

# EPISTLE OF I JOHN

## STUDY 1

### Tools Needed:

Two or more Translations of the Bible  
Bible Dictionary and/or Commentary on I JOHN  
Pen & Paper

*In order to take a fresh, personal look at John's first letter, we will incorporate some general guidelines for studying any "epistle" or Biblical letter into this first study. This means that instead of being given the background to the book, you will be finding that information for yourself. This will give a practical way to dig into any epistle on your own, and hopefully it will be enjoyable at the same time. (\*1)*

FIRST, we need to take a look at the HISTORICAL CONTEXT of the Epistle.

1. Using your Bible Dictionary, or the Introduction to I JOHN in your commentary, find answers to the following questions:

A. Who was this John, the writer of the letter?

What is known about him?

Why would the readers listen to what he is saying to them? (If Bible references are used to support an answer, be sure to record these).

B. What was the current thinking in the ancient world at the time John wrote the letter (toward the end of the first Christian century)? This will give you an idea about the "occasion" of the letter, i.e. what prompted John to write it.

\*1 Adapted from How to read the Bible for all its Worth, by G. Fee and D. Stuard, esp. Ch. 2, 3, & 4.

2. Read through the epistle of I JOHN in two or three different translations. Choose only one translation from each kind of translation (i.e. for your two readings, choose translations from different columns; on third reading you MAY choose from a column you have already read from).

### Literal

King James  
New American Standard  
Revised standard

### Equivalents

New International Bible  
Good News Bible  
Jerusalem Bible  
New English Bible  
New American Bible

### Free

Phillip's  
Living  
The Message

Don't try to grasp the meaning of every word or phrase as you read the letter through, but try to read for the big picture. What you are trying to do in your reading is to discover why the letter was written, and what the main subjects are that John is writing about. To this end, (and especially for those who find it hard to take mental notes), make notes in the following areas

as you read:

- A. what you notice about the recipients themselves: social status, attitudes, problems
- B. John's attitudes
- C. any specific things mentioned as to why the letter was written
- D. the letter's natural logical divisions (introductory phrases and changes in subject matter are the clues to the divisions of the letter). (\*2)

(\*2) The divisions, and their titles, used in the remainder of this study are taken from the Believers Bible Commentary N.T. by William MacDonald

### PROLOGUE: THE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP (1:1-4)

3. Summarize what John is trying to say in these verses.
4. Compare the introduction to this letter to the introductions to other Biblical letters. (Acts 15:23-29, I Corinthians 1:1-9, and Ephesians 1:1-4 are a few examples). What is missing in I JOHN?
5. How does John describe the "Word of life"? What does he mean by it?
6. What does John say is the source of full or complete joy? This theme (of fullness of joy) is found elsewhere in Scripture also. What seem to be the factors involved in experiencing it?

I John 1:4  
Ps 16:11  
John 3:29  
John 15:11  
John 16:24

7. What are some factors affecting your "fullness of joy" (or lack of it)? What could you do to improve your experience of it?

FOR NEXT WEEK:

Do STUDY 2

*Memorize I John 1:9 (or freshen it in your memory)*

## STUDY 2

### MEANS OF MAINTAINING FELLOWSHIP (1:5 - 2:2)

1. Read the above passage in two translations. (This would be a good approach to each passage that we study).
2. John makes frequent use of extreme opposites in his writings. List the opposites used in this section. What is John trying to point out by using them?
3. What is meant by the phrase, "God is light"?
4. Define the word "fellowship". How is our fellowship with God and with other believers maintained? Why does our fellowship with God have an effect on our fellowship with others?
5. Reread verses 1 and 2 of Chapter 2. How is Jesus different than an advocate or defence lawyer in a court of law?
6. Take time now to thank your Father for providing the "atoning sacrifice" for your sin. Confess any sin that may be blocking your fellowship with God and with others. (Consider sins of thought as well as sins of action). If none came to mind, ask God to make you sensitive to personal sin.
7. If you have not done so already, begin to memorize I John 1:9. Make sure you can say it word perfect and include the reference.

