

Letters



Of Love

**Studies From
1st, 2nd, and 3rd John**

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Letters Of Love

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Studies From 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John

Lesson 1 – General Introduction

Overview

Suppose you are heavily involved in some cause or movement. You have given yourself fully to its success. None can doubt your allegiance. Then come detractors. Some are from without who are not sympathetic. Others disappoint you by defecting from within. They begin to malign and discredit the entire movement, seeking its demise. They attack the authenticity of your founders. They belittle the goals to which you aspire. This to you is utter blasphemy. Other members begin to show signs of doubt. Even you may begin to wonder. What is desperately needed is for someone to rise in defense of this cause, someone who has concrete evidence that will vindicate the movement and its founders. Doing so will silence the opposition and make future success possible. A failure to do so will only quicken its demise.

Believe it or not, the above illustration is one way to view 3 short New Testament epistles: **1st, 2nd, and 3rd John**. Tucked away towards the end of the Scripture, they, along with the short letter from **Jude**, may often be ignored in a rush to study **The Revelation**. In so doing, many deprive themselves of great truths that are at the core of the faith of Jesus Christ. These 3 letters address fundamentals that every child of God should know, and at times be reminded of. They contain indispensable “faith facts” that if embraced and practiced will ensure fellowship with God, both now and after death. If they are ignored or rejected, we have set our course for misery in this life and a fiery eternity.

Even though they are short in length, **1st, 2nd, and 3rd John** are long on doctrine. Consider these themes of the Lord’s teachings that are given emphasis:

- ♦ fellowship (**1 Jn. 1:6-7; 2 Jn. 9; 3 Jn. 9-10**)
- ♦ worldliness (**1 Jn. 2:15-17**)
- ♦ righteousness (**1 Jn. 3:6-8**)
- ♦ brotherly love and concern (**1 Jn. 3:14-18; 2 Jn. 5**)
- ♦ false teaching (**1 Jn. 4:1**)

In these epistles, we have set in contrast basic Biblical themes that run throughout the New Testament. Notice the following:

- ♦ light and darkness (**1 Jn. 1:5**)
- ♦ love and hate (**1 Jn. 2:9-10**)
- ♦ children of God and children of the devil (**1 Jn. 3:10**)

Quite often these letters, especially **1st John**, are labeled “The Epistles of Love.” John himself often wears the moniker “The Apostle of Love” for his many statements about love, both in his gospel and these letters.

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The word “love” or its derivatives occur some 62 times in these three books. John stresses that love for God is shown by keeping His commandments (**1 Jn. 5:3; cp. Jn. 14:15**). Keeping God’s commandments would necessarily mean refraining from error, another topic that receives considerable attention. John also teaches that love for each other is shown by charitable deeds (**1 Jn. 3:17-18**).

The word “know” also is emphasized (**cp. 1 Jn. 2:3-6; 3:14**), possibly to refute the error of gnosticism.

The Author

We confidently submit that the Holy Spirit used John the apostle, whose name means “*Jehovah is gracious*,” to write these 3 short letters. This would be the same man who authored the fourth gospel record of Jesus. From inspired literature, we know the following about John:

- ◆ he was the son of Zebedee and Salome (**Mt. 4:21; 27:55-56; Mk. 15:40-41**)
- ◆ he and his brother James were fishermen with their father (**Mk. 1:19-20**)
- ◆ he and James were called “*Boanerges*” or “Sons of thunder” by Christ because of their fiery behavior at times (**Mk. 3:17; cp. Lk. 9:53-54**)
- ◆ he was one of the 3 most intimate disciples of the Lord (**Mt. 17:1ff; 26:37**)
- ◆ he was a close associate of Simon Peter
 - first ones to arrive at the tomb (**Jn. 20:2-8**)
 - suffered imprisonment together after healing a lame man (**Acts 3 & 4**)
 - traveled together to Samaria after the gospel was preached (**Acts 8:14-17**)
- ◆ he was one of the “pillars” of the church in Jerusalem (**Gal. 2:9**)

From sources external to inspiration, we are told the following about John:

- ◆ Polycarp, Papias, & Justin Martyr, some of the “early church fathers,” often quoted from his writings
 - Polycarp and Papias were identified as pupils of John
 - they have writings dated as early as the 2nd century
- ◆ he was eventually banished to the isle of Patmos by the Roman emperor Domitian, from where he received the visions and wrote **The Revelation** (**cp. Rev. 1:9**)
- ◆ he returned to Ephesus to live out the rest of his life, from where he wrote these three epistles as well as the gospel that bears his name
 - archeological remains bear his name in ruins of churches and shrines
- ◆ he outlived all the other apostles

That the author of the Gospel of John is the same one who penned these letters can also be concluded when comparing the works side by side:

- ◆ his gospel and these three letters have similar beginnings (**Jn. 1:1; 1 Jn. 1:1-3**)
 - Christ is announced as “The Word” or *logos* [λογος, λογου]
 - only John wrote of this
- ◆ only in the writings of John is Jesus styled as “the only begotten Son” (**Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:9**)
- ◆ his gospel and these three epistles have similar closing thoughts (**Jn. 20:30-31; 1 Jn. 5:13**)

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Date & Place of Writing

As with most books in the Bible, we cannot know for certain when and from where these epistles were penned. Some guesses are better than others, but are still just that – guesses. It is believed by most Biblical students that John wrote these letters from Ephesus, the place believed to be where he died.

