



**The Summit**  
Green Campus of Canton Baptist Temple

# **Resources for Your Life**

1-3 John and Jude  
17 Sessions

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## Resource Guide

This resource was compiled from the personal Bible study and blog entries created by Tom Hogsed, pastor of the Summit in Green. You can find the original blog entries at [www.tomhogsed.com](http://www.tomhogsed.com).

The **introduction** to this book has been written so the reader has a better understanding of the Biblical author, his purpose in writing, and important points to understand before reading.

Following the introduction, each new page represents a **verse by verse overview** of the Scripture passage. The best way to study is to first read the Scripture verses from your Bible relying on the Holy Spirit to provide understanding and then to support your understanding with the commentary written below.

At the end of each Scripture commentary, there is a short **prayer** written so the reader can personally apply what has been discovered; however, it is suggested that you also pray from your heart in response to God's Word.

Feel free to make your own personal notes in your Bible, on this page, or even in a journal.

If this resource has helped you or you have further questions, please send an e-mail to [tomhogsed@gmail.com](mailto:tomhogsed@gmail.com).

## **Introduction to 1 John**

Although there is much discussion regarding the date of this writing, most scholars believe that this general letter was written by the apostle John somewhere toward the end of the first century. Even though the writing date is not clear, the reader can be certain that this letter was written by the apostle John who, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, also wrote four other books contained in the New Testament (the gospel of John, 2 John, 3 John, Revelation). Early Christian writers such as Irenaeus, Clement, and Tertullian ascribe this writing to John, who was an eyewitness of the life and ministry of Jesus, often identifying himself in his gospel as the one "whom Jesus loved." All of the gospel writers identify him (along with Peter and James) as one of the closest associates of Jesus, which meant he was often privy to experiences that the other disciples were not.

When the reader considers John's reasons for writing this letter, they can be certain of a few things. First of all, John's intended audience seems to be believers. Phrases such as "my little children" (2:1; 3:18) indicate that John is speaking as an older man to those younger in the faith. Secondly, John's emphasis throughout his letter is on combating false teaching, mainly Gnosticism. Gnosticism was an erroneous philosophy which taught dualism, matter is evil and spirit is good. This belief led them to believe that they could do anything with their body, even the most immoral sins, because the only thing that mattered was the spirit realm. Obviously, this teaching changed their view of Jesus Christ. The Gnostics taught that Jesus never really had a physical body, but it only seemed that way. Of course, this belief calls into question the sufficiency of Jesus' atonement for sin. Another false premise in Gnosticism was a "deeper or heightened sense of knowledge" only possessed by a few. This "knowledge" was received outside of Scripture and provided them with an arrogant view of themselves and an inferior view of those who had not received this "knowledge." However, the major difference between the teachings of Gnosticism and Christianity is how a person attains salvation. For the Gnostic, salvation is received through elevated knowledge, while Scripture teaches that salvation is a gift which can be received by all those who will repent of sin and confess Jesus as their Savior (Romans 10:9-13).

In order to combat this false teaching, which may have been infiltrating the church, John uses his words wisely to communicate the true nature of those who believe. In order to keep things simple, John identifies two areas which determine if a person has a relationship with God: beliefs and actions. What a person believes will always determine their actions. If a person believes in God through "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son [which] cleanses us from all sin" (1:7), his or her actions will reflect God's ways; however, a false belief system will lead a person to make sinful choices and into a lifestyle which opposes God's ways. Using this letter as a standard for those to whom he was writing, John asked them to closely examine the beliefs and actions of the false teachers to see if they were truly from God (3:24-4:6). If not, they should be rejected along with their teachings.

Although John mainly wrote this letter to battle a false system of beliefs, the reader is able to discern those things which make Christianity unique: love for God (and His commands) and love for others. As you journey through John's words, take time to personally examine your own life to see if what you believe is being put into practice in your life.

*Dear God, may John's words challenge us to match our beliefs with our actions.*

## 1 John 1:1-2:2

From the very beginning of John's writing, he seeks to establish the absolute reality of Jesus' humanity as well as His deity. The reader must keep in mind that much of John's letter is spent defending the truth by exposing the false teachings of the Gnostics, who did not believe in the humanity of Jesus. If Jesus was not fully God AND fully man, His death and resurrection meant nothing. When Jesus took on the form of a human (incarnation), it enabled Him to satisfy the wrath of God upon sin by dying in man's place and taking his sin upon Himself (2 Corinthians 5:21). So, as a personal eyewitness to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, John begins his writing by reminding his readers that what he was about to tell them was truth, not just because he heard it from someone else, but because he witnessed it with his own eyes. In fact, John uses some very strong words such as "heard...seen...looked upon...have handled, concerning the Word of life" (1:1) to emphasize that Jesus, being God, also became a literal man and this "Word of life" not only refers to Jesus Christ, but also the proclamation good news (the gospel). The good news (the gospel) is the fact that Jesus Christ came to earth as a human being (Matthew 1:21), lived a perfect life (2 Corinthians 5:21), died on the cross to pay the penalty for sin (Romans 6:23), and rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:4) to guarantee eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:20-22) to all who will repent of sin and believe in Him (John 3:16-18; Romans 10:9-13). This message of salvation and hope through Jesus Christ was given to the apostles (1:2) who were personal eyewitnesses, but the false teachers (who claimed to be teaching the truth) had never seen or heard Jesus Christ. The apostles were worthy to be trusted because of their interaction with Jesus Christ and what they heard directly from Him was the same message they were declaring to the masses (1:3a) "that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1:3b). In summary, John was presenting the reader with two choices: believe the apostles or believe the false teachers. The message of the apostles accurately represents the truth of God while the doctrines of these teachers lead to belief in a lie. If his readers would believe the message of the apostles, it would bring fellowship and joy (1:3-4).

