

Study of 1, 2 & 3 John

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Introductory to 1, 2 & 3 John

I. Author

The Spirit used the Apostle John to give us the Gospel of John, three epistles, and the Book of the Revelation. These three works complement each other and give to us a full picture of the Christian life.

The Gospel of John	The Epistles of John	The Revelation of John
Emphasis on salvation	Emphasis on sanctification	Emphasis on glorification
Past history	Present experience	Future hope
Christ died for us	Christ lives in us	Christ comes for us
The Word made flesh	The Word made real in us	The Word conquering

II. Aim

John stated five purposes for the writing of his first epistle:

A. That we might have fellowship (1:3).

“Fellowship” is the key theme of the first two chapters (see 1:3, 6–7). Fellowship has to do with our communion with Christ, not our union with Christ, which is sonship. Our daily fellowship changes; our sonship remains the same.

B. That we might have joy (1:4).

The word “joy” is used only here, but the blessing of joy is seen throughout the entire letter. Joy is the result of a close fellowship with Christ.

C. That we might not sin (2:1–2).

The penalty of sin is taken care of when the sinner trusts Christ, but the power of sin over the daily life is another matter. First John explains how we may have victory over sin and how to get forgiveness when we do sin.

D. That we might overcome error (2:26).

John was facing the false teaching of his day just as we face false teachers today (2 Peter 2). The false teachers in John’s day were claiming: (1) that matter was evil,

therefore Christ did not come in the flesh; (2) that Christ only appeared to be a real man; (3) that knowledge of truth is more important than living the truth; and (4) that only a “spiritual few” could understand spiritual truths. As you read 1 John, you will see that John emphasizes: (1) that matter is not evil, but man’s nature is sinful; (2) that Jesus Christ had a real body and experienced a real death; (3) that it is not enough “to say” what we believe, we must practice it; and (4) all Christians have an unction from God and can know His truth.

E. That we might have assurance (5:13).

In his Gospel, John tells us how to be saved (John 20:31), but in this epistle, he tells us how to be sure we are saved. The letter is a series of “tests” that Christians may use to examine their fellowship (chaps. 1–2) and their sonship (chaps. 3–5). Note that the emphasis in chapters 3–5 is on being born of God (3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18).

III. Analysis

Study the suggested outline and you will see that the letter falls into two divisions: chapters 1–2 emphasize fellowship, and chapters 3–5 emphasize sonship. In each of these sections, John gives three basic “tests”: obedience (walking in the light), love (walking in love), and truth (walking in the truth). In other words, I can know I am in fellowship with God through Christ if I have no known sin in my life, if I have love for Him and His people, and if I believe and practice the truth and not some satanic lie. Furthermore, I can know that I am a son of God in the same way: if I am obeying His Word; if I have love for Him and His people; and if I believe and live the truth. John asks us to apply these tests, that we might enjoy the Christian life to the fullest.

IV. Study

I recommend that you also read 1 John in a modern translation, preferably *The New Testament*, translated by Charles Williams (Moody Press). The Gk. verbs are important in this letter, and the *Authorized Version* sometimes does not bring their meaning out in their fullest. First John 3:9, to be discussed later, is a case in point.

1 John 1–2

These two chapters deal with fellowship, and in them, John gives us the three tests of true fellowship. Note the contrast between saying and doing: “If we say ...” (1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6). Too many times we are better at the “talk” than we are at the “walk”! In 1:1–4, John introduces his theme: Christ the Word who has revealed the Father. (See 1:1–14.) He explains that when Christ was here on earth, He was a real Person, not a phantom, and that He had a real body (Luke 24:39). The false teachers of John’s day were denying that Jesus had come in the flesh. If we do not have a real Christ, how can we have real forgiveness of sin? John is being a witness by telling what he had seen and heard (Acts 4:20). He explains that Christ was manifested to reveal God and to make

possible our fellowship with Him. See also 3:5, 8, and 4:9 for other reasons why Christ came.

I. The Test of Obedience (1:5–2:6)

John introduces us to the image of light (John 1:4). God is light, and Satan is the prince of darkness (Luke 22:53). To obey Him is to walk in the light; to disobey is to walk in darkness. Keep in mind that fellowship is a matter of light and darkness; sonship is a matter of life and death (3:4; 5:11–12). John points out that it is possible for people to say they are in the light, yet actually live in darkness. Note the four “liars” here: (1) lying about fellowship, 1:6–7; (2) lying about our nature, saying that we have no sin, 1:8; (3) lying about our deeds, saying that we have not sinned, 1:10; and (4) lying about our obedience, saying that we have kept His commandments when we have not, 2:4–6.

