

THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK

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Verse By Verse Bible Studies

TO KNOW AND KNOW YOU KNOW

A Study Guide
To
The Epistles of John

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DEDICATION

To

Carolyn Sanders

&

Susan Sanders

Thanks you for those nieces and nephews!

INTRODUCTION

AUTHOR. In this study it is assumed that the author was John, brother of James, son of Zebedee, the same apostle who wrote the Gospel According to John and the Revelation. At the time these epistles were written John was well advanced in years, having outlived all the other apostles and Paul by many years. He is affectionately known now as the Elder John or John the Evangelist.

DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING: The epistles were probably written around A.D. 85 - 95. John reportedly spent the last years of his life at Ephesus, except for the exile of Patmos. He was probably at Ephesus when he wrote the epistles.

PURPOSE AND OCCASION: The epistles were written to deal with specific difficulties that threatened the church. A.T. Robertson said that the epistles were written for the edification of readers in the truth and the life in Christ. “Yet,” he says, “the errors of the Gnostics were constantly before John’s mind. John warns believers about false teachers. The false teachers against whom he wrote were antimonian Gnostics, Gnosticism grew out of Greek philosophy and by the time John wrote these letters many Christians had been confused by the heresy. The Gnostics got their name from the Greek word “gnosis” which means knowledge. To them the key to salvation was knowledge.

1. They separated the Father from the Son.
2. They denied the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.
3. They held a dualistic view of the world.
4. They insisted that salvation came from knowledge – learning a certain set of theories about the creation and about Jesus.
5. They also insisted that sin was powerless over their lives, and to prove it they boasted of their indulgence in immoral acts.

In I John, the author gives the Christians a series of nine tests for knowing the truth – each time using the verb “to know” (gnosis): 2:3,5; 3:16,19,24; 4:2,6,13; and 5:2.

Practically every thought in I John is found in the Gospel. Compare the prologue to the Gospel with the first four verses of this Epistle. The First Epistle is a letter which may have been addressed to any New Testament church but was not. Some have referred to it as a “to-whom-it-may-concern” letter.

POINT TO REMEMBER: The purpose given for the Gospel of John is found in John 20:30-31: “Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so **that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.** The purpose in 1 John is given in 2:3: “By this **we know that we have come to know Him**, if we keep His commandments.” The Lord wants you to know Him and He wants you to know that you know Him.

CHAPTER ONE

I John 1:1 - 4: The Prologue to the first Epistle.

1:1_ WORD OF LIFE: “The term ‘Word’ when used in relation to God, is borrowed from human speech. It indicates that when a man utters words he has formed a purpose and chosen to reveal it. In like manner God’s word means that He has chosen to reveal His purpose” (Robbins).

1:2_ The term “Word” (logos) means reason or thought and its utterance. “Word of Life” is employed by John to portray God’s manifestation of Himself—His character, purpose, love purity, His salvation through Jesus Christ, His incarnate Son.

1:2-3. MANIFEST means to make known that which already exists.

FELLOWSHIP - The Word became flesh to create a new fellowship. Fellowship here suggests the body of Christ. Those who are saved are born into a new fellowship – they belong to Jesus and to one another. This fellowship is a special life which one can possess only through sharing in the life of Jesus Christ.

1:4. The goal of the epistle – “That our joy may be complete” (TEV).

I. GOD IS LIGHT, 1:5.

He is absolute light – the source of light. Dr. Robbins says, “As it is the property of light to shine, it is the nature of God to reveal Himself. He imparts Himself to man. The full sun blaze of his revelation of himself came when the eternal Word became flesh.”

II. FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD, I John 6-10.

1. Walking in the light, 1:6-7.

The Gnostics claimed to have fellowship with God but insisted that it made no moral demands on their lives. The Scripture states that it is impossible for one to continue in sin (darkness) and have fellowship with Him who is light.

a Anyone who claims to know God and have fellowship with Him, but continues to live in sin is living a deceived, deluded existence.

b. WALK: the word suggests the total expression of one’s life in this world—the way he lives.

The Gnostics isolated God from the arena of human struggle and attributed salvation to knowledge rather than Jesus. What are some of the ways we isolate God from life today?

