

The Letters of John:

A Study of I, II, & III John



GULF SHORES

CHURCH OF CHRIST

Gulf Shores, AL

BIBLE CLASS STUDY GUIDE

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Study Guide for the Letters of John

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This study guide was created by Ray Reynolds for the purpose of Sunday morning Bible classes at the Gulf Shores Church of Christ (Gulf Shores, AL). The material presented in this class series will be gleaned from personal notes, the New King James Study Bible, Dr. Coy Roper, Dr. Steven Guy, Mark Copeland, Gleason L. Archer, Irving L. Jenson, J.W. Roberts, and other various sources.

Study Guide for the Letters of John

INTRODUCTION

Author:

The letters of John are favorites among the General epistles, especially I John. Traditionally these books are assigned to the apostle John the son of Zebedee. Early church leaders like Eusebius, Papias, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and many others taught that John wrote these books. The style, vocabulary, and concepts are all very similar and can also be compared to the gospel of John

I John doesn't start like a letter or end like a letter, but it is a very personal writing. II and III John are short, one chapter letters that are obviously written to individuals and congregations. The fact that these books are written from the perspective an "elder" is evidence that the churches and individuals who read them knew John very well and genuinely appreciated his pastoral work.

Date:

It is generally accepted that these books were written in the late 80's or early 90's AD. John lived until about 100 AD and died of natural causes, therefore, these books would have been written later in his life. Most scholars believe these letters were actually written from Ephesus.

Theme:

I John is about loving one another. He talks about forgiveness, the need for loving our brethren, and avoiding those who teach false things. There is a great contrast between truth and falsehood.

II John is about avoiding false teachers. They should not be greeted or encouraged. He also encourages the church to remember what he said about "loving one another"

III John is about the contrast between good and evil. There is a comparison between Diotrephes (bad) and Demetrius (good). We need to emulate good and encourage those who practice it.

Audience:

All of the letters are for Ephesian Christians. I John was written to the Christians in the Ephesian church and surrounding area. II John was written to a church near Ephesus. III John was written to Gaius, who was from the church at Ephesus.

Key Verses:

I John 1:3, 1:5-10, 2:1-2, 2:7-11, 2:18-19, 2:22-23, 2:26-29, 3:1-3, 3:7-9, 3:16-18, 3:24, 4:1-3, 4:7-16, 4:20-21, 5:1-5, 5:12-18, 5:20

II John 4-6, 8, 10

III John 2-4, 9-10, 11

Outline:

I John

- II. *The Test of Obedience (1)*
- II. *The Test of Love (2)*
- III. *The Test of Character (3)*
- IV. *The Test of Spirituality (4)*
- V. *The Test of Assurance (5)*

II John

- VI. *Greeting Other Christians (vs.1-3)*
- VII. *Commending Other Christians (v.4)*
- VIII. *Challenging Other Christians (vs.5-6)*
- IX. *Warning Other Christians (vs.7-11)*
- X. *Encouraging Other Christians (vs.12-13)*

III John

- I. *Christian Leaders Should Be Friendly (vs.1-4)*
- II. *Christian Leaders Should Be Focused (vs.5-8)*
- III. *Christian Leaders Should Be Forewarned (vs.9-11)*
- IV. *Christian Leaders Should Be Faithful (vs.12-15)*

Study Guide for the Letters of John

ARE YOU A FAITHFUL CHILD OF GOD?

The Test of Obedience – I John 1

Introduction: In **Matthew 6:9** Jesus told believers that they could call God their Father in heaven. However, Paul reminds us that we can only call Him Father if we are truly a child of God (**Romans 8**). Well, we have to ask ourselves the question, “Am I child of God?” If the answer is “Yes,” then we have to ask ourselves, “Am I faithful child of God?” You see, John is writing to identify two things: fellowship & sonship. He wants us to become a child of God, and then be faithful in fellowship with God. In today’s lesson we are going to study **I John 1** and then we are going to take the first test to prove our sonship and fellowship

Discussion:

I. A Child of God Has Fellowship (vs.1-3)

- A. The Lord (Word) brings eternal life (v.1).
- B. The Lord (Word) was manifested to us (v.2).
- C. The Lord desires fellowship with His children (v.3).

