



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Community Group Material:

Bible Reading: 1 John 2:3-11

³ This is how we know that we know him: if we keep his commands. ⁴ The one who says, “I have come to know him,” and yet doesn’t keep his commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵ But whoever keeps his word, truly in him the love of God is made complete. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ The one who says he remains in him should walk just as he [Jesus] walked. ⁷ Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old command that you have had from the beginning... which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. ⁹ The one who says he is in the light but hates his brother or sister is in the darkness until now. ¹⁰ The one who loves his brother or sister remains in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. ¹¹ But the one who hates his brother or sister is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and doesn’t know where he’s going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. (1 John 2:3-11 CSB)

SUMMARY: 1 John is often viewed as presenting “tests of eternal life” for Christians to assess their own salvation. Commentators suggest between 2 and 11 such tests. However, this approach can be counterproductive, increasing doubt and anxiety rather than providing certainty. Contrary to most expositors we argue the “tests” are intended to evaluate believers’ *fellowship* with God, not their ultimate *salvation*. John’s primary goal is encouragement, not testing, so he offers direct statements of reassurance, independent of subjective self-evaluation. His “tests” are meant to identify opponents and help Christians distinguish between true and false prophets and teachers. In other words, John’s “tests” are for congregations to assess the trustworthiness of potential teachers, not for preachers to impose upon their congregations. Ultimately, John seeks to ensure his community continues to walk in truth and love. When applied correctly, the “tests” are helpful; when misapplied, they are hazardous.

Discussion:

1. 1 John has two 'purpose statements' – 1 Jn. 1:3 & 5:13 – regarding 'fellowship' & 'assurance (certainty)'
 - a. Fellowship — '*so that you may have fellowship with us...with the Father & with his Son*' (1 Jn. 1:3)
 - b. Assurance – '*so that you may know you have eternal life*' (1 Jn. 5:13)
 - What's the relationship between these two topics? Are they basically the same thing or different?
 - Can someone be 'God's child' with eternal life & yet be '*out of fellowship*,' or have '*limited fellowship*'?
2. In the prior section – 1 John 1:5 to 2:2 – is the main topic 'assurance' or 'fellowship'? Are the 'tests' in the prior section 'tests of (eternal) life' or 'tests of fellowship'? Why does it matter?
3. Many preachers view 1 John's main purpose as providing 'tests of eternal life' for Christians to evaluate whether they are genuine 'children of God' with eternal life, or they are mistaken. John MacArthur offers these 11 'tests':
 - a. Have you enjoyed fellowship with Christ & the Father? (1 Jn. 1:3)
 - b. Are you sensitive to sin? (1:6-10)
 - c. Do you obey God's word? (2:3)
 - d. Do you reject this evil world? (2:15)
 - e. Do you eagerly await Christ's return? (3:2)
 - f. Do you see a decreasing pattern of sin in your life? (3:9)
 - g. Do you love other Christians? (2:9-11; 3:14; 5:1)
 - h. Do you experience answered prayer? (3:22)
 - i. Do you experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit? (4:13)
 - j. Can you discern between spiritual truth and error? (4:1-3)
 - k. Have you suffered rejection because of your faith? (3:13)
 - Individually, please go through the list, responding either "YES" or "NO" to each item. What's your score?
 - If a 'Pass' is 100% —11/11— did you pass? If it's >50%? Did this exercise give you more (or less) assurance?
4. Sunday's message proposed the 'tests' in 1 John are [1.] 'tests of fellowship' *not* 'of (eternal) life' & [2.] the 'tests' are intended to 'test' the opponents of John's church and to evaluate potential/visiting teachers & prophets. Discuss these proposals.