

2019



*A living faith:*

**FOR NOW ...**

**AND THEN**

**LIVING ISSUES FROM 1 JOHN**

**SCOT POLLOK**



### 1 John 1:1-2:22

“<sup>1</sup>What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life— <sup>2</sup> and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us— <sup>3</sup> what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete. <sup>5</sup> This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup> If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; <sup>7</sup> but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. <sup>8</sup> If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. <sup>2:1</sup> My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; <sup>2</sup> and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world”.

“<sup>5:13</sup>These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life”.

### Notes:

### 1 John 2:15-29

<sup>15</sup>Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup>For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. <sup>17</sup>The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever. <sup>18</sup>Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. <sup>19</sup>They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. <sup>20</sup>But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. <sup>21</sup>I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth. <sup>22</sup>Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. <sup>23</sup>Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. <sup>24</sup>As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. <sup>25</sup>This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life. <sup>26</sup>These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. <sup>27</sup>As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. <sup>28</sup>Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. <sup>29</sup>If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him”.

### Notes:

### 1 John 3:1-10

“<sup>1</sup>See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and *such* we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. <sup>2</sup> Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. <sup>3</sup> And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. <sup>4</sup> Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup> No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. <sup>7</sup> Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; <sup>8</sup> the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. <sup>10</sup> By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother”.

### Notes:

### 1 John 3:18-4:3

<sup>18</sup> Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. <sup>19</sup> We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him <sup>20</sup> in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. <sup>21</sup> Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; <sup>22</sup> and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. <sup>23</sup> This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. <sup>24</sup> The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. <sup>4:1</sup> Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. <sup>2</sup> By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; <sup>3</sup> and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world”.

### Notes:

### 1 John 4:15-5:3

<sup>15</sup>Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. <sup>16</sup>We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. <sup>17</sup>By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. <sup>18</sup>There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. <sup>19</sup>We love, because He first loved us. <sup>20</sup>If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. <sup>21</sup>And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also. <sup>5:1</sup>Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the *child* born of Him. <sup>2</sup>By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. <sup>3</sup>For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome".

### Notes:

# 1 John Tool Kit

What follows is intended to be a helpful resource to aid your study and application of First John. It will cover matters of background, interpretive helps, theology, elements of extended teaching and application questions and exercises. It is truly a tool kit, and as such you should utilize the tools or sections you need and set the others aside as you see fit. I pray it is a blessing. The contents of the tool kit are as follows:

- Outline of First John
- Introduction to First John
- Background: Author, Recipients and Date of Writing
- Purpose and Theology
  - A Closer Look at Fellowship
  - A Closer Look at Eternal Security

## Outline

### 1 John

#### “The Fruit of Fellowship”

- I. Introduction: “The Joy of Fellowship” 1:1-4
- II. Body: “The Principles of Fellowship” 1:5-5:17
  - a. Principles of Fellowship Introduced 1:5-2:27
    - i. Right Living – Dealing with our Sins 1:5-2:2
    - ii. Right Loving – Dealing with our Brothers 2:3-11
    - iii. Right Learning – Dealing with our Enemies 2:12-27
  - b. Principles of Fellowship Developed 2:28-4:6
    - i. Right Living – Dealing with our Sins 2:28-3:10a
    - ii. Right Loving – Dealing with our Brothers 3:10b-23
    - iii. Right Learning – Dealing with our Enemies 3:24-4:6
  - c. Principles of Fellowship Climaxed 4:7-5:21
    - i. Right Loving – Dealing with our Brothers 4:7-5:5
    - ii. Right Learning – Dealing with our Enemies 5:6-13
    - iii. Right Living – Dealing with our Sins 5:14-17
- III. Conclusion: “Encouragement for Little Children” 5:18-21<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Why study an ancient letter like First John? What is the point? Isn't it outdated and irrelevant? I've got enough troubles of my own right now; do I really need someone else telling me how I'm falling short?