It is usually accepted that John wrote them late in his life. Supporters of this point to **2 Jn. 1** and **3 Jn. 1**. In both verses, the author calls himself “the elder.” In the original text, there is a definite article before “elder.” Thus, the reference is probably to an older man rather than to one who serves as an overseer in a local church (**cp. 1 Pet. 5:1**). Also, **1 Jn. 2:1,12,28; 3:7,18; 5:21**; and **3 Jn. 4** all reference John’s readers as his “little children.” Such a fatherly concern points to John as an older man.

As to a date, it is commonly believed to have been written close to the end of the 1st century, somewhere between 90-94 A.D. The other suggested date is sometime prior to 70 A.D. and Jerusalem’s destruction. Advocates for the later date point to the following as support:

- ♦ they were apparently written at a time of external peace
- ♦ they lack encouragement to perseverance one would expect to find if that destruction was coming
 - Jesus so exhorted when He was addressing Jerusalem’s destruction (**Mt. 24:4-34**)
- ♦ they were written to saints of considerable spiritual attainment who were able to grasp profound theological themes
 - this would also tend to support a later date

We accept the later date. However, whether or not one agrees with these suggestions will not hinder him or her from learning the messages contained in these inspired documents.

Purpose

In terms of a *positive* stated purpose, John gives us reasons why he wrote these epistles:

- ♦ “...that your (our) joy may be made complete.” (**1 Jn. 1:4**)
- ♦ “...that you may not sin.” (**1 Jn. 2:1**)
- ♦ “...that you may know that you have eternal life.” (**1 Jn. 5:13**)

Like the gospel of John, the 3 letters of John were written to supply evidence essential for the building of credible faith.

It also seems evident that John had a purpose to write that was *negative* in nature. He addresses false doctrines that threatened the faith of the early saints (**cp. 1 Jn. 2:26**). There were some who even went out from among the believers (**1 Jn. 2:19; cp. Acts 20:30**). Of particular concern during these days was the threat of gnosticism.

“Gnosticism” comes from *gnosis*, which meant “knowledge.” It was “the philosophical result of the blending of the cosmogony of Greek thought with the theology of oriental religions, esp. Judaism” (*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 3, p. 648*). Gnostics believed they had superior knowledge, and

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such knowledge was limited only to their select group. According to them, salvation came from knowing theories rather than faith in a Savior. Such a claim obviously puts them at odds with the Lord's apostles who were promised to be "guided into all truth" (**Jn. 16:13**). It also contradicts the promise made to those who, upon reading inspired documents, would have apostolic insight into previously hidden mysteries (**Eph. 3:3-5**). To meet such a threat, the error of gnosticism had to be exposed.

Gnostics believed that all matter was evil, and the spirit of man was good. They believed the human body and the spirit within had no effective contact with each other. A redeemed soul inside a sinful body was not affected by immoral behavior. Thus, a person could engage in all sorts of wickedness and it would not endanger the soul. This "theory" puts them in conflict with the Incarnation, or God dwelling in bodily form (**cp. Phil. 2:7; Col. 2:9; Jn. 1:14**). In terms of everyday application of such a doctrine, usually one of two extremes were practiced:

- man should abstain from everything that would satisfy the sinful flesh
- since the soul could not be affected by sinful behavior, man was at liberty to do anything that would satisfy the flesh

Generally, gnosticism fell into 2 categories: Docetic or Cerinthian.

- ◆ **Docetic gnostics** (from *dokein*, "to seem")
They did not believe that Christ came in bodily form. He only "seemed" to have been physical; it was "imagined." If He did come, He was not perfect while in the flesh (**cp. 1 Jn. 4:1-3**).
- ◆ **Cerinthian gnostics** (named after Cerinthus, an Ephesian gnostic)
They attempted to make a distinction between the man Jesus and the Christ. They taught that Christ descended upon Jesus at His baptism, and ascended shortly before His crucifixion. Thus it was not Christ who suffered, died, and rose again but Jesus (**cp. 1 Jn. 5:6**).

In order to combat these heresies, John provides proof of the reality of the Lord's fleshly body. He offered testimony using 3 of his 5 human senses (**1 Jn. 1:1**). Also, to refute the notion that sinful activity can be indulged in without consequences, John pointed out the following:

- ◆ only those who are pure have an eternal hope (**1 Jn. 3:3**)
- ◆ only those who do righteousness are righteous (**1 Jn. 3:7**)
- ◆ those who habitually practice sin are of the devil (**1 Jn. 3:8**)

1st John may seem less "personal" than **2nd** or **3rd John**. **1st John** may seem to be more "doctrinal" because it covers more issues in depth. The last two letters were personal notes written to specific individuals with whom John was acquainted.

