



Notes and Comments by John Sullivan

*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

1, 2, and 3 John

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NOTE TO E-BOOK READERS:

The printed journal, unlike this e-book version, has pages for notes.

You might want to have your own journal, either physical or electronic, because there is a lot of writing recommended in this study.

1, 2, and 3 JOHN

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God is Light.
1 John 1:5

God is Love.
1 John 4:8, 16

Introduction

In **1 John 5:13**, we are told:

*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.*

That was the apostle John's stated purpose for writing this letter. Since we believe that the Holy Spirit of God inspired John to write what he did, that means that this is also God's desire for you. While Satan is always trying to devastate you with doubts on the one hand and fool you with false assurances on the other hand, our Lord wants you to have a valid assurance of the most important thing about you – your eternal salvation. Read **John 20:30 – 31** to see how this compares to John's goal for writing his gospel about Jesus.

History tells us that the apostle John lived in Jerusalem taking care of Mary until she died. Then, after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, he moved to Ephesus. From there he possibly wrote these three letters, near the end of the first century.

John emphasizes, in a clearer way than found anywhere else in Scripture, two qualities of God: *God is Light* and *God is Love*. As is true with all characteristics of God, these two qualities have direct implications on the way we live, since we are made in His image. John wrote at a time when Christians needed to be encouraged to live their lives in the purity of God's light and in the atmosphere of Christian love. The same need exists today.

This brief journal is not meant to be a full commentary on every verse, but it is a guide to help you organize your thoughts as you continue your quest to know your Bible better and know your God better. Hopefully, by the time we are done, you can look at John's goal stated above and see that his goal has been accomplished in your life.

The pace for this journal is very flexible. If you're doing this with a group, you might want to go as slowly as one chapter per week. In that case, the thought questions given at the end of each section in this journal could be used as some of your discussion questions in the group. But you can certainly go at whatever pace helps you absorb and apply this wonderful part of God's Word.

Hopefully, the comments in this journal will be helpful to guide you in your thoughts and meditations. But this journal is at best the side dish. The main ingredient is the Word of God itself. So be sure to read each section of the Scriptures carefully and thoroughly before reading this journal.

At the end of this journal there is an opportunity to also study the short letter from Jude. It is not connected to John's letters, but its size and location in our Bibles make it appropriate to also study it now. Like John, he also encourages us to remain true to the faith and keep ourselves in God's love.

God bless you as you pour your heart into this study.

John Sullivan

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P.S. It would be great for you to take the time to listen to a recording of the whole letter in one sitting before we get into the study of each section.

I. Walking in the Light

At the time this letter was written, Christianity had existed for nearly 70 years and had become a powerful influence in many places. Many of the Christians were second or third generation Christians, most of whom would have been faithful, joyful disciples. But for some, the pure gospel was being perverted, and for others the powerful love that was to distinguish true disciples was beginning to grow cold. (See **John 13:34 – 35; Matthew 24:12; Revelation 2:4.**)

One of the main doctrinal threats of that day was known as *Gnosticism* (from the Greek word *gnosis* which means "to know"). They denied the complete incarnation of Jesus, because they believed that nothing good could live in the flesh. God became flesh and blood – that's certainly one of the unique teachings about Jesus. Without that, a lot of the fundamentals are lost. So John makes the point that Jesus was a physical being that could be seen and touched. The Gnostics were also an elitist type of group that looked down on others who were "not in the know" as they were. John uses the word "know" over 30 times in his letters to assure the Christians that they do not need to be misled by these false teachings.

In the introduction to his Gospel, John talked about Jesus as the Word (**John 1:1-2**). In the introduction to this letter, he expanded that thought to refer to him as the Word of Life (verses 1 & 2). You might want to take a minute to compare those two introductions. [**NOTE:** several times in this journal you will be encouraged to compare verses in John's letters to verses in his gospel.]

At the time John is writing this, John is an old man and the last of the original apostles. You might enjoy looking up the apostle John and finding out all you can about his life and about what it was like to live in the Roman Empire at the end of the first century. Can you imagine how he felt writing this letter as one of the last remaining eye-witnesses of Jesus (verses 3 & 4), and can you imagine how his readers felt reading this?

