



Welcome to Living Way Bible Study

Thank you for your order! It is our prayer that the Holy Spirit will use this study to help you grow in your knowledge and appreciation of our God and His Word. "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 3:18

WHO WE ARE

Living Way Bible Study, Inc. is an auxiliary of the Pacific Southwest District of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS). All studies are written and/or edited by LCMS pastors. We have been providing studies to churches throughout the U.S. and Canada since 1982.

YOUR ORDER

These studies are available by email (pdf-file) or snail-mail (hard copy). For a *suggested* donation of \$1-per-lesson within a study (e.g., 23-lesson study of John is \$23) you receive an original of the study, from which you are then free to make copies for your class. Please honor our copyright of these materials.

All studies have the same basic format, using an effective four-step approach for Bible study. Please see the following pages for additional information on these four steps, as well as helpful hints for facilitating these studies.

As a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that relies solely on freewill donations, *additional donations are much appreciated* and enable us to continue to produce and promote the study of God's Word.

CONTACT US

If you have any questions or comments on this study or any part of it, please contact us. We are always eager to hear from "our students" and appreciate your comments.

May God bless you as you walk in His Living Way!

Living Way Bible Study, Inc.

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LWBS Four-Step Method

Living Way Bible Study suggests this four-step method:

- PERSONAL The student prays for guidance from the Holy Spirit and answers the Personal Application (P.A.) questions at home using only the Bible (no commentaries).
- 2. SMALL GROUPS The class meets for an opening and divides into small groups of 8–10 people. The small group leader guides the group through the P.A. questions, encouraging each to share their answers and discuss further as time allows.
- THE MESSAGE The lecture or message is given by a pastor or layperson who has researched the material and presents the study, giving personal insight and augmenting, but not duplicating, the author's comments.
- THE NARRATIVE The author's comments or narrative, along with the P.A. questions for the next lesson, are given out at the end of the class. At the next class meeting, before answering the P.A. questions, the small groups may choose to review the author's comments of the last lesson, and share what each has highlighted as meaningful or important.

Each lesson should be stapled together according to the number of the lesson in the right-hand corner of the page. The P.A. questions for the next week should be attached after the author's narrative for the current week, as they will be the home study for the next class session.

The first meeting of the class is an introduction to the study. Since the members of the small groups have no P.A. questions to discuss at the first meeting, they may use the time to get acquainted or to tell what they hope to receive by studying this course. At the first meeting, the lecturer presents background information about the course, using the Introduction lesson as a guide.

With this four-step method the student has the opportunity to study the particular section of Scripture covered by the lesson from four different approaches. This emphasizes the Bible text and gives the student an understanding and ownership for each section studied.



What our Students are Saying...

Lakeside Community Lutheran Church (Webster,

WI): "Our Bible Study in Genesis is in full swing and I had to let you know so far it is a great success. We have been struggling for some time attracting people to our studies and finally I think we have hit the jackpot! We have a full house (room) of enthusiastic, constant participants, including MEN! Our lessons are animated to say the least and everyone participates fully. ... We have been using your studies since 2003 and really enjoy them as they are very precise and informative, easy to understand and uplifting."

Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church (Anza, CA): "We will be beginning our fourth year of Living Way Bible Study... It has been such a blessing for our church...nurturing the women of our congregation and as an outreach to our community. The Lord has blessed us with women from the community and brought at least three of them into membership in our church."

Palisades Lutheran Church (Pacific Palisades,

CA): "Our breakfast Prayer Group again finds your studies helpful and rewarding."

St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church (Stryker, OH - Pastor): "Our group leaders are very pleased with the additional background information that is provided with Living Way courses."

Faith Lutheran Church (Sequim, WA): "Currently in our 10th year ...continue to be blessed... have between 70-90+ men and women... some are non-members of our church... use to plug new members in."

St. James Lutheran Church (Cleveland, OH): "...we greatly appreciate the ministry of Living Way Bible Study! They're all very good! ..."

Faith Lutheran Church (Sequim, WA): "I'm looking forward to our study that your ministry has blessed us with ... Your study allows one to go as deep as time permits or give the simplest most direct answer ... providing materials for us to become proficient in His living and active Word."

Holy Cross Lutheran Church (San Diego, CA): "The women...continue to enjoy the lessons you provide. We have had many lively discussions over the questions in the lessons."

Lakeside Community Lutheran Church (Webster, WI- ELCA): "Your studies are excellent and we look forward to each study we undertake."

Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd (Olympia, WA - ELCA): "We're starting into year 12!...We've been enjoying all of the studies and appreciate your service."

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church (Tacoma, WA): "Living Way Bible Study has been an excellent study that we have used for almost 30 years."

Bethany Lutheran Church (Long Beach, CA): "We are going on our 30th year in LWBS. Our group of about 40 really loves it and grows in our faith with each new study."

Crown of Life Lutheran Church (Sun City, AZ): "I used the Thessalonians study for the Ministry Staff Retreat (7 of us) and will be repeating a small portion of the study for a three week session with approximately 50 adults. The material is excellent and very helpful to me as I prepare to teach."



The Letters of John; 1, 2, 3

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DR. ROBERT HOLST

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LWBS Courses: The Gospel According to John

The Letters of John; 1 John, 2 John, 3 John

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The Letters of John; 1, 2, 3

DR. ROBERT HOLST

Lesson 1

INTRODUCTION

PERSONAL APPLICATION - 2 JOHN 1:1-13

5

"First John is more like a tract or a sermon. It gives no explicit information identifying either author or reader. Second and Third John tell us, although in cryptic terms, who wrote and who received the letter and the names of people involved in the life of the church. I think that First John grows in meaning if studied after Second and Third John."

