

What Do You Know?
An Introduction to 1 John

When I was in college, I got a job working for a lumber yard/home improvement store. I really don't remember why I applied there, because I knew nothing about lumber and I knew only a little more about electricity, paint, plumbing, cabinet installation, or anything else that I was required to sell on a daily basis.

And everyday I was interacting not only with homeowners on do-it-yourself projects, but also with contractors who were demanding. I could generally figure out how to solve most basic problems that homeowners came in with, but the contractors all knew very quickly that I didn't know anything and I was generally much better off just pointing them to the aisle where plumbing parts were and then leaving them alone.

The truth is, when I started that job, I didn't know anything about it.

I believe that is often true of Christians as well. Even, unfortunately, people who have been Christians for quite a while, they too often don't know what it means to be a Christian. They don't know what they should know. And all too often, they don't know what they should know about their salvation and the certainty of that salvation. What is good news, however, is that a book of the Bible was written to address that very issue — a book that we will begin studying this morning — 1 John.

There are two words for “know” in the Greek language. One has the sense of cognitive understanding and intellectual awareness — “I know the governor of the state of Texas, Rick Perry.” Well, that is, I know and comprehend that he is governor and I know how it is that he came to be governor. The second word has the sense of experiential knowledge — “I know my wife.” In every sense, I have a comprehension of who she is and how she functions from a daily interaction with her for more than 25 years. And in this short letter, John uses those two words 40 times. A few samples —

- ✓ “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; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him” (2:3–5)
- ✓ “I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong,

and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.” (2:13–14)

- ✓ “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and *such* we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.” (3:1–2)
- ✓ “You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.” (3:5–6)
- ✓ “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” (4:7–8)
- ✓ “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.” (5:13)

In every way, John wants the believer to know and be sure of his salvation.

In a sentence, this is what first John is about —

*FIRST JOHN IS WRITTEN TO ASSURE READERS OF THEIR SALVATION THROUGH TESTS OF THEIR DOCTRINE
AND MORALITY — WHAT THEY BELIEVE AND WHAT THEY DO (5:13).*

The believer in Christ is not kept by his works of righteousness, but his righteous works demonstrate (and give assurance) that he is kept. And right believing will produce right living and result in a right confidence in Christ’s salvation.

So let’s start our study of this book by asking a few questions about what you know —

- 1. What Do You Know About JOHN?**
- 2. What Do You Know About 1 JOHN?**
- 3. What Do You Know About HERESY (Living in the World)?**
- 4. What Do You Know About GOD?**
- 5. What Do You Know About YOURSELF?**
- 6. What Do You Know About SALVATION?**

1. What Do You Know About JOHN?

- We are making the assumption that this book was written by the apostle John, the beloved disciple of Jesus. He is not named in this book, but as we'll see in a few minutes, this book has a great many parallels to the Gospel of John, which is widely attributed to the disciple. Further, it was written by someone who spent time with Jesus (1:1) and someone with apostolic authority (e.g., 2:1, 7-8), and the early church fathers were unanimous in attributing this book to John. So 1 John was written by the disciple named John.
- What do we know about John?
 - ✓ His older brother was James, the first martyr of the early church.
 - ✓ They were sons of Zebedee and they were brought up to take over their father's fishing business
 - ✓ While there were 12 disciples, John was one of the "inner three" — Peter, James, and John are often listed together as having unique interactions with Christ (e.g., they alone saw the transfiguration of Christ) — and of those three, John was singled out further as "the beloved disciple."
 - ✓ Their mother was Salome, who was one of the witnesses of the crucifixion. Interestingly, John was the only disciple to view the crucifixion, so he was there with his physical mother and she was there to hear Jesus say to John about Mary, "Behold, your mother..." (Jn. 19:26-27) giving John responsibility to care for Mary. But that care would have been natural, given that John was not only beloved by Jesus, the closest of the disciples to Jesus, but Salome and Mary were also sisters, so John was related to Mary as her nephew (and Jesus was thus his cousin).
 - ✓ John and James were somewhat outspoken and opinionated, given that their nicknames were "Boanerges — "sons of thunder." Peter is generally given that reputation, but John was evidently much like Peter (e.g., **Mk. 9:38**).
 - ✓ John served an important role in the early church (e.g., Acts 3:1; 4:13; 8:14-17), though he is superseded by Peter and Paul.
 - ✓ John was the oldest surviving disciple, though he spent many years imprisoned on Patmos (where he received the revelation from Christ) by the Roman emperor Domitian. After Domitian died, he was released and he returned to Asia Minor, evidently to Ephesus where he served as an elder (some refer to him as Pastor-Emeritus) in his final years, and from where he wrote the three letters that bear his name. He died sometime in the late 90s of the first century.