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, David R. *Maximum Joy: First John - Relationship or Fellowship?* (Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data),



These are good questions. Thinking people ask questions like these. In fact, it is the honest answer to questions like these that prepares the way for a worthwhile and transforming study of really old letters like First John. And to be sure, it's old; probably over 1,920 years old. However, this ancient text still speaks with great power today, primarily because it is inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. Its inspiration transcends time. It is also powerful because of its subject matter. First John speaks to the very heart of our experiences and struggles as followers of Jesus. As such, it couldn't be any more relevant than it is. But we have some work to do as we read such literature. I. Howard Marshall explains this well.

“The task of the commentator is to serve the text and to help make it comprehensible to the reader; no commentary was ever meant to be read for its own sake but only as a means to an end, the understanding of the text. John wrote his Epistles in Greek, a language not universally understood; the commentator must either use a translation in the language of his readers or produce a fresh one. The author and his readers lived in the past; the commentator must re-create the situation in which the Epistles were composed so that the modern reader can appreciate them in their original setting. The Epistles contain things which are hard to understand or ambiguous in meaning; the commentator must strive to establish the meaning and express it with all clarity. Finally, the Epistles form a part of Holy Scripture, the Word of God written; it is the commentator's supreme task to present their message to the modern reader, showing how they form part of God's Word to his people today. The commentator's duty is thus to be the servant of the text and its readers, so that the text may once again speak and be the vehicle of God's Word to a new generation. Anybody, therefore who wishes to hear the Word of God is invited to read the Epistles of John.” (Marshall, NICNT)

The first letter of the Apostle John is clearly and obviously a continuation and expansion of several themes that richly colour his original life story of Jesus, our Fourth Gospel. It is difficult to read any short section of First John without bumping into specific words, phrases or subjects that echo deeply from the Gospel of John. We will run into this truth many times over in our study.

The Second and Third Epistles of John were not necessarily written after the First. Their order in our New Testament canon is very likely based on length, not priority or importance. In fact, it is the view of many that a reading of these short letters (the shortest in the New Testament) can serve as a great introduction to the language and approach of John in the First Epistle. I share this view and encourage you to test this hypothesis by engaging in a concentrated reading of **2 and 3 John**, the subject and purpose of which are both related to and different than First John.

## Background

### *Author*

This letter does not include the name of its author, but there is excellent internal (within the text of the Bible) and external (extra-Biblical sources) evidence to see the author as John the Apostle, the beloved disciple and writer of the Fourth Gospel.

Since the decades after the apostles, the age of the Church Fathers, the popular notion seemed to be that John authored this letter. Some of our most important witnesses to this tradition include Irenaeus (d. AD 202), Clement of Alexandria (d. ca. AD 215), Tertullian (d. after AD 220) and Dionysius of Alexandria (d. ca. AD 265).

John the Apostle  
and His Gospel

Irenaeus, for example, was a follower/hearer of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the Apostle John. His citation of Johannine authorship is therefore only two generations removed from John himself. This is clearly a strong tradition. How they all shared the same barber, we may never know.

The internal evidence is also very strong. The primary example is the amount and density of similar vocabulary, phrasing, syntax and themes between First John and the Fourth Gospel. Beginning with the first verse, *“What was from the beginning... concerning the Word of Life,”* the language is deeply reminiscent of the Fourth Gospel, *“In the beginning was the Word.”* A Bible with good cross-references such as the NASB or NIV Study Bible will highlight many of these correlations. While modern scholarship has challenged Johannine authorship (along with seemingly everything else), the weight of internal evidence and ancient tradition remains strong.

### ***Recipients and Occasion***

The letter itself also does not explicitly mention its intended target audience. One of the things we can clearly, and critically deduce from the contents of the letter is that the recipients were believers (see **2:12-14, 21; 5:13; etc.**). Could they have been church leaders, pastors or elders (see **2:20, 27**)? While the latter ministry of John was focused on Ephesus, capital of the Roman province of Asia, according to the rich tradition mentioned above, whether or not the original recipients of this letter were Christians in this city is impossible to determine. With the lack of internal specification of recipients, it seems likely that John targeted the local Ephesian house churches as well as Christians and churches beyond.