The Letters of John deal with issues of life and death. Reading the letters makes one think that John writes in times much like our own. People seem to be forgetting the Gospel truths or reworking them to fit their own opinions. In such threatening times, John writes to defend Christian truth and to expose human error. God's love for people stands affirmed again and again. The meaning of Jesus in human life is presented and explained as a precious truth. Christian love toward God and each other receives encouragement many times. As you read these letters note how many times the words dealing with life, love, truth, abiding (in God, in truth, or in love), and confessing appear. On the negative side, sin, deceit, and hate appear.

The Johannine letters speak to problems within a Christian community. Almost every group of Christians faces two challenges. On the one hand, the church proclaims the Gospel to people who do not hold the faith. It does mission work. On the other hand, the church must defend the faith even from enemies within. It deals with false teaching. The Johannine letters deal primarily with struggles within the church.

In most churches there occur two types of struggles. At times, a congregation faces stress because of personal differences. Two people may hold the same faith but they argue about ways and means to serve God. Sadly, a congregation may face serious divisions within over opinions about things as non-essential as the color of a new carpet, whether or not to buy a new hymnal, or what time to worship. At other times, a congregation faces conflict within because of a theological threat. People disagree on fundamental Christian truths. Although Second and Third John report some tension between people, the Johannine Letters mainly address theological conflict within the church. John's readers face heresy. False teachers within the church threaten the faith. John wants bad theology recognized for what it is and stopped.

"The Gospel's goal was to share the life giving power of Jesus' name so that people could believe and live. John's Letters also want people to believe and have life."

In some ways, the Johannine Epistles continue the tradition of Christian proclamation started in the Gospel of John. The Gospel stated, "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). The Gospel's goal was to share the life giving power of Jesus' name so that people could believe and live. John's Letters also want people to believe and have life. John's First Letter begins by reminding people about the initial revelation and experience of Christians and the fellowship they have with each other in the Father and in Jesus Christ. The purpose? "We write this to make our joy complete" (1 John 1:4). There is joy in sharing the Gospel. Some early Greek manuscripts have "We write to make your joy complete." The ancient variation also captures the purpose of the letter. Sharing the Gospel gives both giver and receiver joy.

First John begins its concluding remarks with the words, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13, NIV). The letter concludes with three direct statements. "We know that anyone born of God does not continue in sin... We know that we are children of God and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true..." (1 John 5:18-20). John writes so that Christians may know their unique relationship to God.

On a more somber note, in his first letter John also writes because of a threatening theological problem, "I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray" (1 John 2:26). The document's last words present a poignant plea, "Dear Children, keep yourselves from idols." The body of the document presents theological statements seeking to support the faithful and defeat the faithless. First John wants people to know the truth of God's work in Jesus and to reject error.

The short letters of Second and Third John are more personal and direct although they also carry a forceful concern for life giving Christology. In both letters, the author identifies himself as "the elder" (2 & 3 John 1). Probably the self-designation reflects the office or honor given the author by the early Christians more than his age. Second John 1 addresses a chosen lady and her children which probably is reference to a congregation and its members. Third John 1 addresses a dear friend Gaius who is clearly an influential and hospitable Christian. Both letters offer personal suggestions but state that there is much more to write. The author prefers to make a brief written contact preliminary to a personal visit (2 John 12, and 3 John 13).

To be fair, I should note two assumptions lying behind my own approach to the Johannine Letters. In your reading of other scholarly writings you will find scholars who disagree with my conclusions. First, I think that the Gospel of John and the Three Johannine Letters have the same author. Various commentaries will describe the problem in detail. Concordia Study Bible gives a good summary on the authorship issues together with information supportive to my opinion.

"As the mission work progresses, John is inspired to write the Gospel."

As a second working hypothesis, I think that the Johannine Letters were written after the Gospel of John. None of the documents is precisely dated so one must draw inferences from the writings themselves. I envision a historical process something like the following. John, the Son of Zebedee, begins mission work, probably in Ephesus, speaking the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles. As the mission work progresses, John is inspired to write the Gospel. The written word explains the life of Jesus in order to support the faith among new Christians and emphasizes the relationship of Jesus to the Father because people, especially the monotheistic Jews, found it hard to accept the divinity of Jesus.

Unfortunately, the Gospel was misused. The Gospel's description of Jesus was not kept in historical perspective. People became so enamored with the divinity of Jesus

that they down-played, and then denied, His humanity. Tragically, the Gospel of John became the favorite Gospel of heretics who denied the humanity of Jesus and accepted only His divinity. I think that the Letters of John were written when that heresy began. The Letters note, describe and try to stop the tendency to deny the humanity of Jesus. The task is important because if one denies that Jesus came as a human being, then He could not suffer and die for sin. As Son of God He could reveal truth but He would not be the Suffering Servant and Savior sent by God. Without Jesus' human blood, there is no atoning sacrifice. Ironically, therefore, the Johannine Letters seek to correct false thinking which arose from lack of care in reading the Gospel of John. In summary, our study proceeds on the premise that the readers of the Johannine Letters know the Gospel of John. I like the Concordia Self-Study Bible suggestion that John's Gospel was written about AD 85 and the letters within the next decade (p. 1925).

"First John makes historical and theological sense as a dynamic written response to people in the situation developing in Second and Third John."

