

1 John

IGNATIUS CATHOLIC STUDY BIBLE QUESTIONS

Welcome

“You are approaching the ‘word of God’. But for thousands of years, ... the Word of God has been approaching you.”

The following guide is provided to enhance your reading of the First Letter of Saint John using the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*. If you are new to this resource or to reading the Bible, we recommend you read the general Introduction before you begin. It explains what it means that Scripture is the Word of God as well as how we understand and interpret it as Catholics. It also introduces the special features of the Study Bible and tells how they can enrich your reading and study. Additionally, the *Introduction to the Catholic Epistles* will provide valuable context for your reading.

A simple rhythm of prayer followed by reading and reflection is offered below to guide you through the book one chapter at a time. Questions draw attention to key footnotes and word studies to lead you into a deeper understanding of what you read and then prompt you to consider how to apply what you have learned. For a deeper dive, take advantage of additional features as you go: not just the other footnotes but also cross-references to Scripture and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* that are provided above the footnotes as well as any maps, charts, or essays that are not touched on in the questions.

Don't miss these helpful icons as you read! They highlight footnotes that pertain to the Church's criteria for interpreting Scripture (see CCC 112–14):



Be attentive to the content and unity of Scripture

Notes marked with a Bible icon connect Old Testament passages and New Testament mysteries, fostering appreciation for God's unified plan.



Read Scripture in light of the Church's living tradition

This icon marks notes drawn from the Holy Spirit's guidance of Church teaching and the spiritual senses of scripture. Here you'll find official teaching as well as interpretations from Fathers, Doctors, and saints of the Church.



Be attentive to the “analogy of faith”

Explore notes marked with an icon of keys to learn how the mysteries of faith, revealed in Scripture and defined by the Church, clarify and connect with one another in a unified, coherent way.

May God bless you as you read his word!

of God,* did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself,[†] taking the form of a servant,[‡] being born in the likeness of men.[§] And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.[¶] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,^{||} that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,^{|||} and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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12 Therefore, obeyed, so now much more in salvation with f work in you, bo pleasure.
14 Do all th tioning,¹⁵ that y children of God crooked and per

2:9–11: Rom 10:9; 14:9; Eph 1:20–21. 2:13: 1 Cor 15:10. 2

2:7 emptied himself: The Greek verb *kenōō* means “empty out” or “render void”. The idea is, not that Christ divested himself of divinity when he united himself with humanity, but that he restricted his rightful exercise of certain divine abilities during his earthly life and accepted certain limitations of the human condition. In effect, the Son of God made himself poor in order to make us rich with his grace (2 Cor 8:9) (CCC 472). • Christ emptied himself by compressing the glory of his Godhead within our smallness. What he always was remained perfect and incomprehensible, but what he assumed was in proportion to the measure of our nature (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Apollinarius*).

2:8 death on a cross: The ultimate indignity. Death by crucifixion was the most awful and degrading form of criminal execution in the ancient world. The Romans reserved it for slaves and insurrectionists. See note on Mk 15:24.

2:9 exalted him: By raising him from the dead, enthroning him in heaven, and clothing his humanity with divine glory. A similar destiny awaits all who humble themselves as Jesus did (3:21; Lk 14:11).

2:10 every knee should bow: An allusion to the divine oath in Is 45:23. • Yahweh swore that all peoples, to the very end of the earth, would acknowledge his Lordship and bow before him in homage. Paul moves Christ into the center of this prophecy as the divine Lord destined to be revered by all. **heaven ... earth ... under the earth:** The three principal realms in the world view of ancient Israel (Ex 20:4). Homage will come from all creatures great and small—the angels and saints above, the family of man and beasts spread over the earth, and the dead and the demons of the underworld.

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Prepare

Read the Introduction to 1 John, paying particular attention to the *Purpose* of the book and its *Themes and Characteristics*. What one thing stands out to you, that you would like to remember?

Read the Outline of 1 John to get an overview of the book. What are its major divisions?

Pray

Use the following questions to guide your reading of 1 John, going at a pace that is comfortable to you. Before you begin each new section, pray simply for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit:

Come, Holy Spirit, open my heart to hear and receive these words as what they truly are, the Word of God. Enlighten my understanding and give me grace to put what I read into practice in my life. Amen.

Read and Reflect

Read and reflect on 1 John as follows:

- Pray before you read
- Read a section of biblical text by itself
- Read the text again, referring to the notes that accompany the text
- For deeper understanding and to aid in applying what you read, answer the questions that follow. The references at the top of each numbered question correspond to particular notes.

At the end of each chapter, review what you have written and linger where you feel drawn, asking the Lord to speak to your heart and into your life. What do you hear? Respond in prayer and ask his help to live what you hear in your attitudes and actions this week.

