

THE EPISTLES OF

*First John*  
*Second John*  
*Third John*

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*Jude*

WITH INTRODUCTIONS  
AND  
CLASS QUESTIONS

By: Reg Ginn



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*Third John*

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# *The First Epistle of John*

## INTRODUCTION

**THE AUTHOR:** He is not named in the book, but from very early times the author was considered to be John the apostle. However, there is some dissent about this authorship among some modern scholars. The language and outlook of this book are very similar to that found in the gospel of John. Some think this book was written by John rather late in his life, probably about 90 A.D. Others place its writing prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

**THE BOOK:** First John was apparently written to combat the false teaching of *gnostics* who denied that Jesus was God in the flesh. This denial was based on a theory that all physical things, including fleshly bodies, are inherently evil and totally incompatible with anything good. Thus, many fundamental beliefs of Christians were rejected by gnostics, such as:

1. The creation of the physical world by God. They claimed that some inferior power must have been responsible for the physical creation.
2. The indwelling of Christ in a physical body. His flesh and blood were unreal, they said.
3. The atonement for man's sins by the sacrifice of a physical body on the cross. *Docetism* (a form of gnosticism) differentiated between Christ (as a spirit) and Jesus (as a fleshly man). It was claimed that Christ (spirit) descended upon Jesus as a dove at His baptism and left Him at the cross before His crucifixion.
4. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Gnostics thought that the ultimate goal of the spirit is to be freed from the physical body, not to be reunited with another (spiritual) body.

First John addresses some forms of this gnostic movement that was gaining popularity at the close of the first century. Some of the "intellectually elite" had been attracted by this error and had deserted the faith of the gospel (I John 2:18,19) for a doctrine that seemed to conform better to much of the "modern thinking" of the day. Additionally, the Jews continued to reject the true identity of Jesus because of their religious prejudices, and the Greeks rejected any possibility of His true identity because of their mindset of rationality over faith. (See 1Corinthians 1:23.) Christians of John's day were beset with assaults upon the deity of Jesus from all three groups. This epistle was evidently written to comfort faithful saints in their efforts to remain steadfast in the basic truths of the gospel that were denied by gnostics and other unbelievers.

**THE THEME:** The theme of First John could be considered as "Victory in Christ."

**THE OUTLINE OF THE BOOK:** A simple outline of First John might be:

<b>Section 1--</b>	<b>1:1-4</b>	<b>Christ's Way to Victory-- "From Heaven to Earth and Back Again"</b>
<b>Section 2--</b>	<b>1:5- 2:11</b>	<b>Victory Over the Practice of Sin</b>
<b>Section 3--</b>	<b>2:12- 27</b>	<b>Victory Over Satan and His Angels</b>
<b>Section 4--</b>	<b>2:28- 4:6</b>	<b>Victory Through Righteousness</b>
<b>Section 5--</b>	<b>4:7- 5:3</b>	<b>Victory Through Love</b>
<b>Section 6--</b>	<b>5:4-21</b>	<b>Victory Through Faith</b>

[These themes are interwoven throughout the book]

*Gnostics and Gnosticism*

**ORIGINS OF GNOSTICISM:**

1. The name “gnostic” is derived from “gnosis” (Greek: “gnosko”-- “to know”).
2. Some forms of the philosophy originated among the Jews and was later spread among the Gentiles.
3. Gnosticism emphasized salvation by knowledge, not by faith.
4. The doctrines centered around two main issues: (1) the origin of the universe and (2) the nature and function of God.

**TEACHINGS OF GNOSTICISM:**

1. The “Great God” is unknowable and unapproachable. James 4:8
2. Man gets closer to this God only by acquisition of special “knowledge” imparted through other men who possess a special “insight” into the real meaning of man’s existence. Jn. 8:32; 1:17
3. There are many intermediary beings between God and man. Each one has a particular role in the great scheme of things. John 14:6
4. A Great Mother, Sophia (Wisdom), later equated with the Holy Spirit, plays a dominant role in man’s progression toward the Great God. John 14:26
5. There are two primary powers in the universe: good and evil.
6. Jesus was a special divine agent created to become the redeemer of the world. John 1:3
7. Accounts of the world’s creation, other than in the Old Testament, were advocated.
8. The lowest “emanation” from the Great God was Jehovah, the Creator. He was much inferior to the Great God because he had a connection with material things. Col. 2:9
9. The apostles of Christ were inferior to the “apostles” of the Great God; both Old Testament and New Testament revelations were very inferior to the “true knowledge” of the Great God. 2Peter 1:3
10. Sin resides in the physical body (flesh) rather than in the heart (spirit) of man. Matt. 15:19,20
11. Man’s “fall” is individual, being identified with the incarnation of spirits in human bodies. Luke 18:16
12. “Redemption” is the liberation of spirits from human bodies at death. Col. 1:14; 2:13
13. There are three levels of men: (1) Some cannot be saved at all; (2) Some surely will be saved; (3) Some might be saved if properly taught the “special enlightenment.” Matt. 11:28,29
14. Bodily resurrection is impossible, since man’s goal is liberation from any form of (evil) bodily existence. 1Cor. 15:42
15. Christ had no real body. He had a “phantom” body into which His spirit came at His baptism and from which it left shortly before His “death” on the cross. John 1:14

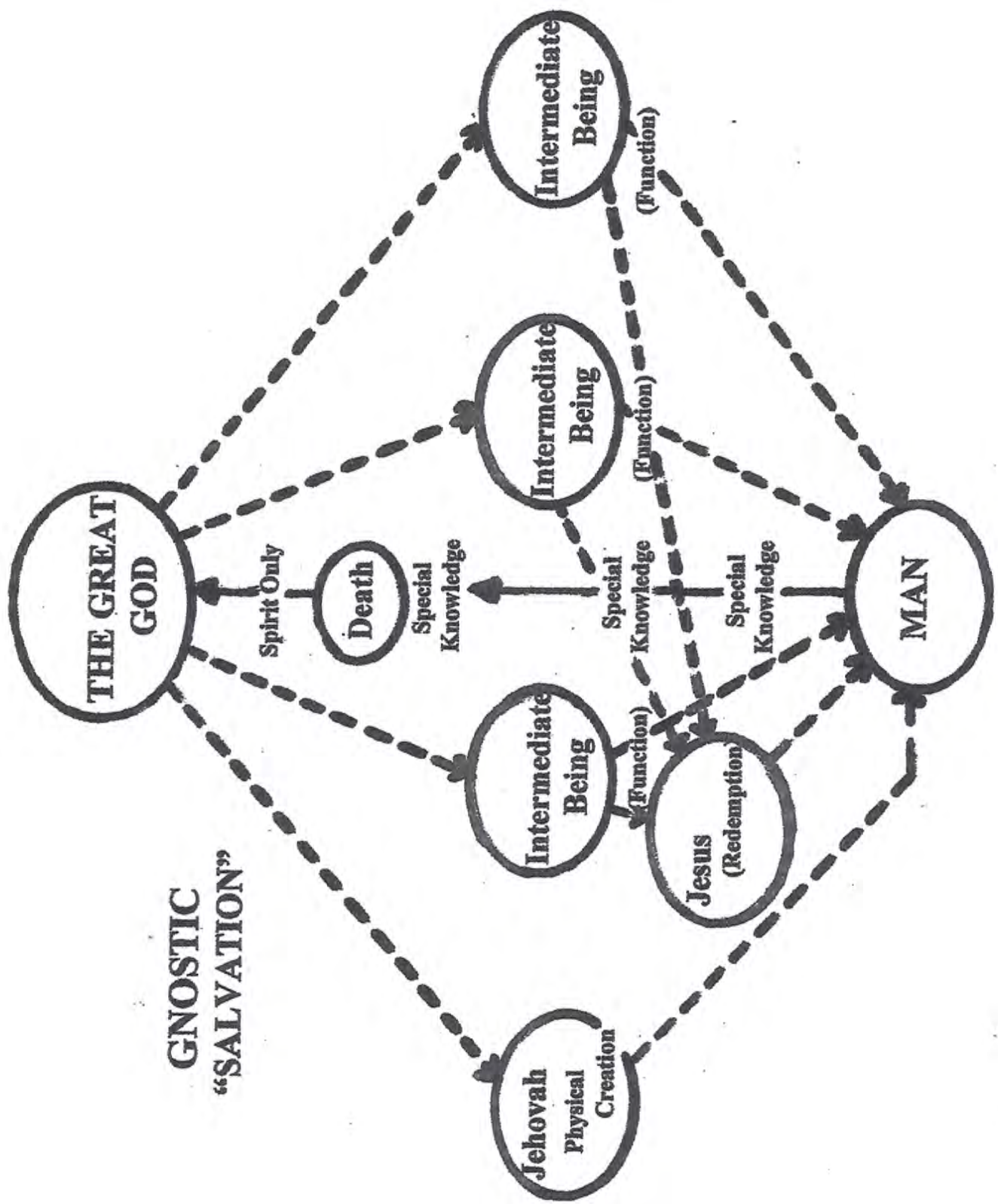
**TACTICS OF Gnostics in the First Century**

1. They used thoughts and terms of Christian teaching in similar but deceptive ways.
2. The “accepted” Christ in a dualistic way. They distinguished between his coming “in the flesh” and his coming “into the flesh.”
3. They simulated Christian practices, such as the Lord’s Supper, baptism, etc.
4. They pretended to possess private revelations from the great God which “explained” many of the teachings of Jesus and his apostles.
5. They espoused numerous gospels and epistles which were needed for men to achieve the “true knowledge” of the Great God.

**EFFECTS OF Gnosticism on the Early Church:**

1. It had a great impact because of the aggressive activity of gnostics.
2. It spread rapidly among churches and threatened to stifle true religion, especially in the second and third centuries.
3. Churches set standards for membership, such as the “Apostles’ Creed,” which affirmed twelve New Testament truths (one for each apostle) about Jesus as the Christ.
4. It led to the formulation of formal dogmas and creeds among the churches (culminating in the Nicene Creed of 325 A.D.).
5. Gnostic stress on mysteries, spiritualistic hymns, and impressive rituals led to more elaborate services in churches.
6. Contempt for material things led to monasticism (monasteries and nunneries).
7. Intermediary beings of gnosticism led to a reverence for saints in the Catholic Church.
8. Categories of mankind (who can be saved) led to the doctrine of predestination, total depravity.
9. A more direct influence of gnosticism on some religious movements can still be seen today.
  - a. The Christian Science Church [Church of Christ, Scientist] stresses "mind over matter."
  - b. Jehovah's Witnesses teach Jesus was a created being-- "a" god who was "with the True God"; He was only a "mighty one"-- Jehovah was the "great and eternal God."





**GNOSTIC  
"SALVATION"**

## GNOSTIC "SALVATION"

1. Gnostics acknowledged a "**Great God**" who ruled the entire universe. This god possessed a cold and passionless disposition and was completely insensitive to the desires and needs of human beings.
2. Gnostic "**salvation**" involved the efforts of humanity to achieve a spiritual connection with the "**Great God.**" For the ordinary individual, this lifelong process was very strenuous and vague in its regimens and requirements.
3. **Man** bore the sole and arduous responsibility of "**lifting himself by his own bootstraps**" from a state of condemnation to a spiritual unity with the *ultimate* spirit ("**Great God**").
4. A body of "**special**" **knowledge** by which man might eventually be connected to his god was available only to a select group of privileged humans (the "**elite**") who enjoyed innate capabilities of accumulating and applying this "**knowledge**" in their struggle to reach the gnostic "**heaven.**"
5. Some thirty **intermediate beings** ("**emanations**") had been created to perform various functions in the conduct of the physical universe and in man's quest for immortality. These beings (including Jehovah, who made the physical earth, and Jesus, who had been especially created to play a role in man's salvation) were vastly inferior to the nature of the "**Great God.**" Only because of their inferiority could they have any contact with or any interest in similarly inferior mankind.
6. **Man's inferiority** was profound. His fleshly body was totally corrupt, as were *all* physical things. His "**salvation**" could be accomplished only when his spirit successfully separated itself over time from its physical body and from *all* other physical impediments.
7. Only **man's spirit** was impacted by the "**saving truths**" of Gnosticism. Only his spirit was involved in his salvation. There could be no resurrection of the physical body from the grave to be reunited with a spirit finally made free from evil flesh. Nor was there any place prepared in the gnostic "**heaven**" for unwanted and castoff bodies to exist along with spirits liberated by the acquisition of Gnosticism's precious "**knowledge.**"

*Section One: The Way to Victory*

**Verses 1:1-4-- “That which was from the beginning...”** There is an obvious resemblance between the introductions, or preambles, to First John and the Gospel of John. This fact presents strong evidence of a single author:

First John Chapter One

Jesus is the “Word”-- verse 1  
Jesus was “from the beginning”-- verse 1  
Jesus was “with the Father”-- verse 2  
Jesus was “that eternal life”-- verse 2  
Jesus was “manifested”-- verse 2  
Jesus’ reality had witnesses-- verse 2

Gospel of John Chapter One

Jesus is the “Word”-- verse 1  
Jesus was “in the beginning”-- verse 1  
Jesus was “with God”-- verse 1  
Jesus had “the life” in Him-- verse 4  
Jesus “became flesh”-- verse 14  
Jesus’ reality had witnesses-- verse 7

John immediately attacks the gnostic doctrines about Jesus Christ that were contrary to the teaching about Him in the gospel.