I believe there is a logical progression in the Letters of John, as well. For our Bible study we are going to study Second John and Third John before we study First John. Although that order may seem strange, there are good reasons for doing so. Reading the three letters carefully, we learn that Second John was written warning people about false doctrine and telling them to ostracize false teachers. Third John gives evidence that the advice was rejected. Instead of rejecting the false teachers, a church leader rejected the messengers of the truth. In such circumstances, it is logical and necessary to write a second letter, which is the letter we call Third John. I think John refers to Second John when he mentions a previous letter in 3 John 9. What if Third John also did not solve the problem? In both Second and Third John, the author notes that the letters are preliminary to a "hoped for" personal discussion. If the brief letters did not solve the problem, and, in fact, hostility grew, John may have been forced to set aside the desire not to use "paper and ink" but to have a face to face conversation. First John makes historical and theological sense as a dynamic written response to people in the situation developing in Second and Third John. First

John may contain the "much" that John preferred to talk about rather than write (2 John 12 & 3 John 13).

My primary reason for not studying 1, 2, 3 John in the traditional order, is that First John seems easier to understand if Second and Third John are studied first. Second and Third John are genuine letters and provide information that gives a historical context for all the letters. First John is more like a tract or a sermon. It gives no explicit information identifying either author or reader. Second and Third John tell us, although in cryptic terms, who wrote and who received the letter and the names of people involved in the life of the church. I think that First John grows in meaning if studied after Second and Third John.

Furthermore, we are free to make such a change because the order in which the letters are printed in Greek or our English Bibles may not be the order in which they were written. Human tradition, not divine revelation, put them in the standard order of First, Second and Third John. The order may simply be based on length. It is true that for centuries early Christian theologians debated whether Second and Third John deserved to be in the Bible. The letters are therefore called "antilegomena," or "spoken against." I suspect the letters were debated not because they were written later or by a different author, as some theologians think, but because they are overshadowed by the great theological presentation of First John. Second and Third John do not carry much meaning when compared to First John but they do make First John more meaningful.

If reading the letters in the order of Second, then Third and finally First John disturbs you, by all means study the letters in the traditional way. On the other hand, remember that the order of the books in our Bible stands on human tradition and was not established by God. Many old Greek manuscripts, for example, have the Gospels in a different order than our modern sequence of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. As another example, the letters of Paul are printed in our Bibles by order of length, with one exception, and not according to the time of writing. The Pauline letters to churches are Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians. In fact, many scholars think that First Thessalonians was the first Biblical letter that Paul wrote. It seems certain that Romans was written after the Corinthian letters. Following the letters

First John warns about loving the world and not loving other ('hristians. Such love is not merely an attitude or emotion. It means actions such as sharing material things. Such love is possible because of God's love.

to churches come the Pauline letters to individuals (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon). Listed last is Philemon although Philemon was written years before 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus.

As stated above, First John is more like a tract or a sermon. Unlike a typical New Testament letter, the first four verses of First John give no information about who wrote or who received the letter. There is no salutation or blessing as in Second and Third John, or in the first verses of every Pauline letter. Instead, First John begins with words that remind one of the prologue of the Gospel of John (John 1:1-18). The Word, from the beginning, appeared in this world. First John's initial theological rebuke is for people who think that they have not sinned (1 John 1:5-8). Such an opinion makes God a liar. Weaving together Christological truths with warnings about antichrists and antichristian behavior, First John warns about loving the world and not loving other Christians. Such love is not merely an attitude or emotion. It means actions such as sharing material things. Such love is possible because of God's love. Liars claim to love Jesus but do not carry out His commands. Children of God love God and live in love. They believe Jesus gives eternal life. Second John makes two main points. First, live in love. Second, reject false teaching. In fact, do not even practice hospitality to a false teacher. Third John is a more complicated little letter. It notes rejection, warns about imitating evil, and seems to support a church leader. The letter ends with an exchange of friendly greetings.

In conclusion, read the Johannine Letters seeking God's truth but bold enough to recognize that errors tempt us, and that we must rely on His unchanging Word. Regardless of the order in which we study the Bible, it is important to remember the words of Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Listen to God's love story and God's call to us to love in a world filled with hate and hate makers. May the Letters of John affect you, on the one hand, like a loving letter from a dear friend. May you grow in awareness of how wonderful it is to be alive as a Christian. On the other hand, may the Letters of John affect you like a warning letter from a wise teacher. May you grow in alertness to threats to being alive as a Christian.

PERSONAL APPLICATION - 2 JOHN 1:1-13

Dear Lord, open my thoughts, emotions and actions to be affected by God's truth in the Letters of John. In Jesus Name. Amen.

1.	In the <i>Concordia Self-Study Bible</i> or a different translation that has notes, read an introductory statement about 2 John List information that seems important.
2.	Read 2 John in its entirety. In general, what problem or problems does 2 John discuss?
	How does 2 John seek to solve the problem or problems?
3.	Who wrote 2 John, verse one?
	Do you think the author's title is meant to be understood literally or figuratively? Explain your answer.
4.	Who receives the letter (v. 1)?
	How is the receiver's description to be understood?
5.	The word "truth" appears three times in verses 1 and 2. What do you think the word means in this context?
	Why might "truth" be so emphasized as 2 John begins?
	What does "truth" mean for your Christian faith and life?
ô.	Share what the blessing of 2 John v. 3 means to you.
7.	How would you explain "walking in truth" (v. 4)?

