

The Epistles Of

1 John

2 John

3 John



Walking in Light

Walking in Love

Walking in Truth

ESV Text & Study Guide

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Introduction to 1, 2 & 3 John: First Impressions

Welcome to the class! Our first study will be a simple one in which we focus on getting to know the letters by reading through them in one sitting, stopping briefly to discuss a few key things that stand out in each chapter. Let your eyes do all the work! We will spend time on in-depth study later on, but for now simply focus on becoming a good observer of the text. What do you see? Record your initial observations from each chapter in the space below, and write down any other information you can gather from a cursory reading of the letter.

Observations:

- 1 John 1

- 1 John 2

- 1 John 3

- 1 John 4

- 1 John 5

- 2 John

- 3 John

Write down any background information you can find about these letters. Author? Recipients? Date of authorship? Author's purpose for writing?

How would you describe the author's tone and/or writing style? Do you notice any changes in the tone or any other significant transitions in the text?

What main themes are present in each letter? Write down any key words, phrases, or verses you find as you read. Do you notice a progression of thought throughout any of the letters?

1 JOHN 1:1-2:2 In the margins below, record your observations from the text.

1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—

2 the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—

3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

4 And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

7 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 cleanses us from all sin.

8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

In your own words, state what you believe to be the main point of this text.

Questions for Discussion

1. Even though John's name is never mentioned in the letter (nor in 2 or 3 John), his authorship of all three letters is accepted almost universally. Do you see anything in the text that points to John's authorship?
2. Who are the "we" and "us" in these verses? What evidence do you find in the text to support your conclusions?
3. Why do you think John refers to Jesus as "the word of life" (v. 1)?
4. Explain v. 4. How would John's joy be completed through the writing of this letter?
5. What kinds of attitudes and/or behaviors characterize "walking in the light"?
6. If you have access to a Bible dictionary, Greek lexicon, or other study tool, research the meaning of the following words:
 - a. Fellowship
 - b. Advocate
 - c. Propitiation

1 JOHN 2:3-17 In the margins below, record your observations from the text.

2:3 And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. 4 Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, 5 but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: 6 whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

7 Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. 8 At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. 9 Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. 10 Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. 11 But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name’s sake. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. 14 I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. 17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

In your own words, state what you believe to be the main point of this text.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the commandment John gives his readers? Why do you think he calls it an “old commandment” in v. 7, but a “new commandment” in v. 8 (compare Jesus’ statements in John 13:34-35 & 15:12; see also 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:21; 2 John 5)?
2. To which group(s) of people does John write in this section? Who do you think these groups represent?
3. What is the difference between “the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions”?
4. According to the text, what are some of the problems that result from loving the world?

1 JOHN 2:18-29 In the margins below, record your observations from the text.

18 Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.

19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

20 But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.

21 I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth.

22 Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.

23 No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.

24 Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.

25 And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.

26 I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you.

27 But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything—and is true and is no lie, just as it has taught you—abide in him.

28 And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.

29 If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

In your own words, state what you believe to be the main point of this text.

Questions for Discussion

1. What do you learn from this text about the antichrist? In what way(s) does this differ from how people today commonly view the antichrist?
2. Explain the anointing John describes in this passage (vv. 20, 27). What is this anointing? How does it take place?
3. In v. 26, John gives one of his purposes for writing this letter. Based on what he has written so far, what conclusions can you draw about the things these deceivers may have been teaching?

1 JOHN 3:1-12 In the margins below, record your observations from the text.

3:1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

2 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

4 Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

5 You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.

6 No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.

7 Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.

8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

9 No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.

10 By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

11 For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

12 We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.

In your own words, state what you believe to be the main point of this text.

Questions for Discussion

1. The NKJV translates v. 9, “Whoever has been born of God does not sin for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.” The NASV reads, “No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” How do you reconcile this verse with John’s teaching in 1:8-10?
2. What does it mean for God’s seed to abide in us (v. 9)? How does this keep us from sinning?
3. What do you think it means to “practice” righteousness or lawlessness? How would you explain this concept?
4. Does v. 12 teach you anything new about the story of Cain & Abel in Genesis 4? In what way(s) were Cain’s deeds evil? What do you learn from Cain’s story about loving our brethren?

1 JOHN 3:13-24 In the margins below, record your observations from the text.

13 Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.

14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.

15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

17 But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

19 By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him;

20 for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.

21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God;

22 and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.

23 And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

24 Whoever keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

In your own words, state what you believe to be the main point of this text.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does v. 13 fit in with the surrounding context?
2. How do we learn what love looks like? Why is this significant?
3. What are some of the differences between loving “in word or talk” and loving “in deed and in truth” (v. 18)?
4. Explain vv. 19-22. How does loving our brethren relate to our confidence before God?
5. What conditions are placed on receiving from God what we ask of Him? How should this affect the way we pray?