Perhaps more than their identity, we can deduce significant background information about the recipients, most notably what they were struggling with at the date of writing. As the various church creeds bear witness, the first few centuries during and after the apostles were filled with many true and false attempts to understand the person of Jesus, most specifically the interplay between His Deity and humanity. Various heresies with charismatic spokesman-leaders sprouted up and ravaged the early church with false teaching. Among these was Docetism, a very young form of Gnosticism and other twisted marriages of unbiblical belief that pop up later. The following definitions of beliefs about Christ, arranged in loosely chronological order, reveals one very important fact: the early church struggled deeply with a Biblical understanding of Jesus and His nature. Obviously, just downstream of this theological debate is the critically linked matter of salvation, or soteriology.

**Docetism:** Jesus Christ only “seemed” to be human; His bodily human form was an illusion with no true reality (the verb “to seem” in Greek is *dokeo*); this is first-second century AD.

**Adoptionism:** Jesus was adopted as God's son at some point in his earthly life, either at his baptism, resurrection or ascension; prior to this point, Jesus was simply an exemplary human.

**Gnosticism:** The material world is evil and the spiritual world is good; knowledge or "gnosis" is the way to "salvation" and can be gained in various charitable ways; a fully developed system of Gnosticism does not seem to appear until the second century AD.

**Apollinarism:** The Son did not have a human mind, soul or spirit; He is completely Divine; He had a human body and lower soul but a Divine mind; this is now into the fourth century AD.

**Nestorianism:** Jesus was fully Divine and also fully human, but in such a way that He was two persons; at one point we see the Divine Jesus, at another the Human Jesus; never a single man that is both fully Divine and Human; this is a fifth century AD heresy.

*NOTE: Official ecclesial councils declared these teachings false and anti-biblical in*

*AD 325 (Council of Nicea), AD 381 (Council of Constantinople) and AD 451 (Council of Chalcedon). The creeds were their official response.*

For example, Colin Kruse offers a hypothetical scenario that attempts to recreate the events behind the response contained in First John:

"Sometime after the writing of [an] early form of the [Fourth] Gospel, difficulties arose within [the community of John the Apostle]. Some of the members had taken on board certain beliefs about the person and work of Christ that were unacceptable to the author of [1,2,3 John] and those associated with him. These new beliefs involved a denial that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, come in the flesh (**1 John 4:2-3**), and that his death was necessary for the forgiveness of sins (**1 John 5:6-7**). A sharp disagreement arose which resulted in the secession of those who embraced these new views (**1 John 2:19**). (Kruse, Pillar NTC)

Even though this scenario is hypothetical and inevitably coloured by an understanding of purpose in its author, it vividly portrays this treacherous occasion of false teaching. The exact scenario is likely responsible for the form of the letter as well, as the diverse attempts to outline the letter illustrate. This is so because the letter functions most like a verbal sermon. John traces a specific purpose and line of thinking but often pauses to belabour a point or give an illustration, and then later doubles back to reinforce. The lack of typical features of a letter in both the introduction and conclusion further validates this claim.

In deciphering the letter and argument as a whole, one needs to hold tightly to the matters of purpose explained below while remembering the characteristics of the original audience and occasion.

## ***Date of Writing***

“This is one of the most difficult of all the New Testament books to date” according to Tom Constable.

Very little, besides possibly **2:19**, in the text of First John has linkage to dateable events. If John meant by *those who “went out from us”* a reference to the Jewish revolts and scatterings of AD 66-70, then a date during this time is plausible. But this is tenuous.