	What other expressions in verses 5 & 6 help interpret this phrase?
8.	According to verse 4, how many people are "walking in the truth?"
	What church problem might arise from this situation?
9.	In what specific ways can you apply verse 6 to your life?
10.	What do the deceivers not acknowledge (v. 7)?
11.	List ways in which people today practice the same deceit.
12.	Apply the following references to how people "deny that Jesus came in the flesh" when they forget that God's love applies to life now, and that faith is not simply about life after death in heaven? (Matthew 25:37-40, 44-46, Luke 19:10, John 1:14, 1 John 3:18)
13.	What is the warning in verse 8 and how can you apply it to your life?
14.	How do you interpret verse 9?
15.	What is the directive of verse 10?
16.	What people or things could pose such a threat today that we should not "take them into our house or welcome them?" Why?
17.	Relate a time when a personal visit is "better" than writing someone. (v. 12)
18.	If we relate "lady" (v. 1) and "sister" (v. 13) to Christian churches, what spiritual meaning do we express by calling then "God's family" or "sister churches?"



The Letters of John; 1, 2, 3

DR. ROBERT HOLST

Lesson 2

2 JOHN 1-13

PERSONAL APPLICATION - 3 JOHN 1-15

11

"(omplete joy comes from sharing with others the love of Jesus (hrist."

The brevity of Second John underscores its urgency. Like a parent writing to a child urging cautious action before they have a long talk, Second John expresses concern quickly and concisely. The author asks that we love one another (v.5), watch out for deceivers (v.8) and avoid anyone who works evil (v.10). The advice is timely and timeless. Whatever our age or circumstance, the essential message of Second John is relevant. The message is as direct as the prophetic words of Amos, "Hate evil, love good" (Amos 5:15). Careful study of the letter, however, enables us to understand its teaching better and use it with more meaning.

Second John begins like a typical ancient letter. Like a business letter written in our culture, the sender and addressee are identified before the message of the letter begins. "The elder" writes to "the chosen lady and her children." From our distant point in history, we wish the words would be more specific. Who is the elder and what does the term mean? "The elder" could literally refer to an "older" person. The same Greek word carries a literal meaning in I Timothy 5:1 and describes an "older" brother in Luke 15:25. On the other hand, the Gospels show that the title identified religious leaders in the Jewish tradition (Luke 7:3, 20:1, 22:52). The word is used also as a title of respect for a Christian leader not only in 1 Timothy (cf. 5:17 and 19) but frequently in Revelation. (Revelation 4:4, 10; 5:5,6,8,11,14; 7:11,13; 11:16; 14:3 and 19:4). It seems certain that the author of Second John uses the title to address people in a relationship of love and respect.

The letter goes to "the chosen lady and her children." Although this could literally address a woman and her family, almost certainly that is a lovely way of referring to a congregation and members of the congregation. The closing greeting seems to have the same meaning (2 John 13). In a similar way when Peter sent greetings to people in Asia Minor he talked of a "woman" who was "chosen" with them. Speaking of church members as children is somewhat parallel to when Peter and Paul referred to Mark and Onesimus respectively as their sons (I Peter 5:13, Philemon 10).

On the basis of tradition or scholarly theory, we might expect the letter to begin, "John, the son of Zebedee, to the church and its members at

Ephesus." Why is such specific language not used? Reflect for a moment on what symbolic language means, not only for the ancient church, but for us today. The language of Second John seems to be terms of endearment and respect. There is a politeness or courtesy that must have blessed both author and reader. "Elder" leads us to think of experience, wisdom and dedication more than a mere name. "Chosen lady" makes us think of God's electing grace and the church as the bride of Christ. "Children" reminds us that God's people are a family with one God and Father of us all. In a sense, we remember our one spiritual mother when in the creed we confess faith in "one holy Christian Church." In our culture of casual informality and instant usage of first names, can the initial words of Second John remind us of the dignity of our relationship with other Christians?

The word "truth" appears five times in the first four verses of Second John. The Elder and all who know the truth love the lady and her children in truth because of the truth that lives in us and he rejoices that some walk in the truth. His prayer or blessing is that grace, mercy and peace will be with them in truth and love. Such redundancy makes "truth" an important concept to understand. In English, truth can be an abstract term: truth is "conformity with fact or reality." "They told the truth" means "They do not lie." Truth can also have a more dynamic meaning having "the character of being true" or honesty and integrity. Some people live the truth; you can trust them. A Greek dictionary explains the term this way. Truth means "dependability, truthfulness, uprightness in thought and deed...truth has a strongly practical side, which expresses itself in virtue like righteousness and holiness." (A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, ed William F. Arndt, et al, 2nd edition, U. of Chicago Press, 1979, page 35-36).

"The first four verses of Second John draw all readers into the covenant relationship of grace, mercy and peace given us by God the Father and Jesus (hrist."

The word "truth" carries more meaning in the first four verses than claiming to be factually correct. It is helpful to recall that the Gospel of John states that "grace and

truth" came through Jesus Christ (John 1:18) and Jesus claims to be "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). Such words suggest that the word "truth" in Second John carries Gospel impact. The Elder loves in the name and way of Jesus. People who know the truth know the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus and His love live in them. They walk in the truth which is a Hebraic way of saying that they live with Jesus as their Savior and their model for Christian living. The verses provide their own commentary on what it means to walk in truth as John tells us to love one another, to walk in love, or to live in love. To capture the vigor of the Gospel nuance, read the first four verses again and replace the words "The truth" with the word "Jesus." The first four verses of Second John draw all readers into the covenant relationship of grace, mercy and peace given us by God the Father and Jesus Christ. "Truth" reminds us of God's grace, Christian faith and Christ like faithfulness. Don't overlook the Gospel basis for the call to walk in truth, Grace, mercy and peace from God stand as a blessing and truth not only for John's readers but for all God's people today.

"These are painful verses. They strip away idealistic hopes of a perfect congregation and make us face the reality that sin has an impact on the life of the church."