Gnostic Doctrine

“Jesus” and “Christ” were *different* persons  
Jesus was just an “extraordinary human”  
Jesus’ body was not real- a "phantom"  
Incarnation impossible- Christ only a spirit  
Resurrection impossible- spirit’s goal is  
freedom from the fleshly body

Gospel Teaching

“Jesus” and “Christ” were named *together*-- vs.3  
Jesus was “in the beginning” before humans--vs.1  
Jesus’ body was subject to *three* senses--vs.1  
Christ (eternal) was “manifested” as “Jesus”--vs.2  
Resurrection a reality- the body was seen and  
handled by witnesses--vs.1 (See John 20:25,27;  
Luke 24:39,40.)

John’s position on the dual nature of Jesus Christ was that God came to earth from heaven, lived here in a human body as God/man, performed His work of redemption, and then went back to heaven again!

John and the other apostles had fellowship (“sharing; joint participation”) with the Father and the Son in the truth about the nature of Jesus the Christ. The Godhead planned and executed the dual existence of the Son on earth; they all testified to its reality. The apostles had personally witnessed the

activities of a *supernatural* Christ (evidenced by His miracles) in a natural body; they all testified of the reality of both natures in “Jesus Christ” (verse 3).

All Christians can also have fellowship (sharing) with the apostles in the glorious reality that God has made our salvation possible by means of a plan that only Divinity could have formulated-- *Spirits* can be forgiven and redeemed through the sacrifice of a *body*! We can share in the “eternal life” of the Christ by embracing the truth about His dual nature that was preached by the apostles (verse 3).

John’s purpose in writing this letter to these saints was that “your joy” (or “our joy”) might be *full*. The false teaching with which they had been confronted by the gnostic teachers had, no doubt, dampened the enthusiasm of some disciples. Perhaps doubts had been sown in their minds about the basis of their faith in Jesus. The Lord had promised the saints that where He was going, there they “would be also” (John 14: 1-3). But, where did He go? What really had happened to Him at the cross and thereafter? A strong restatement of the truth about things already believed would be encouraging to them. The joy of their confidence, now diminished somewhat by their doubts, would be restored to “fullness” again. Being firm and clear is what John was determined to do in this letter. And, as we shall see in the remainder of this epistle, that is exactly what he did (verse 4).

#### Lesson One: The Way to Victory [Salvation]--

1. The Word was in the beginning; the Word had eternal life in Himself;
2. The Word and His life were manifested to the world;
3. The Word was resurrected from the dead;
4. The apostles witnessed these facts and declared them to the world;
5. Acceptance of these truths is essential to humanity’s fellowship [salvation] with God;
6. Fellowship with God gives men full joy now and hereafter.

# The First Epistle of John

## QUESTIONS-- SECTION ONE

1. Study carefully the “preambles” John wrote to First John (1:1-4) and to the Gospel of John (1:1-5). What **similarities** do you observe?
  - (a) The time reference that proves Christ’s eternity: \_\_\_\_\_
  - (b) The name used to identify Christ: \_\_\_\_\_
  - (c) The Person associated with Christ in eternity: \_\_\_\_\_
  - (d) The *names* of the Person associated with Christ in eternity: (1) \_\_\_\_\_  
(2) \_\_\_\_\_
  - (e) The *thing* most closely linked to Christ: \_\_\_\_\_
  - (f) The *thing/Person* revealed to men: \_\_\_\_\_
2. What are some **differences** in these *two* passages? Which passage mentions:
  - (a) Christ as the Maker of all things? \_\_\_\_\_
  - (b) Fellowship with the Father and Son? \_\_\_\_\_
  - (c) The purpose for writing about Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_
  - (d) The failure of some to believe? \_\_\_\_\_
  - (e) Human contact with the Christ? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Do you think that both passages appear to have been written by the same author? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What *three* human senses could testify about the reality of Jesus in human flesh? What physical members are used to give that testimony? (vs. 1)

<u>Human Sense</u>	<u>Member Used</u>
(a) _____	(a) _____
(b) _____	(b) _____
(c) _____	(c) _____
5. What is the “chain” of fellowship that comes through accepting the apostles’ testimony about the nature of Jesus? (vs.3)
6. What are the *two* purposes John had in mind when he wrote about the real Jesus? (vs.3,4)
7. If “your” should be translated “our” in verse 4, in what way would the apostles’ joy be made “full” when saints accepted the teaching about the nature of Jesus Christ? (vs. 4) (See 2John 4.)

*Section Two: Victory Over the Practice of Sin*

One of the leading doctrines of gnostic teachers was that the spirits of “mature” disciples were not accountable for the “sins” of physical bodies. Their practice of things considered sinful in others was acceptable in their lives because of their special “knowledge” about sin. This teaching, of course, was very attractive to some who were not altogether committed to the idea of sacrificing their former way of life. It was unsettling to others who were willing to abandon sinful practices but were intimidated by the “respectability” given to gnostics whose lifestyles were so different from their own. It was John’s urgent task to discuss the inappropriateness of sin in the Christian’s walk with Jesus Christ and to display the dangers faced by the Christian when he chose to embrace gnostic teaching about sin.

**Verses 1:5-7-- “This is the message which we have heard from Him...”**

The inappropriateness of sin in the Christian’s life:

Christians must live apart from sin to the best of their ability, because their spiritual condition is determined by their relationship to sin. Fellowship with Christ and cleansing through His blood depend on our “walking in the light as He is in the light” (verse 7). “Light” is truth, purity, and spiritual goodness; “darkness” is error, defilement, and spiritual wickedness. To live as Jesus lived on earth, and as He taught His disciples to live on earth, is imperative. God (Divinity) is by nature altogether light and cannot be associated with darkness in any way or to any degree (verse 5). How can men do what God cannot do and have communion with Him? Those who make such arrogant claims (the gnostics) lie when they teach this absurd doctrine (verse 6). The practice of sin will prevent cleansing by Jesus’ blood.

Gnostics denied that anything physical could be related to anything good. However, John here declares that physical blood can cleanse from spiritual guilt (verse 7). Jesus’ nature was twofold- physical and spiritual- and His life and death were intended to touch the dual nature of all men. He legislates our physical behavior by word and example and then cleanses our spiritual nature when body and spirit violate His law.

**Verses 1:8-10-- “If we say that we have no sin...”**

The reality of sin in the Christian’s life:

Some were contending that there is no chargeable sin in the lives of the “enlightened.” John boldly refutes that claim and exposes the folly of the claimants. He who makes such a boast (1) deceives himself (whether or not he deceives anyone else), and (2) he denies the truth about sin: “*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” [Romans 3:23] (verse 8). Christians must not be intimidated by the gnostics’ claim that any commission of sin by the regenerate would prevent them from ever realizing spiritual freedom. Forgiveness to the confessing penitent is freely offered by God (verse 9)! But cleansing from sin is denied to anyone who says (to himself or to others) that he has not sinned (in committing/not committing specific acts for which he is responsible) and who refuses to confess any sin (verse 9). The seriousness of such behavior lies in the fact that claims of sinlessness run contrary to God’s plain teaching and essentially charge God with lying. The works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21) will keep people out of heaven-- they *can* affect the souls of the saved (verse 10).

**Verses 2:1-8-- “...these things I write unto you, that you may not sin.”**

This passage clearly stresses that sin defiles the spirits of all who practice it and that Christians must avoid sin to the greatest extent possible if they are to inherit eternal life.

The defenses against sin in the Christian’s life:

1. Giving heed to the written word of God (verse 1). This is the *first* line of defense. God’s word *guides* men away from sin, *convicts* them when they sin in spite of warnings, and then promises *freedom* to the guilty when they seek God’s forgiveness through the propitiation (“atoning sacrifice”) of Jesus [See John 8:32.] (verses 1,2). This grace of forgiveness is not restricted to an “elite” group but is freely available to the whole world (verse 2). Conversely, rejection of that grace confirms the justice of God in punishing all impenitent sinners, whether once-saved or never-saved.
2. Keeping God’s commandments (verses 3-5). We can “know” God only by (1) embracing His nature that expects strict obedience from His creation, and (2) cultivating an intimate relationship with Him by demonstrating obedience to His commands. The gnostic movement rejected all commandments because the morality of right and wrong was unimportant to those who “could not sin” in the spirit. John challenged their claim of possessing an enhanced knowledge of God while refuting

the principle of obedience to God. In *reality*, they lied, rejected the truth about sin, and did not love God (verses 4,5)!

3. Following the example of Jesus' life on earth (verse 6). Gnostics scoffed at any importance in Jesus' bodily deeds and declared that His activities could not serve as a moral pattern for men.
4. Developing a deep and abiding love for God (Divinity/Jesus) and for all things associated with Divinity. This enveloping "commandment (See number 2, above.) was not "new" as a requirement for a close relationship with God. Obedience had always been the avenue by which this intimacy is accomplished. It was as "old" as Eden and Sinai. Its roots were found in *every* previous relationship between God and man (verse 7). Why should anyone expect that this new relationship through Christ would be any different?
- (5) Cultivating a deep and abiding love for all God's children (verses 8,9). Jesus had shown the depth and extent of a love willing to sacrifice everything for the benefit of others. He encouraged that same kind of love in His disciples (John 13:34) because "in Him" and "in us" this sacrificial love is proof that man is capable of replacing his pervasive self-serving with a mindset of placing the welfare of others above his own (See Philippians 2:3-8.). "Darkness" (error) is thus supplanted by "light" (truth) as we learn to "walk in the light as He is the light" (chapter 1:7). Gnostics rejected any need to act kindly toward others because, they said, bodily deeds are totally insignificant to the "spiritually mature."

**Verses 2:9-11-- "He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother..."**

The consequences of sin in the Christian's life:

Gnostics denied *all* spiritual consequences of one's physical behavior. But it is plainly seen from the truth (the "message heard from Him" [chapter 1:5]) that sin surely results in spiritual harm to the sinner and will condemn anyone who persists in sin.

1. He is still ("until now") in darkness. He is no better off for all his "knowledge" that was so treasured by the gnostic movement (verse 9).
2. He is certain to "stumble" (verse 10), for Christ is always a "stone of stumbling" to dishonest hearts. (See 1Peter 2:8.)
3. He is ignorant of his eternal destination (verse 11). He thinks that his "knowledge" will take him to a great reward, but, instead, it will carry him to a great disappointment. Hell is his destination, but error's "darkness" has blinded his eyes to that awful fact.
4. He is unable to change his course as he rushes headlong toward destruction as long as his blindness rejects the apostles' truth about sin and salvation (verse 11). Some of the saints had once been cleansed from their old sins but had forgotten the sense of obligation they had once felt to serve the Lord who made their cleansing possible (2Peter 1:9). Love for God, demonstrated by obeying His commands, and love for



the brethren, shown by our sacrificial service to them, are both integral parts of the “new commandment” that will keep our faces pointed toward heaven.

Lesson Two: Victory Over the Practice of Sin is achieved only through obedience to all God’s commandments, not the least of which is that we must love one another deeply.

1. Refer to the gnostic teachings in the Introduction to First John. What might “light” and “darkness” imply as they are used in verse 1:5?
  - a. “Light”: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. “Darkness”: \_\_\_\_\_
2. What plain statement does John make to expose the error of gnostics who confess Jesus while denying His true nature? (vs. 6)
3. “Walking in the light” will bring us two important blessings. What are they? (vs. 7)
4. What does John declare about the reality of sin in all lives?
  - a. Present sin: \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 8)
  - b. Past sin: \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 10)
5. Men deny that they have sin because the \_\_\_\_\_ is not in them. (vs. 8)
6. Men deny that they have sinned in the past because \_\_\_\_\_ is not in them. (vs. 10)
7. What do we do to ourselves when we deny that we have sins in our lives? (vs. 8)
8. Confessing (admitting) our sins is the first step toward receiving what *two* blessings? (vs. 9)
9. Why do we make God a “liar” when we deny the sin in our lives? (vs. 10)
10. Why is it true that if we refuse to admit that we are sinners in need of forgiveness:
  - a. The word of God is not in us? (vs. 10)
  - b. The Word of God is not in us? (See John 14:23)
11. Does chapter 2:1 teach the impossibility of apostasy? Why or why not?

12. What is an “advocate”? Why do Christians need Jesus as our Advocate? (vs. 2:1)

13. What is a “propitiation”? How is Jesus our propitiation? How is that role connected to the last word in verse 1? (vs. 1,2)

14. Three things may be said of the disciple who obeys Jesus Christ:

a. (Verse 3)-- \_\_\_\_\_

b. (Verse 5)-- \_\_\_\_\_

c. (Verse 6)-- \_\_\_\_\_

15. John speaks of an “old commandment” and a “new commandment.” What do you think each one is?

a. “Old commandment”? (See verses 2:5-7 and Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37.)

b. “New commandment”? (See verses 2:8-11 and John 13:34,35; 15:12,13.)

*Section Three-- Victory Over Satan and His Angels*

Gnostics had no conviction of a personal Satan or a personal struggle against sin and against those who would lead them into sin. Religion to them was a process of overcoming *superstition* and *tradition* about the guilt of bodily sins. Man's most urgent spiritual need was to reach an "understanding" about sin and the soul that would free the "mature" disciple from all restraints and obligations arising from any perceived connection between sin and salvation.

