

December 26

1 John, 2 John, & 3 John

Your reading today was from 1st, 2nd and 3rd John. These little letters are some of the last books of the New Testament to be written. They are from the apostle John at the end of his life. John, as you may know, also wrote the gospel of John and the book of Revelation.

As far as we know, only John, of all Jesus' disciples, lived to an old age and died a natural death. He survived for many years beyond the deaths of Jesus' other disciples. He was the last man living who had walked with Jesus. The Christians at the end of the first century hung on every word John spoke or wrote.

John begins by referring to Jesus as "The Word" and writes as an eyewitness who had heard, seen and even touched the Lord Jesus who had lived on the earth. This is the same way he begins the gospel of John and is a hallmark of his writing. The "Word" is 'logos' in the Greek and is the eternal logic, and communication of God.

Another hallmark of John is the symbolism of Jesus as the light. Jesus called Himself, "The Light of the World" in John 8.12 and the theme of light appears prominently in 1st John. Chapter 1. Jesus is light and brings light into a dark world. Light exposes everything. Imagine walking into a dark bedroom and flipping on the light. Immediately you can tell if it is neat or messy, clean or dirty. Immediately you can see where it is safe and unsafe. Jesus' light exposes the sincerity of our faith and the messes in our life just as easily.

Fortunately, right after the prologue is one of the most precious verses in all of Scripture in chapter 1, verse 9: "If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This verse is an assurance to all who call themselves believers in Jesus that when we sin we can confess it and be forgiven.

John urges his readers to live out the "the new command" Jesus gave that "we love one another". In this little letter of just 5 brief chapters, John will refer to it four times as the application of how to live in the Light.

There are at least 3 different classes of believers that John addresses: Little children; young men and fathers in chapter 2. John's assumption is that the body of Christ is comprised of people who are at different stages in their spiritual development. We start out as children; develop spiritually like young people, and move on mature spiritually as fathers. That is NOT an automatic process but it is unnatural NOT to grow. God expects us to grow up in our relationship to Jesus to live in light and to love one another.

John tells believers how to live out their life in this light by doing what is right. As we do we will be ready when Jesus returns (2.29-3.3). On the flip side, John is equally concerned that some of his readers test their relationship with Jesus to ensure that they are part of God's forever family. John offers us some tests. If we pass these tests then we can be absolutely sure that our relationship with God is genuine. If we do not pass these tests, then we have no right to call ourselves children of God.

The first of John's 3 tests is a moral test - the test of obedience. We know that our relationship with God through Christ is for real if we obey Him and live out his commands in our daily lives.

The second test of is a social one - the test of love. John would never forget Jesus' words at the Last Supper: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." This test will prove the moral test of obedience.

The third test is a doctrinal one. The 'test' is the belief that Jesus Christ is God. You cannot be a Christian and question the deity of Christ. He is God who was made flesh who came to earth to dwell among us (John 1.14; 1 John 5.6-9). John's hope is that these tests will give us confidence of our place in God's family (5.13-15).

In the next two letters there are two items that are apparent. Just as 1st John is a letter to all Christians everywhere, so 2nd and 3rd John are personal letters addressed to specific individuals, "The chosen lady" and John's personal friend Gaius.

In 1st, 2nd and 3rd John, the Christian life is called a "walk." In 1st John we were exhorted to not walk in darkness but to walk in the light. Second John exhorts us to "walk in obedience and love"; 3rd John uses the expression to "walk in truth". In all of these we see the way to live out our relationship to Jesus and his church.

John's focus at the end of 2nd John and through 3rd John is for these churches to be able to discern right teaching. If someone teaches otherwise the believers were not welcome them into their home. It was natural that traveling believers should be given hospitality by members of local churches. Genuine Christian missionaries, John writes, may be recognized both by the message they bring and by the motive which inspires them. If they faithfully proclaim Jesus as God made flesh and go out to proclaim him, then they should be both received and sent out on their way in a manner worth of God.

As John ends his 3rd letter he writes about us imitating what is good. If someone imitates Jesus, then he is from God. Demetrius was one of those who lived this way. Look for examples around you of believers who love God and others, live like Jesus and obey what Jesus taught in his Word. These are the ones who

hold up John's tests or standard of living in the Light. Remember that the Christian life is lived one day at a time depending on the Spirit of God who will lead you and help you to be more like Jesus. Blessings on you as you continue to read. Thanks for receiving the insights that God has given to me.