- ◆ **2nd John** was addressed to the "chosen lady and her children" (**v. 1**)
 - many interpret this as a reference to the church
 - if so, who would be the children?
- ◆ **3rd John** was addressed to Gaius (**v. 1**)

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It is obvious that John wrote these last 2 epistles to individuals who were very dear to him and who he “loved in truth” (**2 Jn. 1; 3 Jn. 1**). In **2 Jn.**, John warns about showing hospitality towards false teachers (**vv. 9-11**). In contrast, **3 Jn.** commends the reader for his hospitality to those who are worthy (**vv. 5-8**). Each letter closes with John expressing hope to see his readers shortly (**2 Jn. 12; 3 Jn. 13-14**). This may account for the brevity of the letters.

Review Questions

1. *What proof is there that the John who wrote the 4th gospel is the same who wrote these letters?*
2. *Define “gnosticism.” How did John refute this in these epistles?*
3. *Despite their shortness, what important Biblical themes are covered in these letters?*
4. *For what does John teach us to show love?*
5. *For what stated reasons did John write these letters?*

The Prologue Gaining Fellowship With God 1 Jn. 1:1 – 2:2

Introduction

As John begins these short letters, there are certain “fundamentals” that he must address before dealing with threats that apparently troubled the saints in Ephesus. These fundamentals are at the absolute core of the gospel. If one does not accept them, then all the attempts at establishing doctrine are just spin.

The letter begins with a short prologue (1 Jn. 1:1-4). This brief introduction gives John integrity, elevates God, and informs the reader of what John hopes to accomplish by writing this letter. Then, having born witness to Jesus’ true identity and his own credibility, John cites 5 “truths” concerning the importance **of** and requirements **for** fellowship with God (1 Jn. 1:5 – 2:2). All who are in the religious world lay claim to fellowship with God. Yet, John shows us what is involved in having communion with Deity. Until we read, understand, and practice this section of John’s epistle, fellowship with God will remain out of our reach.

While the majority of this letter will deal with specific issues, it will still contain tangent points off this one main idea presented in this section: having fellowship with God.

The Prologue (1 Jn. 1:1-4)

1. Who is John talking about, and how does he describe his knowledge of Him? (**vv. 1-3**)
2. Rather than say “Jesus” or “Christ” or “the Son of God,” John writes “the Word of life” (**v. 1**) What does he seem to be emphasizing? (**cp. 1 Jn. 5:11-13**) What had Jesus already said about “life”? (**cp. Jn. 6:35,48; 8:12; 14:6**)
3. Notice that **v. 2** is parenthetical; that is, the main thought goes from **v. 1** to **v. 3**. What is found in **v. 2**, and what does it add to the main thought of the prologue?
4. What does John hope to achieve for those who read and are convinced by his testimony? (**v. 3**) From this verse alone, what do we learn about “fellowship”?

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5. What else does John hope to accomplish by the evidence he will give? **(v. 4)** Why is this a “natural conclusion” to the thoughts presented in the prologue?

Gaining Fellowship With God (1 Jn. 1:5 – 2:2)

6. For fellowship to be possible, what is the first “truth” John mentions? **(v. 5)** How does the Scripture use “light” in such a way? **(cp. Eph. 5:8-10)** What is so vivid about this illustrative description of God? **(cp. Jas. 1:17; 1 Tim. 6:16; 1 Pet. 2:9; Eph. 6:12; Col. 1:13)**
7. What is the second “truth” John mentions? **(vv. 6-7)** What is required to be in fellowship with God? **(cp. Jn. 8:12)** What two kinds of people are described in **vv. 6-7**? To what terrible price for sin’s payment does John refer? **(v. 7)**
8. *Thought question:* how can we best understand the doctrine of “continual cleansing” from these verses?
9. What is the third “truth” John mentions? **(vv. 8-9)** How does this relate to the previous one? What results from the mindset that we are sinless? What will result when we freely confess our sins to God? **(cp. Prov. 28:13)**
10. What is the fourth “truth” John mentions? **(v. 10)** How does denying our past sinfulness make God a liar? **(cp. Rom. 3:4,23)**

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11. Despite John's affirmation about our sinfulness, what was the fifth "truth" he had to mention?
(1 Jn. 2:1-2) How must we properly understand John's words, "And if anyone sins,..."? (v. 1)

12. What role does Jesus play according to 1 Jn. 2:1? To what "work" of Christ does this refer?

13. What else is He called in 1 Jn. 2:2? What does "propitiation" mean? How does it help us understand God's description as being "faithful" and "righteous" (just) in 1:9?

Maintaining Fellowship With God 1 Jn. 2:3-29

Introduction

John, having taught what is necessary to gain fellowship with God (1 Jn. 1:5 – 2:2), now covers the next logical step: maintaining that fellowship with God (1 Jn. 2:3-29). The fact that he had to teach on how to maintain fellowship with God automatically affirms that such fellowship can be lost. This alone refutes the ever-popular “once saved, always saved” error of denominational doctrine. John would have his readers know of certain conditions and conflicts of this fellowship with God so that this precious communion never be interrupted.

In this section of the epistle, John discusses two “tests” of fellowship (vv. 3-11). If these tests are failed, fellowship with God is forfeited. The apostle then pauses for a moment to address the recipients of the letter (vv. 12-14). Following that, he reviews two “perils” that ever exist to threaten our fellowship with God (vv. 15-24). This section closes with reassuring words to guide us through those perilous moments when fellowship with God may be threatened (vv. 25-29).

