

I—3 JOHN

Faith, Hope & Love

I. Introduction

A. History

1. Timeline¹

- 69** POLYCARP was born. After having ministered in the foothills of the Caucasus mountains, to the Scythians in South Russia around the Black Sea, establishing churches in Scythia, Byzantium, Greece, Thrace, Macedonia and Patros, ANDREW was crucified at Achaia on a cross in the form of an “X”, hanging there for three days before he died on the last day of November. LUKE, who had been ministering with ANDREW, was crucified at Patros, Greece by being hanged on an olive tree by the idolatrous priests.
- 70** VESPASIAN arrived at Rome. TITUS, his son, with 80,000 men, captured and destroyed Jerusalem in August. 700 Jewish prisoners were taken to Rome. Judea was detached from Syria and made a separate Roman province.
- 71** *All astrologers and philosophers were banished from Rome.*
- 72** After ministering in Syria, Edessa and northern Persia, JUDE (THADDAEUS) was killed with a halberd at Edessa and was buried at Kara Kelesia. SIMON ZELOTES was sawn asunder in Persia. *Jewish revolts in Egypt and Cyrene. ANTIOCHUS IV was deposed. Asia Minor was added to Cappadocia.*
- 73** BARNABAS was killed by the Jews in Salamis on Cyprus. *Greece was made a senatorial province. Censorship of VESPASIAN and TITUS.*
- 75** *HEROD AGRIPPA II and BERNICE moved to Rome. VESPASIAN began building the Roman Coliseum.*
- 76** JOSEPH of Ariamathaea died in Britain and was buried at Glastonbury.
- 79** *Mt. Vesuvius erupted, destroying Pompeii and Herculaneum.*
- 80** *Rome was burned again. TITUS dedicated the Roman Coliseum.*
- 81** “Targums”, Aramaic versions of the Old Testament, began to appear. *TITUS died, succeeded by his brother DOMITIAN, son of VESPASIAN and FLAVIA DOMITILLA.*
- 85** JOHN wrote his Gospel.
- 88** CLEMENT I was bishop of Rome.
- 90** Jewish rabbis gathered at Jamnia to establish the Jewish canon of Scripture. JOHN wrote I John, II John and III John. *DOMITIAN began his persecution of Christians.*
- 94** *Roman persecution of Jewish and Christians. Josephus’ “Antiquities” was published.*
- 95** POLYCARP was baptized by JOHN on December 25th. JOHN was banished from Ephesus to Patmos by DOMITIAN where he wrote “Revelation”. During his banishment, TIMOTHY ministered at Ephesus. CLEMENT wrote his first epistle to the Corinthian church from Rome.

¹Wetzel, *A Chronology Of Biblical Christianity*

96 JOHN was released from exile on Patmos by NERVA and returned to Ephesus.

DOMITIAN was stabbed by STEPHANUS in September and MARCUS COCCEIUS NERVA became Emperor. KANISHKA, ruler of the Kushan dynasty in India, died.

97 TIMOTHY reproved the pagans of Ephesus for their idolatry, causing them to fall upon him with clubs and beat him. He died two days later from the beating. CLEMENT wrote his second epistle to the Corinthian church. JOHN the Apostle died at Ephesus on September 26th.

100 HEROD AGRIPPA II died. The book “*Bhagavad Gita*”, which influenced Hinduism, was composed.

2. Authenticity

Language, early mention by extra-biblical sources, and a lack of convincing arguments to the contrary support these letters’ authenticity. Origen’s mention (c. A.D. 231) indicates that 2 & 3 John are not accepted by some as genuine, and Eusebius cites (c. 325) 1 John as accepted but 2 & 3 John as disputed, though “well known and acknowledged by most.” All 3 are included in lists of the books of the New Testament by Athanasius (367), and the councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397).²

B. Author

Almost universally accepted to be John, Son of Zebedee. Quoted by Clement of Rome (c. A.D. 96), the *Didache* (c. 90–120), *Epistle of Barnabas* (c. 130), & Polycarp. First reference to the epistles being specifically Johannine: Papias (d. 130) cites one, Ireneus cites at least 2 (c. 180), as does Clement of Alexandria (c. 200). The first known mention of all 3 epistles is by Origen (d. 253). No convincing arguments allow for any other author.³

103 JUSTIN MARTYR was born at Neapolis, Samaria.

107 IGNATIUS, bishop of Antioch, wrote seven letters to churches, and TRAJAN had him thrown to the lions in Syria.

110 POLYCARP, elder of Ephesus, wrote to the Philippians.

111 *PLINY the Younger was governor in Bithynia.*

112 *PLINY wrote TRAJAN for advice on how to deal with Christians. The first organized persecution of Christians.*



²Carson, Moo, & Morris. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. Zondervan: 1992.

