



# 1 John

At the time of this writing, between A.D. 85 and 90, from Ephesus, John was an older man and perhaps the only surviving apostle at this time. He had not yet been banished to the island of Patmos, where he would live in exile.

The apostle John reassure Christians in their faith and to counter false teachings. The letter is untitled and was written to no particular church. It was sent as a pastoral letter to several Gentile congregations. It was also written to all believers everywhere.

As an eyewitness of Christ, he wrote authoritatively to give this new generation of believers assurance and confidence in God and in their faith. John wrote, “I write these things 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).

John is the apostle of love, and love is mentioned throughout this letter. There are a number of similarities between this letter and John’s Gospel—in vocabulary, style, and main ideas. John uses brief statements and simple words, and he features sharp contrasts—light and darkness, truth and error, God and Satan, life and death, love and hate..

First John was written “His dear children” to dispel doubts and to build assurance by presenting a clear picture of Christ. Entering history, Jesus was and is God in the flesh and God in focus—seen, heard, and touched by the author of this letter, John the apostle. John walked and talked with Jesus, saw him heal, heard him teach, watched him die, met him arisen, and saw him ascend. John knew God—he had lived with him and had seen him work. And John enjoyed fellowship with the Father and the Son all the days of his life.

The elder statesman in the church, John wrote this letter to his “dear children.” In it he presented God as light, as love, and as life. He explained in simple and practical terms what it means to have fellowship with God.

At the same time, false teachers had entered the church, denying the incarnation of Christ. John wrote to correct their serious errors. So, John’s letter is a model for us to follow as we combat modern heresies.

John opens this letter by giving his credentials as an eyewitness of the incarnation and by stating his reason for writing (1 John 1:1-4). He then presents God as “light,” symbolizing absolute purity and holiness (1 John 1:5-7), and he explains how believers can walk in God’s light and have fellowship with him (1 John 1:8-10) with Christ as their defender (1 John 2:1-2). John urges them to obey Christ fully and to love all the members of God’s family (1 John 2:3-17). He warns his readers of “antichrists” and the antichrist who will try to lead them away from the truth (1 John 2:18-29).

In the next section, John presents God as “love”—giving, dying, forgiving, and blessing (1 John 3:1-4:21). God is love, and because God loves us, he calls us his children and makes us like Christ (1 John 3:1-2). This truth should motivate us to live close to him (1 John 3:3-6). We can be sure of our family relationship with God when our lives are filled with good deeds and love for others (1 John 3:7-24). Again, John warns of false teachers who twist the truth. We should reject these false teachers (1 John 4:1-6) as we continue to live in God’s love (1 John 4:7-21).

In the last section, John presents God as “life” (1 John 5:1-21). God’s life is in his Son. To have his Son is to have eternal life.

Do you know God? Do you know Christ? Do you know that you have eternal life? First John was written to help you know the reality of God in your life through faith in Christ, to assure you that you have eternal life, and to encourage you to remain in fellowship with the God who is light and love. Read this letter written by one overwhelmed by God's love, and with renewed confidence, pass on his love to others.

John wrote about the most vital aspects of faith so that readers would know Christian truth from error. He emphasizes the basics of faith so that we can be confident in our faith. In our dark world, God is light. In our cold world, God brings the warmth of love. In our dying world, God brings life. When we lack confidence, these truths bring us certainty.

1. God is light (1 John 1:1-2:27)
2. God is love (1 John 2:28-4:21)
3. God is life (1 John 5:1-21)

John explained that even Christians sin. Sin requires God's forgiveness, and Christ's death provides it for us. Determining to live according to God's standards in the Bible shows that our lives are being transformed. We cannot deny our sin nature, maintain that we are "above" sinning, or minimize the consequences of sin in our relationship with God. We must resist the attraction of sin, yet we must confess when we do sin.

Christ commands us to love others as he loved us. This love is evidence that we are truly saved. God is the Creator of love; he cares that his children love each other.

Love means putting others first and being unselfish. Love is action—showing others we care—not just saying it. To show love we must give sacrificially of our time and money to meet the needs of others.

The theme is the "Family of God". We become God's children by believing in Christ. God's life in us enables us to love our fellow family members. How we treat others shows who our Father is. Live as a faithful, loving family member.

John also uses a theme "Truth and Error". John teaches that the physical body does not matter; false teachers encouraged believers to throw off moral restraints. They also taught that Christ was not really a man and that we must be saved by having some special mystical knowledge. The result was that people became indifferent to sin.

God is truth and light, so the more we get to know him the better we can keep focused on the truth. Do not be led astray by any teaching that denies Christ's deity or humanity. Check the message; test the claims.

John also stresses, "Assurance". God is in control of heaven and earth. Because his word is true, we can have assurance of eternal life and victory over sin. By faith, we can be certain of our eternal destiny with him.

Assurance of our relationship with God is a promise, but it is also a way of life. We build our confidence by trusting in God's word and in Christ's provision for our sin.

# Chapter 1

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;

First John was written by John, one of Jesus' original 12 disciples. He was probably "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:20) and, along with Peter and James, he had a special relationship with Jesus. This letter was written between A.D. 85-90 from Ephesus, before John's exile to the island of Patmos (see Rev. 1:9). Jerusalem had been destroyed in A.D. 70, and Christians were scattered throughout the empire.

By the time John wrote this letter, Christianity had been around for more than a generation. It had faced and survived severe persecution. The main problem confronting the church at this time was declining commitment: many believers were conforming to the world's standards, failing to stand up for Christ, and compromising their faith. False teachers were plentiful, and they were accelerating the church's downward slide away from the Christian faith.

John wrote this letter to put believers back on track, to show the difference between light and darkness (truth and error), and to encourage the church to grow in genuine love for God and for one another. He also wrote to assure true believers that they possessed eternal life and to help them know that their faith was genuine—so they could enjoy all the benefits of being God's children. For more about John, see his Profile.

[2] (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) [3] That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

As an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry, John was qualified to teach the truth about him. The readers of this letter had not seen and heard Jesus themselves, but they could trust that what John wrote was accurate. We are like those second and third-generation Christians. Though we have not personally seen, heard, or touched Jesus, we have the New Testament record of his eyewitnesses, and we can trust that they spoke the truth about him. See John 20:29.

[4] And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

John writes about having fellowship with other believers. There are three principles behind true Christian fellowship. First, our fellowship is grounded in the testimony of God's Word. Without this underlying strength, togetherness is impossible. Second, it is mutual, depending on the unity of believers. Third, it is renewed daily through the Holy Spirit. True fellowship combines social and spiritual interaction, and it is made possible only through a living relationship with Christ.

[5] This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. [6] If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

Light represents what is good, pure, true, holy, and reliable. Darkness represents what is sinful and evil.