The implications of Second John, verses four through six, carry a somber side. The joy of finding "some" walking in the truth also carries the sorrow of knowing "some" members of the congregation do not live in a God pleasing way. Here, for the first time, we realize the Johannine congregation is divided. Some walk in truth: some do not. Some walk in love: some do not. Some obey God's commands: some do not. These are painful verses. They strip away idealistic hopes of a perfect congregation and make us face the reality that sin has an impact on the life of the church. We want our congregations to be places where Jesus' love binds people in perfect love and unites them in harmonious evangelical purposes. Second John's words remind us of what we have learned from experience. No congregation stands immune from the forces of sin.

The words challenge us in two ways. First, rejoice that

some do walk in love. Second, remember that even in the church not all walk in truth. There is joy in John's words. Rejoice in the faithful. Count the blessings. The words also call for responsibility. Work needs to be done even in our congregations. The Gospel must be proclaimed in and to the church. Paradoxically, the church has mission work to do in the church itself. Walking in love means to care not only about people who give us joy but also people who do not walk in God's truth.

John plunges us from the lofty joy of knowing that some live in God's love to the deep grief of knowing that many deceivers have entered the world (2 John 7). John is not talking about a general human tendency to deceive. The specific lie is to deny that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. This is no small lie. If Jesus did not come in the flesh, he could not suffer and die for human sin. If Jesus was not human, one could not confess as First John 1:7 states, "The blood of Jesus... purifies us from all sin."

Historical evidence suggests that John speaks to the initial stages of a theological heresy called gnosticism or docetism. Gnosticism called for "knowledge (about God)" rather than faith in Jesus' death and resurrection as acts of God. Docetism taught that Jesus only seemed to be human. Concordia Self-Study Bible (p. 1925) presents five key doctrines of the early heresy. The human body is evil in contrast to the divine spirit which is good. Salvation means to escape the body by special knowledge. Christ's humanity was denied, either by saying that he only appeared to be human, or that only for a limited period of time was he both human and divine. In either case, Jesus did not suffer and die to atone for sin. Finally, because the body was evil, gnostics either sought complete and often harsh control of the body to contain the evil, or they permitted the body to do all the evil it wanted because such evil would not harm the soul.

Whatever the specific historical heresy which Second John addresses there are ways in which we, too, can deny that Jesus came in the flesh. If someone does not forgive, that person denies that Jesus died on the cross to forgive sin. If someone seeks to dominate others, that person denies that Jesus humbled himself in order to serve, even to the extent of washing other people's feet. If someone will not feed the hungry, clothe the naked,

visit the sick, help the prisoners, that person denies that Jesus taught us to do such human things. As 1 John 3:17 reminds us, "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has not pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" It may be hard for us to identify people who deny the humanity of Jesus, although so many people in our culture deny the divinity of Jesus. John's warning can be applied however by noting ways in which Christian people do not accept and practice the reality of God's love. People who make Christianity merely an idea or theory, rather than a way of life, also deny that Jesus came in the flesh. Perhaps one way to apply this passage in a meaningful way is to state that not only did Jesus come in the flesh but He wants His disciples to continue to use human resources to meet human needs. to continue the ministry of Jesus in the world today.

"John next issues a personal warning about the threat these deceivers pose."

John next issues a personal warning about the threat these deceivers pose. Watch out that you don't lose all you worked for but that you may be rewarded fully (2 John 8). This verse must be interpreted carefully. It cannot mean to watch out lest you lose the salvation you worked for. Salvation is God's gift. If Second John 6 is properly interpreted in the light of the Gospel, John is warning the readers that their faith is in danger. Today we might catch the meaning of the verse if we say, "If you tolerate the deceivers with their false teaching, then all your hard work in Bible study, memorization and catechism instruction in order to understand the faith will be wasted time."

Another way to interpret the warning is to state: The Christian way of life of the congregation, that the people had worked for, was put in jeopardy by the false teaching of the deceivers. The statement is like a warning to a congregation that if they let certain things happen, all the work they did over the years will be wasted. The congregation will die. Illustrating the truth on a very human level, if deceit is tolerated in marriage, even heroic efforts to create a happy home will fail. In summary, John teaches that deceit within a congregation will destroy laborious achievements.

With the warning, John also offers a promise. There will

People chosen by God seek the blessing of living together in God's love.

be a full reward for being aware of the deceivers (2 John 8b). Dealing with deceit is seldom easy or enjoyable. Yet John promises that being on guard will have its full reward. John's promise may be as lofty as reminding the people that God will give the crown of life to those who are faithful unto death. On the other hand, John's promise may be as simple as reminding people of the reward of living in Christian love rather than antichristian deceit. It may be like a wise church leader saying, "Solve this problem and your congregation will be rewarded with peace and harmony." John's words remind us that confronting tough issues may be essential in order to enjoy God's blessings.

Second John nine describes the attitude of the deceivers and the heinous reality of sin. "Running ahead and not continuing in the teaching of Christ" reminds us that deceit or sin often comes disguised as "modern thought," "current trends" or "advanced thinking." "Adult bookstores" or "movies for a mature audience" falsely imply that Christian morality is wrong because it is old fashioned or childish. Peer pressures persuade too many people to sin because they don't want to be left behind or left out.

John's warning is not against new ideas per se, but about new ideas that do not continue in the teaching of Christ. Christians should celebrate creative, Spirit guided, innovative, ways of serving God. John warns of novelties that forsake the faith.

