



## **1 John: The Epistle of Assurance By the Apostle of Love** by Sellers S. Crain, Jr.

*All Scriptures and comments are based on the **New King James Version**, unless otherwise noted.*

In beginning a study of any book of the Bible, there are questions we should ask:

1. Who wrote the book?
2. When was it written?
3. To whom was it written?
4. What did the author hope to accomplish with this book?

Let's answer these questions before getting into study of I John.

**Who wrote 1 John?** When we studied **2** and **3 John**, we concluded they were written by the Apostle John who also wrote the gospel account that bears his name, and the **Revelation**. While it is certain that name was added to the gospel account later by scholars, it was based upon reliable internal and external evidence. The author went out of his way in that book to conceal his identity (**John 21:23-24**). He is not named in this book even though we know he was present at very definitive times. A clue to the author's identity is the phrase, "the disciple whom Jesus loved," mentioned several times in the gospel account. He was at the Passover meal, at which time the Lord's Supper was instituted, and it was him who lay on Christ's breast (**John 13:23**). He was along with Mary, the Lord's mother, at the crucifixion (**John 19:26,27**). He was among the disciples who met Jesus on the coast of the Sea of Tiberias (Galilee) (**John 21:1-2; 7, 20-24**).

The story in **John 21** deserves special attention. This story tells of the second miracle of a drought of fish caught by Peter, James and John (**4-8**), the first being at the beginning of Christ's ministry (**Luke 5:3-7**), and this one was at the end of His ministry. The first was to prove He was the Messiah, the second was to prove He had truly risen from the dead. It also tells Jesus having Peter confess His faith in Him three times, even as he had denied Him three times before His crucifixion (**John 21:15-17; Matthew 26:69-75**). It also contains the account of the statement made to Peter by Jesus after He had told him the manner of his death. (**John 21:18-19**) Peter looked back and saw the "disciple whom Jesus loved" following them, and he asked, "What about this man?" (**21**) Jesus answered, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? Follow Me." (**22**) This led to the saying by some that John would not die. He did live until the end of the first century and possibly into the early second century. By the time he died, all of the other apostles had been martyred. His brother James being the first of them to die (**Acts 12:1-2**). Many scholars believe it was John who followed. As mentioned in the Book of Acts, Peter and John were very close and were often together. (**Acts 3:1-3; 4:13, 19; Acts 8:14**)

While it may be nothing more than coincidence, John often followed Peter. He is thought to be the "disciple" who followed him to the High Priest quarters, and being known by the high priest, he entered the courtyard while Peter remained outside (**John 18:15-16**); he is thought to be "the other disciple" who ran with Peter to the tomb of Christ after being told Jesus had risen from the dead (**20:2-10**). There is a beautiful painting by Eugene Burnand titled, *Peter and John Running to the Sepulcher on the Morning of the Resurrection* depicting this scene.

Further evidence of their close relationship is that Peter, James and John are called the inner circle because they were with Jesus on special occasions: the transfiguration (**Matthew 17:1**); at the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead (**Luke 8:51**), and later Jesus chose them to go further into the Garden of Gethsemane with Him to pray (**Matthew 26:37**). James and John were often referred to only as the "sons of Zebedee," (**Matthew 4:21**; **John 21:2**), Many believe they had a fishing business together, along with their father, Zebedee. (**Matthew 4:18-21**; **Mark 1:16-20**; **Luke 5:10**). All of these biblical facts being true, it would be a logical conclusion that the "disciple whom Jesus loved" was John.

The external evidence that John was the author of **1 John** is the testimony of some of the Early Church Fathers. Polycarp (AD 70-155), who knew John when Polycarp was a young boy, quoted several passages from **1 John**. We owe it to Irenaeus (AD 130-202) who quoted from Polycarp about John writing **Revelation** while living in Ephesus. Ignatius of Antioch (AD 50-117), who some say may have had a copy of the original of John's gospel, or may have been a student of John, depended on the fourth gospel. Justin Martyr (AD 100-165) is said to have been the first of the Early Church Fathers to quote from John's gospel. He placed it on the same level as the Synoptic gospels (**Matthew**, **Mark**, and **Luke**). Clement of Alexandria (AD 130-215) credited John with writing the gospel account and quoted from it many times. Origen (AD 186-245) wrote a commentary on John's gospel to combat the teaching of the Gnostics. While Eusebius and Papias credit some unknown man they call John the Elder, the majority of early Christian writers hold that the Apostle John was the author of all of the books that now bear his name.