The statement “God is light” means that God is perfectly holy and true and that he alone can guide us out of the darkness of sin. Light is also related to truth in that light exposes whatever exists, whether it is good or bad. In the dark, good and evil look alike; in the light, they can be clearly distinguished. Just as darkness cannot exist in the presence of light, sin cannot exist in the presence of a holy God. If we want to have a relationship with God, we must put aside our sinful ways of living. To claim that we belong to him but then to go out and live for ourselves is hypocrisy. Christ will expose and judge such deceit.

Here John was confronting the first of three claims of the false teachers: that we can have fellowship with God and still walk in darkness. False teachers who thought that the physical body was evil or worthless taught one of two approaches to behavior: either they insisted on denying bodily desires through rigid discipline, or they approved of gratifying every physical lust because the body was going to be destroyed anyway. Obviously the second approach was more popular! Here John is saying that no one can claim to be a Christian and still live in evil and immorality. We can't love God and court sin at the same time.

[7] But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. [8] If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. [9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. [10] If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

## Chapter 2

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: [2] And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

John uses the address “dear children” in a warm, fatherly way. He is not talking down to his readers but is showing affection for them. At this writing, John was a very old man. He had spent almost all his life in ministry, and many of his readers were indeed his spiritual children.

To people who are feeling guilty and condemned, John offers reassurance. They know they have sinned, and Satan (called “the accuser” in Rev. 12:10) is demanding the death penalty. When you feel this way, don’t give up hope—the best defense attorney in the universe is pleading your case. Jesus Christ, your advocate, your defender, is the Judge’s Son. He has already suffered your penalty in your place. You can’t be tried for a case that is no longer on the docket. United with Christ, you are as safe as he is. Don’t be afraid to ask Christ to plead your case—he has already won it (see Romans 8:33-34; Hebrews 7:24-25).

Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice for our sins (see also 1 John 4:10). He can stand before God as our mediator because his death satisfied the wrath of God against sin and paid the death penalty for our sin. Thus Christ both satisfies God’s requirement and removes our sin. In him we are forgiven and purified.

Sometimes it is difficult to forgive those who wrong us. Imagine how hard it would be to forgive everyone, no matter what they had done! This is what God has done in Jesus. No one, no matter what he or she has done, is beyond forgiveness. All a person has to do is turn from his or her sin, receive Christ’s forgiveness, and commit his or her life to him.

[3] And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. [4] He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. [5] But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. [6] He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

Light represents what is good, pure, true, holy, and reliable. Darkness represents what is sinful and evil. The statement “God is light” means that God is perfectly holy and true and that he alone can guide us out of the darkness of sin. Light is also related to truth in that light exposes whatever exists, whether it is good or bad. In the dark, good and evil look alike; in the light, they can be clearly distinguished. Just as darkness cannot exist in the presence of light, sin cannot exist in the presence of a holy God. If we want to have a relationship with God, we must put aside our sinful ways of living. To claim that we belong to him but then to go out and live for ourselves is hypocrisy. Christ will expose and judge such deceit.

How can you be sure that you belong to Christ? This passage gives two ways to know: if you do what Christ says and live as Christ wants. What does Christ tell us to do? John answers in 1 John 3:23: “to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another.” True Christian faith results in loving behavior; that is why John says that the way we act can give us assurance that we belong to Christ.

To “walk as Jesus did” or living as Christ did doesn’t mean choosing 12 disciples, performing great miracles, and being crucified. We cannot merely copy Christ’s life—much of what Jesus did had to do with his identity as God’s Son, the fulfillment of his special role in dying for sin, and the cultural context of the first-century Roman world. To walk today as Christ did we must obey his teachings and follow his example of complete obedience to God and loving service to people

Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.

Here John was confronting the first of three claims of the false teachers: that we can have fellowship with God and still walk in darkness. False teachers who thought that the physical body was evil or worthless taught one of two approaches to behavior: either they insisted on denying bodily desires through rigid discipline, or they approved of gratifying every physical lust because the body was going to be destroyed anyway. Obviously the second approach was more popular! Here John is saying that no one can claim to be a Christian and still live in evil and immorality. We can’t love God and court sin at the same time.

[8] Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.

The commandment to love others is both old and new. It is old because it comes from the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:18). It is new because Jesus interpreted it in a radically new way (John 13:34-35). In the Christian church, love is not only expressed by showing respect; it is also expressed through self-sacrifice and servanthood (John 15:13). In fact, it can be defined as “selfless giving,” reaching beyond friends to enemies and persecutors (Matthew 5:43-48). Love should be the unifying force and the identifying mark of the Christian community. Love is the key to walking in the light, because we cannot grow spiritually while we hate others. Our growing relationship with God will result in growing relationships with others.

Here John was attacking the second claim of the false teachers: that people had no natural tendency toward sin, that they were “without sin,” and that they were then incapable of sinning. This idea is at best self-deception and at worst a bald-faced lie. The false teachers refused to take sin seriously. They wanted to be considered Christians, but they saw no need to confess and repent. The death of Christ did not mean much to them because they didn’t think they needed it. Instead of repenting and being purified by Christ’s blood, they were encouraging sin among believers. In this life we are always capable of sinning, so we should never let down our guard.

[9] He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. [10] He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

The false teachers not only denied that sin breaks our fellowship with God (1 John 1:6) and that they had a sinful nature (1 John 1:8), but they also denied that their conduct involved any sin at all (1 John 1:10). That was a lie that ignored one basic truth: all people are sinners by nature and by practice. At conversion all our sins are forgiven—past, present, and future. Yet even after we become Christians, we still sin and still need to confess. This kind of confession is not offered to gain God’s acceptance, but to remove the barrier to fellowship that our sin has put between us and him. It is difficult, however, for many people to admit their faults and shortcomings, even to God. It takes humility and honesty to recognize our weaknesses, and most of us would rather pretend that we are strong. But we need not fear revealing our sins to God—he knows them already. He will not push us away, no matter what we’ve

done. Instead he will draw us to himself.

Confession is supposed to free us to enjoy fellowship with Christ. It should ease our consciences and lighten our cares. But some Christians do not understand how it works. They feel so guilty that they confess the same sins over and over; then they wonder if they might have forgotten something. Other Christians believe that God forgives them when they confess, but if they died with unconfessed sins, they would be forever lost.

These Christians do not understand that God wants to forgive us. He allowed his beloved Son to die just so he could offer us pardon. When we come to Christ, he forgives all the sins we have committed or will ever commit. We don't need to confess the sins of the past all over again, and we don't need to fear that God will reject us if we don't keep our slate perfectly clean. Of course we should continue to confess our sins, but not because failure to do so will make us lose our salvation. Our relationship with Christ is secure. Instead, we should confess so that we can enjoy maximum fellowship and joy with him.