John offers a solution, in verses ten and eleven, to the deceptive antichristian threat. These are strong words. "If anyone comes...and does not bring this (original or true) teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him" (2 John 10). And to underscore the seriousness of the threat, John continues, "Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work" (2 John 11). The words remind us that some threats to the faith are so serious that they deserve quarantine. The directive is blunt but rests on

protective love. The directive is as protective as a church council declaring, "Our church will not permit a drug dealer to enter our school grounds." It is as responsible as a police officer telling children, "Don't get into a car with a stranger." It is as caring as parents forbidding their children to watch an unsavory movie. It is as loving as a pastor warning members not to cooperate with a Satanic cult. The drastic advice stands in line with the petition Jesus taught us, "our Father...lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

Now John draws his short letter to a close (2 John 12). John's words sound like an admission that the topic is complicated and deserves more attention. John hints that the situation needs a personal exchange of ideas rather than a long, impersonal letter. I sense an urgency that calls for a quick, albeit inadequate, reply. Difficult problems cannot be ignored but personal involvement may also be necessary. There are times when a letter or a telephone call cannot replace a personal visit. In my ministry, frequently I have made a short telephone call simply to let people know that I knew of the crisis and cared. But I kept the conversation short because I knew the time and the dynamics of a face to face conversation were necessary. A misunderstanding between friends can be settled more effectively over a cup of coffee than with an exchange of letters. Yet a short note may be a necessary preliminary. A friend threatened by sin deserves a quick note of support followed by a time for sharing advice which rests on mutual respect.

Finally, the letter ends much like it began. A letter sent to a chosen lady and her children is also from a chosen lady and her children. It could be family writing to family but, as noted above, more likely it is one church sending greetings to another. There is a Gospel basis for the greeting. People chosen by God seek the blessing of living together in God's love. The concluding remarks can summarize the purpose of the brief note. Complete joy comes from sharing with others the love of Jesus Christ.

PERSONAL APPLICATION - 3 JOHN 1-15

Dear Lord, as we study Third John, help us understand that difficult problems need your guidance and our patient faith as we search for solutions. In Jesus' name. Amen

In the Concordia Self-Study Bible, or a different translation with notes, read an introductory statement about 3 John. List information that seems important. Read 3 John in its entirety. In general, what problem or problems does 3 John seek to solve? How does 3 John seek to solve the problem or problems?
In general, what problem or problems does 3 John seek to solve?
How does 3 John seek to solve the problem or problems?
List the names of people mentioned in 3 John. Who is mentioned in a favorable way and who is described in a critical way? Why were they praised or criticized?
Who wrote 3 John (v. 1)?
Who receives the letter?
How do the readers of 2 and 3 John differ?
How might awareness of different readers affect your interpretation of the two letters?
What is the purpose of the prayer of 3 John verse 2 and how is it a model for us?
What gives the elder great joy according to 3 John verses 3-4?
Can you relate when someone's life in Christ gave you great joy? Briefly describe that person and how that joy affecte you.
How has your life in Christ brought joy to others?

8. What is the theme of 3 John verses 5-8? 9. To whom in your life does this theme apply? 10. What is Diotrephes doing and why does he do it? (v. 9-10, 2 John 9) 11. Can you think of someone who seems or seemed to act the way Diotrephes did? If so how did that action affect your congregation, church workers, and leaders or you personally? 12. How does the elder plan to deal with Diotrephes? 13. How does the elder's plan fit in with Jesus' words in Matthew 18:15-17? 14. What is the advice of 3 John 11? 15. Note some practical ways in which 3 John 11 can be useful in your life. 16. What does the elder say about Demetrius? 17. It has been said that we live in an age without heroes or that children often grow up today without positive role models. Can you think of people today who, like Demetrius, can serve as role models for you personally or for people in our church? If so, note briefly who and why. 18. Note the differences in the closing of 2 John 12-13 and 3 John 13-14. 19. Summarize the purpose and goal of 3 John.



The Letters of John; 1, 2, 3

DR. ROBERT HOLST

Lesson 3

3 JOHN 1-15

PERSONAL APPLICATION - 1 JOHN 1:1-10

17

"Peace is now a blessed goal of the congregation."

Third John does not address the subject of false teaching but expresses strong concern over lack of Christian hospitality. Unlike Second John which probably addressed a whole congregation, the same author, now writes to a single person named Gaius. The letter shows that the elder loves and trusts Gaius and we may speculate that he was respected in the congregation as well. The troubling issue revolves around four key people: the elder, Gaius, Diotrephes and Demetrius. The elder attacks divisive attitudes and hostile behavior and promotes harmony and peace. A man named Diotrephes embodies the problem. He has a bad attitude; he loves to be most important. He will have nothing to do with the elder and his people. Not only will he not welcome the other Christians but he stops others from doing so, and puts them out of the church if they want to help. Finally, he gossips maliciously about the elder (3 John 9-10). The essence of the problem seems clear. John sent Christians to visit another Christian community and Diotrephes stymied the visit.

If we connect Third John with Second John the picture becomes more complex. The key question is, does Third John 9, which refers to a previous letter, refer to Second John? To be sure other historical possibilities exist but let us, at least for the sake of this study, assume that Diotrephes rejected 2 John. If he rejected 2 John, our sense of history can envision a vivid historical background. When Diotrephes rejected the letter, he also repudiated the elder's authority and the people carrying his mail. If Third John 9 refers to a lost letter, as many scholars think, then Second and Third John deal with separate issues. If Diotrephes rejected First John, which is also a possibility, he stopped circulation of a profoundly theological document. Since the elder does not call Diotrephes a deceiver who denies that Jesus came in the flesh, it seems unlikely that 3 John 9 refers to First John.

