

Bible Study # 46
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General Epistles Series—I, II, III John and Jude

This evening we want to finish up this short series that we have had on the General Epistles. We are going to do so by **focusing in on the epistles of John (I, II, III John) and also the book of Jude—a short one-chapter book.**

All three of John's books were written near the close of the first century A.D. John was the last of the apostles to die. He outlived the others of the twelve by close to thirty years. He lived into the late 90s A.D.—close to about 100 A.D. John clearly, at that time, would have been close to a hundred years of age; he lived to a very advanced age.

He was in exile for a period of time in the 90s A.D. on the isle of Patmos. Patmos is a small island off the coast of Asia Minor (what is today modern-day Turkey). He was placed in exile by Emperor Domitian. This exile ended about 96 A.D. John had been in Ephesus prior to his exile. In the latter years, he was in Ephesus for several years. He was exiled from Ephesus to the island of Patmos, yet he did have mail contact. It was from the island of Patmos that he wrote most of the writings for which he is noted.

The book of Revelation, in particular, was written at that time. He wrote to the Churches in Asia Minor. This is the area around Ephesus—the very area to which the book of Revelation was addressed. It was addressed to the seven Churches of Asia Minor.

John was released from exile in 96 A.D. After his return from exile on the island of Patmos, evidently he returned to Ephesus where he was said to have died in 98 A.D. John was writing toward the close of the early apostolic era of the Church. He was addressing problems that needed to be addressed. The books that he wrote put, in a sense, the final touches of the New Testament.

We focused last time on how Peter was responsible for collecting together the books that comprise most of our New Testament. We focused on how Peter had borne testimony of the fact that he and John had been given that sure word of prophecy (II Peter 2). Peter was responsible for collecting probably twenty-two books of the New Testament, which would be all of the New Testament books except John's five books. Twenty-two books, and in that sense, would have corresponded exactly with the Jewish

reckoning of the number of books in the Hebrew Bible. What Peter did (even though it was what God wanted at that time) was not the final capstone. There was information that yet needed to be written. At the time Peter died, in the late 60s (just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.), events had not yet come to the point where some of these final things needed to be written.

John wrote and was able to address things from a perspective of thirty years down the road from the time of the rest of the New Testament. Many of the problems that were in the beginning stages at the time that Peter addressed it—or James or Paul addressed it—had continued on and developed further for a period of about thirty years. The heresies that had begun to creep in ultimately gave rise to the false church—the false church that calls itself “Christian” yet does not practice the religion of Jesus Christ.

Paul said in II Thessalonians 2:7, when he was writing in the 50s A.D., ‘the mystery of iniquity does already work.’ The mystery religion of lawlessness was already at work even in the 50s A.D. Paul spoke in the book of Galatians of some coming and bringing another gospel (Galatians 1:6-7).

In the book of Acts written by Luke under Paul's auspices, we were introduced to an individual by the name of Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8) or Simon the Magician known in history as Simon Magus.

Acts 8:9, Simon Magus was the religious leader of the Samaritans. He was an individual who professed Christianity and yet never truly repented.

Verses 18-20, Peter rebuked him very strongly when Simon sought to purchase with money the office of an apostleship in the New Testament Church. Peter rebuked him very strongly. It is clear that while Simon was baptized and professed belief in Christ, he never repented.

That is stated very clearly because Peter told him in v. 20, “...your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!” ‘Your money is going to go where you are and you are both going to burn up. Your money perishes with you because you have thought this.’ We are introduced to something just kind of on the surface level.

In v. 10, we are told that this man was the great religious leader of the Samaritans and that all of them paid attention to him. We are introduced to that fact in other books.

In II Peter 2:1, for instance, we are told that ‘false prophets were creeping in.’ There were things that were being taught by some who were seeking to water down the gospel message and to undermine the importance of keeping the commandments and obeying God. There was a different message that was coming in and being introduced.

Now, when John was writing thirty years later down the line, many of these heresies had developed to the point that, in some cases, certain whole Churches were, literally, being taken over by the heretics and true Christians put out (III John: 9-10). Many of the so-called Gnostic heresies (“Gnostic” means “we know”) dated back to Simon the Magician and gave rise to a lot of teachings of the professing Christian Church. Perhaps we can go into that at a later Bible study.

In the books of John, we have, in a sense, a final admonition to a Church that had lost a lot of its first love. The Church at Ephesus typified the first stage of the Church of God. The Church at Ephesus typified the whole beginning stage or era of the Church. That Church was rebuked because they lost their first love. The Church to which John is writing had lost its first love, and as a result, it did not have the power of God to really resist the insidious encroachments of the heretics.

The books that John wrote, particularly I, II, III John, serve not only as a warning to the Church of that day, but it also provides for us a record of what actually transpired. It gives us the beginning of the events that developed. Many historical writers say that with the conclusion of the New Testament, a curtain rang down on Church history. We aren’t really able to penetrate that curtain for almost the best part of a century. Towards the end of the second century when the curtain begins to rise, the church that calls itself “Christian” is in so many ways totally different from the Church of which we read in the book of Acts.