- What is most helpful in thinking about John, though, is not the historical facts we know about him, but the spiritual transformation that God worked in Him.
 - ✓ When we read the gospel accounts, we see John — the Son of Thunder. He is opinionated, and harsh — the gruff attributes of the fisherman lifestyle have not been softened. One writer says he was “intolerant, ambitious, zealous, and explosive.”
 - ✓ By the time he writes this epistle, he is known as “the apostle of love.” He stresses love in this epistle (the various forms of the word for love are used 52 times in these five chapters), but he is also loving in the way he writes. He is affectionate with his readers, often calling them beloved, and his children. He is not condescending in his correction, but uses the words “us” and “we” more than 100x. The “son of thunder” is now “the gentle man.”
 - ✓ What happened? This is the evidence of the transforming work of God through Christ. The ancient writer Jerome says that John had the reputation of often saying, “My little children, love one another.” He was asked why he always said that, and he replied, “It is the Lord’s command, and if this alone be done, it is enough.”
 - ✓ One of the themes of 1 John is the power of the gospel and salvation to transform us, and John’s own life bears testimony to the gospel’s ability to do just that. As we go through this book, be confident and hopeful that the demands of the book are possible through the power of Christ. And ask God to work the same kind of transformation in you that He worked in John.

2. What Do You Know About 1 JOHN?

- This book is very similar to John’s Gospel. A few examples:
 - ✓ One author has offered 51 references in 1 John that parallel statements in John.
 - ✓ 1 John 1:1-2 parallel John 1:1-4
 - ✓ 1 Jn. 5:13 parallels John 20:31
 - ✓ “to be of the devil” (1 John 3:8 and John 8:44)
 - ✓ “to be of God” (3:10 and 8:47)
 - ✓ “to be of the world” (2:16 and 8:23)
 - ✓ “the Spirit of truth” (4:6 and 14:17)
 - ✓ “to lay down his life” (3:16 and 10:11, 17-18)
 - ✓ “to have eternal life” (3:15 and 3:16, 36)
 - ✓ “to pass from death unto life” (3:14 and 5:24)
 - ✓ “to overcome the world” (5:4 and 16:33) — and 41 more!
 - ✓ Also both this letter and the Gospel set pairs of opposites over against each other, such as light and darkness, life and death, love and hate, truth and falsehood, the Father and the world, the

children of God and the children of the devil, and to know God and not to know God.

- First John is also a *personal* polemic.
 - ✓ It is personal — John speaks affectionately to his “children.” He is bound to them and them to him. He obviously knows their circumstances and is loving and gentle with them. It is warm.
 - ✓ Yet it is also written like a treatise or formal paper. There is no greeting at the beginning and no farewell at the end. He refers to no one by name. Everything is written simply and boldly — all the issues he addresses are black and white. He is writing to address serious issues and while personal, it still has that tone of formality.
- Purpose
 - ✓ John is writing a group of churches (this was likely a circular letter) to address teachings done by a group of people who had taught heretical error and then left the church (so I will refer to them as errorists, heretics, or secessionists). Among the things we know they taught were:
 - They claimed to know God (in spite of lives of sin, 1:6; 2:4, 6, 9)
 - They claims to be sinless (1:8, 10)
 - They denied the deity of Christ (2:22-23; 4:1-3; 5:9-10)
 - They denied the substitutionary death of Christ (5:6)
 - They lacked love for other believers (2:11; 3:15; 4:8, 20)
 - They continued in sinful behavior (3:6, 8, 10)
 - Some have suggested that these were a forerunner of a group of people called Gnostics who taught that there was a separation between body and spirit so that they could indulge in any kind of sinful activity and be sinless and also claimed to have a special or secret knowledge that gave made them spiritually superior. Regardless of whether these teachers were actually Gnostics is somewhat immaterial. They were wrong and they had left the people in these churches questioning their salvation, and John was writing to encourage the remaining believers about their salvation and how they could know they were saved.
 - ✓ There is one particularly clear statement of the purpose of this letter — **5:13**. But there are also several other statements about John’s purpose (“I have written...”): 1:3, 4; 2:1; 2:12-14 (6 statements); 2:21; 2:26. I believe 5:13 serves as the primary statement, and the others are secondary to that one statement and serve to give nuances to his primary purpose.
 - ✓ So I summarize the purpose this way: First John is written to assure readers of their salvation through tests of their doctrine and morality — what they believe and what they do (5:13).
- The structure/outline of the book is difficult. John is not linear in his thought, but circular, so he keeps returning to the same themes of obedience, love, and righteousness over and over (3-4 times).