2. It is impossible to exhibit continually a life of darkness and have fellowship with him who is light, 8-10.
 - a. Fellowship with God convinces one of the reality of sin, 8.
 - b. Confession of sin leads to fellowship and forgiveness of sin, 9.
 - c. If we say we have no sin (not any sin at all) we make a liar out of God, 10.

CHAPTER TWO

I. FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD MAKES US STRIVE TO AVOID ALL SIN, 2:1-2.

1. "That you may not sin."

This is good preventive theology, as well as a primary purposes in the epistle, and it should be a goal for every believer.

"My little children" is a term of endearment. The Elder John thought of the believers in the area as his spiritual children, or his children in the ministry. John's urgent plea was that they sin not - not one sin. This is God's desire for every believer, yet He knew that all men will sin (Rom. 3:23), so He provided an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

Former New Testament professor Malcom Talbert wrote, "The gospel is always grace and demand (or demand and grace). Without demand, grace would be cheap sentimentality. Without grace, demand would be an intolerable burden that would drive us to despair."

"That you sin not" is in the Aorist tense, denoting snap shot action. This verse recognizes the fact that a believer will commit an individual act of sin, but he will not keep on sinning so as to make the sin his lifestyle.

ADVOCATE. This is from *parakletos* (paraclete, the word for Comforter, the Holy Spirit in John 14). The word means "one who is called to stand along side." Jesus is the Advocate Who represents us before the Father. However, this metaphor should not be pushed so far as to give a distorted picture of the relationship between the Father and the Son. Remember that when Jesus died on the cross, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself," (2 Cor. 5:19).

2. He is the propitiation for our sins (He Himself, He alone).

He is also the expiation for our sins. Expiation refers to what God does to deal with the problem of sin in man. It is not that we need Jesus to break down the barrier in God. The barrier which needs to be broken down is in man, not in God (2 Cor. 5:19).

II. KNOWLEDGE AND FAITH AS RELATED TO OBEDIENCE, 1 John 2:3-14.

1. The relationship is stated, 2:3.

TEST ONE (for assurance) - “Know” is knowledge gained by personal experience.
“Commandments” - all of the commands of our Lord.

2. One’s profession of faith is called into question by disobedience.
3. True believers keep on keeping His commandments, 2:5 (**TEST TWO** in our Assurance).
4. Believers should live as Jesus lived, 2:6.
5. THE NEW COMMANDMENT...LOVE, 2:7-10.

OLD - the law of Moses.

NEW - Jesus commands us to love God and love one another. The new law of love given by the One Who is perfect love and absolute light.

6. Hate reveals darkness and alienates one from God, 2:11.
7. The blessings of assurance, 2:12-14.

- a. Forgiveness, v. 12.

- b. Knowledge, v. 13.

- c. Spiritual strength, divine truth, spiritual victory, v. 14.

“Fathers” denote those with experience, spiritual maturity.

“Young men” are to hope for tomorrow (God calls the young to service).

III. THE CHRISTIAN AND THE WORLD, 2:15-17.

1. “World” refers to the moral, social, political, and cultural realm that is set against God, 2:15.

2. "Lust" is the urgent and sinful desire to partake of things or acts forbidden by God, 2:16.
3. "Lives forever" is our assurance of eternal life.

The person who knows and loves God is one who has a personal relationship with God. He has entered into fellowship with Him and he will be protected in the judgment.

IV. THE PERIL OF FALSE TEACHERS, 2: 18-29.

1. "The last hour" is the entire period between the first and second comings of Christ, 18-19.
 - a. The Incarnation ended the old order.
 - b. The antichrist is coming.
 - c. Many antichrists have appeared already.
 - d. The antichrists prove that this is the last age.
 - e. The antichrists are not a part of the true church, 2:19.
2. The Holy Spirit will teach believers and anoint them with power, 2:20-27.
 - a. We have an anointing from the Holy Spirit, 2:20.
 - b. The truth is from the Holy Spirit, lies are from Satan, 2:21 (John 8:44).
 - c. He is an antichrist who denies that Jesus came in the flesh, 2:21.
 - d. No one who denies the Son knows the Father, 2:23.
 - e. If you abide in the truth you abide in (have fellowship with) Father, 2:24.
 - f. Eternal life is assured, 2:25.
 - g. False teachers threaten our fellowship with God, but those who abide in the Holy Spirit will grow in fellowship with the Father, 2:26-27.
3. Christians are exhorted to remain in fellowship with God and practice righteousness, 2:28-29.

