

JOHN'S LETTERS



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Welcome to the books of 1,2, and 3 John!

To begin your study of John's letters, meditate upon the content of 1 John reflected in the overview chart below. As you consider the five major sections we have outlined, what do you notice about the author's purpose in writing this book? We have chosen 5:13 as a key verse that reflects 1 John's overall theme of True Fellowship. What do you learn as you meditate upon this verse?

1 JOHN		True Fellowship	
Light Witness 1:3,7	Love Command 2:9,10,15-17	Brotherly Love 3:18,19	
1	2	3	
Spirit of Love 4:2,18-19		Fruits of Love 5:4,5	
4		5	

"That you may know you have eternal life." 5:13

Also note the scripture references listed within the overview chart above. Take this opportunity to investigate each one, looking for relationships between the section titles and key verses. Use these passages as guideposts to unlock the message of the book. What have you learned so far about the book of 1 John?

Of all of the disciples, John appears to have experienced a personal human closeness with Christ that was unparalleled. It is hard to imagine the Son of God having friends and companions, and yet it was the power of this closeness that prepared them to carry on His important Kingdom work.

Open your heart as you read!

Do you experience assurance that you possess eternal life? In what ways have you embraced Jesus' path of brotherly love? Do you sense that your faith is an overcoming faith?

WELCOME TO THE LETTERS OF JOHN THE DISCIPLE

THE AUTHOR

This is the same John who penned the Gospel of John, but is distinct from John the Baptist. John the disciple had special insight into a relationship with Jesus. Along with Peter and James he was truly privileged to have an up-close and personal look inside the miracle of God's Son incarnating in human form. This prepared John to write many years later with a depth of experience few men will ever know. John makes it clear we have only a few days of the breadth of what Jesus did preserved for us in the Scriptures. It will be amazing to see and hear the untold stories! (John 21:24,25).

DATE OF WRITING

Both the Gospel of John and the letters of 1,2,3 John appear to have been penned a number of decades after Christ had risen from the dead. These books probably are written with a recognition that Jesus would not be coming back as quickly as the disciples had first hoped, and there was now a need for a Spirit-led, written, eyewitness account of what they had seen. 1 John is written to clarify the essence of the truth of the Gospel and the core of Jesus' teaching to "love one another." 2 and 3 John are written to display the outworking of this in various locations or "churches." John also penned the book of Revelation even later in his life.

THE TEACHING OF 1 JOHN

The emphasis of 1 John is on the reality of experiencing true fellowship with the risen Christ. From John's writings it is evident that he had learned much about being close to Jesus.

Five evidences are considered for our own "assurance of salvation." These five "proofs of life" are specifically delineated in 2:3 (obedience), in 2:19 (perseverance), in 3:7 (purity), in 4:7 (love), and in 5:4 (faith). If we cannot look at our lives and see these five tests manifested in some form, we probably should be shaky about our personal assurance of our position in Christ - for our own spiritual welfare!

WHY STUDY 1 JOHN?

- 1) to be convinced and assured of our walk with God,
- 2) to define the reality of a true relationship with Christ, and
- 3) to receive practical instruction to help us discern between godliness and worldliness.

2 and 3rd John help us to understand how the truth of Christ was being worked out in *true hospitality* and *love* within the early church.

READING THREE**"Brotherly Love as a Life-form"****Read Chapter Three**

- 1) What do you envision will be the difference between now and then? (3:2)
- 2) What does hope have to do with purity?
- 3) What is the difference between sinning and practicing sin?
- 4) Why did Cain kill Abel? Doesn't this seem like an extreme teaching?
- 5) How does one live with an uncondemned heart?
- 6) How can a person keep God's commandments to the core of their soul?

What about today?

John is painting a picture of love on a very practical level. He is also clearly explaining what it means to keep Christ's commands. Why would John have had special insight into this concept? What is your level of insight into loving and believing?

READING FOUR**"The Spirit of Love"****Read Chapter Four**

- 1) How do we test spirits and why is this important?
- 2) How important is the kind of love that is described here, and why is it so key?
- 3) Why the statement about fear? What does this have to do with love?
- 4) Who and what is verse four talking about?