In case his readers questioned the authority by which the apostles delivered their message, John reminds them that this message is not human but divine, and the divine message is "that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1:5). The comparison between light and darkness is a very common expression throughout Scripture with light representing truth/purity and darkness illustrating error/sin. Light has no connection with darkness and they cannot exist together. Where there is light, there can be no darkness and where there is darkness, there can be no light. Although the false teachers were declaring that they were "enlightened", John claimed that their message and actions revealed otherwise. If a person says that they know God, but does not practice His ways, they are lying (1:6); however, those who follow God's ways (truth) prove that they have "fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us [them] from all sin" (1:7b).

The false teachers of Gnosticism thought that they were truly enlightened and free from sin, but John wrote the following words to expose their erroneous beliefs, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1:8). At a later time John writes, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1:10). Much like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, these teachers did not believe they were sinners. Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-22 reveals the necessity for someone to recognize their sinfulness before they can follow Christ. In contrast with the arrogant and proud, those who willingly admit their sinfulness are given the following promise on the condition of confession, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1:9). When a person is fully aware of their sinfulness and confesses, God will grant forgiveness and cleansing.

John then writes to those who believe, "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate [Helper] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation [appeasement] for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (2:1-2). When a believer surrenders to the Holy Spirit, He can provide the power not to sin (Romans 6:12-14); however, when a follower of Christ does sin, he must remember that he has been acquitted of all punishment through the payment of Jesus on the cross. So, the first major difference between the teachings of the apostles and the false teachers is their view of sin. The apostles knew they were sinners, but believed they were forgiven based on Jesus' death on the cross; however, the false teachers denied their sin and saw no need for repentance.

*Dear God, thank You for offering forgiveness and cleansing to all who confess and believe in Your Son, Jesus.*

## **1 John 2:3-11**

John has already provided two areas of distinction between the doctrine of the apostles and the doctrine of the false teachers. First of all, he exposed that although the Gnostics believed in Jesus' divinity, they did not believe in His humanity (1:1-4). If Jesus was not fully God as well as fully man, He could not be a sufficient sacrifice for sin. Since God demanded death to pay for sin (Romans 6:23), death is the only thing which could satisfy the wrath of God on sin. When God the Father sent His Son to earth as a human, His one mission was to pay the death sentence for mankind (John 3:16-17). Jesus had to be fully man to accomplish this; however, in order to guarantee life after death, Jesus must have also been God, which provided Him the power to conquer death (1 Corinthians 15:20-22, 56-57). The second area of John's disagreement with the false teachers was their failure to believe in the reality of sin (1:5-2:2). Although these teachers thought they were enlightened, John revealed that their sinful lifestyles proved otherwise (1:6, 8).

In the next few verses, John points out a third area of concern about these false teachers - they did not obey God's commandments. Listen to John's warning to believer's about these deceitful teachers, "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (2:3-6). One of the clearest ways to tell if someone is a teacher representing God is to see if they obey what He taught. If a person's actions do not demonstrate obedience to God's commandments, that person is a false teacher. Of course, John's readers need to balance what he is saying with what he has already written. Believers will sin (1:8), but they will humbly confess before God (1:9) because they know that the Father has provided forgiveness through His Son, Jesus (2:1-2). In contrast to John's teaching, these false teachers disregarded the commandments of God and their lives did not demonstrate love for Him. What a person teaches must also be modeled in their own life.

In addition to obeying God's commandments, John also says that those who claim to represent God will love others (2:7-11). John presents this concept of loving others as "no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning..." (2:7). Although loving others is an old commandment, it was realized in a new way as Jesus provided the perfect example of what it means to love others, so this "new commandment" (2:8) is no longer just seen in written commands, but in real life. John writes some strong words to those claiming to love God but hating others, "He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes" (2:9-11). Again, all believers have hated others at one time or another, but the overall character of their life cannot be hatred toward others or else they also demonstrate their hatred for God.

Are you obeying God's commandments? Are you loving others? If not, recognize that these are two indicators of those who love and follow God.