Verse 3 talks about the fellowship that Christians have with each other and the fellowship we have with the Father and with Jesus. In a sense, all of God's Word reveals what he wants us to know about our relationship with him and our relationships with each other. (Think about the greatest commandments, for instance.) Hopefully, we never miss the importance of all of that.

We mentioned in the introduction to this journal that John states in chapter 5 a purpose he had in writing this letter, which was to give Christians the assurance of their salvation. Verse 4 of chapter 1 also shows one of his purposes for writing: *complete joy*. It's easy to forget that God really does want us to have assurances and joy. So keep those purposes in mind as you continue this study.

God is Light

Light is frequently used in the Bible to describe the qualities of God and His presence in our lives. The Gospel of John often referred to that analogy. Jesus said that he, himself, is the Light (**John 8:12**). In this letter, John emphasizes the essential point: God is light (verse 5). In him is no darkness.

In this passage, John says that we are to walk in the light (verse 7). We are not the source of that light, but God gives us the choice to put ourselves into his light or not. Back in the Gospel of John we were told the sad but realistic truth that people have a tendency to love darkness instead of light (**John 3:19**). So the decision to walk in God's light is an extremely important decision. It is a decision that we make one time when we have that dramatic turn from darkness to light, and it is a decision that we make several times a day when we choose the attitudes and actions that are consistent with the light of God over the attitudes and actions that are consistent with darkness.

One of the practical actions connected with walking in the light is confessing our sins (verse 8 – 10). Verses 8 & 10 make it clear that there is no reason for any of us to claim that we are without sin. We deceive ourselves and we actually make God out to be a liar. The benefits, on the other hand, of being open with our sins are incredible. You might want to compare that with **James 5:16**.

There are two amazing results of walking in the light found in verse 7:

1. We have fellowship with one another. Satan would try to make us believe that being transparent, dropping our guard and letting our life be in the light would make Christians think less of us. And in truth, there may be some people who will judge you and reject you when you are open with them. But the opposite is true for people who are also walking in the light. There is a closeness that results from being real.
2. The blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin. The goal is not just to confess our sins. People who are walking in the light don't just confess their sins and deliberately keep on doing them. They also repent. But the real benefit comes from what God himself does as we walk in the light. He forgives and purifies us (verse 9 also). The language used here describes an on-going action of continually purifying us from all unrighteousness. (The Greek word for purifying is *katharizo*, from which we get the English word *catharsis*.) As important and effective as our faith and repentance are, only God can forgive and purify.

God is Light – Walk in the Light.

As stated in the Introduction, the **Thought Questions** in each section of this journal could be used as some of the discussion questions, if you are doing this study with a group. If you are not doing it as a group, they are for your own benefit.

Thought Questions

1. What ideas come to your mind when you think of God as Light?
2. How do you feel about confessing your sins?
3. How do you feel about being continually purified from your sins?

Research Questions

Use one of the written resources such as those listed on p. 28 or an on-line resource such as www.gotquestions.org to research the following:

1. Find out all you can about the life and times of the apostle John.
2. Who were the Gnostics?

2. Walking as Christ Did

Walking in the light emphasizes two things:

- (1) *the Light* and
- (2) *the walk*.

The Light, of course, is supernatural and divine. As we have already seen, it is an analogy that is frequently used in Scripture. John quoted Jesus' emphasis that Jesus, himself, is the Light (**John 8:12** and **9:5**). John, as we read in chapter 1 of this letter, pointed out that God is Light. It seems important to remember, then, that the Light is the Lord himself – not just an ideal or doctrine, but a personality with qualities that are nothing but pure love.

The walk, on the other hand, is the way we live our lives. "Walking" is also an analogy that is often used in Scripture. It describes the way we live our life. It is our decision. God, of course, provides the Light; we make the choice to live (walk) in that light.

One part of that walk is the openness that was talked about in the first chapter of this letter. That is a decision that not everyone wants to make. There is the human tendency to love darkness more than light. Another part of that walk is what is talked about in verse 6 of this chapter, which is the decision to walk as Jesus did. Some versions of the Bible paraphrase verse 6 to say "live as Jesus did," but the literal translation is "walk." Obviously it isn't talking about a literal type of walking, but a type of living. And this verse says that it is an absolute must for anyone desiring to be a Christian.