Since solid and early church tradition has the Apostle John living much of his later life and ministry in and around Ephesus, most of his writings are seen as originating from here, near the end of his life, sometime just before the start of the second century AD, usually between AD 85-97. However, a small group of scholars, in whose argument I see some merit, make a case for a majority (or in some cases, all) of the New Testament being written before AD 70, when General Titus destroyed Jerusalem and her Temple in response to the Jewish Revolts mentioned above. Much, but not all, of this argument is based on the explicit silence in the New Testament regarding that cataclysmic event.

It does, however, seem clear from the internal evidence of First John that this short epistle was written after the Fourth Gospel. The language of the two letters is very similar, as mentioned above, and the critical fellowship text of the Upper Room Discourse and Priestly Prayer in **John 13:31-17:26** seems to serve as the foundation for the text and theology of First John.

Taken all together, these background matters paint a beautiful ecclesiological picture of First John: a heartfelt letter written to a group of house churches in and around Ephesus (and beyond) with the express purpose of correcting false understandings and encouraging the church toward deeper fellowship with Jesus, all while leaning heavily on a critical section of the text of John’s Gospel.

## **Purpose and Theology**

As mentioned in the introduction above, First John is one of the most debated texts of the New Testament at a very foundational level. Is it a letter that contains certain “tests of life” to help someone determine if the readers are Christians; whether or not they are “in”? Many believe it does. And while explanations and applications remain diverse, this view is, in many ways, seeing resurgence today.

In a bit of a mediating position, for example, I. Howard Marshall, a formidable scholar in his own right, relates that “John’s purpose has sometimes been expressed as giving his readers ‘The Tests of Life.’ He lists the characteristics by which a person may know whether he has life and bids his readers test themselves accordingly. But in fact John’s purpose is somewhat more positive. He is not so much encouraging his readers to test themselves and see whether they qualify for eternal life as assuring them that in fact they do qualify for eternal life.” (Marshall, NICNT). By seeing John’s purpose expressed in 1 John 5:13, instead of the first chapter of the epistle where we will find his explicit purpose, Marshall starts with the question of assurance expressed in 5:13 and then is inclined to make sense of the rest of the letter and its vocabulary from this beginning point.

There are numerous scholars who interpret the book in this way. In the specific language of the text, these men and women see John as posing several revealing questions designed to aid the original recipients of the letter in making sure that they have done *all the things* necessary, as it were, to be assured of their salvation. Well, at least as much assurance as is available to those that have a list of qualifications to follow in order to have it.

Hopefully, one can read the sad irony in the previous statements rather easily. I obviously believe there is a better way of reading First John than seeing certain “tests of faith” to determine if someone is saved or not. Fortunately, there are many scholars who share my perspective and we do so for several reasons that help us determine the purpose and theology of First John.

First, it is tenuous at best, to see any book of the New Testament, after the Gospels and Acts, as written to unbelievers. If not explicitly written to the church of a certain location, the internal evidence of every other letter contains multiple insights and assertions that the recipients are believers. At the same time, no New Testament author assumes that every individual hearer of their writings will have expressed faith in Christ as Saviour, but it seems clear that each book is intended for a Christian audience. This is true of First John.

*“I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name’s sake. I am writing to you, father, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong and the Word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.” 1 John 2:12-14.*

Again, *“I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth.” 1 John 2:21. “These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.” 1 John 2:26. “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.” 1 John 5:13.*

The author calls his hearers “*beloved*,” “*little children*,” “*children*” and “*brethren*.” It seems clear from every chapter that John is writing to believers. His purpose is to respond to false teaching that is infiltrating the church and to reinforce their secure assurance of salvation in Christ. To misunderstand John’s letter as a scorecard or “standard” by which to measure acceptability or inclusion into the family of God is to, quite literally, flip its purpose and theology on its head.