Christians do sin, but this does not mean they must be saved all over again. Sin in the life of the believer breaks the fellowship but does not destroy the sonship. A true Christian is always accepted even if he is not acceptable. How does God provide for the sins of the saints? Through the heavenly ministry of Christ. We are saved from the penalty of sin by His death (Rom. 5:6–9), and we are saved daily from the power of sin by His life (Rom. 5:10). The word “advocate” means “one who pleads a case” and is the same Gk. word as “Comforter” in John 14:16. The Holy Spirit represents Christ to us on earth, and the Son represents us to God in heaven. His wounds testify that He died for us, and therefore God can forgive when we confess our sins. Read carefully Rom. 8:31–34. The word “confess” means “to say the same thing.” To confess sin means to say the same thing about it that God says. Keep in mind that Christians do not have to do penance, make sacrifices, or punish themselves when they have sinned. Every sin has already been taken care of at the cross. Does this give us license to sin? Of course not! The Christian who truly understands God’s provision for a life of holiness does not want to deliberately disobey God.

II. The Test of Love (2:7–17)

A. The new commandment (vv. 7–11).

See John 13:34. When we are in fellowship with God, walking in the light, we also walk in love. It is a basic spiritual principle that when Christians are out of fellowship with God, they cannot get along with God’s people. We are all members of God’s family, so we ought to love one another. This was even an “old commandment” back in the days of Moses (Lev. 19:18).

B. The new family (vv. 12–14).

Like a loving father, John calls the saints “little children”; all of God’s children have been forgiven. But we ought to grow in the Lord, becoming strong young men and women in the faith and ultimately spiritual “fathers and mothers.”

C. The new danger (vv. 15–17).

There is conflict between love for the Father and love for the world. By “the world” John means all that belongs to this life that is opposed to Christ. It is Satan’s system, society opposed to God and taking the place of God. If we love the world, we lose the love of

the Father and cease to do His will. Anything in our lives that dulls our love for spiritual things or that makes it easy for us to sin is worldly and must be put away. John mentions three specific problems: the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life. Is this not what the people of the world live for? But living for the world means losing everything in time, because the world is passing away. Lot suffered such loss. But if we live for God, we will abide forever.

There can be no true fellowship without love. Unless we love God and God's children, we cannot walk in the light and fellowship with God.

III. The Test of Truth (2:18–29)

God reveals Himself to us in His Word, which is the Truth (John 17:17); thus we cannot believe lies and have fellowship with God. John warns about the anti-Christian teachers already in the world, and he tells us how to recognize them: (1) they have left the fellowship of the truth, v. 19; (2) they deny that Jesus Christ is the Son of God come in the flesh, v. 22; (3) they try to seduce believers, v. 26. John agrees with what Peter describes (2 Peter 2): that these false teachers once were in the church, but then departed from the truth they professed to believe.

Here is where the Holy Spirit comes in: He is our heavenly unction (anointing) who teaches us the truth. The Spirit of God uses the inspired Word of God to communicate God's truth to us. "You know all things" in v. 20 (NKJV) should read "and you all know." Verse 27 should not be taken to mean that Christians have no need for pastors and teachers, otherwise Eph. 4:8–16 would not be in the NT. Rather, he is saying that believers must be Spirit-taught personally through the Word and should not always depend on human teachers. The Christian in fellowship with God will read and understand the Bible and be taught by the Spirit.

In vv. 28–29, John suggests (as Peter also taught) that false doctrine and false living go together. If we believe the truth with our hearts and commit ourselves to it, then we will live holy lives before men. Of course, one of the greatest incentives to holy living is the imminent coming of Jesus Christ. How tragic that some Christians who have not been abiding (fellowshipping) with Christ will be ashamed when He returns.

While there are many details in these chapters that we have had to overlook, the main lesson is clear: If Christians desire to have fellowship with Christ, they must obey the Word, love God's people, and believe the truth. Whenever sin enters, the Christian must immediately confess it and claim God's forgiveness. We must spend time in the Word, learning the truth and letting the truth take hold of the inner person. Or, to look at it negatively, the Christian who deliberately disobeys the Word, neglects the Word, and who cannot get along with God's people is out of fellowship with God and in the dark. It is not enough to talk about the Christian life; we must practice it.

