1, 2, 3 JOHN AND JUDE

BIBLE STUDY

A Verse-by-Verse Study



Walk in the light, love one another,
and contend earnestly for the faith

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A note before you begin. This book is written to teach the Bible and encourage faith. It shares my understanding of Scripture and is offered for study and spiritual growth. It is not counseling, medical, legal, or financial advice. If you are facing a crisis, a health problem, or a legal or money problem, please reach out to a qualified professional as well as your pastor and church family. To the fullest extent the law allows, Andrew Dominguez, Trinfinity Enterprises, and Andrew Dominguez's heirs, estate, successors, and assigns accept no liability for how this material is used.

A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of the books of 1, 2, and 3 John and Jude. My purpose in writing this study guide is the same as it was for my study of Revelation: to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

I went from hoping to knowing I had eternal life by reading God's own words. 1 John 5:13 says these things are written so that you may know. My confidence does not rest on how I feel. It rests on what He said.

These four short letters come near the end of the New Testament, and they were written near the end of the apostolic age. John, the last of the apostles, wrote his three letters as an old man to churches he loved. Jude, a brother of James, wrote one urgent letter to believers under attack. All four letters face the same danger: false teachers inside the church who were twisting the truth about Jesus and treating sin as if it did not matter. And all four give the same answer: hold on to the truth you heard from the beginning, walk in it, and love one another. I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on these letters. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and understand what He has given us in His Son. Before you read any part of this book, or any part of Scripture, I ask that you pray, asking God:

- For the Holy Spirit to be present, to help open your eyes and your heart (Psalm 119:18, 119:105)
- For discernment and knowledge (Psalm 119:66, James 1:5)

2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth."

The Bible is God's Word to us (2 Timothy 3:16), given for training in righteousness. If we cannot understand what it says, we cannot apply it to our lives or help build God's kingdom.

So how do we go about understanding God's Word?

The first rule is context. You may have heard the saying "Context is King," but what does that mean? Every word, sentence, and passage helps explain the ones around it. Before we read any passage, we should ask a few simple questions: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What came right before it? Knowing the answers gives us a clearer picture of what God is saying, both in general and to each of us personally.

Context matters a great deal in these letters. John's words about sin, love, and assurance were written to believers who had just watched a group of false teachers walk out of their church, men who denied that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh. If we forget that, some of John's strong statements, like "everyone who sins has not seen Him" (1 John 3:6), can frighten a tender believer or be pulled out of shape. Once we see who John is answering, the letters become clear and full of

comfort. Second and Third John need their context too: traveling teachers depended on believers to give them a place to stay, and John tells one church not to welcome false teachers and another man to gladly welcome true ones. Jude also writes against men who had crept into the church, and his examples from the Old Testament and from Jewish writings make sense when we know what he was fighting.

Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Hermeneutics

People typically interpret the Bible using one of two methods, Exegesis or Eisegesis. Both are explained below, along with a third word, Hermeneutics. Sometimes people use both methods to "make their case" for the interpretation they want. These definitions are based on www.merriam-webster.com, with my own notes added.

Exegesis means explaining a text, especially a passage of Scripture. Exegesis is reading and interpreting the full text of a passage, and drawing out what it is actually saying.

Eisegesis means reading your own ideas into a text. This happens when we try to find something in the text that really isn't there. It can lead to many errors, especially when we bring assumptions to a passage that aren't actually in it. This method can be used to justify a behavior, position, or belief that goes against what the text originally meant.

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles used to interpret a text, such as the Bible. "Hermeneutics" and "Exegesis" are sometimes used to mean the same thing. The difference is that Exegesis is the work of explaining a passage, while Hermeneutics is the set of principles that guides that work. In Biblical Hermeneutics, the Bible should be read literally unless the text itself gives us a different meaning.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB)

"16 Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work."

This passage tells us plainly that the writers of Scripture were inspired by God. Every passage in the Bible came from God and was written down by man. These are not fairy tales or made-up stories. They are God's own breath, given to us so we can be equipped and ready to do good work.

Because every word was inspired and breathed by God, I believe we must let God's Word interpret itself. We must study the Bible using Exegesis, drawing out what the text says, guided by sound Biblical Hermeneutics.

We should study God's Word using the Golden Rule of Interpretation, as Dr. David L. Cooper stated it:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate

context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

(http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page55.html)

I read the Bible as it is written. These letters teach plainly, and this study takes John and Jude at their word: Jesus Christ really came in the flesh, God really is light and love, a believer really can know that he has eternal life, and the faith really was once for all delivered to the saints.

This study uses the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) unless I note otherwise. To better understand the original Greek, I also used The Interlinear Bible (Jay P. Green Sr., ISBN 1-56563-977-4).

How This Study Is Laid Out

Each chapter of this study follows the same pattern as my study of Revelation:

- Scripture: the full text of the chapter, broken into sections, so you can read it straight through first.
- Preview: a short look at what the chapter covers.
- Study: the chapter again, verse by verse, with my notes on what each verse says and what it means for us.
- Summary: the main points of the chapter in a few lines.
- Study Questions: questions for personal study or a small group, from simple fact questions to questions about how we live. Some of them are personal. In a group, no one should ever have to answer one aloud, and what is shared in the group stays there.
- Old and New Testament links: after many verses you will find a short line in small type that lists the places where the other Testament quotes, fulfills, pictures, or echoes that passage. "Quoted" means the New Testament quotes the Old Testament words. "Fulfilled" means the New Testament tells us a prophecy or promise came true. "Pictured" means the New Testament itself points to an Old Testament person, event, or object as a picture of Christ. "Alluded to" means a clear echo in shared words or pictures. Every link is listed again in a table at the back of the book.

Each letter also has its own Overview and Background before its first chapter, so you know who wrote it, who it was written to, and why.

Using This Study With a Group

This study works for one person or for a group. Here are two ways a group can pace it:

- One chapter a week: eight weeks, five for 1 John and one each for 2 John, 3 John, and Jude. If you like, add a first meeting to read the Introduction and the Background of 1 John together.
- A shorter plan: seven weeks. Take 2 John and 3 John together in one meeting, since they are short letters from the same writer about the same problem seen from two sides.

For each meeting, I suggest reading the Scripture out loud together first, straight through, before anyone comments. Then walk through the Study section, stopping where the group has questions, and finish with the Study Questions and prayer. The first questions in each list can be answered from the text. The later ones are more personal, and no one should feel pressed to answer them aloud.

Some parts of these letters touch painful subjects: guilt and confession (1 John 1:8-10; 3:19-20), fear about whether one is truly saved or has committed the sin to death (1 John 3:6-9; 5:16-17), hatred in families and churches (1 John 2:9-11; 3:15), a brother in real need (1 John 3:17), loved ones caught up in false teaching (2 John 7-11), a controlling church leader (3 John 9-10), and sexual sin (Jude 7). If you lead a group, read those sections ahead of time and be ready to listen. If someone shares something that puts them or another person in danger, help them get help right away.

I look forward to walking with you through the books of 1, 2, and 3 John and Jude. If you'd like to share feedback, please email me at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

May God bless you and your time studying and getting to know Him better.

Overview of 1 John

First John is the twenty-third book of the New Testament. It sits between 2 Peter and 2 John. It is the first of three letters written by the apostle John, and it belongs to the group of seven letters often called the General Letters (James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John, and Jude), because most of them are written to believers in general rather than to one named church.

First John does not open like a normal letter. There is no greeting, no name, and no list of people at the end. It reads more like a pastor's message to churches he knows and loves. John calls his readers "little children" again and again. He writes to protect them from false teachers who had left the church, and to help them be sure of their salvation. He gives a few simple tests that show who truly knows God: believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God come in the flesh; keeping His commandments; and loving one another. John tells us his purpose plainly near the end:

1 John 5:13 (SLB)

"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, and so that you may believe in the name of the Son of God."

First John has 5 chapters and 105 verses. John does not write in a straight line. He circles back to the same themes, truth, obedience, and love, each time going a little deeper. Here is the structure this study follows:

Part One: Fellowship With the God Who Is Light (chapters 1 and 2)

- 1 John 1: Walking in the Light
- 1 John 2: Knowing That We Know Him

Part Two: Living as the Children of the God Who Is Love (chapters 3 and 4)

- 1 John 3: Children of God
- 1 John 4: God Is Love

Part Three: Sure of Eternal Life (chapter 5)

- 1 John 5: That You May Know You Have Eternal Life

Background of 1 John

Author: The letter does not name its author, but the early church was united in saying it was written by John the apostle, the son of Zebedee, one of the twelve. The writer says he heard, saw, and touched "the Word of life" (1:1), so he was an eyewitness of Jesus. The style and words are very close to the Gospel of John: light and darkness, truth and lies, love, abiding, eternal life, and being born of God. Some modern scholars believe a follower or a circle of John's students wrote these letters, and some point to an early writer, Papias, who seems to mention a second man known as John the elder. I take the letter at its word. The writer claims to be an eyewitness, speaks with the authority of an apostle (4:6), and sounds just like the Gospel that the early church said John wrote.

Who it was written to: John does not name the churches. Most believe he wrote to the churches in and around Ephesus, in the Roman province of Asia (the west coast of what is now Turkey), where he lived and served in his old age. These are likely the same area as the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3. The readers were believers who knew John well and had been taught the truth "from the beginning" (2:24).

When and where it was written: Early Christian writers say John lived in Ephesus late in his life. Most date this letter to about A.D. 85 to 95, written from Ephesus. That would make John an old man, probably the last of the apostles still living, which fits the way he calls his readers "little children."

The false teaching: Some men had left the church and were spreading a teaching that denied Jesus had come in the flesh (2:19, 22; 4:2-3). Many in the Greek world believed that the physical body was bad and only the spirit was good. From that idea grew teachings that the Son of God could not really have become a man. One form, later called Docetism (from a Greek word that means to seem), said Jesus only seemed to have a body. Another teacher in Ephesus named Cerinthus taught that "the Christ" came on the man Jesus at His baptism and left before He died. An early church leader named Irenaeus tells a story that John once ran out of a public bathhouse in Ephesus because he heard Cerinthus was inside. We cannot be sure John had these exact men in mind, but their ideas fit what he fights against. These teachers also claimed a special knowledge of God and seem to have said that sin in the body did not matter.

Purpose: John writes so that his readers' joy may be full (1:4), so that they will not sin (2:1), to warn them about those who were deceiving them (2:26), and above all so that they may know they have eternal life (5:13). He wants them to hold on to the truth they heard from the beginning, to walk in the light, and to love one another.

1 John 1: Walking in the Light

Scripture

1:1-10 That which was from ***the*** beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we looked upon and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life— and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us— that which we have seen and heard we proclaim to you, so that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship ***is*** with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you so that your joy may be made full. And this is the message which we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and darkness is not in Him at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we do not have sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous so that He may forgive us the sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

Preview

John does not open with his name or a greeting. He opens with Jesus. The One who was "from the beginning" became a real man that John heard with his ears, saw with his eyes, and touched with his hands. John was there. He writes as an eyewitness so that his readers can share the same fellowship he has with the Father and the Son, and so that their joy may be full.

Then John gives the message he heard from Jesus: "God is light." That truth sets the test for everyone who says they know God. We cannot claim fellowship with Him and keep walking in the dark. But John does not leave us there. If we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us. Anyone who says they have no sin is fooling only themselves.

Study

1:1 *That which was from **the** beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we looked upon and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life—*

"That which was from the beginning." These words take us straight back to John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word." John is talking about Jesus, the eternal Son of God, who existed before anything was made.

Then John piles up proof. He has "heard" Him, has "seen with our eyes," has "looked upon" Him, and "our hands handled" Him. John is not passing on a rumor. He walked with Jesus for about three years, leaned on Him at the Last Supper (John 13:23), and touched Him after He rose (Luke 24:39; John 20:27).

Why stress this? The false teachers John was facing said Jesus only seemed to have a real body. John answers them on the first line. The eternal Word became real flesh, and John touched Him. He calls Him "the Word of life," because life itself comes from Him.

1:2 *and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—*

John breaks off his sentence to explain. "The life was manifested." To be manifested means to be made visible, brought out into the open. The life that "was with the Father" from eternity stepped into history where people could see it.

John uses three verbs for what he does with what he saw: we "have seen," we "bear witness," and we "proclaim." A witness tells what he knows firsthand. That is the heart of the Christian message. It rests on what God did in real time, in a real body, before real witnesses.

Notice that John calls Jesus "the eternal life." Eternal life is not only a length of time that never ends. It is a Person. To have Jesus is to have that life (5:12).

1:3 *that which we have seen and heard we proclaim to you, so that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship **is** with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.*

Now John gives his reason for writing: "so that you also may have fellowship with us." The Greek word for fellowship is koinonia. It means sharing something in common, being partners in it. Christian fellowship is far more than coffee after church. It is sharing a life together in God.

And John tells us who that fellowship is with: "with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." The false teachers claimed a special closeness to God. John says real fellowship with God comes only through the Son, and it is shared with the apostles and with every believer who holds to what they taught. You cannot walk with God and walk away from His people and His truth.

1:4 *And these things we write to you so that your joy may be made full.*

"These things we write to you so that your joy may be made full." John wants his readers to have joy, and not a thin, partial joy, but a full one.

Where does that kind of joy come from? From fellowship with God and with His people, built on the truth about Jesus. Many people look for joy in things, in success, or in feelings. Those things never fill us up. Jesus told His disciples that He spoke to them so that His joy would be in them and their joy would be full (John 15:11). John heard that, and now he passes it on. Full joy comes from knowing Christ and sharing life with others who know Him.

1:5 *And this is the message which we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and darkness is not in Him at all.*

"God is light, and darkness is not in Him at all." This is the first great statement about God in this letter. Later John will say "God is love" (4:8). We need both. In the Bible, light stands for truth and

holiness. Darkness stands for lies and sin. God is pure, with no mixture of evil in Him, not even a shadow.

John calls it "the message which we have heard from Him and announce to you." A few Greek copies read promise here instead of message, but most read message. Either way, John is passing on what Jesus told him. It came from Jesus Himself, who said "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12).

This truth is good news and hard news at the same time. It is good because God can be fully trusted. It is hard because sin cannot hide in His presence. Before anything else, we need to know what God is like.

1:6 *If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.*

Here is the first of three "If we say" statements (1:6, 8, 10). Each one exposes a false claim.

"If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in the darkness, we lie." Some people in John's day said that what you did with your body did not matter, as long as your spirit knew God. John calls that a lie. You cannot walk with the God who is light while you live in darkness.

To "walk" in the Bible means the way we live day by day. John is not talking about one slip. He is talking about a way of life. A person who claims to know God but keeps on living in open sin with no concern is fooling himself. The words "do not practice the truth" remind us that truth is something we do, not only something we believe.

1:7 *But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.*

"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light." Walking in the light does not mean we never sin. The very next words show that, because they promise cleansing. Walking in the light means living honestly before God, out in the open, not hiding, letting His light show us what is really there.

Two things follow. First, "we have fellowship with one another." When we are honest with God, we can be honest with each other. Second, "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." The word "cleanses" is in the present tense. It keeps on cleansing. The blood of Jesus is His death on the cross, the payment for our sin. It does not cover only the sins we had before we believed. It covers "all sin."

1:8 *If we say that we do not have sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

The second false claim: "If we say that we do not have sin." Some people said they had grown past sin, or that sin was not really part of them. John says that kind of person deceives himself. He is not fooling God, and usually he is not fooling anyone else either.

Every believer still has a sin nature while we live in this body. Paul describes the struggle in Romans 7:14-25. Becoming a Christian does not make us sinless. It makes us forgiven, and it gives us new life and power to fight sin. If someone tells you they no longer sin, John says "the truth is not in us." Be careful with any teacher who says he has arrived.

1:9 *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous so that He may forgive us the sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

This is one of the best-loved verses in the Bible, and for good reason. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous so that He may forgive us the sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

To confess means to say the same thing as God about something. It is agreeing with Him that what we did was sin, without excuses, without blaming someone else. It is honest, and it is specific: "our sins," not a vague admission that nobody is perfect.

Then look at God's side. He is "faithful," so He keeps His promise. He is "righteous," so He does what is right. You might ask, how is it right for a holy God to forgive sinners? It is simple: Jesus already paid for those sins on the cross (2:2). God is not being soft on sin when He forgives. He is being just to His Son, whose blood paid the debt in full.

And notice how far it goes: "from all unrighteousness." Not most of it. All of it. Satan loves to keep believers stuck in guilt over sins God has already forgiven. When you have confessed it, believe what God says.

Bible teachers read this verse in two main ways. Many see it as written to believers about their daily walk with God: we are already forgiven and saved, and confession keeps our fellowship with the Father open, the way a child who wrongs his father still belongs to the family but needs to make it right. Others see it as a call to anyone, saved or not, to come to God and be forgiven. Both agree that confession does not earn forgiveness. The blood of Jesus is the ground of it.

1:10 *If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.*

The third false claim: "If we say that we have not sinned." This goes a step further than verse 8. Verse 8 denied having a sin nature. This denies ever having sinned at all.

