



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

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.

1. Fellowship, Assurance, & 'Tests of Life' in 1 John

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

- a. **Fellowship** — 'so that you may have fellowship with us...with the Father & with his Son' (1 Jn. 1:3)
- "What we have seen & heard we declare to you too, so that you may have *fellowship* with us (& indeed our *fellowship* is with the Father & with his Son Jesus Christ)." (1 Jn. 1:3)
- b. **Assurance** — 'so that you may know you have eternal life' (1 Jn. 5:13)
- a. "Everyone who *believes* that Jesus is the Christ has been *born of God*...¹¹ God has given us *eternal life*, & this life is in his Son. ¹² The one who has the Son has life ...I've written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God *so that you may know that you have eternal life*." (1 Jn. 5:1, 11-13)
 - b. "See what great love the Father has given us that we should be *called God's children—and we are!*" (1 Jn. 3:1a)
 - c. "5:13... [is] the writer's overarching purpose statement...John has given several statements of purpose ...each... complementary to 5:13. In 1:3, John says...he's proclaimed the word of life that his readers *might have fellowship* with him... [&] with the Father & the Son...John finds joy that his children are in fellowship with God (1:3) and such *fellowship leads to confidence that they have eternal life* (5:13)." [C. D. Bass, *That You May Know*, p. 52]
 - d. "His reason for writing is clear...to help those who already believe to gain the certainty of their salvation." — Steven Lawson, *Absolutely Sure*, 21
 - e. "One of John's primary purposes in writing his 1st letter is to affirm that God's people can have...assurance —to know beyond a doubt that they are in right relationship with God & headed for heaven (5:13)" —*ESV Fire Bible*
 - f. "No other book of the NT speaks of the believer's confidence or assurance of salvation as frequently or explicitly as the first letter of John." — Christopher Bass
 - g. "*1 John was written primarily to reinforce the assurance of the readers* in the wake of the departure of the secessionists and its subject matter focuses on issues of assurance & current belief & practice in the Christian community." [Paul Trebilco, *Early Christians in Ephesus*, p. 266]

b. "Tests of Life" – Litmus Tests for Eternal Life

- a. Proposition #1: "Tests are a major component of 1 John"
- 1 John "is filled with a series of 'tests' ... by which its readers might *assess their lives* & find added confirmation that they have been *born of God*, know him, & abide in him." — Christopher Bass
 - "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
- b. Proposition #2: "Christians are exhorted to examine (test) themselves." (2 Cor. 13:5-6)
- "*Test yourselves* to see if you are in the faith. *Examine yourselves*. Don't you recognize that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless you fail the test. I hope you will recognize that we ourselves do not fail the test." (2 Cor. 13:5-6)
 - "The Scriptures command us to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith...[to] discern whether we are truly Christian... [But.] what is the authoritative standard...? The standard, or tests of genuine conversion, are laid out for us most clearly ... [in] John's first epistle [1 John]." [Paul Washer, *Gospel Assurance & Warnings*, pp.]
- c. The 'Tests' in 1 John
- "The subject for which 1 John is known is *how people can know if they are Christians*. The letter develops a *series of tests that demonstrate whether a person is in Christ*. These tests fall into 4 categories: [1.] intellectual tests (assent to the truths of the Gospel), [2.] subjective tests (inner awareness of having been born of God & the experience of abiding in God), [3.] a behavioral test (living in accordance with God's commands) and [4.] a communal test (love for God's people)." [Leland Ryken, *Literary Introductions to the Books of the Bible*, p.]
 - "John wrote First John against the backdrop of influential false teachers to help his readers know that their faith was genuine and that they possessed eternal life in Jesus Christ. John Stott writes... John's 'great emphasis is on *the differences between the genuine Christian & the spurious* [Christian], & *how to discern between the two*... The predominant theme of these Epistles is Christian certainty." [John Stott, *Epistles of John*, pp. 42, 50]
 - *1 John "sets up 'Tests of Life'* which extends for the rest of the Epistle... 1 John 1:5-10 develops alternating statements of inclusion & exclusion. If someone claims to have a relationship with Christ (as in 1 Jn. 1:6) there is enough *to test whether in fact the claimant has this everlasting life*. These tests are apparent in instances of exclusion (such as 1 Jn. 1:6, 8, 10) For example, if one claims to have a relationship with Christ, but his life identifies him as within a lifestyle of darkness (not receiving Christ's revelation, nor reflecting Christ's life in his life) then he 'lies & does not practice the truth'." [Douglas W. Kennard, *Biblical Covenantalism*, Vol. 3, p. 184]