This has puzzled many of the historians. We see Easter being substituted for Passover. We see a controversy having erupted and Easter having replaced Passover. We see Sunday worship having replaced the Sabbath, and we see the introduction of the mass and things of that sort taking the place of the Passover service. We see the introduction of many things that are radically different from the Church of which we read in the book of Acts.

The books of I, II, III John serve not only as a warning to the Church of that day, but they also serve to record for us what actually transpired that eventually resulted in what developed into the Roman Catholic Church. What we see starting here ultimately developed into the Catholic religion of the fourth century, which came to dominate the visible Church.

There were many different heretical movements that entered into the Church through the first century. One of these emerged, and by the time of the fourth century, with the political muscle of the Emperor Constantine, the brand of religion that had come to dominate in Rome was made the official religion. Everybody was expected to conform to that religion or they had to flee outside the bounds of the Roman Empire to avoid persecution.

Constantine saw the need, as he viewed it, to put the empire together with religion. He could see that nobody believed the old Roman religion any more. There was a need to have the unifying force of religion. He could see the vitality of the Christian religion. But there were different approaches and different variations to that, and he took the side of the bishop of Rome. He called a church council at Nicea and enforced on everyone that particular brand.

The books of John show us the beginnings of the heresies that gave rise to these events. It is a warning to us by way of example. The authority of John’s epistles and their authenticity are easily attested to from the earliest times in the area to which they were addressed—the Churches of Asia Minor. In the area of the Churches of Asia Minor, the books of I, II, III John and Revelation were never questioned; there’s never any question recorded in terms of the authenticity of these books.

Even Catholic historians preserved the writings of Polycarp, for instance, who was a disciple of the Apostle John and wrote in the 140s A.D. Polycarp was involved in a dispute with the bishop of Rome over the issue of Passover and the importance of observing the Holy Days. There are records that are preserved that date back to that time.

In those areas, there was never any question that John wrote these books and of their authority. The only places where we find the authority and the authenticity of these books questioned at early times was in Rome and perhaps in Alexandria, Egypt, and some of the areas that took their cue from Rome. The reason they were questioned was because there was an attempt to

undermine them. It was an unsuccessful attempt. It was an attempt to undermine them because of the indictment that they contained. Because they were uncomfortable with the message, they sought to attack the messenger and to try to cast doubt on the credibility.

Jude wrote the book of Jude. Jude was the brother of James who wrote the book of James, which makes him also the half-brother of Jesus Christ. It was written about the same time that Peter wrote II Peter. **Jude is a book that primarily warns about the advancing heresies of the day.** It was evidently addressed to the same areas that James had addressed his Epistles. It was written to pretty much the same audience that James had written to. It was written a little later than James who had written in the latter 60s A.D. It was written after James' martyrdom, in a sense, as kind of a warning to those areas. Jude was written earlier than the Epistles of John, but there is a sequence that we have already gone through on James, Peter, John and Jude as to why that was the logical sequence. Even though John's works were written later, they were inserted between the writings of Peter and Jude because of the subject matter and the flow that it gave.

We pick it up in **I John**. We will notice some things as we go through the book of I John. One thing that ought to be readily apparent is that there are *two basic themes* that John stresses all through I John. One theme has to do with the importance of love, real and true love, toward God and toward neighbor. John stresses the subject of love and he also stresses the subject of keeping the Commandments. He stresses *law and love*. He stresses commandment keeping and love over and over and over. If you go through the book of John, you'll see he talks about this type of thing.

In I John 1, he starts out by discussing the subject of fellowship. Brethren, the basis of our fellowship in the Church is explained right here in I John 1:3. Sometimes we hear the term "disfellowship." That's a term that's used in the Bible. It refers to someone who is put out or excluded from the fellowship of the Church. Many times that term has been used, and we have not understood where it originates. Why do we use that term? It's the term the Bible uses. But why does the Bible use that term? Notice what we're told about fellowship and we'll understand if we make the connection.

I John 1:3, "that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have

fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." That is the basis of our fellowship, our communion and our close intimate family relationship. John is saying, 'The things that I know, I am going to tell you because I want us to have a close relationship with one another. I want us to have fellowship and a close communion. I want us to have a close intimate family relationship with one another.'

He goes on to say that close relationship, that fellowship that we have, is not simply with one another—that fellowship is with God the Father and with Jesus Christ.

Then he continues in v. 5, "This is the message which we have heard of Him and declare unto you. God is light and in Him is no darkness at all."

There are many places in the Bible where it talks about God's word being a lamp unto our feet, a light to our path (Psalm 119:105).

I John 1:5-7 talks about the analogy of light and darkness and that God is the source of light. Matthew 17:2 talks about how, in His glorified state, Jesus' face shone as the sun in its glory. It is that sense of light chasing out darkness.

Whoever came into this room first this evening flipped a light switch. Here was a room that was dark, and all of a sudden, light came on and filled the room; now everybody can see. If the light suddenly went off, we would have trouble seeing where we are. That's the analogy that is used to refer to this whole world. God is the source of light. His truth is light. It comes out from Him. There is no darkness, no spiritual darkness, in God. God is perfect. He is complete. His Word is truth (John 17:17).

I John 1:6, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth." The point is you can't run with the devil and walk with God.