John says that when we claim that, "we make Him a liar." Why? Because God has said plainly that all have sinned (Romans 3:23). The whole message of the cross is that we needed a Savior. To say we have never sinned is to say God is wrong about us, and that Jesus died for nothing.

"His word is not in us." A person who will not admit sin has not let God's Word in. The way into the light always starts with admitting the truth about ourselves. That is not where the Christian life ends. It is where it begins.

Summary

John opens with the eternal Word of life, who became a real man that John heard, saw, and touched. He writes as an eyewitness so that his readers may share fellowship with the Father, with His Son Jesus Christ, and with the apostles, and so that their joy may be full. The message he heard from Jesus is that God is light, with no darkness at all. Anyone who claims fellowship with God while walking in darkness is lying. Those who walk in the light have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus keeps cleansing them from all sin. To claim we have no sin, or have never sinned, is self-deception that makes God a liar. But if we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

There are a few sins I have confessed that I still carry guilt and shame over. 1 John 1:9 says God is faithful to forgive and to cleanse. If He has cleansed it, I do not need to keep carrying it.

Study Questions

1. What four ways does John say he came to know the Word of life? (1:1)

2. Why would John stress that Jesus could be seen and touched?

3. What does the word "fellowship" mean, and who is our fellowship with? (1:3)

4. Why did John write these things? (1:4)

5. What does it mean that "God is light"? (1:5)

6. What three false claims does John expose in 1:6, 1:8, and 1:10?

7. What does it mean to walk in the light, and what two things follow from it? (1:7)

8. What does it mean to confess our sins, and why is God "faithful and righteous" to forgive? (1:9)

9. Is there a sin you have confessed that you still carry guilt over? What does 1:9 say to you about it?

10. Who in your life helps you walk in the light honestly, and how can you be that kind of friend to someone else?

1 John 2: Knowing That We Know Him

Scripture

2:1-14 My little children, these things I write to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ ***the*** Righteous ***One***; and He Himself is ***the*** propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one saying, "I have come to know Him," and not keeping His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, truly in him the love of God has been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him. The one saying ***he*** abides in Him ought, just as that One walked, himself also to walk in this way. Brothers, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you had from ***the*** beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from ***the*** beginning. Again, a new commandment I am writing to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. The one saying ***he*** is in the light and hating his brother is in the darkness until now. The one loving his brother abides in the light, and a stumbling block is not in him. But the one hating his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness blinded his eyes. I write to you, little children, because the sins have been forgiven you on account of His name. I write to you, fathers, because you have come to know Him who ***is*** from ***the*** beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil ***one***. I write to you, young children, because you have come to know the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you have come to know Him who ***is*** from ***the*** beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil ***one***.

2:15-29 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him; because all that ***is*** in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boasting of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and its lust; but the one doing the will of God abides forever. Young children, it is ***the*** last hour; and as you heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from which we know that it is ***the*** last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but ***they went out*** so that they might be manifested that they all are not of us. And you have an anointing from the Holy ***One***, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar except the one denying that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one denying the Father and the Son. Everyone denying the Son does not have the Father either; the one confessing the Son has the Father also. You therefore, what you heard from ***the*** beginning, let it abide in you. If what you heard from ***the*** beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise which He Himself promised us: the eternal life. These things I have written to you concerning those deceiving you. And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him. And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He is manifested we may have boldness and not be ashamed

before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness has been begotten of Him.

Preview

John writes as a father to his "little children." He wants them not to sin, but if they do, they have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous One, who is the propitiation for our sins and for the whole world. Then John gives a test. The one who really knows Jesus keeps His commandments and walks as He walked. The old commandment to love is also new, because the true light is already shining. Anyone who hates his brother is still in the dark.

In the middle of the chapter John speaks to children, fathers, and young men, and he warns them all not to love the world, which is passing away. Then he turns to the false teachers. It is the last hour. The Antichrist is coming, and many antichrists have already gone out from the church. They deny that Jesus is the Christ. John's answer is to let the truth they heard from the beginning abide in them, to trust the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and to abide in Christ, so that they will not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

Study

2:1 *My little children, these things I write to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ* ***the*** *Righteous* ***One****;*

"My little children." John was an old man by now, and he writes like a loving grandfather to people he had watched grow in the faith. The tone is warm, but the goal is clear: "so that you may not sin." Chapter 1 told us God forgives. That truth is never a license to sin. It is a reason to stop.

But John knows we will still fail. "And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father." An advocate is someone who stands beside you and speaks for you, like a lawyer for the defense. The Greek word is parakletos, the same word Jesus used for the Holy Spirit (John 14:16). The Spirit is our helper on earth. Jesus is our Advocate in heaven.

And look at who our Advocate is: "Jesus Christ the Righteous One." He does not plead that we are innocent. He pleads His own righteousness and His own blood. That case never loses.

2:2 *and He Himself is* ***the*** *propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.*

"And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins." Propitiation is a big word with a simple meaning. It is a sacrifice that satisfies God's just anger against sin and turns it away. God is holy, and sin must be paid for. On the cross Jesus took that judgment on Himself. He did not only offer the payment. John says He Himself "is" the propitiation.

Then John adds, "and not for ours only, but also for the whole world." Bible teachers read this in two main ways. Many believe Jesus died for every person, so that His death is enough for all and is offered to all, though only those who believe receive it (John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:6). Others believe "the whole world" means people from every nation, not only Jews, and that Christ's death was

aimed at saving those who would believe (John 11:51-52). Both agree that no one is saved apart from faith in Christ, and that the gospel should be preached to everyone. What John wants his readers to see is that there is no other sacrifice and no other way.

2:3 *And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.*

"And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments." Here is the first test of real faith. John is not telling us how to get saved. He is telling us how we can know that we already are.

The word "know" shows up again and again in this letter. The false teachers claimed to have special knowledge of God. John says real knowledge of God always shows up in how we live. It is not a secret idea in the head. It is a life that listens to Jesus and does what He says.

This is not perfection, because John just told us we will sin (2:1). It is direction. Is your life, on the whole, turned toward obeying Jesus?

2:4 *The one saying, "I have come to know Him," and not keeping His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;*

John is blunt. "The one saying, 'I have come to know Him,' and not keeping His commandments, is a liar." That is a strong word, but it is honest. A person can say all the right words, know all the right songs, and still not know Jesus at all.

Jesus said the same thing: not everyone who says "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom, but the one who does the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21-23). "The truth is not in him." Words alone cannot prove a relationship with God. A changed life does. If a man says he loves his wife but never comes home, his words are empty. Our walk with God works the same way.

2:5 *but whoever keeps His word, truly in him the love of God has been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him.*

"But whoever keeps His word, truly in him the love of God has been perfected." To be perfected means brought to its goal, made complete. God's love has a purpose in us. It is meant to produce obedience. When we keep His word, His love has done what it came to do.

Notice John says "His word," not only His commandments. That is wider. It is everything Jesus taught, not just a list of rules. The believer wants to hear all of it and live all of it.

"By this we know that we are in Him." Being "in Him" is John's way of talking about our union with Christ. The proof of being joined to Him is that His word shapes us.

2:6 *The one saying **he** abides in Him ought, just as that One walked, himself also to walk in this way.*

"The one saying he abides in Him ought, just as that One walked, himself also to walk in this way." To "abide" means to stay, to remain, to live in. Jesus used this word in John 15:4-7, where He calls Himself the vine and us the branches.

Here is the standard: walk as Jesus walked. That is a high bar. How did He walk? In obedience to the Father, in love for people, in truth, in humility, and in prayer. We will never match Him perfectly in this life. But if we claim to live in Him, His life should be showing up in ours. The question for each of us is simple. Does my life look more like Jesus than it did a year ago?

2:7 *Brothers, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you had from **the** beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from **the** beginning.*

"Brothers, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you had from the beginning." John has not mentioned the commandment by name yet, but verses 9-11 make it clear. It is the command to love.

Why call it old? Because they had heard it from the beginning, when they first learned about Jesus. It was not something John invented. It goes back further still, to the Law of Moses: love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18).

The false teachers liked new ideas and fresh secrets. John brings his readers back to the old message. In the Christian life, we do not need something new. We need to obey what we have already heard.

2:8 *Again, a new commandment I am writing to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.*

"Again, a new commandment I am writing to you." Is it old or new? Both. Jesus called it a new commandment in John 13:34: love one another just as I have loved you. The command to love was old, but Jesus gave it a new standard, His own love shown at the cross.

John adds that it is "true in Him and in you." Jesus lived it fully, and now it is coming true in His people. "The darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining." When Jesus came, a new day dawned. The old age of darkness is on its way out. Every time a believer loves the way Jesus loved, the light of that new day shines a little brighter.

2:9 *The one saying **he** is in the light and hating his brother is in the darkness until now.*

"The one saying he is in the light and hating his brother is in the darkness until now." Here is another "saying" test. Some claimed to be enlightened, full of light. John says hate gives them away.

"His brother" here means a fellow believer. John is not talking about a passing disagreement. He is talking about ongoing hatred: bitterness, contempt, wishing harm on someone. A person who lives that way is "in the darkness until now," no matter how spiritual he sounds.

That is a searching word for churches. We can be right on doctrine and still be in the dark if we hate the people sitting near us. Love is not a side issue in the Christian life.

2:10 *The one loving his brother abides in the light, and a stumbling block is not in him.*

"The one loving his brother abides in the light, and a stumbling block is not in him." Love keeps us in the light.

A stumbling block is something that trips you up, or that causes someone else to fall. Love clears the path. When we love our brothers, we are not tripping over grudges, and we are not putting obstacles in front of others. Hate always makes someone fall, either the one who hates or the one who is hated.

Think about how much trouble in families and churches comes from bitterness that no one deals with. Love is not weakness. It is the clear way forward. It keeps us walking in the light where we can see where we are going.

2:11 *But the one hating his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness blinded his eyes.*

"But the one hating his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness blinded his eyes." John paints a sad picture. A man stumbling in the dark, with no idea where he is headed.

Hate blinds. It makes us see others wrongly and see ourselves wrongly too. A bitter person often cannot see how far he has gone. He thinks he is right, and everyone else is the problem.

Notice that the darkness "blinded his eyes." The longer someone stays in hatred, the less he can see. That is why we should deal with bitterness quickly (Ephesians 4:26-27, 31-32). Do not let it settle in and take your sight.

2:12 *I write to you, little children, because the sins have been forgiven you on account of His name.*

John now speaks to his readers in groups. "I write to you, little children, because the sins have been forgiven you on account of His name." Most likely "little children" here means all of his readers, the whole family of God, since John uses that name for all of them (2:1, 28).

Before he warns them, John assures them. Their sins have been forgiven. That is a settled fact. And it is "on account of His name," because of who Jesus is and what He did, not because of anything they earned.

The Christian life starts here. Before we can obey, before we can love, before we can resist the world, we need to know we are forgiven. Everything else is built on that.

2:13 *I write to you, fathers, because you have come to know Him who **is** from **the** beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil **one**. I write to you, young children, because you have come to know the Father.*

Then John speaks to three groups: fathers, young men, and young children. Bible teachers read these in two ways. Some see three age groups in the church. Others see three stages of spiritual growth that every believer should be moving through. Either way, the message fits.

The "fathers" have "come to know Him who is from the beginning." Mature believers know Jesus deeply after years of walking with Him. The "young men" have "overcome the evil one." They are in the thick of the battle and winning by God's strength. The "young children" have "come to know the Father." Even the newest believer knows God as Father. Each stage has something to celebrate.

2:14 *I have written to you, fathers, because you have come to know Him who **is** from **the** beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil **one**.*

John repeats himself, now saying "I have written." Repeating something in the ancient world was a way to underline it.

He adds to what he said about the young men: "you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one." Here is the secret of their strength. It is the word of God living in them. Jesus beat Satan in the wilderness by quoting Scripture (Matthew 4:1-11). We fight the same way.

If you want to be strong in your faith, there is no shortcut. Read God's Word, think about it, memorize it, and obey it. Let it "abide," make its home in you. Then when temptation comes, you will have something to stand on.

2:15 *Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him;*

"Do not love the world nor the things in the world." What does John mean by "the world"? Not the planet, and not the people in it. God loves the people of the world (John 3:16). Here "the world" means the whole system of life that leaves God out, its values, its goals, and its pull away from Him.

"If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." John puts it as an either-or. We cannot love both. James says the same thing: friendship with the world is hostility toward God (James 4:4).

This is not a call to leave society or to hate good things God made. It is a call to check our hearts. What are we living for?

2:16 *because all that **is** in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boasting of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.*

John names three ways the world pulls at us. "The lust of the flesh" is the craving of our sinful nature for what feels good. "The lust of the eyes" is wanting what we see. "The boasting of life" is pride in what we have and what we have done.

Eve saw that the fruit was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable to make one wise (Genesis 3:6). Satan tempted Jesus in the same three areas in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13). Eve fell. Jesus stood. The tactics have not changed.

None of this is "from the Father." These desires do not come from God. They come from a world that has turned its back on Him.

2:17 *And the world is passing away, and its lust; but the one doing the will of God abides forever.*

"And the world is passing away, and its lust." Here is the reason not to love the world: it will not last. Everything the world offers is already on its way out. The things people chase so hard, the money, the status, the pleasure, will all be gone one day.

"But the one doing the will of God abides forever." That is the contrast. The world passes, but the person who does God's will lasts.

So it boils down to this. Why would we pour our lives into something that is fading away, when we can give our lives to God, who lasts forever? What we do for Him will never be wasted.

2:18 *Young children, it is **the** last hour; and as you heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from which we know that it is **the** last hour.*

"Young children, it is the last hour." From the time Jesus went back to heaven, we have been living in the last days (Acts 2:17; Hebrews 1:2). The next great event on God's calendar is the return of Christ.

"As you heard that the antichrist is coming." The word antichrist means one who is against Christ, and also one who sets himself up in place of Christ. John's readers had been taught that a final Antichrist was coming. Paul calls him "the man of sin" and "the lawless one" (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, 8). Daniel 9:27 tells of a ruler who makes a covenant for seven years, and Revelation 13 shows him as the beast who rules the world. I believe that after Christ takes His church to be with Him, this man will rise during the seven-year Tribulation, until Jesus returns and destroys him (2 Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 19:20).

But John says there is something even now: "many antichrists have arisen." The spirit of the Antichrist was already at work in false teachers. They are previews of the one who is coming.

2:19 *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but **they went out** so that they might be manifested that they all are not of us.*

"They went out from us, but they were not of us." The false teachers had been part of the church. They sat in the meetings, maybe even taught. Then they left.

John explains what their leaving showed. "If they had been of us, they would have remained with us." Their going out "manifested," made it plain, that they never truly belonged. They had been in the church without the church's faith ever being in them.

This verse speaks to a hard question. What about people who once professed faith and then walk away from Christ completely? John says, at least of these men, that their leaving revealed what was true all along. Bible teachers discuss how far to apply this, but John's point here is clear and it should comfort those who stayed. God knows His own.

2:20 *And you have an anointing from the Holy **One**, and you know all things.*

"And you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things." The false teachers boasted of special knowledge. John tells his readers they already have something better.

An anointing is pouring oil on someone to set them apart. In the Old Testament, kings and priests were anointed. The word "Christ" means anointed one. Here the anointing is the Holy Spirit, given to every believer by "the Holy One." Most take the Holy One here to be Jesus, who promised to send the Spirit (John 14:26; 16:13); some take it to be the Father. Either way, the Spirit is God's gift.

"You know all things" does not mean they knew every fact. It means they were not missing anything they needed. They did not need the false teachers' secrets. In context, they knew the truth about Jesus.

2:21 *I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth.*

"I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it." John is not writing to people who are lost in confusion. He is writing to remind and to strengthen people who already know the truth.

That is a good word for any teacher. Much of what we need is not new information. It is reminding. Peter said the same thing near the end of his life (2 Peter 1:12-13).

"No lie is of the truth." There is no such thing as a lie that is partly true and therefore fine. Truth and lies do not mix. A teaching that denies who Jesus is cannot come from the God of truth, no matter how much else it gets right.

2:22 *Who is the liar except the one denying that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one denying the Father and the Son.*

"Who is the liar except the one denying that Jesus is the Christ?" Here John names the core lie. The false teachers denied that the man Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the eternal Son of God.

Some of them seem to have taught that "the Christ" was a spirit that came on the man Jesus for a while and then left Him before the cross. An early church writer named Irenaeus tells of a teacher in Ephesus named Cerinthus who taught something like that. We cannot be sure he is the exact person John had in mind, but his teaching fits what John is fighting.

"This is the antichrist, the one denying the Father and the Son." To reject the Son is to reject the Father who sent Him.

2:23 *Everyone denying the Son does not have the Father either; the one confessing the Son has the Father also.*

"Everyone denying the Son does not have the Father either." John closes every door to the idea that we can have God without Jesus. Then he says the same truth from the other side: "the one

confessing the Son has the Father also." Whoever confesses Jesus as the Son is not shut out from God. He has the Father too.

Many people today say they believe in God but not that Jesus is God's Son. Some religions honor Jesus as a prophet or a good teacher but deny He is the Son of God. John says plainly that whoever denies the Son "does not have the Father." Jesus said the same thing: no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).

