

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## 2 & 3 JOHN

Today, I have with me a Top Ten List. It's entitled, "[The World's Top Ten Shortest Books](#)." *You might notice that my list includes a few pretend titles...*

- 10) [America's Most Popular Lawyers](#)
- 9) [Different Ways to Spell Bob](#)
- 8) [French Hospitality](#)
- 7) [The May 2020 Guide To Organized Sports](#)
- 6) [The Loganville Travel Guide](#)
- 5) [Everything Men Know About Women](#)
- 4) [Everything Women Know About Men](#)
- 3) [Things We Know For Sure About The Coronavirus](#)
- 2) [The Amish Phone Directory](#)

And the world's number one shortest book: 1) [Pastor Sandy's Jokes That Are Actually Funny](#)

These would all be very short books, indeed. And speaking of short books... we have two to study today.

2 & 3 John are the shortest books in the Bible. In the original text both combine for less than 500 words.

I call them "[The Lilliputian Letters](#)" after the little people in Gulliver's Travels. You could also call them "[The Fruit of the Loom Letters](#)," *since both are **brief***.

Turn with me to John's second letter...

John begins by introducing himself, "[The Elder...](#)"

These letters were perhaps the last NT books written. By the time he penned them John was 100 years-old - the last living of the original twelve apostles.

John's stature was unsurpassed within the Christian community. He was known not just as *an* elder, but as "**THE Elder.**" John was an elder with a capital "E."

And he writes, "**to the elect lady and her children...**"

Some expositors believe the "**elect lady**" is actually a "**sister church.**" In the NT the Church is referred to as *the Bride of Christ*. It's *possible* the lady and her children are titles for a specific body of believers. But it's *more probable* John has a specific person in mind.

*Some have suggested both ideas are true.* He could be writing to a devout Christian lady who's vibrant witness had birthed a church-full of spiritual children.

No personal names are used because John wrote in a time of persecution. He didn't want to help the enemies of Christianity target anyone specifically.

John writes "**to the elect lady and her children whom I love in truth...**" Here's John's theme: **love in truth.**

1 John told us if we love God we'll love our brother, but here we're told real love never ignores the truth.

*God's love* is always in harmony with *God's truth.*

If ever our love causes us to ignore the truth - if in the name of love we tolerate, or gloss over, or accept a falsehood, realize we're not exhibiting the true love of God. Real love affirms and supports God's truth!

And in today's "Can't Offend, Tolerant-Of-Everything, Watered Down World" many churches have adopted a "*Love is Supreme, Unity at all Costs*" type of mentality.

To them *nothing is as important as love, peace, and unity*. Apparently, they've forgotten the words of Jesus.

In Luke 12:51-53 the Lord said, "Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

Jesus said He would draw a line in the sand.

Jesus came to confront us with the truth about God and life and us, and we're forced to make decisions that put us at odds with folks who choose the opposite.

Sometimes friction even erupts in the same family.

Not everyone humbles themselves and receives the truth. It's been said, "*You shall know the truth and the truth can make you mad.*" To insist on unity at all costs glosses over the reality of objective truth - God's truth.

Once a pastor called the kids to the front of the church for a children's sermon. The pastor taught on unity. He said, "*Boys and girls, God wants us all to be one.*" A little four year-old shouted out, "*Yea, but I wanna be five.*" The truth is, **all people are NOT one.**

To suggest that Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Atheists, Mormons should just forget their differences and love one another as brothers is ridiculous.

As Christians we should love all people and seek to lead them to Jesus, but for us to embrace them as family is to deny the truth that saves us and defines us!

**Real love will never deny God's truth!** And to suggest it really doesn't matter what you believe - *that doctrine is irrelevant - that all that should matter to us is love* - is total naïvety about what the Bible teaches!

The notion that truth is irrelevant is straight from the pit of Hell. *Your doctrine will determine your destiny.*

Having **love**, and even **faith**, is not enough - the real question is can **the object of your faith** save you?

Just because a baby can suck a bottle is no guarantee he or she will grow up healthy. *It depends on the contents of that bottle!* Likewise, faith alone will never save. **Faith and love has to be grounded in truth!**

John loves in truth, **“and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth, because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever...”**

Real truth is eternal. It doesn't shift from age to age, or generation to generation. God's truth is unaltered by popular opinion. His truth is *absolute* and *timeless*.