### MARKS OF THOSE IN THE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP Part 1 (2:3-11)

8. What are the marks, or tests, of those in the Christian fellowship mentioned here? (These and more are developed later in the epistle--you can make a composite list of these at the end of Lesson 5)
9. Does John imply that a Christian will be faultlessly obedient to God's will? Look at John 14:21. How are love and obedience related?

### STAGES OF GROWTH IN THE FELLOWSHIP (2:12-14)

10. How are those in each stage of Christian growth characterized?

Children  
Fathers  
Young men

11. How have the young men defeated the evil one?

### TWO DANGERS OF THE FELLOWSHIP (2:15-28)

12. In these verses, what two dangers to Christian fellowship are addressed?
13. What makes loving the world and loving the Father incompatible (vs. 15—17)?
14. Would you buy a house whose foundation is cracked? Would you invest in a bank that is corrupt and sinking (like various failed provincial banks of previous recessions)? Why then, as Christians, do you think we find it so tempting to invest in this world?
15. How does John respond to false teaching prevalent at the time of his writing that: (vs. 20-28)
- (a) there is “additional knowledge” to be had, superior to previous teaching
  - (b) Jesus was/is not both God and man
16. How does John say a believer can distinguish between truth and error?
17. Name some of the present—day religions and cults that deny the deity of Jesus, but profess to worship God.

*Optional: Make a list of verses that support John’s claim that these people (that deny the deity of Christ) are “antichrist”. Keep this list for future reference.*

**STUDY 3**  
**MARKS OF THOSE IN THE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP PART 2 (2:29-3:10)**

A. RIGHTEOUSNESS AS A MARK (2:29-3:10)

1. Define “righteousness”.
  
2. List several observations about sin found in this section.
  
3. How does focusing on sin help us to understand that righteousness is a Christian “family trait”?
  
4. A problem we all have at one time or another is allowing unconfessed sin to build up in our lives--cutting us off from fellowship with our Lord and generally making us miserable.

What specific things happened in David’s life when he refused to confess his sin (Psalm 32:3,4)?

What happens in your life when you have held onto certain sins, resisting the Holy spirit’s voice?

What did David find to rejoice about after he “came clean” before the Lord?

Think of at least one practical way you might remind yourself to “keep short accounts with God” --that is, come to Him in confession immediately after you become aware of sin in your life. (\*3)

B. LOVE AS A MARK (3:11-18)

5. What is meant by the word “love” as used here?
  
6. What are the practical manifestations of our love for our brothers--list them in order of the personal cost they have to the one doing the loving.
  
7. What is meant by loving “with actions and in truth” (NIV) vs. 8?
  
8. List some examples of this you have seen in your personal experience.
  
9. Hebrews 10:24 suggests, “let us consider” how to stimulate and encourage one another to love and good deeds. In other words, it takes some careful, creative thought—it doesn’t happen automatically.

Think of three individuals you could encourage with your words or with practical actions. Now, do what the text says.. .consider. Think and pray it through. Seek discernment from the Holy Spirit to discover appropriate methods. And then, go and do it! (\*4)

## CHRISTIAN CONFIDENCE (3:19—24)

10. What is meant by our heart “condemning” us ?

11. If the condemnation is because of sin, we have the solution already in I John 1:9 (which you now have memorized). Can our consciences unjustly condemn us? How do we “set our heart at rest” (NIV) when this happens?

12. What is the source of the confidence mentioned in vs. 21. What is the outcome of having such confidence?

## STUDY 4

### THE NEED TO DISCERN BETWEEN TRUTH AND ERROR (4:1-6)

1. John gives actual tests by which a teacher is proven true or false. Outline the two tests given in this section.
2. What are true believers supposed to do about false teachers?
3. Why do you think false teachers (antichrists) are so popular?
4. Did you know that Socrates was an American Indian chieftain, that Camp David is in Israel, and that Managua is the capital of Vietnam? These are among the things that students at an American college thought they “knew” on a general knowledge (quiz 5)  
Think about how you would rate on a Biblical knowledge quiz.