This is not narrow-mindedness. It is the truth. The Father has made Himself known in His Son, and there is no other way to Him.

2:24 *You therefore, what you heard from **the** beginning, let it abide in you. If what you heard from **the** beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.*

"You therefore, what you heard from the beginning, let it abide in you." Here is John's answer to false teaching: hold on to the original message. Do not trade it in for something new.

"From the beginning" here means from the beginning of their faith, the gospel the apostles first preached to them. The truth about Jesus does not change with the times.

And look at the promise. "If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father." When the truth lives in us, we live in God. Staying close to sound teaching is not dry religion. It keeps us close to God Himself.

2:25 *And this is the promise which He Himself promised us: the eternal life.*

"And this is the promise which He Himself promised us: the eternal life." In the middle of all these warnings, John stops to remind them what is at stake. It is eternal life.

Jesus made this promise again and again (John 3:16; 10:28; 17:2-3). Eternal life is not just life that goes on forever. It is the life of God Himself, knowing the Father and the Son, starting now and going on forever.

The false teachers offered something that sounded deeper. But nothing they offered could match this. Why trade God's promise of eternal life for a teacher's clever ideas? Hold on to the promise.

2:26 *These things I have written to you concerning those deceiving you.*

"These things I have written to you concerning those deceiving you." John names what is going on. These teachers were not just mistaken. They were "deceiving," trying to lead believers astray.

The word means to cause someone to wander off the path. The false teachers were active. They were working on John's readers, trying to pull them away.

That is still true. Deception rarely announces itself. It usually sounds spiritual, smart, and kind. That is why John spends so much of this letter on how to tell truth from error. Believers need to be alert, not suspicious of everyone, but anchored in the truth so that they recognize when someone is leading them away from it.

2:27 *And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.*

"And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone teach you." Does this mean Christians do not need Bible teachers? No. God gave teachers to the church (Ephesians 4:11), and John himself is teaching in this very letter.

In context, John means that they did not need the false teachers or any new revelation to add to what they had. The Holy Spirit who lives in them "teaches you concerning all things" and "is true and is not a lie." The Spirit always points to Jesus and agrees with the Word He inspired.

So the answer is the same: "you will abide in Him." The Spirit keeps us in Christ.

2:28 *And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He is manifested we may have boldness and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.*

"And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He is manifested we may have boldness and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." Here John looks ahead to the return of Christ. The word for "coming" is parousia, which means His arrival or presence.

I believe this points to the moment Jesus comes for His church, before the Tribulation, when the dead in Christ rise and we who are alive are caught up to meet Him (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; John 14:1-3). After that, every believer will stand before the judgment seat of Christ, not to be judged for salvation, but to receive rewards (2 Corinthians 5:10).

John wants us ready. He wants us to have "boldness," confidence, when we see Him, not to shrink back in shame because we were living for ourselves. Abiding in Him now is how we get ready for then.

2:29 *If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness has been begotten of Him.*

"If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness has been begotten of Him." Here John brings in an idea he will develop in the next chapter: being born of God.

To be "begotten of Him" means to be born of Him, to have God as your Father. And children share their father's nature. If God is righteous, then His children will practice righteousness.

Notice the order. Doing right does not make us God's children. Being born of God makes us start doing right. Jesus told Nicodemus that we must be born again (John 3:3-7). Here John shows us one of the signs that it has happened. A new birth always shows up in a new life.

Summary

John writes so that his little children will not sin, and if they do, they have Jesus Christ the Righteous One as their Advocate with the Father and the propitiation for their sins and for the whole world. The one who truly knows Jesus keeps His commandments and walks as He walked. The old command to love is also new, because the true light is already shining, and anyone who hates his brother is still in the dark. John assures his readers that their sins are forgiven, that they know the Father, and that they have overcome the evil one. He warns them not to love the world, which is passing away. It is the last hour. The Antichrist is coming, and many antichrists have already gone out, denying that Jesus is the Christ and so denying the Father too. Believers are to hold to what they heard from the beginning, trust the anointing of the Spirit, and abide in Christ, so that they will have boldness and not be ashamed at His coming.

Study Questions

1. What is an Advocate, and why is Jesus the perfect one for us? (2:1)

2. What does propitiation mean? (2:2)

3. According to John, how can we know that we have come to know Jesus? (2:3-6)

4. How can the command to love be both old and new? (2:7-8)

5. What does John say about the person who hates his brother? (2:9-11)

6. What are the three things in the world that John warns about, and why should we not love the world? (2:15-17)

7. Who is the antichrist, and what were the many antichrists denying? (2:18, 22)

8. What did the leaving of the false teachers show about them? (2:19)

9. What would it take for you to have boldness and not be ashamed if Jesus came today? (2:28)

10. Which part of "the world" pulls hardest at you right now, and what step can you take this week to love God more than it?

1 John 3: Children of God

Scripture

3:1-10 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we may be called children of God! Because of this the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we will be. But we know that when He is revealed, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was revealed so that He might take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. Everyone who abides in Him does not sin; everyone who sins has not seen Him, nor has he known Him. Little children, let no one lead you astray; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. The one who practices sin is of the devil, because the devil sins from ***the*** beginning. For this ***purpose*** the Son of God was revealed, so that He might destroy the works of the devil. Everyone who has been born of God does not practice sin, because His seed abides in him; and he is not able to sin, because he has been born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: everyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, and ***neither is*** the one who does not love his brother.

3:11-24 For this is the message that you heard from ***the*** beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain ***who*** was of the evil ***one*** and slaughtered his brother. And because of what did he slaughter him? Because his works were evil, but those of his brother ***were*** righteous. Do not marvel, my brothers, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. The one who does not love the brother abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we have known the love ***of God***, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down ***our*** lives for the brothers. But whoever has the goods of the world and sees his brother having need and shuts his compassion from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and before Him we will assure our hearts, that if our heart condemns ***us***, God is greater than our heart and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God, and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the ***things*** pleasing before Him. And this is His commandment, that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as He gave ***the*** commandment to us. And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given to us.

Preview

John bursts out in wonder: "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we may be called children of God!" We are His children now, and when Jesus is revealed we will be like Him, because we will see Him as He is. Everyone who has that hope keeps himself pure. Then John draws a hard line. The one who practices sin is of the devil, and the one born of God does not

practice sin, because God's seed abides in him. Jesus came to take away sins and to destroy the works of the devil.

In the second half John turns again to love. Cain hated and killed his brother. Believers are not to be like him. We know we have passed from death to life because we love the brothers. Jesus showed us what love is when He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for each other, in deed and in truth, not only in words. When our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts. His command is simple: believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another.

Study

3:1 *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we may be called children of God! Because of this the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.*

"See what kind of love the Father has given to us." John wants us to stop and look. The words "what kind of" carry a sense of surprise, as if he were saying, where did a love like this come from? It is not like any love we know.

God's love has made us His "children." He did not only forgive us and let us stand outside the house. He brought us in and gave us His name. Paul says God adopted us as sons (Ephesians 1:5). Here John says we are born into His family.

"The world does not know us, because it did not know Him." Do not be surprised when the world does not understand you. It did not understand Jesus either.

3:2 *Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we will be. But we know that when He is revealed, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.*

"Beloved, now we are children of God." Not someday. Now. That is our standing today, settled and sure.

"And it has not yet been revealed what we will be." There is more to come. We do not know every detail of what our future bodies and lives will be like. "But we know that when He is revealed, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is."

I believe this looks ahead to the rapture, when Jesus comes for His church and changes our bodies in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; Philippians 3:20-21). We will have bodies like His resurrection body, free from sin and death. Seeing Him will change us. Think about that the next time you feel discouraged with yourself. God is not finished with you.

3:3 *And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*

"And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." Here is what the hope of Christ's coming does for us now. It makes us want to be clean.

Biblical hope is not wishful thinking. It is a sure expectation of something God has promised. And that hope changes how we live. If you knew an important guest was coming to your house, you would clean up before he arrived. If we really believe Jesus could come at any moment, we will want Him to find us living for Him.

"Purifies himself" does not mean we save ourselves. It means we take part in what God is doing in us, turning away from sin and pursuing holiness, with Jesus as our standard.

3:4 *Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.*

"Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness." John defines sin plainly. Sin is not just making mistakes or falling short of our potential. It is lawlessness: rebellion against God, living as if His law did not apply to us.

The false teachers may have treated sin lightly, as though it did not really matter to a spiritual person. John says sin matters a great deal. It is setting ourselves against God.

Notice the word "practices." It is in the present tense in Greek, and it means to keep on doing something as a way of life. That word will be the key to understanding the verses that follow.

3:5 *And you know that He was revealed so that He might take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.*

"And you know that He was revealed so that He might take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin." Why did Jesus come into the world? John gives two answers in this chapter. Here is the first: to take away our sins.

John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and called Him the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Jesus took away our sins by bearing them on the cross. He could do that only because "in Him there is no sin." A sinner cannot pay for another sinner's debt. Only a spotless sacrifice could take our place (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22-24).

If Jesus came to take sin away, how could His people be comfortable living in it?

3:6 *Everyone who abides in Him does not sin; everyone who sins has not seen Him, nor has he known Him.*

"Everyone who abides in Him does not sin; everyone who sins has not seen Him, nor has he known Him." This verse, with verse 9, is one of the hardest in the letter. John already told us that anyone who says he has no sin is deceiving himself (1:8). So what does he mean here?

Bible teachers give several answers. The most common reading looks at the Greek present tense, which often means ongoing action: the one who abides in Christ does not keep on sinning as a settled habit of life. Others say John is describing the new nature in the believer, which does not sin, even though the old nature still does. Others think John has a certain kind of sin in mind, the open lawlessness the false teachers excused. All of these views reject the idea that a Christian can reach sinless perfection in this life, since 1:8-10 rules that out.

3:7 *Little children, let no one lead you astray; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.*

"Little children, let no one lead you astray." John can see the danger. Someone was telling these believers that you can be righteous without living righteously. John says do not be fooled.

"The one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous." This does not mean doing right makes you righteous before God. We are made right with God by faith in Christ (Romans 3:22-24). John's point is that real righteousness shows. A good tree bears good fruit (Matthew 7:17-18).

Words and claims are easy. A life is harder to fake. If someone says he is right with God and lives like the devil, John says believe the life, not the words.

3:8 *The one who practices sin is of the devil, because the devil sins from* ***the*** *beginning. For this* ***purpose*** *the Son of God was revealed, so that He might destroy the works of the devil.*

"The one who practices sin is of the devil, because the devil sins from the beginning." The devil has been sinning since his first rebellion, and he has never stopped. A person whose life is marked by ongoing sin is showing the family likeness of the devil, not of God.

Then John gives the second reason Jesus came: "For this purpose the Son of God was revealed, so that He might destroy the works of the devil." The works of the devil are sin, lies, death, and bondage. Jesus came to break all of it. At the cross He defeated Satan (Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14-15). One day He will throw him into the lake of fire for good (Revelation 20:10). Why would a child of God keep doing the very works that Jesus came to destroy?

3:9 *Everyone who has been born of God does not practice sin, because His seed abides in him; and he is not able to sin, because he has been born of God.*

"Everyone who has been born of God does not practice sin, because His seed abides in him." The word for "seed" is sperma, which points to the new life God plants in us when we are born again. Peter says we were born again of seed that cannot perish, through the living Word of God (1 Peter 1:23).

"And he is not able to sin, because he has been born of God." This is the same hard saying as verse 6, and the same readings apply. The most common view is that the believer cannot go on sinning as the settled pattern of his life, because God's life in him will not let him rest in it. A real child of God who falls into sin will be miserable there. God's seed in him fights it.

That is a comfort as well as a warning. If you hate your sin and long to be free of it, that is a sign of God's life in you.

3:10 *By this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: everyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, and* ***neither is*** *the one who does not love his brother.*

"By this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest." John says there are only two families. Every person belongs to one or the other.

How can you tell them apart? John gives two marks. The first is righteousness: "everyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God." The second is love: "neither is the one who does not love his brother."

John ties right living and love together. Some people are strict about right and wrong but cold toward others. Some people are warm and loving but do not care about holiness. John says a child of God has both. This verse also opens the second half of the chapter, which is all about love.

3:11 *For this is the message that you heard from* ***the*** *beginning, that we should love one another,*

"For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." Once again John takes them back to the start. This is not new teaching. It is what Jesus taught from the beginning (John 13:34-35; 15:12).

The word for love throughout this letter is agape. It is not a feeling that comes and goes. It is a choice to seek the good of another person, even at cost to ourselves. God's love for us is that kind of love.

"One another" means fellow believers. That is often the hardest place to love, because we know each other's faults up close. But Jesus said the world would know we are His disciples by our love for each other.

3:12 *not as Cain* ***who*** *was of the evil* ***one*** *and slaughtered his brother. And because of what did he slaughter him? Because his works were evil, but those of his brother* ***were*** *righteous.*

"Not as Cain who was of the evil one and slaughtered his brother." John goes back to the first murder in the Bible (Genesis 4:1-8). Cain was the first son of Adam and Eve, and he killed his own brother Abel.

Why? "Because his works were evil, but those of his brother were righteous." God accepted Abel's offering and did not accept Cain's. Instead of turning to God, Cain turned on his brother. His hatred was rooted in jealousy and in his own guilt. A good life can make an evil person angry because it shows up what he is.

John says Cain was "of the evil one." His murder showed which family he belonged to.

Old Testament links: Genesis 4:8 (alluded to)

3:13 *Do not marvel, my brothers, if the world hates you.*

"Do not marvel, my brothers, if the world hates you." To marvel means to be surprised or amazed. John says do not be surprised.

If Cain hated Abel because Abel was righteous, the world will often resent those who live for God. Jesus warned His disciples that if the world hated Him, it would hate them too (John 15:18-19).

This does not mean we should go looking for trouble or be unkind and then call it persecution. But when we are mocked or pushed aside for following Jesus, we should not be shocked. It has been that way since the beginning. It is part of belonging to Him.

3:14 *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. The one who does not love the brother abides in death.*

"We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers." Here is one of John's tests of assurance. Love for other believers is evidence that we have new life.

Notice the order. We did not pass from death to life because we love. We love because we have passed from death to life. Love is the result, not the cause. Jesus used almost these same words: the one who hears His word and believes "has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24).

"The one who does not love the brother abides in death." A person with no love for God's people is still in the condition he was born in, spiritually dead. Love is one of the clearest signs of spiritual life.

3:15 *Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.*

"Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer." That sounds extreme, until we remember what Jesus said. He taught that anger in the heart is the root of murder (Matthew 5:21-22). Hate is murder in seed form. It wishes the other person were gone. The only thing missing is the act.

"And you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." John is not saying a murderer can never be forgiven. Paul had been part of killing Christians before Jesus saved him. John is saying that a life ruled by hatred is not the life of God. Eternal life and settled hatred cannot live together in the same heart. If there is hatred in us, we need to bring it to the cross.

3:16 *By this we have known the love **of God**, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down **our** lives for the brothers.*

"By this we have known the love of God, that He laid down His life for us." If you want to know what God's love is, look at the cross. That is where God showed it. The One who laid down His life is Jesus, God the Son. Love is not first a feeling. It is Jesus giving up His life for people who did not deserve it.

"And we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers." Here is how it applies to us. The same kind of love should mark His people.

For most of us, that will not mean dying for someone. It will mean giving up our time, our comfort, our money, and our rights for the good of others. Laying down your life happens a little at a time, day after day. But it is still the same kind of love.

3:17 *But whoever has the goods of the world and sees his brother having need and shuts his compassion from him, how does the love of God abide in him?*

"But whoever has the goods of the world and sees his brother having need and shuts his compassion from him, how does the love of God abide in him?" After the big picture of laying down our lives, John gets very practical. Love opens the wallet.

Look at the three steps. A person "has" the means. He "sees" the need. And then he "shuts his compassion." He closes his heart on purpose. John asks how God's love could live in someone like that.

James says the same thing: telling a hungry brother "go in peace" without giving him what he needs is useless (James 2:15-16). Real love sees need and does something about it. It does not look away.

3:18 *My little children, let us not love in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*

"My little children, let us not love in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth." Here is the summary of what John has been saying. Talk is cheap. Love shows up in action.

This does not mean words do not matter. Kind words are part of love. But love that is only words is not love at all. "In deed" means action. "In truth" means sincerely, not for show.

You might ask, how do I know whether my love is real? It is simple. Look at what you do, not just what you say or feel. Who have you helped lately? What have you given up for someone else? Love that never costs anything is probably not the kind John is describing.

3:19-20 *And by this we know that we are of the truth, and before Him we will assure our hearts, that if our heart condemns* ***us****, God is greater than our heart and knows all things.*

"And by this we know that we are of the truth, and before Him we will assure our hearts." When we love in deed and in truth, it gives us assurance before God.

But what about the times we feel condemned? "If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things." Many sincere believers struggle with guilt. Their own hearts accuse them, even after they have confessed and turned from sin.

John's answer is beautiful. God is greater than our feelings. He knows everything, including our failures and the real love and faith He has put in us. Our hearts can be wrong. God never is. When your heart accuses you, take it to the One who knows all things and has already forgiven you in Christ (1:9; 2:1-2).