What about today?

The spirit of love is the opposite of the spirit of fear. Serving God for many religious people originates from fear. Being afraid OF God is different than having reverence FOR God. While there should definitely be a respect for the authority God wields, the life of a Christ-follower is blessed to be covered by God's unfailing love!

READING FIVE**"The Fruits of Love"****Read Chapter Five**

- 1) Why is it so important to know that Jesus is God's Son?
- 2) What gives us victory in life? What does this look like for you?
- 3) What is the role of the Spirit and how powerful is He?
- 4) Why did John write this letter?
- 5) Why the unusual ending to the book?

What about today?

What place is love supposed to hold in the life of someone who follows and obeys Christ? What has happened in your heart of love since you found Christ (or Christ found you)?

Conclusion

Love is everything. And God's love eclipses human love. His love forms the pattern for evaluating all love. We love Him because He first loved us!

John's Second Letter

John's second letter focuses "living in truth and love." The Apostle John writes to a woman or uses the term "lady" and "children" figuratively. He makes his letter brief because he knows he will soon be "face to face" with its recipients.

A key verse is 2 John, vs. 4: "I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father." Note the emphasis on lady, children and Father. It was very important to see individuals applying the truth of the gospel in practical ways - particularly in a community of relationships. This is consistent with John's message in 1 John. Also note 4:6.

Why study 2 John? 1) to exhort us to be obedient to the truth by walking in love, 2) to warn us about deceivers who do not "hold to the teachings" so we may discern and avoid them entirely, and 3) to encourage us as we see an example of God's tender, practical care exemplified through the life and teaching of John the Apostle.

- 1) What sense do you get about community in the early church from this book?
- 2) How were earlier followers of Christ cared for?
- 3) What do you think John meant by "walking in truth?"
- 4) Why was denying Christ's human incarnation considered heresy or "antichrist?"
- 5) What was to be the "hospitable response" to those who did not hold to Truth?

John's Third Letter

This letter is similar to 2 John in structure and form. 3 John is all about showing **hospitality** to traveling saints. John draws a contrast by revealing his joy over Gaius and his distress over Diotrephes. He ends the book with his desire to see them face to face - indicating his loving care for those among whom he served as an "elder."

A key verse is 3 John vs. 6: "And they bear witness to your love before the church; and you will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God."

Why study 3rd John? 1) to be exhorted toward a life committed to truth, and 2) to view concrete examples of those who are committed to hospitality and those who are not.

- 1) What do you think was the "way of truth" that was being followed faithfully?
- 2) Why is hospitality equated with visible faith?
- 3) Like Paul, John appears to have been denigrated by men of "importance." What is his response to such men?
- 4) What reasons could anyone possibly have for withholding hospitality from traveling Christians?

4 ASSURANCE OF HEART

In 1 John five "assurances of heart" are considered in 2:3 (obedience), in 2:19 (perseverance), 3:7 (purity), 4:7 (love), and in 5:4 (faith). If we cannot look at our lives and see these five manifestations in some form, we probably should feel shaky about assurance in Christ. *Why should a person who is claiming heaven sense assurance when his or her life is disobedient, impure, unloving, or faithless?*

This teaching stands side by side with God's gracious, sovereign choice of our souls. One in no way omits the other. My response to people who feel insecure about their faith is to encourage them to go before God with transparency and ask the hard questions before their Creator - because when all is said and done, He is the only one who can give true assurance. Check out Philippians 2:12 on this!

OBEDIENCE (1 John 2:3)

When you think about the things that you KNOW God wants from you, what comes to mind? In what ways can submission and obedience to God's Word and will assure my heart? Do you feel you "keep His commandments?"

PERSEVERANCE (1 John 2:19)

Why would "giving up" make you doubt your secure position in Christ? What are common reasons people give for quitting things? Are you a person who perseveres in your spiritual pursuits?