Amos 3:3, "Can two walk together lest they be agreed?" If we have fellowship with God, that means we are where God is. We're walking with God, which means we agree with God. You can't have fellowship with God if you don't agree with Him.

That's why the devil doesn't have fellowship with God. Because the devil didn't agree, he was cast out of heaven. It talks about the angels that kept not their first estate.

Jude 6, "And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their habitation...." They were cast down to the earth (Isaiah 14).

Jude 13, "...wondering stars to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever."

If you have fellowship with somebody, the basis of fellowship is because you have something in common; you are where they are.

In I John 1:6-7, John says that if we say that we're in fellowship with God, but our lives reflect darkness, then we're lying. We're not in fellowship with God unless we're dwelling in the light. God is in the light of His way, His truth. You can't be in close contact and fellowship with God, walking with God, have that relationship with God and be living like the world—living in spiritual darkness.

I John 1:7, "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another..." The basis of our fellowship with one another is, first and foremost, our fellowship with God and with Christ. We have fellowship with them when we're where they are—which is in the light. If we are outside the circle of light, if we're over here in the darkness, then we don't have fellowship with them. If we don't have fellowship with them, we don't have a basis for fellowship with one another. The basis of fellowship for the people of God is that we're in fellowship with God and with Christ.

When our actions take us outside of fellowship with God and Christ, it excludes us from any longer having a basis to fellowship with one another. That's what the term "disfellowship" means. It simply means "somebody who is removed from the fellowship." They are no longer in fellowship because they are no longer living like God's people live.

Look around. Most of you here wouldn't even know one another if it weren't for the truth of God. That's what brought most of us together. We represent a wide variety of backgrounds: different ages, different ethnic backgrounds, different educational backgrounds, different interests, different social backgrounds and different economic circumstances. Most of us would be total strangers to one another.

The thing that gives us what we have in common is the truth of God. If we weren't all in the Church, we wouldn't all be sitting here. We wouldn't know one another. We might not even like one another. We probably wouldn't have gotten to know one another well enough to know whether we liked one another or not. The basis of what brings us together is our relationship with God. We can't lay aside the relationship with God and expect to maintain the relationship and the rapport we have with one another. The reason

we can be in agreement with one another is because we agree with God; when we cease agreeing with God, we no longer agree with the people of God.

Heresies were creeping in. There were various problems that were coming in. John is addressing the subject. John is laying a foundation and explaining what is the basis for true Christian fellowship. The basis is not some mistaken idea of love and that you tolerate all kinds of sins and heresies, where you kind of put up with everything. The very basis of Christian fellowship is, first and foremost, fellowship with God. That's the basis of our fellowship with one another. Mistaken ideas come in and sometimes people don't understand.

One person explained it, and I thought he put it very aptly. Years ago, back in the mid-70s when certain ones were seeking to water down various things and bring in all kinds of things, they kept talking about being open-minded. One minister finally pointed out that there was a vast difference between being open-minded and empty-headed. Some failed to see the difference.

This was a problem in the New Testament period. They failed to really see the difference. They confused love with toleration of sin and heresies. They allowed certain of these problems to grow and to fester; it was not dealt with in accordance with God's government and God's way. Because it was not dealt with in the way that it would have been dealt with at an earlier time, some of the problems grew to the point of what we see happened. John is explaining things and is setting the stage.

Then he continues and talks about forgiveness of sin. He talks about the fact that if we say we don't have sin, we are kidding ourselves (v. 8). We all have sinned and made mistakes. When we seek to excuse and justify ourselves, we're just kidding ourselves.

Verse 8, "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." When we justify and excuse ourselves, then we're not getting anywhere. That's not the way to get out from under guilt. The human way to get out from under guilt is to want to blame somebody else. People have an excuse.

Ever notice when things go wrong and some governmental investigative body starts calling all these people in. Everybody has an excuse; it's always somebody else's fault. The ideal thing is that somebody has died, then they can all blame it on him—he's not around to defend himself.

The guy that's dead can be the ideal scapegoat because you can't ask him any questions. This is human nature. People have been "passing the buck" ever since God asked Adam 'Why did you do it?' Adam "passed the buck" to Mrs. Adam. The whole human race took a lesson from that and has been doing it ever since. God wasn't impressed then and He's not any more impressed now. That's not the solution. How do you get out from under guilt? –The solution?

Verse 9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Not by making excuses and justifications and blaming others, but by confessing our sins, by facing the truth and admitting it. The way to get out from under guilt is to be forgiven, to have God clean us up. There's a way out from under guilt. We don't have to live under guilt. God holds out mercy, but mercy is contingent upon judgment. If we won't bring ourselves under judgment, God will have to.

I John 2:1, "My little children these things I wrote to you, that you may not sin..." John is telling us the importance of not sinning. John is stressing this because some of the heresies that were coming in were based on the idea that you don't have to keep the law—it's not necessary to really obey. They claimed that's what grace is all about and that the law is done away. Peter warned that certain ones were taking what Paul wrote and were twisting it out of context. Peter had warned them about that almost thirty years earlier. The process had continued and had grown so that some were taking things Paul had written about—how we are justified by faith—out of context and using that as though the law was done away.

