

THE EPISTLES OF JOHN

To Know Jesus is to Know the God of
Love

Introduction

- 1 John is an anonymous letter and 2 and 3 John are written by someone called the “elder”
- The style and language are identical to each other and to John’s gospel
- Scholars conclude that the letters are from the disciple that Jesus loved (Jn 21:20-24)
- Writing in his old age, John oversees a network of house churches comprised of mainly Jewish Christians in Ephesus
- The letters address a crisis, because a group of people broke off from these churches and no longer acknowledge Jesus as Messiah (1 Jn 2:18-23; 4:1-3)
- They also stirred hostility among those who remained (3:4-10)

Introduction

- 2 and 3 John clearly address this conflict
- 2 John is a warning to a specific house church that, when the deceivers come to ask for support and validation, the church does not offer help
- 3 John is written to a specific member of a house church name Gaius, offering instruction to welcome missionaries who will arrive soon, because the leader of the church Diotrephes is rejecting anyone associated with John the elder
- These letters offer a window into conflicts faced in these churches
- 1 John was written as a form of damage control to assure those still believing in Jesus that God is still with them

Structure of 1 John

- The main message is for believers to stay true to what they already believe about life, truth, and love. These ideas are derived from Jn 13-17
- Introduction: The apostles' message concerning the "Word of life" to the next generation of believers is that they share fellowship with them through their relationship with Jesus (1:1-4; cf. Jn 1:1-18; Provb 8)
- Two main sections are marked by the words: "This is the message"
 - God is light (1:5-3:10)
 - God is love (3:11-5:17)
- Conclusion (5:18-21)

God is Light

- The message of “God is light” means that he is victorious over darkness, and his followers walk in the light
- To walk in the light means to keep Jesus’ commands (1:5-7):
- ⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: **God is light**; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out 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, purifies us from all sin.
- Walking as children of light is hard. We must confess our sins and ask for forgiveness and Jesus’ atoning death will cover our sins (1:8-2:2)

God is Light

- What does it mean to “know Jesus” (2:3-6)?
- ³We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. ⁴Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. ⁵But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.
- What teachings of Jesus are we to obey? To love one another as he loved them (2:9-10; Jn 13:34):
- ⁹Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. ¹⁰Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble.

God is Light

- If God's light is shining it means the world's darkness is passing away
- It also means we have victory over the evil one (2:12-14)
- John challenges them to not love the world—"the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has" (2:15-17)
- John talks about those who have left the community (2:19):
- ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.
- They also denied Jesus (2:22):
- ²² Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son.

God is Light

- In contrast to the deceivers, true believers show their faith by doing righteousness and love one another (3:6, 9-10):
- ⁶ No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.
- ⁸ The one who does (**practices**) what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.
- ⁹ No one who is born of God will continue to (**practice**) sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.
- ¹⁰ This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do (**practice**) what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.

God is Love

- The message of the apostles is that: “We should love one another” (3:11)
- Believers are to love one another and avoid hatred like Cain, who murdered his brother Abel (3:12; Gen 4)
- Why should we love one another (4:7-8)?
- ⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. **Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.** ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.
- What is love? It is defined by giving up one’s life as a sacrifice for the well-being of others just like Jesus’ death on the cross (3:16-17):
- ¹⁶ **This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.** And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

God is Love

- When we trust in Jesus and love him, we are transformed (3:19-22):
- ¹⁹ This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence ²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹ Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have **confidence** before God ²² and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. ²³ And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ²⁴ The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: **We know it by the Spirit he gave us.**

God is Love

- John again warns of the deceivers as false prophets, who speak for God
- We have to test the Spirits, meaning people cannot speak for God, if they don't focus on Jesus as the crucified Son of God (4:1-6)
- True children of God will focus their lives on the crucified Jesus and the risen Lord
- The cross of Jesus is where we see God's true heart—his self-giving love is revealed
- This should compel believers to love others the same way (4:7-21)

God is Love

- When we find this love, it does away with fear and anger because believers have victory over the world (5:1-12)
- This love comes by trusting in the crucified Christ's and God's testimony
- When it gets a hold of us, it opens up eternal life, one that is permeated by God's presence, life, and love (5:13-17)

Conclusion

- We know the Son of God has come (5:18-21)
- “We know also 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—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.” (5:20)
- To know Jesus is to know the God of love

Discipleship Pointers

- These letters deal with the sobering reality of spiritual defection
- Purpose of writing: While the gospel of John (Jn 20:30-31) and the epistles of John both encourage people to believe, the latter was written specifically to grant assurance to those who believe (1 Jn 5:13)
- For this purpose, John focuses on:
 - holding to certain truths about Christ (Messiah and Son of God),
 - obedience to Christ's commands, and
 - transparent practical love for one another
- In other words, we are to apply the doctrinal test, moral test, and social test as the bases of our assurance of salvation
- Though not the ultimately ground of confidence, all three are in the domain of observable conduct