

**NT Survey – 1, 2, and 3 John**  
**Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School**  
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**Introduction to 1 John**

Author – Leaders in the early church assumed that John the Apostle, author of The Gospel of John, also wrote these three letters even though he never identified himself by name. Though it is generally agreed that the same person wrote them all (vocabulary, style, and emphasis are identical), some feel they were not written by John the Apostle, son of Zebedee, but by another John, an elder or overseer of the early church. The argument for the Apostle John, however, is stronger and answers the objections. Every evidence, internal and external, points to John the elder being the same person as John the Apostle, and the author of all four books (the Gospel of John and his three epistles).

As the last remaining Apostle, John's voice was powerful and important to the first century church. Papias, an early church Father who had direct contact with John, described him as a "living and abiding voice" who was active in the church even though he was very old. He was the only man left alive who had firsthand experiential knowledge of Jesus. He was an eyewitness to the ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord.

Date – Since there are no clear historical references in these letters, no precise date is possible. Writings by a multitude of historians and church Fathers indicate that the Apostle John spent a significant part of his advanced years in Ephesus carrying out a wide evangelistic ministry, overseeing many churches, and conducting an extensive writing ministry. Church records place their writing in the latter part of the first century, and they were most likely written soon after the Gospel and before the persecution under Dalmatian in AD 95 since that event is not mentioned. Considering these factors it is reasonable to date all three letters between AD 90-95.

Audience of 1 John – John does not mention his readers by name which suggests it was a circular letter to be read in multiple churches; perhaps those churches in Asia Minor where Ephesus was located.

Theme – 1 John is written to believers in order to present tests to determine if true saving faith has been exercised or are we deceived. Having determined that we have exercised true saving faith as we see the change that God has made in our lives, we should have joy.

<sup>4</sup>These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete. 1 John 1:4

<sup>13</sup>These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. 1 John 5:13

Woven into these tests is John's attack on Gnosticism. Gnosticism emphasized a special knowledge (gnosis), denied the deity and saving work of Jesus, and resulted in immoral lifestyles (see introduction to Colossians).

**Outline – 1 John**

- I. Introduction (1:1-4)
- II. Doctrine Test 1 – Fellowship (1:5-2:2)
- III. Conduct Test 1 – Obedience and Love (2:3-17)
- IV. Doctrine Test 2 – False Teachers (2:18-29)
- V. Conduct Test 2 – Righteousness, Love, and Prayer (3:1-3:24)
- VI. Doctrine Test 3 – Source of Truth (4:1-6)
- VII. Conduct Test 3 – Love, Victory, and Certainty (4:7-5:5)
- VIII. Doctrine Test 4 – Received Witness (5:6-12)
- IX. Conduct Test 4 – Christian Certainties (5:13-20)
- X. Conclusion (5:21)

## Summary – 1 John

### Introduction (1:1-4)

1:1-4 – John begins the epistle with a statement of the apostolic message that had been consistently proclaimed throughout the NT. The way from death to life, from blindness to sight, and from darkness to light is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

These first two verses address Gnosticism: Jesus is not an angel, emanation, or spirit. He is the God-man. John had heard Him, seen Him, touched Him, and witnessed His death.

John wants to ensure his readers are in fellowship with himself and other believers (horizontal relationship) and in fellowship with the Father (vertical relationship). "Fellowship" is the Greek word *koinonea* which means association, community, communion, joint participation; the sharing of common purpose and direction.

- ❖ Do I view the body as a community sharing a common purpose and direction?
- ❖ When fellowshiping with the brethren do I focus on my vertical relationship with God first?

### Doctrine Test 1 (1:5-2:2)

1:5-2:2 – John begins his tests (or evidences) of saving faith by describing how the true believer deals with sin. God is perfectly holy; He is “light and in Him there is no darkness at all”; no evil dwells with Him.

