

August 30, 2015 by Steve Brandon



Do You Have Eternal Life?

1 John 1:1-4

This morning we begin our journey through the wonderful little book of 1 John. Now, whenever you begin on a journey, it is always helpful to know where you are going, so that you might anticipate what's coming. It helps to give you perspective of the trip, and makes the trip more enjoyable.

For instance, our family took a vacation this summer to California. And looking over the map, we knew that we would travel from the flat cornfields of Illinois to the hilly cornfields of Iowa to the sandhills of Nebraska to the cattle ranges of Wyoming to the salt flats of Utah to the barrenness of Nevada to the beauty of California. So, as we traveled across our beautiful country, we knew what to expect.

Furthermore, we knew that we were going to drive through the night until we arrived at our destination. Knowing this beforehand helped our children to know that we weren't going to have a lot of stops along the way.

My purpose this morning is to give you a road-map, of sorts to 1 John, that you might know what to expect over the next few months. Now, it's not an easy task, because 1 John is a confusing book. Not because it is difficult to understand, because, in fact, 1 John is actually very easy to understand. 1 John is a confusing book, because 1 John seems to go round and round and round.

To use the travel illustration, John doesn't travel from Illinois to California straight through Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming, Utah & Nevada. If so, his book would be a lot shorter. Instead, he begins by going east through Indiana, and then south through Kentucky and Tennessee. And just when you think he's going west, he heads north again through Virginia and West Virginia and Ohio. Then, he returns to Indiana and Illinois and heads north through Wisconsin and Minnesota. He then skirts up into Canada and comes down into the United States through Washington. Then he continues east through Idaho and Utah and Arizona, before finally arriving in California.

And that's what John does in this little book. He goes round and round and round. Now, he gets the point across. There is very little doubt as to what he's saying. He gets from Illinois to California. It's simply that he doesn't go about it in a straight-forward way. He weaves here and there through various related topics.

And this is what I want to do in my message this morning. I want to weave in and out through 1 John to show you some of its repeated themes, quoting often from the book. As 1 John is difficult to outline, I have no outline. But, my message will be clear like John's message was.

You can see John's style in the first few verses. He begins his thought in verse 1. Then, he interrupts his thought in verse 2. Then, in verse 3, he returns and finishes his thought that he began in verse 1.

1 John 1:1-3

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life -- the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us -- that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

As confusing as the flow is in these verses, there is no doubt as to its meaning. John brings us to the beginning, probably the beginning of the ministry of Jesus.

John tells us that he experienced Jesus first-hand. He saw him. He heard him. He touched him. After all, John was one of the disciples of Jesus. John had met Jesus as he was mending his nets along the sea of Galilee. Jesus approached him and his brother and (probably) said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). Both he and his brother "left the boat and their father and followed him" (Matthew 4:22).

And John followed Jesus for the next three years. He saw and experienced everything. He saw Jesus love the multitudes and heal the afflicted. He heard Jesus teaching to the crowds. He was one of the three chosen to be with him at the mount of Transfiguration to see the glory of Jesus first-hand. John was close enough to Jesus to experience actual physical contact with him. At the last supper, Jesus washed his feet. And John reclined at Jesus' side during the Passover feast. And what John experienced, he is proclaiming to us.

This is the heart of the book. John is communicating his first-hand testimony of what he knows to be true about Jesus and life and eternity.

1 John 1:2

the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us --

This book is all about eternal life. It's all about knowing the truth about who has it and who doesn't have it. Along with all of the other disciples, John was convinced in what he saw.

1 John 5:20

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

John said, "I have heard it. I have seen it. I'm telling you what is true: Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is the true God. In him is eternal life. So, believe in him. So, trust in him."

This is the burden of the book, that we might know that we have eternal life. In fact, look at chapter 5, and verse 13.

1 John 5:13

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.

The title of my message this morning is, "Do You Have Eternal Life?" This is the purpose of the book of 1 John. John wants for you to know that you have eternal life. That is, life beyond the grave. Life that never ends. And it is available to all who believe in Jesus.