In verse 3 John extends his greetings to the elect lady and her children, **“Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from**

God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, **in truth and love.**

*“Grace, mercy, peace”* is the *triplet of our treasure* in Christ - *“truth and love”* is the *duo of our devotion.*

Verse 4, **“I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father.”** Apparently, John had been in contact with a group of Christians who’d been discipled by this elect lady, and he rejoices that they’re doing well. This is a credit to her and her ministry.

It’s true, that a person who *walks in truth* is more than likely a person who was *weaned on truth.*

Her disciples were on a good trajectory because they were straight from the start - **grounded** in God’s truth!

**Never underestimate a good foundation!**

**“And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. This is love, that we walk according to His commandments.”** Notice love is measured not by *how we feel*, but by *how we walk* - in essence, *what we do.*

Love is a lifestyle. **Real love is love in action.**

If I really love my wife I’ll not just do what’s easy or convenient for me to do, but I’ll love her in the way she wants and needs to be loved. *Love aims to please.*

And this should be our attitude toward God. Anybody can mouth the words they love God, but a real love for God walks

according to what's pleasing to Him - as John puts it, *"according to His commandments."*

*"This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it."*

John is asserting that **nothing has changed**.

From the outset of Jesus' ministry, the Lord taught us to love one another. And John is still trumpeting this message... *real love is expressed on God's terms: doing His will, keeping His commandments.*

This was the message *"from the beginning."*

Theologian Richard Niebuhr once said, "The great Christian revolutions have come not by the discovery of something that was not known before. They happen when somebody takes radically something that was always there." We tend to look for new tactics, but it's the rediscovery of simple truths that reignites passion.

We don't need a new commandment. We need to move out of our comfort zones, and put our love into action. *Really love... and watch it change the world!*

Verse 7, *"For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist."*

It was Mark Twain who wrote, "A lie runs around the world while truth is putting on her shoes." Bad news travels faster than good. *And this is true in the church.*

Paul warned the Ephesians about being *"tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery*

of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive...” False doctrine is constantly blowing through the Church. Whether it’s those in **John’s day** who denied Jesus’ humanity, or those **today** who deny His deity - let’s be on-guard.

Warren Wiersbe once quoted the pastor of a faithful and biblical church as saying, “If I took my eyes off this work for 24 hours and stopped praying, it would be invaded before we knew it.” He knew the importance of being vigilant in the cultivation of sound doctrine.

It reminds me of the little boy who was asked by his Sunday School teacher if he knew how to define the term “false doctrine.” He thought the teacher said, “*false doctoring.*” He replied, “False doctoring is when a doctor gives the wrong stuff to people who are sick.”

And this is the same definition of the term “*false doctrine*” - it’s giving wrong stuff to the spiritually sick.

Here again, John tells us how to spot the person who is *false doctoring* - they may be right on 95% of what they say and teach, but invariably they’ll stray when it comes to what they believe about Jesus Christ.

John notes the deceivers of his day as those “*who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh.*”

Remember, John battled the heresy of “**Gnosticism.**” It was a system of belief that denied Jesus’ humanity.

In contrast, most false teachers today deny Jesus’ deity. Both are wrong! Our Lord Jesus revealed Himself as *the God-man* - both *fully man* and *fully God*.

**“Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.”**

John labored for years to lay a solid foundation of right teaching in the church of his day, but he realized that foundation could be lost if it was not preserved.

I look at all God has done at CCSM over the years, yet if we don't continue to serve, and support, and give and pray we'll lose the gains for which we've worked.

If we kick back and say, *“I did my time in the nursery when my kids were younger... I gave money to the last project... I've done the usher thing. It's someone else's turn... I've been involved in the church, now I deserve a little time off...”* If we all just pass the buck we can lose what we've worked so hard and long to build.

It's been said, **“No snowflake in an avalanche ever feels responsible.”** That's why we need to **own** the personal part that God has called each of us to play.

Verse 9, **“Whoever 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.”** This is why it's so crucial that you're right in your belief about Jesus. *If you're not right about Jesus you can't be right with God!* Jesus is the means by which God has chosen to redeem the world to Himself!

**Jesus is the one bridge between man and God!**

There is a bridge in China, the Danyang-Kunshan Grand Bridge that purports to be the world's longest. It's part of the

Beijing to Shanghai freeway. Its length is 540,682 feet - that's a tad more than 102 miles long.