*Dear God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, help me to obey Your commandments and demonstrate love toward others.*

## **1 John 2:12-17**

So far in John's letter of warning to the church about false teachers, he has alerted his readers to the distinctives of those who follow Christ. These teachers of error were attempting to infiltrate the church with evil doctrine which would ultimately lead believers away from following God's ways. The biggest distinctive between the apostles' teaching and the doctrine of the Gnostics was their view of Jesus' true nature (1:1-4). The false teachers denied Jesus' humanity, which meant that He could not be an appropriate sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 2:14-17). Rather than centering on the person of Christ, the false teachers focused on developing a "higher knowledge." This knowledge provided a sense of security and pride within these teachers enabling them to "speak in the name of God." John was trying to tell his readers that these false teachers do not represent God or His message. How can John judge these teachers? Their actions did not reflect God's ways and this is clearly seen in the second distinctive, the false teachers' view of sin (1:5-2:2). The false teachers viewed themselves as sinless, while true believers know that they are sinners in need of God's forgiveness and help to overcome evil (2:1-2). John mentions two more distinctives of those who follow Christ: view of God's commandments and view of others (2:3-11). The people who love God will be easily identified because they obey God's commands and demonstrate love toward others. The false teachers demonstrated neither of these characteristics.

John did not want his readers to feel as if they were failing in these distinctives, so he acknowledges the growth he had witnessed in their lives. When he refers to them as "little children, fathers, and young men" John is recognizing the process of spiritual growth taking place within them. The "little children" know that their sins have been forgiven, but are still in the process of learning (2:12, 13c). The "young men" have knowledge which has assisted them in resisting temptation from the devil (2:13b, 14b). The "fathers" are the spiritually mature in their faith (2:13a, 14a). Although each person is at a different stage of growth in knowledge and love for God, John knows that they are growing toward spiritual maturity.

In contrast to love for God is love for the things of the world. Love for God and love for the world's system of values and beliefs cannot exist together because they are completely opposite. John says it like this, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (2:15). John then defines what love for the world looks like, "For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh [passion to do evil], the lust of the eyes [wanting what others have], and the pride of life [bragging about possessions and accomplishments] --is not of the Father but is of the world" (2:16). In case they were tempted to give into the world, John reminded them that "...the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (2:17). Loving the things of the world brings temporary pleasure while love for God has the ability to sustain life, ultimately eternal life. Who do you love - God or the world? Are your actions representing the one whom you say you love?

*Dear God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, help me to love God with all my heart. May I reject the things of the world recognizing that it only brings temporary pleasure, while You bring eternal happiness.*

## **1 John 2:18-27**

The apostle John has already detailed four characteristics of those who love and follow God: belief in Jesus' humanity as well as His deity (1:1-4), belief in the sinfulness of all men (1:5-2:2), obedience to God's commandments (2:3-6), and love for others (2:7-11). By identifying the true nature of those who believe in God, John was able to expose the dangerous message of the false teachers who were seeking to infiltrate the church. They did not believe in Jesus' humanity. They did not believe sin existed in their lives. They certainly did not follow God's commands nor did they demonstrate love for others. Because of their failure to love and obey God, these teachers had no right to speak on behalf of Him. Instead of believing the erroneous message of the deceitful teachers, those reading John's words should receive his words as God's.

Although John's purpose in writing was not to correct believers, he did desire to warn them of the potential danger in accepting another doctrine contrary to the apostles' teaching; in fact, John commends his readers for their interest in spiritual growth (2:12-14). However, realizing that even believers can be susceptible to false teaching, John writes these words, "Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist [future deceiver in the end times] is coming, even now many antichrists [false teachers, see also 2:22-23] have come, by which we know that it is the last hour" (2:18). False teaching has existed since the time of Satan's deception of Eve in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-6). The devil has the ability to twist God's words in order to make them sound right when, in reality, his words are deceptive. From the beginning, Satan has endeavored to deceive the faithful and he will employ whatever strategy necessary to bring confusion to the world. False teachers existed in John's day and they will certainly exist until the end. John's readers needed to be aware of this reality.

Sometimes false teaching is not so obvious because it begins with those previously connected to the church but have since departed. This is why John writes, "They [false teachers] went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us" (2:19). Their departure from the truth proved that they were never of the truth. As a challenge to stay faithful to the truth John writes, "Therefore let that [truth] abide in you which you heard from the beginning. 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 that He has promised us--eternal life" (2:24-25).

With so many teachings in our world, believers should be careful about listening to and accepting anything which "sounds good." Even Paul warned Timothy, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Timothy 4:3-4). In order to guard against believing a lie, we must know the truth and since God revealed the truth through His written word, the Bible, we must read, study, meditate upon, and practice those things. Anything contrary to the Bible must be rejected and exposed as error.

*Dear God, help me to know You through reading Your word...so that I can recognize and obey truth while exposing that which is false.*

## 1 John 2:28-3:9

Although we are not certain about the specific recipients of John's letter, we can conclude that he was writing to Christians who may have been the target of false teachers. As an apostle of Jesus Christ who personally witnessed His earthly ministry, John was convinced that Jesus' teachings were true and that eternal life only came through belief in Him (1:1-4). So, in order to guard the words of God, John wrote to expose deceitful men who claimed to represent God, but did not follow His ways. John used the words of this letter to reveal the true nature of those who love and follow God - belief in Jesus' humanity as well as His deity (1:1-4), belief in the sinfulness of all men (1:5-2:2), obedience to God's commandments (2:3-6), and love for others (2:7-11). These characteristics will be demonstrated in genuine believers.