To help with this distinction between what some consider to be “tests of life” and I am proposing are, in truth, something much more akin to “tests of intimacy,” perhaps some distinction of terms is in order. To do this, we begin with a hunt for an explicit purpose statement, or, at the very least, a theme that arises that helps make a coherent and comprehensive understanding of the whole of the text possible. **First John 5:13**, (*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life*) where many scholars start this search, identifies the purpose of the letter as the difficult task of assuring the readers of their salvation. How does one do this? What is the basis for assurance of salvation, Biblically available to all believers? For many today, assurance is based on an examination of the

subject's life and practice. Are they engaging in active sin? Is there regular repentance? Are they walking in the Spirit? Are they eating too much, sleeping too much, working too much, playing too much, drinking too much, Facebooking too much? If one can answer these questions, among others, properly, then they have at least some reason to feel assured. Stated this way, again, one begins to see the sad irony.

“The theme of the epistle is not found in **5:13**. The stated purpose of the epistle is found right where you would expect to find it, in the introduction of **1:1-4**. There we find the word ‘fellowship’ twice. Whereas, the theme of John’s Gospel was relationship with fellowship as a sub-theme, here the theme is fellowship with relationship as a sub-theme. The ‘things written’ of in **5:13** are not a reference to the entire epistle as so many assume. Instead they refer to what has been written in **5:1-12**, as many technical scholars have observed... What John is arguing for in this passage is the credibility of God’s testimony (witness). It is greater than that of men. And this witness or testimony is that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. We can either accept or reject this testimony. If we believe it, we internalize the testimony so that it is in us, in our hearts. If we reject the testimony, we are calling God a liar (not a very good option...)” (Anderson, *Free Grace Soteriology*)

Biblically, and as clear as crystal in John’s Gospel, salvation and entrance into both the Kingdom of God and the Body of Christ on earth, has one, and only one condition: faith in Jesus Christ. This is the repeated emphasis in the whole of the New Testament. It follows that assurance of this salvation cannot be based on anything other than the one condition on which it is granted. For a Christian, assurance of salvation is based on God’s spotless ability to keep His promise to save, redeem and rescue because of the sacrifice of Jesus, His Son. When the weight of our assurance is erroneously placed on the weak and tentative back of our experience, growth, maturity and struggle with our flesh, it becomes a shifting burden impossible to confidently carry this side of our final gasp. Herein lies the heart of the matter regarding the purpose, theology and interpretation of First John.

Let me restate this for clarity sake. It is my deep conviction that First John is written to believers and that it starts from the Biblical perspective of assurance of salvation (with all the weight of this assurance on the God who granted it, based on the sacrifice of His son; by grace). The “tests” contained in the letter are then quite easily understood under the explicit purpose statement of the first chapter, namely, how to experience maximum joy through close and intimate fellowship with Jesus Christ. They are methods and questions by which a believer can evaluate their obedience to Christ, and therefore their enjoyment of intimacy with Him. For a great explanation of this interpretation, see David R. Anderson’s *Maximum Joy*.

### ***A Closer Look at Fellowship***

Again, in an attempt at great clarity, let me take a moment to distinguish between some important terms that will be repeated in this Tool Kit and in the sermons. Despite the fact that it cannot contain all the beautiful truths therein, the simple chart that follows may prove helpful.

For **First John**, this relationship fellowship distinction is perhaps no more clearly seen than in its relationship to the Upper Room Discourse in the Gospel of John. While **John 20:30-31** clearly presents an evangelistic purpose for the life-story as a whole, it is also clear that in **John 13-16**, the Upper Room Discourse, the purpose is markedly different. Since He had already sent Judas away (**13:30**), the remaining speech of Jesus is directed solely to the eleven remaining disciples, all believers. He is no longer interested in evangelism as he was with the Pharisees and masses. Here begins an indescribably critical training moment about fellowship.