True confession also involves a commitment not to continue in sin. We wouldn't be genuinely confessing our sins to God if we planned to commit them again and just wanted temporary forgiveness. We should also pray for strength to defeat temptation the next time we face it.

If God has forgiven us for our sins because of Christ's death, why must we confess our sins? In admitting our sins and receiving Christ's cleansing, we are: (1) agreeing with God that our sin truly is sin and that we are willing to turn from it, (2) ensuring that we don't conceal our sins from him and consequently from ourselves, and (3) recognizing our tendency to sin and relying on his power to overcome it.

[11] But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

Does this mean that if you dislike someone you aren't a Christian? These verses are not talking about disliking a disagreeable Christian brother or sister. There will always be people we will not like as well as others. John's words focus on the attitude that causes us to ignore or despise others, to treat them as irritants, competitors, or enemies. Christian love is not a feeling but a choice. We can choose to be concerned with people's well-being and treat them with respect, whether or not we feel affection toward them. If we choose to love others, God will help us express our love.

[12] I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. [13] I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. [14] I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.

John was writing to believers of all ages, his "dear children" who had experienced forgiveness through Jesus. The older men ("fathers") were mature in the faith and had a long-standing relationship with Christ. The young men had struggled with Satan's temptations and had won. The boys and girls had learned about Christ and were just beginning their spiritual journey. Each stage of life in the Christian pilgrimage builds upon the other. As children learn about Christ, they grow in their ability to win battles with temptation. As young adults move from victory to victory, they grow in their relationship with Christ. Older adults, having known Christ for years, have developed the wisdom needed to teach

young people and start the cycle all over again. Has your Christian growth reached the maturity level appropriate for your stage in life?

[15] Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. [16] For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

Some people think that worldliness is limited to external behavior—the people we associate with, the places we go, the activities we enjoy. Worldliness is also internal because it begins in the heart and is characterized by three attitudes: (1) *the cravings of sinful man*—preoccupation with gratifying physical desires; (2) *the lust of his eyes*—craving and accumulating things, bowing to the god of materialism; and (3) *boasting of what he has and does*—obsession with one's status or importance. When the serpent tempted Eve (Genesis 3:6), he tempted her in these areas. Also, when the devil tempted Jesus in the desert, these were his three areas of attack (see Matthew 4:1-11).

By contrast, God values self-control, a spirit of generosity, and a commitment to humble service. It is possible to give the impression of avoiding worldly pleasures while still harboring worldly attitudes in one's heart. It is also possible, like Jesus, to love sinners and spend time with them while maintaining a commitment to the values of God's kingdom. What values are most important to you? Do your actions reflect the world's values or God's values?

[17] And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

When our attachment to possessions is strong, it's hard to believe that what we want will one day pass away. It may be even harder to believe that the person who does the will of God will live forever. But this was John's conviction based on the facts of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and promises. Knowing that this evil world and our desires for its pleasures will end can give us courage to control our greedy, self-indulgent behavior and to continue doing God's will.

[18] Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.

John is talking about the last days, the time between Christ's first and second comings. The first-century readers of 1 John lived in the last days, and so do we. During this time, antichrists (false teachers who pretend to be Christians and who lure weak members away from Christ) will appear. Finally, just before the world ends, one great antichrist will arise (Rev. 13; Rev. 19:20; Rev. 20:10). We do not need to fear these evil people, however. The Holy Spirit shows us their errors, so we will not be deceived. However, we must teach God's Word clearly and carefully to the peripheral, weak members among us so that they won't fall prey to these teachers who "come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (Matthew 7:15).

[19] They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

The antichrists were not total strangers to the church; they once had been in the church, but they did not really belong to it. John does not say why they left; it is clear that their reasons for joining in the first place were wrong. Some people may call themselves Christians for less than the best reasons. Perhaps going to church is a family tradition. Maybe they like the social and business contacts they make there.

Or possibly going to church is a long-standing habit, and they have never stopped to ask themselves why they do it. What is your main reason for being a Christian? Unless it is a Christ-centered reason, you may not really belong. You don't have to settle for less than the best. You can become personally acquainted with Jesus Christ and become a loyal, trustworthy follower.

[20] But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.

*Anointing* usually refers to the pouring out of special olive oil. Oil was used to consecrate kings and special servants for service (1 Samuel 16:1, 13), and also was used by the church when someone was sick (James 5:14). "You have an anointing from the Holy One" could read, "The Holy Spirit has been given to you by the Father and the Son." When a person becomes a Christian, he or she receives the Holy Spirit. One way the Holy Spirit helps the believer and the church is by communicating truth. Jesus is the truth (John 14:6), and the Holy Spirit guides believers to him (John 16:13). People who are opposed to Christ are also opposed to his truth, and the Holy Spirit is not working in their lives. When we are led by the Spirit, we can stand against false teachers and the antichrist. Ask the Spirit to guide you each day (see 1 John 2:27).

[21] I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. [22] Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. [23] Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.

Apparently the antichrists in John's day were claiming faith in God while denying and opposing Christ. To do so, John firmly states, is impossible. Because Jesus is God's Son and the Messiah, to deny Christ is to reject God's way of revealing himself to the world. A person who accepts Christ as God's Son, however, accepts God the Father at the same time. The two are one and cannot be separated. Many cultists today call themselves Christians, but they deny that Jesus is divine. We must expose these heresies and oppose such teachings so that the weak believers among us do not succumb to their teachings.

[24] Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.

These Christians had heard the gospel, very likely from John himself. They knew that Christ was God's Son, that he died for their sins and was raised to give them new life, and that he would return and establish his kingdom in its fullness. But their fellowship was being infiltrated by teachers who denied these basic doctrines of the Christian faith, and some of the believers were in danger of succumbing to false arguments. John encouraged them to hold on to the Christian truth they heard at the beginning of their walk with Christ. It is important to grow in our knowledge of the Lord, to deepen our understanding through careful study, and to teach these truths to others. But no matter how much we learn, we must never abandon the basic truths about Christ. Jesus will always be God's Son, and his sacrifice for our sins is permanent. No truth will ever contradict these teachings in the Bible

[25] And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life. [26] These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. [27] But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

Christ had promised to send the Holy Spirit to teach his followers and to remind them of all that Christ

had taught (John 14:26). As a result, Christians have the Holy Spirit within them (“the anointing”) to keep them from going astray. In addition, they have the God-inspired Scriptures, against which they can test questionable teachings. To stay true to Christ, we must follow his Word and his Spirit. Let the Holy Spirit help you discern truth from error. For more about who the Holy Spirit is and what he does, see the notes on ▪3:6; ▪1:5; and ▪. 1:13-14.

Christ lives (remains) in us through the Holy Spirit, and we also live in Christ. This means that we place our total trust in him, rely on him for guidance and strength, and live as he wants us to live. It implies a personal, life-giving relationship. John uses the same idea in John 15:5, where he speaks of Christ as the vine and his followers as the branches (see also 1 John 3:24; 1 John 4:15).