II. A Child of God Has Joy (v.4)

- A. Joy is found in Christ.
- B. Joy is found in revelation.
- C. Joy is found in fellowship.

III. A Child of God Has Cleansing (vs.5-7)

- A. Cleansing comes from the God of light (v.5).
- B. Cleansing is hindered by walking in darkness (v.6).
- C. Cleansing is hindered by not practicing the truth (v.6).
- D. Cleansing comes from walking in the light (v.7).
- E. Cleansing comes from the blood of Jesus Christ (v.7).

IV. A Child of God Has Truth (v.8)

- A. Lying about fellowship (1:6-7).
- B. Lying about nature, sin (1:8).
- C. Lying about works, deeds (1:10).
- D. Lying about obedience (2:4-6).

V. *A Child of God Has Maturity (vs.9-10)*

- A. Our confession matures us (v.9)
- B. God's faithfulness matures us (v.9).
- C. God's justice matures us (v.9).
- D. God's forgiveness matures us (v.9)
- E. God's cleansing matures us (v.9).
- F. Our honesty/humility matures us (v.10).
- G. God's word matures us (v.10)

Conclusion: Obviously, the test of obedience is difficult. If we have faith in God, and trust in His Word, we will pass this test with flying colors. If we fail the test of obedience there is no hope for eternal life. John knew that the heart and soul of Christianity was obedience to God (**John 14:15**).

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ARE YOU A FAITHFUL CHILD OF GOD?

The Test of Love – I John 2

Introduction: In the last lesson we identified the fact that God has children (**Matthew 6:9, Romans 8**). We then asked ourselves the question, “Am I child of God?” If the answer was “Yes,” I challenged you to ask yourself, “Am I faithful child of God?” We noted that John, the beloved, is writing to identify two things: fellowship & sonship. John wants us to become a child of God, and then he challenges us to be faithful in fellowship with God. In the last lesson we also noted that in order to prove our faithfulness we have to pass a series of tests (The first test was obedience). In today’s lesson we are going to study **I John 2** and then we are going to take the second test to prove our sonship and fellowship

Discussion:

I. A Child of God Has A New Advocate (vs.1-6)

- A. Our Advocate, Jesus Christ, is righteous (v.1).
- B. Our Advocate, Jesus Christ, is our propitiation (v.2).
- C. Our Advocate, Jesus Christ, is knowable (vs.3-4).
- D. Our Advocate, Jesus Christ, is forgiving (vs.5-6).

II. A Child of God Has A New Commandment (vs.7-11)

- A. Those in fellowship with God walk under a new commandment (vs.7-8).
- B. Those in fellowship with God walk in the light (v.9)
- C. Those in fellowship with God walk in love (v.10).
- D. Those in fellowship with God walks with his eyes open (v.11).

III. A Child of God Has A New Family (vs.12-14)

- A. All of us need or sins forgiven (v.12).
- B. All of us need to know God (v.13).
- C. All of us need to overcome the devil (v.13).
- D. All of us need to be strong (v.14).

IV. *A Child of God Has A New Life (vs.15-17)*

- A. Our new life is not influenced by the world (v.15).
- B. Our new life is not influenced by the things of the world (vs.15-16).
- C. Our new life is not influenced by temporal things (v.17).
- D. Our new life is not influenced by what we see (v.18).

V. *A Child of God Has A New Danger (vs.18-23)*

- A. There is a conflict between love for the Father and for the world (vs.15-17).
- B. There is danger and conflict because the last hour has come (vs.18-19).
- C. There is danger and conflict because people deny the truth (vs.20-21).
- D. There is danger and conflict because people deny Jesus (vs.22-23).

VI. *A Child of God Has A New Anointing (vs.24-27)*

- A. Our anointing is from the Holy One (v.20)
- B. Our anointing is for eternal life (vs.24-25).
- C. Our anointing is for protection (v.26).
- D. Our anointing is for understanding truth (v.27).