**1 John was most likely written from Ephesus between A. D. 90 and 95.** While there is some debate among scholars about who John was writing to, **some scholars believe he was writing to the seven churches of Asia Minor** addressed by Jesus in **the Revelation**. Some scholars believe **1 John** was meant to be a circular letter which was **meant to be read to other churches**. They point out that the gospel account also has that purpose, but **2** and **3 John** are addressed to specific people.

**What did John hope to accomplish with this epistle? An analysis of the book will show that he had two specific purposes.** First, to **expose false teachers** and their anti-Christ doctrine that our Lord did not come in the flesh (**1 John 1:1-3**; **2:18-23**; **4:1-3**). Exposing these false teachers and their doctrine was very important, but the second purpose seems to be John's main point. **He wrote to Christians to give them assurance of their salvation** by giving them eye witness testimony to confirm their faith in the incarnate Christ (**1 John 5:10-12, 19-20**).

#### **Two questions:**

- 1. Can you know you are saved?**
- 2. How would you answer that question?**

In this Epistle of Assurance, John gives us some test to determine if we are saved or not. Let's examine those together.

We can know we are saved because Jesus Christ has come. John wrote that:

We have heard, we have seen with our eyes, our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life — the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us. (**1 John 1:1-3**)

He was also seen by Peter who said he was an “eyewitness of His majesty.” (**2 Peter 1:16**). He was seen alive after His resurrection by over 500 brethren at one time, by James, our Lord’s brother, and finally by Paul, “as one born out of due season.” (**1 Corinthians 15:5-8**) He came to fulfill His mission as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (**John 1:29, 36**). He was our propitiation to answer God’s call for justice against sin. (**Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10**). He shed His own blood for our sins (**Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 7:24-27; 9:11-15, 22, 28**) Our sins are forgiven when we are buried with Christ in baptism, and as long as we remain in Him, they continue to be forgiven (**Romans 6:3-7; Romans 6:17-18; 1 John 1:7-10**).

We can know we are saved because of the test of love. (**John 13:34-35; I John 7:11**) The love test says we can know we are of God if we “love one another.” (**4:7-11**) John wrote that, “we know we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother aids in death.” (**I John 3:14**) He added that if we say we love God and hate our brother, we are liars, saying,

If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him; that he who loves God must love his brother also. (**1 John 4:20-21**)

We can know we are saved because of the obedience test. John wrote,

By this we know we know Him if we keep His commandments. He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. (**1 John 2:3**)

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. (**1 John 5:2-3**)

The writer of **Hebrews** said Christ is the “author of eternal salvation to all of them that obey Him...” (**5:8-9**). Jesus said, “If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” (**John 8:24**) He also said that if we do not confess our faith in Him, He will deny us before our Father in Heaven. (**Matthew 10:32-33; Luke 12:8-9**) Peter made the good confession to Jesus saying that, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (**Mathew 16:16**). The Ethiopian Eunuch later made this same confession before Philip would baptize him (**Acts 8:37**)

Jesus said, “unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” (**Luke 13:3**) In Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost, when the people “cut to the heart” cried out saying, “what shall we do,” He told them, “Repent and every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (**Acts 2:37-38**)

The following questions will help to answer the question of whether you are saved or not:

Do you believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and have you confessed your faith in Him?

Have you repented of past sins; basically, meaning have you turned your life around and turned it over to God?

Have you been buried with Christ in baptism and thereby washed in His blood (**Revelation 1:5**)?

God's word says that if you have done these things, you are saved at that point. Our salvation is then assured if we endeavor to faithfully follow His word and keep His commandments (**Revelation 2:10; John 14:15**).

God's word makes it clear a Christian can fall from grace (**Galatians 5:4; Acts 8:13; Acts 8:18-24; 1 Corinthians 9:27; 10:12; 2 Peter 1:10**). While we can fall, I do not believe it is as easy to fall as some think it is. If we are Christians, and we continue to "walk in the light of God's word," and continually confess our sins to Him, they are forgiven, and

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made us free from the law of sin and death. (**Romans 8:1-2**)

As long as we remain in Christ, we have "blessed assurance" that we are in a saved relationship with God through our Lord (**1 John 5:13**)

—-- *Sellers S. Crain, Jr., October 6, 2021*