CHAPTER THREE

I. CHARACTER AND BLESSINGS OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD, 3:1-10.

1. An explanation of the Christian's nature and character, 3:1-3.
2. Character of the children of God and the children of Satan are contrasted, 3:4-10.
 - a. Anyone who continues in sin is not of God, 3:4-5.
 - b. The child of God does not habitually sin, 3:6-7.

On the surface this is a difficult passage. John has already said that the person who says he has not sinned is a liar (1:8). Here, he declares that the child of God does not sin. To understand what he means we must examine the verb tenses used.

- 1) 1:8 - Present tense - If we say that we have (at this present moment) no sin (one even one sin) we are liars.
 - 2) 1:10 - Perfect tense - If we say we have never sinned at any time we make Him a liar.
 - 3) 2:1 - Aorist tense - If anyone does sin (snap shot action - one time action).
 - 4) 3:6 - Present tense - "No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him" (in the Greek the present tense denotes continuous or habitual action). A Christian will commit acts of sin but he will not continually or habitually sin. He will not habitually live in rebellion against God. He cannot both abide in Sin and abide in God.
- c. The devil had continued sinning from the beginning, 3:8.
 - d. "No one who is born of God practices sin," 3:9.
 - e. Our spiritual heritage is manifested by our actions, 3:10.

II. THERE IS A SPIRITUAL TEST (LOVE), 3:11-18.

"By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we

should love one another” (3:10-11).

III. CHRISTIAN LOVE IS THE ASSURANCE OF FELLOWSHIP WITH THE LORD, 3:19-24.

There are four ways the Holy Spirit produces assurance of salvation - 3:14-24:

- 1) Love of the brethren, 3:14-18.
- 2) Freedom from condemnation by our heart, 3:19-20.
- 3) Prayers are answered, 3:21-22.
- 4) “By the Spirit whom He has given us,” 3:23-24.

TESTS (FOR ASSURANCE): - THREE - 3:14; FOUR - 3:19; FIVE - 3:24.

CHAPTER FOUR

I. THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH CONTRASTED WITH THE SPIRIT OF ERROR, 4:1-6.

Paul gives a formula to help us know who is a Christian: “Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus is accursed’; and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3). John expands the formula here: “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God” (4:2). Anyone who denies that Jesus came in the flesh is an antichrist. John is not saying that the false teachers are uninspired, what he is saying is that their inspiration comes from the devil.

The Spirit of truth is the Holy Spirit and the spirit of error is Satan. The success of the false teachers is easily explained. What they say appeals to the world because it is of the world, it proceeds from the spirit that controls the world, and it resonates with fallen man. Remember that the world is at enmity with God and Satan, the prince of the world, hates our Lord and everything that may potentially glorify God.

II. THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF LOVE, 1 JOHN 4:7-24.

1. Godly love is an awesome force in the world, 4:7-13.
 - a. Love is the proof we belong to God, 3:7-8.

God is the source and origin of love. In fact, the Bible tells us that God is love. His children must practice this same kind of love, both for God and for others. This love (agape') is a mental attitude kind of love, a love that can be directed by the mind and the will. It is not a slave to emotions, but it does not preclude emotions. When we are born again we receive a new nature, a nature like that of our Lord. In fact, we are partakers in His nature. "Love in a man is but a reflection of God's love and a response to it" (Robbins).

b. Love in its essence is revealed in Christ, 4:9-10.

The coming of Jesus Christ is the greatest manifestation of the love of God.

c. God's love obligates us to love others, 4:11.

d. Godly love is the assurance of salvation and fellowship with God, 4: 12-13.

"The unseen God, Who revealed Himself in His Son, is now revealing Himself in His people if and when they love one another. His love is seen in our love because our love is His love imparted to us by His Spirit" (Robbins).