c. 'Applying the Tests' (1 Jn. 2:3–6)

- a. "One way in which the readers may be certain of their salvation is by *applying a range of 'tests' that John gives in the letter*. These 'tests' are designed to enable the readers to ascertain whether they 'walk in the light' (1:7), or 'know God' (2:3), or 'have passed from death to life' (3:14) and so on. One clear example is 1 John 2:3–6:" o "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,' & yet doesn't keep his commands, is a liar, & the truth is not in him. ⁵ But whoever keeps his word, truly in him the love of God is made complete [has reached perfection]. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ The one who says he remains [abides] in him should [ought to] walk just as he [Jesus] walked." (1 Jn. 2:3-6)

- b. "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 to the question about obeying commandments is 'no' (2:4), then the addressee is a liar & does not know God, & 'the truth does not exist' in such a person. This is one of many tests in 1 John, tests that are intended to result in the assurance of salvation." [Paul Trebilco, "*Salvation & Gift in 1 John*," pp. 498-9]
- c. "A person's way of life becomes a test of the reality of a person's belief in God and relationship with God. Fundamentally for John, 'claims to know God are testable.' It will be argued here that a crucial element of the logic of these tests that lead to the assurance of salvation is... that while *salvation* is unconditioned, & so is always God's free gift, it [*salvation*] is not unconditional. Rather, it is obligatory that the recipients of God's gift of salvation should live in a certain way [in order to be saved!]." [P. Trebilco, "*Salvation & Gift in 1 John*," p. 499]

d. How Many 'Tests of Life'?

a. Three Tests –Robert Law, *Tests of Life* (1909)

- Robert "Law's title [was] *The Tests of Life* (1909) ... Law has 3 tests –righteousness, love, belief." –John Painter
- "1 John is famous for its 3 'Tests of Faith'. While these tests have helped struggling believers gain a sense of assurance of their salvation, they have helped others to understand they did not really know Jesus as Savior. *John repeats these 3 tests throughout 1 John.*
 - a. The first test is doctrinal: Christians must believe that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (1 John 4:1-3).
 - b. The second test focuses on character (holiness): Those who belong to Christ must seek to obey him (2:29).
 - c. The third test highlights a believer's genuine love for fellow-believers (1 Jn. 3:11) [1 Jn. 2:9-11]." [William F. Cook III, *Journey through the NT*, 213]
- Robert "Law's title [was] *The Tests of Life* (1909) ... Law has 3 tests –righteousness, love, belief... The 'tests of life' were necessary because the author of the letter perceived that counterfeit claims were abroad in the Church. Such claims needed to be tested so that the *true ones [claims] may be recognized & the false ones rejected*... Critical analysis of the epistle that emphasizes the way it is constructed, to refute false affirmations & to affirm what was falsely denied, implies that the epistle was written with a specific problem in mind that was confronting a church or circle of churches." [John Painter, "*Johannine Literature*," in SE. Porter (ed.) *Handbook to the Exegesis of the NT*, p. 585]
- "Many Protestant commentators follow the classic treatment of *Robert Law in detecting "tests of life"* in this epistle. These are usually thought to be three, sometimes four: [1.] allegiance to certain truth, in this case the confession that the Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus; [2.] ...obedience; [3.] love for other believers; & [4.] in some analyses, the witness of the Spirit." [DA Carson, *Reflections on Assurance*, p. 22]

