

# The Apostle John



The Apostle John is an interesting person to study and to recognize for his desire for true faith in the Living God and also, his implementation of that true faith in the Son of God, Jesus. As we know John is the writer of five letters in the New Testament. He writes His Gospel account, which is very different than the other three Gospel accounts that we have –

Matthew, Mark and Luke. There is a reason for that in which we will discuss in a moment. John also is the writer of 1John, 2John and 3John. The most profound of all of his writings that we have, is found in the Book of Revelation.

If we take a look at John's life we see some very interesting things. When he first met Jesus, he was approximately 12 or 13 years of age. Yes, he was very young when he began his search for the truth and the true God. We know through various accounts that John was a young seeker of God. He did actually know some of the people from Qumran – even at this young age. We know that he and his brother James became one of the first four disciples whom Jesus actually chose. They accepted the call to be with Him – along with Simon and Andrew – and left their father's fishing business. John was the son of Zebedee and Salome (a family of fishermen).

Jesus referred to John as one of the "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17). The other "Son of Thunder" was James, John's brother. It is believed that this nickname was a result of the brothers' bold and somewhat aggressive personalities. They were aggressive in terms of wanting the truth about God being revealed and then believed by all those who would hear it. They believed so deeply in Jesus that they wanted everyone to believe that Jesus was their true Messiah.

John enjoyed a very close relationship with Jesus along with Peter and James. He was on the Mount Transfiguration when Jesus was transformed for a brief time in which John and the others saw and witnessed who Jesus actually was. John writes in His Gospel account in John 21:20 that he was also referred to by Jesus as "*the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved.*"

Many scholars also believe that John wrote the Gospel of John and his three epistles in Ephesus. He wrote Revelation on the Isle of Patmos prior to him being released and then going to Ephesus where he served for the remainder of His life. He was older than 90 years of age at that time and he died of natural causes. John was the last of the 12 disciples to pass away.

In Galatians 2:9, Paul refers to John as one of the “pillars” of the church in Jerusalem. It is thus believed that John was present in Jerusalem for the apostolic council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). It was here that James, the brother of Jesus and the chief elder of the council in Jerusalem, decided and made way to allow the Gentiles to become apart of the Body of Christ. Yes, John certainly was an important part of the Body of Christ.

John’s Gospel is much different than the three Gospels written before his. Matthew, Mark and Luke give a basic account of the life and ministry of Jesus. John’s gospel is more about the last week of Jesus’ ministry on this earth. The reason why John wrote his Gospel in that way was because at the time of John writing His Gospel, there were people that were coming into the church as false teachers telling the believers the wrong things concerning Jesus.

As we know, John wrote his Gospel much later than the other Gospel writers. His Gospel was written approx 65-70 AD. John wanted the believers to get the truth about Jesus. Not that the other Gospels were not truthful about Jesus but they were not yet widespread and read by all the believers. Unfortunately, there were many false teachers telling the believers lies about Jesus. They were teaching that Jesus did not really come in the flesh but only appeared to do so.

This was a theory called Gnosticism. This basically taught and believed that everything of the spirit realm was inherently good and everything of the natural real was inherently evil. Therefore, they said, if Jesus had come in the flesh, in any way, shape or form, than He would have been evil. They taught that Jesus was actually a “spirit being” who looked as if he was in the flesh but actually was not.

John came against this teaching, as we should. Jesus was both 100% man AND 100% God. He had to be. Otherwise He would never have been able to take our punishment on the cross and take our punishment in hell for us. He became man so that He could take our place and

die – for us; and take the punishment – for us! He also rose again from the dead and became the first born again man – for us!!!

Yes, Jesus was 100% man. He was the perfect sacrifice. But man could never raise himself from hell. This is where Jesus, being 100% God comes into full view. He was the perfect sacrifice but He was also the perfect man who was also God. He was to be able to go to God, the Father, and present Himself to the Father on that Resurrection Sunday.

All the Gospels tell us about this. However, John give us detail accounts of how Jesus did this. The main thing that he tells us about this was at the crucifixion. John's Gospel is the only Gospel that gives us the account of the soldier, making sure that Jesus was dead, stuck a sword in His side and water and blood came forth. John was signifying that Jesus was truly a man, not a spirit being, a full fledged man, who died on that cross for our sins. The water and the blood specifically shows this to us. Yes, Jesus was both 100% God and 100% Man.

In the letters of 1, 2, and 3 John we, from earliest times, have attributed them to the Apostle John. The content, style, and vocabulary seem to warrant the conclusion that these three epistles were addressed to the same readers as the Gospel of John – those in Asia Minor or modern day Turkey. The writing of all these letters was sometime after his release from the Isle of Patmos sometime around 85-95AD.

John's first epistle (letter) indicates that the readers were being continually confronted with the error of Gnosticism. This became a more serious problem in the second century and is still a problem today whether we realize it or not. John reviews a few times the error of the antichrist spirit and its teachings that were infiltrating the Body of Christ. This error was the teaching of the precept of Gnosticism.

