

First Letter of John**1 John 4:7–5:21**

Memory Verses: *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).

Background Helps:

For background, here is some material repeated from the last two weeks' forecasts:

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:

Here are two alternative aims and plans for this week's lesson:

1. My students will learn about John's teaching on love in 1 John 4:7-21, so that they will love God and love one another. Notice once again the emphasis on the "birthmark" of love (v. 7) in 1 John 4:7-21:
 - God is love (vv. 8, 16)
 - God is the source of love (v. 7)
 - God demonstrated his love in history in Jesus Christ (vv. 9-10, 14)
 - God continues to manifest his love in us through our love for one another (v. 12)
 - Our proper response to God's love is: (1) love for God (vv. 19-21) and (2) love for one another (vv. 7-8, 11-12, 19-21)
 - God perfects his love in us (vv. 12-18)


Your students should walk away from this class with a resolve to love their fellow-Christians and with some practical ideas of how to put that love into practice this week.


2. My students will learn about the Christian doctrine of assurance in 1 John 5:13-20, so that they will have assurance in their own lives. Notice the repeated use of the verb “know” in these verses:

- Assurance of eternal life: “. . . that you may *know* that you have eternal life” (v. 13, from the memory verse)
- Assurance of answered prayer: “And if we *know* that he hears us in whatever we ask, we *know* that we have the requests that we have asked of him” (v. 15).
- Assurance of victory over sin: “We *know* that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning . . .” (v. 18).
- Assurance of belonging to God: “We *know* that we are from God . . .” (v. 19).
- Assurance of the incarnation of Christ and of our knowledge of God: “We *know* that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may *know* him who is true . . .” (v. 20).

Your students should walk away from this class with a deeper sense of assurance in their life with God. You could close your lesson with a prayer time, inviting your students to finish this sentence: “Dear God, I know . . . etc.”

Home Assignment:

 Read: 2 and 3 John

 Memorize: 3 John 2 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.