³Ibid.

C. Theme/Purpose

The theme of all three of John’s epistles is fellowship. 1 John lays the groundwork for fellowship, offering not only a basis for fellowship, but also the characteristics and consequences of fellowship. 2 John continues by explaining with whom to avoid fellowship, and 3 John offers positive and negative examples of fellowship through two church leaders.

II. Setting

Written from Ephesus, according to Eusebius & Ireneus, and probably written to many or all of the churches of Asia Minor listed in the beginning of Revelation, over which John had oversight. Some have suggested that 1 John was sent to all the churches, while 2 & 3 John were cover letters sent with 1 John to specific congregations.

III. Preliminary Questions

- A. How is 1 John’s time like ours?
- B. How is 1 John’s message particularly applicable to our daily lives?
- C. Why is 1 John relevant to all eras of God’s people?

IV. The text⁴

A. 1 John

1. The Basis of Fellowship1:1–2:27

a. Introduction1:1–4

Who is the “we” in 1:1? What does this tell us about the authority of this epistle?

What is it that was “from the beginning”? (1:1) How is this opening similar to the opening of John’s Gospel?

What is the “Word of Life”? (1:1)

This letter was written to counter an early form of *Gnosticism*. How does 1:2 speak against this teaching? (q.v. John 1:14)

According to 1:3, what is the basis of Christian fellowship?

b. The Conditions for Fellowship 1:5–2:14

i. Walk in the Light1:5–7

How is God “light”? (1:5)

What is the darkness of which John speaks? How do we avoid walking in darkness? (1:6)

⁴Outlines from *The Open Bible: Expanded Edition*. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985.

What does the light bring to light? (1:6-10)

What is the basis of our being cleansed from sin? (1:7)

ii. Confession of Sin.....1:8-2:2
Gnosticism claims the freedom from sin. John points out how ludicrous this idea is.

What does God’s faithfulness have to do with our forgiveness? (1:9)

Have you ever said of one of your actions, “That wasn’t really sin,” when you knew it was sin?
Why?

How is Jesus our advocate? (2:1) How is His righteousness important in this case?

What does “atoning sacrifice” mean? (2:2)

iii. Obedience to His Commandments.....2:3-6
The Gnostics claimed to have special knowledge of God, but they rejected the concept of sin.
Can you know God without keeping His commandments?

How would you answer someone who says, “I know Jesus, but I don’t need to go to church to be saved”?

Do you keep God’s commandments?

What is the advantage of “walking with God”?

Can anyone “walk with God” without faith?

iv. Love for One Another.....2:7-14
How is the command to love “new”? (2:7-8)

What is the true light? (2:8)

Are hate and love primarily emotions or actions? (2:9-10)

How does “abiding in the light” show love to our brother? (2:10)

What does John mean by “cause for stumbling”? How can we avoid being a “cause for stumbling” to a brother?

How can hatred blind us? (2:11)

What does it mean that our sins are forgiven “for His *name*’s sake?”

Who are the “fathers,” “young men,” and “children” John addresses in 2:13–14?

c. The Cautions of Fellowship2:15–27

i. Love of the World2:15–17

How can a church fall into the trap of loving the world? (2:15)

Is it wrong to love the world God gave us? What does John mean in 2:15? What commandment is this?

What is the will of God? (2:17)

How is God’s will done? God’s will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God’s name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die. This is His good and gracious will. (Small Catechism, 5th Petition)

Compare 2:17, Luther’s explanation of the Fifth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer (above), and the last paragraphs of the Athanasian Creed: “And they that have done good will go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire.”

ii. Spirit of the Antichrist.....2:18–27

What does it mean that we’re in the “last hour”? (2:18)

Who is the Antichrist? (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:3–12) Are there more than one? (2:18)

Where do they come from?

When someone claims to be a Christian but teaches contrary to Scripture, what is the effect? (2:19)

Are you anointed? (2:20) What does this mean? (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:21)

What does John mean by “You *all* know”?

Does anyone in modern times “deny the Son” but claim to have the Father? (2:23)

What is the significance of 2:24 for the importance of Bible study and church attendance?

When did you get “anointed”? (2:27) If you are anointed, do you need teaching? What is the purpose of teaching?

2. The Behavior of Fellowship.....2:28–5:21

a. Characteristics of Fellowship 2:28–5:3

i. Purity of Life 2:28–3:3

Will you have confidence at His coming? (2:28) Why?

How did you get to be a child of God? What does it mean to be God’s child (What is the benefit)?