**Verses 2:12-14-- "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you..."**

Victory over Satan requires a life-long struggle

John's message to the "little children," "fathers," and "young men" is the same lesson Paul taught the Corinthians about overcoming sin in this world. (See 2Corinthians 11:13-15.) Victory over Satan and his angels (agents) involves a prolonged struggle, not just a brief skirmish against the forces of evil. As we develop into spiritual adulthood, we strengthen simultaneously our defenses against the "spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). We never outgrow the need to remain watchful and resourceful against the wiles of the devil. Three groups (according to their maturity in the gospel rather than their chronological ages), demonstrate this truth. To these groups he "writes" presently the *same* message that he "has written" them previously about the importance of overcoming Satan's devices (verses 12-14). The need for vigilance never diminishes, no matter how far we have progressed in the Christian life. He singles out each group for special attention:

1. "Little children" were likely new converts who had recently obeyed God's commands because they "know" the Father as a God who demands obedience. They understood that obedience had brought them freedom from their past sins, and this understanding impelled them to *reject* the doctrines of the gnostics regarding sin (verses 12,13).
2. "Young men" (and young women) were blossoming Christians who had the spiritual strength to oppose Satan's fleshly temptations and to overcome "the wicked one." They had confidence in the word and its teaching about sin and salvation. Their struggle was not over but was very hopeful. They, too, rejected the doctrines of the gnostics that discounted the seriousness of threats to their salvation posed by Satan and his angels (verses 13,14).

3. “Fathers” (and mothers) comprised that segment of the Christian population that should have (according to gnostics) already outgrown false ideas about sin and salvation and about the humanity of Christ. However, these mature saints had over time deepened their understanding and faith about “Him who is from the beginning.” They had increased to full knowledge (relatively) of Jesus’ nature and role in their redemption (verses 13,14). This group, most of all, renounced the doctrines of the gnostic teachers.

“I write/have written to”:

“Little children”

“Little children”

“Young men”

“Young men”

“Fathers”

“Fathers”

“because”:

“your *sins* are forgiven you”

“you have *known* the Father”

“you have *overcome* the wicked one”

“you are *strong*; the word *abides* in you”

“you have *known* Him who is from the *beginning*”(Jesus)

“you have *known* Him who is from the *beginning*”

**Verses 2:15-17-- “Do not love the world or the things in the world.”**

Victory over Satan requires a separation from the world:

Gnostics made no distinction between godly things and worldly things. They freely indulged the body in the lusts of the flesh. John warns, however, that such an attitude is foreign to the lifestyle laid out by Jesus, who “committed *no* sin, nor was guile found in His mouth” (2Peter 2:21,22).

1. Christians must choose whom to serve. (See Matthew 6:24.) A life based on worldly principles or that engages in specific worldly practices that lead away from God’s service must be renounced. *What* we love is demonstrated by what we *do*, so we cannot act out love in contrary ways unless our love is divided. Our choice is to be *altogether*, not *partial*. If God tells us, “Don’t lie” (Colossians 3:9), and Satan says, “Lie” (John 8:44), we must make an absolute choice about lying that will reflect where our love resides (verse 2:15).
2. Satan appeals to us through the avenue of our fleshly lusts, which sometimes can be extremely powerful in us. But we cannot afford to be controlled in our behavior by the flesh, the eyes, or the pride of our egos. The God of heaven will not tolerate even partial loyalty to the god of this world (verse 16).
3. It was foolish to follow the gnostic deception about sin because the enjoyment of

earthly pleasures is *temporary*, whereas God is *eternal* and obedience to Him will result in everlasting pleasures (verse 17).

**Verses 2:18-27-- “Little children, it is the last hour...and the Antichrist is coming...”**

Victory over Satan requires strict adherence to God’s word:

Gnostics offered a “new” gospel that appealed to worldly-minded people. The original (apostles’) gospel had become “old fashioned” after only sixty years (or less).

1. Warnings about false teaching are common in New Testament revelation (e.g., 1Timothy 4:1; 2Thessalonians 2:3). The “last hour” is the last opportunity for man to please God. The benefits of the gospel spring from man’s acceptance of Jesus as the Christ. (See Acts 8:37.) During the gospel age (“last days”), Satan could be expected to make a concerted effort to use “antichrists” (agents who oppose the true Christ) who would foment a spirit of rejection against Jesus as Lord. These evil efforts of the antichrists might be perpetrated through various institutions, governments, and individuals. Some attempt to identify “the” (not in some manuscripts) Antichrist as: the Roman Empire/Roman emperors or the Roman church/the popes. Whoever or whatever the antichrist(s) might be, Christians must not reject the Sonship of Jesus or there would be no other opportunity to embrace Him (verse 2:18). (See Hebrews 10:26.)
2. John’s warnings and those of other gospel writers were already being fulfilled in “many antichrists” who denied the divinity of Jesus. There was a definite sense of urgency and finality among believers (verse 18).
3. Antichrists (gnostics) had already challenged the truth and broken off fellowship with “unenlightened” believers. This fact alone illustrated the magnitude of the differences between gnostics and loyal saints. They “went out” and proved that they were “not of (like) us” in the matters of dispute (verse 19).
4. The disciples had an “anointing” (privilege) to understand the truth regarding Jesus’ divinity. This came not by preferential treatment but by acceptance of the message that had gone everywhere (Mark 16:20) about the Savior. Many had been denied the “anointing” because they had rejected the message (verse 20).
5. John had nothing new to add to the established truth of Jesus’ Sonship. He was affirming the same thing that others had proclaimed since Pentecost. Any deviation from what he was preaching could not have originated from any earlier teaching by inspired men. All spoke the *same truth!* (verse 21).
6. Gnostics disallowed the incarnation of Jesus because they denied that a spiritual Father could have had anything to do with a spiritual Son taking on a body of flesh. However, anyone who denies the *true* relationship between the Father and the Son in

the incarnation cuts himself away from *any* relationship with the True God [the one gnostics claimed as the Supreme God] (verses 22,23). Gnostics were totally outside any religion that could lead to eternal rewards!

7. Eternal life was contingent upon loyalty to the original truth about these controversial questions. Abandonment or compromise of the gospel message would not be tolerated (verses 24-27).
8. Be not deceived!! (verse 26)

Lesson Three: Victory over Satan and His Angels can come only through holding fast to the “one God, one Lord,” and the “one faith” that had been taught to them from the beginning of their contact with the gospel.

## *The First Epistle of John*

## QUESTIONS--SECTION THREE

1. John writes to different groups of saints for different reasons. What are they? (vs. 2:12-14)
  - a. "Little children"-- \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. "Young men"-- \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. "Fathers"-- \_\_\_\_\_
2. Give examples of the "things of the world:" (vs. 15-17)
  - a. "Lust of the flesh"-- \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. "Lust of the eyes"-- \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. "The pride of life"-- \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the difference between "the Antichrist" and "many antichrists"? (verse 18)
4. What can we understand about people who defect from the truth? What is our defense from defecting as they do? (vs. 19,21)
5. How subject to change was the original truth about Jesus' nature? (vs. 21)
6. For how long had the truth about Jesus' nature been taught? (vs. 24) [See also Acts 11:15; Acts 2:22-36]
7. How is the *promise* described in verse 25 dependent upon the *duty* described in verse 27?
8. What is the Christian's best defense from being deceived by false teachers? (vs. 26)



***Section Four-- Victory Through the Practice of Righteousness***

Righteous living played no part in the gnostics' search for salvation. They were "above sin." Purity of life was unimportant to those who were properly "informed." John's position, however, was that *nothing is more important* to the Christian. Gnostics considered themselves to be right because of their "knowledge" of God. But John declares that a person is right because of his knowledge in action! "Righteousness" ("quality of being right"--Vine) is possible only as the result of right living. Those who refuse to govern their personal lives within the guidelines presented in the gospel can never be "righteous" in the eyes of God. The apostle here seeks to emphasize three themes throughout this letter.

**Verses 2:28-3:22 (selected verses)-- "And now, little children, abide in Him..."**

God's approval is given to those who practice righteousness

1. God accepts practitioners of righteousness as His children (verses 2:29; 3:1). Those who "abide" in Him (by righteous conduct) maintain their status in the Father/child relationship with God. The child must endeavor to be like the Father (See Matthew 5:48), and He is altogether righteous. Christians are "identified" as having been born into God's family (the church- 1 Timothy 3:15) by righteous living. It is a family "mark" that cannot be ignored by members of the family. The gnostics called themselves the children of God. But that was an empty claim. On the other hand, God Himself "calls us" His children if we are righteous, and that lays claim to wonderful prospects for those who qualify as children.

Gnostics apparently saw no need to emulate their "Supreme God." It was by means of special "knowledge" and not by moral living that they could become more like him. Popularity was important to them, and the teaching of morals is not usually the way to popularity. Christians understood that they would not be popular if they sought to "bear the marks" of Jesus in their bodies. He had been rejected by the world, and they could expect the same treatment if they became "like" Him (verses 3:1,2).

2. Christians who live righteously can anticipate a great reward at the final judgment. Saints who "abide" in Him know that they will not "be ashamed at His coming" (verse

2:28). Their state will be like His. They cannot now understand just how awesome their reward will be any more than they can fathom the actualities of Jesus' own "reward" for faithfulness (See Hebrews 12:2.). They can, however, take heart in the fact that their situation will be similarly wonderful to His if they, too, are willing to make the sacrifices necessary for righteousness (verse 3:2). This hope is motivation enough for them to do whatever they must to be pure before God (verse 3:3).

3. Righteous disciples will escape the awful penalties of sin (verses 3:5,6). God's *justice* requires that "the way of the transgressor is hard" (Proverbs 13:15). Impenitent sinners deserve no mercy for their impenitence. The practice of sin is the practice of *lawlessness* (verse 3:4), and God's law was intended to help us to become "holy as He is Holy." (See 1 Peter 1:15,16.) Sin is an activity *outside* of God's law (See Matthew 7:21; 2John 9.) and God's commandments (law) are "righteousness" (Psalm 119;172). Hence, there can be no righteousness when men elect to sin and act outside the law of the Lord. Judgment offers no promise of escape for unrighteous individuals.
4. The prayers of the righteous will be heard and answered by their God (verse 3:22). Religion is valueless to man unless it offers the positive intervention of a higher power when man's circumstances are discouraging. Gnostics had no such god as would care to hear and respond to his adherents when they fell into various problems. Christians, on the other hand, have a God who *can* and *will* act to relieve our distresses if we are righteous. (See 1Peter 5:7; James 5:16.)
5. A righteous life promotes a clear conscience (verses 3:19-21). The conscience is directly responsive to training. We can live in *good* conscience when our practice corresponds to the teaching about righteous living that is so prevalent throughout the Bible, and especially in the New Testament. If our hearts (properly taught consciences) do not condemn us when we examine our practices, we can be "assured" that we are living the way God's children should (verse 3:21). Only a righteous life can impart the comfort of a good conscience.

**Verses 2:29- 4:6 (selected verses)-- "...everyone who practices righteousness..."**

Righteousness is attainable by all who would be righteous

Gnostics did not believe that everyone can be saved. Some could in no way reach the status of "eliteness" associated with an ultimate release from the worldly realm and an eventual entrance into the ecstasy of a spiritual awakening. Others might if they could be initiated into the mindset of gnosticism by intensive instruction. There was no place for

such invitations as, “Come unto me, *all* ye that labor...” (Matthew 11:28). The righteousness by which God’s children are identified is not restricted. It is *available* to all and *attainable* by any who choose to pursue righteousness in this unrighteous world. It is achieved by positive activity, not by the possession of “special knowledge.”

1. We are righteous when we have been born again into God’s family (verse 2:29). The “new birth” of water and Spirit (John 3:3-5) gives us access into the Lord’s *kingdom*, which is His *church* (Matthew 16:18,19), which is His *family* (“household”-- 1 Timothy 3:15). “Doing right” makes us “righteous,” and a sinner does right when he is “led by the Spirit” (through the word of God) to “repent and be baptized” (in water) for remission of his sins (See Acts 2:38). The born-again individual is a righteous individual for having “done right.” This access to righteousness is not difficult, but it is not particularly appealing to many people.
2. Those who “keep His commandments” attain righteousness through their obedience to those commands (verse 3:24). When we keep the commandments we please God (verse 3:22) because all His commandments are “righteousness,” i.e., they enable us to be righteous. (See Psalm 119:172.) The scriptures are intended to “make the man of God “*complete*” (2Timothy 3:16,17).
3. “Practicing righteousness” will make us righteous (verses 2:29; 3:7,10). “Practice” involves *continual*, not *sporadic*, activity. A lawyer “practices” law; a doctor “practices” medicine. Christians “practice” righteousness constantly and continually as a way of life. Righteousness attained by keeping God’s commands must be maintained by ongoing obedience to the “whole counsel of God.” (See Acts 20:27.)
4. Avoiding sinful conduct of every kind is also important to our being righteous before God (verses 3:6,8). Sin cannot be a Christian’s bosom friend. (See James 4:4.) While John has clearly declared that none are completely free of sin in their lives (1 John 1:8), he also insists that the disciple who allows sin to rule his soul is no disciple at all (verse 3:6). Jesus died to “destroy” the works (sins) of the devil. This purpose is accomplished when Christians destroy the sins that beset them and strive to be as sin-free as they can. This is what “righteousness” is all about.
5. Love for the brethren must not be forgotten when one sets out to display righteousness in his life as a Christian (verse 3:10). One cannot expect to “do right” without having a deep and sacrificial love for other Christians any more than he can expect to be righteous and not be concerned about keeping his Father’s commandments. Christians must utilize ways of expressing love for God: (1) By obeying His word (See John 14:15) and (2) by

showing love for our brethren by doing good to them (Matthew 25:34). Gnostics who gave lip-service to the love of God while displaying no interest at all in the love of others perhaps offered an object-lesson about how empty of real value their religion really was.