I John 2:1-2, "...And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world." John says, 'I am telling you not to sin, but if you do, we have an Advocate with the Father. Jesus Christ is the propitiation [payment] for our sins.'

Verses 3-6, "Now by this we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word; truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked."

John is stressing over and over that we have to obey; we have to do what God says.

Verse 7, he says, 'I am not telling you something new. I'm telling you something that you've had from the beginning.'

Then he begins to stress the importance of loving one another.

Verses 9-10, "He who says he is in the light [if we say that we're obeying God], and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him." If we really love our brother, we're abiding in the light, and we're not going to be an occasion for stumbling. The word in the Greek is "scandal of stumbling." There is no scandal of stumbling in him; that is an important aspect. If we are really doing what we should do, our conduct is not going to be a scandal. We're not going to be involved in scandalous conduct—carousing around and escapades that cause a source of stumbling to others. We are going to be careful where we go and what we do.

He says in v. 12, "I write these things to you little children..." John is in his 90s when he is writing this. That's his perspective as he looked at the people in the Church.

In v. 13, he talks to fathers and to young men of the importance of obeying God and of overcoming the wicked one.

Verse 15, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." He addresses the subject of not loving the world. Don't be in love with this world. Don't be in love with this world's values, its ways or its set of priorities. He brings out that the world's set of values and God's set of values are totally different and distinct. You can't really love God and love the world at the same time.

He summarizes the value system of this world.

Verse 16, "For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world." What it feels like, what it looks like and to what extent is it going to impress other people—this is the value system the world revolves around. That is something that is passing away, and if you focus on that, you are going to pass away with it.

Verse 17, "And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."

Verse 18, he brings up the subject of antichrist. There are many antichrists. Antichrists are those

who are against Christ or whose message is against Christ.

Verse 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...” Here are those who had been in fellowship with the Church who had gone out. They had left the fellowship of the congregations and were bringing in many of these heresies. They had separated themselves.

Verse 20, “But you have an unction [KJV, “anointing”] from the Holy One, and you know all things.” What did he mean by that?

Verse 27, “And the anointing which you have received of Him abides in you and you need not that any man should teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things...” The term “anointing” is talking about “the outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit or the indwelling of God’s Holy Spirit.” “Unction from the Holy One” or “anointing from the Holy One” simply means “the receiving of God’s Holy Spirit.” “...the anointing which you have received from Him...”

When the ministry anoints you with oil, such as when we pray for someone’s healing, the oil is a symbol. Olive oil is used in the Bible as symbolic of God’s Holy Spirit. The physical anointing with oil is simply an outward symbol of the reality, which is the outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit.

The audience to whom John was writing had an outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit. God had given them His Spirit. They knew and understood these things.

In v. 27, he says this outpouring of the Spirit, “...which you have received of Him abides in you and you need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing [or outpouring of the Spirit] teaches you all things, and is true...” What did he mean when he said, ‘you don’t need anybody to teach you?’ What was John doing when he wrote this letter? Wasn’t he instructing them?

The point is that the basis of the teachings of many of these heretics was a development of the mystery religion. The idea was: ‘You couldn’t understand the Bible; you don’t need to study the Bible. We’ll tell you what it means. You can’t understand. You have to be initiated in the mysteries. It’s all written in allegories, and it doesn’t mean what it says.’ That was the way they sought to do away with it. They claimed it didn’t mean literally what it says; it was an allegory, an illustration. They claimed these physical stories were simply to illustrate a

spiritual truth. They spiritualized away all of the literal accounts of everything that happened.

John is saying you don’t need somebody else to come along and interpret. You have God’s Holy Spirit and you can understand. The Bible isn’t written in some way that a converted mind doesn’t understand. That doesn’t mean that there is not a need for a ministry or for teaching. But we don’t tell you in the Church that you don’t need to study the Bible—you can just take my word for what it means. Some of you may come out of a church where you were basically told that. We don’t tell you that. Yes, you can understand it if you are yielded to God.

Psalm 111:10, “...A good understanding have all those that do His commandments...” If you are really acting on what God is teaching you, if you really act, obey and do what God says, you will grow in understanding. God’s Spirit will lead you into a deeper understanding. John is stressing to them the opposite of what many of these heretics were telling them. That was what he is stressing right here.

I John 3:1, “Behold what manner of love that the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God...”

Verse 2, “...it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” That’s what we are going to be like in the resurrection. We are going to be like God. We are going to be like Jesus Christ. If you want to know what you are going to be like in the resurrection, study and see what God is like. We are His children, and it’s not demonstrable yet. We don’t see what we are going to be like in the resurrection, but we are going to be like Him.

Verse 4 is a very familiar scripture (KJV), “Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law, for sin is the transgression of the law.” That’s what sin is! People will tell you the law is done away. Well, if the law is done away, so is sin.

John, again, is stressing in v. 5, “...He was manifested [talking about Christ], to take away our sin, and in Him is no sin.”

Verse 6, “Whosoever abides in Him, does not sin...” If we are abiding in Christ, if we are letting Christ live His life in us, we are following Him and are not sinning because Christ didn’t sin. To the extent that we are really walking with God, we are not going to sin either. When we sin, it’s because we’re not walking with God; we’re not abiding with Christ.

