

Slow Food Bible Studies: 1 John (35 studies), 2 and 3 John (8 studies)

These three documents are similar to each other and to the Fourth Gospel in style and language; although they do not bear the name of John the apostle and brother of James, they have traditionally been ascribed to him and were probably written in the last decade of the first century to combat false teaching about Christ and this-world-centred attitudes. Though John takes no part in the story of the early church after Acts 8:14, he is mentioned as meeting Paul at Jerusalem (Gal 2:9), and is very probably the John named as the author of the book of Revelation (1:1 etc). He is recorded as having lived and ministered at Ephesus in Asia Minor (western Turkey), where he died in the early days of Trajan's reign (AD/CE 98-117).

John's sequence of thought is sometimes difficult to follow as he seems to be recapitulating one moment and changing track abruptly at the next. However, he transmits mainstream Christian teaching and 1 John in particular has always been found devotionally stimulating. His first letter is more a tract than a personal letter, and is full of pastoral concern for Christians whom he calls his 'little children'. The second and third letters are much shorter, but punch above their weight; 2 John is apparently to a 'lady' which may be a cover name for a church, while 3 John is to 'Gaius' who seems to be an actual individual. For the issues involved in authorship, dating and purpose, see commentaries such as: John Stott *The Epistles of John* (Tyndale/IVP 1964, 2nd ed 2009); David Jackman *The Message of John's Letters* (BST/IVP 1988, 2nd ed 1992); Tom Wright *Early Christian Letters for Everyone* (SPCK 2011).

The text is split into sections of a few verses at a time, affording a manageable daily study. Those who want to get a move on can combine sections. The questions are not exhaustive (nor, we hope, exhausting!); they may be tackled using more than one version of the Bible, and commentaries to taste. The 'I' form is used to encourage individual study, but can be changed to 'we' for group study. Cross-references (usually limited to three and in biblical order) chase up similar ideas in the rest of the Bible, but were not necessarily in the mind of the original human author.

1 John

- 1:1-4 How does my experience of Jesus Christ differ from that of the first apostles? Is my faith therefore secondhand? *Jn 1:1; Eph 3:14-19; Rev 3:20.*
- 1:5-7 What is 'darkness'? How can I avoid 'walking in' it? *Jn 3:19-21; 8:12; Eph 5:8-16.*
- 1:8-10 What response do I make to God's word when it puts me in the wrong? *2 Sam 12:13; Prov 28:20; Heb 4:12-16.*
- 2:1-2 If forgiveness is so readily available, does it matter how often I sin? *Isa 53:11; Rom 6:13; Heb 7:25.*
- 2:3-6 Can I ever be sure that I 'know' Christ? *Phil 3:10; 2 Tim 1:12; 2 Pet 3:18.*
- 2:7-8 Why is the command to love both 'old' and 'new'? *Lev 19:18; Mt 5:44, 6:12; Jn 13:34.*
- 2:9-11 Does my attitude toward some people (whether they profess belief in Christ or not) amount to 'hatred'? What can I do about it? *Mic 7:8; Rom 12:19-20; 1 Cor 13:4-7.*
- 2:12-14 Which Christian age-group am I in? What about those with whom I am chiefly involved? What is the keynote experience of these groups? *Jn 17:3; Eph 1:7, 6:10ff; Eph 4:15 (the TISCA motto!).*
- 2:15-17 What's wrong with enjoying life to the full? *Gen 3:6; Ps 16:11; Jn 10:10.*
- 2:18-23 Do I pass the tests of a true Christian? *Mk 8:38; Jn 1:14; 2 Cor 13:5.*
- 2:24-27 Am I being 'deceived'? If so, by what or by whom? *Gal 6:5; Col 2:4, 8; Jas 1:13, 16.*
- 2:28-29 If Christ were to come back today, would I be embarrassed? *Ps 119:1-3; 1Thess 5:23-24; 2 Pet 3:14.*
- 3:1-3 What difference does God's love make to my life and service? *Rom 14:4; 2 Cor 5:14; 1 Jn 4:19.*
- 3:4-6 What are John's arguments against sin? Do I agree from the heart with all of them? *Mt 7:21-23; Jn 8:29, 46; Heb 10:5-10.*
- 3:7-10 Why does John go on about sin and righteousness? Surely Jesus dealt with all that on the cross? *Rom 6:6; Gal 6:14-15; 1 Pet 2:24.*
- 3:11-15 Is the fact that I have 'passed from death to life' evidenced by my attitude to others? *Gen 4:1-10; Gal 5:19-21, 6:9-10.*