Yet this is not the longest bridge. **Jesus connects heaven to earth. He links God to man.** He spans the enormous gulf that's been caused by our sin... Today, even though you've broken and violated God's law you can still have a relationship with God through Jesus.

And verse 10 works all this out practically, **"If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him..."** In the first century Church traveling apostles were common.

Many of the infant churches lacked adequate leadership so men would travel from place to place to fill the gap. The churches would put these fellows up, provide for their needs, and support their ministry.

In a second century document known as the **Didache** or **"The Teaching of the Twelve,"** instructions were given to churches concerning these traveling apostles.

The Didache reads, **"Every apostle who comes to you should be received as the Lord. But he should not remain more than one day, and if there is some necessity a second as well; but if he should remain for three, he is a false prophet."** In other words, if the fellow stays more than the weekend without offering to pay you for his upkeep he's a freeloader, a deadbeat!

It continues, **"And when the apostle departs, he should receive nothing but bread until he finds his next lodging. But if he requests money, he is a false prophet... And not**

everyone who speaks forth in the spirit (or who claims to speak for God) is a prophet, but only if he has the kind of behavior which the Lord approves. From his behavior, then, will the false prophet and the true prophet be known... And every prophet, who in the spirit, (or who speaks as if by the Holy Spirit) orders a table to be spread shall not eat therefrom; but if he does, he is a false prophet.”

In other words, if it's truly God's Spirit speaking through a person He'll order food for the hungry and needy folks around him - not for his fat-cat self.

“And whoever says in the spirit, ‘Give me money’... do not listen to him. But if he says that it should be given for others who are in need, let no one judge him.”

In other words, a greedy or lazy person in the ministry is still greedy and lazy. Don't give in to his appeals no matter how spiritual he sounds. The church needs discernment. A sincere person won't be selfish.

It reminds me of the old maxim, “Treat your guest as a guest for two days. On the third day give him a rake.” In short, *put him to work* - sounds like the Didache’.

The Didache was written in the second century to correct the first century church's lack of discernment.

Apparently the inaugural church abounded in love, but at times lacked discretion. The church was in the habit of taking in everyone - *true or false teacher*.

They were so enamored with the need to love they failed to support the truth. John is teaching that **a love that is not wedded to the truth is not real love.**

It seems this problem in the early church was so prevalent that Christian charity was actually helping the heretics and perpetuating the spread of their heresies.

This is why John warns in verse 11, “**for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.**” Offer a false teacher support and you become an accomplice in their deception. You’re aiding and abetting a deceiver.

Say Mormon missionaries pull up to your house on their bicycles. They’re hot and sweaty - so in the spirit of niceness - you invite them into your air-conditioning to take a nap and drink some lemonade - *don’t!*

You’re enabling a false prophet to carry on in the spread of his deception. You want to see them all pooped out and ready to quit. Don’t encourage them.

If you see a Mormon with a flat tire. *Help get him to safety - give him a ride home* - but don’t fix his flat and send him on his way. He’ll keep **pedaling** his heresy.

There may be times to invite a Jehovah Witness into your house, and proper hospitality can be shown. But make sure your intention is to plant seeds of truth in their mind, not just a hot meal in their belly.

I’m not saying don’t be friends with the cultist. We need to be a friend of sinners if we’re going to lead them to Christ. But when they actively propagate their lies, don’t help them. One commentator writes, “**John warns us not to unintentionally collaborate with the enemy... Don’t be mean, but when he**

comes to your door don't moisten lips that lie with your lemonade."

John concludes his second letter, "Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full. And this is why these letters are so short and to the point. John was planning a visit where he would end up filling in all the details.

"The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen."

3 John begins, "The Elder, to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth..." 2 John was written to "the elect lady." 3 John is addressed to a man named "Gaius."

And there are actually three Gaius' in the NT...

Acts 19 speaks of **Gaius the Macedonian**... Acts 20, **Gaius of Derbe** in Galatia... Romans 16 and 1 Corinthians 1 speak of **Gaius who lived in Corinth**...

This Gaius to whom John writes could be either of the three I've mentioned, or a different man altogether.

Whoever this Gaius was, John loved him in truth!

The Greek name, "Gaius" means "on Earth" - and the message John sends to Gaius would indeed apply to all of us who presently live on this fallen planet.

3 John is a letter from the Elder to the earthlings.

And welcome to THE shortest book of the Bible, In the original language it's 26 words shorter than 2 John.