b. "Tests" form the basic structure of 1 John

- "The most famous threefold division [of 1 John] belongs to Robert Law, whose 1909 commentary argued that 1 John had 3 parts, each part offering 3 'tests of life': *righteousness* [obedience], *love*, & *belief*. The secessionists failed to acknowledge the importance of *righteous* behavior, do not *love* fellow Christians, & deny *belief* in Jesus Christ, the Son of God...[Its] creativity is attractive, [but] it falls short..." [Gary Burge, *Letters of John*, 43]
- John "Painter's literary structure for 1 John...[is] built on the...*two* 'tests [of life]'. Its scheme is...(simplified):
 - a. Prologue (1:1-5)
 - b. *First Presentation* of the *two* tests (1:6-2:27)
 - a. The ethical (love) test (1:6-2:17)
 - b. The Christological test (2:18-27)
 - c. *Second presentation* of the *two* tests (2:28-4:6)
 - d. *Third Presentation* of the *two* tests (4:7-5:12)
 - e. Conclusion (5:13-21)
 - "The structure [for John Painter] ... presents each of the 'tests,' ethical & Christological, in turn, alternating between the ethical & Christological, until the Epilogue is reached... The author [Painter] shows that the 'tests' are interlocked...[since] without right Christology...the love of God... cannot be rightly apprehended... [to be] the proper ground for loving each other." [Christopher Armitage, *Atonement & Ethics in 1 John*, pp. 57-58]

e. John MacArthur's 11 Tests for Assurance of Salvation

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

f. **The Test of Perseverance** [Can only know at end of life that you’ve persevered; not very reassuring!]

- “To the tests already laid out –the test of obedience & the test of love –another, *the test of perseverance* or continuance, is now introduced.” [FF. Bruce, *Epistles of John*, p. 69]
- “The theme of persevering (2:19, 28; 2 Jn. 9) ...*in certain respects is an additional test*. The assumption of 2:19 is that the departure of the secessionists proves they never were ‘of’ us... Real believers persevere.” [DA Carson, *Johannine Perspectives on... Assurance*, p. 74] [Reformed doctrine – ‘the perseverance of the saints’]
- “John has put forward the test of obedience & the test of love, & now he adds *the test of perseverance* ...John is confident that those who belong to God will remain with God & by extension, with the community of faith. This verse is not meant to scare people into obedience but to strengthen the faith of the Johannine church.” [Daniel Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, pp. ilix]

2. Do ‘Tests of Life’ Set Up Believers for Success or for Failure?

a. ‘Tests of Life’ – counterproductive re: Assurance

- a. “Take 1 John ... John’s stated purpose...is to bring his readers to a deep confidence that they are heirs of eternal life... *Many Christians*, though, *read John’s letter & employ his tests* in exactly the wrong way & therefore *draw exactly the wrong conclusions*...” [Greg Gilbert, *Assured*,]
- b. “Consider this idea of ‘testing.’ *Read this way*, the letter [1 John] repeatedly *invites the reader to a place of selfexamination & even self-doubt about their salvation*. That isn’t necessarily a particularly ‘assuring’ experience; in fact, *it can be deeply unsettling & anxiety inducing*. This is deeply unfortunate, since the author’s expressed intention was that his Christian readers would be assured & affirmed in their faith.” [Matthew N. Payne, “*1 John is for Assurance, not Testing*,” *StretchTheology.com*, 23 September, 2021]
- c. A believer’s test-results “are *not necessarily very reassuring*. On their own they are likely to function as ‘mirror law,’ exposing for the Christian how *inadequate his evidences* He may think of all the times he has not loved others and consequently *wonder about the state of his faith* [Do I have ‘saving faith,’ or not?].” [Aaron J. Kristopeit, “*Encouraged by the Evidence*,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary* (2018) p. 7]

b. ‘Impossible Tests’ are “indefensible & dangerous... causing doubt”

