

## **The Epistles of John**

**Using John MacArthur and James Boice**

### **The Introduction**

**2-14-10**

There are only two Epistles in the New Testament  
Where the author remains unnamed – Hebrews and 1John  
We really don't know who wrote the Book of Hebrews  
But from the first century on  
The church has known that the apostle John wrote this letter  
And there are striking similarities between this Epistle and John's Gospel  
In both John uses stark contrast  
Light and darkness – death and life – love and hate – truth and lies  
And he gives us no third alternative  
By using this type of contrast he is saying – you are in or you are out  
You are dead or you are alive – there is no gray area  
Scripture recognizes only two classes of mankind – two races  
The children of God and the children of the devil  
That is all there is  
As Dave Szabo would say – there are the saints and there are the ain'ts  
Then there is a similarity in theme from the Gospel to the Epistle  
And that is certainly planned  
The Epistle literally picks up where the Gospel leaves off  
The Gospel makes you right with God  
The Epistle describes how men can know they are right with God  
The apostle John was the younger of the two sons of Zebedee  
Zebedee was a prosperous fisherman on the Sea of Galilee  
His mother Salome contributed financially to Jesus ministry  
Tradition has it that she was Jesus' mother Mary's sister

## **So it is possible that John and Jesus were cousins**

Most likely John was still a teenager when he walked with Jesus  
He was the youngest of the disciples – the youngest of the apostles  
So listen up you young men and women in the front rows  
Jesus doesn't just call and use old-timers like me

## **Jesus loves the young – Jesus loves the young**

He took special interest in the young  
John was the younger brother of James – probably a teen-ager  
Mary was the younger sister of Martha – possibly a teen-ager  
And He had a special place in His heart for both of them  
Remember He scolded Martha the older sister but praised Mary the youngest  
It was John who lay his head on Jesus at the Last Supper  
It was Mary who sat at Jesus feet when He talked  
When her brother Lazarus died Mary made this profession

## **I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God**

And she meant it  
It was John alone who stayed by Jesus all the way to the cross  
And it was to John that Jesus entrusted the care of His mother  
You see both John and Mary had one thing in common  
They not only wanted to be hear Jesus - they wanted to be near Jesus  
**John and Mary not only believed what Jesus had to say**  
**They got as close to Him as they could**  
They weren't content just hearing Him – they wanted to know Him  
Now listen carefully – especially you young people  
A lot of people believe what the Bible has to say  
And they are going straight to hell  
**Christianity isn't believing what the Bible says**  
**It is an ongoing love relationship with Jesus Christ**

And if you were take all of John's Books  
His Gospel – his Letters – His Revelation  
And sum them up in a single phrase

## **That phrase would be – Get to know Jesus**

If you are longing for security and are troubled by sin  
Get to know Him for your salvation  
If you are riddled with guilt anger fear or going through tough times  
Get to know Him for Your daily living  
If you want to know for certain what awaits you on the other side of this life  
Get to know Him for your future  
No matter what the question is about your life – the answer is Jesus Christ  
Get to know Jesus  
I don't want you to think you don't need the Bible – for you do  
The primary way we get to know Jesus is through the Word of God  
**But believers are to love the Word of God precisely because  
It takes them into the presence and power of the living God**  
That is why I mainly preach through Books of the Bible  
It is in the Word and understanding it's meaning that we draw closer to God  
And reflect the character of His Son – our Lord  
So the apostle John wrote the Letter  
When he began his journey with Jesus he was but a teenager  
When he wrote 1John he was an old man near the end of his life  
And in this Letter is the wisdom and understanding that comes  
From some 60 years of walking with and serving the Lord  
John was originally a disciple of John the Baptist  
When the Baptist pointed out Jesus as the Messiah  
John immediately left him and became a disciple of Jesus  
Now he's come down to us as the apostle of love  
But when he was young he had a fiery reputation  
Jesus called James and John "Sons of Thunder" and they deserved it  
It was John who saw someone not of their group casting out demons  
And tried to stop them  
When a Samaritan village refused to receive Jesus

It was James and John who asked  
Do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them  
They were serious men  
You didn't want to mess with the "sons of thunder"  
There is only one way John could have gone from being a "son of thunder"  
To being the apostle of love  
John's life was transformed by the power of God