3:21-22 *Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God, and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the **things** pleasing before Him.*

"Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God." When we walk honestly with God, with nothing hidden, we can come to Him in prayer boldly, like a child to a loving father.

"And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things pleasing before Him." This is not a blank check. John is not saying obedience earns answers. He is saying the person who is living to please God will ask for the things that please God. His prayers line up with God's will (5:14-15).

Jesus said almost the same thing: if we abide in Him and His words abide in us, we can ask what we wish (John 15:7). Prayer flows out of a close walk with Him.

3:23 *And this is His commandment, that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as He gave **the** commandment to us.*

"And this is His commandment." John sums up all the commands in one. And it has two parts. First, "that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ." Second, "love one another, just as He gave the commandment to us."

These two always go together. Faith is aimed up toward Jesus. Love is aimed out toward others. You cannot have one without the other. Faith without love is dead, and love without faith in Christ cannot save.

"The name" of Jesus means everything He is: the Son of God, the Christ, the Savior. To believe in His name is to trust all of who He is.

3:24 *And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given to us.*

"And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him." Here is the two-way abiding Jesus spoke of in John 15:4. We live in Him, and He lives in us.

"And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given to us." This is the first time in the letter John names the Holy Spirit outright, though he has spoken of the anointing (2:20, 27). The Spirit is God's own presence in the believer, and He is the one who gives us assurance (Romans 8:16).

How does the Spirit show He is there? John will answer that in the next chapter. The Spirit always leads us to confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, and He fills us with love.

Summary

The Father has given us such great love that we are called children of God, and that is what we are. When Jesus is revealed we will be like Him, and everyone who has that hope keeps himself pure. Sin is lawlessness, and Jesus came to take away sins and to destroy the works of the devil. The one born of God does not go on practicing sin, because God's seed abides in him, and the children of God and of the devil are known by righteousness and love. We must not be like Cain, who hated and killed his brother. We know we have passed from death to life because we love the brothers, and we have learned what love is from Jesus, who laid down His life for us. Love shows itself in deed and in truth, especially toward a brother in need. When our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts. His command is to believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, and His Spirit in us assures us that He abides in us.

Study Questions

1. What does John want us to see about the Father's love? (3:1)

2. What will happen when Jesus is revealed, and how should that hope change us now? (3:2-3)

3. How does John define sin? (3:4)

4. What two reasons does John give for why Jesus came? (3:5, 8)

5. How do you understand "does not sin" in 3:6 and 3:9, in light of 1:8-10?

6. What two marks show who is a child of God? (3:10)

7. Why did Cain kill his brother, and what does John say about hate? (3:12, 15)

8. How does John define love, and what does it look like in practice? (3:16-18)

9. When your heart condemns you, what does 3:20 tell you to remember?

10. Is there a brother or sister in need you have seen but looked away from? What could you do for them in deed and in truth this week?

1 John 4: God Is Love

Scripture

4:1-6 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits ***to see*** whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ having come in ***the*** flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus Christ having come in ***the*** flesh is not of God. And this is the ***spirit*** of the antichrist, which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because greater is the ***One*** in you than the ***one*** in the world. They are of the world; because of this they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are of God; the one who knows God listens to us; he who is not of God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

4:7-21 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. The one who does not love has not known God, because God is love. By this the love of God was revealed among us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son ***as*** a propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given to us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son ***as*** Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have known and have believed the love that God has in us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God ***abides*** in him. By this love has been perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment, because just as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has punishment, and the one who fears has not been perfected in love. We love Him because He first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how is he able to love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

Preview

John warns his readers not to believe every spirit. Many false prophets have gone out into the world, and every message must be tested. The test is what a teacher says about Jesus. Every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ having come in the flesh is of God. Every spirit that denies it is the spirit of the antichrist. Believers do not need to be afraid, because greater is the One in them than the one in the world.

Then John writes some of the most loved words in the Bible. "God is love." Love comes from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God. God showed His love by sending His only begotten Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Since God loved us that much, we ought to love one another. Perfect love casts out fear, so we can have confidence in the day of judgment. We love Him because He first loved us, and anyone who says he loves God but hates his brother is a liar.

Study

4:1 *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits **to see** whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God." Behind every teacher and every message is a spirit, either the Holy Spirit or a spirit of error (4:6). John tells us not to swallow everything we hear just because it sounds spiritual.

To "test" means to examine something to see if it is real, the way a jeweler tests gold. The believers in Berea did this with Paul himself, checking the Scriptures daily to see whether what he said was so (Acts 17:11).

Why? "Because many false prophets have gone out into the world." That was true then, and it is true now. Testing is not a lack of faith. It is obedience. A believer who believes everything is not open-minded. He is unprotected.

4:2 *By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ having come in **the** flesh is of God,*

"By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ having come in the flesh is of God." Here is the test. What does this teacher say about Jesus?

In John's day the false teachers said Jesus only seemed to have a body. This idea was later called Docetism, from a Greek word, dokeo, that means to seem. They thought the physical world was evil, so God could never truly take on flesh. John says the Spirit of God always confesses that Jesus Christ came "in the flesh." He was fully God and fully man.

To "confess" here means more than to say the words. It means to openly agree and stand on it. The true Spirit always points to the real Jesus, born, crucified, and risen in a real body.

4:3 *and every spirit that does not confess Jesus Christ having come in **the** flesh is not of God. And this is the **spirit** of the antichrist, which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.*

"And every spirit that does not confess Jesus Christ having come in the flesh is not of God." The test works both ways. Any teaching that denies the real Jesus, God come in the flesh, does not come from God.

"And this is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world." John links these teachers to the Antichrist he spoke of in 2:18. The final Antichrist has not yet come. He will be revealed after the church is taken up, during the Tribulation (2 Thessalonians 2:3-8). But the spirit behind him is already at work, and it shows itself every time someone denies who Jesus is.

We should apply this test today. A group may use the name of Jesus, but if it denies that He is God come in the flesh, it is not of God.

4:4 *You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because greater is the **One** in you than the **one** in the world.*

"You are of God, little children, and have overcome them." After the warning comes comfort. John's readers had not been swept away by the false teachers. They had held on to the truth.

How? "Because greater is the One in you than the one in the world." The One in you is the Holy Spirit. The one in the world is Satan, whom Jesus called "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31). Satan is real and strong, but he is not equal to God. He is a created being, and the Spirit of God is far greater.

This is one of the most encouraging verses in the Bible for a believer facing spiritual attack. You do not win by your own strength. You win because God lives in you.

Old Testament links: 2 Chronicles 32:7 (alluded to)

4:5 *They are of the world; because of this they speak from the world, and the world listens to them.*

"They are of the world; because of this they speak from the world, and the world listens to them." False teachers often draw a crowd. Why? Because they speak the world's language. They tell people what they want to hear.

Paul warned Timothy that a time would come when people would not put up with sound teaching, but would gather teachers to tickle their ears (2 Timothy 4:3-4). A message that never calls us to repent, that promises comfort with no cross, will always be popular.

So a big crowd does not prove a message is true. The question is not how many people listen, but whether the message agrees with the truth about Jesus.

4:6 *We are of God; the one who knows God listens to us; he who is not of God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.*

"We are of God; the one who knows God listens to us." The "we" here most likely means John and the other apostles, the eyewitnesses who taught with Christ's authority. People who know God listen to the apostles' teaching, which we now have in the New Testament.

"He who is not of God does not listen to us." A person's response to the apostles' message shows where he stands.

"By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error." This is our second test. The first was what a teacher says about Jesus (4:2). The second is whether a teaching agrees with the Word the apostles gave us. Any message that contradicts Scripture comes from the spirit of error, no matter who brings it.

4:7 *Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.*

"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God." John turns from testing teachers to loving one another. Truth and love belong together.

Love "is of God." It comes from Him. Every bit of real love in the world has its source in God. That is why "everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God." John is talking about the kind of love that comes from new life in Christ, agape love, the self-giving love that God Himself shows.

A child takes after his father. When God gives us new birth, He gives us His nature, and His nature is love. A believer who loves is showing the family likeness.

4:8 *The one who does not love has not known God, because God is love.*

"The one who does not love has not known God, because God is love." Here are three of the greatest words ever written. God is love.

John does not only say that God loves, though He does. He says love is what God is. Everything God does is loving, even His judgment, because He is holy love. God is also light (1:5), so His love is never soft on sin. It is pure and true.

This does not mean love is God, as if any feeling we call love were divine. The Bible defines love by God, not God by our ideas of love. And John's point is plain. If God is love, then a person with no love has never really known Him.

4:9 *By this the love of God was revealed among us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.*

"By this the love of God was revealed among us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him." How do we know God loves us? Not by looking at our circumstances. By looking at what He did.

"Only begotten" means one of a kind, unique. Jesus is God's Son in a way no one else is. And God sent Him. This echoes John 3:16, that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

Why did He send Him? "So that we might live through Him." We were dead in sin. God sent His Son so we could have life. When you wonder whether God loves you, look at the manger and the cross.

4:10 *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son **as** a propitiation for our sins.*

"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as a propitiation for our sins." Love did not start with us. We did not love God first and then He responded. He loved us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8).

John uses the word "propitiation" again, as in 2:2. It means the sacrifice that satisfies God's just anger against sin and turns it away. Here is the wonder of it. God's own love provided the sacrifice that His own justice required. He did not wait for us to find a way to Him. He sent His Son to be the way.

That is the measure of love. Not a feeling, but a gift that cost the Father His Son.

4:11 *Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." Here is the application. Since God has loved us so much, we owe the same kind of love to each other.

The word "if" does not mean John doubts it. It means "since." God did love us this way. So we ought to love.

Think about the people in your church who are hard to love. God loved you when you were hard to love. He did not wait for you to clean up or to deserve it. That is the love He calls us to show. It is not easy, but it is not optional. When we struggle, the answer is to look again at how much God loved us.

4:12 *No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.*

"No one has ever seen God." John said the same thing in his Gospel: no one has seen God at any time, but the only begotten Son has made Him known (John 1:18).

But here John says something remarkable. "If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us." God cannot be seen with our eyes, but His love can be seen in His people. When believers love one another, the invisible God becomes visible in a way.

"Perfected" means brought to its goal. God's love reached its goal in us when it moves through us to others. His love is not meant to stop with us. It is meant to flow.

4:13 *By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given to us of His Spirit.*

"By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given to us of His Spirit." John returns to the gift of the Holy Spirit, as in 3:24.

How do we know we belong to God? One answer is the presence of His Spirit in us. Every believer receives the Spirit when he believes (Romans 8:9; Ephesians 1:13). The Spirit's work in us shows up in faith in Christ, love for others, a hunger for God's Word, and a growing hatred of sin.

John keeps giving us these tests not to make us anxious, but to give us confidence. If the Spirit is at work in you, you can know you abide in God.

4:14 *And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son **as** Savior of the world.*

"And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world." Once again John speaks as an eyewitness. He saw Jesus. He testifies to what he saw.

And what is the truth he witnessed? The Father sent the Son as "Savior of the world." The Samaritans in John 4:42 used the same title for Jesus. He is not the Savior of one nation or one class of people. He came for the world.

The word Savior means one who rescues. We needed rescuing from sin, death, and judgment, and we could not save ourselves. The Father sent His Son to do what we could not.

4:15 *Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.*

"Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God." Here is another mark of real faith: confessing Jesus as the Son of God.

Again, to confess means more than to say the words. Even demons know who Jesus is (James 2:19). To confess Him is to openly agree with God about who Jesus is and to put your trust in Him. Paul says that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9).

"Whoever" is a wide door. Anyone at all who truly confesses Jesus as the Son of God has God living in him.

4:16 *And we have known and have believed the love that God has in us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God **abides** in him.*

"And we have known and have believed the love that God has in us." John says we have both known and believed God's love. We know it because God showed it at the cross. We believe it because we trust what He says, even when we do not feel it.

"God is love." John says it a second time, as if to make sure we do not miss it.

"And the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." To abide in love is to keep living in God's love, receiving it and passing it on. It is not a single moment of feeling loved. It is a place we live. When we stay in His love, we stay close to Him.

4:17 *By this love has been perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment, because just as He is, so also are we in this world.*

"By this love has been perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment." Most people think of the day of judgment with fear. John says believers can face it with confidence.

Why? "Because just as He is, so also are we in this world." God sees us in His Son. Jesus is accepted by the Father, and we are accepted in Him. Jesus already took the judgment for our sins, so there is no condemnation left for those who are in Him (Romans 8:1).

For believers, the judgment ahead is the judgment seat of Christ, where our lives will be reviewed for rewards, not for salvation (2 Corinthians 5:10). Love that has done its work in us gives us boldness, not dread, when we think about that day.

4:18 *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has punishment, and the one who fears has not been perfected in love.*

"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has punishment." Fear and love push against each other. The more we understand God's love, the less we are afraid of Him.

This is not the healthy fear of the Lord, which is reverence and awe (Proverbs 9:10). John is talking about the fear of punishment, the terror of a criminal before a judge.

"The one who fears has not been perfected in love." Many believers live with a low-grade dread that God is angry with them. If that is you, the answer is not to try harder. The answer is to look at the cross and let God's love sink in. Jesus took the punishment. There is none left for you to fear.

4:19 *We love Him because He first loved us.*

"We love Him because He first loved us." This is one of the shortest verses in the letter, and one of the clearest. Our love for God is always a response. It never comes first.

That keeps us humble. We cannot boast about our love for God, because it is His love that started it. It also gives us hope. If your love for God feels small or cold, do not try to work it up by your own effort. Go back to His love for you. Read again about the cross. Think about what He has forgiven you. The more you see how much He has loved you, the more your love for Him will grow.

4:20 *If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how is he able to love God whom he has not seen?*

"If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar." John does not soften his words. A claim to love God is a lie if it comes with hatred for a brother.

Then he gives the reason. "The one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how is he able to love God whom he has not seen?" Loving someone we can see is easier, in a sense, than loving someone we cannot see. If we fail the easier test, how can we claim to pass the harder one?

Our love for God is tested in the kitchen, at the office, and in the church parking lot. The way we treat people shows what is really in our hearts toward Him.

4:21 *And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.*

"And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also." John ends the chapter with a command, not a suggestion. Jesus joined the two greatest commandments together: love God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:29-31).

Love for God and love for His people cannot be separated. If we try, both die.

This is where the chapter has been leading. God is love. He showed it by sending His Son. We have received that love. Now we pass it on. Who is the brother or sister God is calling you to love right now?

Summary

John warns believers not to believe every spirit, but to test them, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. Every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ having come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that denies it is the spirit of the antichrist, already at work in the world. Believers have overcome, because the One in them is greater than the one in the world, and those who know God listen to the apostles' teaching. Love is of God, because God is love. He showed it by sending His only begotten Son to be the propitiation for our sins, so that we might live through Him. Since God so loved us, we ought to love one another, and when we do, His love is perfected in us. Perfect love casts out fear and gives us confidence in the day of judgment. We love Him because He first loved us, and anyone who claims to love God while hating his brother is a liar.

Study Questions

1. Why does John tell us to test the spirits? (4:1)

2. What is the test John gives for whether a spirit is of God? (4:2-3)

3. Who is "the One in you," and who is "the one in the world"? (4:4)

4. Why do false teachers often draw a crowd? (4:5)

5. What does it mean that "God is love," and how does that fit with "God is light"? (4:8; 1:5)

6. How did God show His love for us? (4:9-10)

7. What kind of fear does perfect love cast out? (4:17-18)

8. Why does John say a person who hates his brother cannot love God? (4:20)

9. Is there any teaching you have heard lately that you need to test against what Scripture says about Jesus?

10. Do you live with a fear that God is angry with you? How do 4:10 and 4:18-19 speak to that fear?

1 John 5: That You May Know You Have Eternal Life

Scripture

5:1-12 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the ***One*** who begot also loves the ***one*** who has been begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. For everything that has been born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world: our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? This is the ***One*** who came through water and blood, Jesus the Christ; not by the water only, but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the ***One*** who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three who testify in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three who testify on earth: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement as one. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God which He has testified concerning His Son. The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has testified concerning His Son. And this is the testimony, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. The one who has the Son has life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

5:13-21 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, and so that you may believe in the name of the Son of God. And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked from Him. If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin not to death, he will ask, and He will give him life, for those who sin not to death. There is a sin to death; I do not say that he should make request concerning that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not to death. We know that everyone who has been born of God does not sin; but the one who was born of God keeps himself, and the evil ***one*** does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the evil ***one***. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know the ***One who is*** true; and we are in the ***One who is*** true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and the eternal life. Little children, guard yourselves from idols. Amen.

Preview

John ties his three tests together. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone born of God loves God's children and keeps His commandments, which are not burdensome. Our faith is the victory that overcomes the world. Then John gives the testimony about Jesus. He came through water and blood. The Spirit testifies. In the SLB, which follows the Received Text, John also names three who testify in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and three who testify on earth. God's testimony is that He has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. The one who has the Son has life.