2. Love is expressed faith in God, 4:14-18.

a. We must accept the birth of Jesus as the incarnation of the Son of God, 4:14.

b. Salvation comes when one confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, 4:15.

"Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God."

c. Love dispels fear and builds confidence and hope, 4:16-18.

Jesus did not come just to prepare us for another world. He also came to prepare us to live in this world. He does not save us just to take us to heaven or he could save Himself a lot of trouble by taking us home to heaven as soon as we are saved. He wants to get a little of heaven into His children here on earth. We must take on the nature, character, and mission of our Lord. "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear" (v. 18).

d. Love for God demands love for the brethren, 4:19-20.

God's love was manifested in His giving His Son to die for our sins (Rom. 5:8).

THREE MORE TESTS: SIX - 4:2; SEVEN - 4:6; EIGHT - 4:13.

CHAPTER FIVE

I. EXPERIENCES THAT HELP US BE SURE OF OUR SALVATION, 5:1-17.

1. The nature and meaning of faith, 5:1-5.

Faith is “an experience with reality that exercises a person’s ability to know, to appraise and appreciate solid value and to act by decision of the will” (Green).

TEST NINE - 5:2 - Assurance offered in the Scripture and through the Holy Spirit.

The salvation experience gives the believer a new nature, a disposition of love. Christian love moves us toward:

- 1) greater love for God.
- 2) greater love for others.
- 3) greater loyalty to the commandments of God.

Vs. 4 - “World” here is the realm of godless human society under the rule of Satan. “Overcome (present tense) the world” - There is a continuous struggle which requires a deep faith.

Vs. 5 - There is only one way to overcome the world. “Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

2. The Christian and the Holy Spirit, 5:6-12.

The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Triune God-head (He is Deity -God, not divine - like God) and anyone who has experienced salvation through Jesus Christ has experienced the Holy Spirit. You do not “get the Holy Spirit” through some second blessing.

Vs. 6 - The Holy Spirit was a witness to the Incarnate Son. There are three witnesses:

- 1) There is the three fold abiding witness of the Holy Spirit, 5:6-8.

[WATER - Baptism ^ BLOOD - Death ^ SPIRIT - Holy Spirit]

- 2) God testified that Jesus Is His Son, 5:9.

- 3) The believer has the inward witness of the Holy Spirit, 5:10.

Blessings are granted to the believers who receive and respond to the testimony, 5:11-12.
3. Assurance for believers, 5:13-17.

a. Assurance of eternal life, 5:13.

b. The Christian's privilege in prayer, 5:14.

1) He may approach God in prayer.

2) He may approach God in confidence and faith.

3) He may approach God with his petitions.

c. The Christian receives assurances as his prayers are answered, 5:15.

d. Intercessory prayer is encouraged, 5:16.

e. All sin is serious, 5:17.

4. Concluding exhortations, 1 John 5:18-21.

Vs. 18 - The child of God is expected to live a victorious and exemplary life.

Vs. 19-20 - Assurance is offered again.

Vs. 21 - A final exhortation - avoid idols.

John resorts to repetition to assure the believer and to give tests by which he can know the he knows Jesus Christ as his Savior.

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF JOHN

INTRODUCTION, 1-3.

AUTHOR. The author was John, who refers to himself as “the elder”, no doubt because he was now an elderly man, having outlived all the other apostles and Paul. Paul had begun the work at Ephesus and served there for three years. John had now served in Ephesus for many years. Paul was martyred around A. D. 68 and John probably recorded the Revelation around A. D. 96 - 98. John probably served as mentor to some of the men who would become the leaders of the Christian movement over the next fifty years. He would influence those who would lead the church over the next century or more.

DATE: A. D. 90. The circumstances and subjects suggest that this epistle was written around the same time as the First Epistle of John. It was probably written from the same place, Ephesus.

RECIPIENT. The Second Epistle of John IS addressed to “The Elect Lady.” There is a debate as to the identity of the “elect lady”, some holding to the theory that the term probably referred to particular church. Others have suggested that the epistle was sent to a particular Christian home where John had found lodging on some of his preaching missions.

