I, II, AND III JOHN

The Apostle John is one of my very favorite Bible characters. He was the youngest of Jesus’ disciples, probably reached at age 16 or 17. He was present at the cross when Jesus died. Our Lord cared so much for John that He committed the care of His mother Mary to John’s care. When the persecution was launched against followers of Christ, John went to western Turkey (Ephesus) where he pastored the church long since founded by Paul. When he was 90, Emperor Domitian had all church leaders (who could be located) arrested and either imprisoned or slaughtered. John was exiled to the island of Patmos (in the Aegean Sea, between Greece on the west and Turkey on the east). The imprisonment was supposed to be until John died. But Domitian died first (he was assassinated) and his successor Nerva freed most political prisoners, including John, who returned to Ephesus and continued pastoring. It was John who gave us five fabulous books of the Bible - I, II, III John which we study tonight, the Gospel of John (which I believe is the greatest single document ever given to mankind) and the Revelation.

I John

I John is different from I Peter. Peter wrote his letter to a church that was under fire. Persecutions were rampant from Roman authorities. But John, as a heartbroken shepherd, writes to the last of his wolf-torn lambs. He wrote to a church that had been seduced by the world system. By this time, the believers were second and third generation followers of Christ. Their fervor was gone; the passion for Christ was missing. To many of these people being a Christian was a real “chore.”

Ephesus in John’s time was one of the major cities of the Roman world, centered upon the shrine of the native goddess Diana (or Artemis - same god). She was called “the goddess of fertility.” She was represented by a many-breasted image located in the Temple of Diana, one of the ancient seven wonders of the world. A serious problem that afflicted Ephesus was the progressive siltting of its harbor by the river Cayster, which eventually blocked access to the water. Today the coastline has retreated six miles and the ruins of the city - some 15 miles across - are stranded inland. The remains of Ephesus, which I have visited many times, are the most impressive in all Turkey.
When John was in exile on Patmos, Jesus appeared to him personally and gave him a message to deliver to the Christians in Ephesus:  
Rev. 2:1-7 (New Living) "Write this letter to the angel of the church in Ephesus. This is the message from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven gold lampstands: [2] "I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars. [3] You have patiently suffered for me without quitting. [4] But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first! [5] Look how far you have fallen from your first love! Turn back to me again and work as you did at first. If you don't, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches. [6] But there is this about you that is good: You hate the deeds of the immoral Nicolaitans (a cult known for eating food that had been dedicated to idols and were sexually immoral), just as I do. [7] "Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Everyone who is victorious will eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God.

So Pastor John’s challenge was to bring the congregation back to its first love for Jesus.
1 John 1:1-4  KJV  That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; [2] (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) [3] That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with
the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. [4] And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

John was never shy about stating his position with Jesus or the things he had experienced. But this is certain: he had the ability to make Christ real to the folks he ministered to.

John certainly did not believe in living in darkness, that is - a place away from the heart of Christ: 1 John 1:5-10 KJV This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. [6] If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:
[7] But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. [8] If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. [9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. [10] If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Chapter Two

What if, while taking inventory of our own personal lives, we find sin there? 1 John 2:1-2 KJV My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: [2] And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. Let this be made very clear: we have but ONE “go-between,” one mediator, one advocate (one who pleads a cause) and that is Jesus. Where in Scripture are we taught to pray to any saint or Biblical figure? Nowhere for there is no other mediator.

Not only is Christ our advocate, He is also our PROPITIATION (verse 2), that is the One person in all the world through whom all guilt for sins is removed. It was through Jesus' death - and no other's - that we are restored to God.

Here’s the big question: who really is a Christian? 1 John 2:3-6 KJV And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. [4] He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. [5] But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby we know we that we are in him. [6] He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

A Christian is someone who obeys what the Lord says. That’s not hard for a parent t
understand. Little Johnny says, “I love you, Daddy....” and then proceeds to disobey everything “Dad” said to do. The words of love become meaningless after while.

John alludes to the spirit of antichrist in the last days: KJV 1 John 2:18-23

Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. [19] They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. [20] But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. [21] I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. [22] Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. [23] Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.

In our upcoming study (beginning in November) I will deal at some length with the antichrist. Suffice it for now to say that during the 7-year tribulation period, antichrist will “rule the neighborhood.” He will deny God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit and he will exalt himself.

The Anointing

1 John 2:26-27 KJV [26] These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. [27] But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

In the Old Testament, only the priests were anointed to serve. But since Calvary, all of us who know Christ are kings and priests unto God and may be anointed. THE ANOINTING IS THE PERSONAL TOUCH AND BENEDICTION (BLESSING) OF GOD ON YOUR LIFE.