Righteousness and unrighteousness cannot dwell together

Gnostics would have been glad if John had chosen to ignore their pernicious activities in the hope that their influence would wane and the adverse effects of their work would just “go away.” But both John and the gnostics well understood that this could never be. John, like Paul, was “set for the defense of the gospel” (Philippians 1:17). Perhaps no one was surprised that the “apostle of “love” was not so tolerant of others because of his “real love” that he could *ignore* the serious threats of false teachers to the doctrinal and moral purity of the church. 1John literally overflows with statements from the apostle that directly challenge and condemn the falsehoods of the gnostic movement. This particular section of scripture (2:28-4:6) is ripe with his rebukes of their false teachings that could lead the faithful astray.

1. “Abiding” in Christ is a definite condition of being children of God (verse 2:28,29).
2. “Practicing righteousness” is essential to *being* righteous (verse 2:29).
3. Popularity is not the measure of religious correctness (verse 3:1).
4. Purity of life is essential to our having communion with the true God (verse 3:3).
5. Lawlessness, acting outside God’s law, is sin; gnostics were thereby sinners (verse 3:4).
6. Sin will prevent or destroy one’s real “knowledge” of the nature of God (verse 3:6).
7. The disobedient are Satan’s children, not God’s (verse 3:8,9).
8. Concern for others is a necessary facet of the life that pleases God (verse 3:10-18).
9. A bad conscience shows that one knows better than he does, and a bad conscience condemns such a person (verse 3:19-21).
10. The real God *can* and *does* intervene to relieve the distress of His people (verse 3:21,22).
11. Accepting the “name of” [nature] of Jesus is essential to salvation (verse 3:23).
12. “False” teachers exist and their errors must be resisted (verse 4:1).

13. God requires that people believe that His Son assumed a human body (verse 4:2).
14. Any effort to discount Jesus' dual nature is the work of "the Antichrist" (verse 4:3).
15. The power of the True God is greater than that of the gnostic "Supreme God" (verse 4:4).
16. Gnostic doctrines appeal to worldly people, not to the truly spiritual (verses 4:5,6).

See the chart, "Gnostic Error in the Modern World," page 24, for additional information about John's confrontation with the erroneous teachings of the gnostic movement.

Lesson Four: To be right with God, one must not only keep those commandments that will make him God's child but also those that will keep him a child of God. The *practice* of "righteousness" is the lifelong obligation of righteous people.

## *The First Epistle of John*

## QUESTIONS--SECTION FOUR

1. We know that Jesus was “righteous” because He *always* did the Father’s will, (See John 5:30; Psalm 119:172; Matthew 3:15.) How can we as Christians strive to be “righteous” in our daily lives? (vs. 2:29)
2. There are *two* reasons why Christians can actually be called “children of God.” What are they? (See John 3:3,5; Galatians 4:5.) What makes both reasons possible? (vs. 3:1,2)
3. When will we be able to comprehend fully the blessings attached to faithfulness to God? (vs. 3:2)
4. What action will a person take if he truly desires to receive God’s eternal blessings? (vs. 3:3)
5. Gnostics denied: (1) the existence of any *system* of law regulating our relationship with God and (2) the need for man to practice a lifestyle acceptable to God because it was based on such a definite *system* of spiritual law. How does John connect those *two* things into an **essential truth** that governs all who will be saved? (vs. 3:4)
6. “Righteousness” is not achieved by special knowledge, as gnostics believed, but how? (vs. 3:7)
7. Sin is fellowship with whom? For what purpose did Jesus come to earth? (vs. 3:8)
8. What prevents Christians from sinning? What does this mean? (vs. 3:9)
9. John specifies *two* requirements for validation of a man’s sonship. What are they? (vs. 3:10)
10. The world hates God’s children when they practice \_\_\_\_\_. For this same reason, \_\_\_\_\_ hated his \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. (vs. 3:12)
11. Contrary to gnostic belief, those who are practicing *spiritual* \_\_\_\_\_ are as sure to be lost as \_\_\_\_\_ for practicing *physical* \_\_\_\_\_. (vs. 3:12-15)

12. \_\_\_\_\_ gave the ultimate example of really loving one another by \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ for us. What should we do in return? (vs. 3:16)
13. How is love for the brethren to be shown? (vs. 3:17-19)
14. In response to gospel teaching, how should a Christian's heart (conscience) react when he *does* and *does not* respond to his opportunities to help the brethren? (vs. 3:19-21)
15. Gnostics taught that only the spirit is capable of anything good (including truth). Why was it appropriate for John to speak of false teachers as "spirits"? (vs. 4:1,3)
16. All "spirits," including God's Spirit, should be judged by what they teach about the nature of Jesus. What was the ultimate test, in John's time, of all "spirits" as to whether they were or were not "of God"? (vs. 4:2,3)
17. Why had some fallen victim to false teachers and others had not? (vs. 4:4-6)

## GNOSTIC ERROR IN THE MODERN WORLD

### Gnostic Error

### Modern Error

1. Men may choose from among many “gospels” whatever “truths” best suit.
2. The spiritual man is above rules of any one gospel. Each seeker is a law unto himself to find truths to promote his growth.
3. The Great God has no interest in man’s physical behavior (which is all evil).
4. Seekers after God have no spiritual responsibility for sin in the body.
5. There is no relationship between one’s lifestyle (good or bad) and his spiritual condition before God.
6. Moral strictness is unimportant to regenerated people.
7. The very act of regeneration assures eternal redemption from all sins.

Note: 1Jn.3:6,8a,9, etc. use the Greek aorist (present) tense for “sin” and “sinning.” This tense denotes continuous action: “Keeps on sinning” (a lifestyle of sin).

8. The spiritually “elite” need to show no concern for the “unenlightened.”

1. There is no absolute truth; everything is “relative.”
2. “To thine own self be true.”  
“Do your own thing.”
3. God is bigger than “petty” issues of men; His love overlooks sin.
4. The Christian Science religion espouses this theory.
5. Baptists and others don’t always tie acts of the body to the security of the soul. (See quote: Sam Morris--p.25)
6. “Situation ethics”: Circumstances determine the morality of any act.
7. “Once saved, always saved.”
8. “To each his own.” “Live and let live.”  
“Give me my space!”

**Catholic errors:** (1) Creeds-- stress on basic truths [e.g., "Apostles' Creed"]; (2) monastic life-- separate from world for purity; (3) Images-- reaction against evil nature of human body; (4) preservation of knowledge-- truth entrusted to clergy alone.



The far-reaching effects of gnosticism, so destructive to the faith of many in the early centuries of the Lord's church, still have a significant impact on the convictions of millions. One of the prominent doctrines of the gnostics was that the regenerate were regenerate forever. John Calvin "revived" that idea in his "TULIP" doctrines\* that became so pervasive within Protestant organizations. Today, multitudes are convinced that "a child of God cannot so sin as to be lost," or "once saved, always saved." Below is a quotation that illustrates the extremity to which this gnostic idea has come in our time. As I remember, Sam Morris, the originator of the statement, was a prominent Baptist preacher in Texas and was at one time president of the Southern Baptist Convention. His pronouncement was intended to represent the position of all who espouse the "once saved, always saved" doctrine. I have never see any repudiation of his statement by any of his fellow church members--[RG].

"A prominent denominational preacher, in a tract entitled, 'Do A Christian's Sins Damn His Soul?' wrote, 'We take the position that a Christian's sins do not damn his soul. The way a Christian lives, his character, his conduct, his attitude toward other people have nothing to do whatever with the salvation of his soul... All the prayers a man may pray, all the Bibles he may read, all the churches he may attend, all the sermons he may practice, all the debts he may pay, all the ordinances he may observe, all the laws he may keep, all the benevolent acts he may perform will not make his soul one whit safer; and all the sins he may commit from idolatry to murder will not make his soul in any more danger...the way a man lives has nothing whatsoever to do with the salvation of his soul.'"

(Quoted in, Commentary on First John, Guy N. Woods, p.225)

### **GNOSTICISM MARCHES ON!!**

\* "TULIP" is an acronym for John Calvin's five fundamental tenets:

1. Total depravity of all mankind resulting from original sin of Adam;
2. Unconditional election of saved individuals [only];
3. Limited atonement for the elect through the blood of Christ;
4. Irresistible grace of the Spirit's [direct] operation on the [elect] sinner's heart;
5. Perseverance of the saints [impossibility of apostasy].

*Section Five-- Victory Through Love*

Gnostic doctrine made no demands on its followers to feel any dependency upon or responsibility for their fellowmen. Each “did his own thing” in his individual progress toward spiritual perfection [a union with the Supreme God], through a unique “knowledge” enjoyed only by the spiritually “elite.” John’s contention is that one cannot understand the nature of God without understanding the importance of love among men on earth.

**Verses 4:7-11-- “...let us love one another, for love is of God...”**

God’s love best expresses His Nature

Love is fundamental to every relationship that God has with man. He is: (1) man’s Creator; (2) man’s Provider; (3) man’s Teacher; (4) man’s Savior; (5) man’s Comforter, etc. How far-reaching and how true: “God is love” (verse 8b).

1. To comprehend God’s love is to comprehend God (verse 7)!
2. Man’s own love is his way of responding to the love of God.
3. Man’s capacity to love is a precious gift from God, and man’s expression of love toward others is his expression of the divine nature (verses 7,8a). (See 2Peter 1:4.)
4. The *totality* of God’s love reflects the *totality* of the beauty of His Nature (verses 9,10).
5. God’s beauty was best shown in giving His *obedient* Son to die for *disobedient* men! (See Romans 5:9,10.)
6. God’s love makes a demand on man’s reason: “...we also ought to love...” (verse 11).
7. Gnostics’ most basic goal was to become “one” with God through knowledge, but they ignored the most fundamental characteristic of God and failed to imitate that trait!

**Verses 12-16-- “No one has seen God at any time...His love has been perfected in us...”**

God’s Nature is best understood through love among men

God is Spirit (John 4:24). A spirit does not have flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). God cannot be seen with the human eye. All we can know about Him is what He has told us about Himself, which we accept by faith, and by what we can *rationally conclude* about Him by our own observations about those things that represent His Nature to us. The *demonstration*

of love among His children tells us a great deal about the love that first existed in their Father.

1. Many deny that God is responsible for the phenomena attributed to Him, contending that things "just happen." This may be because many of His blessings are so universally distributed among men. (See Matthew 5:45). Nevertheless, John affirms that His love *is* represented accurately ("perfected") by mutual love among Christians (verse 12a).
2. Man's love to man is contrary to the self-interest of human nature and is explained only by the influence of God's love on the human family and on our individual lives (verses 12b; 13a). Through His Spirit in the scriptures we have been taught to love as He loves us (verse 13b).
3. Jesus is the most profound and direct *confirmation* of God's Nature. He loved; He gave; He saved! (See John 3:16.) Those who accept the Person of Jesus as the ultimate sacrifice of *love* (Christians) have *endorsed* the Nature of God; those who reject Jesus as the slain *Christ* (gnostics) have denied the expression of that Nature (verses 14,15).
4. John's *challenge* to gnostic teachers: "Who really understands God--he who embraces Jesus' example of love for others in life and in death, or he who doesn't? (verse 16).

**Verses 17-19-- "Love has been perfected among us in this..."**

God's love in man is the basis for man's acceptable service

1. Love will be the basis for God's judgment of man (verse 17) because our love "in this world" is our way, through imitation, of paying the Godhead the greatest compliment possible for us to give. We strive to be like God because God is our very best *role model* (verse 17).
2. Lovers of God will serve Him out of *love*, not *fear*. "Perfect" love serves God primarily to please Him and not just to avoid His punishment (verse 18). Love does not ask: "How much *must* I do?" but "How much *can* I do?"
3. We love and serve God as a rational response to His love for us (verse 19). Gnostics likely took pleasure in charging Christians with serving God from a fear of punishment, associating Christian conduct with the pagans who had long served their gods for the same reason. But our God is different from all others--He is a God of love!

Verses 4:20- 5:3-- "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother..."

Man proves his love for God by his service to other men

1. A "hater" of men *cannot* be a "lover" of God (verses 20,21) because love always responds to need. God's only need is for man to be Godlike. (See Matthew 5:48.) Since responding to others' needs is fundamental to *God's* Nature, man cannot really have any love for God if he refuses to behave like God when confronted with the needs of his brethren and fellowmen.
2. This truth was counter to the gnostic's thinking that man may live in isolation from others as long as he seeks personal development by acquiring their prized "special knowledge." They had the same outlook manifested by some today who suppose that they can worship alone and grow spiritually without help from their brethren. Not so!!
3. Only he who appreciates the *degree* of love expressed in the gift by divinity to die for humanity can share in the family trait ("be born of God") (verse 5:1). Members of the family love not only their Father but also all other family members (verse 1).
4. Our love for the Father and our desire to do what pleases Him will prompt us to show love for His other children in ways dictated by His commandments (verse 2). Following the word of God assures us that we are loving the children of God as we should.
5. Love for God is shown when we keep His commandments about our relationships with our brethren. These commandments benefit the entire family (verse 3). Telling the truth (Ephesians 4:25); forgiving one another (Colossians 3:13); and relieving one another's physical distresses and being hospitable (Romans 12:13) are behaviors that are helpful to everyone involved. These actions are not burdensome. They not only lighten the load carried by others but also help to satisfy our own need to be like God in our nature. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35) proclaims a wonderful principle of self-help!

Lesson Five: No man can truly be in an intimate relationship with God unless he is also in an intimate relationship with God's children. It's a "family matter." We "marry into" God's family when we choose to have a close relationship with God, and we must behave in ways that are becoming to Christ's bride.