In 1 John 2:18-27 John acknowledges that false teachings and teachers have existed from the beginning of the human race and will continue until the last days; however, believers need to know the truth in order to recognize error. Since God is true and His words are also true, believers must constantly expose themselves to God's written word. Why should believers remain in the truth? John answers this question when he writes, "And now, little children, abide [continue] in Him, that when He [Jesus] appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming [rapture, see also 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18]. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him" (2:28-29). This concept should be obvious. Those who love God will obey and follow His ways.

In an expression of worship, John reminds his readers about God's love for them, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him" (3:1). In his gospel account of the life and ministry of Jesus, John had dedicated much of his writing to exposing God's love for mankind (John 3:16-17) as well as the privilege of those who believe being adopted into God's family (John 1:12). We have not yet experienced the fullness of being God's children, "but we know that when He [Jesus] is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (3:2-3). Our present bodies are subject to sin, sickness, and weakness but when Jesus returns for those who believe in Him, we will receive new bodies. Paul writes about how our bodies will change at Jesus' return, "So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). Knowing that Jesus will return for believers should challenge them to live according to God's ways.

In reality, John is trying to tell his readers that the way of sin and God's ways are very different paths which cannot be traveled at the same time. Although believers still struggle with sin, the ways of the world (1 John 2:15-17) do not characterize their lifestyle. For this reason John writes, "Whoever [habitually] commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He [Jesus] was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. Whoever abides in Him does not [habitually] sin. Whoever [habitually] sins has neither seen Him nor known Him" (3:4-6). Returning to his warnings about the false teachers, John reveals why they cannot be children of God, "Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (3:7-8). John's message is very evident. Those who have become the children of God through repentance of sin and belief in Jesus do not live according to the world's ways (3:9).

*Dear God, thank You for the love that You demonstrated toward me by sending Your Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for my sin. Now help me to demonstrate my love for You by living my life according to Your ways.*

## 1 John 3:10-24

One of John's major purposes in writing this letter to Christians was to reveal the true character of those who follow Christ, while also exposing the false teachings of deceitful men who were attempting to infiltrate the church. Although these false teachers claimed that their message was from God, their lives did not reflect His ways. So far in his writing, John has said that those who believe in Jesus (1:1-2:2) will obey His commandments (2:3-6, 24-29; 3:1-9) which is expressed in love for God and love for others (2:7-11). In the next few verses John instructs his readers a little further on the true nature of love when he writes, "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother" (3:10). Those who do not love others are not in fellowship with God. John then illustrates this concept with the Old Testament example of Cain, who murdered his brother, Abel (Genesis 4:3-5). Even though Cain brought an offering to "worship" the Lord, his murderous actions against his brother demonstrated his true nature (3:11-12). When a so-called "believer" says that he loves God but continually hates others, his actions reveal that he is not a child of God. Furthermore, John writes, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever [continually] hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (3:14-15). John's teaching is very simple. Those who love others show that they also love God; however, those whose lifestyle is defined by hatred reveal that they are not children of God.

In case his readers did not completely understand love, John provides the perfect illustration of true love, "By this we know love, because He [Jesus] laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (3:16). Jesus sacrificed His life in order to provide life for those who would believe, so true love is self-sacrificing; in other words, true love willingly places the needs of others above our own. In order to further illustrate the true nature of love John writes, "But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (3:17-18). When a person truly loves others, he cannot ignore their cries for help - he takes action to provide for their needs. Loving others in this way brings "assurance" of our relationship with God (3:19). Even though we may doubt God at times, a continual demonstration of love toward others provides confidence that we really do love and know God (3:20-21). Not only does love for others bring assurance of our love for God, but also answered prayer (3:22).

In the final two verses of chapter 3, John reviews the three major indicators of someone who is a child of God: belief in Jesus Christ (3:23a), love for others (3:23b), and obedience to God's commandments (3:24). Examine your heart and actions. Are you believing, loving, and obeying? If not, begin today.

*Dear God, help my belief in You to lead to more love for others and more obedience to Your ways.*

## **1 John 4:1-21**

John's purpose in writing this letter to believers was to help them clearly distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. False teachers were attempting to influence the church by questioning Jesus' humanity (1:1-4), claiming sinlessness (1:5-2:2), ignoring God's commandments (2:3-6), and lacking compassion for others (2:7-11). Instead of following God's ways, these deceitful teachers loved the ways of the world (2:15-17), denied the truth which God had revealed (2:18-27), lived lives contrary to the truth (2:28-3:9), and failed to love others (3:10-24).

In addition to these failures, John also exposes the source of their evil teachings - demonic spirits. Just as believers have been given the Holy Spirit of God to assist them in following God's ways, the false teachers were also being directed by a spirit; however, this spirit was not from God but from the devil. In order to protect his readers from believing the lies of these teachers, John warned them not to "believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (4:1). Every man who claims authority from God, does not necessarily teach His ways. For this reason John demands that his readers be skeptical of anyone who supposedly represents God and to "test the spirits." How does a person distinguish between true and false teachings? John reveals the easiest way to judge the validity of someone's teachings, "By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God" (4:2-3a). If an individual believes that Jesus, as God, came to this earth in human flesh, His teachings are of God; however, those who deny Jesus' deity or humanity prove that they are false teachers.