PURITY (1 John 3:7)

What does "practicing righteousness" look like in your mind? What is the difference between practicing righteousness and practicing sin? How can an understanding of this make us feel more secure in our faith?

LOVE (1 John 4:7)

In what ways does loving someone else make us realize that we are "in the faith?" What do you think it means that "God IS love?" Do you feel loved by God in a personal way?

FAITH (1 John 5:4)

What do you think it means to "overcome the world?" What does it mean to have a sense of spiritual victory? Do you feel your faith is an overcoming faith?

1 John 3:18-22 is a great summary of why this concept (and study) is so practical for someone who is serious about following God over the long-haul!

Your thoughts on assurance of heart:

BROTHERLY LOVE IS TOUGH

Love between brothers has been volatile ever since the fall of Adam. If one looks carefully at the story of Cain and Abel, you can see the incredible struggle within these brothers' hearts - a struggle resulting in alienation and death.

Jesus viewed love for one another as a proof of our love for Him. We all know how difficult this is. It is one thing to tolerate those with whom we have limited exposure, but when a close brother or sister is offended or feels unloved, the heart ramifications are huge.

Ephesians 4 fleshes out the desire Jesus had for His disciples to live in love. Like John's Gospel and his letters, Ephesians attempts to explain the gravity of failure in being one in unity, the very thing Jesus prayed for His followers before delivering Himself to be crucified (John 17).

"Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.

"Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for building up according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." - Ephesians 4

KIND

Do you consider yourself a kind person? Is kindness easy or difficult for you?

What are some things that you consider to be acts of kindness?

When you think about your upbringing would "kind" be one of the attributes of your home?

TENDER-HEARTED

What things make your heart hard?

What things touch your heart to make it pliable?

Who is the most tender-hearted person that you know?

Would you consider yourself a tender-hearted person?

FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER

The picture here is one of being lavish in our forgiveness because of the forgiveness which has been poured out upon us.

Do you have any grudges that you have been unable to release?

Are you by nature forgiving or vindictive for pay back?

What are your personal qualifications for forgiveness?

What are some "roots of bitterness" that come about with lack of forgiveness?

As best as we know how we must love our brother from the heart. While this is difficult (and sometimes can seem hopeless) we must be at peace with one another as much as we possibly can. May God give you the grace to be released from bitterness which comes from lack of forgiveness.

ENTERTAINING ANGELS

*"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,
for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it."
- Hebrews 13:2*

What an interesting and radical idea: we should take care to treat strangers with hospitality because they might be angels certainly puts a whole new spin on entertaining! But it is obvious from passages like this (as well as in the teachings of Moses through the example of Sodom and Gomorrah - and the appearances around the events of Christ's life) that there may be times that just such contact might occur. Here are a few thoughts on the lofty concept of being a "lover of strangers."

HOSPITALITY AT HOME

There are many different levels of hospitality. The bible discusses much more than merely having someone over for dinner. The idea is that another person (or angel) would be received into our homes with a huge amount of deference and care. And not merely concerning their physical needs, but their spiritual needs as well.

- Do you need to have a "perfect house" in order to welcome others?
- Are you flexible and able to show hospitality at a moment's notice?
- Do you find yourself able to capitalize on people opportunities over and above the inflexibility of already "having plans?"

HOSPITALITY AT WORK

- Are you an approachable person? Do others confide in you?
- Would you be looked upon as a welcoming person at work?
- Do you allocate dollars with regularity to hospitality (lunches/personal follow-up)?

HOSPITALITY IN THE COMMUNITY

- Are you accepting of people who are different than you?
- In what ways do you engage for the benefit of the community around you?
- What is your reputation for acceptance and concern for others?
- How soft is your heart when it comes to accepting others who operate differently?

CARING FOR STRANGERS

There seemed to be a definite advantage to entertaining strangers, perhaps because of the practical protection it provided to travelers at the time the Bible was written. Certainly God created us to interact and to not isolate from one another. And if "stranger" reflects a lack of familiarity with customs and backgrounds, God is probably talking about hospitality with those different from ourselves. *Be hospitable...you never know who may end up at your dinner table!*