In 3:2, John says we will be like Him. That was the claim of the serpent in Genesis 3. How are the two promises different?

Give a synonym for the word “hope” as it’s used in 3:3.

ii. Practice of Righteousness.....3:4–12

Does God take sin seriously? How did He show us that? (3:4–5)

Do you sin? Do you, then, know God? (3:6)

When you sin, whom do you serve? (3:7)

What is the danger of normalizing sin? (3:9)

Does God’s seed abide in you? (3:9) How so?

What does 3:10 tell us about the relationship between faith and works?

iii. Love in Deed and Truth.....3:13–24

Does the world hate you? (3:13) Why or why not? Examples?

What does “because” modify? What is the significance? (cf. John 5:24)

Can murderers (and haters) be saved? (3:15)

iv. Testing the Spirits.....4:1-6
 What are some examples of “false spirits” you’ve heard about? (4:1)

What does it mean for a spirit to “confess that Jesus Christ has come into the flesh”? (4:2)

Who is “he who is in the world”? (4:4)

How does 4:6 answer doctrine based on “I think God is...”?

v. Love as Christ Loved..... 4:7-5:3
 Can you love without knowing God? Can you know God without love? (4:7-8)

What does it mean to “live through Christ”? (4:9)

What is the basis of all love? (4:10)

What does 4:10-11 say to holding grudges?

How do Christians show the unseen God to others? (4:12)

How do we know we are saved? (4:13)

What is the basis of our confidence on Judgment Day? (4:17)

Should we fear God? (4:18)

Is it possible to love a father without loving his son? (5:1)

How does 5:1 respond to, “All religions are pretty much the same. It doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you believe in God.”?

What does it mean to “keep God’s commandments and His commandments are not burdensome”? (5:3)

b. Consequences of Fellowship.....5:4-21
i. Victory over the world.....5:4-5

How are we born of God? (5:4)

How is the world overcome? (5:5)

ii. Assurance of Salvation5:6-13
 What water does 5:6 speak of? Note the reference to being “born of God” in 5:4 and the Spirit in 5:7.

How does the water & blood assure us of our salvation? (5:6)

What is the significance of having the witness in you? (5:10) What do you do with it?

For what reason does John write to them? (5:13)

iii. Guidance in Prayer.....5:14-17
 In light of 5:14-15, how would you answer someone who says, “I prayed for God to give me a new car, but He didn’t. He didn’t hear my prayer.”

What sins do or don’t lead to death? (5:16-17)

iv. Freedom from Habitual Sin.....5:18-21
 Are you born of God? Do you sin? (5:18)

Note the contrast between 5:19 & 5:20. Who controls this world? Who is *ultimately* in control?

How does 5:21 summarize the entire book?

B. 2 John

1. Abide in God’s Commandments.....1-6

a. Salutation.....1-3

Who is “the chosen lady”? (v. 1)

What is “the truth”? (v. 2-4)

b. Walk in Truth4

Who are they who don’t “walk in truth”?

c. Walk in Love5-6

Of what commandment is John speaking?

2. Abide not in False Teachers7-13

a. Doctrine of False Teachers7-9

What is “what we have accomplished”? (v. 8)

Is heaven a reward? Reward for what? (v. 8)

What is the danger of false teachings? (v. 10)

b. Avoid the False Teachers10-11

How do vv. 10-11 apply to cultists showing up at your door? Should we invite them in?

c. Benediction12-13

Who is the chosen sister? (v. 13)

C. 3 John

1. The Commendation of Gaius1-8

a. Salutation1

Is this letter only to Gaius?

b. Godliness of Gaius2-4

What is the most important concern of John for his “children”?

How does this apply to the “ecumenical” movement to minimize the importance of differences among Christian denominations and religions in general?

c. Generosity of Gaius5-8

How does helping others further the Gospel? (vv. 5-6)

From v. 7, what can we learn about the background those who received this letter?

How do vv. 7-8 apply to the modern church?

2. The Condemnation of Diotrephes.....9-14

a. Pride of Diotrephes.....9-11

What is Diotrephes’ [dee-ot-ref-ace'] main sin? What did it lead to?

What were Diotrephes’ “deeds”? (v. 10)

How are Diotrephes and Gaius contrasted?

In what ways might you be a “Gaius” instead of a “Diotrephes”?

b. Praise for Demetrius.....12

Who was Demetrius? Why does Paul mention him here?

How is Demetrius connected with the contrast between Gaius & Diotrephes?

c. Benediction.....13-14

What is the importance of greeting by name? (cf. John 10:3)

This is the only place where “friends” is used to mean “Fellow Christians”. How is this appropriate for 3 John?