## *The First Epistle of John*

## QUESTIONS--SECTION FIVE

1. Christians driven by love for one another are \_\_\_\_\_ of God and \_\_\_\_\_ God. (vs.4:7)
2. God's love was demonstrated fully by what action on His part? (vs. 9) Where is an earlier Bible verse that expresses the same truth in the same way?
3. What was *unique* about the love that God demonstrated to man? (vs. 10)
4. On the basis of bad relationships with others, what is John's rationale in verse 11?
5. While it is true that the physical senses cannot measure the nature of God and His love, what has the Spirit taught us about the *proof* that God loves man? (vs. 12-14)
6. Man can accept God's love for him only when he accepts what *physical* fact? (vs. 15) What impact would accepting that fact have on one's conception of "good" and "evil"?
7. What is the "day of judgment" in verse 17? How are "boldness," "fear," and "love" related to this "day"? (vs. 17,18)
8. The gnostic doctrine of unconcern about the treatment of others is refuted in John's contrast between haters and lovers of brethren. What is the contrast? (vs. 20)
9. How did John stress the *essentiality* of the loving treatment of brethren? (vs. 21)
10. Why does the fact that Christians are "born of God" make it essential (and natural) that they love one another? (vs. 5:1) (See I Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 3:6.)
11. *Two* things will motivate God's children to love one another. What are they? (vs. 2)
12. God's people demonstrate their love for Him when they do what? (vs. 3)

**PERFECTING THE LOVE OF GOD IN FIRST JOHN, CHAPTER FOUR--1John 4:17  
God IS Love (4:8)**

THE LOVE OF GOD (4:9) anticipated man's need of perfection at the judgment (4:17); so,  
the Father gave

THE SON OF GOD (4:10) for man's redemption from his sins (4:9); then,  
the Father/Son gave

THE APOSTLES OF GOD (4:6) for man's knowledge of His plan; then,  
the Father/Son gave

THE SPIRIT OF GOD (4:2,13) for man's assurance of faith (4:13); then,  
the Father/Son gave

THE WORD OF GOD (4:6,14) for man's obedience to the truth (4:6).

These proofs of God's LOVE gave men the right to become

THE CHILDREN OF GOD (4:4) for their salvation (4:4,15)! His children  
will partake of

**THE NATURE OF GOD** (4:4) to fulfill their purpose on earth (2Pe.1:4).

**THEN,**

**PARTAKERS OF GOD'S NATURE** will love:

THE OTHER CHILDREN OF GOD (4,7,11);

THE WORD OF GOD (4:6);

THE TEACHERS OF GOD'S WORD (4:4,6);

THE SON OF GOD (4:15);

**GOD!!** Thus, the all-inclusive *love of God* is "perfected" in this completed cycle from God  
to man and back again!

*Section Six-- Victory Through Faith*

The battle of the saints against the onslaughts of gnosticism was to be fought on many fronts. There were many weapons that must be used against Satan's agents in this world. But when all was said and done, disciples could successfully resist the vile influences of the gnostics only by standing "*fast in the faith*" (1 Corinthians 16:13). Without faith in both the Father *and* the Son, victory over sin and the devil is impossible (Hebrews 11:6).

**Verse 5:4a-- "For whatsoever is born of God overcomes the world."**

The Origin of Faith

Christians needed reassurance that their resistance to the popular but false doctrines of gnosticism was not in vain. John's task in these final lines of First John is to give that encouragement. Their *faith* was at issue in this struggle, so he sets out to assure them that their faith in the Father and the Son was on firm footing. It was gnostic "faith" that could not bear the light of truth and reason.

1. Whatever (not whoever) originated from God was intended to help them in their war against sin and Satan ("the world") (vs. 4a). God has provided whatever is necessary for us to win the conflict. (See 2Timothy 1:12.)
2. Our primary weapon to use in "overcoming" is our faith (vs. 4b). There is no substitute!
3. Nevertheless, our "total package" of weaponry includes many other things. *Hope* and *love*, which spring from our faith, also contribute to make us strong against the forces of evil. (See 1Corinthians 13:13.)
4. Of course, the *word of God* is the defense against sinful things upon which all other defenses are based. It, too, comes to us from God. (See 1 Thessalonians 2:13.)
5. Everything "born of [originating with] God" should be employed in our efforts to "overcome" and not to "be overcome." We cannot have too much help! (See 1Peter 5:8.)

**Verses 5:4b, 5-- "...the victory that has overcome the world---our faith."**

The Power of Faith

1. Paul illuminated the power of faith when he declared that the gospel, "mixed with faith" (Hebrews 4:2), becomes "dynamite" (Greek--*dunamis*) that can blast away error and lead us to *salvation* (Romans 1:16,17).
2. James stated that men can be *justified* if they have a living faith in Christ that is demonstrated

by their works of obedience (James 2:24,26).

3. John says that by his faith the believer “overcomes the world” (verse 5:5). No error, trial, lust, temptation, or persecution is impervious to the power of faith in the Christian’s heart.
4. Faith is the great power source by which we meet all our problems. But we must *use* our faith actively as a weapon against hurtful things if faith is to deliver us. We must always be confident that faith can “move mountains” (figuratively)!

### **Verses 5:6-13-- “This is He who came by water and blood--Jesus Christ.”**

#### The Certainty of Faith

The power of faith is only as strong as the source from which faith comes. “So then, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). Whom are we to believe in this controversy about Jesus as the Christ? Whose testimony is better-- the gnostics’ or the apostles’? John proceeds to examine the available testimony concerning this question:

1. God’s testimony about Jesus as His Son assures us that we have embraced the correct position on this matter (verse 5:6b). God’s Spirit, through the apostles’ teaching, with no exception, had always claimed that Jesus was the divine Son of God. The miracles that accompanied their teaching gave powerful testimony also. (See Mark 16:20.)
2. God’s testimony employs three components: the *Spirit* (using the word), the *water*, and the *blood*. These three testify as one: Jesus Christ possessed a dual nature--spirit and flesh-- throughout His life on earth (verses 6,8).
  - a. Gnostics contended that the spiritual being of Christ came into the physical being (body) of Jesus at His baptism, there to remain until shortly before His death on the cross. Hence, they accepted His baptism as an expression of His divinity, but they rejected His crucifixion as being related to a divine nature.
  - b. To the contrary, John declares that Jesus “came” (was manifested) in His dual nature not only “by water” (baptism), but also by “blood” (death by crucifixion).
  - c. His baptism manifested Jesus’ close relationship with the Father because it was done to “fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15), i.e., to obey completely the will of the Father. God’s testimony of Jesus’ Sonship was corroborated when the Spirit, in the form of a dove, lit on Him while the Father said, “This is my beloved Son.”
  - d. The *physical* part of the dual nature was involved in this baptism and belied gnostic doctrine that physical things could have *no* connection with anything good. They had to admit that it was *good* for God to recognize His own Son before men.
  - e. The *physical* part of the dual nature was also involved in the crucifixion. The “blood” of Jesus was shed in a death that was much more than ordinary. Earlier, the same apostle John had reported this shedding of blood “so that you may believe” (John 19:34,35). Several prophecies were fulfilled in the death of Jesus (John 19:36,37; Matthew 27:35). A pagan soldier who witnessed the events attending the crucifixion was deeply impressed by what he observed and he confessed, “Truly this was the Son of God!” (Matthew 27:54).



- f. Indeed, Jesus' baptism and crucifixion were the two most impressive declarations of the close relationship that existed between the spiritual/physical Jesus and the spiritual Father. Yet, both were acts of the physical body! The two greatest proofs of the love that Jesus Christ had for man were both physical proofs! These were facts hard for the gnostics to explain as mere coincidences.

[Many versions omit verse 5:7 and the first half of verse 8 from the text because they do not appear in the oldest manuscripts. That omission, however, does not in any way alter John's message about Jesus' Sonship.]

3. God's testimony has corroboration (verse 9). Man's testimony is received as credible if supported by the testimony of two or three other men (2Corinthians 13:1). There were three *divine* witnesses to Jesus' dual nature. God (Godhead--Father, Son, and Spirit) all affirmed that truth. If men can be believed, why not God(s)? Moreover, the water and the blood added their testimony to that of the divine Three.
4. God's testimony is accessible through the gospel (verse 10a). The testimony is in our rational minds, either to be accepted as true or rejected as false. But we either validate or deny God's trustworthiness by the decision we reach about His testimony of Jesus.
5. God's testimony is fundamental to salvation ("life"). It is not by some elitist "knowledge" that we reach God but by Jesus. "No one comes to the Father except through Me."
6. God's testimony is consistent (verse 13a). Compare the wording of this verse with John 20:31. The written testimony of the apostles was identical with the spoken testimony of those same men. There was never any variance because truth never varies.
7. God's testimony is enduring (verse 13b). *Continued* belief is as important as *initial* faith. The promise of both early and late gnosticism that one's "ticket is punched" when he first believes never has been and never will be true. It is imperative to "continue to believe."

Verses 5:14-21-- “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him...”

The Rewards of Faith

They are many and profound:

1. The answer to our prayers (verses 14-17). Our confidence as Christians is that (1) God cares enough about us to listen to our petitions, and (2) He will give us the things we ask for (if we respect His teaching about prayer).
  - a. Thus, we can pray for our own needs (verse 15) in keeping with whatever is consistent with the execution of God’s plan in this world. (See Romans 8:28.)
  - b. Also, we can pray for the needs of others (verse 16a). The prayer of a righteous man “avails much” (James 5:16). It is especially important that we can pray in behalf of one another’s *spiritual* needs. Sins that are “not unto [spiritual] death” can be forgiven if we confess them and repent of them prior to [physical] death, This forgiveness, or course, depends on having faith in the divine Jesus. (See chapter 1:7).
  - c. There are sins that cannot be forgiven because there is no blood sacrifice available to cause their forgiveness. These are sins committed by those who reject the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. John’s overriding concern in this passage remained the vulnerable position into which gnostics had placed themselves and their disciples when they denied the dual nature of Jesus Christ (verse 16b).
2. Avoiding a sinful life (verse 18a). Born-again people do not sin (keep on sinning as when they were unbelievers--Greek *aorist* tense--continued action). We must “keep ourselves” if we are to enjoy spiritual security. “Keep yourselves in the love of God” (Jude 21). Security is not automatic--it is labor-intensive! (See Philippians 2:12.)
3. Escaping from the devil’s power. Satan’s “touch” may take many forms in the lives of those who succumb to his devices: It may be (a) a “hard” life (Proverbs 13:15); (b) a “hopeless” life (Ephesians 2:12); (c) a “troubled” life (Philippians 4:6,7). The “whole world,” except for the children of God, is under the devil’s influence and can expect terrible consequences here and hereafter.
4. Eternal life. (verses 13, 20). Christians have an “understanding” that is far more meaningful than the so-called understanding boasted by gnostics and others. Ours is an understanding of what is *real* and *true* and that will bring us to eternal life if we persevere.
5. Avoidance of entanglement in idolatry. (verse 21). Displacing the true dual-natured Jesus by the ridiculous characterization of Him by the gnostics was certainly participation in idolatry. There were also many other ways in which the faithful might go astray after “other gods” (See Colossians 3:5.) which would be equally condemning to their souls. Great vigilance was called for if these saints were to see heaven.

Lesson Six: Victory cannot come to one who surrenders the certainties of gospel truth in exchange for the uncertainties of false teaching. When a man gives up his faith, he gives up----- everything!!

## *The First Epistle of John*

## QUESTIONS--SECTION SIX

1. The basic defense that we have against being “overcome by the world” is our \_\_\_\_\_. John especially advised that the assaults of gnostics could be repulsed by their \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ as the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_. (vs. 5:4,5)
2. Gnostics taught that the “real” Christ had no enduring connection with the body He inhabited. The divine nature entered the physical body at His baptism and left the body before His death on the cross. How does John deny this by his reference to “coming by blood”? (vs. 6) (See John 19:33-35).
3. Gnostics also denied any connection between *physical* behavior and spiritual welfare. How does the reference to “coming by water” deny that idea? (vs. 6) (See Matthew 3:13-17.)
4. All *Three* in the *Godhead* testify that Christ’s spirit and flesh both participated in physical obedience to please the Father (vs, 7). What did the Father say? (See Matthew 3:17.) What did the Word (Christ) say? (See Matthew 3:15; Psalm 119:172.) What did the Spirit say? (See John 19:35; 16:13.)
5. Whose “witness” should carry the most weight with saints? What did it testify? (vs. 9,11)
6. How does verse 5:13b bear on the doctrine of “once saved, always saved”?
7. The relationship we have with God (through the “real” [spirit/body] Jesus) assures us that God will do what for us, especially in time of trouble? (vs. 14,15)
8. What sins are not “unto death”? (vs. 16,17) (See Acts 8:22; 1John 1:7,9.)
9. What were the “idols” in verse 21? How does the warning relate to the gnostic teaching that a lifestyle of sin had no bearing on one’s spiritual relationship to God? (vs.18-20)



**THE EPISTLE OF**

# **SECOND JOHN**

**By: Reg Ginn**



## SECOND JOHN-- INTRODUCTION

The Second Epistle of John apparently is a “companion piece” to First John. Both letters show a similarity of style, composition, and language that points to a common authorship. Moreover, both seem to be addressing the same gnostic threat to the end-of-the-century churches. There is much that we cannot know about this brief book of the New Testament, but we can transpose it into a twenty-first-century context and be reminded of numerous lessons that we also need about appreciating the ancient truth of the gospel and about the importance of taking our stand against religious error in defense of that truth.

**THE AUTHOR:** Identified only as “The Elder,” the author of this epistle cannot with total certainty be named. However, as noted above, the literary style and other considerations have led Bible scholars to the almost unanimous opinion that John was the writer of this “trilogy”-- First, Second, and Third John. John resided in Ephesus during many of his later years, and it is reasonable to suppose that this letter was written from that city in the waning days of the first century.