- “The ‘tests of Life’ view ends up holding that *failure* [to pass the test(s)] *indicates a lack of* [eternal] *life*. [Yet,] *every Christian* who is honest must admit to *some habitual sin*, whether great or small. Yet if the practice of sin or righteousness in 1 Jn. 3 proves the presence of death or life, [‘No one born of God makes a practice of sinning ...& he cannot keep on sinning, because he’s been born of God.’ (1 Jn. 3:9 ESV)] then one is forced to decide ‘how much is too much’ [so it’s a ‘practice’?]. Thus, *arguing that John intended these tests as indicators of the presence or absence of eternal life is both indefensible & dangerous*. The question is legitimately asked: After giving such *impossible tests as ‘proofs’ of eternal life, how could John then...write to assure [believers] of their possession of eternal life? The tests, if absolute & if proving the presence or absence of life, can only cause one to doubt his salvation* whenever he sins.” [Gary W. Derickson, “*What’s the Message of 1 John?*” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1993) pp. 99-100]

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

- “This is how we...reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, & he knows all things.” (1 Jn. 3:19-20)
- “John’s words of assurance... [address] the crisis of self-examination... [They] tell us what to think when moments of profound insecurity overtake us. Our assurance is anchored in God & God alone. John is urging that God is the final arbiter of our personal spiritual well-being. *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 M. Burge, *Letters of John*, 163-4]
- “This letter goes so far as to *assure its readers whether they feel it or not. Does your heart condemn you? God is bigger than that problem!* Does your heart not condemn you? Good – you should have confidence! *Either way, be assured that you belong to God your Father* (1 Jn. 3:19-22).” [Matthew N. Payne, “1 John is for Assurance, not Testing,” *StretchTheology.com*, 23 September, 2021]
- “Two statements are made about ‘our hearts’ –they can both condemn us...or they can reassure us since God is greater than our hearts. He knows everything [among other things] ...the salvific position of believers... Because of our salvific relationship to God, we need not be afraid of the condemnation by our hearts, since the *love and forgiveness of God is greater than that.*” [Jan G. van der Watt, *Grammar of the Ethics of John*, p. 207]
- “God’s witness & judgment supersede the inner witness of the heart or conscience. Having a grasp of good theology means realizing that God knows all things & occupies a superior position to judge accurately & fairly.” [G. Soo Hoo, P. Sultan, *1, 2, 3 John*, 87]
- “The experience of self-condemnation that is the operation of conscience creates doubt about whether we are indeed loved by God, but we know ‘by the Spirit...he’s given us’ (3:24) that God does abide in us.” – Paul Gooch

d. **“1 John never asks Christians to ‘test’ themselves” — Matthew Payne**

- “Whil[e]...there is value in this [‘tests of Life’] approach to 1 Jn., it’s important to recognise that *this is not how the letter presents things. 1 John never asks Christians to ‘test’ themselves* (tho’ they are to test others, 1 Jn. 4:1). This idea of ‘testing’...doesn’t accurately describe the character of this part of the Bible.” [M. N. Payne, *Op. cit.*,]

e. **“1 John is for Assurance, not Testing” — Matthew Payne**

- “John’s purpose in writing the letter was to assure his Christian readers of their right standing before God in light of the dramatic split that they had just experienced in their community. His letter isn’t intended to test his readers’ faith; it is intended to assure them that *they have already passed the test of continuing in Christ*, even whilst others turned aside. (1 Jn. 2:12-14).” [Matthew N. Payne, *Op. cit.*,]

3. ‘Tests of Fellowship’ vs ‘Tests of (eternal) Life’

- “There’s a “debate over whether this passage in 1 John [1:5-2:2] *gives tests of life* (to distinguish true believers from unbelievers) *or tests of fellowship* (in the sense of daily fellowship with God).” –Daniel L. Akin