"Propitiation" (2:2 and 4:10) has to do with the meaning of Christ's death from God's perspective. Christ's death brought forgiveness; but before God could forgive a guilty sinner, His justice had to be satisfied. This is where propitiation comes in. The word carries the idea of satisfying God's holiness through the death of a substitute. It does not mean that God was so angry that Christ had to die to make Him love sinners. Christ's death met the demands of God's law and thus broke down the barrier between men and God, making it possible for God to take away sin. The word "mercy seat" in

Heb. 9:5 is equivalent to “propitiation.” See Ex. 25:17–22. The blood on the mercy seat covered the broken law and made it possible for God to deal with Israel.

1 John 3

We move now into the second half of the letter, which deals with sonship. The word “fellowship” is not found in this section at all. Instead, John emphasizes being “born of God” (see 3:9; 4:7; 5:4). This passage ties in with John 3 and emphasizes the theme “God is love” (4:8, 16). In this chapter, John states that a true child of God will prove his spiritual birth by being obedient to God’s Word. He gives five motives for obedience:

I. God’s Wonderful Love (3:1)

“Behold, what foreign-kind of love” is literally what John writes. Paul had this idea in mind when he wrote Rom. 5:6–10. Love is the greatest motive in the world, and if we understand God’s love, we will obey His Word. “If you love me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Of course, the world has no understanding of this love, and the world hates us. But the world does not know Christ, so it cannot know Christ’s own.

II. Christ’s Promised Return (3:2–3)

What we are now is wonderful; but what we shall be is even more wonderful! “We shall be like Him.” This means inheriting a glorified body like His body (Phil. 3:20–21) and sharing in His eternal glory (John 17:24). But the saint who really expects Christ to return will obey His Word and keep his life clean. We shall see Him “as He is,” but we must also “walk as He walked” (see 2:6) and “be righteous even as He is” (3:7). Saints are expected to purify themselves, that is, keep their hearts clean (2 Cor. 7:1).

III. Christ’s Death on the Cross (3:4–8)

John gives several reasons why Christ was made manifest: (1) to reveal the Father and enable us to fellowship with Him, 1:2–3; (2) to take away our sins, 3:4–5; (3) to destroy (annul) the works of the devil, 3:8; and (4) to reveal God’s love and bestow God’s life, 4:9. The fact that sin resulted in Christ’s suffering and death ought to be reason enough for the Christian to hate sin and flee from it. John defines sin as transgressing the law. The Christian who abides in Christ (this is the fellowship of chaps. 1–2) will not deliberately break God’s law. Every Christian sins, perhaps without knowing it (Ps. 19:12); but no true Christian will deliberately and repeatedly defy God’s Word and disobey Him. Verse 6 ought to read, “Whosoever abides in Him does not habitually sin.” Ephesians 2:1–3 makes it clear that the unsaved sin constantly because they live in the flesh and for the devil. But the Christian has a new nature within and is no longer Satan’s slave.

IV. The New Nature Within (3:9–18)

The key thought of chapters 3–5 is “sonship,” which results in a new nature within the believer. God does not destroy or eradicate the old nature; rather, He implants a new nature that gives the believer a desire for spiritual things. Verse 9 should say, “Whosoever is born of God does not habitually, deliberately sin; for he has the seed of the new nature within.” This new nature cannot sin. Of course, believers who yield to the old nature will stumble and fall. See Gal. 6:1–2.

John contrasts the children of God and the children of the devil, using Cain and Abel as examples. Abel had faith and was accepted; Cain tried to be saved by works but was not accepted (Gen. 4). Cain was a liar and a murderer, like the devil (John 8:44); he murdered his brother, then lied about it to God. Genesis 3:15 states that Satan’s seed (children) will oppose God’s seed. Note Matt. 3:7 and 23:33. This will finally culminate in Christ’s battle with the Antichrist in the last days. But please note that Satan’s children are “religious.” Cain worshiped at an altar, and the Pharisees were the most religious people of their day. Not religion, but a true love for God and God’s children, should be the test of our devotion to God. True Christians do not hate and murder; instead, they show love and try to help others. The new nature that is implanted at the new birth is responsible for this change.

V. The Witness of the Spirit (3:19–24)

True Christianity is a matter of the heart, not the tongue. We have the witness of the Spirit in our hearts that we are God’s children (Rom. 8:14–16). Of course, v. 19 should be tied in with 2:28. When Christ returns, the believers with assurance in their hearts will not be ashamed.