That goal, along with the goal stated in verse 1 (*I write this to you so that you will not sin.*), is enough to make any of us wonder how we could possibly ever have any assurance of salvation. The good news is God's provision for those times when we sin and when we fail to "walk" the way Jesus would. But it might be helpful for us to remind ourselves occasionally of God's goal in our lives. True, he is great about forgiving us and purifying us from our sins, but he is also actively involved in providing us the opportunity and ability to walk away from sin by walking the way Jesus would.

Verses 1 and 2 speak of two important aspects of Christ's work on our behalf:

- (1) He is our advocate, the one who speaks to the Father in our defense. The Greek word is *paraclete*, which is the same word Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit in **John 14:16** and could be translated as *advocate, counselor, or comforter*.
- (2) He is also the atonement sacrifice for our sins. Yes, he is giving us a high calling and setting a high standard for us, but look at all he has done and continues to do to help us with that goal. It's a healthy balance of having a high standard as a goal but basking in the light of the grace that we need to keep us from stressing out about that goal.

The Antichrists and the Anointing

Religious discussions sometimes talk about the antichrist, often connecting it with a frightening, end-times false messiah. The only Bible verses that actually use that word are verses 18 and 22 of this passage along with **1 John 4:3** and **2 John 7**. As often is the case, the Bible is clearer and easier to understand than some manmade doctrines. These four references make three clear points:

- (1) There are many antichrists (2:18).
- (2) They are already here (2:18 and 4:3).
- (3) It is anyone who denies Jesus as the Christ (2:22).

Simple; it is someone who is anti (against) Christ. There may very well be a climatic example of an antichrist coming at the end of times, but there have always been examples of antichrists ever since Christianity began.

We might not enjoy talking about "doctrinal" issues. But recall what Paul said about watching both your life and your doctrine (**1 Timothy 4:16**). John's writings about the antichrists, which would fit the Gnostics of his day, were not designed to just be argumentative, but to make sure that true Christians were not deceived by them. Hopefully we can have the same attitude today.

In contrast to the warning about the antichrists, a great blessing is described for believers: *we have an anointing* (2:20, 27). In Scripture, an anointing involved a priest or prophet pouring oil on someone's head signifying that God had set that person apart for a special assignment and was giving the person His Spirit to help perform that task. We have not received a literal anointing with oil, but we have been anointed by God, chosen by him and given his Spirit. We have God in us. Some may be anti Christ, but Christ is for us. By the way, *Christ* means *the anointed one*. So we have been anointed by the anointed one.

John also said to continue in the Lord, so that when He appears we may be confident and unashamed (2:28). (Compare that with **2 Peter 3:11 – 12**.)

Remember John's goals about writing this so that you will know that you have eternal life and so that our joy may be complete. God is not trying to stress you out or make you live in fear, but he knows that we need to be aware of dangers and we need to keep our focus on walking in the light. That is where true security and joy are found.

Thought Questions

1. How do you feel about Jesus being your atoning sacrifice and your advocate?
2. How does the warning about the antichrists help you?
3. How does it feel to know that you have been anointed?
4. What stands out to you about standing confident and unashamed?

Research Questions

Use one of the written resources such as those listed on p. 28 or an on-line resource such as www.gotquestions.org to research the following:

1. Look up the word *paraclete* to see some of its rich meaning.
2. Research the topic of *antichrist*. See why some people think it is connected with an end-of-the-world evil figure and some do not.

3. God's Love for Us and Our Love for Others

God wants us to see how much he loves us. Verse 1 is stated as an acclamation. Literally it is encouraging us to: *Behold God's love for us!* Look at it; really look at it! But it might help us see how much that love is if we turn that into a question: *how much love has God poured out on me?* You might want to spend some time meditating about that.

As a part of that great love, this verse says that he calls us his children. That's walking in the light. One thing the darkness does is hide our identity. In the darkness, no one can clearly see who you are, and you can't really see yourself or others. We need God's light to see God's love which shows us who we really are: God's children. It's a blessing to see this verse emphasize it by saying that we are not just *called* the children of God; that's who we really are!

Verses 2 and 3 give us one of the most hopeful promises about heaven. In essence it is saying that we don't understand everything that will be going on in heaven, but here is something we can know: in heaven we will be like Jesus. No more doubts, worries, sins, or sickness – just being like Jesus. How great is that? As implied in verse 3, that gives us hope and that hope gives us determination to walk in the light which purifies us from all sin.

