

The Three Tests of Life: Epistle of 1 John

The Epistles of John were written so that Christians would know that: 1) Believing in Jesus as the Son of God, 2) Loving other people, and 3) Obeying His Commands - is the evidence of possessing an authentic Christian faith.

A basic definition of **Heresy**, according to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, is "adherence to a religious opinion contrary to church dogma." A second definition is "dissent or deviation from a dominant theory, opinion, or practice." That's a good starting point for us. These definitions identify two key elements: a dominant position and a contrary position. With regards to religion, any belief or practice that goes against the official position of the church is considered heretical.

Docetism, (Gk. dokein, "to seem") was a late-first-century heresy asserting that Jesus only seemed to be human. Docetism is the assertion that Christ's human body was a phantasm, and that his suffering and death were mere appearances. Docetism would say, 'If he suffered he was not God; if he was God he did not suffer.' They denied the humanity of Christ but affirmed his deity. Docetism was already present in late New Testament times, as is evident by the exhortation of John the apostle about those who deny "that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" (1 John 4:2).

The problem with Docetism is that it denies the core truths of the gospel, namely, the Incarnation or physical life of Jesus AND the physical death and resurrection of Christ.

Cerinthianism, later labeled Arianism in 4th century, is the teaching that Jesus was not fully God. Cerinthus, was a contemporary of the Apostle John. He held to the heresy that Jesus was not fully God. Polycarp, a personal disciple of John, famously stated, '*John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming "Let us fly, let even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within!"*

Perfectionism, holds that it is possible for Christians to completely defeat sin in the present life and to live holy lives like Jesus did. Cerinthus, also espoused this teaching. The false teachers in Ephesus were probably not claiming to have eradicated the sinful nature that fallen humanity inherits but rather to have not committed actual sins for some significant period of time, perhaps ever since they had received the "enlightenment" they thought their belief system provided them. Other eras of church history have been infected by this similar deception. Perfectionism has always had an attraction for the pious, for intellectuals, for those who are confident they have mastered the basics. 1 John 2:5 teaches that perfection consists in obeying God's word, that and nothing else. True Christian belief leads to a recognition of the need to obey all of God's commands, living like Jesus, outwardly as well as inwardly.

Antinomianism, is the belief that there are no moral laws God expects Christians to obey. Antinomianism takes a biblical teaching to an unbiblical conclusion. The biblical teaching is that... Christians are not required to observe the Old Testament Law as a means of salvation. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, He fulfilled the Old Testament Law (Romans 10:4; Galatians 3:23-25; Ephesians 2:15).

The Antinomian heresy was and still is the ultimate grace abuser and misapplied key doctrine of "freedom in Christ" to an unbiblical conclusion. Romans 6:1-2 states, "*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?*" A modern example might be those who confess faith in Christ and embrace BUT misunderstand "once saved, always saved" and then go out and live life like the devil.

Antinomianism is unbiblical in that it misapplies the meaning of God's gracious favor.

John's greatest desire was to reassure that people that they really understood who Jesus was, (see the Gospel of John). He wanted them to know that their faith was real and would lead them to Eternal Life. John gave them 3 main principles - 3 actions - **that would assure them that they were aligned with Jesus or "walking in the Light, making their joy complete** (1 John 1:4).

²³ Now this is his command: that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another as he commanded us. ²⁴ The one who keeps his commands remains in him, and he in him. And the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he has given us" (John 3:23-24).

THE TESTS OF LIFE (1 JOHN)

	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Keeping God's commandments	1:5–2:6	2:28–3:10	5:16–21
Loving one another	2:7–17	3:11–24	4:7–21
Believing in Jesus as the God-man	2:18–27	4:1–6	5:1–15

Each test entails the other two (3:23–24)

PROLOGUE (1 John 1:1-4)

“What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— ² that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— ³ what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may also have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete” (1 John 1:1-4).

Keeping (obeying) God's Commands

In Tests of Life Cycle 1, John is addressing PERFECTIONISM heresy in 1 John 1:5-2:6?

In Tests of Life Cycle 2, John is addressing ANTINOMIANISM heresy in 1 John 2:28-3:10?

In Tests of Life Cycle 3, John is addressing DOCETISM heresy in 1 John 5:16-21?

Loving One Another

In Tests of Life Cycle 1, who does John encourage us to love in 1 John 2:10? BROTHER/SISTER IN CHRIST

In Tests of Life Cycle 2, who does John encourage us to love in 1 John 3:17? BROTHER/SISTER IN NEED

In Tests of Life Cycle 3, how does John encourage us to love in 1 John 4:11? SACRIFICIALLY – LIKE CHRIST

Believing in Jesus as the God-man (fully God & fully human)

In Tests of Life Cycle 1, John is addressing CERINTHIANISM heresy in 1 John 2:18-27?

In Tests of Life Cycle 2, John is addressing DOCETISM heresy in 1 John 4:1-6?

In Tests of Life Cycle 3, John is addressing DOCETISM heresy in 1 John 5:1-15.

TAKE AWAY: There are many false teachings that can lead people astray, but John wrote this book to Christians of all centuries to be reminded that believing Jesus was the true God-man, by loving others like Jesus loved us, and obeying His commands, they can know that their faith is authentic.