In the second half John tells us why he wrote: so that we may know that we have eternal life. That knowledge gives us confidence in prayer. John speaks about praying for a brother who sins, and about a sin to death. He closes with three things "we know": the one born of God does not keep on sinning, we are of God while the whole world lies in the evil one, and the Son of God has come so that we may know the true God. His last words are a father's warning: "Little children, guard yourselves from idols."

Study

5:1 *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the **One** who begot also loves the **one** who has been begotten of Him.*

"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God." Notice the tense. Believing is the evidence that new birth has already happened. God gives the new life, and faith is the first sign of it.

"The Christ" means the Messiah, God's promised anointed King. To believe that Jesus is the Christ is to believe that the man Jesus of Nazareth is the very Son of God whom the prophets promised. That is exactly what the false teachers denied (2:22).

Then John adds, "everyone who loves the One who begot also loves the one who has been begotten of Him." If you love a father, you will love his children. If we love God, we will love everyone else He has brought into His family. Faith and love go together again.

5:2 *By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.*

"By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments." In 4:20 John said our love for God is shown by loving our brothers. Here he turns it around. Our love for God's children is shown to be real when we love God and obey Him.

Why does that matter? Because real love for people is not just going along with whatever they want. Sometimes the world calls something love that God calls sin. Love for God's children never asks us to disobey God.

The two kinds of love check each other. Love for God without love for people is empty. Love for people without love for God loses its way.

5:3 *For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.*

"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments." Love for God is not mainly a feeling. It shows up in obedience. Jesus said the same: if you love Me, you will keep My commandments (John 14:15).

"And His commandments are not burdensome." That word means heavy or crushing. Some people think of God's commands as a heavy weight that makes life miserable. John says they are not.

Why not? Because the One who gives the commands also gives new life and the Spirit to help us keep them. Jesus said His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11:30). Sin is the real burden. God's commands are the path to freedom.

5:4 *For everything that has been born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world: our faith.*

"For everything that has been born of God overcomes the world." To overcome means to win the victory. The world, with its lusts, pride, and pressure (2:16), is a powerful enemy. But God's life in us is stronger.

"And this is the victory that has overcome the world: our faith." The victory is not our willpower, our religion, or our good works. It is our faith, trusting in Jesus. Faith joins us to Christ, and Christ has already overcome the world (John 16:33).

Notice the past tense, "has overcome." The victory has already been won at the cross and the empty tomb. Our faith takes hold of that victory and lives in it day by day.

5:5 *Who is the one who overcomes the world, except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*

"Who is the one who overcomes the world, except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" John asks a question to make his point unmistakable. The only overcomer is the believer.

Many people try to overcome the world in other ways. Some try to escape it. Some try to fight it with rules. Some try to rise above it by thinking deeper thoughts, as the false teachers claimed to do. None of these work.

Only faith in Jesus as "the Son of God" brings victory. Not faith in faith, and not faith in a vague higher power, but faith in the real Jesus, who is God's own Son. Everything rests on who He is.

5:6 *This is the **One** who came through water and blood, Jesus the Christ; not by the water only, but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the **One** who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.*

"This is the One who came through water and blood, Jesus the Christ." What do "water and blood" mean? The most common view is that the water points to Jesus' baptism, where the Father and the Spirit testified that He is the Son (Matthew 3:16-17), and the blood points to His death on the cross. Others connect the words to the water and blood that came from His side (John 19:34).

"Not by the water only, but by the water and the blood." This answers the false teaching that "the Christ" came on Jesus at His baptism and left before the cross. John says no. The same Jesus Christ was baptized and died. The Son of God really shed His blood for us.

"And the Spirit is the One who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth."

5:7-8 *For there are three who testify in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three who testify on earth: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement as one.*

In the SLB these verses read: "For there are three who testify in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three who testify on earth: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement as one."

Taken as printed, the words set two groups of witnesses side by side. In heaven, the Father, the Word (John's name for Jesus, John 1:1), and the Holy Spirit testify, and they are one. On earth, the Spirit, the water, and the blood agree in their witness to Jesus. The Law required two or three witnesses to settle a matter (Deuteronomy 19:15). John gives three, and then three more.

I need to be plain with you about these verses. The words about the three in heaven, often called the Comma Johanneum (a "comma" here means a short clause), are in the SLB because it follows the Received Text, the Greek New Testament printed in the 1500s that the King James Version was made from. But they are missing from almost all Greek copies of 1 John made before the late Middle Ages. They show up first in some Latin writings and Latin Bibles, and only in a handful of late Greek copies. Erasmus added them to his Greek New Testament in its third edition in 1522, and from there they came into the King James Version. Most modern Bibles leave them out or put them in a footnote.

This does not touch the doctrine of the Trinity. The Bible teaches plainly that there is one God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in many other places, such as Matthew 28:19 and 2 Corinthians 13:14. No teaching of the faith rests on these words alone. Without them, verse 8 still names three witnesses on earth who agree.

5:9 *If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God which He has testified concerning His Son.*

"If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater." We trust human witnesses all the time. A court decides cases on what people saw. We believe what history books tell us about people we never met. If we accept the word of men, how much more should we accept the word of God?

"For this is the testimony of God which He has testified concerning His Son." God Himself has spoken about Jesus. He spoke from heaven at His baptism and on the mountain (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). He spoke through the prophets. He raised Jesus from the dead.

To refuse to believe in Jesus is not just to doubt a man. It is to refuse the testimony of God Himself.

5:10 *The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has testified concerning His Son.*

"The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself." When we believe, God's witness to Jesus becomes our own, written in our hearts by the Spirit (Romans 8:16). It is no longer just something we heard about. It is something we know.

"The one who does not believe God has made Him a liar." That is a sobering way to put it. Unbelief is not a neutral position. If God has testified about His Son and a person refuses to believe it, he is calling God a liar.

John is not trying to be harsh. He is showing how serious unbelief is. It is not a lack of information. It is a refusal to take God at His word.

5:11 *And this is the testimony, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.*

"And this is the testimony, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." Here is the heart of what God says.

Notice that eternal life is a gift. God "has given" it. We do not earn it, and we do not work our way up to it. Paul said the same: the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

And notice where the life is found: "in His Son." Eternal life is not found in a church, a set of rules, a feeling, or a philosophy. It is found in a Person. If you want the life, you must have the Son. You cannot have one without the other.

5:12 *The one who has the Son has life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have life.*

"The one who has the Son has life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have life." This may be the simplest statement of the gospel in the Bible. There are only two kinds of people. Those who have the Son, and those who do not.

To "have" the Son is to receive Him by faith (John 1:12). It is not just knowing about Him. It is trusting Him and belonging to Him.

This verse cuts through all the confusion. The question that matters most is not how good you have been, how often you go to church, or what your parents believed. The question is this: do you have the Son? If you do, you have life. If you do not, you do not.

5:13 *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, and so that you may believe in the name of the Son of God.*

"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." Here John tells us the purpose of his whole letter. His Gospel was written so that people would believe (John 20:31). This letter was written so that believers would know.

God does not want His children to live in doubt. You can know that you have eternal life. Not guess, not hope so, but know. That knowledge rests on God's promise, not on our feelings.

John also writes "so that you may believe in the name of the Son of God." Faith does not stop once we are saved. We keep on believing, trusting Him more and more. Assurance and growing faith go hand in hand.

5:14 *And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.*

"And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." Knowing we have eternal life gives us confidence in prayer. We are children speaking to our Father.

But notice the condition: "according to His will." Prayer is not a way to get God to do what we want. It is a way to line up our wants with what He wants. Jesus prayed this way in the garden: not My will, but Yours be done (Luke 22:42).

How do we know God's will? Much of it is plainly written in His Word. When we pray what Scripture says God wants, we can pray with great confidence.

5:15 *And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked from Him.*

"And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked from Him." When we pray according to His will, we can know the answer is settled, even before we see it.

To be "heard" here means more than God noticing our words. It means He grants the request. If God hears us, the request is as good as done, though the answer may come in His time and His way.

That should give us peace. We do not have to worry whether God is listening, or whether we used the right words. If we have asked for what He wants, we can rest. Prayer becomes a place of trust, not anxiety.

5:16 *If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin not to death, he will ask, and He will give him life, for those who sin not to death. There is a sin to death; I do not say that he should make request concerning that.*

"If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin not to death, he will ask, and He will give him life." John gives an example of praying according to God's will. When we see a fellow believer sinning, our first response should be prayer, not gossip.

Then comes a hard saying: "There is a sin to death; I do not say that he should make request concerning that." What is the sin to death? Bible teachers hold several views. Some believe it is a sin by a believer that God judges with physical death, as with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11)

and some in Corinth who abused the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:30). Others believe it is the settled rejection of Christ by those who, like the false teachers, went out and denied the Son (2:19, 22). Others link it to the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:28-29). John does not name it, and we should be careful not to be more certain than he is.

5:17 *All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not to death.*

"All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not to death." John does not want anyone to take sin lightly. Every wrong thing is sin. There is no such thing as a harmless sin.

But he also does not want believers to live in terror. Most sin is "not to death." That means there is hope. We can pray for one another. God gives life and restores His people.

If you are afraid you have committed the sin to death, the very fact that you are troubled about it and want to be right with God is a good sign. Those who have hardened their hearts against Christ do not usually worry about it. Come to Him. He has promised not to cast out anyone who comes (John 6:37).

5:18 *We know that everyone who has been born of God does not sin; but the one who was born of God keeps himself, and the evil **one** does not touch him.*

"We know that everyone who has been born of God does not sin." This is the first of three "we know" statements that close the letter. John repeats what he said in 3:6 and 3:9. The one born of God does not go on in sin as a way of life.

"But the one who was born of God keeps himself, and the evil one does not touch him." Some Greek copies read this as "keeps him," meaning Jesus, the One born of God, keeps the believer. The SLB follows the reading "keeps himself." Either way, the believer is guarded.

"The evil one does not touch him." Satan can tempt and attack a believer, but he cannot take hold of him and drag him back as his own. We belong to God.

5:19 *We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the evil **one**.*

"We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the evil one." Here is the second "we know." There are two sides, and every person is on one of them. Believers are "of God." The rest of the world "lies in the evil one."

That is a strong picture. The world is lying in Satan's grip, like a child lying in the arms of someone who holds it. Paul calls Satan "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4). This is why the world thinks and acts the way it does.

This should not make us proud. We were once part of that world too. It should make us thankful, and it should move us to pray for and reach out to people still held by the enemy.

5:20 *And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know the* ***One who is*** *true; and we are in the* ***One who is*** *true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and the eternal life.*

"And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know the One who is true." The third "we know." Jesus came, and He opened our minds to know God. We could never have found Him on our own.

"And we are in the One who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ." Being in the Father and being in the Son are one and the same, because the Son is one with the Father (John 10:30).

"This is the true God and the eternal life." Many Bible teachers see this as one of the clearest statements in the Bible that Jesus is God, since the nearest name is "His Son Jesus Christ." Others read "this" as pointing back to the Father, "the One who is true." Either way, John has just said that we are in the Father by being in His Son, and the rest of the letter leaves no doubt that Jesus is God come in the flesh. On the first reading, John, who began the letter speaking of the eternal life that was with the Father (1:2), ends it by calling Jesus the true God and the eternal life.

5:21 *Little children, guard yourselves from idols. Amen.*

"Little children, guard yourselves from idols. Amen." John's last words may seem sudden. Why end with idols?

An idol is anything we put in God's place. In Ephesus, there were real idols, like the great temple of Artemis (Acts 19:23-27). But John has also been warning against a false Jesus. A Jesus who did not come in the flesh, or who is not the true God, is an idol too, a god made by human ideas.

Today our idols may be money, pleasure, success, a person, or even a version of Jesus we have shaped to fit our wants. John's word is the same. Guard yourselves. Keep your heart for the true God, the one revealed in His Son. "Amen" means so be it. Let it be true of us.

Summary

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, loves God's children, and keeps His commandments, which are not burdensome. Our faith in Jesus as the Son of God is the victory that overcomes the world. Jesus came through water and blood, and the Spirit testifies to Him. The SLB, following the Received Text, also names three who testify in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; most older Greek copies do not have these words, but the Trinity is taught plainly elsewhere. God's testimony is that He has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. John wrote so that believers would know they have eternal life. That assurance gives us confidence to pray according to God's will, including for a brother who sins. John closes with three things we know: those born of God do not go on in sin, we are of God while the world lies in the evil one, and Jesus has come so that we may know Him who is true. He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

Study Questions

1. What does John say is true of everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ? (5:1)

2. Why are God's commandments not burdensome? (5:3)

3. What is the victory that overcomes the world? (5:4-5)

4. What does God's testimony say about eternal life? (5:11-12)

5. Why did John write this letter? (5:13)

6. What condition does John give for confidence in prayer? (5:14-15)

7. How should we respond when we see a brother sinning? (5:16)

8. What three things does John say "we know" at the end of the letter? (5:18-20)

9. Do you know that you have eternal life? What does 5:12-13 say you can base that on?

10. What idols compete for your heart today, and how can you guard yourself from them? (5:21)

Overview of 2 John

Second John is the twenty-fourth book of the New Testament. It sits between 1 John and 3 John. It is one of the shortest books in the Bible, short enough to fit on a single sheet of papyrus, the paper of that day. Only 3 John is shorter in the Greek.

The theme of 2 John is walking in truth and love together. John reminds his readers of the command they have had from the beginning, to love one another, and then he warns them about deceivers who deny that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. Love does not mean opening the door to everyone. It means walking in God's commandments and guarding the truth. The key verse is John's warning:

2 John 9 (SLB)

"Everyone who transgresses and does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching of Christ, this ***one*** has both the Father and the Son."

Second John has 1 chapter and 13 verses. This study covers it in one chapter:

- 2 John: Walk in Truth and Love

The letter falls into two parts:

- Walk in truth and love (verses 1-6)
- Guard against deceivers (verses 7-13)

Background of 2 John

Author: The writer calls himself simply "the elder" (verse 1). The early church held that this was John the apostle, the same man who wrote 1 John and the Gospel of John. The words and themes are the same: truth, love, the commandment from the beginning, Jesus Christ coming in the flesh, the antichrist, and joy made full. By the time he wrote, John was an old man and the last living apostle, and the churches would have known who "the elder" was without being told his name.

Who it was written to: John writes "to the elect lady and to her children" (verse 1). Bible teachers hold two main views. Some believe she was a real Christian woman, perhaps one who opened her home to the church, and her children were her family. Others believe "the elect lady" is a way of speaking of a local church, with "her children" as its members and "your elect sister" (verse 13) as John's own church. In favor of the church view, John moves back and forth between "you" in the singular and "you" in the plural, and the commands fit a congregation. In favor of the woman view, the letter reads naturally as a note to a real person. Scripture does not settle it, and the message is the same either way.

When and where it was written: Most date 2 John to about A.D. 85 to 95, written from Ephesus, around the same time as 1 John.

Traveling teachers: In the first century, teachers and missionaries went from town to town and depended on believers to give them food and a place to stay. That was a good thing, but it also opened the door to false teachers. If a church welcomed a teacher into a home where it met, it gave him a platform. John writes to make sure the lady and her children do not help the deceivers spread their error.

Purpose: John writes to encourage the lady and her children to keep walking in truth and love, to warn them about deceivers who deny that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, and to tell them not to welcome such teachers. He also lets them know he hopes to visit soon.

2 John: Walk in Truth and Love

Scripture

1:1-13 The elder, to ***the*** elect lady and to her children, whom I love in truth, and not I only, but also all those who have known the truth, because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy, ***and*** peace will be with you from God ***the*** Father and from ***the*** Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. I rejoiced greatly that I have found ***some*** of your children walking in truth, just as we received commandment from the Father. And now I ask you, lady, not as writing to you a new commandment, but ***the one*** which we have had from ***the*** beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you heard from ***the*** beginning, that you should walk in it. For many deceivers have entered into the world, those who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in flesh; this is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, so that we do not lose the things we have worked for, but receive a full reward. Everyone who transgresses and does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching of Christ, this ***one*** has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into ***your*** house, and do not say to him, "Greetings"; for the one who says to him, "Greetings," shares in his evil works. Having many things to write to you, I did not want ***to do so*** with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and to speak mouth to mouth, so that our joy may be made full. The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen.

Preview

Second John is a short letter, about the length that would fit on one sheet of papyrus. The elder writes to "the elect lady and to her children," whom he loves in truth. He is glad to hear that some of her children are walking in truth, and he reminds her of the command they have had from the beginning: love one another. Love, he says, means walking according to God's commandments.

Then he gives a warning. Many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in the flesh. Believers must watch themselves and abide in the teaching of Christ. If a false teacher comes to them, they are not to receive him into their house or give him a greeting, because that would make them partners in his evil works. The elder closes with the hope of visiting soon and speaking face to face.

Study

1:1 *The elder, to **the** elect lady and to her children, whom I love in truth, and not I only, but also all those who have known the truth,*

"The elder." John does not give his name. He calls himself simply "the elder." An elder is an older man, and also a leader in the church who oversees and shepherds God's people (1 Peter 5:1). Peter, also an apostle, called himself a fellow elder. By this time John was the last of the apostles still living, and the churches would have known exactly who "the elder" was.