Verse 7, “Little children, let no man deceive you, He that practices righteousness is righteous....” Why did John have to say something so self-evident? There were those who were saying that wasn’t necessarily so—you don’t really have to do anything. The Gnostics had really sought to kind of spiritualize away the statements in the Bible. Their teaching was that the Bible was written in some kind of unintelligible allegory that only those initiated into the mysteries could understand. Once you get people away from the Bible, then you can introduce all kinds of human tradition and custom and just go on from there. John makes it plain, “if you do righteousness, you are righteous.”

Verse 8, “He that commits sin is of the devil, for the devil sins from the beginning....” It’s a matter that Christ is righteous; if we are going to be righteous, we have to live like Him. The devil sins; if we are going to sin, we’re living like the devil. It’s our choice. It’s our choice between right and wrong, good and bad, God and the devil.

Verse 9, when the times comes that we’re ultimately born of God, we won’t sin at all because we are born of God.

Verse 10, “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: whosoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he that loves not his brother.” We demonstrate who our Father is by the way we act.

John stresses again in v. 11, “For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.”

I John 3:9 makes plain that when we are born of God, we can’t sin.

Verses 7-8 bring out that we still sin from time to time right now. So we are obviously not born of God yet. We are not yet born; we are begotten. God’s Spirit is in us.

Verse 2 says it does not yet appear what we shall be. We’re His sons. We’re begotten sons and we will be born. When He returns, we are going to be like Him. We are going to be changed, transformed—born again. We are going to be born a second time, not born of a literal human mother but born of the Spirit.

John 3:6, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Right now we are flesh, but we shall be spirit.

John stresses the subject of love and the fact that we can’t be born into God’s Kingdom if we have enmity toward a brother.

Verses 14-16, “...He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” We are to give, to help, to sacrifice. We are to give of ourselves and of our time. We are to give of our life. What is your life? Your life is composed of time. If we perceive and really grasp God’s love, we’re going to demonstrate that in our dealings. An evidence of not having God’s love is if we have this world’s goods, we see a brother in need and refuse to do what we could to help. You can’t say that’s really a manifestation of the love of God. If we are in a position to help someone and we just turn our back—if we don’t have a caring and compassionate attitude—that’s not God’s way.

Verse 18, “My little children let’s not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” Certainly there is a matter of wisdom. Sometimes there may be factors where we need to get some counsel in terms of the best way to help someone. Sometimes a person is bringing a problem or problems on themselves and the best help is to let them learn a lesson. But we are to have an attitude of wanting to give, wanting to help, wanting to share—not to just stand by and have this attitude of selfishness. Not having this attitude of, ‘I am going to take care of me, and I don’t care what happens to you.’ We live in a world that is very much that way, a very self-centered world. People are going to take care of “number one” and not have a concern for helping others. We are instructed to love one another in deed and in truth.

John tells us in I John 3: 22, “...whatsoever we ask we receive of Him because we keep His commandments and do those things which are pleasing in His sight.”

We are going to look at two keys to answered prayers. One of the keys to answered prayers is obedience. Whatever we ask we receive because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing to Him. We are obeying God.

The second key is given in I John 5:14, “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him that if we ask anything according to His will He hears us.” **John mentions two keys to answered prayer:** (1) *obedience to God* and (2) *ask in accordance with God’s will.*

I John 4:1, “...believe not every spirit, but test [try] the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”

Again, he warns that not everybody is what they say they are. Because of all the problems that were extant, he was warning them to not think that everybody is what they say they are. He told them to try the spirits. He tells us how to do that.

Isaiah 8:20, “To the law and to the testimony! If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” If they speak not according to the law and the testimony, it’s because there’s no truth in them. He tells them to try the spirits. There are many false prophets.

I John 4:2, “By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.” What did he mean by that?

Matthew 24:5, “Many are going to come in My name, saying, ‘I am Christ,’ and will deceive many.”

In Matthew 15:9, Christ talked about people worshipping Him in vain, teaching the doctrines of men.

In Matthew 7:21, He talked about those who would say, ‘Lord, Lord.’ But Jesus said, ‘not everyone who says unto Me, ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter into the Kingdom, but he that does the will of My Father.’

So, what did John mean when he said, “Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God”? Part of the understanding comes from the most literal translation of v. 2; the tense of the verb “is come” in the Greek is the present progressive. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is coming (present progressive) is an evidence of God. That is the fact that the Spirit of God—the teaching of God’s Spirit, the confession, the admission, the acknowledgment that Jesus Christ comes into our flesh (into our life) to live His life in us—is coming in the present tense.

John 16:7, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him [It] to you.” Jesus described how He would send the Comforter and that it was expedient for us that He should go away. Jesus Christ comes into us.

In Philippians 2:5, the Apostle Paul tells us, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” Christ is coming to live His life in Christians through the Holy Spirit.

I John 4:12, “No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides [present progressive] in us, and His love has been perfected in us.”

Paul says in Galatians 2:20, “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” What I am doing, I am not simply doing on my own. It is Christ living in me because He is alive; He has been resurrected; He is at the right hand of the Father; and He is dwelling in me through the power of the Spirit of God to live His life in me. I have surrendered myself to Him to where He is my Lord and my Master. I am getting out of the way and letting Him live in me. John brings out that this is the test.