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

- “A person does not demonstrate *he is a believer* by his lifestyle... [Rather, a person] demonstrates he is *walking in fellowship with God* by his lifestyle...The way we know someone is born again is by his confession that he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ for everlasting life.” [Zane C. Hodges, “*Review of Bass’s That You May Know*,” JGES (Autumn, 2011) p. 11]
- “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’* ...The purpose statement of 1
- John comes in 1:3 [‘so that you may also *have fellowship*’] as opposed to 5:13. For [Zane] Hodges [& others] 5:13 is only the purpose statement for 5:9-12, while 1:3 serves as the overarching purpose statement for the whole epistle... The purpose of [1 John] is ‘fellowship’.” [Christopher D. Bass, *That You May Know*, pp. 28-9]
- “Assurance is...based exclusively on the promises of God & work of Christ & is... completely divorced from works (Zane Hodges, *Gospel Under Siege*, p. 143) ... ‘We insist that the NT Gospel offers the assurance of eternal life to all who believe in Christ for that life. The assurance of the believer rests squarely on the Biblical promises in which this offer is made, & nothing else’... Hodges wants to make

clear that ... 'fellowship with God' or 'abiding in God' must never be misunderstood to be referring to salvation." [C. D. Bass, *cit.*, pp. 27, 29]

- "Key themes are developed in [1 John] ... eternal life, knowing God, and abiding in faith. Additionally, the author uses contrasts, such as walking in the light & walking in the darkness, being either a child of God or a child of the devil, love or hate, and life or death. These contrasts delineate between true & false teachers, and between those *believers in fellowship with God & those who are not*. However, where [the tests] bring the salvation of false teachers into question, they never serve as tests of the readers themselves with regard to their salvation, only their sanctification" [Fred Chay, *Review of "Gary W. Derickson, 1, 2, 3 John,"* (2012)]

b. "Tests of Fellowship" view – there's only one 'Test of (eternal) Life' in 1 John

- "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ...[is] born of God...¹⁰ The one who believes in the Son of God has this testimony within himself...¹¹ This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, & this life is in his Son. ¹² The one who has the Son has life. The one who doesn't have the Son of God doesn't have life. ¹³ I've written these things to you who believe in the Son of God *so that you may know that you have eternal life.*" (1 Jn. 5:1, 10-13)
- "The bottom line... is exactly what John states in his First Epistle, 'Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God...' (1 Jn. 5:1). There are no exceptions to this! 'Whoever' ['everyone'] is the pivotal word here. *Belief that Jesus is the Christ... is saving belief.* A faith which has as its content 'Jesus is the Christ' (in the Johannine sense) is saving belief. But to believe this is to know that 'I am saved.' Assurance, therefore, is inseparable from—and part of the essence of—saving faith. Consequently, the individual believer who knows that Jesus is the Christ, knows also that he himself is 'born of God' (1 Jn. 5:1). It's as simple as that. How then did so many evangelicals become so badly confused? ...One answer is this: *When we begin to test our faith by our works, we actually begin to alter the very nature of faith.* And we alter it radically and without biblical warrant." [Zane C. Hodges, "*We Believe in: Assurance of Salvation,*" *Journal of GES,* (2009) p. 24]

c. Case Study #1: Light (Darkness), Fellowship, Confession, Cleansing (1 Jn. 1:6-7, 9)

- "Let's contrast the two views [–'Tests of Life' vs. 'Tests of Fellowship–] using... key passages.

a. 1 John 1:6-7 Light, Fellowship, & the Blood's Cleansing

- "If we say...we have fellowship with Him, & walk in darkness, we lie... But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, & the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1:6-7).
- *Test of Life:* The claim to "have fellowship with Him" can be restated as, "If we say that we are saved." "Walk[ing] in darkness" describes people who "say" or profess they are saved, *but who aren't [saved]*. "Walk[ing] in the light" is a condition that proves one's salvation.
- *Test of Fellowship:* "Fellowship" denotes a practice of being in fellowship [with God]. To "walk in darkness" is to be *out of fellowship*; "walk in the light," to be *in fellowship*. First John 1:6 does not say that if we walk in darkness, we do not *have* the truth; rather, it indicates that if we walk in darkness, we do not *practice the truth*.