[28] And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. [29] If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.

The visible proof of being a Christian is right behavior. Many people do good deeds but don’t have faith in Jesus Christ. Others claim to have faith but rarely produce good deeds. A deficit in either faith or right behavior will be a cause for shame when Christ returns. Because true faith always results in good deeds, those who claim to have faith and who consistently do what is right are true believers. Good deeds cannot produce salvation (see Ephes. 2:8-9), but they are necessary proof that true faith is actually present (James 2:14-17).

## Chapter 3

[3:1] Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

As believers, our self-worth is based on the fact that God loves us and calls us his children. We are his children *now*, not just sometime in the distant future. Knowing that we are his children should encourage us to live as Jesus did. For other references about being part of God's family, see Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 3:26-27; Galatians 4:6-7.

1 John 3:1 tells us who we are—members of God's family ("children of God"). 1 John 3:2 tells us who we are becoming—reflections of God. The rest of the chapter tells us what we have as we grow to resemble God: (1) victory over sin (1 John 3:4-9); (2) love for others (1 John 3:10-18); and (3) confidence before God (1 John 3:19-24).

[2] Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. [3] And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

The Christian life is a process of becoming more and more like Christ (see Romans 8:29). This process will not be complete until we see Christ face to face (1 Cor. 13:12; Phil. 3:21), but knowing that it is our ultimate destiny should motivate us to purify ourselves. To purify means to keep morally straight, free from the corruption of sin. God also purifies us, but there is action we must take to remain morally fit (see 1 Tim. 5:22; James 4:8; 1 Peter 1:22).

[4] Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

There is a difference between committing a sin and continuing to sin. Even the most faithful believers sometimes commit sins, but they do not cherish a particular sin and choose to commit it. A believer who commits a sin repents, confesses, and finds forgiveness. A person who continues to sin, by contrast, is not sorry for what he or she is doing. Thus this person never confesses and never receives forgiveness. Such a person is in opposition to God, no matter what religious claims he or she makes.

[5] And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.

Under the Old Testament sacrifice system, a lamb without blemish was offered as a sacrifice for sin. Jesus is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Because Jesus lived a perfect life and sacrificed himself for our sins, we can be completely forgiven (1 John 2:2). We can look back to his death for us and know that we need never suffer eternal death (1 Peter 1:18-20).

[6] Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.

[7] Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. [8] He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. [9] Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

We all have areas where temptation is strong and habits are hard to conquer. These weaknesses give the devil a foothold, so we must deal with our areas of vulnerability. If we are struggling with a particular sin, however, these verses are not directed at us, even if for the time we seem to keep on sinning. John is not talking about people whose victories are still incomplete; he is talking about people who make a practice of sinning and look for ways to justify it.

Three steps are necessary to find victory over prevailing sin: (1) seek the power of the Holy Spirit and God's Word; (2) stay away from tempting situations; and (3) seek the help of the body of Christ—be open to their willingness to hold you accountable and to pray for you.

**3:9** “No one who is born of God will continue to sin” means that true believers do not make a practice of sinning, nor do they become indifferent to God's moral law. All believers still sin, but they are working to gain victory over sin. “God's seed remains in him” means that true believers do not make a practice of sinning because God's new life has been born into them.

We are “born of God” when the Holy Spirit lives in us and gives us Jesus' new life. Being born again is more than a fresh start; it is a rebirth, receiving a new family name based on Christ's death for us. When this happens, God forgives us and totally accepts us; the Holy Spirit gives us new minds and hearts, lives in us, and begins helping us to become like Christ. Our perspective changes too because we have a mind that is renewed day by day by the Holy Spirit (see Romans 12:2; Ephesians. 4:22-24). So we must begin to think and act differently. See John 3:1-21 for more on being born again.

[10] In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. [11] For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. [12] Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. [13] Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

Cain killed his brother, Abel, when God accepted Abel's offering and not his (Genesis 4:1-16). Abel's offering showed that Cain was not giving his best to God, and Cain's jealous anger drove him to murder. People who are morally upright expose and shame those who aren't. If we live for God, the world will often hate us, because we make them painfully aware of their immoral way of living

[14] We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. [15] Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

John echoes Jesus' teaching that whoever hates another person is a murderer at heart (Matthew 5:21-22). Christianity is a religion of the heart; outward compliance alone is not enough. Bitterness against someone who has wronged you is an evil cancer within you and will eventually destroy you. Don't let a “bitter root” (Hebrews 12:15) grow in you or your church.

[16] Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Real love is an action, not a feeling. It produces selfless, sacrificial giving. The greatest act of love is giving oneself for others. How can we lay down our lives? By serving others with no thought of receiving anything in return. Sometimes it is easier to say we'll die for others than to truly live for

them—this involves putting others’ desires first. Jesus taught this same principle of love in John 15:13.

[17] But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? [18] My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

These verses give an example of how to lay down our lives for others—to help those in need. This is strikingly similar to James' teaching (James 2:14-17). How clearly do your actions say you really love others? Are you as generous as you should be with your money, possessions, and time?

[19] And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. [20] For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

Many are afraid that they don't love others as they should. They feel guilty because they think they are not doing enough to show proper love to Christ. Their consciences bother them. John has these people in mind in this letter. How do we escape the gnawing accusations of our consciences? Not by ignoring them or rationalizing our behavior, but by setting our hearts on God's love. When we feel guilty, we should remind ourselves that God knows our motives as well as our actions. His voice of assurance is stronger than the accusing voice of our conscience. If we are in Christ, he will not condemn us (Romans 8:1; Hebrews 9:14-15). So if you are living for the Lord but feeling that you are not good enough, remind yourself that God is greater than your conscience.

[21] Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. [22] And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

If your conscience is clear, you can come to God without fear, confident that your requests will be heard. John reaffirms Jesus' promise that whatever we ask for will be given to us (Matthew 7:7; see also Matthew 21:22; John 9:31; John 15:7). You will receive if you obey and do what pleases him because you will then be asking in line with God's will. Of course this does not mean that you can have anything you want, like instant riches. If you are truly seeking God's will, there are some requests you will not make.

[23] And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

In the Bible, a person's name stands for his or her character. It represents who he or she really is. We are to believe not only in Jesus' words, but also in his very person as the Son of God. Moreover, to believe "in the name" means to pattern your life after Christ's, to become more like him by uniting yourself with him. And if we are living like Christ, we will "love one another.

[24] And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

The mutual relationship, living in Christ as he lives in us, shows itself in Christians who keep these three essential commands: (1) believe in Christ, (2) love the brothers and sisters, and (3) live morally upright lives. The Spirit's presence is not only spiritual and mystical, but it is also practical. Our conduct verifies his presence.