We see here (in 5:13) that the audience of this little letter is believers--those who have trusted in Christ for eternal life. And John wants for them to have assurance of their salvation. He writes, "so that you might know that you have eternal life" (5:13). No doubts. No false assurance. No mis-understanding. You have eternal life and you know it.

It's here where we see the difference between this book and the gospel of John. The gospel of John was written to lead people to faith in Jesus. John 20:31 says, "these [things] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

The call of the gospel of John is to believe in Jesus. Everything written in the gospel of John had an evangelistic purpose, to show those who didn't believe the wonders of Jesus that they might believe in him. And through that book, John put forth a series of signs that demonstrated Jesus to be the Christ. He turned the water into wine at Cana in Galilee (John 2:1-11). He healed the official's son, who was at the point of death (John 4:46-54). He healed the man who had been paralyzed for 38 years at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:17). He fed the 5,000 (John 6:1-15). He walked on water (John 6:16-21). He healed the blind man (John 9). He raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11). He, himself raised from the dead (John 20).

And through the gospel of John, we hear the claims of Jesus. He said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). "I am the door" (John 10:9). "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11). "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25-26). "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). "I am the vine" (John 15:5).

John could have written about many other things in his account of Jesus (John 20:30). But, he carefully chooses these things that we might believe in Jesus. And as we believe, we will have life in his name.

John brings up many of the same themes in 1 John that are prominent in the gospel of John. Throughout 1 John, he talks about "abiding in God." [\[1\]](#) Throughout 1 John, he talks about being "born of God." [\[2\]](#) He talks about light and darkness. [\[3\]](#) He talks about life and death. [\[4\]](#)

The aim of 1 John is different. 1 John is written to those who have heard of Jesus and have come to believe. The call of 1 John is to know that you believe. Know that you have eternal life. You might say that 1 John is a book about assurance.

There are those who have eternal life, but are filled with doubt. This book is written to dispel the doubts. This book is written to assure people of their salvation. But, there are also those who think that they have eternal life but don't have it. In this case, they have a false assurance. This book is written to expose the error of their ways. And this is all too common today.

How many are there in our society who would identify themselves as Christians, but know little to nothing about following Jesus? They are all around us! They have no heart for God. They don't follow in the ways of God. They live sinful, self-centered lives. And, they call themselves Christians.

Listen, just because someone claims to believe in Jesus and have eternal life doesn't necessarily mean that they do. Surely you know people like this. People who regularly attend church, and do the religious thing. They speak well of Jesus and the Bible. Yet, they live their lives as if God doesn't matter. Their lifestyles are anti-God. Their worldview is anti-God. Their language is anti-God. Listen, such people aren't believers!

Just this week I was speaking with someone about a bad experience they had at church. He told me that people would act all religious and everything on Sunday morning. And yet, throughout the week, they loved their alcohol and were routinely drunk. 1 John will help you to think about such people. 1 John might expose your own life, that you are one of these people.

Listen, if you believe in Jesus, you will follow in his ways. That's the message of 1 John. That's the path to assurance -- to see that Jesus is true in your life! And if he is true in your life, you may know that you have eternal life! You may have assurance. And if he isn't true in your life, you may have a false assurance. 1 John may be the very book that exposes your unbelief and draws you to Christ.

It's not unusual for church members to come to faith in Christ. I remember a pastor telling the story of how he came to pastor a church in the south. And God began to move. People began to see their sin. People began to see the glories of Christ like never before. And he told of a deacon in his church who came to faith during a deacon's meeting.

1 John is trying to bring truth to bear upon our lives that we might know that we have eternal life (5:13). And if we don't have eternal life, John wants to expose that as well.

Several times in this book, we hear about false teachers -- antichrists and false prophets -- who are trying to pull the believers away from Jesus.

1 John 2:18

Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.