Chapter Three to Chapter 4, verse 6

This chapter deals with the IMPERATIVE (that which must be) OF LOVE. 1 John 3:10-15 KJV In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. [11] For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. [12] Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his
brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brothers righteous. [13] Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. [14] We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. [15] Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Should you drive across our great state and see groves of orange trees - the fruit just hanging from the branches - you would know, "Hey - those are orange trees." You know the tree by its fruit. So it is with the follower of Jesus: we are known because of our love for God and for people.

Ah, but what kind of love? Not the bumper sticker type. No, verse 16-type: 1 John 3:16 KJV Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

And in verse 17, John really lays it on the line: 1 John 3:17 KJV But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? Jesus declared in the Sermon on the Mount that His followers are "the salt of the earth." Salt left in the shaker and not placed on the food does little good.

How to spot heresies: KJV 1 John 3:24

And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us. 1 John 4:1-6

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. [2] Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: [3] And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. [4] Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. [5] They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. [6] We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

1. We test teachings and teachers (and spirits) in this way: a true Godly spirit will acknowledge that Jesus is Christ, the Messiah.

2. The spirit must acknowledge that Jesus Christ was incarnated (born in the flesh of the Virgin Mary) 2000 years ago. He was not just a mere man, as so many in the cults profess. He was God! If a person denies that, John warns us that person is NOT of
Chapter 4 Continued

In this passage John again tells the marvelous story of God’s search for man: 1 John 4:10-11. KJV Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. [11] Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

John’s next passage, this one on fear - or the lack of it - is very special: 1 John 4:17-19. KJV Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. [18] There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. [19] We love him, because he first loved us.

Christ’s followers have tremendous respect for the majesty of God. We realize that He is the divine Creator and not just “the man upstairs.” Yet our fear is tempered by our love for Him and His love for us. I am God’s child. So are you. What kind of father would bring down wrath upon a child? Chastisement at times, yes. But not wrath. Not vicious beatings or judgment. And God is my Heavenly Father. He loves me so my fear is gone.

Chapter 5

1 John 5:1-5 KJV Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. [2] By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. [3] For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. [4] For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. [5] Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

John has already instructed us in this epistle that if we love God we will keep His commandments. Is that difficult? No. Verse 3 informs us that His laws are not “grievous” or burdensome.

The Trinity: 1 John 5:7-17 KJV [7] For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. [8] And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood:
and these three agree in one.

These verses give us solid teaching on the reality of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. It is a blessed thought that the holy "Three-In-One" reach out to minister to each of us.

John concluded this short letter by warning us to keep from sin. 1 John 5:18-21 KJV

We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not. [19] And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. [20] And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. [21] Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

We flee from sin's seducing advances. We cleave to God. When you fall in love, you want to be with that person as much as possible. After 58 years of marriage, my wife is still my very best friend. I would rather be with her than anyone else. When you fall in love with Jesus, you want to be with Him, to draw near to Him. The real believer is the one constantly seeking God.

II JOHN

2 John 1:1-13 [The Message]

My dear congregation, I, your pastor, love you in very truth. And I'm not alone—everyone who knows the Truth that has taken up permanent residence in us loves you. [2] [3] Let grace, mercy, and peace be with us in truth and love from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, Son of the Father! [4] I can't tell you how happy I am to learn that many members of your congregation are diligent in living out the Truth, exactly as commanded by the Father. [5] But permit me a reminder, friends, and this is not a new commandment but simply a repetition of our original and basic charter: that we love each other. [6] Love means following his commandments, and his unifying commandment is that you conduct your lives in love. This is the first thing you heard, and nothing has changed. [7] There are a lot of smooth-talking charlatans loose in the world who refuse to believe that Jesus Christ was truly human, a flesh-and-blood human being. Give them their true title: Deceiver! Antichrist! [8] And be very careful around them so you don't lose out on what we've worked so diligently in together; I want you to get every reward you have coming to you. [9] Anyone who gets so progressive in his thinking that he walks out on the teaching of Christ, walks out on God. But whoever stays with the teaching, stays faithful to both the Father and the Son. [10] If anyone shows up
who doesn't hold to this teaching, don't invite him in and give him the run of the place. [11] That would just give him a platform to perpetuate his evil ways, making you his partner. [12] I have a lot more things to tell you, but I'd rather not use paper and ink. I hope to be there soon in person and have a heart-to-heart talk. That will be far more satisfying to both you and me. [13] Everyone here in your sister congregation sends greetings.