Let us living on this side of Calvary beware...the contents in this section of **1st John** are as needed today as they were when he penned them in the first century.

The Tests of Fellowship (1 Jn. 2:3-11)

1. What is the first “test” of fellowship? (vv. 3-6) Define what you believe John really means by use of the word “know.” What would he have been refuting by emphasizing this word?
2. Is it possible to claim to know God and be deceived? How does John categorize such people? (v. 4; cp. Jn. 8:44) What did Paul say about such people? (cp. Titus 1:16)
3. What does it truly mean to “know God” and be “in Him”? (vv. 5-6; cp. 1:7; Jn. 15:4-5) *Thought question*: who is the “Him” of vv. 3-6: the Father or the Son? (cp. 1:2-3)

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4. What is the second “test” of fellowship? (**vv. 7-11**) Explain the paradox of a “new” and an “old” commandment? (**vv. 7-8**)

5. To what metaphor does John return to illustrate what the followers of Christ must do? (**vv. 8b-11; cp. 1:5-7**) What had Jesus already said about His disciples loving each other? (**cp. Jn. 13:35; 15:17**)

6. What do you make of the 3 classes of people mentioned in **vv. 12-14**, and what is the apostle saying to each group?

The Perils To Fellowship (1 Jn. 2:15-24)

7. What is the first “peril” to fellowship John mentions in **vv. 15-17**? What is the danger of loving the world? (**v. 15**) What O.T. passage does **v. 16** correspond with? Why is it foolish to love the world too much? (**v. 17**)

8. What is the second “peril” to fellowship John mentions? (**vv. 18-24**) In what way do we normally hear of the use of “The Antichrist”? In what 2 ways does John identify “antichrist”? (**vv. 19, 22-23**)

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9. Of what does John remind his readers that they have as protection from antichrist? (**vv. 20-21, 27**)
What do you suppose was the “anointing”? Do we have such today? If not, what do we have to protect ourselves against antichrist?

Closing Reassurance (1 Jn. 2:25-29)

10. With what confidence does John seek to assure his readers in the face of the antichrists? (**vv. 25-29**)
What is the key to our success of not being overcome by those who would deceive us? (**v. 27**)
11. In what will our “confidence” result? (**v. 28**) What is the one sure way to guarantee such confidence? (**v. 29**)

Behavior Worthy Of Fellowship With God (1) 1 Jn. 3:1-24

Introduction

Having discussed what it takes to gain fellowship with God, and what is necessary to maintain communion with God, John takes the rest of this epistle to discuss behavior to be seen in us that exemplifies, or shows itself worthy of, fellowship with God (1 Jn. 3:1 – 5:21). While we will never truly be “worthy” to be in league with Deity, we are expected to live and behave in such a way that shows we are trying our very best to live in fellowship with the God who calls us and would receive us if we submit to His conditions.

In this section, John begins with a discussion of God viewing us as His children (vv. 1-3). Such a blessing should serve as an inducement to maintain fellowship with our Father. And this requires certain behavior. We shouldn't sin against God (vv. 4-9); against our brethren (vv. 10-18); and our hearts should not condemn us, but be single or pure (vv. 19-24).

God's View Of Us: Children (1 Jn. 3:1-3)

1. What is the great blessing John mentions in v. 1a? How is it connected to the thought John closed with in 2:29? The fact that we are God's children leads to what other “reality”? (v. 1b; cp. Jn. 15:18-19) In what way(s) does the world “not know” us or Him?
2. What “future” does God have for those who are presently His children? (v. 2) To what event does John refer? How should children of God feel about this coming event? (v. 3a) What behavior should result in how we feel about this coming event? (v. 3b)

Not Sinning Against God (1 Jn. 3:4-9)

3. What definition does John give of sin? (v. 4) What does “lawlessness” mean? What other N.T. passages help define “lawlessness”?
4. What did Christ do to rectify the problem of sin? (v. 5a) What does the apostle reaffirm about Jesus? (v. 5b; cp. 1:5)

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5. In **vv. 6-9**, what is the fundamental truth about man, sin, and God that John emphasizes? Again, John uses the word “abides” in **v. 6**. Using this and **Jn. 15:1-8**, what is the thought conveyed by its use?
6. What two people does John speak of in **vv. 8-9**? In lieu of **1:8,10** and **2:1**, be prepared to explain, “...he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (**v. 9**). [*Read 2 Kings 4:38-41 as a parallel thought*].