Satan always mixes a little truth in with his heresy. He has a variety of heresies, and each one will have maybe a little glimmer of truth. But one thing Satan is never going to stress is the fact that you have to let Christ live His life in you. That is what Satan does not want. The evidence of the true Spirit of God is the acknowledgment and the teaching that we have to yield ourselves for Christ to come into our flesh, to dwell in us and to live His life in us.

I John 4:4, “...He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”

Verse 6, “We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” He is showing that there were those who were going to listen to what he had to say, and there were those who wouldn’t.

Verse 7, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God...”

Verse 8, “...God is love...”

Verses 10-11, “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

Verse 13, “By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.”

Verse 19, “We love Him because He first loved us.” That’s why we love God. We learn to love. God loved us first. He took the first step. Because God loves us, we learn to respond to that love. That’s the way a little child learns to love. A little child responds to his parents’ love. Little children who grow up in a house where there is no love grow up very stunted emotionally. They need to have that love demonstrated to them in order to learn to love and to respond to that love. We learn to love God because God first loved us.

Verse 18, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear....” If we really grasp the depth of God’s love and God’s mercy, there is a confidence that we have.

Verse 20, we can’t love God and hate our brother. The love of God and the love of the brethren go hand in hand. If we love God, we need to love our brother also.

As we continue in I John 5:2-3, “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome [KJV, “grievous”].” This is how the love of God is defined. The commandments tell us how to love God and how to love our brother. The first four commandments tell us how to love God; the last six commandments tell us how to love our brother. The love of God is not just a feeling or emotion. It’s not just this feeling in your heart somewhere. It is a way of living and an attitude.

I John 5:1, “Whosoever believes that Jesus is the Christ [the Messiah] [Now if you really believe that, you are going to act on it.] is born [the better rendering is “begotten”] of God, and everyone that loves Him who begat, loves him also who is begotten of Him.” The sense here is “begotten,” not “born.” If we really believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Anointed of God, the coming Lord of lords and King of kings, then we are begotten children of God; we love God; and we love God’s children. You have to take what John said in its own context.

Verse 5 talks about overcoming the world.

Let’s notice something.

Verse 6, “This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness because the Spirit is truth.”

In vv. 7-8, you will find in the NKJ Bible and in many other translations a footnote for, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth....”

The footnote says, “NU, M omit the rest of v. 7 and through ‘*on earth*’ of v. 8, a passage found in only four or five very late manuscripts in Greek.”

Verses 7-8, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.”

All of v. 7 and the words “and there are three that bear witness on earth” of v. 8 are words that don’t exist in any of the original Greek manuscripts. It’s not something that existed in any of the early Greek manuscripts. It first existed in the Latin version of the Bible (the Vulgate) when it was inserted in the Middle Ages. Any commentary will point that out.

The reason it’s in the KJ translation of the Bible is because the KJ translation was made from the Greek manuscript published by Erasmus of Rotterdam who flourished just prior to the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. He flourished right around the beginning period of the Protestant Reformation in the late 1400s. He published a Greek New Testament text. The first text that he published got him in “hot water” because the text that he produced did not have this verse in it, though this verse appeared in the Latin Vulgate, which was the only place that it appeared. It wasn’t in any of the Greek. This really drew the wrath of the church there in Europe when Erasmus published his text and he didn’t have this “proved” text to the trinity. Because there is no “proved text” to the trinity, this one had been inserted. It created quite a stir. In fact, Erasmus was threatened with his life. When they explained it to him that way, he kind of “saw the light.” So when he republished his text, he put in there what they told him to put when it came to this verse—which did not come out of any of the Greek manuscripts but simply came out of the Latin.

It is not something we have a monopoly on. If you check it out in any good commentary or scholarly Bible dictionary, they all admit that there isn’t any evidence that this was ever part of the original text. It was inserted into a Latin manuscript. It was translated from the Greek text published by Erasmus. The only problem with it was the fact that when the pressure got put on Erasmus, he decided discretion was the better part of valor; rather than have his head chopped off, he stuck in this fictitious verse that he was pressured to put in.

Verse 6 should read, “...And it is the spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth.”

Verse 8, which would probably be v. 7, would read, “...and there are three that bear witness, the Spirit, the water and the blood [God’s Spirit, the water (baptism), and the blood (of Jesus Christ)]; these all agree in one.”

Verse 9, “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater, for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son.”

Verses 11-12, “And this is the testimony: that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that has the Son has life; and he that has not the Son of God has not life.”

Verses 16-17, “If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.” He describes the unpardonable sin and the fact that we can pray for a sin not leading to death.

Verse 19 (KJV), “We know that we are of God, and the whole world is under the rule of the wicked one.” (NKJV), “...the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.”

Verses 20-21, “And we know the Son of God is come, and has 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. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.” Already idolatrous objects of worship were beginning to come in. John concludes here.

Then we have the very short little book of **II John** addressed to the elect lady and her children (v. 1). There’s been a lot of speculation as to whom John meant by this.

In **II John** 4 after his greeting, he says, “I rejoice greatly that I found of your children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.”