Christians need to cultivate assurance. “Make your calling and election sure” is what Peter wrote (2 Peter 1:10). Verse 19 assures us that as we sincerely love the brethren, we belong to the truth and are saved (see also 3:14). Unsaved people may like some Christians because of their personable qualities, but only a born-again Christian loves even a total stranger when he or she discovers the stranger is a Christian. This is the message of Rom. 5:5. Sadly, our hearts (consciences) do condemn us because we know we have not always loved the brethren as we should. But John helps us by pointing away from our feelings to the God who knows us. Thank God salvation and assurance are not based on the feelings of the heart!

Verse 21 promises that the Christian with an assured heart can pray with boldness (confidence). If there is sin in our hearts, then we cannot pray with confidence (Ps. 66:18–19). But the Holy Spirit within convicts me of this sin, and I may confess it and get back into fellowship with the Father. What a tremendous revelation: whenever a Christian is out of fellowship with another Christian, he or she cannot pray as one should. Read 1 Peter 3:1–7 to see how this applies in the Christian home. The secret of answered prayer is obeying God and seeking to please Him. By doing so we abide in Him, and when we abide in Him, we may pray with power (John 15:7).

Faith and love go together (v. 23). If we trust God, we love one another. We love the saints because we are all one in Christ and because we seek to please the Father. How happy earthly parents are when their children love one another! The indwelling Holy

Spirit yearns to unite all believers in a wonderful fellowship of love, the kind of spiritual unity Christ prayed for in John 17:20–21.

God abides in us by His Spirit; we ought to abide in Him by yielding to the Spirit and obeying the Word. People who claim to be born of God, but who repeatedly disobey the Word and have no desire to please God, ought to examine themselves to see if they are really born of God.

1 John 4

You have noticed that John repeats himself. The themes of light, love, and truth are interwoven throughout this brief letter. Chapter 4 states that those who are born of God prove it by their love. In this chapter, John uses the same motives for love as he did for obedience in chapter 3. True believers will have love for one another for these reasons.

I. We Have a New Nature (4:1–8)

John begins with a warning about the false spirits in the world. Keep in mind that the NT was not yet completed and what had been written was not widely known; until the completion of the NT, the local churches depended on the ministry of people with spiritual gifts to teach them truth. How could a believer know when a preacher was from God and that his message could be trusted? (See 1 Thes. 5:19–21.) After all, Satan is an imitator. John states that the false spirits will not confess that Jesus is the Christ (see 1 Cor. 12:3). The false cults today deny the deity of Christ and make Him a mere man or an inspired teacher. But the Christian has the Spirit within, the new nature, and this gives overcoming power.

There are two spirits in the world today: God's Spirit of Truth, who speaks through the inspired Word, and Satan's spirit of error that teaches lies (1 Tim. 4:1ff). Teachers sent by God will speak from God, and God's children will recognize them. Satan's workers will speak from and depend on worldly wisdom (1 Cor. 1:7–2:16). The true sheep recognize the voice of the Shepherd (John 10:1–5, 27–28). True sheep also recognize and love one another. Satan is a divider and destroyer; Christ unites people in love.

II. Christ Died for Us (4:9–11)

The world does not really believe that God is love. They look at the awful ravages of sin in the world and say, "How can a God of love permit these things to happen?" But people need never doubt God's love: He proved His love at the cross. Christ died that we might live "through" Him (1 John 4:9), "for" Him (2 Cor. 5:15), and "with" Him (1 Thes. 5:9–10). The logic is clear: "If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." We should love each other in the same measure and manner as God loves us.

The cross is a plus sign; it reconciles sinners to God and people to one another. If two Christians do not love one another, they have taken their eyes from the cross.

III. The Spirit Witnesses to Us (4:12–16)

People cannot see God, but they can see God's children revealing Him in their love for one another and for those in need. This love is not something that we work up; it is the work of the Spirit within (Rom. 5:5). God's love flows from us as we yield to the Spirit. Christians do not love each other because of their good qualities, but in spite of their bad qualities. As we abide in His love, we have no difficulty loving other Christians.