Not Sinning Against Brethren (1 Jn. 3:10-18)

7. Not only are we identified as either “children of God” or “children of the devil” by whether or not we practice righteousness, how else are we so distinguished? (**v. 10b**) What are our basic instructions regarding this matter? (**v. 11**)
8. What example does John use to illustrate his point? (**v. 12; Gen. 4:1-8; Heb. 11:4**) Based on Cain’s association with the devil, and John’s words in **v. 13**, what do we conclude about Cain? What seems to be the point John wishes his readers to remember from **v. 13**? (**cp. Jn. 15:17-19**)
9. In context, what is meant by our “passing out of death into life”? (**v. 14a**) What about the one who does not love his brethren? (**v. 14b**) To what else does John equate hatred of brethren? (**v. 15**)
Thought question: how might this verse help us understand **Mt. 5:28**?
10. As a further display of brotherly love, what does John mention? (**v. 16a; cp. Jn. 10:11, 17-18**) In view of this, what does the apostle instruct? (**v. 16b; cp. Jn. 15:12-13**)

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11. On a comparatively smaller scale, how does John continue the same point from **v. 16** in **vv. 17-18**? How does **v. 18** aptly summarize John's discussion on love for brethren?

Having A "Single" Heart (1 Jn. 3:19-24)

12. How does John address the need for us to have a "single" or "pure" heart? (**vv. 19-22**) How are our hearts assured before God? (**v. 19**)
13. What if our hearts condemn us? (**v. 20**) What if our hearts do not condemn us? (**vv. 21-22**)
14. To which two basic commandments does John refer in **v. 23**? [*They also serve as a summary to this chapter*] What is the result of one keeping the commandments of God? (**v. 24a**) What is the proof of God abiding in us? (**v. 24b; cp. Eph. 1:14**)

Behavior Worthy Of Fellowship With God (2) 1 Jn. 4:1-21

Introduction

John continues his discussion of our behavior that proves itself worthy of being in fellowship with God (1 Jn. 3:1 – 5:21). In his remarks from 3:24, he stated that God has given us the Spirit as a confirmation that He abides in us, and we in Him. On the heels of that, John offers a warning about believing spirits, or the forces behind religious doctrines. There is God's Spirit, and there are other spirits in the world. Therefore, believers need to know how to distinguish between them. To do so, certain tests need to be applied, and these are outlined in vv. 1-6. Following that, John returns to a discussion of loving brethren by using God's love for us as the model for our love for each other (vv. 7-21).

Testing The Spirits (1 Jn. 4:1-6)

1. What is John's initial admonition to his readers? (v. 1a) Why does he so admonish? (v. 1b; cp. Mt. 24:11) What was the goal of the false prophets in the world? (cp. 2:26; 2 Pet. 2:1-3)
2. What do you think is meant by "try" [KJV] or "test" [NKJV, NASV]? Notice these other passages for your answer: **Prov. 17:3** (same word in the Septuagint, or Greek version of the O.T.); **1 Pet. 1:7; Lk. 14:19; 2 Cor. 8:8.**
3. Thought question: what is the significance of who is being told to test the spirits? What application does this have in the religious world?
4. What is the first test mentioned? (v. 2-3) What particular threat would be proven wrong by this test? How does John label the proponents of the heresy exposed by this test? (v. 3; cp. 2:18, 22) Thought question: what would this test reveal?

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5. How does John exhort his readers in view of the antichrists and their doctrine? (**vv. 4-5**) Why are we to take such great comfort? In what way is “God in us”? (**cp. 3:24**)

6. Be prepared to make modern application of v. 5. (**cp. 2 Tim. 4:2-4**)

7. What is the second test mentioned? (**v. 6**) How have some received the preaching of the apostles? (**cp. 1 Cor. 1:23-24**) How are we to receive it? (**cp. 1 Thess. 2:13**) *Thought question*: what would this test reveal?

Loving The Brethren (1 Jn. 4:7-21)

8. According to v. 7, what is shown by loving other brethren? What type of love do you think John is addressing in these verses? What is the model for our love? (**vv. 8b-10**) Be prepared to explain v. 8, “...does not know God.”

9. How does John emphasize the depth of God’s love in v. 10? Based on what he has said, what admonition does John give in v. 11?

10. According to v. 12, what is enjoyed by loving other brethren? What is our assurance of fellowship with God? (**v. 13; cp. Gal. 5:22; Rom. 5:1-5**)

Behavior Worthy Of Fellowship With God (3) 1 Jn. 5:1-21

Introduction

At the close of last chapter, John enjoined upon his readers a love not just for God, but also for brethren. As he brings his first epistle to a close, he continues his theme of showing the behavior that is worthy of having fellowship with God (1 Jn. 3:1 – 5:21). In the last chapter of this letter, the apostle emphasizes what love for God entails: keeping His commandments and loving His children (vv. 1-5). Following that, he discusses the witnesses God has left to influence man to believe in Him and His Son (vv. 6-12). Finally, John has some closing exhortations and assurances (vv. 13-21).