## **You cannot spend that much time with Jesus and remain the same**

The words of Jesus – the very Person of Jesus is a change agent  
And this is the point of John's first letter  
You cannot be a child of God indwelt by God's Spirit and remain unchanged  
It just doesn't work that way  
It is believed that John was the only apostle who wasn't martyred  
He died of natural causes in exile on the island of Patmos  
All of John's writings occurred late in his life  
Probably in excess of 80 years old - perhaps while he was in exile  
Which brings me to another point  
I mentioned that you are never too young to follow Jesus

## **But you are also never too old to be used by Jesus**

When John was taken from his ministry and exiled  
I would guess that he thought his ministry was over – finished  
He had seen them all go before him – first James then Paul and Peter  
He was the last of the apostles and now his ministry was gone  
But God is never finished with the person who is available to Him  
John followed Jesus for sixty some years  
But his greatest period of ministry  
Occurred at an age when most people quit or give up  
Now you are not going to write another Book of the Bible  
**But if you are a servant of God**

**Regardless of your age – He will use you**

Maybe in some unexpected ways

So regardless of your age

Keep your heart right and your eyes open - God isn't finished with you yet

Also- for both Paul and John their greatest ministry

Occurred in places most would have said that their ministry was finished

Paul in prison – John in exile

God never quits using us for His glory – we just quit being available

**But if you continue to love God**

**If you continue to care about others – God can and will use you**

Now I have heard people ask – How can God use someone like me

And I have heard the answer – Because He's desperate

Which is funny - but not true

God isn't desperate – God is a miracle worker

God takes ordinary men and women and places the extraordinary in them

**God molds people into Jesus' image**

**And then places them where they can most glorify Him**

Paul in prison wrote much of the NT

And he continued that ministry until he went home to be with the Lord

John in exile wrote the Gospel of John – three Epistles and the Book of Revelation

So don't ever think you have nothing to offer

Don't ever think your situation makes you unavailable

Take a lesson from the little boy with the loaves and fish

He offered a little sack lunch to Jesus

And Jesus fed 5,000 men plus women and children with it

**God can take the smallest offering and multiply it**

**So that untold numbers can benefit from it**

It is possible to read a book from cover to cover

And in the end not know what it was all about

What its intended purpose was

When you - not just read - but study a book you must deal with the question

Of why the book was written – what is its intended purpose

It is the same when studying the Bible

Each Book of the Bible has a purpose  
And in most cases a distinct purpose  
They were not written randomly – they weren't just a good idea at the time  
Each Bible Book is purposed by God with a particular message  
The Bible isn't just what men had to say about God  
It was written by God using men as the medium

## **You see all Scripture is inspired by God and is for our benefit**

Scripture is literally God-breathed and it comes with a purpose  
For God never does anything without purpose behind His action  
**So it is essential when studying the Bible to determine God's intent**  
In the case of John's Epistles studying them is also rewarding  
The problems the church faced in John's day  
Are similar to those of our own time  
If we are to grow in grace and present the message of Christ to the world  
Then the objectives John has for us are objectives we must also have

So what's this Book about

John gives us the first and most obvious answer to this question

1John 5 – I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life

John wants you to know

When you are saved you are saved forever

Isn't that great – when you are in – you are in – forever – no more worrying

The term we use to describe this forever salvation is “eternal security”

In Christ your future is eternally secure

John's reason for writing this Letter is seen in sharp contrast

To the equally explicit statement he gave for writing his Gospel

John 20 – Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this Book, but these have been written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name

Those to whom John wrote the Gospel were not yet Christians

And his purpose was to lead them to faith

John wrote his Gospel as an apologetic so that those who read it might believe and be saved

John's Gospel was addressed to nonbelievers

And its intent was to bring them to salvation

In this Epistle John's intent is to lead those who are already saved

Into a deeper understanding of the faith

And to greater confidence in that which they already possess

**John's first Epistle is addressed to the church so that we who believe**

**Might have absolute assurance of that our salvation is real**

And having that assurance live for Jesus without fear

The Gospel is an historical Book – a factual account of the life of Jesus

The Epistles are an ethical statement of truth

The Gospel sets forth the facts to show that Jesus is the Christ – the Son of God