b. 1 John 1:9 Confess, Forgiven, Cleansed

- "If we confess our sins, He is faithful & just to forgive us our sins & to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1:9).
- *Test of Life:* Confessing our sins—leading to cleansing & eternal forgiveness—describes *what we do to get saved*. "Confess" & "believe," therefore, are synonyms.
- *Test of Fellowship:* Confessing our sins describes *what we do to get back in fellowship*, not what we do to get saved. Confessing our sins is a 'work,' so it cannot be equated with belief. In many of the nearly 100 uses of "believe/faith" in John's Gospel, everlasting [eternal] life is promised as a result of merely believing in Jesus for it [e.g. Jn. 3:16]. There is nothing about eternal life in 1 John 1:9." [Don & Kim Reiher, "*Walking in the Light? – Two Views of 1 John,*" faithalone.org]

d. Case Study #2: Test — Do you love the world, or the Father? (2:15)

- "Do not love the world or the world's things. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (2:15)
- "This expression [*'love of the Father'*] is unique in the NT. The genitive could be either subjective ('the love which the Father has is not in him') or objective ([his] 'love for the Father is not in him'). Marshall argues for the objective sense... [since] love for the world & for the Father cannot coexist in a person. [In] the preceding... phrases 'Do not love the world' & 'if anyone loves the world'...in both cases '*world*'

is the object of this person's love, which suggest[s] that 'of the Father' ...[is] also an objective genitive, where the Father is the object of an individual's love... Once again the author of 1 Jn. has set behavior (love for the world) as a 'test' or indication of belief: the individual who 'loves' the 'world' shows by this allegiance that he has no love for God & that God's love has not come to dwell in him ['Tests of Life' view]. [W. Hall Harris, 1, 2, 3 John, pp. 97-98]

- "Test of Life: If a person loves the world, they are giving evidence they are not saved. The phrase 'the love of the Father is not in him,' means *this person is not saved.*"
- "Test of Fellowship: The phrase, 'the love of the Father is not in him,' refers to that *person being out of fellowship ...[which] is characterized by God's love ['love for God'] not being actively displayed... There's nothing in this context about a world-loving person needing to be saved.*" [Don & Kim Reiher, "Walking in the Light? – Two Views of 1 John," faithalone.org]

4. '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 is 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. In this light the tests... served as standards by which men's teachings can be measured to identify whether they are servants of God or of Satan." [G. Derickson, *cit.*, p. 100]
- "The [opponents'] claim to have fellowship with God is...subjected to two tests, the first ethical & the second Christological. The ethical test (1:5-2:27) is first expressed in terms of walking in the light, exposing the first lie. The message is now stated as a basis for a critique of the position of the opponents. Their position is elaborated by a series of affirmations (1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9) & positions opposed by the Letter..." [John Painter, Scot McKnight, *Eerdmans Commentary on the...Epistles of John*, pp. 8-9]
- "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... This introspective reading suffers from significant anachronism and ignores the author's clear statements of confidence in the audience's faithfulness. The tests that are actually offered have a more communal function in that they provide the community with criteria by which to determine whether or not to receive a visiting teacher or prophet (1 Jn. 4:1-6; 2 Jn. 10-11)." [Daniel R. Streett, *They Went Out from Us*, p. 122 & #34]
- In 1 Jn.3:10 [etc.] we encounter...a second series of appeals to criteria to test the claim of the opponents. Our author seeks to test their claim to be children of God by the criterion of 'doing righteousness,' living faithfully, which he interprets as 'loving the brother.' ...The appeal to criteria for testing claims of knowledge [3:14, 16, 19] reflects the conflict with the opponents whose claims the author sought to repudiate. The criteria were also aimed at providing assurance to... readers. He sought to assure them that they were children of God, of the truth [3:19]." [John Painter, Scot McKnight, *Eerdmans Commentary on the...Epistles of John*, 15]
- "1 John has often been read as advocating a series of personal 'tests of life', by which individuals can evaluate the genuineness of their conversion. This [author] argues that framing 1 John's teaching on assurance in this way distorts its teaching by failing to recognise the epistle's rhetorical strategy. It argues that this epistle was intended to positively cultivate assurance in its original recipients by highlighting that they had already proven their possession of salvation by their perseverance in their confession, whereas others [opposers /secessionists] had recently abandoned it. [We should] reflect... on the role of pastoral evaluation & exhortation in cultivating assurance rather than on individualistic strategies alone." [Matthew N. Payne, "Post-Crisis Assurance & the 'Tests of Life' Reading of 1 John," *Reformed Theological Review*, Vol. 80, #2 (2021) p. 133]
- Paul Trebilco perceives that early Christian NT "communities are developing 'exclusionary principles' of belief & practice... One feature of this is the development of 'litmus tests'... that a group used with regard to their 'opponents,' leading to their exclusion (or departure in the case of the secessionists [1 Jn.]). ...In 1 & 2 John we have the affirmation (itself a 'litmus test') of the true flesh of Jesus... The later affirmation of the true humanity of Jesus against docetists is in keeping with this." [Paul Trebilco, "Christian Communities in W. Asia Minor into...Early 2nd Century," *JETS*, v. 49/1 (2006) pp. 42-43]