Chapter 1



For Understanding

1 John 1:1–4

- To what does this prologue to John's letter give witness?
- On whose behalf is he speaking?
- How does John describe the Incarnation in terms applicable to the sacraments of the Church?
- What sacrament might serve as an example, and how?

1 John 1:5

- What does it mean to "live in the light"?
- Who else in Judaism shared this black-and-white view of the world?

1 John 1:9

- What kind of confession of sin does John envision?

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- In biblical terms, what does “confession” mean?
- To what should private confession of sins to God ordinarily lead us?
- How does Jesus imply this in John’s Gospel?
- How do we know that confession of sin to a priest is not a peculiarity of the New Covenant?



For Application

1 John 1:1–4

- Has your reception of the sacraments, particularly Reconciliation and Eucharist, affected your personal relationship with Jesus Christ? In what way?
- What story (or, in John’s word, “testimony”) could you tell to illustrate the difference these sacraments make?
- How might such stories encourage others?

1 John 1:5

- Refer to the note for this verse. How do you picture the world?
- To what extent would you share John's black-and-white view of it?
- If you are willing to tolerate "shades of gray" in yourself, how would your approach to sanctity compare with that of John—or, for that matter, with that of Jesus, who said, "He who is not with me is against me" (Mt 12:30), and, "He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Mt 10:37)?

1 John 1:6–7

- *For private reflection:* Think about which of the Ten Commandments touches the area of greatest moral weakness for you. What are the issues you face in regard to that commandment or to the Church's teaching about it?
- Does your attitude or your behavior bring you closer to what John says in v. 6 or to what he says in v. 7?

1 John 1:8–10

- How hard is it for you to prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation?
- How might these words of 1 John encourage us to take advantage of this cleansing sacrament more often?

Reflect

After reading and reflecting on this chapter, I hear the Lord saying to me:

My prayer response to him:

Chapter 2



For Understanding

Word Study: *Expiation* (1 John 2:2).

- What can the Greek term mean in reference to God? Or to sin?
- Which of these two meanings is meant in 1 John?

Word Study: *Expiation* (1 John 2:2). (continued)

- What is the basis for this understanding in the OT Greek?
- In light of this OT background, how does John interpret the death of Jesus?

1 John 2:15–17

- Why does John urge readers to let go of the world, since God both made it and loves it?
- What is man's natural inclination in regard to the world?
- Why do Jewish and Christian traditions promote the ascetical disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving?

1 John 2:18

- If the “last hour” applies to the final phase of salvation history, what is this final phase?
- Also, what does the expression “antichrist” mean?

- How is its meaning sometimes restricted?

1 John 2:20

- What does it mean to say that believers are “anointed”?
- What is the relationship between confessing Jesus as Messiah and receiving his anointing?
- What kind of anointing did Isaiah have in mind (Is 61:1)?
- What does Vatican II teach about this?



For Application

1 John 2:1–3

- How scrupulous is your conscience? For example, how do you feel about committing small infractions, such as blurting out an obscenity?
- What comfort can you derive from knowing that “Jesus Christ the righteous ... is the expiation for our sins”?

1 John 2:4–6

- How do you respond spiritually when you violate one of the Ten Commandments (taking into consideration, as well, the way the *Catechism* understands their application)?
- How seriously do you take such violations?
- What motivation can you derive from knowing that obeying the commandments helps bring the love of God to perfection?

1 John 2:15–17

- Reflect on the note for these verses. How difficult would it be for you to give up your economic, social, or political status or have it taken away?
- If its removal would be hard for you, how might this attachment be affecting your love for God?

1 John 2:26–27

- Consult the note for v. 20, especially the part about what Vatican II teaches. Although the “supernatural insight into the gospel (*sensus fidei*)” protects the Church *as a whole* from error, individual Christians can (and do) err about what the gospel says. What aspects of the gospel are unclear to you?
- What can you do to understand better Christ’s teaching on these issues?

- How does the Church, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, provide guidance?

Reflect

After reading and reflecting on this chapter, I hear the Lord saying to me:

My prayer response to him:

Chapter 3



For Understanding

1 John 3:1

- How do believers become children of God?

- To what does the grace of divine generation entitle us?

- If our standing as sons and daughters before God is not in name only, what is it?

1 John 3:6

- What is John saying that true believers refuse to do?

- To what does John's focus on the moral life lead, and what point does he wish to make?

1 John 3:16

- When it comes to laying down our lives, what two kinds of martyrdom does John have in mind?

- Who is called to which kind?

- How does John's plea to help the needy with tangible assistance fit into this?

1 John 3:19–20

- How does a believer know that his heart is beating with the truth?