The Epistles give us the acts and words which are now expected

For those who have believed this great truth

## **Believers can and should know that they are children of God**

Can you imagine life if you could never be sure if you were saved or not

Never be certain if heaven or hell awaited you

And on your death bed having lived for Jesus

Not know if you would spend eternity with God

Or spend eternity in torment

That's how important assurance is

Of course John is not alone in giving us this fact

Scripture is loaded with words of assurance – as it should be

Paul to the Thessalonians – our Gospel came to you not with words, but with power and **deep conviction**

The writer of Hebrews – Let us draw near to God with **full assurance of faith**

In Colossians Paul writes – we should be encouraged in heart and united in love so **that we have the full riches of understanding in order that we may know the mystery of God**

There are certainly more

But when we put these together we find that

# God intends for Christians to have complete assurance of faith

We are to have a settled understanding and this is to be true forever

This truth runs through the whole NT

But only in John's Letter is it the major theme

And not just included in the package

Well what event sparked the writing of this letter

Gnosticism had come into the church and was drawing believers away

Gnosticism comes from the Greek word for knowledge

Among other things this heresy refuted the deity of Christ

And taught that spirit is good – flesh is bad

So you can have a saved spirit and a terrible flesh and still be saved

Salvation meant that your spirit was in God

And your body was not part of the process

So if I can use the phrase –

You could live like hell and it didn't make any difference

Some of the significant members of the church had left

And formed their own congregation

They claimed that what they were doing

Was an improvement on what had previously been taught

They had "secret knowledge" - hence the word Gnosticism

Many of those left behind were confused

Were these new teachers right

Was the old teaching to be abandoned

Were they Christians or was what they had been taught

Just a preparation for the real thing

John specifically addresses these Gnostic teachings

Gnostics believed that because the body was corrupt

What it did was outside of and not related to salvation

John writes – **If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves**

Because they had secret knowledge they looked down on those who didn't

John writes - **By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious; anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother**

The real questions the church was asking were  
Can you truly know that you have been born again  
Can you be certain that you have eternal life  
To these questions John replies that

## **As a Christian you can know and should never doubt that you are saved forever**

John gives us three practical tests with which we can settle the matter  
Pass these three tests and you will never doubt your salvation  
In one form or another these three tests are repeated throughout the Letter  
They are - the moral test – the social test – and the doctrinal test

### **The moral test is the test of righteousness or obedience**

Do you live for God or do you live for yourself

### **This is the test of practical righteousness**

This doesn't mean that you do not sin – for you do  
It doesn't mean that you won't wander for you might  
It does mean that when you wander you will always return home  
It does mean that you are progressing in your desire to live for Christ

### **The social test is the test of love**

This is the test of your relationship to other Christians  
Is life all about you or are you sacrificing your desires for the sake of others

### **The doctrinal test is the test of your belief about Jesus Christ**

This is the theological test  
Who is Jesus Christ – what did He accomplish  
What is your relationship to Him  
These are tests that anyone claiming to be a Christian

Can use to examine himself and find comfort

**At the same time having this assurance of salvation**

**Should lead you to boldness in your approach to God**

That is your right and your privilege as a child of God

Another of John's purposes

## **Was to elaborate on Christ's new commandment**

John 13 – Jesus speaking – **A new commandment I give to you; Love one another**

Jesus praying to His Father about us – that the love You have for Me may be in them

Paul writing to the Corinthians

**Now abideth faith hope and love, but the greatest of these is – love**

Now in this Letter John

Who was with Jesus when He gave that new commandment writes

**If anyone loves his brother, God's love is made complete in him**

**The one who loves his brother abides in the light**

I guess I wouldn't be far off if I stated that John loved love

Love for God – love for one another

Jesus commanded it – Jesus prayed for it

His Spirit within us empowers it

John stresses it

## **The distinguishing lifestyle of a Christian is to be love**

I want to close with some questions

Did you pass the three tests

The moral test – are you growing in righteousness

The doctrinal test – Do you know who Jesus is – what He did – and what it means to you

Finally the social test – what is your relationship to other Christians

Is it sacrificial love

By the way - how are you doing on that new commandment