“Some believe that the ‘chosen lady’ is a figurative way of designating a particular church (‘chosen sister,’ v. 13, would then mean a different church). Others hold that the letter was addressed to an individual Christian and her family (in which case the “sister” would be her natural sister)” [RSB].

The author addresses his audience as “the elect lady and her children.” If the “elect lady” is a person, then we understand that her children would be her real children. The Believer’s Study Bible Notes offer the following help:

As he communicates his love for these believers, he states that he loves “in truth.” The word “truth” (aletheia, Gk.) appears five times in this brief epistle. Thus, the author’s love is consistent with the truth of the Christian message which he and his readers have received. This emphasis on truth shows that authentic Christian love involves more than emotional sentimentality. The Christian community consists of those who “know the truth.”

Because of the feminine form John uses for this lady, it will be assumed here that John is writing to an individual, and not just any individual. She was a person of deep character, purity, and ideals. The basis for the friendship between John and this family) was the truth. They shared a common conviction about the Gospel. John had given his life to the preaching of the Gospel and they had given their lives to living it.

GREETINGS: Verse 3.

GRACE - Unmerited love and favor.

MERCY - Compassion and concern that leads to action.

PEACE - Inner security and tranquility.

I. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, 2 John 4-5.

1. Children walking in the light an occasion to rejoice, 4.

Some believe these were grown children who were out on their own and were living the kind of life the Lord would have them to live. What an occasion to rejoice in our day!

2. We are commanded to love one another, 5.
3. There is a reciprocal relationship between love and obedience, 6.

II. WARNING OF DANGERS, 7-11.

1. John warns about “deceivers”, 7.

Originally the word referred to people who wandered about with the purpose of deceiving, seducing, or leading astray. Some have called them “religious tramps.” These religious tramps were antichrists, denying the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

2. The elect lady must be on her guard continuously, 8.
3. There are tests for divinely appointed teachers and leaders, 9.
4. There is a course to take in dealing with false teachers, 10-11.

It seems that there were times when a stranger would come to a church and claim that he was being led of the Lord to speak to that church. We still need to be on guard against those who show up with extra-biblical revelations today.

CONCLUSION, 2 John 12-13.

THE THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN

ADDRESS AND GREETING, 3 John 1-2.

1. The writer is John the “elder.”
2. The person addressed is Gaius, a faithful Christian layman.
3. The truth is the basis for their mutual interests and friendship. The truth is the revealed message concerning God’s salvation.

I. GAIUS WAS A FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN LAYMAN, 3-8.

1. Gaius’ general conduct, 3-4.
 - a. Gaius appropriated truth in mind and heart, 3a.
 - b. Gaius manifested truth in life and conduct, 3b.
 - c. Gaius’s general conduct was a reason for John to rejoice, 4.
2. Gaius showed hospitality to itinerants missionaries, 5-8.
 - a. His love was manifested in hospitality to others, 5.
 - b. His love was shown in the way he aided missionaries, 6-8.
 - 1) He loved his church.
 - 2) He received ministers and others into his home.
 - 3) He gave financial aid to missionaries (the responsibility of Christians, not the lost).

II. DIOTREPES, A HINDRANCE TO ELDERS, 9-12.

1. “Diotrophes” means nourished by Zeus, the supreme god of the ancient Greeks. This man wanted to be supreme, run the church, and rule everyone else. He loved to have preeminence, vs. 9.
2. Diotrophes created a lot of trouble for the church, 10.
 - a. He fought John and opposed his work.
 - b. He did not receive or aid the Lord’s servants.

- c. He prevented others from giving to missions causes and from receiving missionaries.
- 3. An exhortation to follow the example of Gaius and not that of Diotrophes, 11.
- 4. Demetrius is commended for his faithfulness, 12.

CONCLUSION OF THIRD JOHN, 13-14.

The three epistles of John were written to show the believer how he may find real joy in his salvation (1 John 1:4), to encourage him to avoid sin (1 John 2:1), and to give the believer a series of tests by which he may prove his faith.

No book in the Bible offers greater assurance than 1 John and no book affirms more the need to live a life that is consistent with the profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

“By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments,” (1 John 2:3).

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