerings
- Helping the poor
- Sharing the good news and supporting missions
- Supporting conservative causes
- Sexual purity and marital faithfulness
- Humility, kindness, & forgiveness
- All of the above equally
- None of the above because (please explain):

2. Based on your answer above, how is this “old” commandment that we have had from the beginning, “new”?
3. Read 1 John 2:18-19. Does this challenge your view of when the “end times” began? Why does God speak this way when the end is still more than 2,000 years away? Give a similar example of this from the Bible if you can.
4. Read 1 John 2:20-27. How can he say that we know all things? Now read the Gospel of John, Chapter 16. In verse 29 the apostles suddenly cease doubting Jesus. What happened to them during this speech? Does this help you understand what John is saying?
5. The best comes last. Read 1 John 2:28-29. How do we recognize a born-again believer?

WEEK 5 – TWO SIMPLE TESTS

In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

1 John 3:10 NKJV

See how very much our heavenly Father loves us, for he allows us to be called his children, and we really are! But the people who belong to this world don't know God, so they don't understand that we are his children. Yes, dear friends, we are already God's children, and we can't even imagine what we will be like when Christ returns. But we do know that when he comes we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. And all who believe this will keep themselves pure, just as Christ is pure.



1 John 3:1-3 New Living Translation

The Test of Lawlessness

Believers keep themselves pure, as a bride who faithfully waits for her wedding day. It is not a matter of good behavior as much as a test of loyalty. In the following verses, John gives as the contrast, the man of lawlessness or sin, two of the names of antichrist.

The decision to rebel against the example Jesus gave us is lawlessness. He loved us and died pure for us. Will we love and die pure for him? Lawlessness says “I can do what I want with my own body, possessions, and life”. Of course we can; otherwise it is not a test. Think back on a commitment someone made to you.

- How did you test that person's faithfulness?
- How does God test our decision to make him Lord?
- What is the difference between the loyalty of love and the loyalty of duty?
- Why is it difficult to see the difference?

For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

1 John 3:11-15 NKJV

The Test of Love

John makes the distinction between a religious person and a true follower by the test of love. A religious person brings his sacrifice to God as Cain did, but only does it to be in a position to judge others. True followers do not become jealous or angry when a “lesser” brother or sister is accepted, sins and all, as a child of God. We love anyone God receives as we would love our own family. If they are in need, we don’t judge; we help.

If Cain hated his brother because God accepted him, the world will hate us for the same reason. One clear mark of spirit-filled believers is that they love and protect a vulnerable person even when it costs them something.

- How much cost is John talking about? Read verses 16-17.
- Based on this test, how can you tell if a person follows Jesus in truth and not just for show?

AND WHATEVER WE ASK WE RECEIVE FROM HIM, BECAUSE WE KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS AND DO THOSE THINGS THAT ARE PLEASING IN HIS SIGHT. AND THIS IS HIS COMMANDMENT: THAT WE SHOULD BELIEVE ON THE NAME OF HIS SON JESUS CHRIST AND LOVE ONE ANOTHER, AS HE GAVE US COMMANDMENT. 1 JOHN 3:22-23

- Does a Christian live a life pleasing to God by following the Ten Commandments?
- If all we did was to live by a set of moral rules, would the world still hate us?
- What do we have that makes the world jealous and angry enough to kill us?

HOMEWORK FOR WEEK 6

Read Genesis 4 and 1 John 3. Next week, you (the group) will give the lesson by sharing what you have learned from John's letter so far.

1. What does Cain's name mean? Why do you think Eve gave him this name?
2. If you were the first born son in a patriarchal system of government, what kind of position would you hold?
3. What does Abel mean? How would it make you feel to have this name?
4. Was Cain a religious person? What went wrong?
5. Name some people that the world accepts as religious leaders or saints. Based on what John writes in his epistle, can you tell if they are children of God or fakes?
6. Dig deeper. What is this letter saying to you personally?

WEEK 7 – TEST THE SPIRITS

Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world. This is the way to find out if they have the Spirit of God. If a prophet acknowledges that Jesus Christ became a human being, that person has the Spirit of God. If a prophet does not acknowledge Jesus, that person is not from God. Such a person has the spirit of the Antichrist. You have heard that he is going to come into the world, and he is already here.



1 John 4:1-3 New Living Translation

Greater is He that is in You



This chapter has some of the most quoted words in the Bible. John begins by warning us not to believe everything we hear because there are many false prophets—people who say that God has spoken to them or revealed something to them for us. If you belong to God, you have the Spirit of God and have no need for prophets (see 1 John 2:20).

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world.

They are of the world; therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.

We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

1 John 4:4-6 KJV

When John says “us” he means the Apostles, as he did at the beginning of his letter. When a person says, “I accept the Gospels, but I don’t like Paul,” that person *heareth not us*. Peter received Paul and his letters, and so should we (see Galatians 2:1-10, 2 Peter 3:14-18).

**WE MUST ACCEPT THE WORDS OF THE APOSTLES OF JESUS TO
REMAIN IN THE FAITH.**

God is the Source of our Love

Dear friends, we should love each other, because love comes from God. Everyone who loves has become God's child and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love to us: He sent his one and only Son into the world so that we could have life through him. This is what real love is: It is not our love for God; it is God's love for us in sending his Son to be the way to take away our sins.

1 John 4:7-10

“God is love” may be the most misused words taken from the Bible today. Many pseudo-believers think love is all God is. It is true that *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)*, but read it carefully.

- Who will perish?
- Where will an unbeliever go for eternity?

In this statement of God's love for the world it is equally clear that God must judge the world.