Verses 5 and 8 also give us insight into the whole purpose of the Son of God coming to this world in the first place. It was to take away our sin and destroy the devil's work. You recall that chapter two gave us that lofty challenge of having the determination to not sin. That is an impossible task without the Lord's help. Even with his help it will not be accomplished fully until we get to heaven and then be like Christ completely. The language used in verses 6 and 9 talks about *continuing* to sin, as opposed to committing a single act of sin. We were told in chapter one that none of us could say that we have no sin, but here we are reminded to not use that as an excuse to just remain in that sin. He forgives us, purifies us, and empowers us to fight against sin. There is a huge difference between **committing** a sin, even one that we seem to repeat way more than we want to, and **living** in that sin. The first is almost inevitable because of our human condition, the second is avoidable because of God's grace and empowerment.

Recall that one of the reasons this letter was written is to help us know that we are saved. Verse 10 of this chapter gives a test to help us with that. Children of God do what is right and love their brothers and sisters. That's very simple but not simplistic; it's challenging but not impossible; it's inspiring but not overwhelming. Will you ever be completely sinless or always do the right thing? Not until you get to heaven. But is it your goal to do what is right and love others? I certainly hope so.

Love One Another

John's message is the one he had heard from the beginning: love one another (verse 11). Of course he heard that from Jesus himself. He had heard Jesus clearly teach that loving God and loving others are the two most important commands (**Matthew 22:37 – 39**). John had also heard Jesus say that his disciples will be known to really be disciples by their love for one another (**John 13:34 – 35**).

The question we might have, though, is how do we love one another. Verse 16 tells us that we know what love is from the example that Jesus gave of laying down his life for us. (Again, you can see how these words remind us of what Jesus said in **John 13:15** and **15:13**.) Then we are told that we should do the same thing, and he gives an example of helping your brothers and sisters when they are in need.

Verse 18 reminds us to love in action, not just in words. Words are powerful and important, of course. Scriptures show us both by example and by direct teaching the importance of our words. Telling people that you love them is powerful. But laying your life down for someone is not just saying, "*I'm here for you if you need me.*" Love shows itself by the action. When it comes to love, say it and do it; but don't just say it, do it.

Verses 19 and 20 gives us an assurance from God when we have a tendency to condemn ourselves. The Holy Spirit is very effective in telling us when we are on the wrong path. Guilty feelings can come from actually being guilty. Thank God for a godly conscience. But Satan is also very effective in telling us that we are on the wrong path when we're actually not. That's why it is always important that we are walking in the Light. Sometimes one of the best ways of telling whether it is the Holy Spirit who is convicting you about true sin or it is Satan who is trying to unjustly accuse you is to be open with a true friend in Christ about how you are feeling. In other words, walk in the light with someone else to help you walk in the light with God. The assurance found in this passage is that God is greater than our conscience, and he knows the truth even when we don't. (You might want to also see what Paul said about the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow in **2 Corinthians 7:10.**)

This chapter closes with another statement connected to the purpose John had in writing this letter (the purpose of helping us know that we are saved). Verse 24 says that the Spirit that God gave us helps us know that we live in him. As stated above, the Holy Spirit is a spirit of assurance, not condemnation. Walk in God's light, and listen to his Spirit. You might want to spend some time thinking about the importance of this spirit of assurance and how it applies to you.

Thought Questions

1. How has God lavished his love on to you personally?
2. How does the promise of being like Christ in heaven give you hope?
3. How does it help to see the teaching about not *continuing* in sin?
4. What do you think it means to lay down your life for others?
5. How does verse 18 (love by actions, not just words) apply to you?
6. How does the assurance that is talked about in this passage help you?

4. The One Who is in You

Test the spirits around us. We have seen and see even more in this chapter that this letter focuses a lot on love – God's love for us, our love for God, and our love for others. But we have also seen that God's teaching about love is not a tolerance of sin or false teaching. He wants us to be loving, but he doesn't want us to be deceived. Verse 1 tells us to not just believe every spirit (i.e. every teaching). The test he mentioned here would have described the 1st Century false teaching of the Gnostics who did not believe that Jesus came in literal human flesh. He frankly calls that the spirit of antichrist. But he says that we do not have to live in fear because:

*The one who is in you is greater
than the one who is in the world.*

1 John 4:4b

Do you see how important that statement is in your life? It is the truth, not something that is just made up to cheer you up and make you feel better. You might want to compare that with Elisha's words in **2 Kings 6:16**. Elisha talked about the ones with us referring to the thousands of angelic forces working on our behalf. John is talking about the One who is in us.