<sup>4</sup>For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; **No evil dwells with You.** Psa 5:4

John gives three “if we say” statements dealing with sin; perhaps these are statements made by the false teachers.

v6-7 – If we say that we have true saving faith (fellowship) and yet walk (an habitual pattern) in darkness (sin), we lie (deceive ourselves) and do not practice the truth. If we walk in the light (righteousness), it demonstrates that the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

v8-9 – If we say that we have no sin nature, again, we are deceiving ourselves. An acknowledgment of sin is necessary to come to salvation. Yet, if we agree with God (confess) that we are a sinner, then He is faithful to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (at salvation).

v10 – If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and his word is not in us.

- ❖ What is my view of sin? Do I take it seriously or am I flippant?

John wrote these words in order to prevent his readers from committing sin. Knowing men will sin, he explains that Christ functions as our advocate in the Father's presence assuring their judicial standing before Him (2:1). Jesus is the propitiation (satisfactory substitute sacrifice) and our defender (advocate) in order to satisfy God's demand for justice. God's nature demanded the propitiation, but also moved Him in love to provide for payment in the gift of His own Son.

### Conduct Test 1 (2:3-17)

2:3-6 – Obedience – A visible demonstration of fellowship (loving Jesus) is that we will desire to be obedient to Him (keep His commands). If we call ourselves a believer and yet are not growing in obedience, we are a liar and the truth is not in us.

- ❖ Do I desire to obey Jesus; do I actually do it?

2:7-11 – Love – John is not giving a new command, but an old command stated new (fresh) in its degree, character, and quality. If we say that we are a believer and yet hate, we are in darkness (not a believer). Love is a displaying characteristic of the true believer.

<sup>34</sup>“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. <sup>35</sup>“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35

Love is the sacrificial commitment of my will to another’s needs and best interests regardless of the cost to myself. Love seeks another’s highest good, even if it costs a great deal; even if there is no response of love or gratitude. Love is not an impulse from the feelings. It does not always run with the natural inclinations nor does it spend itself only upon those whom we like or deem worthy to receive love. It is an act of the will, so we can choose to love even if we do not feel like doing it (John 15:12; John 3:16; 1 Cor 13:4-7).

❖ Do I love as Jesus commands?

2:12-14 – Encouragement – John has just spoken in strong, black-and-white terms: if you are not changed, then you have not been saved. He inserts this short section to encourage those who may have been troubled by what he had written. The point is: wherever one is at in the spectrum of Christian maturity, if we are true believers, our sins are forgiven and we will be growing in sanctification.

❖ Am I growing? If not, why?

2:15-17 – Love of the World – The true believer does not love Satan’s evil, God-opposed world system that surrounds them. The sin nature described as the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life is not from the Father. All that is in the world is passing away and has no eternal value. But the true child of God lives forever.

❖ Do I love the world?

#### Doctrine Test 2 (2:18-29)

2:18-29 – John believed the return of Christ was imminent based on the increasing presence of false teachers. Many of these antichrists had come from within the church among the professing believers (v19). A desertion of the faith is evidence of never having exercised true saving faith to begin with.

<sup>19</sup>They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.  
1 John 2:19

The distinctive beliefs of these false teachers included denying the nature of God and that Jesus was the Christ (v22). Many had followed after them (v26-27). Believers should stand against false teaching by:

1. The Holy Spirit who provides a capacity to understand spiritual truth (v20).
2. A personal commitment to the Word of God (v24-25).
3. Abiding in Christ, continuing a walk of obedience (v28-29).

❖ Am I walking in the Spirit, saturated with God’s Word so I can be protected from false teaching?

#### Conduct Test 2 (3:1-3:24)

3:1-3 – Purifying Hope – The true believer moves forward in sanctification (v2) and hopes for the future when we will be free from sin. This hope is purifying – it moves us forward in Christ-likeness.

❖ Do I long to be free from sin or do I like my sin?

3:4-9 – Sin and Righteousness – John gives a parallel statement on the believer’s relationship with sin. A person who makes a practice of sinning should examine themselves to see if they even know Him.