And the names of four men appear in this book: **John the Elder, Gaius, Demetrius**, and a man who is held in a not so flattering light. A villain named **Diotrephes**.

This is why I've entitled our study after a movie from the 1980s, "**Three Men And A Baby**." **John, Gaius, and Demetrius** are the men, while **Diotrephes** is the baby.

Verse 2, "**Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.**"

Here's a verse that has been misunderstood and misapplied, and its misinterpretation has led thousands of Christians into serious error. What John intended as a simple greeting is taken by prosperity teachers as a promise of perfect health and wealth for all Christians.

Kenneth Copeland, Oral Roberts, even Joel Osteen have been major culprits of this erroneous teaching.

Roberts said when he first came across 3 John 2, he said to his wife, "**Evelyn, now this means we're suppose to prosper.**" Oral claimed his whole Christian experience grew out of this understanding of 3 John 2.

Yet here's the problem. Throughout the Bible (*read Hebrews 11 for example*) - and throughout church history - there've been countless examples of devout believers in Jesus who didn't prosper financially, and didn't live out their days in perfect health, yet despite their trials they gained God's approval **by faith**.

Godly people can be poor, and get sick - just like sinners. We all live in a germ-infested fallen world.

To take what John meant as *a common salutation - a simple wish for health and happiness* - as an iron-clad doctrine is an example of shoddy biblical interpretation.

Greek scholar Gordon Fee writes, “To extend John’s wish for Gaius to refer to financial and material prosperity for all Christians of all times is totally foreign to the text. John neither intended that, nor could Gaius have so understood it. Thus it cannot be the ‘plain meaning’ of the text.” One of the first rules of hermeneutics, or biblical interpretation, is to look at the verse in its historical and cultural contexts.

Remember, “A text without a context ends up a pretext.” Gordon Fee refers to John’s phrase in verse 2 as “the standard form of greeting in a personal letter of antiquity.” It was simply a hopeful and happy greeting.

John gets to the body of his letter in verse 3, “For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth.”

Earl Weaver, long time manager for the Baltimore Orioles, once threw a temper tantrum in the dugout. He knocked over coolers and threw what he could grab.

On the team that year was a born again Christian named “Pat Kelly.” After Weaver had pitched his fit, Pat spoke up, “Coach, I hope you learn to walk with the Lord.” The old coach wasn’t too receptive. He snapped back, “I hope you learn to walk with the bases loaded.”

Throughout the Bible the Christian life is referred to as a *walk*. We’re to walk in love, walk in the Spirit, walk by faith,

walk as children of light. Our life with Christ is not a run - or a hop - nor a crawl - it's a walk...

When you run you get exhausted...

When you hop you fail to get firm footing...

When you crawl you have no focus...

But when you take a walk your attention is on the One you're with. Walking denotes a consistent, steady forward progression. Step by step. There's a gentle leading. The time spent is refreshing and rejuvenating.

To *“walk in truth”* is to continue trusting, learning, and applying the truths of God's Word to your everyday life.

Gaius was a fellow believer who walked in truth!

John says to Gaius in verse 4, *“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.”* And like John, as a pastor, I too have no greater joy than to watch the people involved in this ministry progress in their walk with Jesus...

*Get saved, grow, then serve...*

Every year in September at the church leaders conference we host, I have scores of people tell me how impressed they are with the servants from our church, and their eagerness to show the love of Christ.

Trust me, this encourages me. Like John, *“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.”*

*“Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went*

forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles.”

I'll never forget the first time we studied this verse at Calvary CSM...

We started our church in 1980, teaching in the book of Luke. By late 1982 we'd studied through the NT and had reached 3 John. It was our first journey through the Bible. FYI, now in 2020, we're on our fifth trip.

At the time though, we were occupying an old warehouse - *on a temporary basis*. The owner didn't even want us occupying the building. He wasn't even charging us rent. He had told me to get him a liability policy, and we could meet there until we found something else. Well, the weeks dragged on into to months. There were few alternatives on the horizon.

That's when we read 3 John 6, *“they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles.”*

In other words, God doesn't want His people mooching-off nonbelievers. He wants us carrying our own weight - paying our bills. As John puts it, He wants us traveling through life *“in a manner worthy of God.”*

I was convicted. In occupying the warehouse without paying rent I felt we were *“taking from the Gentiles.”*

We were drawing *worldly support* for a *spiritual venture*. John says it's the responsibility of God's people to pay their own freight, so the next week I sent the landlord an unsolicited check for our rent.