Showing Love For God (1 Jn. 5:1-5)

1. What is the proof that one is “begotten” or “born of” God? (v. 1a) What obligation is enjoined upon such a one? (v. 1b) How does this verse connect back to the previous ones? (cp. 4:20-21)
2. How do we know we truly love other children of God? (v. 2) *Thought question:* be prepared to show that v. 1 is not talking about “faith only.” Use other passages as needed.
3. Be able to define “burdensome” [NASV, NKJV] or “grievous” [KJV] in v. 3. What makes God’s commandments not burdensome? [Use Gen. 29:20 as an illustration.] Does this mean they are never hard? (cp. Heb. 11:17)
4. What is further proof that God’s commandments are not heavy or burdensome? (vv. 4-5) How has faith’s “conquering power” been illustrated? (cp. Mt. 17:20; Heb. 11:19) *Thought question:* using other passages, be able to explain why believing in Jesus as the Son of God provides our victory in

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God's "Witnesses" (1 Jn. 5:6-12)

5. John's theme in **vv. 6-12** centers on "witnesses" to the fact that "Jesus is the Son of God" (**v. 5**). These verses can be difficult to interpret, and we'll consider them together as one context.
 - a. What do you think is meant by the fact that Jesus came "by water and the blood"? (**v. 6**) What about John's emphasis, "not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood"? (**cp. Mt. 3:15; Jn. 19:34**) What error would this truth refute? [*pg. 4 of this material*]
 - b. Who else serves as a witness to this work of Christ? (**v. 7; cp. Jn. 1:32-34**)
 - c. Who, then, are the 3 witnesses? (**v. 8**) Notice it says "bear" [*present*] witness; not "bore" [*past*] witness. How do these 3 continually and presently bear witness?
 - d. What is John's point in **v. 9**?
 - e. To what "witness" does John refer in **v. 10a**? (**cp. Acts 5:32; Rom. 8:9; Gal. 4:6; Col. 3:16**)
 - f. What if one does not believe God's testimony? (**v. 10b**) *Thought question*: What are the ramifications of, in effect, labeling God a "liar"?
 - g. What serves as another "witness" to verify God? (**v. 11**) How did Paul agree with this? (**cp. Col. 3:3-4**)
 - h. How does John connect this promised life and the Son? (**v. 12; cp. Mk. 10:29-30; 1 Jn. 2:25**)

Letters Of Love

Lesson 6

Closing Exhortations & Assurances (1 Jn. 5:13-21)

6. With what purpose does John say he wrote this epistle? (v. 13; cp. Jn. 20:30-31) Having the promise of eternal life, what other “assurance” do disciples of Christ possess? (v. 14) How did Jesus show us the way in this assurance? (cp. Mt. 26:39)

7. Be prepared to explain v. 15 “...if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him” in context.

8. In what particular way are we to apply this “privilege of prayer”? (v. 16-17) What is a “sin not leading death”? What will God do when we make such a petition? What is a “sin leading to death” and what are we not to do regarding this? Why not?

9. In closing the letter, John gives us Divine assurances to help us. In vv. 18-20, what are the 3 things “we know” and to what do they refer?

v. 18 _____

v. 19 _____

v. 20 _____

10. What is his final admonition? (v. 21) Why would it be such an appropriate close?

Introduction to 2nd and 3rd John

Overview

The apostle John's second and third letters are so similar in thought, structure, and purpose that it is expedient to consider them together. They are much shorter than his first epistle. Both are personal letters to individual saints as opposed to brethren at large who would read his first letter. Both seem to follow a similar outline:

- ◆ Introduction to a specific person
- ◆ Commendation for faithfulness
- ◆ Warnings about false teachers, brethren in error
- ◆ Closing thoughts about a personal visit from the apostle

John gives emphasis to certain doctrinal themes in these 2 short letters. "Truth" is used 5 times in **2 Jn.** and 6 times in **3 Jn.** "Love" (or its derivatives) was one of his favorite themes in **1 Jn.**, and John again stresses it in the latter two epistles; 4 times in **2 Jn.** and 6 times in **3 Jn.** "Walking" also is repeated in various contexts; 3 times in **2 Jn.** and 2 times in **3 Jn.**

As we observed, the overriding theme from **1st John** was fellowship. Man is to strive for and maintain fellowship with God. Various obstacles threaten to jeopardize our fellowship with God, but all can be overcome by faithfully keeping the will of God, and showing an active brotherly love for fellow believers. Fellowship with God is paramount to happiness on earth, and certainly for achieving our heavenly home.

Though John does not address this theme in the way he did in **1st John**, the apostle still focuses on fellowship from different perspectives. In **2nd John**, he admonishes "the elect lady" (and us today) not to have fellowship with anyone who will not abide in the doctrine of Christ (**2 Jn. 9**). Such a one does not have fellowship with God, and should not have our fellowship either (**vv. 10-11**). In **3rd John**, John praises Gaius for showing hospitality to and supporting, or having fellowship with, laborers in the gospel (**3 Jn. 5-7**). He emphasizes Gaius' love for truth and those that teach it by comparing him to Diotrephes who forbid fellowship to those for whom it should have been extended (**3 Jn. 9-10**).

As he did in his first letter, John also mentions "antichrist" in **2 Jn. 7**. As expressed in **1 Jn. 2:22-23** and **4:2-3**, this evil spiritual force is identified as a deceiver and denier of the Christ. The warning to avoid such a heretic is found in **2 Jn. 9-11**.

Lest we think these 2 short, personal letters are not also applicable for us, notice some characteristics of the early church found in these epistles that are very similar to the church today:

- ◆ all was not always harmonious, even in the apostolic age
- ◆ the "darker side of human nature" carried over into the church, influencing men's actions
- ◆ early saints had to be warned about things that still can trouble saints today
 - the danger of denying Christ, His word
 - the possibility of failing to genuinely love brethren
 - the failure to keep God's commandments

Letters Of Love

Lesson 7

Apparently information had come to John which prompted him writing these 2 individuals.