<b>3:4-7</b>	<b>3:8-10</b>
3:4: Sin is serious because it is rebellion against God.	3:8a: Sin is serious because it originates with the devil.
3:5: Sin is opposed to the sinless Christ’s appearing to take away sins.	3:8b: Sin is opposed to Christ’s appearing to destroy the works of the devil.
3:6: A true Christian does not live in sin.	3:9: A true Christian cannot live in sin.
3:7: A true Christian practices righteousness.	3:10: A true Christian practices righteousness.

❖ Are there ongoing, habitual sins in my life that I need to put off?

3:10-24 – Hatred and Love – John spirals back to a distinguishing characteristic of believers – love. The contrast here is between a true believer who loves his brother in truth and action and a professing believer who does not. To point out how serious this is, he equates hatred to murder (v15). God’s love was revealed when He laid down His life for us (v16) and our love is shown when we love in deed and truth (v17-18). If we demonstrate this love we confirm our standing with God and are able to "have confidence before God" (v21) and assurance that our prayers will be affective (v22).

❖ Do I hate (in word, deed or thought)?

Doctrine Test 3 (4:1-6)

4:1-6 – John warns about people who claimed to be genuine believers, members of the fellowship, who were in fact teachers of error. John provided a test as to how to tell the false from the true. The test by which teaching is to be judged was the acceptance of Jesus Christ as God’s incarnate Son (v2-3). Believers have ultimate victory "because greater is He that is in you than he who is in the world"(v4), and "we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (v6).

Conduct Test 3 (4:7-5:5)

4:7-5:5 – The rest of this section again addresses the preeminent display of true saving faith – love. The love that God demands is supernatural. God is love (v7-8). The greatness of His divine love for us leads us to love each other (v11) and our practice of love for each other is evidence that God’s love for us has been perfected or matured (v12-16). John mentions three demonstrations of saving faith.

1. Confidence for the coming day of judgment (4:17-18)
2. Genuine love and concern for fellow believers (4:19-5:1)
3. Obeying God’s commands (5:2-3)

The true believer overcomes the world through faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

❖ Is my faith demonstrated?

Doctrine Test 4 (5:6-12)

5:6-12 – John’s opponents would challenge his statement that “Jesus is the Christ” so he explains that Jesus is the eternal God-man who was witnessed to by the Spirit and the Father. The water is most likely a reference to Jesus’ baptism (at the outset of His earthly ministry) and blood as a reference to His death on the cross. At these events the other two persons of the Trinity intervened in a miraculous way to testify to the identity of the God-man, Jesus.

1. The Holy Spirit presented His witness at Jesus’ baptism and throughout His life.
2. The Father witnessed at the baptism (water) as well, by His power throughout His ministry, and by accepting His substitute sacrifice (blood) as sufficient.

The truth to which all these witnesses testify is that eternal life is available only through God’s Son.

<sup>11</sup>And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. <sup>12</sup>He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

### Conduct Test 4 (5:13-20)

5:13-12 – John’s purpose in writing was to give us tests to know that we have eternal life. The true believer is different than the world. Believers have confidence in prayer founded on the assurance of eternal life. Without eternal life, there is no way to pray according to the will of God.

❖ Do I have confidence in my prayers?

John gives a specific example of praying for a sinning brother. A true believer not only has confidence before God, but he uses that confidence to love/serve his brothers and sisters. Prayer for a sinning Christian is a concrete demonstration of love.

The sin which John is speaking of are types of sin which have a rapid consequence (the word “a” before sin is an interpretive translation which may wrongly imply there is only one sin which leads to physical death). God disciplines those that he loves (Heb 12:4-11). Some sins or perhaps extended sin brings God's swift judgment and result in the premature physical death of the sinning believer (e.g., Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 5:5; 11:30). John is exhorting us to pray for sinning brothers so they will turn from their sin (repent).

❖ Am I loving the brethren by praying for them?

Unlike the Gnostics, we have a personal, experiential knowledge of God because "we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ."

### Conclusion (5:21)

John concludes with, “Little children, guard yourselves from idols.”

❖ Am I guarding myself from idols?