Verses 6-7, “This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it. For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming [or, “is coming”] in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.”

There are many who say that Christ does not come to live His life in you. They say He did it all for you, and He is not coming (present progressive) to live His life in us. That it is not we who live, but Christ living in us. They say you don’t have to yield yourselves to Christ living in you. There are many deceivers that say that.

John continues in vv. 9-10, “Whosoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your

house, nor greet him [KJV, “neither bid him Godspeed”].” John is warning them that there were false brethren. There were those who were sowing discord. There were those who were bringing in heresies. John said don’t have this distorted concept of love, to think that you just tolerate heresy and lawless actions. If somebody comes bringing you another doctrine, don’t invite him in, don’t wish him well, don’t help him out. If you do, you’re part of it.

Verse 12, “Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink....” He had some names to name and some specifics to say. God did not have some of those things written down in detail because, frankly, some of the very ones whose names John was going to name were the ones, in some cases, who wound up actually helping to preserve the Book. So God did not choose to have some of those things spelled out in that way. But John just mentions that there were specifics that he was going to explain in more detail when he would see them face-to-face.

III John 2, “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.” God desires good things for us. He desires that we may prosper and be in health physically in the same way that we might prosper and be in health spiritually. God’s first concern is for our spiritual well being, but He is concerned for our physical well being as well. God does desire good things for us.

Verse 4, “...I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.”

As we continue, notice what John says—notice the state that the Church was getting into.

Verses 9-10, “I wrote unto the church but Diotrephes who loves to have the preeminence among them receives us not. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds, which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.”

When John wrote I John, he said, **I John** 2:19, “they have gone out from us, and they weren’t of us.” By the time he wrote III John, perhaps a couple of years later, the situation had progressed to the point that in some cases the heretics were literally taking over congregations and putting true Christians out. This was the situation that was becoming extant in the Roman world at the close of the first century A.D.

There were many heretical groups that acknowledged the name of Christ but did not

practice the doctrine of Christ. There were a variety of different heresies that were extant. The truth was being undermined. John was bearing witness of the truth. He was, in a sense, laying emphasis on the things that needed to be emphasized in that context. That's why additional books needed to be written to the New Testament.

He says in v. 11, "Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who practices good is of God, but he who practices evil has not seen God." He says don't follow that which is evil.

Verses 13-14, "I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face..."

Then there is a somewhat unique situation. There is no "Amen." There are only three books in the New Testament that do not conclude with "Amen": the book of Acts, the book of James and the book of III John. "Amen" signifies completion and finality. The book of Acts does not have an "Amen" because there is not that note of finality. It is the acts or the actions of the apostles, but there is much that was not recorded. The rest of the story wasn't recorded.

There were reasons for that. There was information God did not choose to have preserved in the Scriptures for us. And yet He made it plain that, in a sense, you look elsewhere for the information because there is no "Amen" at the end of the book. The book of Acts ends and we don't have the actions of the rest of the twelve. We don't know where the twelve went after they disappeared from Judea. We don't know where they went. We are not told in the book of Acts where they went. We are told where Paul went, up until the end of his first Roman imprisonment.

When you look at the commission to the twelve, Jesus told them they were not sent to the Gentiles but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:5-6). Acts 9:15, Paul was told that his commission was to bear the name of Christ before the Gentiles, before kings and before the house of Israel. Those three were his commission and in that order. The book of Acts tells you the story of Paul going before the Gentiles and before kings. But the third part of Paul's commission to the lost sheep of the House of Israel is not recorded because God allowed the identity of Israel and where the twelve tribes went to be lost from view.

The story of the actions of the twelve and the story of Paul's final portion of his ministry is not

recorded because it would have made plain where the tribes of Israel were at that time. The book of James is addressed to the twelve tribes scattered abroad. Normally, there would have been names and place-names given at the end of the book, saluting certain individuals. That information is left out because, again, it would have made plain where the twelve tribes had been scattered.

In III John, there were things and details that if John had written them, it would have clearly named names of actually some of the earliest Church fathers. It would have named some of the ones who were responsible for what has developed into the professing Christian Church. There was information that God simply did not allow. Some of the specifics God did not want recorded in that way; so it ends not entirely complete.

Let's notice, briefly, the book of **Jude**. Again, Jude is a short one-chapter book. Jude was written approximately the same time as II Peter or a little while earlier than that.

Verse 1, Jude was the brother of James.

Jude 3, "Beloved, while I was very diligence to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." Here was Jude in the 60s A.D. telling the Church to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered because heresies had crept in. That's something that God wants us to be conscious of.

Verse 4, "For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ."

The situation at the time Jude wrote was that it was necessary to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered because there were heresies that were creeping in. There were certain men who had crept in who were turning the grace of God into lawlessness. Jude tells us that certain ones have crept in.

Paul said in II Thessalonians 2:7 that the mystery of iniquity was already at work in the 50s. Jude tells us in the 60s that certain men had crept in unawares and had sought to turn the grace of God into lawlessness—to do away with the law. John says in I John 2:19 that 'they had gone out from us because they were not of us.' By the time he wrote III John, he said they were taking over and were putting true Christians out of the Church. So this was a progression of the story of

the incursion of heresies into the visible Church. Jude then reminds the Church of God's judgment and that God will deal with these things—He will deal with these individuals.