There are those who had come in and taught contrary to Christ. So, John even calls them "anti-Christ." And many followed after them and left the church. John explains how to understand what took place:

1 John 2:19

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

In other words, there are those in the assembly who don't have eternal life. And the fact that they left and followed some false teacher is evidence that they didn't have the life in the first place. John longs that the people aren't deceived.

1 John 2:26

I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you.

1 John 3:7

Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.

Instead, John would encourage us to test the teachings that we hear.

1 John 4:1

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Just because someone stands up in a church and teaches about Jesus doesn't mean that he (or she) is speaking the truth (or that you should follow him). We should test him. Just because someone writes a book about Jesus or the Christian life doesn't mean that it's true. 1 John will call us to test the teachings of others.

John also tells us to test our lives. Throughout the letter, John puts forth some tests of those who believe. For instance, in 2:3-4, we have the obedience test.

1 John 2:3-4

And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,

Do you want to know if you have eternal life? One of the first tests is to see if you are obeying the Lord. If, indeed, we keep his commandments, then it shows that we have come to know him. But, if we aren't keeping his commandments, then we don't know him. I don't care how much you profess to know him, your words are empty.

A great example of this is the churches that are accepting homosexuals into their membership. The Bible is very clear about this. Homosexuality is a sin. It is one of God's commandments put forth in the Old Testament and repeated in the New Testament. And people may be kind and gracious and well-meaning, but they are clearly not keeping the commandments of God. And thus, they don't know God.

Now, it's not that they are struggling to overcome the sin. That's totally different. For those of you struggling with sin, 1 John 1:9 is for you.

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

See, the Christian life isn't a sinless life. That's the point of verses 8 and 10.

1 John 1:8

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

...

1 John 1:10

If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

But, the Christian life will know a measure of obedience to God. There's the obedience test.

John gives another test. It's called "the love test." This is shown in 4:20-21.

1 John 4:20-21

If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Do you want to know if you have eternal life? Simply ask yourself if you "love your brother." This has primary reference to fellow believers, as this is how it is often used throughout 1 John.

1 John 3:14

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers.

A sign of having eternal life is a love for "the brothers." It's talking about those in the church. Now, it's not to neglect your physical brother (or sister). You can't hate them and think that you have eternal life. This is the example that John brings to the front in 3:12. He puts forth the example of Cain, who hated his brother.

1 John 3:12

We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.

And before you get too comfortable in the fact that all of your siblings are still alive, listen carefully to what John says about love.

1 John 3:14-15

... Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

Eternal life is for those who love their brothers. Their physical brothers. Their spiritual brothers.

Another test can be called, "the doctrinal test." The obedience test. The love test. The doctrinal test. Look at 4:2-3.

1 John 4:2-3

By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

In other words, if you believe in a Jesus that didn't come in the flesh, you aren't believing in the real Jesus. Because, the real Jesus came in the flesh.

This may sound a bit strange to our ears, but in the early centuries, there were many who believed that Jesus was a spirit. He simply "appeared" to be in the flesh. Really, he was more of a ghost than a man.

In some measure this belief came because people believed that the flesh was sinful. And how could a man (Jesus) be in the flesh and live a sinless life?

1 John 3:5

You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.

The sinlessness of Jesus wasn't the debate in John's day and age. Rather, it was the humanity of Jesus. Did Jesus really have flesh and blood like we do? John said, "Yes! Jesus has come in the flesh."

The point is this: you must believe in the real Jesus. You must believe that Jesus came in the flesh. In our day and age, this isn't the battle. The battle today is the deity of Jesus, not the humanity. Nearly everyone today (who is intellectually honest) believes that Jesus of Nazareth was a man who lived 2,000 years ago. There's simply too much proof that he existed.

The question of our day is whether or not Jesus is God. And I'm sure that if John were writing in our day, such would have been his concern.

Perhaps 4:2 would read this way, "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is God is from God." Because, if you don't believe in the God-man, Jesus Christ, then you aren't believing in a real Jesus. Your Jesus is a figment of your imagination. And an imaginary Jesus has no power to give you eternal life. That's the doctrinal test.