b. The 'Boasts' of Opponents — "I have no sin..., I know God..., I abide in Him..., I'm in the Light"

a. Opponents' Boasts: "If we say..." (1:6, 8, 10)

- "In [1 John 1:6-2:2] John includes 3 erroneous boasts made by the opponents & their consequences (1 Jn. 1:6, 8, 10), followed by 3 positive assurances made to the believers & their implications (1 Jn. 1:7, 9, 2:1). The

3 claims by the opponents are translated...as 'if' clauses...Most English translations render [them as] 'if we say...' which *represents the boasts of the opponents*, followed by... 'if' statements made by the author." [Edward Watson, "Litmus Test of God's Children," Pax Pneuma, v. 6, #1 (2012) p. 33]

- "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, 1-3 John, 61]

b. Opponents' Boasts: 'The one who says...' (2:4, 6, 9)

- "There are 3 'boasts' or claims in the section, each introduced by 'whoever says...' [or 'the one who says...' CSB]
- "1 Jn. 2:3-11 is the second section of *secessionist claims*... [The author] structures this section like the preceding one [1:6-2:2] ... Both begin with a general proposition (1:5; 2:3), followed by 3 *claims of the secessionists*... The claims in 1:5-2:2 each began with 'if we say...'...Those in 2:3-11 each begin with '*the one who says*...' [(2:4, 6, 9). [As before,] here the Elder refutes the claims of the secessionists singly [one-by-one] ...The bad behavior of the secessionists makes their spiritual claims impossible." [Duane F. Watson, *Letters of John*, p. 42]

c. The 3 'Tests' for Boasters: 'The one who says...' (2:4, 6, 9)

- "The claims... knowing God, abiding in God, being in the light —would have been made by both the author & his opponents. The point... [here] is to articulate criteria ['tests'] —keeping God's words or commandments, walking as Jesus walked, loving one's brothers & sisters — for *testing the validity of such claims*, and thus implicitly *to show that the opponents' claims are invalid*... The one concern that dominates 1 John [is] *enabling the readers to discern* what & *who truly belongs to the realm of God & eternal life*." [David Rensberger, 1-3 John, pp. 60-1]

a. One who says, "I've come to know him," & yet doesn't keep his commands, is a liar, & the truth is not in him. (2:4)

- "In 1 John, the question of knowing God is part of the *conflict with the opponents*... [The author is] proposing criteria [a 'test'] that *undercut the opponents' claim* to know God... & out the opponents on the wrong side of [this issue]." [David Rensberger, 1-3 John, p. 61]

b. "The one who says he remains [or 'abides'] in him should walk just as he [Jesus] walked." (2:6)

- "To 'walk just as he walked' must surely refer to Jesus & not God... Note that though 'abiding' implies union with the divine [i.e., God], it plainly excludes a complete identity." [David Rensberger, 1-3 John, 63]
- "1 John stipulates the test of whether Jesus/God indwells the believer is whether one 'walks just as that one (Jesus) walked' (2:6b) ... The test might be restated... 'if a believer has been cleansed of all sin & truly abides in Jesus, then she will walk just as Jesus walked... [i.e.,] faithful to God & without sin (3:5)." [D. Nienhuis, R. Wall, *Reading the Epistles of... John as Scripture*, p. 37]

c. "The one who says he is in the light but hates his brother or sister is in the darkness until now." (2:9)