In review, if the elder wrote the letter we call Second John to a congregation of which Gaius and Diotrephes were members, Gaius welcomed the letter carriers but Diotrephes did not. Diotrephes' action must have had great impact on the congregation. It is noteworthy that John describes Diotrephes' motivation to be personal popularity and influence. Third John does not mention the theological crisis of the Second (or First) John. Perhaps Diotrephes was not a good theologian. Maybe he simply did not know what difference it made if someone considered Jesus to be only God. Many people today seldom, if ever, talk about

the humanity of Jesus but concentrate solely on His divine nature. We don't find them such a great threat to the church that we would not welcome them into our homes! If the original letter (Second John?) failed to alert the congregation to the false teaching and deceivers, John had to try again. I think that Third John is a more personal approach to the problem. Gaius is a sincere, loving Christian who can speak to people about the elder's concerns. John writes to thank Gaius for his hospitality, to point out the error in the influential Diotrephes' ways, and to insure Demetrius welcome or even to promote him as a helpful, respected Christian.

We don't know who Demetrius was. Some scholars think that he carried the Johannine letters. John therefore writes so that his literary ambassador would be well received and could personally bear witness to the truth. It is possible that Demetrius is a quiet inconspicuous member of the Christian community (of Gaius and Diotrephes). In that case John identifies Demetrius as a person who can help effect reconciliation or exert beneficial leadership.

The uncertainty of the historical situation may be frustrating. If so, recognize that we know nothing beyond the letter. I hope that speculation on the possible background and relationships suggests insights into our own complicated congregational misunderstandings and hurts. There are a number of lessons to be learned from an analysis of the historical background of Third John. First, church problems are complicated by personalities and personal attitudes. Theological debate is seldom dispassionate but involves conflicting interests and subjective influences. Petty jealousies over who has the closest relationship to the pastor can turn simple problems into ugly issues. "In groups" versus "newcomers" can create terrible friction. The life of the church involves people and the relationship of people makes life in the church complex.

Second, sound advice by respected leaders is sometimes rejected. In fact, if the truths of Second John were rejected, we are reminded that sin sometimes thwarts even God's inspired Word. Evangelical advice sometimes backfires. Parents warn children about sinful danger. Alienation results. Members of the Board of Elders visit delinquent members. The caring visitors are called

judgmental. A Bible study group enjoys time in God's Word. People call them a clique. Third John reminds us that service in the church can involve unfair pain.

Third, the writer's approach dares us to try an indirect but personal approach in problem solving. Rather than drop the situation as irresolvable, openly complain, become cynical, or gossip about other people in the church, John informs his dear friend Gaius about the situation. Avoiding public gossip but sharing private opinions with a friend often provides a healthy way to find a solution to troubling issues. Giving a person a tract or encouraging them to read the Bible is important but a personal conversation may, at times, be more effective.

"The final lesson is a reminder that sometimes we can't solve a problem by ourselves."

The final lesson is a reminder that sometimes we can't solve a problem by ourselves. The elder realizes that he might be more a part of the problem than the solution. Actions of Gaius and Demetrius, encouraged by the elder, will provide the solution. Congregational leaders may have offended someone and others might be able to help work reconciliation. An aunt or uncle, grandmother or grandfather may bridge a gap between parent and child. Sometimes a youth worker can communicate with a young person more effectively than parents. Sometimes we must recognize that we are part of a problem, even if unfairly misunderstood. Then we need to realize that someone else might have the answer. We may have to ask our pastor, church council, or a friend to seek a solution that we cannot find. On the other hand, we may need to defend an action of our pastor, church council or a friend in the face of unfair treatment or malicious gossip.

Returning to the beginning of Third John, we learn of the elder's joy (3 John 3-4). His joy comes from knowing that Gaius, like other Christians, is walking in the truth, i.e., living a Christian life. The elder reminds us that Christians find joy in the lives of other Christians. Too often we fail to do this because neither they nor we are perfect. All Christians struggle daily with weaknesses, imperfections and sin. But we dare to rejoice in their Godgiven successes and even in their God-guided struggles. May John's words inspire you to tell a friend today about

the joy she or he gives you because of the love you share as a Christian. May John's words provide a reminder to tell your teacher, or a member in your Bible study group, what joy their walking in Christ gives you. Tell someone today that their Christian faithfulness makes you happy. Also accept the challenge for you implied in the elder's praise. As a Christian, seek to bring joy to someone today.

Third John, verses 5-7, present the positive high point of the letter. Gaius receives praise for practicing hospitality. Furthermore, he is kind to Christian missionaries who are strangers to him. His hospitality promotes working together in the truth. Gaius' kindness not only blesses the people involved but has blessed the church. Christians are talking about his love. John reminds us that being kind to Christians can have a multiple impact. First, it helps meet their basic needs. Second, it enables the missionaries to serve God. Third, it encourages them; they feel good about the kindness received and talk about it. Fourth, the hospitality serves as a model for other Christians. Fifth, such kindness enables the Gospel to be shared without need for help from non-Christians. Sixth, the kindness suggests that Gaius is ready to serve the Lord in other ways as well. Probably without his deeds of hospitality, the elder would not have written him this letter. His faithfulness in showing hospitality makes the elder bold enough to say, "You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God" (3 John 6b, NIV). "Send them on the way" can be a technical Greek term which means "support their mission ministry" (Acts 15:3, 1 Corinthians 16:6, 2 Corinthians 1:16 and Romans 15:24). Before our eyes we see Gaius have a new opportunity in Christian service. Because of his kindness in welcoming Christian missionaries, the challenge of supporting them is also given. Likewise, his caring spirit makes the elder confident that Demetrius can receive special support from Gaius.

"Small acts of hospitality may be the starting point for even more significant ways of serving God."

Seek to apply the lessons of Third John 5-7 to your life. Small deeds of kindness to your spouse, children, grandchildren, or a friend may not only help that person but will serve as a model and inspiration for others.