- 3:16-18 'Loving everybody in general may be an excuse for loving nobody in particular' (Greville Lewis). Am I failing to respond to an obvious case of need? *Exod 23:44-5; Lk 10:33, 15:30; Jas 2:14-16.*
- 3:19-22 Is there anything I need to settle before I can be sure that God answers my prayers? *Ps 37:4; Ps 66:18-19; Heb 9:14.*
- 3:23-24 Is the Christian life impossible? *Jn 15:5; Phil 4:13; 1 Jn 5:3b.*
- 4:1-3 Am I too orthodox? *Mt 13:52; Phil 3:15; Col 2:6-7.*
- 4:4-6 What stops me capitulating to this world's viewpoint? *Jer 9:23-24; Jn 16:33; 1 Cor 2:14.*
- 4:7-8 If I have come to know God in Christ, do I love more, or less, than I used to? *Ps 63:8; Lk 15:29; Rev 2:14, 19; Rev 3:8, 15.*
- 4:9-10 Do I take the love of God for granted? *Ps 116:1; Jn 13:1; Rom 12:1-2.*
- 4:11-12 If God is invisible, how can people know what he is like? *Jn 17:20-23; Eph 4:31-5:2.*
- 4:13-16 How do the cross, the Bible and the Spirit reassure me of God's love for me? *Jn 1:29; Rom 8:15-16; Gal 4:4-7.*
- 4:17-19 Why are love and fear of judgment incompatible? *Jn 5:24; Rom 8:32-34; Rom 15:13.*
- 4:20-21 Is it easier to love God or to love my fellow-Christian or neighbour? *Mt 22:37-38; 1 Thess 3:12, 4:6, 5:12-15.*
- 5:1-3 If I am finding the Christian life hard work, am I missing the point of it? *Ps 55:22; Mt 11:28-30; Mt 23:4; 1 Pet 1:22-23.*
- 5:4-5 Is the pull of the world too strong for me? *2 Tim 4:10a; 2 Pet 1:4; 1 Jn 4:4.*
- 5:6-9 In these difficult verses, John may be saying that baptism, the cross and the Holy Spirit all unite in confirming our faith. How? *Rom 6:3-4; 1 Cor 6:11; Heb 10:19-22.*
- 5:10-13 What is the difference between belief and unbelief? *Isa 53:1; Jn 5:39-40; Jn 20:31.*
- 5:14-15 How can I pray more expectantly? *Mk 11:22-24; Jn 14:13-14; Eph 3:20-21.*
- 5:16-17 Can my intercession for an apparently unrepentant person make any difference? *Acts 8:21-24; 2 Tim 2:25-26; Heb 6:4; Jas 5:15.*
- 5:18-19 Is the Christian life just a matter of not doing 'worldly' things? *Mt 6:13; Jn 17:15; 1 Jn 2:15-17.*
- 5:20-21 How can I be certain that what I worship is the one true God? *Exod 34:6-7; Jer 31:34; Jn 1:18.*

2 John

- 1-3 If 'the truth which lives in me' is Christ, what does he mean to me? *Mt 28:20; Jn 14:17; 2 Th 3:16.*
- 4-6 What would it mean in practice to obey Jesus' command to love others? *Jn 15:12-13; 2 Cor 12:15a; Phil 2:4.*
- 7-9 Am I in danger of 'running ahead' of the sound Christian instruction I have (presumably) been given? *Jn 8:44; Col 1:15-20; 1Th 2:19.*
- 10-13 How friendly should I be to those who disagree with me? *Mt 12:30; Mk 9:38-41; Rom 16:17.*

3 John

- 1-4 If people knew what I am getting up to today, would they be able to confirm that I not only know 'the truth', but am living up to it? *Mt 23:27-28; Phil 2:15-16; Tit 1:15-16.*
- 5-8 Do people who depend on me for solid support actually get it? *Prov 25:11-14; Mt 25:35-36; Heb 13:1-4.*
- 9-10 Does my criticism of others spring from self-importance? *Prov 8:13; Rom 12:16; 1 Pet 5:5-6.*
- 11-15 How good am I? *Tit 2:7-14; James 3:11-13.*