You might also want to compare that with Jesus' words in **John 14:23**. Jesus is not just with us; he is in us. The Father is not just with us; he is in us. The Holy Spirit is not just with us; he is in us. The apostle John had heard those words from Jesus many decades before. They must have had a great impact on him, and he wanted his readers to be impacted by them also. With us and in us – both of those thoughts are life changing truths. It is the light in which we walk, and it is what makes the difference in our lives. Believing this truth does not make it so. But the all important question is: do you believe it?

So who is the "One" who is in us? Is it the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit? The answer is: yes. That, of course, is part of the mystery of the Trinity. The *Three* are *One*. You might want to take some time to meditate about the One who is in you and pray that you will recall his presence during your day and let it impact what you do, what you say, and how you feel.

God's Love for Us and Our Love for Others (again)

Once again, God inspires us by inspiring John to write about God's love. It is writing like this that has led John to be known as the *Apostle of Love*. When he first met Jesus, John and his brother James were called *Sons of Thunder*, showing selfish ambition and a violent tendency. (See **Mark 3:17**, **Matthew 20:20 – 23**, **Luke 9:51 – 56**.) The love of God changed him into a man of love.

God is love.

1 John 4:8, 16

Why does John repeat himself with these three little words? We saw in the previous chapter that our love involves both saying and doing. When it comes to God's love, however, it is not just something that God says, nor even is it just something he does. It is who he is. He showed his love by sending his Son into the world so that we might live through him (verse 9). He does and says the loving thing, because he is love. All Scripture testifies to this characteristic of God, but this statement is unique to John's letters. It could also be said that it is unique to Christianity, in the sense that no other religion states that about God. It is a fundamental fact about God that God seems to want to make sure that we know. (You might want to compare that with **Psalms 62:11 – 12**.) We may not know everything, but we can know this: *God is love*.

And once again, John also challenges us to love one another. We love because we are loved (verses 11 and 19). We also love others because we love God. In fact, he says that we can't claim to love God if we don't love our brothers and sisters. He also makes it clear that if we don't love others, we don't know God (4:8). Love for God and loving others are connected. You are made in his image. He is love – so your inherited tendency is to love.

Perfect love drives out fear (verse 18). The Bible often talks about the importance of fearing God, referring to reverence and awe. (Recall **Hebrews 12:28 – 29**, for instance.) But that is different from a frightening feeling that scares you away from God. While we will hopefully never lose our reverent awe of God, loving him as Father drives away the scary kind of fear. Not only does it drive out the wrong kind of fear about God, love also drives away the fears and insecurities about life that so often tempt us.

While there may seem to be something very basic about the subject of love, there will probably never be a time this side of heaven when we think that we have truly mastered it. Whether it is the reminder of the greatness of God's love for us, or the command to love others, there is always much for us to gain by reading, believing, and obeying Scriptures like these.

Two Basic, but Important, Qualities of God	Two Inherited Characteristics of Those Made in His Image
<i>God is Light.</i>	<i>We walk in Light.</i>
<i>God is Love.</i>	<i>We walk in Love.</i>

Thought Questions

1. How do you feel about the times in the Bible when we are warned about false teachers?
2. *The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*
 - How important is that statement in your life?
 - Do you believe it?
 - How does it change your view of life?
3. How has the love of God changed your life?
4. How do you connect your love for God and your love for others?
5. How does your love for God cast out your fears?

5. Faith is the Victory

Born of God (verse 1). That's one of those amazing but simple thoughts that we can so easily take for granted. Recall what the apostle John said about it in his Gospel (**John 1:12 – 13** and **3:1 – 8**). There are so many inspirational thoughts that come to our minds when we remember that we are children of God through the new birth. John already spoke about that in chapter 2 of this short letter. In this chapter, his point is that love characterizes the children of God. Love for God and love for his other children. We are born to love!