Practicing kindness makes kindness increase. Small acts

of hospitality may be the starting point for even more significant ways of serving God. For example, Mother Theresa's influential international ministry began with simple deeds of kindness to humble individuals in isolated areas of urban poverty.

After the high point of the letter comes the low point. Third John 9-10 describes the hostile action of Diotrephes. In contrast to the hospitality of Gaius stands the opposition of Diotrephes. He actively oppresses the church in five ways. First, he either ignored or rejected a writing from the elder. Second, he spread gossip. Third, he refused to welcome other (Johannine) Christians. Fourth, he stopped the hospitality of others. Finally, he put out of the church anyone who dared to welcome the Christian strangers. Pride and separation motivate his actions. As noted in speculation on the historical context of Third John, there are important lessons - painful lessons - to be learned from Diotrephes. His pride and antagonism hurt the church. His actions create work for the elder who must try to solve a new problem. We can imagine the irreparable harm created by the gossip. What impact did his loveless actions have on the Christians that he put out of the church? What impact did his loveless actions have on those who were not Christians?

Diotrephes' lack of love reminds us that our actions do not take place in a vacuum. Lovelessness hurts people. Conflict between Christians hurts congregational life and provides a negative witness to outsiders. Although it may sometimes be a convenient excuse, too often on evangelism calls I have heard someone who is living without Christ say, "When you Christians stop fighting each other, come back. Until then, I'm not interested." Learn from Diotrephes how lack of love needs the correcting impact of the Holy Spirit.

The intent of the elder, I am certain, is not to complain but to correct. The Gospel, not gossip, motivates Third John. I think that the elder wants Diotrephes to stop hindering the Gospel by his actions and to become more like Gaius. Reflect for a moment on how you act like Diotrephes, and how your conduct needs to be changed in the love of Christ. Or, identify someone who, in your opinion, acts in a way similar to Diotrephes, and think of how you can act like the elder and seek to solve ugly problems.

Third John 11-12 tells Gaius to imitate good rather than evil. In light of the previous verses, John tells us, "Imitate Gaius, not Diotrephes." John reminds Gaius that doing good or evil is more than a human decision. God causes good to be done. Blindness to God creates evil. Take the Gospel message to heart. First, ask what good is God doing through me? Then think of Gaius as a model to imitate. In our complex age it is hard to know how to be a good friend, spouse, parent, child, or even a good church member. Let God give the power and set the goal for doing good. Search for human examples who provide models for doing good things. It is also helpful to mark or reject the models who do evil.

In your quest to serve, God may give you some surprising examples. The elder points to Demetrius as someone well spoken of and even certified by God's truth. Maybe Demetrius carried John's letter and John wants Gaius not only to welcome him but to get to know him better. It is also possible that Demetrius was a humble member of the Christian community who quietly, without public recognition, served God. In that case the elder is saying, "Don't overlook the fact that someone with a good reputation, not well known for outstanding deeds, can also provide a model of Christian service."

In our complex world of conflicting claims and false promises, simply to point to a Christian that others can trust may be a great Christian service. To find a Christian counselor who can be recommended with confidence is one of the great challenges of Christians today. If you know a good Christian counselor, act in a manner like the elder introducing Demetrius to Gaius. Think of how recommending a book, movie or television program that supports Christian values is also a way of promoting what is good. Recommending a school, a teacher, a program, a retirement community, a convalescent center, or even a vacation site can be God pleasing ways to help someone, and do godly good. A personal recommendation, like the elder's "you know that our testimony is true," may help a dear friend more confidently to know what is good.

Finally, we come to the concluding verses of Third John. A careful comparison with the ending of Second John shows minor variations. For example, Third John adds that he wants to see them "soon" but does not state the hopeful goal "so that our joy may be complete" (3 John 14a and

2 John 12b). Second John ends stating that the children of the chosen sister send greetings, i.e., members of the Johannine congregation (2 John 12). Third John explicitly sends a greeting of "peace" but notes that the greeting comes from "friends" to "friends" (3 John 14b). The details may be insignificant variations that convey similar affectionate feelings. It is possible, however, that the slight variations carry profound implications. If Gaius is a member of the family of Christians addressed in Second John, the situation is dramatically worse. The advice to keep out evil teachers (2 John 10-11) was thwarted dramatically by Diotrephes. The church now stands divided. Gaius welcomed John's missionaries. Diotrephes put out of the church people who wanted to welcome them, and spread malicious lies about the elder. Personality conflict overshadows the theological problem of Second John. Gaius may be wondering whom he can trust!

If this possible scenario is relatively accurate, the situation is more urgent, and there is good reason for John to hope to see them "soon." The sooner the better because John may now face a hostile meeting rather than one in which "our joy may be complete." Peace is now a blessed goal of the congregation. The good old days when one assumed that the whole membership of both congregations shared a common mission is gone. Friends supporting friends is now a realistic way to serve God in search for peace and the truth.

I find such speculation fascinating and helpful because I realize better how the Bible speaks to human situations similar to what I experience. In fact, let me push our historical musing one step more. What if John was unable to see the people "soon"? In a more urgent situation, if John could not visit Gaius, could it be that the God-inspired message found in First John was written in place of the personal conversation he had hoped to have? Is First John the blessed result? There is no proof that First John was written last or that it was originally intended to solve the theological and personal conflicts of Second and Third John. But, in fact, First John does deal with these same issues in a forceful and evangelical way. I pray that our study of Second and Third John has not only helped us to identify some of the theological and personal issues hurting our own congregations, but has also prepared us better to appreciate a more complete presentation of the Gospel Message in First John.