1 JOHN 4:1-14 In the margins below, record your observations from the text.

4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

4 Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

5 They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them.

6 We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

9 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.

10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

In your own words, state what you believe to be the main point of this text.

Questions for Discussion

1. What does it mean to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (v. 1)? How do we do this?
2. Write down any additional details you find that characterize false prophets and/or antichrists.
3. What are some ways in which the “spirit of the antichrist” (v. 3) might be present today?
4. According to the text, what are some of the things God’s love does for us?
5. Write down as many reasons as you can find in the text for loving one another.
6. In what way is God’s love perfected in us if we love one another (v. 12)? Where else in the letter does John talk about God’s love being perfected in us?
7. In v. 14, John again claims to testify about things he has seen (see also 1 John 1:1-3). What is the significance of this claim?

1 JOHN 4:15-5:4 In the margins below, record your observations from the text.

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

16 So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

17 By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world.

18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

19 We love because he first loved us.

20 If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

21 And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

5:1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.

2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.

3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

4 For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

In your own words, state what you believe to be the main point of this text.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does perfect love cast out fear (v. 18)?
2. Why do you think our love for God and our love for brethren are so closely linked?
3. In your experience, what are some of the things that make it challenging to love your brethren? What are some of the things that make it challenging for your brethren to love you? How can God's love motivate you to overcome these challenges?
4. Explain the statement in v. 3: "his commands are not burdensome." Are there times when God's commands seem burdensome? If so, what solutions can you find in the text for how to change this?

1 JOHN 5:5-21 In the margins below, record your observations from the text.

5 Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 6 This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. 7 For there are three that testify: 8 the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. 9 If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. 10 Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. 11 And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. 13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. 14 And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. 16 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. 17 All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. 18 We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him. 19 We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. 20 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. 21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

In your own words, state what you believe to be the main point of this text.

Questions for Discussion

1. How do the Spirit, the water, and the blood testify of Jesus (vv. 6-8)?
2. In v. 13, John's stated purpose for writing this letter is so "that you may know that you have eternal life." Based on John's teaching in the letter, how can we know we have eternal life? How might John's answers have differed from those given by the false teachers during his day? How might they differ from some of the answers religious people today commonly give?
3. Explain the instructions in vv. 16-17. What is the difference between a sin leading to death and a sin not leading to death? Based on John's teaching in this letter, how should a child of God respond to sin in his/her life? In the lives of others?
4. How does John's warning in v. 21 serve as an appropriate ending to the letter?

2 JOHN 1:1-13 In the margins below, record your observations from the text.

1:1 The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth,

2 because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever:

3 Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love.

4 I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father.

5 And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another.

6 And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it.

7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.

8 Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.

9 Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting,

11 for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

12 Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete.

13 The children of your elect sister greet you.

In your own words, state what you believe to be the main point of this text.

Questions for Discussion

1. Who are “the elect lady and her children”? Do you think this “lady” is a literal person or a figurative representation of something else? What evidence do you find in the letter that leads to your conclusion?
2. Make a list of all the similarities you find between 1 John & 2 John.
3. In vv. 5-6, John emphasizes things that the recipient(s) knew “from the beginning.” This phrase was also used several times in 1 John. Why do you think this was such a point of emphasis in John’s letters? Does this provide any clues about the false teaching being brought in by the “deceivers” (v. 7)?
4. What do you think it means to “abide in the teaching of Christ” (v. 9)? The two most prominent views are: 1) the “teaching of Christ” is the teaching about Christ (that is, His deity and the fact that He came to the earth, lived in the flesh, died on the cross, and raised the third day) and (2) the “teaching of Christ” is the teaching of Christ (as presented in the gospels and by the apostles). What difference do the two views make in the interpretation of the text? Which view do you believe to be correct? Why?
5. Why do you think John is so strong in his opposition to greeting false teachers and showing them hospitality? In what way would such a greeting cause us to share in their “wicked works” (vv. 10-11)?

3 JOHN 1:1-15 In the margins below, record your observations from the text.

1:1 The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

2 Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. 3 For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

5 Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, 6 who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. 7 For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. 8 Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

9 I have written something to the church, but Diotrophes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. 10 So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

11 Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. 12 Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

13 I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. 14 I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. 15 Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, every one of them.

In your own words, state what you believe to be the main point of this text.

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you find any significance in John's identification of himself as "the elder" in 2 & 3 John?
2. What can you find out about Gaius, the recipient of this letter?
3. Explain John's prayer in v. 2. For what exactly is he praying?
4. What characteristics of Diotrephes does John identify in the text? How could his behavior be harmful to the work of God's people in a given location? How should God's people respond to someone like Diotrephes?