**THE PURPOSE:** Second John, it seems, has the same purpose as First John. The churches of Asia (and probably elsewhere) were experiencing severe spiritual threats from gnostic teachers who had infiltrated local congregations with their pernicious false teaching about the nature of Jesus Christ and had seriously eroded the faith of many disciples in those churches. The First Epistle probably had gone out into general circulation among the saints in the area, but this “follow-up” letter shows that it had by no means solved the problem of gnosticism among God’s people. Perhaps John had received a disturbing report about some imminent danger posed by gnostic teachers coming to spread their doctrines in whatever location(s) was involved. He felt an *urgent need* to address the danger and to instruct these disciples about how to react to their circumstances.

**THE THEME:** This letter places great emphasis on “truth” and “abiding in the truth.” It obviously is aimed at a specific situation which needed John’s immediate attention. If the danger to these Christians was to be abated, John’s directions to them about how to handle certain arriving gnostic teachers would not wait. He needed to be clear and firm in his warnings and instructions, and these saints needed to be aware of the *urgency* of complying with his

## *The Second Epistle of John*

## INTRODUCTION (Continued)

orders. There was not a moment to lose in getting ready for what was ahead in this struggle between truth and error about the Savior.

OUTLINE: A simple outline of this book might be:

- A. The Importance of Truth-- verses 1-3
- B. The Importance of Keeping the Truth-- verses 4-6
- C. The Importance of Separating Truth From Error -- verses 7-9
- D. The Importance of Supporting Only the Truth-- verses 10,11
- E. The Importance of Having Joy From the Truth-- verses 12,13



***Text: Verses 1-13***

**Verses 1-3-- “The Elder, to the elect lady and her children...”** Most scholars agree that the apostle John wrote this book. Agreement may be less universal as to his identification of himself as “The Elder.” Was he speaking of his being a “bishop” (“elder”) of a local church in Ephesus? Or, was he making reference to his advanced age at the time of writing?

1. The evidence (what little there is) seems to support the latter possibility. Peter spoke of himself as “a fellow elder” when he addressed other elders in 1Peter 5:1-4. No one individual can be “the elder” of a local church. (See Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1, etc.) Furthermore, we find no remarks addressed to elders in this book, even though elders are charged with the duty of “convicting” false teachers such as John was warning against (Titus 1:9). Evidently, John simply had in mind his own age and the accumulation of wisdom usually associated with age as credentials for his message, in addition to his heavenly inspiration.
2. “The elect lady and her children” presents another problem. Was this some respected female Christian and her family to whom these words were addressed? Or, was the “elect lady” a local church (as a collectivity) and its members (as individuals) the ones intended in the salutation of the letter? Again, the available facts seem to support the second possibility. Only the “lady” and not the “children” are called “elect.” Members of a congregation, of course, would be considered “elect” if the whole church were spoken of as such. This “lady” seems to have had a wide reputation among “all those who have known the truth,” also suggesting a church rather than an individual. An “elect sister” who joined with John in closing the letter was more likely another church (Ephesus?) than an actual person. Of course, nothing can be conclusive in determining who this “lady” was, and many think that a good case can be made for the alternate choice.

The Importance of Truth

1. John’s high regard for this “lady” was based on the lady’s love of the truth. He had confidence in her present conviction for the truth and her future perseverance in the truth (verses 1,2). He believed that the truth would abide in her (verse 2).
2. There are several terms of interest in this short book. “Abide” and its forms appear three times in these few verses. It was a favorite word of John’s and is found twelve times in First John (plus “remains,” [3:9] once). “Truth” is used five times and “doctrine” three times. “Commandment(s)” is found four times. These usages indicate a strong emphasis in this letter on the importance of *what* the gospel requires of us to be faithful and on *what* basis faithfulness to Jesus is to be

determined. It was obviously much more than love among brethren that was of concern to the apostle (verses 1-10).

**Verses 4-6-- “I rejoiced greatly that I have found...”** In the midst of crisis and concern, John had learned of some things that encouraged him about these beleaguered saints.

The Importance of Keeping the Truth

1. The faithfulness of “some” of them was a source of pleasure. Other versions say “of thy children” or “certain” of the children were keeping the faith. No doubt, John would have rejoiced more greatly had *all* been “walking in the truth,” but it is a rare church of any age where every member is diligent in his Christian responsibilities. The steadfastness of those in a congregation who are standing firm is always an encouragement to those who care about the Lord’s cause.
2. Loyalty to Christ by church members consisted of “walking in truth.” This indicates a consistent and continual way of life (verse 4). It was possible for Christians to “fall from grace,” and they *would* unless they followed “the commandment” from God that challenged them to “abound more and more” (1Thessalonians 4:1). There were *two* areas in which they must abound: (1) love for one another and, (2) love for God, expressed in love for the word of God and its teaching about the true nature of Jesus. The remainder of John’s admonition deals with these two fundamental issues.
3. It was necessary for all Christians to present a solid and unified front if they were to be successful in defending the truth against the devil’s agents in the persons of the gnostic teachers. It was not a *new* concept that saints should love one another. This had been preached from “the beginning” of their exposure to the gospel message (verse 5).
4. The importance of mutual love had not diminished. Love was still “the” (same) commandment that every Christian must “walk in” at all times (verse 6).

**Verses 7-9-- “For many deceivers have gone out into the world...”** John earlier called these gnostic teachers “false prophets” (1John 4:1). Here he emphasizes the methodology employed by these evil men. They were “deceivers,” and deceit is one of Satan’s most potent weapons against the truth. (See 2Corinthians 11:13-15.)

The Importance of Separating Truth From Error

1. There are many forms of false teaching about which God’s children must be wary. One teaching was particularly dangerous to the churches at that time. Gnostics challenged the gospel doctrine of Jesus’ divinity (verse 7). They denied His dual nature and advanced many strange ideas about His identity and His work on earth.

2. For details of gnostic dogma, see the “Background Information” in the material on The First Epistle of John.
3. As he had done in the earlier epistle, John brands those who deny the dual nature of Jesus Christ as “deceivers” and “antichrists” (against Christ) (verse 7). There are many ways in which people take a stand “against Christ,” but none is more devious and destructive than the idea that the physical body in which Christ served God on earth was not crucified or resurrected and did not ascend into heaven in the presence of witnesses (verse 7).
4. Paul said, “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith” (2Corinthians 13:5). John exhorts, “Look to yourselves” (verse 8). Both were aware that we may “lose those things we (the apostles) worked for” if we (saints) waver in our full commitment to the truth. Many have fallen by the wayside after setting out to follow the Master, but every reprobate is a grief to those who love God.
5. Paul and John and other inspired teachers of the gospel had labored hard and suffered much to bring salvation to these Christians. They had no greater joy than to know that their converts were faithful. Their joy, however, could not be “full” (complete) until those disciples proved faithful until the judgment (verse 8). Their personal *salvation* was not jeopardized when saints stumbled, but their *joy* was certainly affected by the loyalty or disloyalty of their “work.” (See 1Corinthians 3:12-15.)
6. Loyalty and disloyalty were measured by the steadfastness of people to the doctrine of Christ. It was not just that some had once “found” the doctrine but whether or not they still “abode” and would continue to “abide” in that same doctrine (verse 9). In particular, one cannot “have” the Father if he rejects the [true nature of the] Son as the gnostics did. There is no place for compromise about Jesus. Either we acknowledge Him as the God/man that He is, or we had just as well renounce God-related religion altogether.

**Verses 10,11-- “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine...”** It is one thing to identify truth and error when we encounter them. But it is equally necessary that we practice truth when we find it. Knowledge without obedience is unproductive. (See Matthew 7:24-27.)

#### The Importance of Supporting Only the Truth

1. Christians are not allowed to give encouragement to both truth and error. Having made the distinction between the two, faithful people must renounce any and all involvement with error and support only things connected with the truth of the gospel. We cannot “serve God and mammon” in any way (Matthew 6:24).

2. Not only must saints reject false *teaching* but also they must deny support and encouragement to false *teachers* (verse 10). “Do not be guilty of anything that furthers the cause of false doctrine!” This concept can present many sticky problems to the Christian as he associates with others and engages in the activities of everyday life, but children of God must “choose whom we will serve” and then try to remain consistent with the choice we have made.
3. This admonition was John’s main point in this letter. Gnostics were coming or had already arrived in town. Christians would take some kind of action either in offering strong resistance to the purposes of the false teachers or in failing to make them understand that their efforts would not be tolerated by dedicated disciples. They must be certain that the message they send will not be misread by men who were determined to destroy the work of the Lord (verse 10).
4. One who supports error will as surely be punished by God in the judgment as the person who does the actual teaching of error. “If the blind leads the blind, both shall fall into a ditch” (Matthew 15:14).

Note-- It is interesting to notice the progression of words used by John to describe the fundamental nature of the teaching about the identity of Jesus as found in the original gospel. His dual nature is not an isolated concept taught by just a few “misguided” men such as John. It rests at the very *center* of everything included in the gospel to save the lost.

- a. The teaching about Jesus as a physical/spiritual man is first described as “truth” (verses 1,2,3,4). It is an *intellectual concept* that must be embraced by the rational mind after examining the evidence that supports the concept. This is the “belief of the truth.” (See 2Thessalonians 2:13 [ASV].)
- b. The teaching is then clothed in the language of *activity*. There are “commandments” attached to the concept of duality (verses 4,5,6), and commandments must be obeyed. These commandments had originated with the Jesus who was being diminished by gnosticism. But they also carry the authority of the Father. One cannot choose *between* the Father and the Son. Obey both or neither!
- c. Finally, the concept moves from “commandments” to “doctrine” (verses 9,10). While “doctrine” is “teaching,” it is often used with reference to a *system* of teaching as well as to an individual idea. (See Romans 6:17.) “Doctrine” called attention to the fact that duality was woven into the whole cloth of Christianity. To deny its reality would be to destroy Christianity itself. This “doctrine” was not subject to negotiation!

**Verses 12,13-- “Having many things to write unto you...”** Some things could wait for a face-to-face encounter. Other things could not. The message of “the Doctrine,” the “Danger,” the “Destiny” (of unstable saints), and the “Duty” (of steadfastness) was urgent!!

## *The Second Epistle of John*

## QUESTIONS--VERSES 1-13

1. By what descriptive word does John identify himself in this letter? (vs. 1) What is the significance of this “title”?
2. Is the “elect lady” an individual or a church? (vs. 1) (See Ephesians 5:23.)
3. What emphasis does the use of “Jesus Christ” (vs. 3,7) give to John’s position on the doctrine that was taught by the gnostics? (vs. 7)
4. Why would John employ the rather unusual language, “the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father”? (vs. 3)
5. Does verse 4 imply that some of the church members were not following the truth? Why?
6. How do we show our love both to God and to our brethren by “keeping the commandments”? (vs. 4-6) (See 1John 3:6; Colossians 3:12-14, etc.)
7. Another warning is given about “the antichrist.” What is it? (vs. 7)
8. What does verse 8 teach (if anything) about “falling from grace”? How does this verse relate to the parable of Jesus in Matthew 20:1-16?
9. In what *two* ways might the “doctrine of Christ” be used in verse 9?
10. What serious consequence of false doctrine must Christians guard against? (vs. 10,11)



*The Epistle Of*

# **THIRD JOHN**

**By: Reg Ginn**





# THIRD JOHN

## ***INTRODUCTION***

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Third John is very much like First and Second John in many respects. Apparently, all have the same author, the apostle John, and all were written to confront the same *serious* problem that faced the churches at that time. There is a significant emphasis in the three letters on “truth” and “keeping the commandments” of the apostles. Third John was directed to a certain “Gaius,” while First John seems to have an intended general circulation among local churches. Second John appears to be a letter sent to some unnamed congregation that faced an imminent threat from gnostic teachers in spite of the admonitions that had been included in John’s first letter to the churches about the dangers of gnostic doctrines.

**THE AUTHOR:** “The Elder” is the same description that the author gives of himself that he used to introduce Second John. See the notes on that letter.

**THE PURPOSE:** Doubtless, it was John’s hope that churches would be sufficiently warned by his instructions in First John and would be able to resist the efforts of any teachers of gnosticism that might come their way. It appears from his remarks in this epistle, however, that the messengers sent to carry the first letter to the churches had been rebuffed by one or more members of a local congregation, and their mission was uncompleted. John is then forced to send his message to an individual member of that church in hope of offering encouragement to the saints who were striving to be faithful to the truth. He wanted also to give a stern warning about retribution to a power-hungry leader in the church and to any others who were following his perverted leadership.

**THE THEME:** The local church to which John had sent his initial warnings about the gnostic threat had been substantially tainted by the selfish ambitions of one or more of its leaders. The congregation was now seriously divided in its loyalties between those who had respect for apostolic authority and those who did not. John was not willing for the abuses of some to keep needed teaching from the rest. His purpose is, therefore, to put everyone on notice that he intends to address personally the problems within this church. Meanwhile, he wants those who had tried to do right to continue in their faithful efforts to obey the truth.

*Text: Verses 1-14*

**Verses 1-4- “The elder, to the beloved Gaius...”** John, the elder (older), had addressed the “elect lady” in Second John in the same way. We cannot know who this Gaius was, but he possibly was a somewhat new convert who was vulnerable to confusion and disillusionment because of the misbehavior of supposedly mature church members.