## **Introduction to 2 John**

Theme – John wrote this letter to a specific woman and her children addressing similar themes as 1 John. Also addressed is how believers should treat false teachers at the individual level.

## **Outline – 2 John**

- I. Introduction (1:1-3)
- II. Commendation (1:4)
- III. Commandment (1:5-6)
- IV. Cautions (1:7-11)
- V. Conclusion (1:12-13)

## **Summary – 2 John**

### **Introduction (1:1-2)**

1:1-2 – John addresses this epistle to a “chosen lady and her children”. There are several thoughts on the recipients, but an individual and her extended family makes the most sense. John sends his greeting in “truth and love”. All who follow Jesus must be committed to living in truth and acting with love toward other people.

- ❖ Am I acting in love towards others?

### **Commendation (1:4)**

1:4 – It appears that John had met some of this chosen lady’s children and observed their conduct and commitment to the truth. Walking in truth means ordering one's life by the Word of God.

- ❖ Am I ordering my life by God’s Word?

### **Commandment (1:5-6)**

1:5-6 – John gives the command to “love one another”. Love moves us to obey the word of God and in context do the “one-anothers”. If we love God we will obey Him, and that obedience will lead us to “love our neighbors as ourselves.”

- ❖ Am I demonstrating my love for God by obeying Him?

### **Caution (1:7-11)**

1:7-11 – The false teachers or “deceivers,” were the same as those in 1 John. They accepted the humanity of Jesus but denied His deity. He warned his readers that they could lose the impact and rewards of ministry if they bought into this heresy, since one who erred on this point of truth did not “have God” (v8-9).

- ❖ Am I guarding myself from accepting false teaching?

The false teachers had come to these believers asking for a warm welcome and acceptance because of their claim to be fellow believers. John warned them not to welcome any who deviated in any way from the doctrine of Christ. John was not encouraging intolerance for those who disagree with our opinions, but he was demanding total intolerance of those who did not accept the person and work of Jesus.

### **Conclusion (1:12-13)**

1:12-13 – John had many other things to say, but chose to confine himself to this one vital teaching, preferring to deal with other things face to face. He sends the greeting to her nieces and nephews.

## **Introduction to 3 John**

Theme – Third John is the most personal of John’s three epistles being addressed to “the beloved Gaius”. 2 John warned a friend against welcoming false teachers, his third letter condemns the failure to show hospitality to faithful ministers of the Word.

## **Outline – 3 John**

- I. Greeting (1:1)
- II. Gaius (1:2-8)
- III. Condemnation of Diotrephes (1:9-11)
- IV. Conclusion (1:12-14)

## **Summary – 3 John**

### **Greeting (1:1)**

1:1 – John addresses this epistle to “the beloved Gaius”. Gaius was apparently a spiritual descendant of the Apostle John and was dearly loved by him.

### **Gaius (1:2-8)**

1:1 – Gaius was walking in the truth and progressing in sanctification. His soul prospered. He was becoming more like Christ. John had no greater joy than to see his children walking in the truth. His life reflected his commitment to the Word of God. Because Gaius was walking well, John prayed that all would go well with him and that he be in good health.

❖ Does my life reflect a commitment to the Word of God?

One of the evidences of walking well is hospitality toward those who have committed their life to ministering the gospel.

❖ Do I love strangers?

### **Condemnation of Diotrephes (1:9-11)**

1:9-11 – In stark contrast to Gaius walking well, Diotrephes was a pompous elder (v9) in the church who had assumed so much power that he felt he could even refute the Apostle John. He did not accept what John had sent in a letter (1 John ???) and put his detractors out of the church. John will deal with him when he visits later. John urged his friend not to be influenced by the bitter spirit of Diotrephes and advised him to choose his examples carefully from those who practice good rather than evil.

❖ Am I proud?

### **Conclusion (1:12-13)**

1:13-13 – In closing, John commends a man named Demetrius who lives what he professes as witnessed by "everyone." John had many things to say, but was not willing to write them in a letter, but would speak to Gaius face-to-face.

❖ Am I concerned about how I communicate?

## **Homework**

Read Revelation.