John wrote this little letter abut 85 A.D., possibly from Ephesus. He begins by referring to himself as “the elder.” In the passage I used here from The Message, “elder” is “pastor.”

He refers to the “elect lady and her children.” Some believe the “lady” is the church. Others believe it was a specific person, perhaps Mary, the Mother of Jesus. You will remember that I believe it was altogether likely that John took Mary with him when he moved from Jerusalem to western Turkey (where he pastored in Ephesus for decades). Jesus had committed to John (from our Lord’s position on the very cross) to take care of Mary. There is a grave now in Ephesus believed to be Mary’s grave. If the “elect lady” was truly Mary, she would have been in her 90’s at the time of this writing - or even older. The other possibility is that the elect lady was Lazarus’ sister Martha who had a thriving ministry of her own in Marseille, France. But we just don’t know for sure who the elect lady was.

In verses 4-6 John rejoiced in the fact that he has found some of the children of this elect lady still walking with the Lord and in knowledge of the truth of God.

Now John wrote that God’s love is manifested to us in two very practical ways:

- Our love for each other
- Our obedience to God’s commandments (not suggestions)

If professed Christian experience does not reflect obedience in those two vital areas, how real can the experience be?

A generation ago, the faith of our fathers was severely attacked by a man named Joseph Fletcher who wrote a book dealing with what he called situational ethics. His theory suggested that the Ten Commandments might be alright in most cases; however in some cases it would be OK to pick and choose which commandments to obey. In other words, the rules of God, according to Fletcher, were “situational.” For example, we are commanded not to steal. Fletcher posited that it depended upon if we were hungry or not. Not so, said John. If we love God, we obey Him.

In verses 7-11, John changed gears and warned of the antichrist. He warned that there
would come among us those who denied the Incarnation - the fact that Jesus became a man and dwelt among us. John strongly wrote that anyone denying the Incarnation already had the spirit of antichrist. The spirit of deception is still at work, I believe stronger than ever. Churches that water down the Gospel so that serving Jesus is "convenient" are popping up everywhere. They grow because nothing is expected of the church-goers except to "have fun."

Our sure defense is the "Word of God." Read it! Spend time in it!

III JOHN

There are only 14 verses in this little book, but they are powerful. John wrote this about 85 AD to a person named Gaius. We don't know for sure who that was. But the contents have to do with a developing situation in a local church which had John greatly concerned.

3 John 1:1-4  KJV  The elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.

[2] Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. [3] For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. [4] I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

Verse 2 has been taken by so many media preachers and distorted. "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers." This passage has been the foundational scripture for the prosperity "gospel." But they don't really emphasize the caveat: "...as your soul prospers..." The truth is that if many folks prospered materially the way they have prospered spiritually they would starve to death. There is no way could ever accept a teaching that Jesus died on that horrible cross of torture so I could drive a better car. The issue that made John so happy about Gaius is that HE WAS WALKING IN TRUTH.

The Issue

Apparently the issue was that a church had allowed an anti-missionary, anti-hospitality spirit to pervade it. It was led by a renegade named Diotrephes.

3 John 1:9-14  I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. [10] Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth
them that would, and casteth them out of the church. [11] Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God. [12] Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true. [13] I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: [14] But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name.

That’s quite a tale of two men, both names beginning with “D.” Diotrephes was a self-serving fellow who liked to be seen of all and applauded, but was a tight-fisted scrooge who cared little for those around him. Demetrius, on the other hand, took God’s work seriously - but didn’t take himself very seriously. He cared about others. John wrote this little book in an effort to make the church take these fellows at face-value and act accordingly.

JUDE

Jude was the half-brother of Jesus, as was James. Matthew 13:55 Is not this the carpenter’s son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? (Jude) Neither man accepted Jesus as Messiah until after the resurrection; then both became ardent followers.

I have always felt that Protestantism has ignored Mary. She was a wonderful person. It was no accident that she was chosen of God to bear the Son of God, but that does not mean she is to be lifted up above all other people. She takes her own rightful place. Elizabeth called her blessed among women, not blessed ABOVE all women. Mary herself confessed her need of a Savior (Luke 1:47). Therefore the brief period through which the church went when the family of the Lord Jesus was elevated to a very high position would certainly have been opposed by James and Jude. They themselves took the position of being merely bond slaves of Jesus Christ.

THRU THE BIBLE / J. VERNON MCGEE / VOLUME V/ P 846 / NELSON PUBLISHER

The theme of Jude is assurance of salvation in a time of apostasy (falling away spiritually). This little book is a warning of a time when people would deny the faith, even while professing a “sort of” gospel.