1. Gaius was very highly esteemed by the apostle for his love of the truth. He “walked in truth” in the same way as some of the children of the “elect lady.” John also loved the gospel message for which he had suffered so much, and he loved anyone who loved the truth as he did (verse 1). Paul directs that we should “give preference to one another” (Romans 12:10). It should not be difficult to give affection to others of like mind.
2. We cannot be sure about the state of Gaius’ health, but John’s wish that his physical state might match his spiritual state could indicate that he was experiencing some sort of health problem (verse 2). Regardless, it was a significant compliment to Gaius’ faithfulness to have such a statement made about him by one as discriminating as the apostle John. Were we to pray that our physical health might equal our spiritual health, how well or sick would we be? Isn’t spiritual well-being much more important than the wellness of the body?
3. John’s current estimate of Gaius’ spiritual health came through a report received from some “brethren” who had come to John. These likely were messengers sent by John to the church of which Gaius was a member. Gaius obviously had not participated in their rebuff by the leadership of that group, and they had been favorably impressed by Gaius. They could see that the truth was in Gaius as well as that Gaius was in the truth. When the truth is so precious to us that it permeates every fiber of our being, we cannot help but do the things that Christians are supposed to do (verse 3). Private behavior will be harmonious with our public conduct. We will “practice what we preach.”
4. A teacher has no greater satisfaction than to see his influence manifested in the lives of his students. This is especially true of teachers of the gospel because this indicates that the teacher *has* made an impact on eternity (verse 4)!

**Verses 5-8-- “Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren...”**

1. This appears to be a commendation of Gaius for his personal treatment of John’s messengers. The “brethren and strangers” perhaps were men more and less familiar to Gaius. Some texts say, “especially for strangers.” It is always commendable for Christians to show hospitality to strangers (Hebrews 13:2). Gaius had done the *right* thing about the men who carried needed warnings

to the church (verse 5).

2. There were other worthy people in this church to whom the warnings were sent. (See verse 12.) Gaius and at least one other member stood out as really loyal to Christ, and a “good testimony” was given of them by the returning couriers (verse 6). In most congregations there are usually a few who impress visitors--some by their personalities, others by their spirituality and dedication to the cause of truth.
3. “If” is not in the text-- Gaius had responded properly to John’s agents in this matter. He had given them “royal treatment” that was “worthy” of God. In this he had done well (verse 6).
4. John’s messengers had taken on a difficult and perhaps dangerous task when they set out to deliver the First Epistle to this church. Their mission was to benefit the Lord's “name,” not a popular undertaking with a lot of people. They were totally dependent on (spiritual) “Israel” and would accept no help from the (unspiritual) “Gentiles.” How troubling it must have been to them to have been turned away by some of their own brethren when they arrived with John’s letter! Thank God for Gaius and the others there who behaved toward them as Christians are supposed to behave (verses 7,8)!
5. Not everyone can “go into all the world” and take the gospel as these letter carriers had done. We all can, however, give appropriate support to the efforts of those who actually go. In this way, we can become “fellow workers” with those who actually “go” (verse 8). Second John warns us to withhold all support from false teachers lest we “share” in their evil deeds (2John 10,11). Here, we are encouraged to give support to faithful teachers so we can “share” in their labors as “fellow workers.”

**Verses 9,10-- “I wrote to the church, but...”**

1. A great opportunity had been lost by this troubled church. A real apostle of Christ, the last one still alive as far we know, had sent them a letter from his own hand. That letter included heaven-inspired directions to help them solve the serious problems facing them at the time. How anxious they should have been to receive John’s messengers! Another church had “jumped” at the chance to have the help of the same apostle (2John). Instead, this church turned away their only hope of having the divine guidance that could enable them to confront gnostic teachers successfully (verse 9).

2. The problem in this group of Christians was not so much in the “fellowship” as it was in the *leadership*. At the center of the problem was Diotrephes, whose ungodly ambitions would not allow him even to *appear* to submit to the authority of an apostle or any other inspired teacher. He insisted on being the “boss” in everything in that church. It does not appear that he was under gnostic influence or that he was guilty of any form of spurious doctrine. His sin was raw pride and obstinacy. He refused to “receive” anyone who might take attention away from *him* even for a moment. Jesus had warned that when we reject the teachers whom He has sent to us, we thereby reject both Jesus and His Father (Matthew 10:40). But that seemed not to matter to Diotrephes (verse 9). How our own egos can blind us to the truth when nothing else can!
  
3. Diotrephes seemed unconcerned that his actions involved other members of the church in addition to himself. He not only had made a *personal* decision to reject the men of God but also he had made that decision for others in the congregation. He did not hesitate to intimidate those who might “receive” the messengers. They were threatened with being “put out of the church” (verse 10). He proposed to speak for everybody, but he didn’t. At least *two* other members--Gaius and Demetrius-- did not share his attitude. There were probably others, too, but “disfellowshipping” is a powerful tool in the hands of the wrong people. Of course, only God can truly “put out of the church,” but local church fellowship is a precious thing to most members, as it should be. Most people are hesitant to place themselves in a position where that fellowship is threatened. This church had made a serious mistake about whom they chose to fellowship in this dispute. But God’s fellowship was *still* extended to the faithful there who were trying to “walk in the light” (1John 1:6,7).
  
4. John seems already to have resolved to handle this ungodly situation personally. It was probably not “if” I come, but “when” I come. We cannot know just what action John would take when he met Diotrephes face to face, but we may be sure that whatever he did, he would settle the problem so that it would no longer bother this congregation (verse 10).

**Verses 11,12-- “Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good.”**

1. It is extremely confusing and troubling when young Christians get “mixed signals” about what constitutes Christian living. Brethren will, of course, have honest differences at times, and even the newly initiated can understand that. But when “mature” members wrangle over issues that cause unrest in the church, and when it becomes clear that some or all of the parties involved are more concerned with personal issues than with issues of truth, the faith of new converts can easily be destroyed. It’s difficult for them to remember the good advice in verse 11: “Do not imitate what is evil, but what is good.” Gaius and others should be warned not to become

## *The Third Epistle of John*

VERSES 1-14

discouraged that the leaders of their local church had let them down as examples to follow. The proof of a man's worthiness to lead is in what he does, not just in what he says.

2. Gaius was not without a good example to follow. Demetrius had a "good testimony" from everyone because his behavior, unlike that of Diotrephes, was consistent with truth. Follow *him*, because both observation and inspiration confirm that he follows Jesus (verse 12).

### **Verses 13,14-- "I had many things to write..."**

1. The problems of this church were not to be solved by a few written words. The personal contact of the apostle was needed with the faithful and with the unfaithful. The faithful needed John's strong encouragement to be steadfast in the truth. The unfaithful needed John's personal denouncement of their unscriptural activities and serious character flaws that were so detrimental to the congregation (verse 13,14).
2. This need was *urgent*. The problems would not wait for appropriate solutions. John had determined to take the situation into his own hands and to come *shortly* to "speak" to both sides face to face (verse 14).
3. A final word to those who wanted to do what was right in God's eyes-- "Peace to you." Even though the church is in turmoil because of the sins of some bad individuals, don't be discouraged. God will resolve the situation in one way or another. His peace is still yours to enjoy if you "keep on keeping on" in your service of the Lord (verse 14). You need not be disturbed just because others are disturbing the things around you!
4. "Our friends greet you." Though Gaius and Demetrius were likely a minority in their determination to walk in the truth, there were many brethren in other places who cared about them and their problems. These "friends" would pray for them and would do anything possible to assist them in their struggles to be faithful to their Lord (verse 14).

## *The Third Epistle of John*

## QUESTIONS--VERSES 1-14

1. John repeats the description of himself that he used in 2John. What is it?
2. *Two* Christians, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ were commended by John for their **faithfulness**. \_\_\_\_\_ is condemned because of **unfaithfulness**.
3. John prayed that Gaius would enjoy both \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ health. (vs. 2)  
Are both important? Why? Which is more important? (See Mark 8:36.)
4. *Two* relationships to the truth must be maintained by the Christian. What are they? (vs. 3)
5. What special joy is possible for a teacher of truth to experience that is not possible for those who never convert others to Christ? (vs. 4) What is the “flip side” of that joy?
6. Gaius was commended for showing hospitality and kindness to *two* classes of people, the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. (vs. 5) What lesson did Jesus teach His disciples about this? (See Matthew 5:46,47.)
7. *Two* contrasts are found in Second and Third John about fellowship. How do they differ?  
(2John 9-11; 3John 6-8)
8. What was Diotrephes’ basic problem? (vs. 9) What had he done because of this attitude? (vs. 9,10)
9. Those who do evil “have not seen God.” How does anyone see God? (See John 1:18; 1John 4:12.)
10. Demetrius had a good reputation that came from *two* sources. What were they? (vs. 12)

THE EPISTLE OF

*Jude*

WITH INTRODUCTION

AND

CLASS QUESTIONS

By: Reg Ginn





## INTRODUCTION TO JUDE

**THE AUTHOR:** Jude, who introduces himself as (1) a servant of the Lord and (2) a brother of “James.” We know that Jesus had several half-brothers and half-sisters [same mother, different fathers]. (See Matthew 13:55,56) “James” and “Judas” (Jude) were among them. James is a prominent character in the early church; Jude is obscure, except for this short letter.

**THE BOOK:** The purpose Jude had in writing this letter is expressed in verse 3: “...I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” The false doctrines and evil practices of certain men who were perverting the apostles’ teachings created an “emergency” situation in the church(es) that demanded immediate attention.

Jude first employs Bible examples of others who had sinned against God and were punished. Next, he compares the then-current false teachers to notorious rebels whose actions were generally deplored by the people of God. Then, he describes and condemns the behavior of these agents of Satan who had much to say but nothing to offer. Finally, he encourages the faithful to “keep themselves” in God’s love and in their useful spiritual service to others.

The time and place of writing are unknown. It is thought that the reference to James implies that James was still living. The similarities between certain parts of Jude and 2Peter cause some to believe that Jude was written after 2Peter and that portions were copied from the 2Peter, but that conclusion has no real basis in fact.

**AN INTERESTING SPECULATION:** Burton Coffman makes this observation in his commentary: “Is it not a most remarkable providence that of those four little boys [Jesus’ brothers named in Matthew 13:55-RG], all of them younger than Jesus, who grew up at Nazareth in the same room with Jesus in the home of Joseph and Mary, is it not astonishing that two of them, James and Jude, have left the legacy of two precious epistles?”

“Just think. Two of the sacred NT writers lived with Jesus practically all of his life on earth, except for the four years, during which, for the most part, they did not belong to the immediate circle of the Lord’s followers, an exclusion that was doubtless also providential. These two did not at first believe in Jesus; but even their unbelief at first must be considered a testimony to the holiness of the Master. Why? Like all other Jews,

they believed that the Messiah would be a conquering hero who would rally the troops and chase the Romans out of Judea. *They knew that Jesus was not that kind of person.* But when they came to know his real purpose of redeeming men from sin, *all that they knew of him* had its weight in constraining them to fall down in his presence and hail him as Lord and Savior, leading them both also, ever afterwards, to write themselves ‘not as his brothers’ but as ‘Servants of the Lord Jesus Christ.’” (Commentary on Jude, p. 522)

**A Brief Outline of Jude**

- I. Jude’s Introduction. Verses 1,2**
- II. The Occasion that Prompted this Letter. Verses 3,4**
- III. God’s Wrath on Evildoers of the Past. Verses 5-7**
- IV. God’s Wrath on Evildoers of the Present. Verses 8-11**
- V. The True Character of False Teachers. Verses 12-16**
- VI. Duties of the Faithful. Verses 17-23**
- VII. A Prayer for the Faithful. Verses 24,25**

***Text: Verses 1-25***

**Verses 1,2-- “Jude a servant of Jesus Christ..”**

Jude introduces himself to the recipients of his letter as “a servant” of Christ and as “a brother” of James.

Jude’s Introduction

1. The “James” here mentioned is generally thought to have been a sibling of Jesus. He came to hold a place of influence in the early church. (See Acts 15:6, 13-21; Galatians 2:9,12.)
2. If “James” was the Lord’s brother, then Jude would have been another brother. “Judas” is named among the brothers of Jesus in Matthew 13:55. Why would Jude not have cited this relationship? Perhaps out of humility; perhaps in an effort to *persuade* rather than to *intimidate* his readers into compliance with his admonitions (verse 1).
3. The recipients of Jude’s epistle were addressed as “*called*,” “*sanctified* by God the Father,” and “*preserved* in Jesus Christ.” (verse 1). Hence, the complete Godhead had participated actively in their experience as Christians. The Holy Spirit had called them to *become* Christians through the gospel (2Thessalonians 2:14); the Father had set them apart to *live* as Christians when He added them to the church (Acts 2:47); the Son’s cleansing blood *kept* them in fellowship as Christians. (See 1 John 1:7; John 10:29.)
4. The particular classification of the false teachers so vigorously denounced by Jude in this book is unclear, except that they indulged in fleshly lusts, challenged the authority of inspired teachers, and taught doctrines that were of their own manufacture. Whether or not they were of the gnostic persuasion like the teachers exposed by John in his letters we cannot know. Perhaps the reference in verse 1 to the “*preserving*” in Jesus and the charge in verse 4 that these evil men denied the “only Lord (God) [omitted in some versions] and our Lord Jesus Christ” may be indications that gnostic errors were involved.
5. What they had already received from heaven to become Christians was now needed in even greater abundance if they were to be successful in meeting the attacks of false teachers who were so grossly immoral and so disrespectful of God’s teachers (verse 2). “*Mercy*” (that allows us to maintain our salvation in spite of our failings), “*peace*” (that gives us spiritual and emotional stability in the face of turmoil), and “*love*” (that serves to keep us “glued” to our duty to the Father and Son) would all be necessary to see them through the trials of faith that lay ahead for them.