As we already discussed, Gnosticism was a philosophy of religion that held, basically speaking, that anything of the flesh is inherently evil and anything of the spirit is inherently good. The solution to the tension between these two was that knowledge, or "gnosis" in the Greek, is the only way through which man could supposedly grow from the mundane (natural) to the spiritual. In other words knowledge, not faith, was the most important thing to grasp. The truth is that knowledge of God is important but true faith in God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit is what gives us salvation.

As mentioned, false spiritual teachers were a big problem in the early church. Because there was not a complete New Testament that believers could refer to, many churches fell prey to pretenders who taught their own ideas and advanced themselves as leaders. The letter of Jude deals with this issue as well as in other letters of the New Testament it is constantly referred to. We know that Paul dealt with such people in Corinth. Let's take a quick look.

After spending 3 years teaching the Corinthians the truth, Paul left to continue his missionary journey. He writes 1Corinthians to them to encourage them in what had taught them. However, immediately, after he left, these false teachers came in and perverted the truth that he had just taught the Body in Corinth. Paul had to write another letter, which we do not have, to correct them from their ways. They then write back to Paul telling him that they have recognized the error of what they were being taught (by the false teachers) and chose to believe Paul's correct teaching. Paul then writes them back in 2Corinthians to review the truth of the faith, again.

The Apostle John wrote His Gospel and these Letters to set the record straight on some of these important issues. Particularly concerning the identity of Jesus as the true Messiah who came in the flesh but yet was still God, as well as the love that we each have been given by Him to now love others. This is the crux of our faith in Jesus – love!!! Loving God AND loving each other.

Because John's letter was about the basics of faith in Christ, it helped his readers reflect honestly on their faith. Are we true believers? Well, John told them that they could tell by looking at their actions. If they loved one another, that was evidence of God's presence in their lives and that they loved God. But, if they bickered and fought all the time or were selfish and did not look out for one another, they were betraying the fact that they were true children of God. They would be declaring, in fact, that they did not truly know God. Hmm.....

This did not mean they had to be perfect. In fact, John also recognized that believing involved admitting our sins and seeking God's forgiveness when we did "miss the mark." Depending on God for cleansing from guilt, along with admitting our wrongs against others and making amends, was another important part of getting to know God.

Unfortunately, today's "Christianity" has taken this part of the truth out from the Bible. There are many churches that have been calling for the removal of the letters of John from the Bible, calling them not scriptural for today's church and that they are "old school." They say that there is no need for repentance because we are saved. Yet, John is telling us the opposite.

1 John explains the fellowship we have with others and with Jesus Christ. That fellowship, that relationship, differentiates between happiness, which is temporary and fleeting, and true joy. John tells us how to achieve that true joy – by loving God and loving each other. If we take the words written by John in this letter and we apply them to our daily lives then the true love, the true commitment, the true fellowship and the true joy that each of us truly long for, will be ours to live by, in through our relationship that we have now with God, the Father in Jesus.

The Apostle John had a very close relationship with Jesus. He was one of the "three" – Peter James and John. John is telling us that we can all have that close, intimate relationship with Jesus. John is telling us that Jesus is right here with us in both the simple, mundane parts of our lives and in the complex, soul-wrenching parts as well. It is called having a true relationship – a true relationship with the "Lover of our souls."

John's first epistle teaches that while it is important to recognize the lines between truth and error, it must always be done in a spirit of love. We are to walk as Jesus loved. How did Jesus love others? He told them the truth – in love. He did not look down on anyone. Only those who refused to listen and be upright in their own self-righteousness received His disdain – the Pharisees and other religious leaders who refused to listen. He loved them but He did not love their actions – especially their actions towards others.

John wanted his readers to experience true fellowship with God and with God's people. He proclaimed the Good News about Jesus to those who would be hearing or listening to this letter. He declared to all his readers saying: "...so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3); "...so that you may not sin," (2:1) and "...so that you may know that you have eternal life." (5:13). John wanted to reassure the true believer that they truly have eternal life in and through Jesus, their Savior and Lord.

That is what we have in our relationship with our Father God through our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. We have eternal life. However, we have much, much more. We have a true relationship with the true and Living God. It is a relationship that is built on true “agape” love – a true love with our God and those of similar and like faith in that God. It is a relationship that will last forever and ever.

That was the message that John wanted so desperately for the true believer to grasp and hold onto. In his Gospel, it was to know the truth that Jesus came in the flesh and took our place. In his letters it was to tell us and speak of the love that God has for us and the love that we are to express to others. In the Book of Revelation it was the message of our hope that one day Jesus will return to rule and reign on this earth for 1000 years and then the New Jerusalem will come forth and we will be with our God - forever.

It is that truth that will be able to get the true believer through the difficult times that may be laying ahead as we enter into the end times. We must be careful of those false teachers who would try to divert our attention away from the truth of God’s Word and from His forever promises.

John says it very clearly – “God is Love.” As His children we must love God and love each other. 1John 4:16 tells us, “*And we have known and **believed** the love that God hath to us. **God is love**; and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him.*” 1John 4:7 tell us, “*Beloved, let us love one another: for **love is of God**; and **every one that loves is born of God, and knows God**.*”