- "It's unlikely that the secessionists were explicitly teaching others to hate members of the Johannine churches... Rather, *their behavior was tantamount to hatred*... they did not support the needy (3:17), left the fellowship of the community (2:19), and urged others to do the same (2 Jn. 10). This destroyed the fellowship with other Johannine Christians when they [the secessionists] were supposed to be loving them because they are begotten of God (5:1)." [Duane F. Watson, *Letters of John*, p. 52]

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

- Learning from the past split; application going forward: "False teachers had left the [Johannine] congregation, but they seem to have been at one time trusted leaders. Their departure left those who remained confused about whom to trust. John... offered *tests for leadership to assist believing readers to know whom to trust among their leaders*. *Trustworthy leaders pass certain tests* that are introduced in 1 Jn. 1:6-10. First, they walk in the light. This means that they live by faith and practice righteousness, but also that their message coheres with that of other authoritative teachers of the church. 2nd, they are *able to publicly admit their sins*. These tests (and others...) demonstrate *who is credible & dependable as a teacher for the church*." [James E. Allman, "1 John 1:9 Confession as a Test, But of What?" Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. 172, #686 (2015) p. 203]

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

- "I'm writing to you, fathers, because you have come to know the one who is from the beginning. I'm writing to you, young men, because you have conquered the evil one. I've written to you, children, because you have come to know the Father." (1 Jn. 2:13-14a)
- "As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, & you don't need anyone to teach you. Instead, his anointing teaches you about all things and is true and is not a lie..." (1 Jn. 2:27)

- Assurance: "John's concern was not that [his readers] *gain* assurance, but that they *retain* He was concerned that they would lose their assurance if they were misled by false teachers. Since retaining assurance of one's everlasting [eternal] life is *crucial to walking in fellowship with God* (2:26), it makes sense that John would deal with this issue." [Zane C. Hodges, "Review of Bass's *That You May Know*," JGES (Autumn, 2011) p. 10]
- "John ties 3 things together in the way he speaks to these Christians to get the theological 'balance' right.
 - a. First, John repeatedly *highlights their identity as Christians, & particularly as God's children*. The repeated address 'children' keeps these Christians' assured status in the background of all else he says (1 Jn. 2:1, 12, etc.).
 - b. Second, John highlights *various marks of Christian identity* (esp. confession, obedience, & love), sometimes in very blunt & absolute ways. These marks are what distinguish Christians from outsiders, & implicitly call them as Christians to remain & continue in those things (cf. 1 Jn. 2:24).
 - c. Third... the epistle implicitly *calls on its readers to continue* in their present Christian belief & conduct. The Christian life is one of living in anticipation of Jesus' return, when we shall be permanently renewed to be as he is (1 Jn. 3:2). We must therefore continue in him until that day." [Matthew N. Payne, *Op. cit.*,]
 - "The point of all this is that as we apply 1 John's teaching on assurance today, let's not neglect *the optimistic approach that the letter takes toward professing followers of Jesus*. 1 John has very little in common with an interrogating judge demanding "*do you really love other Christians?! Do you really obey Jesus?! What's your evidence?!*" It is more like a comforting pastor telling the people he serves: "*can't you see? You do love other believers! You do obey Jesus' commands! Isn't it wonderful that God is clearly at work in you? Let's continue doing that together!*" [Matthew N. Payne, *cit.*,]
 - 'There will be times to have the hard word, & to confront people who are fooling themselves if they think they are genuine Christians. But properly recognising John's approach to assurance helps *lift that 'pressure-cooker of anxiety' off those who sincerely seek to trust & follow Jesus*, especially *those struggling with self-doubt*. And it does it without allowing complacency, spiritual apathy, or empty presumption about one's status before God. In short, 1 John doesn't just present the theology of assurance; it teaches the pastoral theology of assurance." [Matthew N. Payne, *cit.*,]