IV. Christ Is Coming for Us (4:17–18)

Christians who obey God have boldness with God now (3:21–22); and Christians who love one another will have confidence when Christ returns. Some, however, will be ashamed at His coming (2:28). Christians will have to get along with each other in heaven, so why not begin by loving one another down here? Where there is true love for God and His people, there need be no fear of future judgment. God may have to chasten us in love during this life, but we need not fear to face Him when He returns. We may be ashamed, but we need not be afraid.

Verse 17 should read, "Herein is love made perfect with us." God's love has been manifested "toward" us (4:1), "in" us (4:12), and also "with" us. This is a life and a church fellowship saturated with the love of God. This kind of love seeks to please the Father and has no interest in the world. We need not fear the day of judgment, because the Spirit's witness of love proves that we are His children and that we will never face condemnation. Note the astounding statement at the end of v. 17—"as He is (now in heaven), so are we (now on earth)." He is in heaven representing us before the Father, and we are on earth representing Him before sinful men. As long as He is there in heaven, we have nothing to fear. Do we do as good a job here on earth as He does in glory?

God never meant for people to live in terror. There was no fear on earth until Satan and sin entered the world (Gen. 3:10). Adam and Eve were afraid and hid. Judgment is coming, and anyone who has never trusted Christ ought to be afraid. But Christians need never be afraid to meet their Lord (2 Tim. 1:7; Rom. 8:15).

V. God Loves Us (4:19–21)

The theme of God's love began chapter 3, and here it closes the chapter: "We love, because He first loved us." By nature, we know little about love (Titus 3:3–6); God had to show it to us on the cross (Rom. 5:8) and plant it in our hearts (Rom. 5:5). Note 1 John 4:10. "There is none who seeks after God," says Rom. 3:11 (NKJV), so God came seeking man (Gen. 3:8; Luke 19:10).

John shows the contradiction between saying we love God while hating other Christians. How can we love God in heaven when we do not love God's children here on earth? John uses the term "brethren" or "brother" seventeen times in his letter, referring, of course, to all of God's children, male and female. Christians are expected to love each other because they have experienced the love of God in their own hearts.

God commands us to love one another; see 3:11; John 13:34–35; John 15:17; Col. 1:4. It is too bad that our hearts are so cold that He must keep reminding us of this obligation.

Keep in mind that Christian love does not mean we must agree with everything a brother or sister thinks or does. We may not like some of their personal characteristics. But, because they are in Christ, we love them for Jesus' sake. Read James 4 to see what happens when selfishness reigns instead of love.

1 John 5

We come now to the third test of sonship, the test of truth. “We know” is the key phrase here (vv. 2, 15, 18–20). There are several certainties found in this chapter.

I. We Know What a Christian Is (5:1–5)

Most people in the world do not know what a Christian is or how they can become Christians. They trust in religious works and good intentions, depending on the energy of the flesh. God says that a Christian is someone who has been born again. It is faith in the finished work of Christ that makes a child of disobedience into a child of God (see John 1:12–13; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:3). John uses the phrase “born of God” seven times in his first epistle and describes the “birthmarks of believers”: (1) they practice righteousness, 2:29; (2) they do not practice sin, 3:9; (3) they love other Christians, 4:7; (4) they overcome the world, 5:4; and (5) they keep themselves from Satan, 5:18.

Again, John emphasizes love, obedience, and truth as the tests of true sonship. If we have God as our Father and love Him, then surely we will also love His other children. This love will lead to obedience (see John 14:21 and 15:10). Where there is love, there is a willingness to serve and please others. God's commands are not irksome to us because we love Him. There is a law in every city that parents must take care of their children, or else be put in jail. Is it a burden for parents to work and sacrifice to care for their children? Or do they care for them only because they fear this law? Neither is true! They obey the law because they love their children. The Christian who complains that God's Word is a burden does not know the meaning of love. See Matt. 11:28–30.

Christians are not to love the world, belong to the world, or yield to the world. They are overcomers, overcoming the world, the devil (2:13–14), and the false teachers (4:4). They overcome by faith in God's Word, not by their own power or wisdom.

II. We Know Who Jesus Is (5:6–13)

Sinners must believe that Jesus is the Christ and that He died for their sins before they can be saved and born into God's family. Verse 5 stresses the Person of Christ, and vv. 6–7 His work on the cross. There are several suggested explanations of the phrase “water and blood.” We may relate it to John 19:34–35, where John saw the blood and

water come out of Christ's wounded side, thus proving that He had really died. Or, it may be that John had the false teachers in mind. Some of them taught that Jesus was a mere man, but that "the Christ" came upon Jesus at the baptism, then left Him when He died on the cross. This would mean that we have no Savior at all. No, said John, our Savior Jesus Christ was declared to be the Son of God at His baptism (Matt. 3:17), and proved to be the Son of God at the cross (John 8:28; 12:28–33). Of course, the symbolism reminds us of the brazen altar (blood) and the laver (water of the Word) in the OT tabernacle. The Spirit bears witness that Jesus is the Christ through the written Word of God.