John did not want his readers to feel threatened or confused by these teachers of deceit, but rather remember that "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (4:4). These teachers were obviously trying to convince genuine believers that their faith was insincere, but John reminded them that the Holy Spirit is more powerful than any other spirit and if these teachers were truly of God, they would have followed the teachings of the apostles (4:5-6).

As he has done many times before in this letter, John uses the power of contrast to uncover the true character of those who follow Christ and in 1 John 4:7-21 he reveals the most important characteristic of the genuine believer - love. John has already provided his readers with the definition of love through the actions of Jesus, "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (3:16). Love is willingly placing the needs of others over your own - it is selfless and self-sacrificing. John then lists four reasons why believers love: love is the natural result of those who believe (4:7-8, 13-16), love was first demonstrated to us by God (4:9-11), love for others allows them to see God (4:12), and love removes fear of judgment (4:17-19). Realizing that he has given much detail about why believers love, John writes this summary statement, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also" (4:20-21). Those who love God, love others also. One cannot exist without the other.

*Dear God, teach me what it means to love others in the way that You have loved me.*

## 1 John 5:1-12

As John closes out his letter to these believers, he re-emphasizes the characteristics of those who are the children of God. First, "whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God..." (5:1). This belief in Jesus is not just a belief in His existence, but also a belief in His identity as the Savior from sin. A person's belief in Jesus is always expressed in his actions and John reminds his readers of what he has already written, "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" (5:2-3). Belief in Jesus Christ will lead a person to love God, love others, and obey God's commandments. Although a follower of Christ is not perfect in all of his ways, these characteristics are consistently evident in his attitudes and actions. The opposite is true also. Those whose lifestyles do not habitually model these characteristics reveal that their faith is not genuine, regardless of what they claim. So that his readers will not be discouraged by the deceitfulness of the world and those who spread lies, John reminds them of the victory they have in Jesus Christ, "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (5:4-5) The believer is promised to overcome daily trials, temptations, and struggles of the world through faith in Jesus. This promise does not mean that all hardship will be removed from the path of the Christian, but it does mean that God provides the strength to endure without losing hope.

John has just described that all believers have victory and hope through Jesus Christ and in 1 John 5:6-12 he confirms the sufficiency of Jesus as the object of our faith. Since the false teachers questioned the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, John presents Him as the divine One whom God the Father also sent as a man in order to die for the sins of those who believe. John writes, "This is He who came by water and blood--Jesus Christ; not only by water [baptism], but by water and blood [death]. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth (5:6). Jesus' baptism as well as His death testified to His observable humanity, but the Holy Spirit also confirmed the testimony of God through His inner witness. John was probably writing these things to combat a specific dualistic false teaching which said that the divine Christ entered the human man, Jesus, at His baptism and then departed before His death; however, John wanted his readers to know that Jesus' deity (and humanity) was not only evident in His baptism, but also His death. Beyond the earthly witness of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' baptism, and Jesus' death (5:8), there were three heavenly witnesses - God the Father, God the Son (the Word), and God the Holy Spirit (5:7). As one, their witness establishes truth. If a person willingly receives human testimony, how much more should they be willing to receive the testimony of God? (5:9-10)

John then writes regarding the end result of those who believe in Jesus Christ as the Savior from sin, "And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (5:11-12). John probably inserts this reminder for those false teachers who claimed that believers could not have eternal life through Jesus Christ. To imply that eternal life can be given outside of belief in Jesus Christ is a lie and anyone who teaches this invites God's judgment. It is important that we accept only one way to eternal life -belief in Jesus Christ - and anyone who teaches otherwise must be rejected.

*Dear God, thank You for giving eternal life to those who believe in Your Son, Jesus Christ. I know I am undeserving of Your forgiveness, but I receive Your mercy with open arms so I can enjoy everlasting life in Your presence.*

## 1 John 5:13-21

This letter has been written in order to assist the church in recognizing the characteristics of those whose faith in Jesus Christ is genuine and by recognizing these character traits it would help believers understand how to distinguish between truth and error. John was concerned about the false teachers who had entered the church seeking to deceive the faithful, but he hoped his words would help them see the true character of those who claim to represent God. So, what characteristics are demonstrated in the life of a Christian? Genuine faith will be manifest through continuing in the truth which God has revealed through Jesus and the apostles (1:1-4; 2:22-27; 4:1-6), obeying God's commandments (2:3-6, 15-21; 3:1-9), and loving God as well as others (2:7-14; 3:10-23; 4:7-5:5). Although a believer is not perfect, these characteristics will be consistently modeled in their life.

In the conclusion of his letter, John provides the main purpose in writing to the believers, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God" (5:13). John wanted them to be confident in their faith and continue in God's ways. As they continued in their faith, John reminded them of the benefits of faith in Jesus Christ. First, God would hear and answer their prayers (5:14-17). John writes, "Now this is the confidence that we have in 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 petitions that we have asked of Him" (5:14-15). The key in answered prayer is that a person asks according to God's will, which is revealed in His word. This is not a prayer of selfish requests, but rather a prayer for God's will to be done. Whenever our desires are matched with God's will, our prayers will be answered. John then illustrates what it means to pray according to God's will when he refers to a sinning man who is being prayed for by another believer. Since it is not God's will for anyone to sin, a believer can pray that a sinning person would stop sinning and his prayers will be answered; however, John does make a statement that the person sinning must be committing a "sin which does not lead to death" (5:16). Obviously, all sin eventually leads to death but those who continue in sin without repentance may be swiftly judged by death (5:17). Such was the case for Annanias and Sapphira in the book of Acts (Acts 5:1-11). Prayers for those who continue in sin without repentance, although not prohibited, will probably not be answered (5:16b).

