

I, II and III John

Outlined Bible

Introduction: In these epistles, John the "apostle of love" will share his concerns about those things that would threaten the welfare of the church at the end of the first century.

Name — The books are named for the likely author.

Author—Probably John, the apostle.

1. The author is not named in these books.
2. However, there are unmistakable similarities in vocabulary, thought pattern, and writing style between these letters and John's gospel. (e.g. John 1:1 and I John 1:1)

Purpose

1. I John was written to combat false teaching concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ.
2. In II John, the apostle, wrote to warn believers about false teachers.
3. In the third letter, John wrote to commend, encourage, and instruct his good friend Gaius.

I. Background of the books.

- A. Earlier in our study we examined John's life.
- B. Irenaeus tells us that the apostle spent his last years in Ephesus,
 1. From there, he would have served as a mentor to churches throughout Asia Minor. (cf. Revelation 1:4a)
 2. I John was probably a circular letter distributed among the same group of congregations.
- C. These letters were likely written from Ephesus. (ca. AD 90-95)
 1. I John was not addressed to any specific person or church and probably widely distributed.
 2. The second epistle was addressed to "the elect lady."
 - a. Some believe that to be a reference to a local church.
 - b. More likely, the "elect lady" was a well-known, deeply loved sister in the Lord. (II John 1:5, 13)
 3. III John was written to John's friend Gaius.

II. The main messages of the books.

- A. The main message, of I John is that Jesus was God come in the flesh to save humanity.
 1. False teachers had infiltrated the church denying the divinity of Jesus Christ.
 - a. They denied that God could be packaged in flesh. (I John 4:1-3)
 - b. Apparently, they claimed to be sinless. (I John 1:8-10)
 - c. They were attempting to lure others into their apostasy.
 2. This heretical teaching was the groundwork for the false doctrine that came to be known as *Gnosticism*.
 - a. The Gnostics regarded spirit as divine and matter as evil, thus denying the possibility of incarnation.
 - b. Gnostics believed that Jesus was a man specially used by God (beginning at his baptism) and abandoned by God (at the crucifixion).
 - c. An offshoot of this heresy — *docetic Gnosticism* — believed that Jesus was a divine spirit but not really human.
 3. In his first epistle, John affirms the true identity and mission of Jesus Christ. "And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." (I John 5:11)
- B. The main message of II John is an appeal to protect the gospel.
 1. The elect lady was apparently well-known for her hospitality and welcomed visiting teachers.

2. John wrote her to warn her that some of those teachers were foreign to the truth.
 3. "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him." (II John 10)
- C. The main message of III John is to encourage a friend.
1. John commended Gaius for his good life. (III John 3, 4)
 2. Gaius encouraged others through his love and hospitality. (III John 5-8)
 3. But John also warns his friend about a troublemaker named Diotrephes. (III John 2 and 9)
 4. "Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God." (III John 11)

III. Outlines of the books.

A. I John

1. John outlines his general purposes for the epistle. (I John 1:1-4)
2. He writes of the nature of fellowship. (I John 1:5 — 2:6)
 - a. Fellowship and light. (I John 1:5-7)
 - b. Fellowship and confession. (I John 1:8 — 2:2)
 - c. Fellowship and obedience. (I John 2:3-6)
3. John writes of love in action. (I John 2:7-11)
4. He addresses different ages and categories of believers. (I John 2:12-14)
5. The apostle commands that believers not "love the world". (I John 2:15-17)
6. John warns against "antichrists." (I John 2:18-27)
7. We are God's children! (I John 2:28 — 3:10)
8. Love one another. (I John 3:11-24)
9. John commands that believers "test the spirits." (I John 4:1-6)
10. We love because God first loved us. (I John 4:7-21)
11. John speaks of faith. (I John 5:1-13)
 - a. Faith overcomes the world. (I John 5:1-5)
 - b. Faith is always centered on Christ. (I John 5:6-12)
 - c. One who has faith can be confident of eternal life. (I John 5:13)
12. Christians should pray for one another. (I John 5:14-17) and be on guard against sin. (I John 18-21)