As the church entered its second and third generation, false teachers came to teach their heresies. Their goal was money and power. Apparently they were already having success in the church. These false teachers had led some to believe that the grace of
God was so all-encompassing that the believer could engage in all sorts of evil and still be
covered by the bloc of Christ. Not only were these teachers doomed for all eternity,
they were seeking to take a lot of company with them.

Jude 1:5-11 New Living Bible I must remind you—and you know it well—that even
though the Lord rescued the whole nation of Israel from Egypt, he later destroyed
every one of those who did not remain faithful. [6] And I remind you of the angels
who did not stay within the limits of authority God gave them but left the place
where they belonged. God has kept them chained in prisons of darkness, waiting for
the day of judgment. [7] And don't forget the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and
their neighboring towns, which were filled with sexual immorality and every kind of
sexual perversion. Those cities were destroyed by fire and are a warning of the
eternal fire that will punish all who are evil.

[8] Yet these false teachers, who claim authority from their dreams, live immoral
lives, defy authority, and scoff at the power of the glorious ones. [9] But even
Michael, one of the mightiest of the angels, did not dare accuse Satan of blasphemy,
but simply said, "The Lord rebuke you." (This took place when Michael was
arguing with Satan about Moses' body.) [10] But these people mock and curse the
things they do not understand. Like animals, they do whatever their instincts tell
them, and they bring about their own destruction. [11] How terrible it will be for
them! For they follow the evil example of Cain, who killed his brother. Like Balaam,
they will do anything for money. And like Korah, they will perish because of their
rebellion.

Jude called for believers to put a halt to this heresy and to content to the faith, to return to
the teachings of Jesus. His warning was an appeal to history, which teaches that once
corruption of truth sets in, disaster is just around the corner. Jude used seven examples
from the Word:
1. The Hebrews themselves, whom God had saved from Egyptian bondage and delivered
them across the Red Sea... but once again many clamored against God.
2. The rebellion against Moses, led by a fellow named Korah (Numbers 16)
3. Sodom and Gomorrah
4. Satan contended with Michael over the body of Moses. When Moses died, God
Himself buried him on Mount Nebo; but Satan wanted the body for some nefarious
purpose. Michael, the greatest of angels (since Satan - Lucifer - fell) would not speak
against Satan except to say, "God rebuke you!" In other words, Michael knew his place
in God's program and would not over-reach himself.
5. Cain, the first murderer
6. Balaam - the money-hungry prophet
7. Korah who spoke against Moses and Aaron and God killed him and his buddies.
Thus Jude showed from history that the church was on a deadly course by following false teachers. In the next two verses, Jude descriptions of the type of persons the heretics were (the products of rebellion):

Jude 1:12-16 New Living Bible

When these people join you in fellowship meals celebrating the love of the Lord, they are like dangerous reefs that can shipwreck you. They are shameless in the way they care only about themselves. They are like clouds blowing over dry land without giving rain, promising much but producing nothing. They are like trees without fruit at harvesttime. They are not only dead but doubly dead, for they have been
pulled out by the roots. [13] They are like wild waves of the sea, churning up the dirty foam of their shameful deeds. They are wandering stars, heading for everlasting gloom and darkness.
[14] Now Enoch, who lived seven generations after Adam, prophesied about these people. He said, "Look, the Lord is coming with thousands of his holy ones. [15] He will bring the people of the world to judgment. He will convict the ungodly of all the evil things they have done in rebellion and of all the insults that godless sinners have spoken against him." [16] These people are grumblers and complainers, doing whatever evil they feel like. They are loudmouthed bragglarts, and they flatter others to get favors in return.

God would strike these heretics, Jude wrote, with fierce vengeance. It is a dangerous and terrible thing to be a spreader of false teaching in God’s church.

So how should the believer defend against heresies? Jude 1:20-25 TLB But you, dear friends, must continue to build your lives on the foundation of your holy faith. And continue to pray as you are directed by the Holy Spirit. [21] Live in such a way that God’s love can bless you as you wait for the eternal life that our Lord Jesus Christ in his mercy is going to give you. [22] Show mercy to those whose faith is wavering. [23] Rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment. There are still others to whom you need to show mercy, but be careful that you aren’t contaminated by their sins. [24] And now, all glory to God, who is able to keep you from stumbling, and who will bring you into his glorious presence innocent of sin and with great joy. [25] All glory to him, who alone is God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Yes, glory, majesty, power, and authority belong to him, in the beginning, now, and forevermore. Amen.

Engage in spiritual exercise in the Word and Prayer. Be diligent about it!

NEXT WEEK: WE CLOSE ROUTE 66 WITH THE BOOK OF REVELATION.