Relationship	Fellowship
Established Secure by our <b>Justification</b> by faith	Fluctuates based on our <b>Sanctification</b>
Describes our Secure <b>Position</b> in Christ	Describes our variable <b>Condition</b> in Christ
Constant	Dependent
Our Adoption as Sons and Daughters	Our Rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ
First John is written to readers who have a secure Relationship with God	The purpose of First John is to strongly encourage the enjoyment of Fellowship that comes by <b>Obedience</b>

Once Jesus had [washed the disciples' feet] and demonstrated to them what true greatness really was, He was ready to unveil the most intimate truths He had ever shared with human beings. No longer would He call these men servants; now they were being called His friends. He wanted to share with them truth about love between Him and them (**John 14:21**), how to stay close to Him so He could produce fruit through them (**John 15**), and how to have a vital prayer life. He wanted to prepare them for future suffering (**John 16:1-4**), but also for the coming of the Comforter. These are truths for those 'in fellowship' with Him.  
(Anderson, *Maximum Joy*)

Moreover, instead of seeing the purpose statement of First John in **5:13** as many scholars do, I choose to see the purpose statement in **1:3-4**. Here, John also uses the "*these things we write to you*" formula that draws others to **5:13**. But in **1:3-4**, John plainly begins establishing and developing the theme of fellowship by using the word (*koinonia*) twice (**v.3**), linking it with the concept of joy (**v.4**) and then immediately repeating the theme of fellowship in the opening lines of his argument after the introduction (**v.5-7**).

"John began this epistle by explaining to his audience why he wrote. He said he wrote so his readers would enjoy the fellowship with God that is possible only to those who have seen Him. This fellowship, he explained, rests on the reality of Jesus Christ's incarnation, and it results in full joy for those who experience it." (Constable, 1 John, 2010 edition)

I hope that the overriding theme and focus of First John is now clear. It is all about fellowship: an increasingly enjoyable intimacy and nearness to God that undulates according to our obedience, discipline and holiness.

To conclude this section, we will allow Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Bible Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dwight Pentecost, to summarize the purpose of First John with these words.

“Fellowship is one of God’s greatest gifts; the believer delights to be in intimate relationship with fellow Christians. At the same time he longs to enter into an increasingly intimate relationship with the Father and the Saviour. We were created with a need for fellowship, and we are restless and insecure until this becomes our living experience.” (*The Joy of Fellowship; A Study of First John*).

### ***A Closer Look at Eternal Security***

While we maintain the fellowship theme explained above, it is clear that much of the argument and emphasis of First John is based on the thoroughly Biblical doctrine of eternal security. Often people summarize this belief as “once saved, always saved.” While this is accurate, I would like to take a moment to ground it in a more Biblical and holistic way.

Security is a terrible and beautiful thing. It can be terrible to have no security. I think of a young Ethiopian boy I know, now adopted into a loving family with a drastically different life story and skin colour. His parents died when he was very young and as a five-year-old, or younger, he found himself on the streets surviving by his own wits. He was abused by other older kids who would regularly steal the little money he made by knitting scarves underneath a shop. He would have to hide during the “prowling time” of these kids only to reengage in the solitary, lonely, security-less life of an orphan. Yes, it can be a terrible thing to have no security.

Thankfully, security can provide a weight of beauty as well. My young friend now struggles to understand the great security he enjoys. His parents and new siblings adore him; there is food on the table every day; there are no prowling bullies; he can sleep at night smiling at the possibilities of the future instead of dreading the insecurity of the present.

Since most people of the world believe in some sort of afterlife, is there a possibility to be secure in this critical discussion? Of course, Christians believe the truth of the Bible’s revelation of a literal heaven and hell, in stark distinction from the alternatives in the aberrant world religions and cults. Every person that has ever lived is immortal in the sense that they will live forever in the undiminished presence of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or eternally rejected from His presence. There is no third option.

**FREE GRACE.** Salvation is a free gift of God’s grace that comes only through faith in Christ. At the moment of salvation, the believer is granted the perfect righteousness of Christ, declared righteous of all sin, past, present and future, made a new creation and indwelt by the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Changes in lifestyle, surrender to Christ as Lord and the bearing of fruit are results of salvation and are not conditions for gaining or keeping God’s free gift.