Remember, the owner didn't want to rent to us. He had other plans, but after a few months of us sending him money,

he asked us if we'd like to sign a lease. I believe it was God's way of blessing our obedience.

The point of the story is God wants to fund *His work* through *His people* - not secular grants. **God reserves for believers in Jesus the joy of giving to His work.**

Verse 8, **“We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.”**

Here's a beautiful principle - when you give time, or hospitality, or money, or physical support, or prayers to a servant of God you're investing in their ministry.

You're becoming a partner in their work, and thus you're sharing in the spiritual rewards of their labors.

Over last year, and the start of 2020, *you through your church*, have given to Christian ministries in England, Africa, and Mexico - as a result you now share in the rewards of ministries you've never visited.

Verse 9, **“I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.”** And here is the infamous Diotrephes.

I read where the average American eats 68 hot dogs a year. That's a lot of hot dogs... Well, this man, Diotrephes, didn't eat hot dogs - *he was a hot dog!*

**No one should *relish* being like Diotrephes.**

He loved to bask in the limelight - be the center of attention. It reminds me of a comment Woodrow Wilson said of a proud associate, **“He was the only man I ever knew who could strut while sitting down.”**

And Diotrephes could strut! He loved to be in control.

He was a power-monger. Diotrephes knew how to manipulate, and intimidate, and dominate. And when he came into the church he brought along this attitude.

Diotrephes was the self-appointed church sheriff. He thought nothing could go on in *his* town, even in Jesus' name, without his approval. And it was this lust for "*the preeminence*" that made him jealous. He was threatened by the ministries of other believers.

This is why he refused to receive John. Verse 10 accuses Diotrephes of making vicious slurs to discredit John. The Elder John states, "*Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words.*" *He was a slanderer!*

Bible expositor, AT Robertson, once wrote an article for a Southern Baptist magazine. In it he depicted the conduct of Diotrephes, but without naming him.

In the weeks that followed, 25 Baptist church leaders across the state wrote letters to the editor canceling their subscriptions to the magazine. They all claimed that Robertson had been pointing his finger at them.

It's sad, but **the Church today is still plagued by Diotrephes**. When a church develops a sort of union boss, who dictates to God and God's people what can and can't be done - the Spirit is grieved and quenched.

Jesus said in Matthew 20:25-27, "*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among*

you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant... Whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave..."

Christian leaders are to be *servants* not *sergeants*, *disciples* not *dictators*. It's been said the challenge of a leader is to "lead and not drive, inspire and not dominate, create respect and not fear, win support and not opposition." There's only one Master - only one Boss for the believer - and His name is "*Jesus Christ!*"

Verse 12 continues Diotrephes' indictment, "**And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.**" Not only did Diotrephes oppose John the Elder. He opposed anyone else in the church who supported John, and tried to offer him assistance.

With Diotrephes it was *his way or the highway*.

He didn't allow for a dissenting opinions. Diotrephes was an arrogant man - a cult-leader in the making.

And notice what John says at the beginning of verse 10, *when he comes he'll put Diotrephes in his place!*

Don't you wish you could've been present for that encounter? Sparks flew! The Elder put his foot down!

**"Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God."** The knowledge of God produces a desire to obey and walk in His commands

Instead of being a Diotrephes, we should all be a Demetrius. Verse 12, “Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true.”

Nothing is said of Demetrius other than he was a good example. He had “*a good testimony from all...*”

If we contrast Demetrius with Diotrephes, he must’ve been a humble, servant-leader. He was always willing to lend a helping hand. If Diotrephes was about *putting people down*, Demetrius was about *lifting people up*.

Verse 13, “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.”

*Ever written an email that was misinterpreted?*

Tone, inflexion, volume, posturing, even personal persona are absent from an email. *The same is true of a letter.* Some messages - no matter how awkward or unpleasant - need to be conveyed face to face.

John concludes, “Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.” John has been reflecting on the love of Jesus. And remember what John said of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, “the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” When John tells his readers to greet his friends by name, he’s exemplifying the personal, and intimate, and specific love of Jesus.

You’ve heard the statement, “I love humanity. I just can’t stand people.” That’s not Jesus! **He loves each one of us as if there were only one of us to love!**