He writes "to the elect lady and to her children." Who is she? There are two main views. Some believe she was a real Christian woman, perhaps a widow who hosted a church in her home, and her children were her family. Others believe "the elect lady" is a picture of a local church, and "her children" are its members. The way John switches between "you" in the singular and the plural, and the greeting from "your elect sister" in verse 13, lead many to the church view. Both views fit the message.

"Whom I love in truth, and not I only, but also all those who have known the truth." Truth is the key word of this letter. It appears five times in the first four verses.

1:2 *because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever:*

"Because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever." John loves these believers because of the truth they share. That truth is not just a set of facts. In John's writing, truth is closely tied to Jesus Himself, who said, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

The truth "abides in us." It lives in believers. And it "will be with us forever." Truth does not change with the times, and it does not wear out. What God has said about His Son will be just as true a thousand years from now.

This is the bond that holds believers together. We may come from different backgrounds and have different personalities, but we share the same truth, and that truth makes us family.

1:3 *Grace, mercy, **and** peace will be with you from God **the** Father and from **the** Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.*

"Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love." John's greeting is also a promise. These things "will be" with you, and with every believer who walks in the truth.

Grace is God's favor we did not earn. Mercy is God not giving us the punishment we did deserve. Peace is what comes when grace and mercy have done their work: peace with God and the peace of God.

They come from the Father and from Jesus, "the Son of the Father." John puts them side by side as equals, the same point he made against the false teachers in his first letter. And all of this comes "in truth and love," the two great themes of this letter.

1:4 *I rejoiced greatly that I have found **some** of your children walking in truth, just as we received commandment from the Father.*

"I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth." What made John glad? Not money, not numbers, not success. It was seeing people live out the truth.

To walk in truth means to live by it every day, not just to believe it in our heads. Truth is something we walk in.

John says "some" of her children. That may mean simply that these were the ones he had met. Or it may hint that not all of them were walking in truth. Either way, he rejoices over the ones who were. "Just as we received commandment from the Father." Walking in truth is not something extra for the very spiritual. It is what God commands of all of us.

1:5 *And now I ask you, lady, not as writing to you a new commandment, but* ***the one*** *which we have had from* ***the*** *beginning, that we love one another.*

"And now I ask you, lady, not as writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another." John makes a gentle request. He does not order her. He asks.

And what he asks is not new. It is the same command he wrote about in his first letter (1 John 2:7-8; 3:11), the same command Jesus gave on the night before He died (John 13:34). Love one another.

Why repeat it? Because we need it repeated. The great danger in a church that is fighting false teaching is that it can become harsh. It is possible to defend the truth and lose our love. John wants this church to hold both.

1:6 *And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you heard from* ***the*** *beginning, that you should walk in it.*

"And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments." How does John define love? By obedience. Love is not a warm feeling that ignores what God says. It is a life that follows what God says.

"This is the commandment, just as you heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it." Notice how John circles around. Love means keeping His commandments, and His commandment is to love. The two cannot be pulled apart.

Today many people say that love means accepting whatever anyone wants to do. John says love walks according to God's commands. Real love wants what God wants for a person, and God's commands are always for our good.

1:7 *For many deceivers have entered into the world, those who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in flesh; this is the deceiver and the antichrist.*

"For many deceivers have entered into the world, those who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in flesh." Here is why John has been stressing truth. False teachers were traveling from church to church.

Their error was about the person of Jesus. They did not confess that He came "in flesh." This is the same false teaching John fought in 1 John 4:2-3. They denied that the eternal Son of God truly became a man.

"This is the deceiver and the antichrist." John uses the same strong words as in his first letter. These teachers carry the spirit of the Antichrist who is still to come in the Tribulation. A wrong view of Jesus is not a small mistake. It goes to the heart of the gospel.

1:8 *Watch yourselves, so that we do not lose the things we have worked for, but receive a full reward.*

"Watch yourselves, so that we do not lose the things we have worked for, but receive a full reward." John tells them to be on guard. Watching ourselves means paying attention to what we believe and who we listen to.

What is at stake? "The things we have worked for." John and the other apostles had labored to build these believers up in the faith. If they were led astray, that work would be damaged.

"But receive a full reward." The Bible teaches that believers will receive rewards from Christ for faithful service (1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Salvation is a free gift, but rewards can be gained or lost. John wants them to receive a full reward, not a partial one.

1:9 *Everyone who transgresses and does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching of Christ, this **one** has both the Father and the Son.*

"Everyone who transgresses and does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God." The word "transgresses" means to go beyond, to run ahead. The false teachers claimed to be moving on to something deeper, something more advanced. John says that going beyond the teaching of Christ is not progress. It is leaving God behind.

"The teaching of Christ" means the teaching about Christ, and also the teaching Christ gave. The two are the same.

"The one who abides in the teaching of Christ, this one has both the Father and the Son." You cannot have God the Father while rejecting the truth about His Son. Stay with the teaching you received. That is where God is found.

1:10 *If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into **your** house, and do not say to him, "Greetings";*

"If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not say to him, 'Greetings.'" In that day, traveling teachers depended on believers to give them a place to stay and to send them on their way. Churches met in homes, so welcoming a teacher into your house often meant giving him a platform in the church.

John says do not do this for a false teacher. Do not give him a place to stay, and do not "say to him, 'Greetings'" in the sense of welcoming him and wishing him well on his mission.

Does this mean we should be rude to anyone who disagrees with us? No. John is talking about people who come to spread a false gospel that denies Jesus Christ came in the flesh. It is not about a neighbor who believes differently, or a family member who has not yet come to faith. We can

show kindness and share the gospel with people in error. What we must not do is help them spread their error.

1:11 *for the one who says to him, "Greetings," shares in his evil works.*

"For the one who says to him, 'Greetings,' shares in his evil works." Why such a strong warning? Because helping a false teacher spread his message makes you a partner in it.

The word "shares" is related to koinonia, the word for fellowship. To support a false teacher's work is to have fellowship with it.

That is a word for us today. Who do we support with our money? Whose books do we pass around? Whose teaching do we invite into our homes and churches? Love for people does not mean supporting whatever they teach. Sometimes the most loving thing we can do for a church is to keep the door shut to those who deny Christ.

1:12 *Having many things to write to you, I did not want* ***to do so*** *with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and to speak mouth to mouth, so that our joy may be made full.*

"Having many things to write to you, I did not want to do so with paper and ink." John had more to say, but he wanted to say it in person. The "paper" was papyrus, made from reeds, and the ink was made from soot and gum.

"But I hope to come to you and to speak mouth to mouth, so that our joy may be made full." Some things are better said face to face. Letters are good, but they are not the same as being together.

"So that our joy may be made full." John used the same words in 1 John 1:4. Fellowship among believers, in person, brings a fullness of joy that nothing else can. In our day of texts and screens, that is still true.

1:13 *The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen.*

"The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen." If the elect lady is a church, then her "elect sister" is another church, probably the one where John was living, sending its greetings. If she is a woman, these are her nephews and nieces, members of her sister's family.

Either way, the letter ends with a reminder that believers are family. We belong to one another across distance. The church in one town cares about the church in another.

"Amen" means so be it. The letter closes the way it opened, with love among those who share the truth.

Summary

The elder writes to the elect lady and her children, whom he loves in truth. He rejoices that some of her children are walking in truth, and he asks her to keep the command they have had from the beginning, to love one another. Love means walking according to God's commandments. Many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in the flesh, and

they carry the spirit of the antichrist. Believers must watch themselves so they do not lose what has been worked for, and must abide in the teaching of Christ, because whoever goes beyond it does not have God. They are not to welcome false teachers into their homes or wish them well, or they will share in their evil works. John closes with the hope of coming to speak face to face, so that their joy may be full.

Study Questions

1. How does the elder describe himself, and who does he write to? (verse 1)

2. How many times does the word "truth" appear in verses 1-4, and why does it matter so much?

3. What made John rejoice greatly? (verse 4)

4. How does John define love in verse 6?

5. What did the deceivers deny about Jesus? (verse 7)

6. What does it mean to "transgress" the teaching of Christ? (verse 9)

7. What does John tell believers not to do for false teachers, and why? (verses 10-11)

8. Why did John want to speak face to face instead of writing? (verse 12)

9. Is it harder for you to hold to truth or to love? How can you keep both?

10. What teachers or messages do you support with your time, money, or home? Do they abide in the teaching of Christ?

Overview of 3 John

Third John is the twenty-fifth book of the New Testament. It sits between 2 John and Jude. In the Greek it is the shortest book in the Bible. Like 2 John, it is a personal letter from "the elder," but this time it is written to one man by name, his friend Gaius.

Second John warned against welcoming false teachers. Third John shows the other side: believers should gladly welcome and support those who serve the truth. John praises Gaius for doing that, rebukes a church leader named Diotrephes for refusing, and commends a man named Demetrius. The key verse is John's call to Gaius:

3 John 11 (SLB)

"Beloved, do not imitate what ***is*** evil, but what ***is*** good. The one who does good is of God; but the one who does evil has not seen God."

Third John has 1 chapter and 14 verses. (Many modern Bibles divide the last verse in two and count 15. The SLB follows the older numbering.) This study covers it in one chapter:

- 3 John: Imitate What Is Good

The letter falls into three parts:

- Gaius praised (verses 1-8)
- Diotrephes rebuked (verses 9-11)
- Demetrius commended, and closing words (verses 12-14)

Background of 3 John

Author: As in 2 John, the writer calls himself "the elder" (verse 1). The early church held that he was John the apostle. The style, the words, and the love for truth all match 1 and 2 John.

Who it was written to: The letter is addressed to "Gaius the beloved" (verse 1). Gaius was a very common name in the Roman world, and the New Testament mentions several men by that name (Acts 19:29; 20:4; Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 1:14). We do not know whether this Gaius was any of them. He was a believer whom John loved, who walked in truth, and who opened his home to traveling workers. John may have led him to faith, since he counts him among "my children" (verse 4).

The people in the letter: Diotrephes was a leader in the church Gaius knew, a man who "loves to be first" (verse 9). He refused to receive John's letter or the traveling brothers, spread evil talk about John, and put out of the church those who wanted to welcome them. Demetrius was a man with a good report from everyone (verse 12). He may have carried this letter to Gaius.

When and where it was written: Most date 3 John to about A.D. 85 to 95, around the same time as 1 and 2 John. Most believe John wrote it from Ephesus.

Purpose: John writes to thank Gaius for his hospitality to the traveling workers and to urge him to keep supporting them, to deal openly with the problem of Diotrephes, to commend Demetrius, and to let Gaius know he hopes to see him soon.

3 John: Imitate What Is Good

Scripture

1:1-14 The elder, to Gaius the beloved, whom I love in truth. Beloved, concerning all things I pray that you prosper and be in health, just as your soul prospers. For I rejoiced greatly when brothers came and testified to your truth, just as you walk in truth. I have no greater joy than these things, that I hear of my children walking in truth. Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brothers and for the strangers, who testified of your love before ***the*** church. You will do well to send them forward in a manner worthy of God. For on behalf of His name they went out, taking nothing from the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such ***men***, so that we may become fellow workers for the truth. I wrote to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not receive us. Because of this, if I come, I will bring to remembrance his works which he does, talking nonsense against us with evil words; and not being content with these, neither does he himself receive the brothers, and those who want ***to*** he forbids and casts ***them*** out of the church. Beloved, do not imitate what ***is*** evil, but what ***is*** good. The one who does good is of God; but the one who does evil has not seen God. Demetrius has been testified to by all, and by the truth itself; and we also testify, and you know that our testimony is true. I had many things to write, but I do not want to write to you with ink and pen; but I hope to see you soon, and we will speak mouth to mouth. Peace to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.

Preview

Third John is a personal letter from the elder to his dear friend Gaius. John prays for his health and rejoices that Gaius walks in truth. Gaius had welcomed traveling brothers, men who went out for the sake of Christ's name and took nothing from unbelievers. John praises him and urges him to send them on in a way worthy of God, because by helping such men we become fellow workers for the truth.

Then John turns to a problem. A man named Diotrephes, who loves to be first, refuses to receive John or the brothers, spreads evil talk, and puts out of the church those who want to welcome them. John says he will deal with it when he comes. He tells Gaius not to imitate what is evil, but what is good. He commends a man named Demetrius, who has a good report from everyone, and closes with the hope of seeing Gaius soon.

Study

1:1 *The elder, to Gaius the beloved, whom I love in truth.*

"The elder, to Gaius the beloved, whom I love in truth." John again calls himself "the elder," as in 2 John 1. This time he writes to one man.

Gaius was a common name in the Roman world. The New Testament mentions a Gaius in Corinth (Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 1:14), one from Macedonia (Acts 19:29), and one from Derbe

(Acts 20:4). We do not know if this Gaius was any of them. Scripture does not tell us. What we do know is that John loved him, and loved him "in truth," a real love rooted in their shared faith.

John calls him "the beloved," and he will use the word "beloved" three more times in this short letter (verses 2, 5, 11). Gaius was dear to him.

1:2 *Beloved, concerning all things I pray that you prosper and be in health, just as your soul prospers.*

"Beloved, concerning all things I pray that you prosper and be in health, just as your soul prospers." This is a warm, normal prayer for a friend. John wants things to go well for Gaius and wants him to be healthy.

Notice the standard. He prays that his body and his circumstances would do as well as his soul was already doing. What a compliment. Gaius was strong spiritually. Could the same be said of us? If our bodies were only as healthy as our souls, how healthy would we be?

Some teachers use this verse to promise that God wants every believer to be wealthy and healthy. That stretches it too far. This is a friendly wish in a letter, much like the way people today open a letter by hoping all is well. It shows that God cares about our whole lives, but it is not a promise of riches.

1:3 *For I rejoiced greatly when brothers came and testified to your truth, just as you walk in truth.*

"For I rejoiced greatly when brothers came and testified to your truth, just as you walk in truth." Traveling believers had come back to John with a good report about Gaius.

They "testified to your truth." Gaius did not just hold to the truth. He lived it, and others could see it. "Just as you walk in truth." Walking in truth means that what we believe shows up in how we live.

That is a good question for each of us. If other believers spent time with us and then reported back, what would they say? Would they talk about our truth? Gaius had a reputation, and it was a good one, not because he worked at his image, but because he lived what he believed.

1:4 *I have no greater joy than these things, that I hear of my children walking in truth.*

"I have no greater joy than these things, that I hear of my children walking in truth." This is one of the best-known verses in John's letters. Nothing made John happier than seeing his spiritual children walk with God.

"My children" probably means people John had led to Christ or taught in the faith. Gaius may have been one of them.

Any parent understands this. When your children are grown, your greatest joy is not their paycheck or their house. It is seeing them live right and walk with God. Every pastor, teacher, and parent who loves the Lord knows this joy. And if you have spiritual children, people you have helped in their faith, pray that they would walk in truth.

1:5 *Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brothers and for the strangers,*

"Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brothers and for the strangers." Gaius had been showing hospitality. He welcomed traveling believers into his home, even ones he had never met before.

In the first century there were few safe inns, and many were known for bad behavior. Christian missionaries and teachers depended on believers to give them a place to stay and food to eat. Opening your home was a real cost and a real service.

John says Gaius did this "faithfully." He did it well, and he kept doing it. Hospitality is not a small thing in the Bible. Hebrews 13:2 tells us not to forget it, because some have entertained angels without knowing it.

1:6 *who testified of your love before **the** church. You will do well to send them forward in a manner worthy of God.*

"Who testified of your love before the church." The traveling brothers had told the church where John was about the love Gaius showed them.

"You will do well to send them forward in a manner worthy of God." To "send forward" meant more than saying goodbye. It meant giving them what they needed for the next part of their journey: food, money, supplies, maybe a guide. Paul used the same word when he asked churches to help him and others on their way (Romans 15:24; Titus 3:13).

"In a manner worthy of God." Think about that standard. When we help God's servants, we should treat them in a way that honors the God who sent them. Not grudgingly or cheaply, but generously.

1:7 *For on behalf of His name they went out, taking nothing from the Gentiles.*

"For on behalf of His name they went out, taking nothing from the Gentiles." These men were missionaries. They went out for the sake of "His name," the name of Jesus Christ.

"Taking nothing from the Gentiles." Here "Gentiles" means unbelievers, the pagans they were trying to reach. These workers did not ask the people they were evangelizing to pay them. They did not want anyone to think the gospel was for sale. Paul did the same thing in Corinth and Thessalonica (1 Corinthians 9:12-18; 1 Thessalonians 2:9).

That is why believers needed to support them. If the missionaries would not take money from the lost, then the church had to provide for them.

1:8 *We therefore ought to receive such **men**, so that we may become fellow workers for the truth.*

"We therefore ought to receive such men, so that we may become fellow workers for the truth." Here is the principle. When we support those who serve the gospel, we become their partners.

Not everyone is called to go to the mission field. But everyone can be part of the work. When you give to a missionary, pray for him, or open your home to him, you become a fellow worker in what he does. His fruit becomes your fruit.

This is the opposite of 2 John 10-11. There, John warned that welcoming a false teacher makes you a partner in his evil works. Here, he says welcoming a true servant makes you a partner in the truth. Who we support matters, both ways.