John provides a second benefit of faith in Jesus Christ - victory over sin (5:18-19). To explain what he means, John writes, "We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (5:18-19). Those who are children of God have the ability to resist sin and overcome the temptations of the devil. Again, John is not implying that a person of faith can reach perfection in this life, but he can be consistently victorious over sin and the devil.

The final benefit of faith in Jesus Christ is having the knowledge of the truth (5:21). Instead of giving themselves over to false teachings and worship (5:21), a believer can know the truth through knowing God's Son, Jesus. Writing his final words to his readers, John reminds them that "we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life" (5:20).

*Dear God, thank You for the benefits of having faith in Jesus Christ. I know that You will answer all prayer according to Your will. I know You will provide victory over sin as I submit to Your control. I can also know the truth through knowing Your Son, Jesus. Thank You for the truths You revealed to John so that we could understand and obey You.*

## **Introduction to 2 John**

This is the second of three letters John writes to believers sometime at the end of the first century. Although the specific date of writing is not known, the content implies that it was penned soon after his first letter and in regard to the same problem he addresses in 1 John. In his first letter, John primarily wrote to combat a group of false teachers who were seeking to infiltrate the church with teachings not representative of God. John spent most of his initial letter describing the characteristics of those who truly follow Christ so that believers could distinguish who represented God and who did not. The following is a list of those character traits which define the lives of those who follow God's ways: continuing in the truth which God has revealed through Jesus and the apostles (1 John 1:1-4; 2:22-27; 4:1-6), obeying God's commandments (1 John 2:3-6, 15-21; 3:1-9), and loving God as well as others (1 John 2:7-14; 3:10-23; 4:7-5:5). Since the lifestyle of the deceitful teachers did not reflect these qualities, it was safe for John's readers to assume that their doctrine was also erroneous.

There is one major distinction between this letter and John's first letter. 1 John is not addressed to a specific audience, while this letter is written from "the Elder, to the elect lady and her children..." (v.1). Even though this does not provide much detailed information about the recipients of this letter, it does reveal that John was writing to a woman and her children whom he knew well. From the words of the letter the reader can assume that the female recipient was a follower of Christ whom John wanted to warn about the deceitfulness of the false teachers. According to vv. 10-11, it appears that these false teachers had come into the community where this woman lived and were attempting to reside with believers; in other words, they were trying to take advantage of Christian hospitality. The woman to whom John addresses this letter may have opened her home to these evil teachers, so he was writing to provide instructions about the conditions upon which to extend kindness to others.

Some may read this letter and think that John's words are harsh, especially since he has already written about the necessity of loving others; however, when a person or group of people are seeking to deceive believers, different actions apply. It is important that believers distance themselves from those who claim to represent God but, in reality, are trying to lead them away from the truth.

*Dear God, provide understanding for this brief letter John has written and may I be careful to heed every word.*

## 2 John 1-13

John begins his letter by introducing his recipient as "the elect lady and her children" (v.1). Although John does not provide a specific name, it is safe to assume that he is writing to a woman of faith and her children who have, in some way, become entangled with the false teachers about whom he had written in his first letter. According to verses 10-11, John warns her, "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds" (vv.10-11). Considering the brevity of this letter, it appears that John is writing to this woman about the conditions of acceptance and showing kindness to others. These false teachers had probably traveled from another place and were taking advantage of this woman's kindness by taking up residence in her home while they spread their erroneous teachings. While her willingness to be hospitable to strangers is commendable, John looks a little deeper into the situation by declaring that those who host false teachers are, in reality, helping them advance their cause. For this reason, John provides a warning about the motives of these teachers, "For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward" (vv.7-8). John wants this woman to be fully aware of what the false teachers are teaching, so he exposes their denial of Jesus' deity and humanity. This rejection of truth should have caused her to turn away these men. I'm convinced that this woman did not commit this error in rebellion, but maybe in ignorance. No matter her motive, believers should never aid those who "transgresses and do[es] not abide in the doctrine of Christ..." (v.9). Assisting those who are leading many away from the truth is equal to sharing in his work (v.11).

Many reading John's letter may question the balance between loving others and rejecting those who spread lies, but John provides a carefully guided principle. If a person claims they represent God but their teachings do not accurately reflect Him, that person must be rejected and refused in fellowship with believers. Although this may sound harsh, it is important for believers to guard and protect the truth through whatever means necessary. John MacArthur sums up John's teachings by saying, "Truth is the necessary condition of unity and, as a result, the basis of hospitality" (MacArthur Study Bible, p. 1977, notes on 2 John 1).