Verse 3 makes the connection that John had heard Jesus himself emphasize as John recorded it in his Gospel (**John 14:15 – 21**): love for God is inseparable from obeying God. Human religions have often wavered between over-emphasizing obedience and over-emphasizing love. God in his Scriptures has always emphasized both. But love, of course, is the key to making obedience, as John says in verse 3, "*not burdensome*." It is our love for God that makes us say "*I agree with John! I love him, and it is a pleasure, not a burden, to obey him*."

Faith is the Victory. That's the name of a great hymn written by John Yates in 1891. Long before that, the apostle John wrote about it in this letter with the affirmation that faith is the victory that overcomes the world. Once again, John had heard Jesus talk about how he wanted his disciples to not worry or fear about the troubles they would have in this world because HE had overcome the world (**John 16:33**). Did you catch the importance of what is said in verse 4? Our faith does not assist Jesus in overcoming the world. He has done that by his own power and whether we believe it or not. But it is only by believing it that we personally experience it. You might want to spend some time meditating about what it means on a practical level for you personally and for the church collectively to "*overcome*" the world. It's not a competition against the people of this world, but a victory over the negative influences permeating from Satan's world.

The unified testimony of the Spirit, the water, and the blood (verses 6 – 12) point to the truth about how Jesus came and to the truth about the life we have in the Son. The Gnostics in John's day would agree that Jesus came in the Spirit as seen in his water baptism, but they denied that he physically shed his blood. That controversy may not mean as much to us today, but it is assuring for us to remember that Jesus' Spirit and his human body were given so that we can have life in Him.

If he was that devoted to us (and still is), we can have assurance in our life.

Assurances

As we have noted before, the Greek word for *know* is *gnosis*. The Gnostics got their name from that word and claimed to have special, secretive knowledge that everyone needed to know to be truly spiritual. If you've been keeping count, you have seen that John uses the word *know* (*gnosis*) over 30 times in his three letters which would have assured the Christians of his day that they did not need to be misled by the "knowledge" of these false teachings. But what about us? Is it obvious why Christians today need to know that we have eternal life? Insecurity is a common threat to our personal joy and to our ability to joyfully help others. It is a virus that infects us and spreads rapidly to others. That is not the kind of life that Jesus had in mind when he talked about *life to the full* (**John 10:10**).

John tells us in his closing, as we have noted before, his purpose for writing this short letter:

*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

The assurance that God inspired John to write about is not a false assurance. God has no interest in telling people who are hopelessly lost and desperately hurting that they can have assurance about their eternal life unless they really do have that assurance. The truth of this assurance, of course, is based on the love of God, which is an assurance that can be counted on to the fullest. God tells us and shows us in no uncertain terms that he loves us. In fact, love is his character – God is love! That's the foundation of our assurance. Our part in that assurance is based on our love for him, which also leads us to love others. You know that you are not perfectly sinless, and John has told us how to walk in the light about our sin which gives us the assurance of forgiveness and purification. You know, though, that you love God and you love others. God sees that and wants you to be assured by it as well.

One of his practical applications of that assurance involves our prayer life, including praying for one another's sins. The assurance of knowing God's love carries with it the assurance of knowing that he hears us when we pray. The confidence God wants us to have in approaching him, as mentioned in verse 14, is similar to that found in **Hebrews 4:16**.

Then John closes this letter with the rather unusual instruction to keep away from idols. That's not an unusual thought in the Bible as a whole, of course, but it does seem, at first glance, to be an unusual way to conclude this letter, since he hadn't specifically mentioned idols before. But knowledge, security, and self-assurance can be idols, when viewed in the wrong way. The Gnostics of John's day made their knowledge to be something to be worshiped. The same thing can happen today. God wants us to have knowledge, security and self-assurance, but as a result of having Him first. He comes first.

Seek assurances, but seek Him first!

Thought Questions

1. How does being born of God encourage and motivate your love?
2. Do you agree with John that God's commands are not burdensome?
3. What does it mean to you that Jesus has overcome the world and that your faith is the victory that overcomes the world?
4. How has this letter helped you know that you have eternal life?
5. Have any insecurities or doubts come into your mind that you need to share with others and get their prayers?
6. What does it mean to you to keep yourself from idols?