Verse 9, he talks about Moses showing proper respect.

Verse 11, "Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit and perished in the rebellion of Korah." The "way of Cain" was the way of "get" for self. The "error of Balaam for reward" was for profit. Balaam was willing to preach anything for a price. The "gainsaying of Korah"—Korah sought to usurp the priesthood for himself. We see this attitude of "get." We see the attitude that Balaam sought to introduce. Balaam introduced the attitude of compromise that would bring about the destruction of God's people. Korah sought to usurp the authority and the government that God had.

Verse 12, "These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear..." Here they were pretending to be part of the Church. They were taking part in the feasting and things of this sort. They were feeding themselves without fear.

Verses 12-13, "...they are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever."

Jude begins to illustrate the power behind the throne. This is descriptive of demon spirits who are really the power behind the throne. Jude then shows that Christ is going to come, and He is going to deal with these things, with these individuals.

Verse 16, "These are murmurers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts..."

Verses 18-19, "how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit." (RSV), "These be they who set up divisions, sensual, having not the Spirit."

We are told to look to Jesus Christ, to recognize that and to have our focus on what God is doing. Hopefully from some of this we begin to get a little bit of a focus as to the events that were going on in the latter part of the New Testament period. We see the events that were shaping up and the things that were developing that ultimately gave rise to a Church that, in the midst of history, disappears. And when the curtain is

pulled back, what we see on the scene is not what we read of in the Gospels and Acts. We see a church using the name of Christ but not following His teachings. How did that occur? A lot of the understanding of that is given in I, II, III John and the book of Jude.

John lays great emphasis on the importance of love—love to God and love of the brethren. John lays emphasis on the fact that we are to love, but that you cannot separate love from obedience. Real love involves keeping the commandments. That is the basis of our relationship with God and our relationship with the brethren.

Jude warns of heresies. He warns of the necessity of earnestly contending for the faith once delivered. One thing that we ought to note is the tendency of human nature to run down. Throughout the Scriptures, from the beginning and all the way down, is the story of God's people. The tendency of human nature is toward compromise, toward watering down, toward letting down the barriers. It is toward blending in and being absorbed with the world around.

When you go through the story of Israel in the Old Testament, when you go through the story of the judges, the kings and all through the Old Testament, over and over again that was the problem. The tendency of human nature, the tendency of the people of God has always inevitably been to wear down. They get stirred up and are zealous for a short time, but then that begins to wear down. The tendency is to begin to compromise here and there, to begin to blend in, to begin to lose that distinction and that separate identity and to blend in with the world. That's kind of a summation, but when you go through the Old Testament and you find that cycle repeated over and over again.

It happened even in the context of the New Testament Church. When you read the seven stages through which the Church would pass, outlined in Revelation 2 and 3, we see that up and down, that up and down. That is the tendency.

And, brethren, we have to recognize that tendency in our own lives. It's not simply that it was the tendency of the ancient Israelites in the time of the judges or kings. It's not simply that was the tendency then, and we think how could those people in the early New Testament Church do things like that? How could they begin to drift away from the truth? They had heard it from the apostles. They had seen some of these things. They had gone through these things. How could that happen? It's not simply a matter of dead

history. We look at it and we say, 'We don't see how those people could be so carnal.' Is that what we think of when we read the book of Numbers? Do we think, 'If I had been back there, I wouldn't have done anything like that. It would have been Moses and me. We would have been standing up there—three of us going into the Promised Land—Joshua, Caleb and me.'" We just automatically think that. We assume we would have done it, and all the others wouldn't have.

We have to realize that this is here as a testimony and a witness to us. This is my tendency and this is yours. It is the tendency of human nature. The tendency of the people of God is to start out all fired up, begin to let down and eventually begin to water down, compromise and blend in. That goes along until something happens that kind of stirs things up and "lights the fire" again. The only trouble is that the last go-around, those who can be stirred up by nothing else are going to get stirred by the tribulation.

It's important that we read some of these things and realize that this is not simply a matter of history. It's not something that only God's people in the early New Testament period had to be warned of. They are not the only ones who had to be encouraged, stirred up, made conscious of loving and obeying God and loving the brethren. They were not the only ones warned of being separate from the world and contending for the faith once delivered. They are not the only ones warned of being zealous, maintaining that identity and that distinction as a peculiar people. It is something that *applies to us*.

We have to watch because the same things that came on them are there to come on us. The same tendencies of human nature have been repeated over and over. Hopefully, we study the Bible; we study these accounts, not simply from a standpoint of those long dead, but to realize that it also applies to each of us. If we're not careful, we will fall into the same trap because so many have had to contend with it. Those are the tendencies for all of us. But with God's help, we don't have to go that route. We can learn. We can apply and maintain through God's help that faithfulness to God and His way that God wants to characterize all of us as His people.

With that we will conclude the General Epistles this evening. When we start up Bible study again, we will begin a series on the Major Prophets. I think we will see that Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel have an awful lot to say about today's world news. They have a lot to say about the headlines of today and tomorrow and the weeks

and months immediately ahead of us. That will be a timely subject, and I think we will get into that next time.