## Chapter 4

[4:1] Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. [2] Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: [3] And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

“Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits” means that we shouldn’t believe everything we hear just because someone says it is a message inspired by God. There are many ways to test teachers to see if their message is truly from the Lord. One is to check to see if their words match what God says in the Bible. Other tests include their commitment to the body of believers (1 John 2:19), their life-style (1 John 3:23-24), and the fruit of their ministry (1 John 4:6). But the most important test of all, says John, is what they believe about Christ. Do they teach that Jesus is fully God and fully man? Our world is filled with voices claiming to speak for God. Give them these tests to see if they are indeed speaking God’s truth.

Some people believe everything they read or hear. Unfortunately, many ideas printed and taught are not true. Christians should have faith, but they should not be gullible. Verify every message you hear, even if the person who brings it says it’s from God. If the message is truly from God, it will be consistent with Christ’s teachings.

The antichrist will be a person who epitomizes all that is evil, and he will be readily received by an evil world. He is more fully described in 2 Thess. 2:3-12 and Rev. 13. The “spirit of the antichrist” is already here (see the note on John 2:18-23).

[4] Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

It is easy to be frightened by the wickedness we see all around us and overwhelmed by the problems we face. Evil is obviously much stronger than we are. John assures us, however, that God is even stronger. He will conquer all evil—and his Spirit and his Word live in our hearts!

[5] They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. [6] We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

False teachers are popular with the world because, like the false prophets of the Old Testament, they tell people what they want to hear. John warns that Christians who faithfully teach God’s Word will not win any popularity contests in the world. People don’t want to hear their sins denounced; they don’t want to listen to demands that they change their behavior. A false teacher will be well received by non-Christians.

[7] Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

Everyone believes that love is important, but love is usually thought of as a feeling. In reality, love is a

choice and an action, as 1 Cor. 13:4-7 shows. God is the source of our love: he loved us enough to sacrifice his Son for us. Jesus is our example of what it means to love; everything he did in life and death was supremely loving. The Holy Spirit gives us the power to love; he lives in our hearts and makes us more and more like Christ. God's love always involves a choice and an action, and our love should be like his. How well do you display your love for God in the choices you make and the actions you take?

[8] He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

John says, "God is love," not "Love is God." Our world, with its shallow and selfish view of love, has turned these words around and contaminated our understanding of love. The world thinks that love is what makes a person feel good and that it is all right to sacrifice moral principles and others' rights in order to obtain such "love." But that isn't real love; it is the exact opposite—selfishness. And God is not that kind of "love." Real love is like God, who is holy, just, and perfect. If we truly know God, we will love as he does.

[9] In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. [10] Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Jesus is God's only Son. While all believers are sons and daughters of God, only Jesus lives in this special unique relationship (see John 1:18; John 3:16).

**4:9-10** Love explains (1) why God creates—because he loves, he creates people to love; (2) why God cares—because he loves them, he cares for sinful people; (3) why we are free to choose—God wants a loving response from us; (4) why Christ died—his love for us caused him to seek a solution to the problem of sin; and (5) why we receive eternal life—God's love expresses itself to us forever.

**4:10** Nothing sinful or evil can exist in God's presence. He is absolute goodness. He cannot overlook, condone, or excuse sin as though it never happened. He loves us, but his love does not make him morally lax. If we trust in Christ, however, we will not have to bear the penalty for our sins (1 Peter 2:24). We will be acquitted (Romans 5:18) by his atoning sacrifice

[11] Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. [12] No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

If no one has ever seen God, how can we ever know him? John in his Gospel said, "God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (John 1:18). Jesus is the complete expression of God in human form and he has revealed God to us. When we love one another, the invisible God reveals himself to others through us, and his love is made complete.

Some people enjoy being with others. They make friends with strangers easily and always are surrounded by many friends. Other people are shy or reserved. They have a few friends, but they are uncomfortable talking with people they don't know or mingling in crowds. Shy people don't need to become extroverts in order to love others. John isn't telling us *how many people* to love, but *how much* to love the people we already know. Our job is to love faithfully the people God has given us to love, whether there are two or two hundred of them. If God sees that we are ready to love others, he will bring them to us. No matter how shy we are, we don't need to be afraid of the love commandment. God

provides us the strength to do what he asks.

[13] Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

When we become Christians, we receive the Holy Spirit. God's presence in our lives is proof that we really belong to him. He also gives us the power to love (Romans 5:5; Romans 8:9; 2 Cor. 1:22). Rely on that power as you reach out to others. As you do so, you will gain confidence. See also Romans 8:16.

[14] And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. [15] Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. [16] And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. [17] Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

The day of judgment is that time when all people will appear before Christ and be held accountable for their actions. With God living in us through Christ, we have no reason to fear this day, because we have been saved from punishment. Instead, we can look forward to the day of judgment, because it will mean the end of sin and the beginning of a face-to-face relationship with Jesus Christ.

[18] There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

If we ever are afraid of the future, eternity, or God's judgment, we can remind ourselves of God's love. We know that he loves us perfectly (Romans 8:38-39). We can resolve our fears first by focusing on his immeasurable love for us, and then by allowing him to love others through us. His love will quiet your fears and give you confidence

[19] We love him, because he first loved us.

God's love is the source of all human love, and it spreads like fire. In loving his children, God kindles a flame in their hearts. In turn, they love others, who are warmed by God's love through them.

[20] If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? [21] And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

It is easy to say we love God when that love doesn't cost us anything more than weekly attendance at religious services. But the real test of our love for God is how we treat the people right in front of us—our family members and fellow believers. We cannot truly love God while neglecting to love those who are created in his image.

## Chapter 5

[5:1] Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. [2] By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.

When we become Christians, we become part of God's family, with fellow believers as our brothers and sisters. It is God who determines who the other family members are, not us. We are simply called to accept and love them. How well do you treat your fellow family members?

[3] For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. [4] For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

Jesus never promised that obeying him would be easy. But the hard work and self-discipline of serving Christ is no burden to those who love him. And if our load starts to feel heavy, we can always trust Christ to help us bear it (see Matthew 11:28-30).

[5] Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? [6] This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. [7] For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. [8] And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one. The phrase "came by water and blood" may refer to Jesus' baptism and his crucifixion. At this time, there was a false teaching in circulation that said Jesus was "the Christ" only between his baptism and his death—that is, he was merely human until he was baptized, at which time "the Christ" then descended upon him but then later left him before his death on the cross. But if Jesus died only as a man, he could not have taken upon himself the sins of the world, and Christianity would be an empty religion. Only an act of God could take away the punishment that we deserve for our sin.

[9] If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.

The Gospels twice record God's clear declaration that Jesus was his Son—at Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:16-17), and at his transfiguration (Matthew 17:5)

[10] He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. [11] And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. [12] He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

Whoever believes in God's Son has eternal life. He is all you need. You don't need to wait for eternal life, because it begins the moment you believe. You don't need to work for it, because it is already yours. You don't need to worry about it, because you have been given eternal life by God himself—and it is guaranteed.