The entire Godhead agrees that Jesus is the Christ; and on earth, the Spirit, the Word (water), and the cross (blood) bear the same witness. God is witnessing to the world that this is His Son—yet people will not believe. They receive the witness of men, but reject the witness of God. But when we reject this witness, we make God a liar. All God asks is that we trust His Word. We can rely on the inner witness of the Spirit (v. 10, see Rom. 8:16) as He uses the Word. Verses 11–13 summarize as clearly as possible the assurance we have in Christ. Eternal life is in Christ: God has witnessed to this. If we believe God's witness, then we have this life within us. Christian assurance is not a matter of "working up" a religious emotion; it is simply a matter of taking God at His Word.

III. We Know How to Pray with Confidence (5:14–17)

It has well been said that prayer is not a way of overcoming God's reluctance but laying hold of His willingness. If we know God's will, we can pray with boldness. This is "praying in the Spirit" (Jude 20), allowing the Spirit to give us the inward witness of God's will, supported by the witness of God's Word. See 3:22. John mentions praying specifically for another believer who has sinned in a way that might result in death (1 Cor. 11:30). This "sin unto death" is not some "unpardonable sin" that a believer unwittingly falls into, but a deliberate sin in defiance of the Word of God (Heb. 12:9), something that other believers can see and recognize as rebellion. Jeremiah was told not to pray for the rebellious Jews (7:16; 11:14; 14:11; and see Ezek. 14:14, 20). When we show true repentance and confession, the Father is quick to forgive and cleanse (1 John 1:9–2:2).

True prayer is much more than saying words to God. It involves searching the Word, letting the Spirit search the things of God (Rom. 8:26–28), and yielding to God's will as we share our requests with Him. There is a price to pay in this kind of praying, but it is worth it.

IV. We Know How a Christian Acts (5:18–19)

The Gk. verb in v. 18 means "does not practice sin." Christians do not keep themselves saved, but they do keep themselves out of the snares of the devil. "Keep yourselves in the love of God" (Jude 21). "He that is begotten of God" may refer to Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son, or to the believer; perhaps both are true. We must yield to Christ in order to have victory; but we fight "from" victory as well as "for" victory.

God's people must keep their eyes wide open because the whole world "lies in the lap" of the wicked one. Satan is the god of this age and the prince of darkness. He has blinded millions of people spiritually and has kept them in bondage.

V. We Know the Truth (5:20–21)

The Spirit and the Word always agree, for "the Spirit is truth" (5:6) and God's Word is truth (John 17:17). The witness of the Spirit within the heart will never contradict the words of the Spirit in the Bible. The false teachers John was opposing taught that one had to belong to a special "inner circle" before one could understand spiritual knowledge, but John affirms that any true believer can know God's truth.

The true God is opposed to the false gods, the idols. An idol is man's conception of god. God made man in His image; now men make gods in their own image! Read Rom. 1:21ff. Note that John affirms that Jesus Christ is the true God!

Obedience, love, and truth are the key thoughts in this epistle. They are the evidence of salvation and the essentials of fellowship, the secret of true and abiding life.

2 John

The aged John wrote this brief personal letter to an esteemed woman in a local church. Verses 2–3 are introductory and describe the woman as one who is known and loved for her practice of the truth (the Word of God). Note that truth and love go together; Christians cannot have fellowship where there is false doctrine. John next deals with two specific matters.

I. Practicing the Truth (vv. 4–6)

Note the repetition of the word "walk." The truth is not something we simply study or believe; it is a motivating force in our lives. It is not enough to know the truth; we must show it through our actions wherever we are. John rejoiced because he was certain this lady's children were walking in the truth—the equivalent of "walking in the light," which the apostle discussed in 1 John 1.

Christian love is not an emotion that we work up; it is simple obedience to the Word of God. Children love their parents by obeying them. "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15, NKJV). How sad it is when Christians claim to love the Bible but hate the brethren. While saints may differ in their interpretations of certain passages in the Word, they must all agree on loving one another. Where there is a sincere love for the Bible, there will be a love for God's people. Loving the truth and loving the brethren cannot be separated.