Read I Peter 3:13-16. Note especially vs. 15. Set a time in the near future to study, on your own, some doctrinal question that you would like to be able to answer. (e.g. Why do I believe that Jesus is God)

OR if you need more encouragement before you are ready to do that, plan to borrow a copy of Charles Swindoll's book, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life*, and read through at least the first four chapters.

5 Ibid, p. 20

### MARKS OF THOSE IN THE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP Part 3 (4:7-5:20)

#### A. LOVE AS A MARK (Cont'd) (4:7-21)

5. What is John saying when he writes, “God is love”? (vs. 8,16)
6. John describes God's love as manifested to us in three tenses -- past (vs. 9-11), present (vs. 12-16), and future (vs. 17). What are the evidences of God's love for us in each tense?
  - 7a. After reasoning through why we love God, saying “let us love” (vs. 7), and stating that we ought to love God (vs. 11), what is his conclusion in vs. 21?
  - 7b. I John 3:23, and 2 John 5 and John 13:34, 35 present a similar message. Why is such importance given to this particular mark of a true Christian?
8. Is loving your brother or sister in Christ as important to you as it is to the Holy Spirit who guided John in his writings?

Reread Question #9 in Study 3. Have you been “considering” how to show your love to someone in word or action this week?

If not, try again this week. If you just can't think of someone to "love" actively, think of someone you really don't like and pray for an idea that would help you to improve your relationship with them.

Optional: Meditate on Romans 12:9-16

### B. LOVE AND THE OBEDIENCE IT PRODUCES (5:1-3)

9. What are the four results of faith in the Son of God listed here?
  
10. What is meant by, "his commands are not burdensome" (NIV)?

### C. FAITH THAT OVERCOMES THE WORLD

11. How does our faith overcome the world? (It might be helpful to look back at how John describes the world in I John 2:15-17).



## STUDY 5

### D. SOUND DOCTRINE (AS A MARK OF THOSE IN THE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP) (5:6-12)

1. What are the three witnesses (vs. 6-8)? What do they agree on?
2. What is God's testimony about His Son (vs.9-12)?
3. What is meant, in vs. 10, by having "this testimony" in the heart of one who believes?

### E. ASSURANCE (of salvation) THROUGH THE WORD

- 4a. Who gives eternal life? (vs. 11-13)
- 4b. Where is eternal life found?
- 4c. Who has eternal life?
- 4d. Who does not have eternal life?
5. In John 10:27-29, what does Jesus promise his followers?
6. Why is having assurance of salvation (or eternal life) important to you? Take a few moments to thank God for all he has given you in Jesus Christ?

### F. CONFIDENCE IN PRAYER (5:14-17)

7. What condition for answered prayer is presented here?  
What condition is found in John 15:7?
8. What are some hindrances to answered prayer?  
James 4:3  
Psalm 66:18
9. What is to be the result of answered prayer?  
John 16:24  
Phillipians 4:6, 7
10. There are varied ideas about what the "sin leading to death is". In most cases, though, what is our responsibility when we see a brother sin? (vs. 16-18)

### G. KNOWLEDGE OF SPIRITUAL REALITIES (5:18-20)

11. John repeats, "we know", in these verses. What are the things that he says we know as Christians?

12. These verses are, in fact, a summary of what John is trying to communicate throughout the letter. What impressed you most in your study of John's first letter?

13. "Dear children, keep yourselves from idols."

Considering the purpose of the epistle, what is John telling believers to guard against? In a time when false teaching is rampant, how can we, as believers, keep ourselves from "idols"?

**FOR FUTURE REFERENCE**  
**MARKS OF THOSE IN THE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP**

Mark

Reference

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3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

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