B. II John

1. John writes this letter to encourage love and obedience on the part of a Christian lady and her children. (II John 1-6)
2. He warns the sister about giving hospitality to false teachers. (II John 7-11)
3. He expresses hope of seeing her soon (II John 12) and sends greeting to her nieces and nephews. (II John 13)

C. III John

1. John sends well wishes to his friend Gaius (III John 1 -4) and encourages his continued support of missionaries. (III John 5-8)
2. The apostle warns Gaius about Diotrephes. (III John 9-10)
3. He then commends Demetrius. (III John 11-12)
4. John expresses hope for a visit soon. (III John 13-14)
5. Benediction. (III John 15)

IV. Key themes of the book.

A. Scriptural warnings against **false teachers**.

1. In earlier lessons we have come across examples of false doctrine.
 - a. In the Galatian letter, "Judaizers" were trying to mix elements of the Law of Moses with obedience to the gospel. (Galatians 2:4-5; 5:1-6)

- b. In the Colossian letter, a strange mix of Judaism and mysticism had led believers to bizarre conclusions about the work of Christ. (Colossians 2:4, 8-23)
 - c. In II Thessalonians, some were promoting idleness and gossiping. (II Thessalonians 3:2, 6-13)
2. What does the Bible say about false teachers?
- a. II Peter 2:1 — But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them— bring swift destruction on themselves.
 - b. I John 4:1-2 — “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.”
 - c. II John 7-10 — “Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him.”
 - d. Jude 4 — “For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.”
3. Interestingly, the use of the term "false teacher" or "false prophet" in the New Testament is reserved for those who deny the very deity and saving work of Christ.
- a. We live at a time when many are eager to label anyone with whom they disagree about a point of doctrine as "false teacher."
 - b. While every point of doctrine is important, there have always been disagreements about their application. (cf. Romans 14; I Corinthians 8, etc.)
 - c. From a scriptural perspective, the use of the indictment "false teacher" should be used where the very heart of the gospel is denied.
- B. What is the "antichrist"?
- 1. In the early part of this century, a doctrine was born proposing that the antichrist would come just before a millennial reign of Christ.
 - a. Scripturally, that entire millennial theory is without substance.
 - b. The concept of a future individual serving as the sole antichrist is equally foreign to the Bible.
 - 2. I John 2:22 defines the antichrist — "who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son."
 - a. John further states that "many antichrists" had already come at the time of his writing. (I John 2:18)
 - b. John goes on to define the antichrist as a spirit rather than a specific individual. (I John 4:3)
- C. The assurance of salvation. (I John)
- 1. One of John's primary purposes for his first letter is to assure believers of their salvation. (I John 5:13)
 - 2. The word "know" appears in the little book 42 times!
 - 3. Our weakness in the flesh at some time causes every believer to question the assurance of our salvation.
 - 4. John gives several reasons for such assurance:
 - a. The power of the blood of Christ. (I John 1:7; 2:1)
 - b. The power of forgiveness [for Christians] enacted by our confession. (I John 1:9)
 - c. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer. (I John 4:13)
 - d. Our confession of the Christ. (I John 4:14-16a)
 - e. Our love for the brethren. (I John 4:16b-21)
 - f. Our obedience to His will. (I John 5:1-5) 147

1 JOHN

Summarized Bible

John is writing about the Word of Life, Christ (and eternal life), which he saw, touched, testify and proclaim.

The Message he heard

“God is light (righteous); in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” (1 John 1:5-7)

Comment: “Light” probably refers to God’s righteousness, not the light enabling one to see things in darkness.

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” (1 John 1:8)

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.” (1 John 1:9-10)

“If anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (1 John 2:1-2)

“We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.” (1 John 2:3)

“Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.” (1 John 2:6)

Comment: Walking as Jesus is living according to His will.

“Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness.” (1 John 2:9)

Comment: Anyone who wishes ill toward another hates.

“Whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness.” (1 John 2:11)

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. Anyone loves the world; the love of the Father is not in him.” (1 John 2:15)

“Many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.” (1 John 2:18-19)

Comment: An antichrist is anyone who denies Jesus was God in a human body but just a phantom or denies the existence of Christ.

