



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

'Tests' of Life or Fellowship? For Whom?

Bible Reading: 1 John 2:3-11

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.

Fellowship, Assurance, & ‘Tests of Life’ in 1 John

A. Dual Purpose Statements (1:3; 5:13)

1. Fellowship — ‘so that you may have fellowship with us...with the Father & with his Son’ (1 Jn. 1:3)
2. Assurance — ‘so that you may know you have eternal life’ (1 Jn. 5:13)

B. “Tests of Life” – Litmus Tests for Eternal Life

- “A common Reformed reading of 1 John interprets the letter as providing ‘tests of life’ whereby the individual reader may determine whether or not she is regenerate or born of God.” — Daniel Streett

C. ‘Applying the Tests’ (1 Jn. 2:3–6)

- “In John’s view, the addressees want to be sure that they know God (2:3). They can arrive at this certainty by applying this test: ‘Do you obey God’s commandments?’ (2:3). If the answer to this question is ‘yes’ (2:5), then ‘in this person the love of God has reached perfection,’ which clearly also involves knowing God. If the answer... is ‘no’ (2:4), then [he/she] is a liar & does not know God, & ‘the truth does not exist’ in [them].” —Paul Trebilco

D. John MacArthur’s 11 Tests for Assurance of Salvation

- “The apostle John presents 11 objective & subjective tests for assurance of salvation.” – John MacArthur

1. Have you enjoyed fellowship with Christ & the Father? (1 Jn. 1:3)
2. Are you sensitive to sin? (1:6-10)
3. Do you obey God's word? (2:3)
4. Do you reject this evil world? (2:15)
5. Do you eagerly await Christ's return? (3:2)
6. Do you see a decreasing pattern of sin in your life? (3:9)
7. Do you love other Christians? (2:9-11; 3:14; 5:1)
8. Do you experience answered prayer? (3:22)
9. Do you experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit? (4:13)
10. Can you discern between spiritual truth and error? (4:1-3)
11. Have you suffered rejection because of your faith? (3:13)

Do 'Tests of Life' Set Up Believers for Success or for Failure?

A. 'Tests of Life' – counterproductive re: Assurance

- *“Read this way, the letter repeatedly invites the reader to a place of self-examination & even self-doubt about their salvation. That isn't necessarily a particularly 'assuring' experience; in fact, it can be deeply unsettling & anxiety inducing.”* –Matthew Payne

B. 'Impossible Tests' are “*indefensible & dangerous... causing doubt*”

- *“Arguing that John intended these tests as indicators of the presence or absence of eternal life is both indefensible & dangerous... After giving such impossible tests as 'proofs' of eternal life, how could John then...write to assure [believers] of their possession of eternal life?”* –Gary Derickson

C. Confidence in God; Not in self-introspection (1 Jn. 3:19-20)

- *“John... [addresses] the crisis of self-examination... Our assurance is anchored in...God alone... We do not look into our hearts to see if we can feel secure... If our conscience condemns, God overrides its verdict... [because] God is mightier than our hearts, & he knows far more than we can ever imagine.”* –Gary Burge

D. “1 John never asks Christians to 'test' themselves...1 John is for Assurance, not Testing.” — Matthew Payne

'Tests of Fellowship' vs 'Tests of (eternal) Life'

A. An Alternative View: “Tests of Fellowship,’ Not (eternal) Life/Salvation

- *“Arguing against the majority of NT scholars [a minority] assert that John does not give 'tests of life /salvation/assurance' throughout [1 John]; rather he gives his readers 'tests of fellowship'.”* –Christopher Bass
- *“A person does not demonstrate he is a believer by his lifestyle... [He] demonstrates he is walking in fellowship with God by his lifestyle... We know someone is born again...by his confession that he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ for everlasting life.”* –Zane Hodges

B. “Tests of Fellowship” view – *there's only one 'Test of (eternal) Life' it's in 1 John 5:1, 10-13*

'Tests' – Testing the Believers or Boastful Opponents?

A. 'Tests' for Boastful Opponents – “*I have no sin, I know God, I abide in Him, I'm in the Light*”

- *“It's better to see these tests...enabling the discerning Christian to identify false teachers who also professed faith. Rather than tests to be administered to oneself, they were given by John to be administered to others who approached the community of faith...The tests... identify whether they are servants of God or of Satan.”* –Gary Derickson

B. The 'Boasts' of Opponents — “*I have no sin..., I know God..., I abide in Him..., I'm in the Light*”

1. Opponents' Boasts: “*If we say...*” (1:6, 8, 10)
 - *“The problem with the opponents lies not with their boast that they have fellowship with God, but with their contradictory behavior — they continue walking in the darkness.”* –W. Hall Harris
2. Opponents' Boasts: “*The one who says...*” (2:4, 6, 9)

C. The 3 'Tests' for Boasters: “*The one who says...*” (2:4, 6, 9)

1. “The one who says, “I... know him,” yet doesn't keep his commands, is a liar, & the truth isn't in him. (2:4)

2. "The one who says he remains [or 'abides'] in him should walk just as he [Jesus] walked." (2:6)
3. "The one who says he is in the light but hates his brother or sister is in the darkness until now." (2:9)

D. Tests for Church Leaders: Who is a Trustworthy Teacher in the Church?

- "John... offered *tests for leadership to assist believing readers to know whom to trust among their leaders. Trustworthy leaders pass certain tests...* First, they walk in the light... they live by faith & practice righteousness ... Second, they are *able to publicly admit their sins*. These tests... demonstrate *who is credible & dependable as a teacher for the church.*" – James Allman

E. 1 John provides Believers with Assurance, apart from Applying 'Tests' (e.g. 1 Jn. 2:13-14, 27)