3. What Do You Know About HERESY (Living in the World)?

- The influence of the world
 - ✓ The word “world” is used 23x in the book. The word is never used in a positive manner; it is seen as antithetical to the nature of the believer (2:15-17), uncomprehending of believers or Christ (3:1), the enemy of the believer (3:13), passing away (2:17), the habitation of the spirit of the antichrist (2:18; 4:3), under the power of the Evil One (5:19), and the entity for which Christ came as Savior (2:2; 4:15).
 - ✓ But 5:4 strikes a positive note: “For whatever [whoever] is born of God overcomes the world” and as one writer says, “this is an appropriate place to conclude.” The influence of the world is real, but we don’t have to live in that way.
- And even when the world influences the church through heretical teaching (2:18-19), we need not live that way and there is a truth that has been given to us that will sustain us (2:20-21).

4. What Do You Know About GOD?

- In my preparation for teaching this book, one of the things I did was use my Bible software to tabulate the number of words that are used in the book and how often each word is used. (In 105 verses there are 2141 words and 234 different words in the Greek.) The most common word after words like “the,” “and,” and “is,” is the word “God.” John uses the word “God” 62x in this book — more than every other verse, on average, and an average of a dozen times per chapter. And add to that, “Father” is used of God 13 more times.
 - ✓ With the gospel under attack and the faith of believers upset, John reminds the readers about the character of God who has granted and is securing our salvation. What does he say about God?
 - ✓ He is Light — 1:5,7; 2:8-9, 10
 - ✓ He is faithful (to forgive) — 1:9
 - ✓ He is righteous (to forgive) — 1:9
 - ✓ He is righteous — 2:29
 - ✓ He forgives for the sake of His name — 2:12
 - ✓ He has existed from the beginning — 1:1; 2:13f
 - ✓ He is the Holy One — 2:20
 - ✓ He has a (sovereign) will — 2:17; 5:14
 - ✓ He is right to give commands — 3:23; 4:21; 5:2-3
 - ✓ He makes (and keeps) promises — 2:25
 - ✓ He is One who anoints — 2:27
 - ✓ He is omniscient — 3:20
 - ✓ He is knowable — 4:6
 - ✓ He is greater than Satan — 4:4
 - ✓ He is love — 4:7, 10, 16, 19
 - ✓ He oversees the coming day of judgment — 4:17

- We don't necessarily think about John as a book about Christ, but it is an important Christological book. Some of the heretics had claimed that Jesus was just a man and that at His baptism, the "divine" Christ was "joined" to the "human Jesus" and that the divine Christ left Jesus prior to the crucifixion. And others evidently taught that Jesus only seemed to be human, but He was not genuinely human because all material things are inherently evil and Jesus could not be evil, so He must not have been human either. John is refuting these ideas, and many more. So among the things he says about Jesus are:
 - ✓ Christ is from the beginning — 1:1; 2:13
 - ✓ He is the Word of life — 1:1
 - ✓ He is the Son of God — 1:2, 3, 7; 2:22, 23, 24; 3:8, 23; 4:9, 10, 14, 15; 5:1, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 20
 - ✓ He is the Christ — 2:22; 5:1
 - ✓ He is Jesus Christ — 1:3; 2:1; 3:23; 4:2; 5:6, 20
 - ✓ His life (as the Messiah and God) was manifested — 1:2; 4:2
 - ✓ He is the *μονογενής* of God — 4:9
 - ✓ He is righteous — 2:1; 3:7
 - ✓ He is at the Father's right hand as Mediator — 2:1
 - ✓ He is the giver of the Holy Spirit — 3:24
 - ✓ He was testified to by the Spirit — 5:6, 8
 - ✓ He was testified to by God — 5:9, 10
 - ✓ Combine all these realities and the error being confronted by John is clearly addressed. Jesus was God in the flesh from birth to ascension.
- The theology lessons given by John in this book are a reminder that when our faith is upset, we must cling not to what we feel, but what is true. Our mind must be fed on the truth. As A. W. Tozer has said so well, "What we think about God is the most important thing about us."