VII. *A Child of God Has A New Assurance (vs.28-29)*

- A. We can have assurance because we abide in Jesus Christ, and He in us (v.28).
- B. We can have assurance because Jesus is coming again (v.28).
- C. We can have assurance because Jesus is righteous (v.29).
- D. We can have assurance because we are born again (v.29).

Conclusion: Obviously, the test of love is difficult. If we have faith in God, and love Him, we will pass this second test. If we fail the test of love there is no hope for eternal life. John knew that the heart and soul of Christianity was to love God (**John 13:34-35, 14:15**). Will you follow his teachings?

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ARE YOU A FAITHFUL CHILD OF GOD?

The Test of Character – I John 3

Introduction: In the last lesson we identified the fact that God has children (**Matthew 6:9, Romans 8**). We then asked ourselves the question, “Am I child of God?” If the answer was “Yes,” I challenged you to ask yourself, “Am I faithful child of God?” We noted that John is writing to identify fellowship & sonship. John wants us to become a child of God, and then he challenges us to be faithful in fellowship with God. In the last few lessons we have noted that in order to prove our faithfulness we have to pass a series of tests (obedience, love, etc.). In today’s lesson we are going to study **I John 3** and then we are going to take the third test to prove our sonship and fellowship

Discussion:

I. A Child of God Is Pure (vs.1-3)

- A. Purity is found in those that are influenced by the love of God (v.1).
- B. Purity is found in those that are not corrupted by the world (v.1).
- C. Purity is found in those that are ready for the return of Christ (v.2).
- D. Purity is found in those that are placing their hope in the Lord (v.3).
- E. Purity is found in those that are conforming to the image of Christ (v.3).

II. A Child of God Is Righteous (vs.4-6)

- A. We should not live a life of sin because all sin is lawlessness (v.4).
- B. We should not live a life of sin because Christ came to take away sin (v.5).
- C. We should not live a life of sin because there is no sin in Christ (v.5).
- D. We should not live a life of sin because it proves that we have not seen or known God (v.6).

III. A Child of God Is Free (vs.7-9)

- A. Our freedom should remind us of our new Savior (v.7).
- B. Our freedom should remind us of our new adversary (v.8).
- C. Our freedom should remind us of our new birth (v.9).
- D. Our freedom should remind us of our new life (v.9).

IV. *A Child of God Is Caring (vs.10-17)*

- A. Love is proof of your righteousness (vs.10-12).
- B. Love is proof of your salvation (vs.13-15).
- C. Love is proof of your sacrifice (v.16).
- D. Love is proof of your service (v.17).

V. *A Child of God Is Confident (vs.18-24)*

- A. Confidence will lead us to good works (v.18).
- B. Confidence will lead us to assurance (v.19).
- C. Confidence will lead us to godliness (vs.20-21).
- D. Confidence will lead us to prayer (v.22).
- E. Confidence will lead us to confession (v.23).
- F. Confidence will lead us to the Bible (v.24).

Conclusion: Obviously, the test of character is difficult. If we have faith in God, and conform to the image of Christ, we will pass this third test with flying colors. If we fail the test of character there is no hope for eternal life. John knew that the heart of a Christian was seen in his actions.

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ARE YOU A FAITHFUL CHILD OF GOD?

The Test of Spirituality- I John 4

Introduction: In the last lesson we identified the fact that God has children (**Matthew 6:9, Romans 8**). We then asked ourselves the question, "Am I child of God?" If the answer was "Yes," I challenged you to ask yourself, "Am I faithful child of God?" We noted that John, the beloved, is writing to identify two things: fellowship & sonship. John wants us to become a child of God, and then he challenges us to be faithful in fellowship with God. In the last few lessons we have noted that in order to prove our faithfulness we have to pass a series of tests (obedience, love, character, etc.). In today's lesson we are going to study **I John 4** and then we are going to take the fourth test to prove our sonship and fellowship

Discussion:

I. A Child of God Does Not Deny, But Confesses (vs.1-3)

- A. False spirits deny Jesus (v.1).
- B. False prophets deny Jesus (v.1).
- C. The Spirit of God confesses Jesus (v.2).
- D. The Antichrist denies Jesus (v.3). - **I John 2:18**

II. A Child of God Does Not Give Up, But Perseveres (vs.4-6)

- A. The Spirit of God overcomes (v.4).
- B. The spirit of the devil influences (vs.4-5).
- C. The spirit of the world compromises (vs.4-5).
- D. The spirit of truth is of God (v.6).
- E. The spirit of error is of Satan (v.6).