- How did God show his love for me?

If I reject this offer of love, then I must go to judgment relying on my own merit.

FOR I TELL YOU THAT UNLESS YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS SURPASSES
THAT OF THE PHARISEES AND THE TEACHERS OF THE LAW, YOU
WILL CERTAINLY NOT ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

MATTHEW 5:20

The meaning of John's declaration is that “we should love each other, because love comes from God.” The false teachers said they “knew” God and could teach others to “know” God for a suitable fee, if they obeyed all their rules. John says, “Everyone who loves has become God's child and knows God.”

- Who does he mean by “everyone”?
- If an unbeliever loves someone, does this mean he is a child of God and knows God?

Remember, this is a letter John wrote to the Church. “Everyone” does not mean everyone in the world; it means everyone in the Church. He is making the same point as before with a new emphasis, that if you are God's child, you already know God and will reflect the supernatural love of God toward others because he is its source. If you already know God—seen by His love in you for others—then you do not need a false prophet to initiate you into the secret mysteries of God. You know enough.

HOMEWORK FOR WEEK 8

Read 1 John 4 and James Chapters 2-4. John tells us what love is, but James shows us how it walks. Next week, you (the group) will give the lesson by sharing what you have learned.

1. How does James help you to understand what John is saying to the Church?
2. Have you understood God's love incorrectly in the past? Why do most of us make the same mistake?
3. What do you think John means when he says, "No one has seen God at any time." Jesus is God, and John certainly saw him. John also saw the throne of God and the one seated upon it (Rev. 4:2). What is he trying to say in verses 8-16?

Read Romans 1:18-25 and see if it helps.

4. Read 1 John 4:17-19. How does the love mentioned above overcome fear? It sounds like he is saying a saved person will never feel fear. Is that what he means?
5. Read 1 John 4:20-21 with the above in mind. How does the word "brother" change the meaning? Who is your brother or sister in the context of this letter?

WEEK 9 – FAITH THAT OVERCOMES THE WORLD

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. ² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. ³ For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. ⁴ For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. ⁵ Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?



1 John 5:1-5 NKJV

- Read John 8:42-48
- Read John 10:30-31
- What was the reaction of the religious fakes to both of these statements?
- How do we become one with God?

In his letter, John is drawing a simple conclusion from what he heard Jesus say. The world is those who do not believe that Jesus is the Christ. If we do believe, then we are born of God and are no longer of this world. We can, by faith, say the same things Jesus said. We and the Father are one—in *koinonia*, fellowship, communion—as a corporate body. If you love the Father (Him who begot), then you also love his offspring. Jesus gave us this new commandment: love each other.

THE PERSON WHO LOVES GOD PROVES IT BY LOVING EVERYONE WHO
HAS BEEN BORN OF GOD, AS JESUS COMMANDED.

- What does loving other believers have to do with overcoming the world?
- How much faith does it take to know you have fellowship with God?
- How much faith does it take to know that other believers have it too?

By Water and Blood

⁶ *This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth.* ⁷ *For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.* ⁸ *And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.*

1 John 5:6-8 NKJV

John is still talking about what it means to be in fellowship with God. He illustrates it physically with the birth and death of Jesus, and illustrates it spiritually with the Trinity.

- When Jesus was born, how did water, blood, and the breath of life or spirit witness that he was fully human?
- When Jesus died on the cross, how did the same three “witnesses” declare his death?
- When a person denies that the Word became flesh, what are they denying?
- How does it make you feel to follow a God that became flesh, suffered as we do, and died so that you could have eternal life with him?

The Power behind Prayer

¹⁴ *Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.* ¹⁵ *And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.*

¹⁶ *If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that.* ¹⁷ *All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.*

1 John 5:14-17 NKJV

The power behind prayer is our fellowship with God. Jesus was one with his Father, and when he prayed “according to His will” nothing was impossible. John has shown us that we are in fellowship with the Father also. When we pray knowing what God wants, we don’t have to wonder what will happen. He hears and answers us like He heard Jesus.

Application: *there is a sin that leads to death.* John is not talking about rebellion; but if one of our number sins, another can pray for him and he will be forgiven. You are able to intercede for the sins of a wayward believer because of your fellowship or communion with Jesus.

- How can believers intercede for one another’s sins if we never confess them?
- Read James 5:14-16. Does this help you understand what John is saying?

HOMEWORK FOR WEEK 10 – FINAL

Read 1 John 5, James 5, and 1 Peter 2. Next week, you (the group) will give the lesson by sharing what you have learned.

1. How were John and James related? How are they the same in the way they write their letters? How are they different?

2. Martin Luther wrote about the priesthood of believers, quoting 1 Peter 2:9.

That the pope or bishop anoints, makes tonsures, ordains, consecrates, or dresses differently from the laity, may make a hypocrite or an idolatrous oil-painted icon, but it in no way makes a Christian or spiritual human being. In fact, we are all consecrated priests through Baptism, as St. Peter in 1 Peter 2[:9] says, "You are a royal priesthood and a priestly kingdom," and Revelation [5:10], "Through your blood you have made us into priests and kings."²

- a. How was Peter related to John and James? Do the three agree?
 - b. What did we see in John's letter that assigns to all believers the traditional roles of priests?
 - c. Now that you understand this, how will it alter what you do?
3. Take a little time to investigate the Bible meanings of water, blood, and the breath of life or spirit. Share your research.

4. Summarize in one or two sentences what this letter is saying to you.

² Martin Luther, *Weimar Ausgabe*, vol. 6, p. 407, lines 19–25.