[13] These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may

know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

Some people hope that they will receive eternal life. John says we can know we have it. Our certainty is based on God's promise that he has given us eternal life through his Son. This is true whether you feel close to God or far away from him. Eternal life is not based on feelings, but on facts. You can know that you have eternal life if you believe God's truth. If you aren't sure that you are a Christian, ask yourself: "Have I honestly committed my life to him as my Savior and Lord?" If so, you know by faith that you are indeed a child of God.

[14] And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: [15] And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

The emphasis here is on God's will, not our will. When we communicate with God, we don't demand what we want; rather we discuss with him what he wants for us. If we align our prayers to his will, he will listen; and we can be certain that if he listens, he will give us a definite answer. Start praying with confidence!

[16] If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. [17] All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.

s to death is, and whether the death it causes is physical or spiritual. Paul wrote that some Christians had died because they took Communion "in an unworthy manner" (1 Cor. 11:27-30), and Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead when they lied to God (Acts 5:1-11).

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit results in spiritual death (Mark 3:29), and the book of Hebrews describes the spiritual death of the person who turns against Christ (Hebrews 6:4-6). John was probably referring to the people who had left the Christian fellowship and joined the antichrists. By rejecting the only way of salvation, these people were putting themselves out of reach of prayer. In most cases, however, even if we knew what the terrible sin is, we would have no sure way of knowing whether a certain person had committed it. Therefore we should continue praying for our loved ones and for our Christian brothers and sisters, leaving the judgment up to God. Note that John says, "I am not saying that he should pray about that," rather than "You cannot pray about that." He recognized the lack of certainty.

[18] We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not. [19] And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

Christians commit sins, of course, but they ask God to forgive them, and then they continue serving him. God has freed believers from their slavery to Satan, and he keeps them safe from Satan's continued attacks. The rest of the world does not have the Christian's freedom to obey God. Unless they come to Christ in faith, they have no choice but to obey Satan. There is no middle ground; people either belong to God and obey him, or they live under Satan's control.

[20] And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. [21] Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

An idol is anything that substitutes for the true faith, anything that robs Christ of his full deity and humanity, any human idea that claims to be more authoritative than the Bible, any loyalty that replaces God at the center of our lives.

John presents a clear picture of Christ. What we think about Jesus Christ is central to our teaching, preaching, and living. Jesus is the God-man, fully God and fully human at the same time. He came to earth to die in our place for our sins. Through faith in him, we are given eternal life and the power to do his will. What is your answer to the most important question you could ever ask—who is Jesus Christ?

# 2 John

## Chapter One

<sup>1:1</sup>The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth;

The “elder” is John, one of Jesus’ 12 disciples and the writer of the Gospel of John, three letters, and the book of Revelation. For more information about John, see his Profile. This letter was written shortly after 1 John to warn about false teachers. The salutation, “to the chosen lady and her children,” could refer to a specific woman, or to a church whose identity is no longer known. John may have written this from Ephesus.

<sup>1:2</sup>For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever. <sup>1:3</sup>Grace be with you, mercy, *and* peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

<sup>1:4</sup>I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.

he “truth” is the truth about Jesus Christ, as opposed to the lies of the false teachers (see 1 John 2:21-23 ).

<sup>1:5</sup>And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. <sup>1:6</sup>And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.

The statement that Christians should love one another is a recurrent New Testament theme. Yet love for one’s neighbor is an old command, first appearing in the third book of Moses (Leviticus 19:18 ). We can show love in many ways: by avoiding prejudice and discrimination, by accepting people, by listening, helping, giving, serving, and refusing to judge. Knowing God’s command is not enough. We must put it into practice, walking “in obedience to his commands.” (See also Matthew 22:37-39 and 1 John 2:7-8.)

<sup>1:7</sup>For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

In John’s day, many false teachers taught that spirit was good and matter was evil; therefore, they reasoned that Jesus could not have been both God and man. In strong terms, John warns against this kind of teaching. There are still many false teachers who promote an understanding of Jesus that is not Biblical. These teachers are dangerous because they distort the truth and undermine the foundations of Christian faith. They may use the right words but change the meanings. The way your teachers live shows a lot about what they believe about Christ. For more on testing teachers, see 1 John 4:1 .

<sup>1:8</sup>Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.

To “be rewarded fully” refers not to salvation but to the rewards of loyal service. All who value the truth and persistently hold to it will win their full reward. Those who live for themselves and justify their self-centeredness by teaching false doctrines will lose that reward (see Matthew 7:21-23 ).

<sup>1:9</sup>Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. <sup>1:10</sup>If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed:

John instructed the believers not to show hospitality to false teachers. They were to do nothing that would encourage the heretics in their propagation of falsehoods. In addition, if believers were to invite them in, such action would show that they were approving of what the false teachers said and did. It may seem rude to turn people away, even if they are teaching heresy, but how much better it is to be faithful to God than merely courteous to people! John is condemning the support of those who are dedicated to opposing the true teachings of God, not condemning hospitality to unbelievers. John adds that a person who supports a false teacher in any way shares in the teacher’s wicked work.

<sup>1:11</sup>For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

<sup>1:12</sup>Having many things to write unto you, I would not *write* with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full. <sup>1:13</sup>The children of thy elect sister greet thee. Amen.

False teaching is serious business, and we dare not overlook it. It is so serious that John wrote this letter to warn against it. There are so many false teachings in our world that we might be tempted to take many of them lightly. Instead, we should realize the dangers they pose and actively refuse to give heresies any foothold.

# 3 John

## Chapter One

<sup>1:1</sup>The elder unto the well beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.

This letter gives us an important glimpse into the life of the early church. Third John, addressed to Gaius, is about the need for showing hospitality to traveling preachers and other believers. It also warns against a would-be church dictator.

The “elder,” John, was one of Jesus’ 12 disciples and the writer of the Gospel of John, three letters, and the book of Revelation. For more information about John, see his Profile. We have no further information about Gaius, but he is someone whom John loved dearly. Perhaps Gaius had shared his home and hospitality with John at some time during John’s travels. If so, John would have appreciated his actions, because traveling preachers depended on expressions of hospitality to survive (see Matthew 10:11-16).

<sup>1:2</sup>Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.

John was concerned for Gaius’s physical *and* spiritual well-being. This was the opposite of the popular heresy that taught the separation of spirit and matter and despised the physical side of life. Today, many people still fall into this way of thinking. This non-Christian attitude logically leads to one of two responses: neglect of the body and physical health, or indulgence of the body’s sinful desires. God is concerned for both your body and your soul. As a responsible Christian, you should neither neglect nor indulge yourself, but care for your physical needs and discipline your body so that you are at your best for God’s service.