III. A Child of God Does Not See God, But Abides In God (vs.7-16)

- A. If we love others we will abide in God (vs.7-8).
- B. If we live for God we will abide in God (v.9).
- C. If we love God we will abide in God (vs.10-11).
- D. If we know God we will abide in God (vs.12-13).
- E. If we believe God we will abide in God (vs.14-16).

IV. *A Child of God Does Not Fear, But Is Bold (vs.17-19)*

- A. The quality of love makes us bold (v.17).
- B. The effect of love makes us bold (v.18).
- C. The source of love makes us bold (v.19).

V. *A Child of God Does Not Hate, But Loves (vs.20-21)*

- A. If you love God, and hate your brother, you are a liar (v.20)
- B. If you love God, and your brother, you have seen God (v.20).
- C. If you love God, and your brother, you follow God's commands (v.21).
- D. If you love God, and follow God's commands, you are faithful (v.21).

Conclusion: Obviously, the test of spirituality is difficult. If we have faith in God, and conform to the image of Christ, and are led by the Spirit, we will pass this fourth test with flying colors. If we fail the test of spirituality there is no hope for eternal life. John knew that a true Christian's spirit would be approved by God.

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ARE YOU A FAITHFUL CHILD OF GOD?

The Test of Assurance – I John 5

Introduction: In the last lesson we identified the fact that God has children (**Matthew 6:9, Romans 8**). We then asked ourselves the question, “Am I child of God?” If the answer was “Yes,” I challenged you to ask yourself, “Am I faithful child of God?” We noted that John, the beloved, is writing to identify two things: fellowship & sonship. John wants us to become a child of God, and then he challenges us to be faithful in fellowship with God. In the last few lessons we have noted that in order to prove our faithfulness we have to pass a series of tests (obedience, love, character, spirituality, etc.). In this last lesson from I John we are going to study **I John 5** and take the final test to prove our sonship and fellowship

Discussion:

I. A Child of God Is Born of God (vs.1-5)

- A. If you are born of God you love God (v.1).
- B. If you are born of God you keep His commandments (v.2).
- C. If you are born of God you are steadfast (v.3).
- D. If you are born of God you have faith (v.4).
- E. If you are born of God you believe (v.5).

II. A Child of God Is Born of Water & Spirit (vs.6-8)

- A. We must be baptized (v.6).
- B. We must see the unity of the Godhead (v.7).
- C. We must seek unity (v.8).

III. A Child of God Has A New Life (vs.9-11)

- A. The blessing of God (v.9).
- B. The blessing of a new life (v.10).
- C. The blessing of eternal life (v.11).

IV. *A Child of God Has Assurance of Salvation (vs.12-13)*

- A. We must know the purpose of life (v.12).
- B. We must know God (v.13).
- C. We must know the Son (v.13).
- D. We must know that we have eternal life (v.13).

V. *A Child of God Has Confidence in God (vs.14-15)*

- A. We have confidence in our prayers (v.14).
- B. We have confidence in His will (v.14).
- C. We have confidence in His attentiveness (v.15).
- D. We have confidence in our petitions (v.15).

VI. *A Child of God Has Concern For Others (vs.16-17)*

- A. We need to be concerned about those who are sinning (v.16).
- B. We need to be concerned about those who are dying spiritually (v.16).
- C. We need to be concerned about those who are unrighteous (v.17).