In **2nd John**, John had either heard about or personally knew of the faithfulness of the children of “the elect lady” (**2 Jn. 4**). Some take “lady” to refer to some local church. If so, who would be the children? It appears to have been a literal sister in Christ, and her children were commended by this apostle of Christ for their faithfulness as Christians. John also mentions her “chosen sister” and her children (**v. 13**).

In **3rd John**, John praises Gaius for his faith. He appears to have been a man of benevolence, of some financial standing, and one who was greatly devoted to the truth of the gospel. He also encourages him with respect to 2 other brethren in the church. He was not to be like Diotrephes, and he was to imitate Demetrius (**3 Jn. 9-10, 12**).

As a summary, consider all the saints John addresses and see if we cannot still find the same in the Lord’s church today:

- ◆ The “elect lady” and her faithful children => emphasis on rearing faithful children
- ◆ Gaius => dependable disciples who are hospitable and devoted to the cause of Christ
- ◆ Diotrephes => domineering, boastful, and proud; always desiring to have their own way
- ◆ Demetrius => commended by all brethren; humble and kind

Safeguarding Fellowship 2 Jn. 1-13

Introduction

Fellowship with God being the important theme of his first letter, the apostle John expounds upon a closely connected subject in his second epistle: fellowship between believers of God. In commending certain disciples to their mother, John warns her (and all other readers) about protecting their faithfulness and fellowship with God by avoiding false teachers and the error they spread. Such fellowship is so precious that those who advocate error are never to be received or helped along the way, even with the most courteous of gestures. Doing so indicts the believer as a participant in the evil deeds of the false teacher.

Introduction (2 Jn. 1-3)

1. In what sense do we understand “the elder” in **v. 1**? [*see also p. 3 of this material*] To whom is this letter written? (**v. 1**) Even without any biographical information in the letter, what important things about her can we deduce?
2. How did John feel about her? (**v. 1**; **cp. 1 Jn. 3:18**) What is meant by “not only I, but also all who know the truth”? (**v. 1**) Why are believers to love one another? (**v. 2**)
3. How does John complete the introduction of this letter? (**v. 3**) To what do the terms “grace” and “mercy” and “peace” refer? (**cp. Rom. 1:7**; **1 Tim. 1:2**)

Main Body (2 Jn. 4-11)

4. In what did John rejoice? (**v. 4a**) What does it mean to “walk in truth”? With the verb “walk” being in the present tense, what does this mean? (**cp. Eph. 2:1-3**) Why did these children so walk? (**v. 4b**; **cp. 1 Jn. 1:5-7**; **2:4, 6**)

Letters Of Love

Lesson 7

5. To what recurrent theme does John return in **v. 5**? (**cp. Jn. 13:34-35; 1 Jn. 2:7-8**) How else does John define love? (**v. 6; cp. 1 Jn. 5:3**)

6. Why is John so exhorting the “elect lady” and us, too? (**v. 7a**) Since this verse begins with “For...,” how does it connect to the previous verse(s)? How were these deceivers to be recognized? (**v. 7b; 1 Jn. 2:18, 22; 4:3**) What were the apostle’s instructions in **v. 8**? (**cp. 2 Cor. 13:5**)

7. How else are the deceivers described in **v. 9**? What does it mean to “transgress” or “go too far”? What is the result from doing so? Conversely, what happens if one does not commit this error?

8. What were John’s most pointed remarks to the “elect lady” about these false teachers? (**v. 10**) What is meant by “God speed” or greeting such a one? What consequences result if we fail to follow these instructions? (**v. 11**)

Closing (2 Jn. 12-13)

9. How does John close this short epistle? (**vv. 12-13**)

Sharing Fellowship 3 Jn. 1-14

Introduction

In John's final letter, he has one more aspect of fellowship to cover. He has extensively covered fellowship with God and exhorted us to both seek and treasure it above everything else (**1 Jn.**). He has warned us about extending fellowship to teachers of errors, whether by supporting them and the error they further, or even to the point of showing hospitality to them that would help them on their way (**2 Jn.**). Lastly, we are encouraged to show support in all ways for those who faithfully teach the Lord's doctrine, whether we are intimately acquainted with them, or whether they are complete strangers to us (**3 Jn.**). As much as God wants to share fellowship with all humanity, He equally desires that we gladly "extend the right hand of fellowship" to those who are worthy and deserving. Those who refuse to do so run the risk of judgment.

Introduction (3 Jn. 1)

1. To whom is this letter written? (**v. 1a**) If what we have suggested on pp. 2-3 of this material is correct, how might **Acts 19:29** shed some additional light on Gaius?
2. What is the extent of John's love for him? (**v. 1b; cp. 2 Jn. 1; 1 Jn. 3:18**)

Main Body (3 Jn. 2-12)

3. For what reasons did John pray for Gaius? (**v. 2**) How might we understand "prosper"? *Thought question*: how might this verse help us understand just how much we should pursue prosperity?
4. What had made the apostle glad? (**vv. 3-4**) What has John already taught about one's "walk" before God? (**cp. 1 Jn. 1:6-7; 2:4,6; 2 Jn. 4**)

Letters Of Love

Lesson 8

5. For what specifically does John praise Gaius in his “walking in truth”? (**v. 5**) How does John further exhort Gaius in **vv. 6-8**?