<sup>1:3</sup>For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. <sup>1:4</sup>I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

John wrote about “my children” because, as a result of his preaching, he was the spiritual father of many, including Gaius.

<sup>1:5</sup>Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers;

In the church’s early days, traveling prophets, evangelists, and teachers (“the brothers”) were helped on their way by people like Gaius who housed and fed them. Hospitality is a lost art in many churches today. We would do well to invite more people for meals—fellow church members, young people, traveling missionaries, those in need, visitors. This is an active and much-appreciated way to show your love. In fact it is probably more important today. Because of our individualistic, self-centered society, there are many lonely people who wonder if anyone cares whether they live or die. If you find such a lonely person, show him or her that *you* care!

<sup>1:6</sup>Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well: <sup>1:7</sup>Because that for his name's sake they went forth,

taking nothing of the Gentiles.<sup>1:8</sup> We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow helpers to the truth.

The traveling missionaries neither asked for nor accepted anything from nonbelievers because they didn't want anyone questioning their motives for preaching. God's true preachers do not preach to make money but to express their love for God. It is the church's responsibility to care for Christian workers; this should never be left to nonbelievers.

When you help someone who is spreading the gospel, you are in a very real way a partner in the ministry. This is the other side of the principle in 2 John 1:10 (see the note there). Not everyone should go to the mission field; those who work for Christ at home are vital to the ministry of those who go and who need support. We can support missionaries by praying for them and by giving them our money, hospitality, and time.

<sup>1:9</sup>I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. <sup>1:10</sup>Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth *them* out of the church.

This letter to which John refers was neither 1 or 2 John, but another letter that no longer exists.

All we know about Diotrephes is that he wanted to control the church. John denounced (1) his refusal to have anything to do with other spiritual leaders, (2) his slander of the leaders, (3) his bad example in refusing to welcome any gospel teachers, and (4) his attempt to excommunicate those who opposed his leadership. Sins such as pride, jealousy, and slander are still present in the church, and when a leader makes a habit of encouraging sin and discouraging right actions, he must be stopped. If no one speaks up, great harm can come to the church. We must confront sin in the church; if we try to avoid it, it will continue to grow. A true Christian leader is a servant, not an autocrat!

<sup>1:11</sup>Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God. <sup>1:12</sup>Demetrius hath good report of all *men*, and of the truth itself: yea, and we *also* bear record; and ye know that our record is true.

We know nothing about Demetrius except that he may have carried this letter from John to Gaius. The book of Acts mentions an Ephesian silversmith named Demetrius who opposed Paul (Acts 19:24ff), but this is probably another man. In contrast to the corrupt Diotrephes, Demetrius had a high regard for truth. John personified truth as a witness to Demetrius's character and teaching. In other words, if truth could speak, it would speak on Demetrius's behalf. When Demetrius arrived, Gaius certainly opened his home to him.

<sup>1:13</sup>I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: <sup>1:14</sup>But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace *be* to thee. *Our* friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name.

Whereas 2 John emphasizes the need to refuse hospitality to false teachers, 3 John urges continued hospitality to those who teach the truth. Hospitality is a strong sign of support for people and their work. It means giving them of your resources so their stay will be comfortable and their work and travel easier. Actively look for creative ways to show hospitality to God's workers. It may be in the form of a letter of encouragement, a gift, financial support, an open home, or prayer.

# JUDE

## INTRODUCTION TO JUDE

**PURPOSE:** To remind the church of the need for constant vigilance—to keep strong in the faith and to oppose heresy.

The book of Jude is written Jewish Christians, and all believers everywhere about A.D. 65.

From the first century on, Jude the brother of James warned the church that it had been threatened by heresy and false teaching.

To protect from harm, to guard from attack, to repulse enemies—for centuries rugged defenders have built walls, launched missiles, and waged wars, expending material and human resources in the battle to save nations and cities. And with total commitment and courageous abandon, individuals have fought for their families. It is a rule of life that we fight for survival, defending with all our strength what is most precious to us, from every real or imagined attack.

God's Word and the gift of eternal life have infinite value and have been entrusted to Christ's faithful followers. There are many people who live in opposition to God and his followers. They twist God's truth, seeking to deceive and destroy the unwary. But God's truth must go forth, carried and defended by those who have committed their lives to God's Son. It is an important task, an awesome responsibility, and a profound privilege to have this commission.

This was Jude's message to Christians everywhere. Opposition would come and godless teachers would arise, but Christians should "contend for the faith" (Jude 1:3) by rejecting all falsehood and immorality (Jude 1:4-19), remembering God's mighty acts of rescue and punishment (Jude 1:5-11, 14-16) and the warnings of the apostles (Jude 1:17-19). His readers are to build up their own faith through prayer (Jude 1:20), keeping close to Christ (Jude 1:21), helping others (Jude 1:22-23), and hating sin (Jude 1:23). Then Jude concludes with a glorious benediction of praise to God (Jude 1:24-25).

How much do you value God's Word, the fellowship of the church, and obedience to Jesus Christ? There are many false teachers waiting to destroy your Christ-centered life, the credibility of God's Word, and the unity of the body of Christ. Read Jude and determine to stand firm in your faith and defend God's truth at all costs. *Nothing* is more valuable.

Jude wrote to motivate Christians everywhere to action. He wanted them to recognize the dangers of false teaching, to protect themselves and other believers, and to win back those who had already been deceived. Jude was writing against godless teachers who were saying that Christians could do as they pleased without fear of God's punishment. While few teach this heresy openly in the church today, many in the church act as though this were true. This letter contains a warning against living a nominal Christian life.

We must staunchly defend Christian truth. Make sure that you avoid leaders and teachers who distort

the Bible to suit their own purposes. Genuine servants of God will faithfully portray Christ in their words and conduct.

Jude also warns against apostasy—turning away from Christ. We are to remember that God punishes rebellion against him. We must be careful not to drift away from a faithful commitment to Christ.

Those who do not seek to know the truth in God's Word are susceptible to apostasy. Christians must guard against any false teachings that would distract them from the truth preached by the apostles and written in God's Word.

# Jude

## Chapter One

1: Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called:

Jude's letter focuses on *apostasy*—when people turn away from God's truth and embrace false teachings. Jude reminded his readers of God's judgment on those who had left the faith in the past. This letter is a warning against false teachers—in this case, probably Gnostic teachers

Gnostics opposed two of the basic tenets of Christianity—the incarnation of Christ and the call to Christian ethics. Jude wrote to combat these false teachings and to encourage true doctrine and right conduct.

2: Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied.

3: Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

Jude emphasizes the important relationship between correct doctrine and true faith. The truth of the Bible must not be compromised, because it gives us the real facts about Jesus and salvation. The Bible is inspired by God and should never be twisted or manipulated; when it is, we can become confused over right and wrong and lose sight of the only path that leads to eternal life. Before writing about salvation, then, Jude felt he had to set his readers back on the right track, calling them back to the basics of their faith. Then the way to salvation would be clearer. *Saints* refers to all believers.

