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# 1, 2, and 3 John

## Summary

First, Second, and Third John are letters written to a growing group of Christian believers to warn them about false teachers and to assure them of their salvation in Jesus Christ. John writes these letters as a caring parent would write to his cherished children. John saw that some religious leaders were spreading ideas inconsistent with Jesus' teaching, primarily destructive and false teachings of Gnosticism. John explains in simple terms how to determine if someone is teaching the true gospel message in this way. *If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth* (1 John 1:6). These statements provide a way for us to assess teachings from various sources. The second and third letters were probably written around the same time and continue the theme of providing simple truths to support the growing Church. Second John is only thirteen verses in length and is addressed to believers, warning them of the dangers of listening to deceitful teachers. He goes so far as to warn the Christian believers not to ask these false teachers into their homes or to welcome them (2 John 1:10). In the third letter, which is only fourteen verses long, John calls out certain individuals by name for praise or correction. He mentions Gaius who brings him joy, Diotrephes for malicious nonsense, and Demetrius for his great heart for the Lord. Most of these serve as specific examples for godly behavior as the young Christian Church continues to grow, one believer at a time.

## Author

These letters have historically been attributed to the apostle, John, son of Zebedee, the apostle, and author of the Gospel of John and Revelation.

## Date

Most scholars believe these letters were written between A.D. 85 and A.D. 95 when John was nearing the end of his life.

## Primary Characters

- 1 John: New Christians in Asia Minor (the western part of modern-day Turkey)
- 2 John: The "Woman Chosen by God"
- 3 John: Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius

## Historical Moments

- The Letters of John Are Written - (1,2, 3 John)
- Gnosticism Is Implicitly Denounced - (1 John)

## Major Theological Themes

**Fellowship Is Important** - Fellowship is motivated by what God has done for us. It is important that people stay in community because we offer support and accountability to one another. John explains we should love one another. We should not be like Cain (who murdered his brother Abel), but rather like Christ, who laid down His life for us.

**God Takes False Teaching Seriously** - John gives many warnings about false teachers, especially the Gnostics. These false teachers are exposed by their denial of Jesus, the one born of the Virgin Mary, who was crucified and resurrected. Believers can rely on the Holy Spirit to remain in them and provide discernment as they go forward in their Christian walk.

## Lessons Learned from 1, 2 and 3 John

**We Must Be Discerning About Those in the Church** - There are many good people serving and preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, but there are also many deceitful people who pretend to serve the church while they advance their own selfish desires. John calls us to love one another as Christ has loved us, but he also calls us to know what we believe and check the behavior and teachings of those around us against Scripture.

**We Must Analyze Ourselves** - John gives the recipients some tests to look at ourselves and see if we are truly imitating Jesus. From a general point of view, John says, *Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did* (1 John 2:6). This does not mean that we will live perfect lives, but that if we are not continuously trying to live more like Christ, we must analyze why that is. We are provided several simple tests: 1) If we say we have fellowship but continue to sin without regard, then we are lying, 2) if we claim to be without sin, then we are lying, 3) if we claim to know Jesus, but continue to sin without regard, then we are lying, and 4) anyone who claims to be a Christian but hates a brother or sister is not part of the fellowship.