**Verses 3,4-- "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you..."**

The Occasion that Prompted this Letter

1. Jude's plans had changed. His first intention was to write to these brethren concerning their "common salvation." Maybe that would have included some discussion of the "mercy," "peace," and "love" he cited in verse 2. Any discussion of the "common" salvation should be of real interest to all disciples because *all* have believed the same facts of the gospel, obeyed the same commands of the gospel, and trusted in the same promises made in the gospel to everyone who turns to the Lord (verse 3).
2. Circumstances had changed. Jude had learned that "certain men" had "crept in" among the saints and had not at first been detected as being false teachers. The faith of God's people was in grave jeopardy. Moreover, the saints had not been as quick to respond to the threat as they should have been. Jude thought that it was his duty to write and warn them of the urgent need to "contend earnestly for the faith" that was preached by the apostles and that must not be changed in any way (verse 3).
3. It is always prudent to adapt our lessons to the need of the moment. The gospel message is able to destroy all error and false teaching, but it must be "aimed" at the target that needs to be "hit." Generic teaching is not always suitable. Sometimes teaching must be very specific indeed!
4. These evil workers were of a *class* that had long been condemned by the Lord. All men of all time who were "ungodly," who excused "licentiousness" by claiming that God's grace allows it, and who blatantly "denied" the (relationship) of the Father and the Son had always been objects of God's wrath and eternal punishment (verse 4).

**Verses 5-7-- "But I want to remind you..."**

God's Wrath on Past Evildoers

1. The teachers to be confronted with truth by the faithful disciples were guilty of three kinds of sinful behavior: (1) They rejected the authority of God and His designated spokesmen; (2) they actively encouraged others to replace "once-for-all" precepts with other, more popular ideas; (3) they engaged in grossly immoral practices. Jude launches into a listing of other people of other times who were guilty of the same three sins. In each case, there should have been a lesson available to deter others from similar behavior, but it was obvious that some had not learned what God intended to teach about sin and punishment.
2. The first example was "the people" God had saved from Egypt's slavery. Initial salvation by faith did not assure their continued salvation by faith (verse 5). It *is* possible for believers to

stop believing. When they do, God's favor is exchanged for His wrath. (See 2Peter 2:20-22.) The Jews who had witnessed the mighty power of God lost confidence in their Deliverer, and "their bodies were scattered in the wilderness" (1Corinthians 10:5). God does not tolerate disobedience even by His own people!

3. Even more impressive, God had refused to overlook the sins of angels. In some way, at some (distant?) time in the past, certain angels had left their proper place and had engaged in unauthorized activity. Their punishment was severe-- they are now kept "in chains" and in "darkness" until the final judgment. Apparently, at that time the wickedness of heavenly beings will be forever exposed and punished along with the sins of their human counterparts (verse 6).
4. Sodom and Gomorrah and their sister cities stand forever in the minds of God-fearing people as the classic example of what happens to those who dare to rebel against the rule of the Lord. The fire and brimstone that had pronounced God's wrath on them is but a forecast of the "eternal fire" that will be suffered by all others who are guilty of similar behavior (verse 7).
5. The lesson of the past is clear-- if "every transgression and diobedience received a just recompense of reward,"-- "how shall we escape?"

**Verses 8-11-- "Likewise also these dreamers..."**

God's Wrath on Present Evildoers

1. These present enemies of the truth were in no better position with God than were the wicked men of the past. They were "dreamers" who clothed their "dreams" (personal ideas) in attractive wrappings to deceive the innocent and gullible among the disciples (verse 8).
2. They advocated doing whatever would satisfy the wicked desires of the flesh, ignoring any religious authority that might interfere with their lust for self-determination and openly renouncing anyone who dared to expose their conduct. Even apostles and other inspired teachers ("dignitaries"--see Hebrews 13:7) were subject to their malicious reprisals when the gospel message of holy living clashed with the message of dissipation preached by these evildoers (verse 8).
3. Jude employs an obscure incident to illustrate the imprudence of these wicked men. Even an *archangel* (the highest "rank" of angels) had declined to speak in a too-harsh denunciation of the devil but left it to the Lord for a final determination of the devil's cause (whatever that cause was). But-- these false teachers were so aggressive in their disregard of heavenly authority that they did not hesitate to say terrible things about God's messengers when it served their evil purposes (verse 9). Their audacity would surely be repaid!
4. The unlovely character of these adversaries of the gospel is portrayed by two of their sins: (1) they spoke evil of the (spiritual) things that their misshapen minds could *not* understand [things

taught by inspired teachers] and (2) they abused the things that they *could* understand through their physical senses. In this respect, they behaved exactly like “brute beasts” with no self-control and no sense of propriety in their use of their God-given abilities (verse 10).

- a. They corrupted the sense of sight-- their eyes were “full of adultery” rather than filled with the glories of God’s creation. (See 2Peter 2:14.)
- b. They corrupted the sense of hearing-- their ears were “stopped” to the truth and open to every wild idea that stroked their own egos. (See Zechariah 7:11.)
- c. They corrupted the sense of taste-- they were unthankful for their food and indulged themselves in gluttony and in things harmful to themselves. (See Proverbs 23:21.)
- d. They corrupted the sense of touch-- sexual immorality and other physical excesses played prominent roles in their lifestyle. (See Romans 1:24-28.)

Man’s *senses* should be “exercised” in the pursuit of right instead of wrong (Hebrews 5:14). It was shameful that these teachers pursued wickedness and felt no more shame in what they did than one would expect from an animal.

5. The consequence of sinful conduct was certain-- “Woe to them!” (verse 11). We are reminded of the woes Jesus pronounced on the ungodly activities and attitudes of the false teachers of His day. (See Matthew 23:13-29.) The scribes and Pharisees consistently: (1) discouraged men from the kingdom of God; (2) mistreated the innocent; (3) acted hypocritically in everything they did; (4) misinterpreted the scriptures; (5) ignored important divine obligations; (6) resorted to base measures to gain popularity. The evil workers of Jude’s time were guilty of the very same kinds of behavior. No wonder he pronounced a “woe” on them.
6. Three Old Testament characters represent the depth of depravity to which the unfaithful had sunk: (1) Cain, who refused God’s wisdom and followed his own; (2) Baalam, who allowed greed to influence his dedication to the truth; and (3) Korah, who was guilty of sheer rebellion against God’s duly-authorized leadership in Israel. Each possessed a fatal flaw that brought ultimate destruction (verse 11). A similar destiny awaits these latter-day practitioners of error.

**Verses 12-16-- “These are spots in your love feasts...”**

The True Character of False Teachers

1. The disciples had apparently offered fellowship, at least in a limited measure, to men who were a serious threat to their continuance as faithful children of God. They had been hoodwinked by the ingratiating actions of the deceivers and supposed that they were an altogether different

kind of people than they really were. The saints had welcomed them into their “love feasts,” which were meals usually provided by the more affluent members for the benefit of the poor members. It was supposed to be a time for showing care for one another. These bad men were not there out of consideration for others, nor did they have any respect (“fear”) for the bonds of love that held Christians together. They “served themselves” and promoted their evil designs on the faith of those who might be drawn away from the apostles’ teaching. They were “spots” and out of place at such activities (verse 12). The saints should “clean” these spots from their godly fellowship at once.

2. These men were “clouds without water,” holding out to gullible believers the prospect of many attractive things to be enjoyed by their proselytes. But they never delivered on such promises, for they had nothing to offer that compared with the blessings of the truth. They were “carried about by winds” and were forever changing their stance about issues, and so were unreliable. Theirs was a “changeable gospel” that offered no stability (verse 12).
3. They were likened to “late autumn” trees from which no fruit should be expected. Not only so, but fruit (spiritual benefits) was not only unlikely but also impossible because they were *twice dead*, having been uprooted and left with no real connection to the “ground of the truth” (the Lord’s church [See 1Timothy 3:15.]) (verse 12).
4. Like raging waves of the sea, they served no useful spiritual purpose. Rather, all they could show for their efforts was the “debris” of strife and division they always deposited on shores that otherwise would have remained unspoiled and lovely (verse 13).
5. Finally, Jude calls these evildoers “wandering stars” that offered no “fixed position” and therefore no guidance toward safe haven for “seamen” who sought direction from them. If they provided no dependable “light” as they feigned to do, light would also be denied them while they suffered for their sins throughout eternity (verse 13).
6. The prophet Enoch in ancient times had expressed God’s disgust with such deceivers as these. In a short rebuke of their behavior, he called them and their actions “ungodly” *four* times and promised that the Lord will “execute judgment” on them (verse 14,15). “Ten thousand” saints who had faithfully served God will testify to their sinfulness in much the same way as the men of Nineveh and the queen of the South will witness against others who failed to respect God and His spokesmen. (See Matthew 13:41,42.)
7. The punishment for wicked men of all descriptions will be appropriate to their sins. These false teachers were: (1) “murmurers and complainers,” rejecting God’s authority; (2) they lived in their “own lusts,” rejecting God’s standards of morality and decency; (3) they resorted to flattery and other devious methods to gain an advantage with the naive, thus rejecting the emphasis on the power of truth mandated by God. In every way they manifested a complete abandonment of the principles of right upon which the apostles’ doctrine was based and were flagrant in their rebellion against the authority of heaven (verse 16).

**Verses 17-23-- “But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken...”** The danger posed by these unauthorized teachers to the rank and file of faithful brethren was real and imminent. Jude proposes a plan of *defense* against their attacks.

The Duties of the Faithful

1. Remember the apostles’ teaching in its pristine form. The true gospel is unchangeable. (See Galatians 1:6-9.) Christians must not be shaken by any alterations that devious men might attempt to spread among the Lord’s people (verses 17-19). The original gospel is full of warnings about such “sensual persons” who would seek to undermine the faith of the faithful and who would leave behind them a trail of division and spiritual destruction.
2. Build yourselves up in your faith through study and prayer (verse 20). Faith comes by “hearing” God’s word (Romans 10:17), and prayer offers us a connection with God that gives real meaning to what we learn about Him and His ways. (See Ephesians 6:17,18.)
3. Motivate yourselves to keep God’s commandments (verse 21). Dwell in your minds on how much Jesus Christ wants to give us mercy and salvation (See 2Peter 3:9.). Don’t lose sight of the fact that those who love God will keep His word (John 14:23).
4. Deal with sinful situations (verses 22,23). They won’t go away on their own. Whether in the form of false teaching or false behavior, sin must be exposed and eradicated in the lives of saints. However, each situation should be dealt with according to its particular circumstances.
  - (1) Some have sinned because of confusion and doubt. Compassion is in order as spiritual brethren try to recover them to the truth. (See James 5:19,20.)
  - (2) Others may require harsh measures (“fire”) before they will consider the error of their way. (See 1Corinthians 5:4,5.)
5. Avoid all compromise with error (verse 23b). Just as clothing can be defiled from contact with open wounds and emissions from the body, sinful teachings and practices can spread to people and things other than the principal sinners. Children of God must be cautious not to become tainted by the “garment” any more than by the “body.” Hate sin (not the sinner) and all that it involves. Compromise is unthinkable.

**Verses 24,25-- “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling...”** The Christian’s surest defense against the wiles of Satan and his angels (See 2Corinthians 11:13-15.) is to maintain a keen awareness that God is in control of this world. He has all the wisdom and power necessary to assist us in our efforts to resist the devil until he “flees from us.”



A Prayer for the Faithful

1. God is able to keep us from stumbling on our walk to heaven (verse 24). We must work out our own salvation” (Philippians 2:12), but His strength will make it possible for us to complete the task. (See 2Timothy 2:1.) No matter how difficult the trial of our faith may become, we need not stumble if we really want to be faithful. (See 2Corinthians 12:9.)
2. God is able to “present us faultless” before Him at the judgment (verse 24b). There He has promised to claim us before His Father (Matthew 10:32). What a comfort it is to know that the “sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18)!
3. God is able because of His *Nature* (verse 25). He is the:
  - a. God and Savior of *all* the saved;
  - b. Sole possessor of true wisdom;
  - c. Only legitimate recipient of glory and majesty;
  - d. Rightful claimant to all dominion and power;
  - e. Eternally existent and the dispenser of good to His people;
  - f. **All in All-- “AMEN”!!!**

## *The Epistle of Jude*

## QUESTIONS-- VERSES 1-25

1. Jude identifies himself in two ways: (1) a \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ and (2) \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_. (vs. 1)
2. What had Jude first planned to write about to the brethren? (vs. 3)
3. Instead, he found it “necessary” to write about the need to \_\_\_\_\_ for the \_\_\_\_\_ once \_\_\_\_\_ to the \_\_\_\_\_. (verse 3)
4. Some had turned the \_\_\_\_\_ of God into \_\_\_\_\_ and denied the only \_\_\_\_\_ and our \_\_\_\_\_. (vs.4)
5. Whom had the Lord saved from Egypt, and whom had He later destroyed? (vs. 5)
6. Why had certain angels been put into “everlasting chains” until the judgment? (vs. 6)
7. *Two* cities would suffer “eternal fire.” Who were they and what had they done? (vs. 7)
8. Who declined to rebuke the devil? What did he do instead? What was their dispute? (vs. 9)
9. *Three* grievous sinners are negative examples: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_. (vs.11)
10. List the *five* things to which Jude compares false teachers. (vs.12,13)
11. What term is applied *five* times to false teachers between verses 14 and 19?
12. Give *four* (or *five*) unacceptable behaviors of false teachers condemned by Jude. (vs.16)
13. About what had the apostles warned these Christians previously? (vs.18)
14. What *three* things should these disciples do for their own spiritual health? (vs.20,21)
15. What *two* different approaches must be taken to restoring Christians who sin? (vs.22,23)