1:9 *I wrote to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not receive us.*

"I wrote to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not receive us." Now John turns to the problem. He had written a letter to the church, possibly the one Gaius belonged to, but a man named Diotrephes had blocked it.

What was wrong with Diotrephes? He "loves to be first." That was his heart problem. He wanted control. He wanted to be the one in charge, the one everyone answered to.

John does not say Diotrephes taught false doctrine. His problem was pride. That is a warning to anyone in church leadership. Jesus said the one who wants to be great must be a servant (Mark 10:42-45). Diotrephes had it backwards.

1:10 *Because of this, if I come, I will bring to remembrance his works which he does, talking nonsense against us with evil words; and not being content with these, neither does he himself receive the brothers, and those who want* ***to*** *he forbids and casts* ***them*** *out of the church.*

"Because of this, if I come, I will bring to remembrance his works which he does." John will not ignore it. If he comes, he will bring it into the open.

Look at what Diotrephes was doing. First, "talking nonsense against us with evil words." He was spreading malicious gossip about John. Second, "neither does he himself receive the brothers." He refused hospitality to the traveling workers. Third, "those who want to he forbids and casts them out of the church." He put out anyone who disagreed with him.

This is what happens when a leader loves to be first. He attacks others with words, he shuts out those he cannot control, and he hurts the church. Sadly, there are still churches with a Diotrephes in them. John's example shows that it must be dealt with openly and truthfully, not ignored.

1:11 *Beloved, do not imitate what* ***is*** *evil, but what* ***is*** *good. The one who does good is of God; but the one who does evil has not seen God.*

"Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good." This is the key verse of the letter. John has just shown Gaius a bad example. Now he tells him not to follow it.

We all imitate someone. The question is who. John sets two examples side by side. Diotrephes is the evil example. Demetrius, in the next verse, is the good one.

"The one who does good is of God; but the one who does evil has not seen God." This echoes 1 John 3:6-10. A person's life shows his true family. Someone who keeps on doing evil, whatever

position he holds in the church, shows that he has not really seen God. Choose your examples carefully.

1:12 *Demetrius has been testified to by all, and by the truth itself; and we also testify, and you know that our testimony is true.*

"Demetrius has been testified to by all, and by the truth itself." Here is a man worth imitating. We do not know much about him. He may have been the one carrying this letter to Gaius, and John wanted Gaius to welcome him.

Demetrius had three witnesses. "All" spoke well of him, meaning the believers who knew him. "The truth itself" spoke for him, meaning his life matched the truth. "And we also testify," meaning John added his own word.

What a reputation. The world's praise can be flattery. The church's praise can be mistaken. But when the truth itself backs up your life, that is a good name worth having (Proverbs 22:1).

1:13 *I had many things to write, but I do not want to write to you with ink and pen;*

"I had many things to write, but I do not want to write to you with ink and pen." This is almost the same as 2 John 12. John had more to say, but he did not want to put it all in a letter.

Some things, especially hard things like the trouble with Diotrephes, are better handled in person. Written words can be misread. Tone gets lost. A face-to-face talk lets people hear the heart behind the words.

That is wise counsel for us. When there is conflict in a church or a family, it is usually better to sit down and talk than to fire off a letter, an email, or a text.

1:14 *but I hope to see you soon, and we will speak mouth to mouth. Peace to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.*

"But I hope to see you soon, and we will speak mouth to mouth." John looked forward to seeing his friend.

"Peace to you." It is a fitting blessing for a man in the middle of a church conflict. Whatever Diotrephes was doing, Gaius could have God's peace.

"The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name." It is unusual to see believers called "the friends" in a New Testament greeting. Jesus called His disciples His friends (John 15:14-15). John wanted each one greeted "by name." In God's family, no one is just a face in the crowd. Each one is known and loved personally.

Summary

The elder writes to his beloved friend Gaius, praying for his health and rejoicing that he walks in truth. John has no greater joy than to hear that his children walk in truth. He praises Gaius for faithfully welcoming traveling brothers and strangers who went out for the sake of Christ's name

and took nothing from the Gentiles, and he urges him to send them forward in a manner worthy of God. Supporting such men makes us fellow workers for the truth. Diotrephes, who loves to be first, refuses to receive John or the brothers, speaks evil words, and puts others out of the church, and John will deal with it when he comes. Gaius is to imitate what is good, not what is evil. Demetrius has a good report from all and from the truth itself. John hopes to see Gaius soon and speak face to face.

Study Questions

1. What did John pray for Gaius, and what was the standard? (verse 2)

2. What gave John his greatest joy? (verse 4)

3. What had Gaius been doing for the brothers and strangers? (verses 5-6)

4. Why did these traveling workers take nothing from the Gentiles? (verse 7)

5. How do we become "fellow workers for the truth"? (verse 8)

6. What was Diotrephes' heart problem, and what did it lead him to do? (verses 9-10)

7. What three witnesses did Demetrius have? (verse 12)

8. Why did John prefer to speak face to face? (verses 13-14)

9. If someone reported back on how you live, would they speak of your "truth"? What would you want them to say?

10. Who are you imitating right now, and is there a missionary or servant of God you could support this month? (verses 8, 11)

Overview of Jude

Jude is the twenty-sixth book of the New Testament. It sits between 3 John and Revelation, the last of the letters before the Bible's final book. It is short, but it is one of the most urgent letters in the New Testament. Jude had wanted to write about the salvation all believers share, but false teachers had crept into the church, and he had to write a warning instead.

The theme of Jude is standing firm for the truth while staying close to God. Jude gives example after example of how God judges those who turn from Him, and then he tells the faithful how to keep themselves in God's love. The letter ends with one of the best-known blessings in the Bible. The key verse is Jude's call to the church:

Jude 3 (SLB)

"Beloved, while making all diligence to write to you concerning our common salvation, I had necessity to write to you, exhorting ***you*** to contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints."

Jude has 1 chapter and 25 verses. This study covers it in one chapter:

- Jude: Contend for the Faith

The letter falls into three parts:

- Contend for the faith (verses 1-4)
- God's judgment on the ungodly (verses 5-16)
- Keep yourselves in the love of God (verses 17-25)

Background of Jude

Author: The writer calls himself "Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ, and brother of James" (verse 1). In Greek the name is Judas, the same name as Judah, a very common Jewish name. Bible teachers have long held that he is the Jude, or Judas, named with James as one of the brothers of Jesus (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). The James he names is most likely the well-known leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13; Galatians 1:19). Like James in his letter, Jude does not call himself the brother of the Lord. He calls himself a slave of Jesus Christ. That humble way of speaking fits a man who once did not believe in Jesus (John 7:5) and later worshiped Him as Lord (Acts 1:14).

The brothers of the Lord: The Gospels name James, Joses, Simon, and Jude as brothers of Jesus (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). Jesus' brothers were the sons of Joseph and Mary, born after Jesus (Matthew 1:25; 13:55-56), so they were His half-brothers. Some churches hold that they were Joseph's sons by an earlier marriage or cousins. What matters for Jude's letter is that he was close family to Jesus, counted among His brothers, and came to call Him "our Lord Jesus Christ" (verses 17, 21).

Who it was written to: Jude writes "to those who are called, sanctified in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ" (verse 1). He does not name a city or a region. His many examples from the Old Testament and from Jewish writings suggest his readers knew the Jewish Scriptures well, so many believe they were mostly Jewish believers, though we cannot be sure where they lived.

When and where it was written: Jude does not tell us. Most date it somewhere between about A.D. 65 and 80, and many narrow it to about 68 to 80. Verse 17 speaks of the apostles' words as something the readers had heard earlier, which suggests a time when the apostles' work was well known. Jude does not mention the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, though that would have been a powerful example of judgment, and some take that as a hint the letter was written before it.

Jude and 2 Peter: Much of Jude is very close to 2 Peter 2 and 3:1-3. Both speak of false teachers who deny the Master, of the angels who sinned, of Sodom and Gomorrah, of Balaam, of men who blaspheme glorious ones, of waterless clouds or springs, and of scoffers in the last days. Bible teachers do not agree on whether Jude used 2 Peter, Peter used Jude, or both drew on a common warning. Scripture does not tell us, and the message is the same either way.

Jude's use of Jewish writings: Jude mentions a dispute between Michael and the devil over the body of Moses (verse 9), which early church writers linked to a Jewish book called the Assumption of Moses (also called the Ascension of Moses), and he gives a prophecy of Enoch (verses 14-15) that closely matches a line in a Jewish book called 1 Enoch. Neither book is part of the Bible, and neither was accepted as Scripture by the Jewish people. Jude was led by the Holy Spirit to record these things as true, but quoting a true line from a book does not make the whole book Scripture. Paul did something similar when he quoted Greek poets (Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12).

Purpose: Jude writes to warn believers about ungodly men who had slipped into the church, turning God's grace into an excuse for sin and denying Jesus Christ as Master and Lord. He calls

the faithful to contend for the faith, to remember what the apostles foretold, to build themselves up and keep themselves in God's love, and to reach out with mercy to those who are wavering.

Jude: Contend for the Faith

Scripture

1:1-16 Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to those who are called, sanctified in God ***the*** Father and kept for Jesus Christ: Mercy to you and peace and love be multiplied. Beloved, while making all diligence to write to you concerning our common salvation, I had necessity to write to you, exhorting ***you*** to contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, those who long ago were written beforehand for this judgment, ungodly ***men***, changing the grace of our God into sensuality and denying the only Master, God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved a people out of ***the*** land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. And angels who did not keep their own domain, but left their own dwelling, He has kept in eternal chains under darkness for ***the*** judgment of ***the*** great day, just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, having in the same manner as these indulged in sexual immorality and gone after other flesh, are set forth ***as*** an example, undergoing ***the*** penalty of eternal fire. Yet in the same way these dreamers also defile the flesh, and set aside authority, and blaspheme glorious ***ones***. But Michael the archangel, when he was disputing with the devil, arguing about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring against ***him*** a judgment of blasphemy, but said, "May ***the*** Lord rebuke you!" But these blaspheme whatever things they do not know; and whatever things they understand naturally, like the irrational animals, in these things they are corrupted. Woe to them! For they went in the way of Cain, and rushed into the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. These are hidden reefs in your love feasts, feasting together with you without fear, shepherding themselves; clouds without water, carried about by winds; autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of ***the*** sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of darkness has been kept forever. And Enoch, the seventh from Adam, also prophesied about these, saying, "Look, ***the*** Lord came with His holy myriads, to execute judgment against all, and to convict all the ungodly among them concerning all their works of ungodliness which they have done in an ungodly way, and concerning all the harsh ***things*** which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their lusts, and their mouth speaks arrogant ***words***, flattering faces for the sake of profit.

1:17-25 But you, beloved, remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they were saying to you that in ***the*** last time there will be scoffers, walking according to their own lusts of ungodliness. These are the ones who separate themselves, natural ***men***, not having ***the*** Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith, praying in ***the*** Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in ***the*** love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. And on some have mercy, making a distinction; but others save with fear, snatching ***them*** out of the fire, hating even the tunic stained by the flesh. Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present ***you*** blameless before the presence of His glory with exultation, to ***the*** only wise God our Savior, ***be*** glory and majesty, dominion and authority, both now and to all the ages. Amen.

Preview

Jude had planned to write a happy letter about the salvation all believers share. Instead, he had to write a warning. Certain men had slipped into the church unnoticed, turning the grace of God into an excuse for sensual sin and denying Jesus Christ as Master and Lord. Jude calls believers to contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. He reminds them how God judged unbelieving Israel in the wilderness, the angels who left their proper place, and Sodom and Gomorrah. He compares the false teachers to Cain, Balaam, and Korah, and he paints them with pictures from nature: hidden reefs, waterless clouds, dead trees, wild waves, and wandering stars. Even Enoch prophesied that the Lord would come with His holy myriads to judge them.

Then Jude turns to the faithful. The apostles warned that scoffers would come in the last time. Believers are to build themselves up in their most holy faith, pray in the Holy Spirit, keep themselves in the love of God, and wait for the mercy of Jesus Christ. They are to show mercy to others and pull some out of the fire. Jude ends with one of the greatest blessings in the Bible, praise to the God who is able to keep us from stumbling and present us blameless before His glory with great joy.

Study

1:1 *Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to those who are called, sanctified in God **the** Father and kept for Jesus Christ:*

"Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ, and brother of James." Jude does not boast. He could have mentioned his family ties to Jesus, but he calls himself a slave, a servant who belongs to his Master. Most believe the James he names is the well-known leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13; Galatians 1:19), who was called the brother of the Lord. That makes Jude one of the brothers of Jesus named in Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3. Like the other brothers, he was a son of Joseph and Mary, born after Jesus (see the Background of Jude).

He writes "to those who are called, sanctified in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ." Three things are true of every believer. We are called by God. We are sanctified, set apart for Him. And we are kept, guarded by God for Jesus. Jude will come back to that word "kept" at the end (verses 21, 24).

1:2 *Mercy to you and peace and love be multiplied.*

"Mercy to you and peace and love be multiplied." Most New Testament letters open with grace and peace. Jude's greeting is different: mercy, peace, and love.

Mercy is God's compassion toward people in need, holding back the judgment we deserve. Peace is the calm of being right with God. Love is His self-giving care for His children.

And he prays that they would be "multiplied." Not just given, but given more and more. Jude is about to write about judgment, but he starts with a prayer that his readers would have more and

more of God's mercy, peace, and love. That is the place to stand when we face hard truth: in the middle of God's mercy.

1:3 *Beloved, while making all diligence to write to you concerning our common salvation, I had necessity to write to you, exhorting **you** to contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.*

"Beloved, while making all diligence to write to you concerning our common salvation, I had necessity to write to you." Jude had planned a different letter. He wanted to write about "our common salvation," the salvation all believers share. But something urgent came up.

"Exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints." To contend earnestly is a strong word, like an athlete straining in a contest or a soldier fighting a battle.

"The faith" here is the body of truth, the gospel and teaching of the apostles. It was "once for all delivered." God handed it down one time, complete. We do not add to it. We guard it and pass it on. That does not mean we fight with people. It means we stand firm for the truth.

1:4 *For certain men have crept in unnoticed, those who long ago were written beforehand for this judgment, ungodly **men**, changing the grace of our God into sensuality and denying the only Master, God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.*

"For certain men have crept in unnoticed." The danger was not outside the church. It was inside. These men slipped in quietly, like spies.

"Those who long ago were written beforehand for this judgment." Bible teachers read this in two ways. Some see it as meaning these men's judgment was foretold long ago, in Scripture and in prophecies like the one from Enoch in verses 14-15. Others see it as speaking of God's eternal plan. Either way, God was not surprised by them.

Jude names two marks. They were "changing the grace of our God into sensuality," treating God's grace as permission to sin. And they were "denying the only Master, God, and our Lord Jesus Christ," not always in words, but by how they lived.

1:5 *But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved a people out of **the** land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.*

"But I want to remind you, though you once knew this," Jude is not telling them anything new. He is reminding them of what they already know.

"That the Lord, having saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe." This is the first of three examples of judgment. God brought Israel out of Egypt with great power. Yet most of that generation died in the wilderness because they did not believe Him (Numbers 14:26-35; Hebrews 3:16-19).

What is the warning? Being part of God's people on the outside, being in the crowd that came out of Egypt, did not protect those who did not believe. The false teachers were in the church, but that did not make them safe.

Old Testament links: Exodus 14:30 (alluded to); Numbers 14:35 (alluded to)

1:6 *And angels who did not keep their own domain, but left their own dwelling, He has kept in eternal chains under darkness for **the** judgment of **the** great day,*

"And angels who did not keep their own domain, but left their own dwelling, He has kept in eternal chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day." The second example is angels who sinned.

Who were these angels? There are two main views. Many believe they are the "sons of God" of Genesis 6:1-4, angels who left heaven and took human women, and that God locked them away because of that sin. They point out that verse 7 says Sodom sinned "in the same manner as these." Others believe these are angels who fell with Satan in his rebellion, and that some of them are now held in chains while others still roam free. Peter writes of the same angels in 2 Peter 2:4.

Either way, Jude's point is the same. Angels who left their place were not spared. Notice the play on words: they did not "keep" their domain, so God "has kept" them in chains.

1:7 *just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, having in the same manner as these indulged in sexual immorality and gone after other flesh, are set forth **as** an example, undergoing **the** penalty of eternal fire.*

"Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them." The third example is the cities of the plain (Genesis 19). They "indulged in sexual immorality and gone after other flesh."

"Gone after other flesh" means they went after flesh that was not theirs to have. In Genesis 19:4-9, the men of Sodom tried to force themselves on the two visitors in Lot's house, who were angels. Scripture names their sin plainly, including the sexual sin of men with men, and also their pride and their neglect of the poor (Ezekiel 16:49-50).

These cities "are set forth as an example, undergoing the penalty of eternal fire." The fire that fell on them was a picture of a judgment that does not end. God's patience is real, but so is His judgment. The answer for any sinner, of any kind, is to turn to Christ, who forgives all who come to Him (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Old Testament links: Genesis 19:5 (alluded to); Genesis 19:24 (alluded to); Genesis 19:25 (alluded to)

1:8 *Yet in the same way these dreamers also defile the flesh, and set aside authority, and blaspheme glorious **ones**.*

"Yet in the same way these dreamers also defile the flesh, and set aside authority, and blaspheme glorious ones." Now Jude ties the examples to the false teachers.