4: For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Even some of our churches today have false (“godless”) teachers who “have secretly slipped in” and are twisting the Bible's teachings to justify their own opinions, life-style, or wrong behavior. In doing this, they may gain temporary freedom to do as they wish, but they will discover that in distorting Scripture they are playing with fire. God will judge them for excusing, tolerating, and promoting sin.

Some people avoid studying the Bible because they think theology is dry and boring. Those who refuse to learn correct doctrine, however, are susceptible to false teaching because they are not fully grounded in God's truth. We must understand the basic doctrines of our faith so that we can recognize false doctrines and prevent wrong teaching from undermining our faith and hurting others.

Many first-century false teachers were teaching that Christians could do whatever they liked without fear of God's punishment. They had a light view of God's holiness and his justice. Paul refuted this same kind of false teaching in Romans 6:1-23. Even today, some Christians minimize the sinfulness of sin, believing that how they live has little to do with their faith. But what a person truly believes will show up in how he or she acts. Those who truly have faith will show it by their deep respect for God and their sincere desire to live according to the principles in his Word.

5: I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.

6: And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

7: Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

Jude gave three examples of rebellion: (1) the children of Israel—who, although they were delivered from Egypt, refused to trust God and enter the promised land (Numbers 14:26-39); (2) the angels—although they were once pure, holy, and living in God’s presence, some gave in to pride and joined Satan to rebel against God (2 Peter 2:4); and (3) the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah—the inhabitants were so full of sin that God wiped them off the face of the earth (Genesis 19:1-29). If the chosen people, angels, and sinful cities were punished, how much more would these false teachers be severely judged?

Many people don’t want to believe that God sentences people to “hell” for rejecting him. However, this is clearly taught in Scripture. Sinners who do not seek forgiveness from God will face eternal separation from him. Jude gives this warning to all who rebel against, ignore, or reject God.

8: Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.

The “celestial beings” here are probably angels. Just as the men of Sodom insulted angels (Genesis 19), these false teachers scoffed at any authority.

9: Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.

This incident is not recorded in any other place in Scripture. Moses’ death is recorded in Deut. 34. Here Jude may have been making use of an ancient book called *The Assumption of Moses*

10: But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.

Teachers claimed that they possessed secret knowledge that gave them authority. Their “knowledge” of God was esoteric—mystical and beyond human understanding. The nature of God *is* beyond our understanding, but God, in his grace, has chosen to reveal himself to us—in his Word, and supremely in Jesus Christ. Therefore, we must seek to know all we can about what he has revealed, even though we cannot fully comprehend God with our finite human minds. Beware of those who claim to have all the answers and who belittle what they do not understand.

*11:* Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.

Jude gives three examples of men who did whatever they wanted (Jude 1:10)—Cain, who murdered his brother out of vengeful jealousy (Genesis 4:1-16); Balaam, who prophesied out of greed, not out of obedience to God's command (Numbers 22-24); and Korah, who rebelled against God's divinely appointed leaders, wanting the power for himself (Numbers 16:1-35). These stories illustrate attitudes that are typical of false teachers—pride, selfishness, jealousy, greed, lust for power, and disregard of God's will.

*12:* These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;

When the Lord's Supper was celebrated in the early church, believers ate a full meal before taking part in Communion with the sharing of the bread and wine. The meal was called a "love feast," and it was designed to be a sacred time of fellowship to prepare one's heart for Communion. However, the false teachers were joining these love feasts, becoming "blemishes" in what should have been a time of rejoicing in the Lord. In several of the churches, however, this meal had turned into a time of gluttony and drunken revelry.

In Corinth, for example, some people hastily gobbled food while others went hungry (1 Cor. 11:20-22). No church function should be an occasion for selfishness, gluttony, greed, disorder, or other sins that destroy unity or take one's mind away from the real purpose for gathering together.

The false teachers were "twice dead." They were useless "trees" because they were not producing fruit; and because they were not even believers, they would be rooted up and burned

*13:* Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

*14:* And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints,

Enoch is mentioned briefly in Genesis 5:21-24. This quotation is from an apocryphal book called the book of Enoch.

Other places where Jesus is mentioned as coming with angels ("holy ones") are Matthew 16:27 and Matthew 24:31. Daniel 7:10 speaks of God judging humanity in the presence of ten thousand times ten thousand angels.

*15:* To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

*16:* These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.

*17:* But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ;

Other apostles also warned about false teachers—see Acts 20:29; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 2 John 1:7.

18: How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.

The *last time* is a common phrase referring to the time between Jesus' first and second comings. We live in the last times.

19: These are they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.

20: But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,

To “pray in the Holy Spirit” means to pray in the power and strength of the Holy Spirit. He prays for us (Romans 8:26-27), opens our minds to Jesus (John 14:26), and teaches us about him (John 15:26)

21: Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

To “keep yourselves in God’s love” means to live close to God and his people, not listening to false teachers who would try to pull you away from him (John 15:9-10).

22: And of some have compassion, making a difference:

23: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

Effective witnessing saves people from God’s judgment. We witness to some through our compassion and kindness; to others we witness as if we were snatching them from the eternal fire. To hate “even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh” means that we are to hate the sin, but we must witness to and love the sinner. Unbelievers, no matter how successful they seem by worldly standards, are lost and in need of salvation. We should not take witnessing lightly—it is a matter of life and death.

In trying to find common ground with those to whom we witness, we must be careful not to fall into the quicksand of compromise. When reaching out to others, we must be sure that our own footing is safe and secure. Be careful not to become so much like non-Christians that no one can tell who you are or what you believe. Influence them for Christ—do not allow them to influence you to sin!

24: Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

25: To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

As the letter begins, so it ends—with assurance. God keeps believers from falling prey to false teachers. Although false teachers are widespread and dangerous, we do not have to be afraid if we trust God and are rooted and grounded in him.

To be sinless and perfect (“without fault”) will be the ultimate condition of the believer when he or she

finally sees Christ face to face. When Christ appears, and we are given our new bodies, we will be like Christ (1 John 3:2). Coming into Christ's presence will be more wonderful than we could ever imagine!

The audience to whom Jude wrote was vulnerable to heresies and to temptations toward immoral living. Jude encouraged the believers to remain firm in their faith and trust in God's promises for their future. This was all the more important because they were living in a time of increased apostasy. We too are living in the last days, much closer to the end than were the original readers of this letter. We too are vulnerable to doctrinal error. We too are tempted to give in to sin. Although there is much false teaching around us, we need not be afraid or give up in despair—God can keep us from falling, and he guarantees that if we remain faithful, he will bring us into his presence and give us everlasting joy.

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