 6. Why were such men worthy of support? (**v. 7a; cp. Acts 4:12**) How did John further describe these teachers? (**v. 7b; cp. 1 Cor. 9:11-15**)

 7. What results in our support of faithful gospel preachers and teachers? (**v. 8**) *Thought question*: how might we practically make use of what John teaches today?

 8. Who does John mention in **v. 9**? What had this brother done to bring about John’s rebuke? (**v. 10**) How had Jesus dealt with “preeminence” and what did He teach? (**cp. Mt. 23:2-6; Lk. 22:24-27**) *Thought question*: even given the actions of Diotrophes, what couldn’t he undo? (**cp. Acts 2:47**)

 9. What does John tell Gaius (and us) in **v. 11**? *Thought questions*: how do we determine what is “good”? (**cp. 2 Tim. 3:16-17**) Be able to discuss, “...the one who does evil has not seen God.”

 10. Who else is commended in **v. 12**? For what apparent reasons did John exhort Gaius to imitate him?
- Closing (3 Jn. 13-14)**
11. How does John close this short and final epistle? (**vv. 13-14**)

Appendix

Copies of overhead charts used in teaching this class.

"Truths" That Determine Fellowship With God
1 Jn. 1:5 - 2:2

- ❶ God's holy character 1:5
- ❷ Our efforts to live as He directs 1:6-7
- ❸ A recognition of our own sinfulness 1:8-9
- ❹ An admission of our past sinfulness 1:10
- ❺ Our need of an Advocate 2:1-2

"Tests" Of & "Perils" To Maintaining Fellowship With God
1 Jn. 2:3-24

"Perils" to Fellowship 1 Jn 2:15-24

- ❶ Worldliness 2:15-17
 - loving the world prevents loving God
 - the world, its things, are passing away
- ❷ Antichrist 2:18-24
 - anyone who denies the Father & the Son

"Tests" Of & "Perils" To Maintaining Fellowship With God
1 Jn. 2:3-24

"Tests" of Fellowship 1 Jn 2:3-11

- ❶ Obedience to His will 2:3-6
 - keeping His word
 - abiding in Him, walking in His steps
- ❷ Loving other followers of Him 2:7-11
 - an "old," yet "new" commandment



Who Is The "Antichrist"?
1 Jn 2:18-24

- ❶ Anyone refusing apostolic authority v. 19
- ❷ Any one denying Jesus is the Messiah, and that He came to earth vv. 22-23 4:3

Appendix

Copies of overhead charts used in teaching this class.

Loving The Brethren
1 Jn. 3:10-16

Cain

- ✓ An example of hate
- ✓ Killed out of selfishness

Christ

- ✓ An example of love
- ✓ Died out of unselfishness

If we are to avoid the hate which motivated Cain,
we must adopt the love which influenced Christ

Loving The Brethren
1 Jn. 4:7-21

- ❶ It shows true sonship in God vv. 7-11
- ❷ It determines fellowship with God vv. 12-16
- ❸ It provides assurance vv. 17-19
- ❹ Application vv. 20-21

Testing The Spirits
1 Jn. 4:1-6

Test # 1

- Confessing that Jesus Christ has come into the world vv. 2-3
 - test needed because of Docetic gnosticism

Test # 2

- Listening to the apostles v. 6

Witnesses For Christ
1 Jn. 5:8-12

- ❶ The Spirit »»» The Holy Spirit
- ❷ The water »»» His baptism
- ❸ The blood »»» His crucifixion



Their testimony agrees or harmonizes,
and is perpetual or constant, not just
pertaining to past events.

Appendix

Copies of overhead charts used in teaching this class.

“SIN” and “DEATH”

1 Jn. 5:16

- ❶ All sin leads to death Rom 6:23
- ❷ All sin is lawlessness 1 Jn 3:4
- ❸ All sin is unrighteousness 1 Jn 5:17
- ❹ All sin must be confessed 1 Jn 1:9
- ❺ “Life” and “Death” must correspond 1 Jn 5:16
cp. 5:12 3:14-15
- ❻ The context is prayer 1 Jn 5:13-17

**HOW IMPORTANT DOES GOD
VIEW FELLOWSHIP?**

- Always, fellowship with Him should be sought [Theme of 1st Jn]
- Sometimes, fellowship should not be extended that has been [2nd Jn 9-11]
- Sometimes, fellowship that has been denied should be extended [3rd Jn 5-10]

“SIN” and “DEATH”

1 Jn. 5:16

- ◆ Based on these facts, what is “sin not unto death” & what is “sin unto death”?
 - “Sin not unto death” = repented of sin
 - “Sin unto death” = unrepented of sin, sin still separating one from fellowship with God
- ◆ Why pray for the brother who repents of sin?
cp. Jas 5:16