II. Protecting the Truth (vv. 7–11)

A. *Those who deceive (v. 7).*

Here John is referring to the false teachers mentioned in his first epistle. He reminds us that the test of a teacher is what he or she believes about Jesus Christ. If this teacher denies that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, then he or she is false and from the Antichrist. While the one great “Man of Sin” (or Antichrist) will be revealed at the end of the age (1 Thes. 2), the spirit of Antichrist is already in the world (1 John 4:3).

B. *Those who destroy (v. 8).*

Here John warns us not to destroy the things that have been wrought in Christ. The easiest way to get detoured from your Christian walk and to lose all the spiritual ground you have gained is to get involved with false doctrine. Satan is a destroyer, and he uses lies to rob saints of their blessings.

C. *Those who depart (v. 9).*

The word “transgress” here means “go beyond.” That is, these false teachers are not content to stay within the limits of the Word of God. They are “progressive” and “modern,” preferring to go beyond the Bible and “improve on” what God has written. This is the wrong kind of progress! While Christians are to progress in their walk, they must never go beyond the limits of the Bible. We are to “abide” in the doctrine, affirming the fundamentals of the Word of God.

John warns us not to entertain these false teachers in our homes or even to greet them. Any aid that we give to false teachers is a share in their evil deeds. Find out what people believe before you let them in your home or give them donations. Check with your pastor if you have any questions.

3 John

Third John was written to a member of a local church that was beset with problems. In the letter, John discusses three men.

I. Gaius: A Prosperous Christian (vv. 1–8)

How we thank God for church members like Gaius. John uses the word “beloved” four times when referring to him (vv. 1–2, 5, 11). Verse 2 suggests that Gaius may not have been in good health or that he was just recovering from an illness. But this we know: he had a healthy spiritual life. Whatever the condition of the outer man, the inner man was prospering.

Gaius was the kind of Christian others enjoyed talking about. The brethren (probably traveling evangelists and missionaries) had met Gaius and been entertained in his

home. They reported that Gaius was walking in the truth and faithfully trying to help the different Christian workers who came his way. Keep in mind that there were no hotels in John's day, only inns that were uncomfortable and often dangerous. Traveling evangelists depended on the saints for food and lodging. Gaius was the kind of Christian who loved to entertain the saints and "bring them forward" as they went from place to place.

Why did Gaius help the saints? Because he loved them, for one thing, and because he wanted to share in their ministries and further the truth. A man might not be a preacher himself, but he can help others to preach.

II. Diotrephes: A Proud Christian (vv. 9–10)

This is the kind of church member we can do without. He wanted to be the "boss" of the church; he loved to have preeminence and be first in everything. Colossians 1:18 says that Christ alone deserves preeminence. "He must increase, I must decrease," is the way John the Baptist put it (John 3:30).

How did this member act? Well, for one thing, he refused to acknowledge the leadership of John. Whenever a church member wants position and prestige, he or she usually attacks the pastor either privately or openly. Usually they start a "whispering campaign" and try to undermine the pastor's character and ministry. Like Absalom in the OT, they "hint" that the present leadership is not efficient (2 Sam. 15:1–6), and that they could handle things better. Hebrews 13:7, 17 settle this matter once and for all.

Diotrephes told lies about John. "Prating" in v. 10 means "to bring false charges" and is similar to "tattlers" in 1 Tim. 5:13. If church members would remember that they are to listen to no accusations against their pastor without witnesses present, this would help to solve the gossip problem (1 Tim. 5:19).

He also refused to help the brethren, and even went so far as to domineer the church and throw some of them out. The NT teaches that in some cases of discipline, members are to be dismissed, but Diotrephes dismissed people without giving them opportunity to defend themselves or be heard by the congregation. Note 1 Peter 5:3.

It is this kind of member that destroys churches. Eager for power and authority, they trample on the truth, ignore the Bible, grieve the Spirit, and scatter the flock.

III. Demetrius: A Pleasant Christian (vv. 11–12)

How refreshing to turn from Diotrephes to Demetrius! He was the kind of person others could follow ("mimic"). He had a good report from the saints and from the Word itself. You could test his life by the Bible, and it passed the test.

Churches today need more members like Gaius and Demetrius, saints who love the Bible, the church family, and lost souls. We can do without those like Diotrephes!