6. Walking in the Truth/ Walking in Love

The first letter of John was more like a sermon, written to a general audience. The next two letters of John, similar to Paul's short letter to Philemon, are very brief and personal. In these two letters, John continues to emphasize the importance of walking in the light (or walking in the truth, as he refers to it here) and living a life of love. It's encouraging to see the joy that John experienced when he saw the love and faithfulness of others. Hopefully, that provides a great example for us as well.

This letter was written to "*the chosen [or elect] lady and her children, whom I love in the truth.*" That could be a specific family that was close to John or an affectionate way of describing a specific church. In either case, it shows John's loving connection with the recipients of the letter.

The word *truth* is used 5 times in this letter (and 6 times in the next letter):

- Love in the truth (verse 1);
- All who know the truth (verse 1);
- The truth that lives in us and will be with us forever (verse 2);
- Grace, mercy, and peace with us in truth and love (verse 3);
- Walking in the truth (verse 4).

As you reflect on these, remember that truth is not just the genuine teachings that come from God, it is also Jesus himself (**John 14:6**). Hopefully, you can see the connection with *walking in the Light*. Truth (light) is not just a thing or idea; it is a person. Walking in the light is not just a lifestyle; it is walking in Him.

As we have grown to expect from John's writings, this short letter emphasizes Jesus' command to love one another (verses 5 – 6). Walking in truth and walking in love are never contradictory in Scripture. They go hand-in-hand.

As we have also seen from the heart of John's writings, this letter shows his concern about false teachings, once again referred to as being anti-christ. The Gnostics were specifically some who were teaching that Jesus did not come in physical flesh (verse 7). God shows us here how we can stand up for truth, and even stand against what is anti-christ, while still being known for our love. They were told to not support the false teaching, but that did not require a hateful, prideful attitude.

Thought Questions

1. What does it mean to you to walk in the truth?
2. How can you balance a hatred of false teaching with a love for the false teachers?
3. What do you learn from the relationship John had with the "*chosen lady and her children*" that you want to apply to your relationships?

7. No Greater Joy

This short letter from John was written to his dear friend Gaius. We don't know who Gaius was, but John says that he is someone "*whom I love in the truth.*" John knew that being someone loved by Jesus was a special blessing. John personally felt the blessing of being someone that Jesus loved, and he probably made Gaius feel that way too.

Don't you love John's prayer for Gaius (verse 2)? He prayed for his health and also that his soul was getting along well. That models God's concern for our whole health. That's the way he loves us and the way we want to love others.

Verse 4 shows what gave John a great deal of joy:

*I have no greater joy than to hear
that my children are walking in the truth.*

3 John 4

There is probably someone in your life that is getting a great deal of joy seeing your faithfulness. May that person be overflowing with joy today!

John mentioned the practical application of hospitality in verses 5 – 8. We often only think of that word in connection with having people in your home for dinners. But you can see that this Scripture, like others that use this word, is referring to the loving way in which we receive and send one another. That could include having them in your home, but it involves your heart and attitude about the way you treat others.

As he did in the other two letters, John also showed his concern about false teaching. This letter referred to a specific man, Diotrephes. His teachings seemed to come from selfish ambition. Referring to him and other false teachers, John said to imitate what is good, not what is evil (verse 11).

Demetrius, on the other hand is "*well spoken of by everyone – and even by the truth itself.*" (verse 12) What a wonderful description! On the other hand, there is another Demetrius spoken of in **Acts 19:24** that had an opposite description.

John closes the letter with "*Greet the friends there by name.*" People were not numbers or just generalities. They were friends who had names. You can't possibly know everyone by name, but you know that God does!

Thought Questions

1. Who do you have in your life that is like Gaius and John?
2. How do you apply that joy that John felt in verse 4?
3. What do you get from John's relationship with Gaius and the friends around him that you want to apply to your life?

8. Contending for the Faith

Jude, like James, was one of Jesus' brothers. His letter was possibly written 10-30 years before the writings of John. The two writers had some different themes and goals in their writings. But they share the common thread of having the ability to challenge, inspire and equip their readers today just as much as they did almost 2000 years ago.

