

2. To Keep the Commandments especially that of Love

“whoever says I know Him without keeping his commandments is a liar” (2:4) and “Whoever loves his brother remains in the light” (2:10)

This emphasis on love and God’s commandments is particularly stressed in the beautiful words of chapter 4: “Let us love one another since love is from God ..

whoever fails to love does not know God, because God is love”.

3. To Beware of Worldly Distractions—addressed to children fathers, young people, parents “Do not love the world or what is in the world” (2:15) - surely a very valid lesson for today’s society

4. To Be on the Guard against False Teachers

“You have heard that the Anti-Christ is coming and now many Anti-Christis have come” (2:18)

John is so concerned to emphasise these guidelines that he **repeats** them - on Sin (3:3f), on the Commandments and Love (3:11f), on False Teachers (4:1f) and Worldly Distractions (4:4-5).

John’s Second Letter

John again emphasises the key role of love: “to love is to live according to his commandments: this is the commandment which you have heard since the beginning, to live a life of love”

There is the same warning, too, against false teachers and heretical teachings: “There are many deceivers .. refusing to acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in human nature .. If anyone comes bringing a different doctrine you must not receive him into your house”

John’s Third Letter

This letter reveals that a local Church in Asia Minor has been led astray by its leader, Diotrephes “who enjoys being in charge but refuses to accept us”. John’s letter has been sent to a faithful member of that Church, Gaius, to encourage him until John comes to visit and settles the particular issues himself.



The Non-Pauline Letters of the New Testament

1. The Three Letters of John



Questions For

Reflection

1. What are the similarities between the Gospel of St. John and the First Letter of St. John?
2. Does the emphasis on the Commandments and on Love in the second letter of St. John necessarily support the view that its author and the author of the first letter are the same?
3. Why is it important to realise that there were false teachings even in the early Church?

Who is the Author of the Letters of John?

There are three letters that bear the name John in the New Testament, but they may not all have been written by the apostle John or even by the same person.

The First Letter is so closely identical in style and theology to the Gospel of John that it is almost universally accepted to be by the same author - the beginning of both are strikingly similar, there are several common phrases and concepts, like Word, the primacy of faith and love, the coming in the flesh, the new commandment, and contrasts like light/darkness, truth/lie. That author is generally understood as being the apostle John. He claims to have seen, heard and touched the Word, that is, Jesus (1:1)

Although termed a letter, it is not written as a letter, it has no named writer and no named recipient, as normally associated with letters. It should be considered more as a homily, written to convey a particular teaching and to address a specific danger (see later).

The Second and Third Letters are letters proper, written from 'the Elder' to named people: the second letter is to 'The Lady, the chosen one, and her children', evidently a local church under the jurisdiction of John the Elder: the third letter to a named individual, Gaius. The designation 'the Elder' shows the author is the leader of a Christian Church. The fact it does not call him a disciple is an indicator that he is unlikely to have been the apostle John.

The Purpose and Content of the First Letter

It is clear that the early Church was beset with difficulties keeping the teachings of Jesus and the Gospels from being tainted by false ideas and interpretations. Today, when we sometimes read new books, or view television programmes that purport to reveal new Christian teachings, we have to remember that these are not authentic teachings



that have suddenly been discovered, but ones that were rejected by the early Church as heretical. Examples of this are given by the content of all three of the letters of John.

John's First Letter

It seems that false teachers were claiming to be Christians but were denying that Jesus was the Messiah (the Christ) (2:22) or that Jesus was God's Son in human nature (4:2-3). John describes these false teachers as Antichrists (2:18, 23; 4:3) a term not used in John's Gospel but one called for by the particular situation to reflect teachers who were not in conformity with the original Gospel message. As such, John argues, anyone who denies the divinity of Jesus is also denying God the Father (2:22-24). This parallels the many times in John's Gospel when Jesus claims closeness and oneness with the Father (6:27, 40, 44, 46; 8:18, 28-29, 42) especially: **"Before Abraham was I am"** (8:58) and **"The Father and I are one"** (10:30).



John offers **four guidelines** for true Christian living:

1. **To Constantly Beware of Sin.** It may appear that John contradicts himself, sometimes saying that we must acknowledge our essential sinfulness (1:8-10) **"If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves"** and (2:1) **"If anyone does sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ"** yet elsewhere seeming to say that believers in Jesus will be incapable of sinning (3:6) **"No-one who remains in him sins"** and (5:18) **"We are well aware that no-one who is a child of God sins"**

Really though, it is not a question of 'sin or no sin'. John is expressing the truth that we are **both** sinner and, in a real way through the atonement of Jesus' death, sinless. We remain sinners because we remain human (not to be transformed until the future 3:2) but we can call ourselves sinless in so far as we now have the means to avoid persistently rebelling against God.