These are the sorts of questions that 1 John puts to all of us. The obedience test: Are you keeping his commandments? The love test: Are you loving the brothers? The doctrinal test: Are you believing in the real Jesus? Simply put, those who have eternal life believe in the real Jesus, obey his commandments, and do so with a heart of love.

Anything less will not lead to eternal life. A made up Jesus is powerless. A sinful life is fruitless. An unloving life is useless.

And so, the question comes, "Do You Have Eternal Life?" How well are you doing with these tests? Are you delighting in your obedience?

1 John 5:3

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

Are you demonstrating your love?

1 John 3:10

By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

Are you in trusting in the true Jesus?

1 John 5:20

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

Now, throughout this entire letter, John is really clear about the gospel. We obtain eternal life through faith alone, not through any effort of our own.

1 John 5:1

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.

We don't obtain eternal life through our obedience. Rather, our obedience is a sign of our life.

1 John 3:9

No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.

When God's seed is in you, it will keep you from practicing sin in your life. We don't obtain eternal life through our love. Rather, our love is in response to his love.

1 John 4:19

We love because he first loved us.

When God's love is in you, you will love. You will love God. You will love others. John makes clear that lip service isn't enough.

1 John 3:18

Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

You can't simply say you love or claim that you love. You must show your love.

John is very tangible.

1 John 3:17

But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

This is shoe-leather faith! This is "Good-Samaritan" faith! This is the early church who would sell their possessions and belongings and distribute their proceeds to all in the church who had need (Acts 2:45). This is the idea of love. It's not some sentimental feeling. It is action. It demonstrating your love.

And if you don't demonstrate your love to the brothers, then you aren't loving them. And if you aren't loving your brother, then you are in the dark. That's the idea of 2:9.

1 John 2:9

Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.

You can confess that you believe in Jesus all you want. But, if there is nothing in your life that demonstrates your belief, your claims are all hot air. This is the message of 1 John; this is the message that he goes around and around and around to speak about. Belief in Jesus will be demonstrated by action.

Jesus said, ...

Luke 6:46-49

"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great."

And if you don't believe in Jesus, such will be your fall.

My heart for you is that all of you would have eternal life. My heart for you is that all of you would believe. Look at 1:4.

1 John 1:4

And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

What a strange thing to say. It seems that the more logical thing to say would be, "And we are writing these things so that your joy may be complete." And indeed, that's how the KJV and the NKJV translate it. I'm not looking to solve that discussion this morning. But, simply to say this -- when you embrace the truth of 1 John, it will lead to joy. It will lead to your own joy, knowing that you have eternal life.

You can live with confidence in God's love for you. That you are a child of God.

1 John 3:1-2

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

You won't fear the judgment.

1 John 4:17-18

By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

You won't fear because God has a heart of love toward you. Jesus is the propitiation for your sins.

1 John 4:10

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

If you believe in Jesus and trust in him, there is joy in this life. And there is joy in the life to come.

But, it's also true that I will have great joy. In 3 John 4, we read of John's joy when his children are following in the ways of God.

3 John 4

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

This is John's heart here in this epistle. He's writing to the young, the old, and the strong, to help them in their walk before God (1 John 2:12-14). If they walk in God's ways, he knows that he will have joy.

Similarly, when I hear of people at Rock Valley Bible Church walking in the truth, I'm filled with joy. Whether that's steps of obedience that you make. Whether it's love that you show toward others. Whether it's faith that you put on display. This is my joy. So, make me happy and walk in God's ways.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on August 30, 2015 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] 1 John 2:6, 10, 14, 17, 24 (3X), 27 (2X), 28, 3:6, 9, 14, 15, 17, 24 (2X); 4:12, 13, 15, 16 (3X) and in John 15.

[2] 1 John 2:29; 3:9 (2X); 4:7; 5:1 (2X), 4, 9, 10, 18 (2X) and in John 3:7.

[3] John 8:12, "I am the light of the world."

[4] John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth and the life."