Jude said that he preferred to write to them about the salvation we share. Instead, as he states in verse 3, he felt compelled to write and urge his readers to "*contend for the faith*." We might be able to identify with Jude's feelings. We would probably rather spend our time talking about the joys and blessings of salvation, but sometimes we have to speak up in a way that fights (contends) for the faith. As always, though, that should be done with love. With God's help, we can contend for the faith, without being contentious in our attitude.

Note the phrase "*the faith*" in verse 3. The word *faith*, in Scripture, usually refers to the personal trust we have as individuals and as a group. But *the faith* refers to the set of beliefs and principles that describe Christianity as a whole.

Jude uses several references from Old Testament history (Sodom and Gomorrah, Cain, Balaam, Korah) to remind his readers of the severity of judgement. Again, we might rather focus on God's love and forgiveness, but we cannot ignore the reality of his judgement and punishment that accompanies unrepentance. (Recall **Romans 11:22**.)

As we saw with John's writings about false teachers, some details of the false teachings in the first century may not be present today. But many of the attributes are the same today and in every generation before us. Here are a few of Jude's descriptions that sound familiar today, and you could note others:

- They turn teaching about God's grace into a license for sin (verse 4).
- They speak abusively about things they don't understand (verse 10).
- They are shepherds who only feed themselves (verse 12).
- They are grumblers and faultfinders (verse 16).

NOTE: Jude refers to some books that were very familiar to the readers of his day which are not in the Bible. A book called *The Assumption of Moses* describes the reference in verse 9. The *Book of Enoch* is referred to in verse 14. That would be similar to us quoting religious books today. We recognize their value, but neither we nor their authors claim them to be the same as Scripture. Jude's point with these references is well taken, though. It might be summarized as: *our goal is to save people, even those who teach error, not to destroy them; we can judge between right and wrong teachings as they compare with Scripture, but it is only God's role to judge and punish.*

The letter closes with several inspirational thoughts:

- Build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit (verse 20).
- Keep yourselves in God's love (verse 21).
- Show mercy mixed with fear (verses 22 – 23).
- God is able to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy (verse 24).

As you reflect on these, remember that God's love is in you.

Thought Questions

1. What does it mean to you to contend for the faith?
2. What challenges and encouragements do you find in this letter?

Conclusion

Thank you for devoting this time to studying these letters from John and Jude. We have learned so much from God's heart about walking in his light and living as children born to love.

While John used the word *know* (Greek word: *gnosis*) over and over to help the first century Christians not be overwhelmed by insecurity prompted by the lofty sounding teaching from the Gnostics, it helped us to deal with our insecurities prompted by Satan's attempts to rob us of the abundant life that Jesus brings. We appreciate so much his stated purpose for writing:

*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

As a result of this study, I hope that we can all say that John's goal was reached in our lives, or at least that there was significant progress in reaching it. We're not going to let Satan fool us on the one hand with false assurances that have no basis in reality or, on the other hand, burden us with insecurities that come from not trusting the love of God nor admitting our love for him.

God is light, and God is love. We choose to walk in the light, and we choose to live a life of love. While there are many dangers and troubles in this world, we take heart that the One who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world, and He has overcome the world. We've seen the examples of close relationships between John and his friends, and we devote ourselves to having those kind of relationships as well.

All of the above convictions, and more, come from reading, believing, and applying these amazing letters.

May God continue to bless you as you continue to know your Bible better and know your God better.

John Sullivan

Resources

Alexander, David and Pat *Erdmans' Handbook of the Bible*. Lion Publishing, 1973.

Barclay, William *The Letters of John and Jude*, The Westminster Press, 1955.

Halley, Henry *Halley's Bible Handbook*, Zondervan, 2000.

Hamilton, Mark (editor) *The Transforming Word*, Abilene Christian University Press, 2009.

Online Resources

(Sample)

Here is a sample of questions from *The Letters of John and Jude* that can be explored using the website: www.gotquestions.org or just by searching for them on any web browser or in a Bible dictionary.

1. Who were the Gnostics?
2. What is the antichrist? **[NOTE:** most articles about *antichrist* will connect it to a specific end-times false messiah. That may be correct, but it is clearly not what John said about this subject. In any case, it is good to see what people teach about a topic, even if you don't agree with it.]
3. Who was the "Elect Lady"?
4. Who was Gaius?
5. Who was Diotrephes?
6. Who was Demetrius?
7. Who was Jude?

Notes

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