“You have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.” (1 John 2:20)

“The man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist — he denies the Father and the Son.” (1 John 2:22)

“See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you.” (1 John 2:24)

“I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.” (1 John 2:26)

Antichrist discussion – see thebiblewayonline.com/Gnosticism.html

Love of the Father

“We are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him.” (1 John 3:2)

“Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.” (1 John 3:3)

“He appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning.” (1 John 3:5-6)

“No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.” (1 John 3:6)

“Do not let anyone lead you astray - so, one cannot be once saved always be saved.” (1 John 3:7)

“No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on (continue and still be living in righteously in Christ) sinning because he has been born of God.” (1 John 3:9)

“Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.” (1 John 3:10)

Comment: There are several types or levels of love. The love referred to here is desiring what is best for a brother's physical and eternal life.

“The message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.” (1 John 3:11)

- Love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. (1 John 3:16)
- If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? (1 John 3:17-18)
- Let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. (1 John 3:18-19)
- His is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another. (1 John 3:23)
- Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (1 John 4:1-2)
- Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. (1 John 4:2-3)
- His is the spirit of the antichrist. (1 John 4:3)
- No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us. (1 John 4:12)
- If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. (1 John 4:20-21)
- His is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. (1 John 5:2)
- This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome. (1 John 5:3-4)
- Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory. (1 John 5:4)

Eternal Life

“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.” (1 John 5:13-14)

Comment: We have an advocate, Jesus, The Christ, between us and our merciful God who desires no one perish.

“If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.” (1 John 5:14)

“If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that.” (1 John 5:16)

- Physical death – Too late to pray for anyone who does not have their breath of life to obey Christ. Their eternal life is in the hands of a just God.
- Spiritual death – For the living there is hope of repentance and return to God.
- Eternal death – Probably those who deny Jesus was God in human flesh as He said He was but a phantom as Gnostics claim - the antichrist.
- All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death. (1 John 5:17)
- Anyone born of God does not continue to sin. (1 John 5:18)
- The one who was born of God keeps him safe (by the life he lives), and the evil one cannot harm him. (1 John 5:18-19)
- Know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. (1 John 5:20)

Key Points from 1 John

- One can be led astray choosing to cease living a godly.
- The faithful in Christ’s Church, are constantly being washed clean from sin by His blood if they live according to His will.
- A Christian cannot hate (intensely dislike) a brother because God is Love.

Question – What was the message John saw and heard?

2 JOHN

“To the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in the truth — and not I only, but also all who know the truth— because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love. It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.”

Comment: It is unknown who the elect lady was. One could speculate it was a) friend of John's b) the church c) Mary the mother of Jesus – because of the word chosen and d) anything to keep identity secret.

“Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist, Gnostics. Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.”

Comment: The deceivers appear to be, Gnostics, those who deny that Christ came in the flesh because they believe all flesh was evil. So, Christ could not be both God and evil, therefore He was only a phantom. If this belief and teaching is true then there was no atoning sacrifice, no forgiveness, no church and no Body of Christ.

“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.”

Comment: This teaching is Jesus is and was God who came to earth to be the atoning sacrifice to all who put their trust in Him through obedience to His message of reconciliation.

Comment: During this time the act of hospitality was giving aid to a traveling Christian brother. But by giving aid to a self-proclaimed Christian brother whose teaching was his opinion and contrary to Christ was considered to be agreeing to his false teaching. They were told, “do not take him into your house or welcome him.”

Key Points from 2 John

- The teaching that Jesus did not come in the flesh (God in a human body) is the antichrist teaching that destroys the foundation of the atoning sacrifice – forgiveness of sins.
- Welcome, taking care of physical needs of food and shelter, is showing hospitality and indicates you support their teaching. Therefore, do not give aid, comfort and support to anyone who denies the existence of Jesus, the Christ, by welcoming them into your home.

Question: What is the antichrist?

3 JOHN

To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth. Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.

“It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”

“You are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God (true hospitality). It was for the sake of the Name that they went out.”

“Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. So, if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church. “

“Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone — and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true. “

Key Points from 3 John

- Power and the feeling of self-importance by controlling those in the Body is the opposite of being a servant, is condemned.