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God.

For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the Church. Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God, just as her most significant message is what she says about Him or leaves unsaid, for her silence is often more eloquent than her speech. She

can never escape the self-disclosure of her witness concerning God. Were we able to extract from any man a complete 'answer to the question, "What comes into your mind when you think about God?" we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man. [Knowledge of the Holy, 1.]

- As you wrestle with the concerns of your life, let your mind be transformed by the truth of God and His character and His person. The book of John uses theological truth as a foundation for living and so should we.

5. What Do You Know About YOURSELF?

- There is indwelling sin in the believer. We know that apart from Christ, people are by nature lawless (3:4) and sinful (5:17). They are subject to the “lust of the flesh, the lust of they eyes, and the pride of life” (2:16) and are “of the devil” (3:8) and subject to death and the wrath of God (3:14). Moreover, one cannot deny this condition of sinfulness, for those who do are self-deceived (1:8) and assert that God is a liar (1:10).
- That is true of unbelievers, and while the believer does not live in a perpetual and willful state of sin, yet there is a reality of remaining sin so that even as believers, we will sin (**1:8; 2:1-2; 5:16-17**). Though in Christ and secure, we cannot say that we have no sin.
- Yet there is also an ability to live righteously/joyously in spite of our sin. The believer will live in the light and righteousness (1:7; 2:5, 29; 3:7). The believer actively works for his purity and righteousness (2:29; 3:3). Obedience is expected in the believer (2:3-4, 7-8; 3:22, 24; 5:2-3) and this obedience is one of God’s provisions for assurance (3:19-22; 5:2-3). The disobedient self-proclaimed believer has no reason to experience assurance.
- **SUMMARY:** John is merely emphasizing that the ongoing pattern of the believer is not willful sin and lack of repentance; but the pattern of his life is progression and growth in Christ as he battles against remaining sin. He does not love his sin or the world’s offerings (2:15-17); he hates his sin, though he still sins.
- This leads us to one more truth that in some ways is the heart of this book —

6. What Do You Know About SALVATION?

- This book is about eternal life. In fact, the book begins and ends talking about eternal life (**1:1-2; 5:20**), so this theme serves as a set of brackets for the entire book. From start to finish John is talking about eternal life. And the life that has been granted through Christ's salvation is in view throughout the book (e.g., 2:17, 25; 3:14, 15-16; 4:9; 5:11-13, 16). This life is eternal (and the believer needs to be looking towards eternity) because this life is rooted in the One who is Himself life and eternal. With the emphasis on *eternal* life, John is affirming to the readers that what they have is sure and certain. We are (and our salvation is), as Peter says, "protected by the power of God" (1 P. 1:5). Once this salvation and eternal life has been granted, it cannot cease to exist. We can rest in it and be confident in it because of the One who keeps us in it (4:17).
- What we often say about salvation is that Christ's death has freed us from the penalty of our sin — God is no longer angry with us and will never pour His wrath on us. But salvation is not just about getting out of hell for free. It is also about having the power of sin removed from us, so that we who could do nothing to please God, now can do acts of righteousness (Romans 6). And this is John's emphasis throughout the book. The one who has been saved will also be transformed now. He won't be sinless (1:8; 2:1-2), but he will be moving towards Christlikeness (1:7; 2:1; 3:3...).
- ✓ John is not saying that we are kept (made secure) by our works of righteousness, but our righteous works demonstrate (give assurance) that we are kept by God — we have been saved. So over the course of these five chapters, John will offer test after test to determine whether or not what we are doing and how we are living really is indicative of true salvation.
- ✓ Right believing will produce right living and right living will result in a right confidence in Christ who is keeping us.
- ✓ Assurance is not given to everyone who has prayed a prayer, but assurance is given to those who continue to believe in Christ alone for their salvation from the penalty and power of sin.
- ✓ My balance in this sermon series is two-fold —
 - Encourage those who are genuinely saved when they are doubting.
 - Discourage those who believe they are saved when they have no evidence of salvation.
 - In that sense, I am trying to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.
- So we are secure and can have assurance. First John is written to assure readers of their salvation through tests of their doctrine and morality — what they believe and what they do (5:13).

CONCLUSION: What do you know? What do you know about God and Christ and the world and yourself and salvation? Let's discover together all that God has done to secure us so we can live knowing of our salvation.