VII. *A Child of God Has Knowledge (vs.18-21)*

- A. We can know the dangers of sin (v.18, 21).
- B. We can know that we are from God (v.19).
- C. We can know the truth (v.20).
- D. We can know that we have eternal life (v.20, 13).
- E. We can know the will of God (v.21).

Conclusion: Obviously, the test of assurance is difficult. If we have faith in God, and believe that He will save us as He has promised, we will pass this fifth and final test with flying colors. If we fail the test of assurance, and doubt God, then there is no hope for eternal life. John knew that a true Christian would know that God says what He means, and means what He says. – You can be saved!

Study Guide for the Letters of John
ARE YOU WALKING WITH GOD?
II John

Introduction: In John's first epistle, he ponders the benefits of being a faithful child of God. In John's second epistle, he hopes to encourage Christians in their walk with God. He challenges believers to have brotherly love, keep following God's commands, and keep their minds focused on what was important. Let's study together

Discussion:

I. Greeting Other Christians (vs.1-3)

- A. John speaks to the elect lady and her children (v.1).
- B. John loves the elect lady and her children (v.2).
- C. John blesses the elect lady and her children (v.3).

II. Commending Other Christians (v.4)

- A. John commends the church for following the way of truth (v.4).
- B. John commends the church for some having obedience (v.4).

III. Challenging Other Christians (vs.5-6)

- A. John challenges the church to remember the commandment to love (v.5).
- B. John challenges the church to understand love (v.5).
- C. John challenges the church to live a life of love (v.6).

IV. Warning Other Christians (vs.7-11)

- A. John warns of deceivers and antichrists (v.7).
- B. John warns of losing their work and their reward (v.8).
- C. John warns of straying from the doctrine of Christ (v.9).
- D. John warns of false teachers (v.10).
- E. John warns of improper fellowship (v.11).

V. *Encouraging Other Christians (vs.12-13)*

- A. John wanted to encourage the brethren with his pen (v.12).
- B. John wanted to encourage the brethren with his presence (v.13)
- C. John passes on a word of encouragement from a sister congregation (v.13).

Conclusion: In this letter, John addresses the need for all followers of Christ to walk with the Lord and not follow their own way. It is very important for us to stay focused or we will lose our direction. Are you walking with God?

Study Guide for the Letters of John
ARE YOU FOLLOWING GODLY EXAMPLES?
III John

Introduction: In John's first epistle, he ponders the benefits of being a faithful child of God. In John's second epistle, he encourages Christians to walk with God. In this third epistle, he hopes to encourage and challenge a church that was struggling with leadership. We know we should be following someone, but where will they lead us? Who should we follow? Why should we follow them? How will we know if they are the right kind of leaders? Let's study together

Discussion:

I. Christian Leaders Should Be Friendly (vs.1-4)

- A. Christians should encourage their friends (v.1).
- B. Christians should pray for their friends (v.2).
- C. Christians should share good news about their friends (v.3).
- D. Christians should rejoice over their friends (v.4).

II. Christian Leaders Should Be Focused (vs.5-8)

- A. The church should focus on sharing (benevolence) (v.5).
- B. The church should focus on loving (v.6).
- C. The church should focus on serving (v.7).
- D. The church should focus on working (v.8).

III. Christian Leaders Should Be Forewarned (vs.9-11)

- A. Some Christian leaders refuse to listen (v.9)
- B. Some Christian leaders refuse to accept advice (v.10)
- C. Some Christian leaders refuse to change (v.11)

IV. Christian Leaders Should Be Faithful (vs.12-15)

- A. Faithful leaders say good things about others (v.12).
- B. Faithful leaders write encouraging words about others (v.13).
- C. Faithful leaders visit people who need encouragement (v.14).
- D. Faithful leaders offer peace to those in need (v.15).
- D. Faithful leaders pass on positive words (v.15).
- D. Faithful leaders greet others by name (v.15).

Conclusion: Every church needs good godly leaders. It is very important for us to follow leaders that are following God. This letter talks about three men: Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius. Two men were good and one man was evil. This letter challenges us to ask, "Who are we following?" Are you following selfish ego-centric leaders? Are you following godly examples?