**ETERNAL SECURITY** of a believer's salvation is a clear teaching of Scripture. Once an individual places faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, their eternal salvation cannot be lost due to sinfulness or changes in personal belief.

**ASSURANCE** of salvation is available to every believer and is based on the promise of God's Word. The believer's *relationship* with God is held secure by the perseverance of the Holy Spirit of God within the believer. The believer's *fellowship* with God may change based on the obedience they enjoy.

Now let's focus specifically on some of the Biblical texts that reveal the doctrine of eternal security, which "shines as one of the brightest doctrinal lights in the Bible: once you believe, you can never be lost; you can never go to hell. Christ will always be your Saviour. You can nail down your eternal destiny once and for all so that you never have to worry about it." (Anderson, *Free Grace Soteriology*)

**Hebrews 10** is a great place to start. Here, the author contrasts the Old Testament Mosaic system of sacrifices with a greater and more effective sacrifice in Christ. The truth is that the "blood of bulls and goats" cannot possibly take away sin. They did not and cannot deal with future sins, only the sins of the past. Once a year, every year, the high priest must offer another sacrifice on the Day of Atonement for the sins of that year. In stark relief to this cycle, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the perfect and ultimate Lamb of God, offered Himself as the "one sacrifice for the sins of all time." Jesus then sits down at the right hand of God because the work of satisfaction was accomplished. "For by one offering He has perfected (the idea of being completely qualified, holy and whole) for all time those who have been sanctified (in a positional sense)" (**Hebrews 10:14**). This passage highlights the main question behind eternal security: was the sacrifice of Jesus sufficient to atone for/cover all of our sins? If it was, then security in Jesus' provision for eternal life is not only possible, it is a reality.

Let's look at the language of **John 5:24**. "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." Without too much high school English reflux, the verb tenses in this verse are extremely cool. The believer in Jesus *has* eternal life; this simple verb is in the present tense. They *have life now*. But that's nothing compared to the second. The believer in Jesus *has passed* out of death into life. This is technically a perfect tense verb. This tense highlights a completed action in the past and its ongoing benefits or consequences in the present. That means that a believer in Jesus has already crossed the line from death to life. They have life now.

To continue the Biblical picture and revelation of this doctrine, see these passages as well:

**Romans 4:21** – What [God] has promised, He is able to perform...

**Romans 8:31-39** – I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, not powers, nor things present or to come... shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

**Jude 24** – Now to Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless...

**Romans 5:8-9** – Christ proved His love toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us...

**1 John 2:1-2** – And if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous...

**Hebrews 7:25** – He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

**John 17:11** – Holy Father, keep through your name those whom you have given me...

**John 14:16-17** – [The Father] will give you another Comforter that He may abide with you forever...

**Ephesians 4:30** – ...By [The Holy Spirit] you were sealed for the day of redemption.

In some, this doctrine is synonymous with the Reformed doctrine of perseverance of the saints. Based on several layers of difficulties around this document dating back to Augustine (d. AD 430), Luther, Calvin and the Synod of Dordt, I prefer to slightly alter this language and speak more accurately of the *preservation* of the saints. The idea of perseverance tends to emphasize man's efforts in the idea of security while I believe the term preservation more accurately emphasizes God's omnipotent effort in our security. The eternal security of the believer ultimately rests on God's power to preserve the saints, not on the saint's weak power to persevere. As Jesus said in **John 10**, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand." All of the power and pressure is on God.

In conclusion, all of the difficulties and objections raised against the doctrine of eternal security can be traced back to Biblical interpretation, especially a failure or difficulty to distinguish between relationship and fellowship teaching as mentioned above. Other distinctions like justification/sanctification and eternal/temporal judgment can clarify passages that seem contrary.