

**First Letter of John****1 John 2:18–4:6**

**Memory Verses:** *By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers* (1 John 3:16 ESV).

**Background Helps:**

For background, here is some material repeated from last week's forecast:

While the purpose of the *Gospel* of John is to draw people to believe in Jesus Christ so that they will receive eternal life (see John 20:30-31), the purpose of the *first letter* of John is to give assurance of eternal life to those who have already believed in Jesus Christ: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13 ESV). (See the information provided at the end of this forecast for more background on 1 John.) The way in which John provides this assurance is by spiraling repeatedly through a series of three tests:

1. The doctrinal test: Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the incarnate Son of God?
2. The moral test: Do live a righteous life?
3. The social test: Do you love your brother?

The "birthmarks" of true believers are righteousness of life, love for our brothers, and faith in Jesus as the Christ, the incarnate Son of God. Those who bear these marks may have assurance of eternal life. Those who do not bear these marks are counterfeits: false teachers or false believers.

**Lesson Helps:**

1. Once again you could write an aim that covers most of the material in 1 John 2:18–4:6. For example: My students will learn about the three tests of a true believer [see above], so that they will examine their own lives for evidences of true faith. You could then cover (1) believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God in 2:18-27, who has come in the flesh (incarnate) in 4:1-6; (2) practicing a righteous life in 2:28–3:10; and (3) loving your brothers in 3:11-18. 1 John 3:10 and 23 are good summary verses of these three "birthmarks."
2. Or, briefly survey the whole passage and then focus on one section, writing an appropriate lesson aim. For example:
  - a. My students will learn about John's warning against the false teaching of the antichrist in 1 John 2:18-27 and 4:1-6, so that they will believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who has come in the flesh.
  - b. Or, my students will learn about the purpose of the two comings of Christ in 1 John 2:28–3:10, so that they will not practice sin but practice righteousness. Notice the two references to the first coming of Christ and its purpose in 3:5, 8

and the two references to the second coming of Christ and its effect in 2:28 and 3:2-3.

- c. Or, my students will learn about the Christian responsibility to love our brothers in 1 John 3:11-18, so that we will love one another in deed and in truth. This lesson may be a good one for children in the younger classes. Notice the reference to Cain and Abel in 1 John 3:12. Why not combine a study of this passage in 1 John with the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4? Apply the lesson to relationships between siblings at home, between cousins and other relatives, and at church and school among peers. Be sure to include the memory verse: 1 John 3:16.

### **Home Assignment:**

📖 Read: 1 John 4:7–5:21

📖 Memorize: 1 John 5:13 ESV

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### **Background on 1 John**

Author: Anonymous (1:1ff.), but strong early external evidence names the apostle John. Similar in theme, style, and vocabulary to Gospel of John. “We” passages indicate eyewitness, apostolic origin (1:1-4; 4:6, 14). Note of authority throughout.

Recipients: Undesignated but probably a circular letter for Christians in province of Asia (western Turkey). Compare Revelation 1:11.

Date: Probably in John’s later years, after destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70).

Place of Origin: According to early traditions, Ephesus, where John spent his last years.

Occasion and Purpose: John indicates several purposes (1:4; 2:1, 7-8, 21, 26), but his main objective is to provide a basis of assurance for his readers: “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life” (5:13). Contrast this purpose with the purpose of John’s Gospel (John 20:30-31).  
Theme: Tests of a true Christian.

#### Characteristics:

- More like a short treatise or tract than a letter, but has a specific audience in mind
- Only proper names used are the various names of God: Father, Jesus, Spirit, etc.
- Warning against Gnosticism: early heresy that taught “knowledge” (*gnosis*) as the way of salvation, believed that spirit is good and matter is evil (dualism), denied the incarnation, and tended toward opposite extremes of asceticism or immorality.
- No quotations from the Old Testament and only one allusion (3:12)
- Frequent use of contrasts: truth and error, light and darkness, life and death, etc.

Outline: Spiral plan brings readers repeatedly back to the same three tests of genuine Christianity:

- I. Introduction (1:1-4)
- II. Tests of the true Christian (1:5–5:12)
  - A. Moral test (righteous life)
  - B. Social test (brotherly love)
  - C. Doctrinal test (belief that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, come in the flesh)
- III. Conclusion (5:13-21)

Key Passages:

- 1:1-4: Introduction celebrating the incarnation of Christ (cf. John 1:1-18)
- 1:5–2:2: God’s provision for sin: the sacrifice and intercession of Christ
- 2:18-27; 4:1-6: Warnings against antichrist
- 4:7-21: God demonstrated his love for us through the sacrifice of his Son; we ought therefore to love one another.

Applications: Believe that Jesus is the Christ; obey God’s commands; love one another.