*Dear God, help me to carefully guard my relationships so as not to aid those who deceive the faithful.*

## **Introduction to 3 John**

This is John's final letter in a series of three which were written sometime before the close of the first century. Much like 2 John, this letter is also addressed to a specific individual, which is rare in New Testament writings. While 2 John was written to an unnamed Christian woman to warn her against showing hospitality to false teachers (2 John 1), this particular letter was written to a man named Gaius (v.1). Although we know little about this man except what is written in John's letter, we can safely assume that he is a member of one of the churches John oversaw.

Similar in nature to John's second letter, he writes regarding the issue of kindness and hospitality. In John's second letter, he warned a certain family about the dangers of showing hospitality to those who spread lies. Apparently, false teachers had journeyed into the city where this family lived and took advantage of her hospitality by either staying in her home or receiving some kind of assistance from her. John was not condemning her willingness to help others, but rather her aid to men whose teachings were contrary to the truth. At the heart of his letter are these words, " If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds" (2 John 10-11). In contrast with his second letter, John writes this one to commend Gaius for demonstrating kindness toward other believers as well as strangers (v.5). However, John is also quick to expose the lack of hospitality of another man named Diotrephes (vv.9-10).

Regardless of this letter's small size, there is a very important lesson to be learned about the necessity of demonstrating kindness toward others. When a person shows care and concern for the needs of others, he is ultimately reflecting his own love for God. John desired the church to be filled with believers who willingly placed the needs of others above their own and through John's writing, the reader is able to see an example of a man who lived this reality.

*Dear God, make me a person of kindness that I may also demonstrate Your love to others.*

### 3 John 1-14

John, who writes near the end of his life, refers to himself as "the elder" and addresses his third letter "to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth" (v.1). Because this name was common in that culture, the reader is provided with no further information regarding Gaius other than John's mention of him in this letter; however, it is safe to assume that he was a member of one of John's churches that he had visited in Asia Minor. According to verse 13, John even anticipated to see Gaius "face to face" in the future. But even though the reader is not privy to many details about this man's life, John seemed to hold him in high esteem. In fact, John pens some words of praise for the reports he has heard concerning Gaius' life, "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (vv.2-4). Gaius seemed to model Christian character, not just in words but also in his actions. Receiving the news about Gaius' spiritual condition caused John to rejoice in the knowledge that those in whom he had invested time, were now flourishing in their daily walk (v.4).

John moves from a general commendation to a specific instance of praise in the life of Gaius, "Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church" (v.5). While the woman who received John's second letter was warned about showing kindness to false teachers, Gaius was commended for his hospitality toward teachers of the true gospel, whether he knew them or not. There were traveling teachers in this day who were spreading the message of salvation and hope through Jesus Christ but whenever they entered a city, they were dependent on other believers to show them hospitality so that they could do their work. Apparently, Gaius was a shining example of someone who offered these teachers housing, food, and maybe even financial assistance during their visit to his city. John mentions that others ought to follow the example of Gaius because when they receive teachers of the truth into their home, they "become fellow workers for the truth" (v.8); in other words, those who show kindness share in the reward of their faithfulness.

In contrast to the kindness modeled by Gaius, John writes about a man named Diotrephes who was self-centered and refused to place the needs of others above his own (v.9). Instead of demonstrating the attitude of a servant, Diotrephes wanted others to serve him. John writes that he "loves to have the preeminence among them..." (v.9), meaning that he wanted others to put him first; of course, this type of attitude is contrary to biblical teaching. In response to Diotrephes actions John gives him a warning, "Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating [talking foolishness] against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church" (v.10).

John has presented the examples of two men in this letter: Gaius and Diotrephes. Gaius was kind and hospitable to others while Diotrephes was selfish and arrogant. With these two examples in mind, John writes, "Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God" (v.11). Our actions demonstrate who we love.

*Dear God, may I be known as someone who demonstrates kindness toward those who believe and teach the truth. May they find a place of rest and comfort in my company.*

## **Introduction to Jude**

Living during a time when the church was being persecuted by Rome and facing the possibility of many within the church accepting doctrinal error, Jude (half brother of Jesus Christ) writes to challenge his readers to "...contend [fight] earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (v.3). Jude begged his readers to stand firm on the faith which had been passed down to them from the apostles and reject any teachings which were contrary to the truth. Although the reader cannot be certain about the date or audience to whom Jude was writing this letter, scholars indicate that the time of writing falls somewhere between Peter's second letter (AD 68-70) and before AD 80. The recipients of Jude's letter were most likely Jewish and seemed to be facing the infiltration of false teachers into their church. Much like John's first letter, Jude is probably warning his readers about the dangers of Gnosticism which denies the humanity and deity of Jesus (v.4), tolerates immoral lifestyles (vv.8, 16), disrespects authority (vv. 8, 11, 18), seeks financial gain (vv. 11-12, 16), and causes division as well as confusion (v.19).

Similar to the churches in Jude's day, false teachings abound in our world today and are always waiting to push themselves into the minds of believers. Rather than being open to every teacher and teaching, Christians must not only stand firm in the truth but also demonstrate the truth through obedience to God's commandments. As Jude's letter became a warning to the believers in the first century, Christians today must maintain our faith in Jesus by "building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (vv.20-21).