- How does the heart respond?

- What is a sure sign of alienation from the truth?

- What does John mean by saying that God is greater than our conscience?



For Application

1 John 3:1–3

- According to these verses, on what should a desire for personal holiness be based?

- How does the basis of your own desire for holiness compare with John's?

1 John 3:4

- How does John define *sin*?

- Does John's definition include both moral and civil law?

1 John 3:9

- Meditate on this verse. What does it mean to say that, if “God's seed abides” in you, you *cannot* sin?

- How might this consideration encourage you to avoid sin in the future?

1 John 3:11–18

- According to John, loving your neighbor is essential for loving God. Do you ever get into a quarrel, especially one of a long-running nature?
- What have you done to resolve disagreements, grudges, or hurt feelings?
- If you cannot resolve them for some reason, how can you love those who have hurt you or whom you have hurt?

Reflect

After reading and reflecting on this chapter, I hear the Lord saying to me:

My prayer response to him:

Chapter 4



For Understanding

1 John 4:1

- What must John's readers distinguish?
- What practical test does John propose?
- Who are the false prophets about whom John is writing?

1 John 4:8

- What does it mean to say that "God is love"?
- How does this divine love enter into history?
- How does John say that we can be sure God lives in us?

Word Study: *Confidence* (1 John 4:17).

- What else can the Greek word for “confidence” mean?
- How is it used with reference to speech?
- How does 1 John use the term?

1 John 4:18

- How does love cast out fear?
- Over time, what does the exercise of charity instill?



For Application

1 John 4:1

- Consult the note for this verse. How would you test your own spiritual impulses, “senses”, or urgings? Against what standard?

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- Have you ever concluded that a spiritual impulse, “sense”, or urge was not of the Holy Spirit?
- What brought you to that conclusion?
- What did you learn about discernment from it?

1 John 4:4

- Compare this verse with 3:19–20. How might the recognition of the Holy Spirit’s presence in you help allay any anxieties you may have about the world or its influence on you?
- According to 3:21–24 and 4:13–16, how do you know that the Holy Spirit really is in you? Compare John’s criteria for recognizing the presence of the Spirit with those given in Gal 5:16–26.

1 John 4:7–12

- According to v. 10 (and v. 19), where does our love for God and neighbor originate?
- What is the model of our love for one another?
- How is the love about which John is talking different from either liking or being attracted to someone?

1 John 4:17–18

- How often do you think of the Day of Judgment, and what is your attitude toward it?

- When it comes to judgment, of what are you most afraid and why?

- Of what are you least afraid and why?

- How does love eliminate fear?

Reflect

After reading and reflecting on this chapter, I hear the Lord saying to me:

My prayer response to him:

Chapter 5



For Understanding

1 John 5:6

- To what aspects of Jesus' historical ministry does John's expression "by water and blood" refer?
- What is John emphasizing?

1 John 5:8

- How is evidence for the humanity of Christ shown to be continually present in the liturgy?
- That is, to what sacrament do the Spirit, the water, and the blood refer?
- Considering the Torah, explain why John would cite *three* witnesses.

1 John 5:13

- By saying that his readers "have eternal life", what is John saying about them?

- Of what are readers thus assured—and *not* assured?

1 John 5:16–17

- What is the difference between sins that are mortal (deadly) and sins that are not mortal?
- To what mortal sin does 1 John most likely refer?
- What does Catholic moral theology teach about the way mortal and venial sins can be forgiven?



For Application

1 John 5:3–4

- In your experience, how does faith lighten the burden of God’s commandments?
- By contrast, how might lack of faith make the commandments more burdensome?
- What does “the world” have to do with the difficulty of following the commandments?

1 John 5:14–15

- If we are children of God, why does he sometimes deny the requests we make of him?
- What does it mean, in practice, to pray “according to his [God’s] will”?
- Think of an actual situation when you prayed for a particular outcome and felt your request was not granted—how might you have changed the nature of your prayer to be more closely conformed to God’s will?

1 John 5:16–17

- These verses are in the context of vv. 13–15. For what is John recommending that you pray—and why is that prayer according to the will of God?
- Consult the note for these verses: Why do you think John would not say that you should pray about mortal sin?
- If prayer alone cannot help someone who has fallen into grave sin, what can?

1 John 5:19–21

- How can understanding the truth help you remain faithful to your Christian call in a world like ours?

- Granted that we no longer worship the idols familiar to John's readers, what might be the idols in your own life?
- How might you avoid them?

Reflect

After reading and reflecting on this chapter, I hear the Lord saying to me:

My prayer response to him:



Review and Respond

To complete your study of 1 John, prayerfully read it straight through, focusing on the biblical text alone. What stands out to you?

Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart. What is your response to him?