They are "dreamers." They may have claimed visions or dreams to support their teaching, or Jude may mean they live in a dream world, out of touch with reality.

They do three things. They "defile the flesh," like Sodom. They "set aside authority," rejecting the Lord's rule, like the angels who left their place. And they "blaspheme glorious ones," speaking with contempt about angelic beings. These men were proud, and they mocked what they did not understand. That always comes before a fall.

1:9 *But Michael the archangel, when he was disputing with the devil, arguing about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring against* ***him*** *a judgment of blasphemy, but said, "May* ***the*** *Lord rebuke you!"*

"But Michael the archangel, when he was disputing with the devil, arguing about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring against him a judgment of blasphemy, but said, 'May the Lord rebuke you!'" Michael is the chief angel, an archangel, named also in Daniel 10:13 and 12:1 and Revelation 12:7.

The Old Testament tells us that God buried Moses and no one knows where his grave is (Deuteronomy 34:5-6). It does not tell us about this dispute. Early church writers said Jude was drawing on a Jewish book called the Assumption of Moses. The part of that book that would have told this story has not survived in the copies we have.

Here is the point. Even Michael, the greatest of the angels, did not speak against the devil on his own authority. He left the judgment to the Lord. If Michael was that careful, how foolish were these men who mocked spiritual powers.

How should we think about Jude using a story from a book that is not part of the Bible? Jude was led by the Holy Spirit to record this event as true. That does not mean the whole book it came from is Scripture. Paul quoted pagan poets in Acts 17:28 and Titus 1:12 without saying their writings were inspired. Quoting a true line does not make a whole book God's Word.

Michael's words are the words spoken to Satan in Zechariah 3:2, when Satan stood to accuse Joshua the high priest: "The LORD rebuke you, O Satan!"

Old Testament links: Zechariah 3:2 (quoted)

1:10 *But these blaspheme whatever things they do not know; and whatever things they understand naturally, like the irrational animals, in these things they are corrupted.*

"But these blaspheme whatever things they do not know." The false teachers did the opposite of Michael. They spoke with contempt about spiritual things they did not understand.

"And whatever things they understand naturally, like the irrational animals, in these things they are corrupted." The only things they did understand were the things of the body, their appetites and desires. And in those very things they were destroying themselves.

It is a sad picture. These men claimed deep spiritual insight, but they understood spiritual things no better than an animal does. They lived by instinct, like creatures without reason. Pride had made them blind to God and slaves to their own desires.

1:11 *Woe to them! For they went in the way of Cain, and rushed into the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.*

"Woe to them!" This is a cry of grief and a warning of judgment, like the woes Jesus spoke against the Pharisees (Matthew 23).

Jude gives three more examples from the Old Testament. "They went in the way of Cain," who murdered his brother and would not listen to God (Genesis 4:3-8; 1 John 3:12). "And rushed into the error of Balaam for reward." Balaam was a prophet who was willing to curse Israel for money, and who later taught Israel's enemies how to lead them into sin (Numbers 22-24; 31:16; Revelation 2:14). "And perished in the rebellion of Korah," who rose up against Moses and Aaron and was swallowed by the earth (Numbers 16).

Cain was ruled by hatred, Balaam by greed, and Korah by pride against God's leaders. The false teachers showed all three.

Old Testament links: Genesis 4:8 (alluded to); Numbers 22:7 (alluded to); Numbers 16:32 (alluded to)

1:12 *These are hidden reefs in your love feasts, feasting together with you without fear, shepherding themselves; clouds without water, carried about by winds; autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, uprooted;*

"These are hidden reefs in your love feasts." The love feasts were meals the early church shared together, often with the Lord's Supper. A hidden reef is a rock under the water that tears open a ship. These men sat at the table looking harmless, but they wrecked people's faith.

"Feasting together with you without fear, shepherding themselves." They had no reverence for God, and they cared only for themselves, not for the flock (Ezekiel 34:2).

Then Jude turns to nature. They are "clouds without water," promising rain and giving nothing. They are "autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, uprooted." In harvest time they had no fruit. They were dead at the root and pulled out of the ground.

Old Testament links: Ezekiel 34:2 (alluded to); Ezekiel 34:8 (alluded to); Proverbs 25:14 (alluded to)

1:13 *wild waves of **the** sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of darkness has been kept forever.*

"Wild waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame." The sea throws foam and trash onto the beach. These men left nothing behind but the mess of their own shameful living (Isaiah 57:20).

"Wandering stars, for whom the gloom of darkness has been kept forever." In the ancient world, sailors steered by the stars. A wandering star, perhaps a planet or a meteor, could not be trusted to guide anyone. These teachers led people off course.

Jude has now used pictures from the air, the land, the sea, and the sky. Wherever you look, the false teachers are empty and dangerous. And "the gloom of darkness has been kept" for them. Their end is certain.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 57:20 (alluded to)

1:14-15 *And Enoch, the seventh from Adam, also prophesied about these, saying, "Look, **the** Lord came with His holy myriads, to execute judgment against all, and to convict all the ungodly among them concerning all their works of ungodliness which they have done in an ungodly way, and concerning all the harsh **things** which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."*

"And Enoch, the seventh from Adam, also prophesied about these, saying, 'Look, the Lord came with His holy myriads.'" Enoch was the man who walked with God and was taken up without dying (Genesis 5:21-24; Hebrews 11:5). Counting Adam, he was the seventh in the line of Seth.

A myriad is ten thousand, a word for a countless number. The Lord comes "to execute judgment against all, and to convict all the ungodly." The word ungodly, in one form or another, appears four times in verse 15. Jude wants us to hear it.

I believe this points to the Second Coming of Christ at the end of the Tribulation, when He returns to the earth with His saints and His angels to judge (Zechariah 14:5; Matthew 25:31; Revelation 19:11-16). The church, taken up to be with Him before the Tribulation, returns with Him then.

Jude's words closely match a line near the beginning of a Jewish writing called 1 Enoch (1 Enoch 1:9). That book was put together from several parts over a few centuries, long after Enoch lived; the part with this line is older than the New Testament. The Jewish people did not accept it as Scripture, and almost all of the church has not either. Jude says Enoch "prophesied," and by the Holy Spirit he records this prophecy as true. That gives the prophecy God's stamp. It does not make the whole book of 1 Enoch part of the Bible. Quoting a true line from a book does not make the whole book Scripture, as Paul's quotes from pagan poets show.

Old Testament links: Zechariah 14:5 (alluded to)

1:16 *These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their lusts, and their mouth speaks arrogant **words**, flattering faces for the sake of profit.*

"These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their lusts." Jude now describes how these men talked. They grumbled and complained, like Israel in the wilderness, never satisfied with what God gave.

"And their mouth speaks arrogant words." They boasted. They spoke big words about themselves.

"Flattering faces for the sake of profit." They praised people when it got them something. They told the rich and powerful what they wanted to hear.

Grumbling, boasting, and flattery all come from the same place: a heart that lives for itself. Notice that this is not about one bad day. It is a way of life. A godly person is content, humble, and honest in what he says.

1:17 *But you, beloved, remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

"But you, beloved, remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ." Jude now turns to the faithful. He says "but you," setting them apart from the false teachers.

The first thing he tells them is to remember. The apostles had already warned them this would happen. Jude speaks of the apostles as if they were a group apart from himself, and his readers had heard them teach.

When false teaching comes, we should not be shaken, as if God had lost control. The apostles told us ahead of time. Paul warned the elders of Ephesus that savage wolves would come in among them (Acts 20:29-30).

1:18 *that they were saying to you that in **the** last time there will be scoffers, walking according to their own lusts of ungodliness.*

"That they were saying to you that in the last time there will be scoffers, walking according to their own lusts of ungodliness." A scoffer is someone who mocks God's truth and makes fun of those who believe it.

Peter gives almost the same warning in 2 Peter 3:3, where the scoffers mock the promise of Christ's coming. In fact, much of Jude is very close to 2 Peter 2. Bible teachers do not agree on whether Jude used Peter, Peter used Jude, or both drew on a shared warning. Scripture does not tell us, and it does not change the message. Two inspired writers warned the church about the same danger.

"The last time" is the age we have been in since Jesus came. Scoffers who live for their own desires are a sign of it.

1:19 *These are the ones who separate themselves, natural **men**, not having **the** Spirit.*

"These are the ones who separate themselves." The false teachers caused divisions. They drew lines in the church, probably claiming to be more spiritual than everyone else.

"Natural men, not having the Spirit." Here is the irony. They thought they were the spiritual ones. Jude says they are "natural," living only on the level of human nature. Paul uses the same word for the person who does not receive the things of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Then Jude adds that they are without the Spirit. That settles it. Whatever they claimed, they were not believers at all, since everyone who belongs to Christ has His Spirit (Romans 8:9). Their divisiveness showed it.

1:20 *But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith, praying in **the** Holy Spirit,*

"But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith." Again Jude says "but you." Now he gives the faithful four things to do in verses 20-21.

First, build yourselves up. Our "most holy faith" is the foundation, the same faith once for all delivered (verse 3). We build on it by learning God's Word, obeying it, and growing in it together.

Second, "praying in the Holy Spirit." This means praying with the Spirit's help and guidance, in line with His will (Romans 8:26-27; Ephesians 6:18). Some connect it with the gift of tongues, but most read it as all prayer that is led by the Spirit. Either way, the false teachers did not have the Spirit (verse 19). The faithful pray in Him.

1:21 *keep yourselves in **the** love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.*

Third, "keep yourselves in the love of God." Jude does not say keep God loving you. God's love is steady. He means stay in the place where His love is enjoyed, the way Jesus said, abide in My love (John 15:9-10). We do that by walking close to Him and obeying Him.

Fourth, "waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life." The believer lives looking ahead. We are waiting for Jesus to come. When He comes for His church, His mercy will bring us into the fullness of eternal life. That is our blessed hope (Titus 2:13).

Notice the balance. In verse 1 we are "kept" by God. Here we "keep" ourselves. God holds us, and we stay close to Him.

1:22-23 *And on some have mercy, making a distinction; but others save with fear, snatching **them** out of the fire, hating even the tunic stained by the flesh.*

"And on some have mercy, making a distinction; but others save with fear, snatching them out of the fire." Now Jude tells the faithful how to treat those who are being affected by the false teachers.

Some need mercy, gentle care for people who are wavering, "making a distinction," knowing that not everyone is in the same place. Others need urgent rescue. Jude says snatch them "out of the fire," like pulling someone out of a burning house (Amos 4:11; Zechariah 3:2).

But do it "with fear," "hating even the tunic stained by the flesh." The tunic was the garment worn next to the skin. Love the sinner, but hate the sin so much that you do not want to touch even what it has stained. Rescue people without being pulled into their sin (Galatians 6:1).

Old Testament links: Zechariah 3:2 (alluded to)

1:24 *Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present **you** blameless before the presence of His glory with exultation,*

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling." After all the warnings, Jude ends with praise. The letter that started with "kept" ends with the One who keeps.

Who is able to keep us from falling? Not ourselves. Only God. He is able to keep us on our feet when false teachers and temptations try to trip us up.

"And to present you blameless before the presence of His glory with exultation." One day every believer will stand before God. We will not stand there in our own goodness. We will stand blameless because of Christ, and there will be "exultation," overflowing joy. Think of that when you feel weak. The God who saved you is able to finish what He started (Philippians 1:6).

1:25 *to **the** only wise God our Savior, **be** glory and majesty, dominion and authority, both now and to all the ages. Amen.*

"To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and authority, both now and to all the ages. Amen."

Jude gives God four things. "Glory" is His shining greatness. "Majesty" is His royal greatness as King. "Dominion" is His power and might. "Authority" is His right to rule.

Notice the phrase "the only wise God our Savior." There is only one God, and He alone is wise and able to save. And notice the time span: "both now and to all the ages." His glory is not something waiting only for the future. It is right now, and it will go on forever.

A letter about false teachers ends in worship. That is where all our contending for the faith should end. We do not fight for the truth to win arguments. We fight for it because the God of the truth deserves all glory.

Summary

Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ and brother of James, writes to those who are called, sanctified, and kept. He had planned to write about the salvation they share, but instead he urges them to contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints, because ungodly men had crept in, turning grace into sensuality and denying the Lord Jesus Christ. Jude reminds them of God's judgment on unbelieving Israel, on the angels who left their place, and on Sodom and Gomorrah. He compares the false teachers to Cain, Balaam, and Korah, and describes them as hidden reefs, waterless clouds, fruitless trees, wild waves, and wandering stars. Enoch prophesied that the Lord would come with His holy myriads to judge the ungodly. The apostles foretold scoffers in the last time. Believers are to build themselves up in the faith, pray in the Holy Spirit, keep themselves in the love of God, wait for the mercy of Jesus Christ, and rescue others with mercy and care. Jude closes with praise to the only wise God our Savior, who is able to keep us from stumbling and present us blameless before His glory with great joy.

Study Questions

1. What did Jude plan to write about, and what did he write about instead? (verse 3)

2. What does it mean to "contend earnestly for the faith"? (verse 3)

3. What two marks of the false teachers does Jude name in verse 4?

4. What three examples of judgment does Jude give in verses 5-7?

5. What does Michael's example teach us about how to speak about spiritual powers? (verses 8-10)

6. What do Cain, Balaam, and Korah have in common with the false teachers? (verse 11)

7. What four things does Jude tell the faithful to do in verses 20-21?

8. How should we treat people who are being pulled away by false teaching? (verses 22-23)

9. How does knowing that God "is able to keep you from stumbling" encourage you today? (verse 24)

10. Is there someone you know who is drifting from the faith? How could you show them mercy or help pull them back this week?

Conclusion

These four short letters were written late in the life of the early church, by men who had walked with Jesus or belonged to His own family. They faced the same danger, and they gave the same answer. False teachers had come into the church denying that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh, claiming a special knowledge of God, and treating sin as if it did not matter. John and Jude did not answer with something new. They pointed back to what the church had heard from the beginning, the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

In 1 John we saw the tests of real faith. God is light, so those who know Him walk in the light, confess their sins, and keep His commandments. God is love, so those who are born of Him love one another, in deed and in truth. And Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God come in the flesh, so those who have life believe in Him and confess Him. John did not give us these tests to make us anxious. He gave them so that we would know. "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).

In 2 and 3 John we saw truth and love working together in everyday church life. We are not to open our homes and our support to those who deny Christ, and we are to gladly welcome and send forward those who serve the truth. We imitate what is good, like Gaius and Demetrius, and not what is evil, like Diotrephes, who loved to be first. In Jude we were called to contend earnestly for the faith, to remember God's judgment on those who turn from Him, and to keep ourselves in the love of God while we wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jude ended where every one of these letters leads us, in worship of the God "who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you blameless before the presence of His glory with exultation" (Jude 24).

As I said at the start of this study, the guiding principle throughout has been to read God's Word plainly, as it is written, and let Scripture explain Scripture. When we do that with these letters, the message is clear. "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as a propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). "The one who has the Son has life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12). The only thing required of us to spend eternity with God is to receive His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior.

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You are the Savior of the world, and You forgive all who come to You. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross so that I could be forgiven and made right with God. Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer, tell another believer, ask a pastor about being baptized, and find a church where you can grow and serve as part of the body of Christ, walking in the light and in fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7).

Old and New Testament Links in 1, 2, 3 John and Jude

This table lists every Old and New Testament link printed in this study, in verse order. I took the links from the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, with help from the OpenBible.info cross-references, and I checked each one by reading both passages in the Steadfast Literal Bible. Where I was not sure of a link, I left it out.

Verse in this study	Old Testament passage	Kind
1 John 3:12	Genesis 4:8	alluded to
1 John 4:4	2 Chronicles 32:7	alluded to
Jude 1:5	Exodus 14:30	alluded to
Jude 1:5	Numbers 14:35	alluded to
Jude 1:7	Genesis 19:5	alluded to
Jude 1:7	Genesis 19:24	alluded to
Jude 1:7	Genesis 19:25	alluded to
Jude 1:9	Zechariah 3:2	quoted
Jude 1:11	Genesis 4:8	alluded to
Jude 1:11	Numbers 22:7	alluded to
Jude 1:11	Numbers 16:32	alluded to
Jude 1:12	Ezekiel 34:2	alluded to
Jude 1:12	Ezekiel 34:8	alluded to
Jude 1:12	Proverbs 25:14	alluded to
Jude 1:13	Isaiah 57:20	alluded to
Jude 1:14-15	Zechariah 14:5	alluded to
Jude 1:22-23	Zechariah 3:2	alluded to

Bibliography

The following sources were consulted for this study. The commentary reflects my own study and convictions, and any direct quotation from an outside source is identified and cited at the point where it appears.

Green, Jay P., Sr. (ed.). The Interlinear Bible: Hebrew-Greek-English. Hendrickson Publishers, 1986 (2nd ed.; printing used 2005). ISBN 1-56563-977-4.

Treasury of Scripture Knowledge. London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, about 1830. Public domain.

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