*Dear God, help those who believe in You to stand firm in the truths You've revealed through Scripture. May we also be wise and discerning of some who may attempt to distort the truth. May the faith we hold dear also change the way we live.*

## Jude 1-11

Beginning his letter with a standard Jewish greeting, Jude refers to himself as "a bondservant [slave] of Jesus Christ, and brother of James [leader in church at Jerusalem]" and extends "mercy, peace, and love..." (v.1) to those who are receiving his writing. Instead of prolonging his greeting, Jude rushes right into the main reason he was penning this letter, "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (v.3). It appears that Jude's first intention in writing this letter was to speak of the joy and unity in their salvation; however, the invasion of false teachers into the church caused him to change his mind and write about the importance of defending the truth. Jude was very alarmed about these "certain men [who had] crept in unnoticed..." (v.4a) because their message was contrary to that of the apostles and led people away from the truth. These false teachers were "ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness [immorality] and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ" (v.4b). From Jude's words, the reader can conclude that these teachers were using the forgiveness of Jesus as an excuse to live any way that they wanted, even though they ultimately denied the truth about Him.

Rather than pretending that false teaching, unbelief, and immorality were something new, Jude provides three Old Testament illustrations of those who were deceived about the truth and faced God's judgment. First, Jude writes concerning the Israelites (God's chosen people) whom He delivered from Egyptian bondage only to watch them engage in worship of idols and participate in wickedness (v.5). This generation of unbelievers was not able to enter the land which God had promised to Abraham and his descendants (Numbers 14:22-30, 35). Secondly, Jude refers to the fallen angels who possessed the bodies of men (Genesis 6:1-3) in order to defile and deceive; however, the end of these angels would be everlasting judgment (v.6, see also Revelation 20:10). The final illustration used by Jude was the incident at Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19) when men were giving "themselves over to sexual immorality" (v.7) and were eventually judged by earthly fire, which is a preview of the coming judgment in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

Much like those who denied the truth in times past, the false teachers of Jude's day proved that they did not represent God because they did not follow His commandments. Jude reveals three characteristics of these false teachers - they "defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries [angels]" (v.8). Jude gives an example of what he talking about when he mentions that the false teachers "speak evil of dignitaries [angels]." It seems that Michael (God's chief angel) struggled against Satan himself in a battle for the body of Moses after he died (Deuteronomy 34:5-6). Satan may have wanted to use Moses' body for some uncertain purposes which were obviously contrary to God's will. Instead of taking matters into his own hands, Michael left the final decision in God's hands and did not dare curse an angel as powerful as Satan. Apparently, the false teachers of Jude's day, being arrogant, felt as if they possessed all authority above even angels and could speak anything on behalf of God. Jude condemned their actions. Anyone who speaks with this type of prideful authority, speaks without knowledge and will ultimately face divine judgment.

It is important that Christians do not believe everyone who says that they represent God, but rather compare their teachings and lifestyle with God's standards. Those whose teachings contradict Scripture must be rejected as well as those whose lifestyle demonstrates immorality.

*Dear God, help those who believe in You to continue in the truth and expose those who, in error, claim that they speak on Your behalf.*

## Jude 12-25

Jude was writing this very brief letter to challenge believers in the church to "...contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to all the saints" (v.3) because "certain men have crept in unnoticed...who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ" (v.4). These false teachers could be recognized considering that their teachings were contrary to the apostles and their lifestyles were lived in contrast to God's commandments. Deceitfulness and disobedience were two distinguishing marks of those who do not represent God. By using three Old Testament illustrations, Jude was quick to remind his readers that these false teachers would face the same judgment as those who disobeyed God in the past (vv.5-7). To further expose these false teachers, Jude listed three characteristics which defined their lifestyles: immoral (v.8a), rebellious (v.8b), and arrogant (v.8c-11).

Jude continues to warn his readers about the potential danger these false prophets bring into the church and he begins by referring to the meals (called love feasts) shared amongst Christians to celebrate the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is likely that the false teachers were also taking part in these meals as if they worshipped the same God as those who believed; however, Jude labels them as "spots" (stains) on the church. Instead of teaching the truth, Jude says that these deceivers are, "...clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever" (vv. 12b-13). These teachers made many special promises and claims, but they were all empty because they did not teach the truth. In case the presence of these false teachers caused believers to be disheartened, Jude reminded them that their deceitfulness had been predicted by the prophets of old; however, their destruction was sure (vv.14-15). Believers should not be discouraged; in fact, they should keep in mind that the apostles were fully aware of the false teachers who would seek to infiltrate the church, but it did not stop them from preaching and living the truth (vv.16-19).

Rather than wasting energy on those spreading lies, Jude wrote, "But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (vv.20-21). Furthermore, Jude had some special advice for the faithful Christians concerning those who were being deceived by the false teachers, "And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh (vv.22-23). Instead of turning their backs on those who were being deceived, believers were to be compassionate and do everything possible to bring them back to the truth.

In a fitting conclusion to his letter, Jude reminds his readers that it is God "who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (v.24). It would not be in their own strength that they could resist the deceivers, but only through God's protecting power. As they maintained their faith in God, He would provide security now and for all eternity.

*Dear God, thank You for being able to keep me from stumbling so that You can present me faultless before the presence of God.*