



CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

BIBLE SURVEY

THE UN-DEVOTIONAL

1 PETER &
1, 2, 3 JOHN

Week 2

Difficult Passages

1 Peter 3:18-22

OPENING
up to the Word

Are you baptized? If so, what did it mean to you at the time? And now?

DIGGING
into the Word

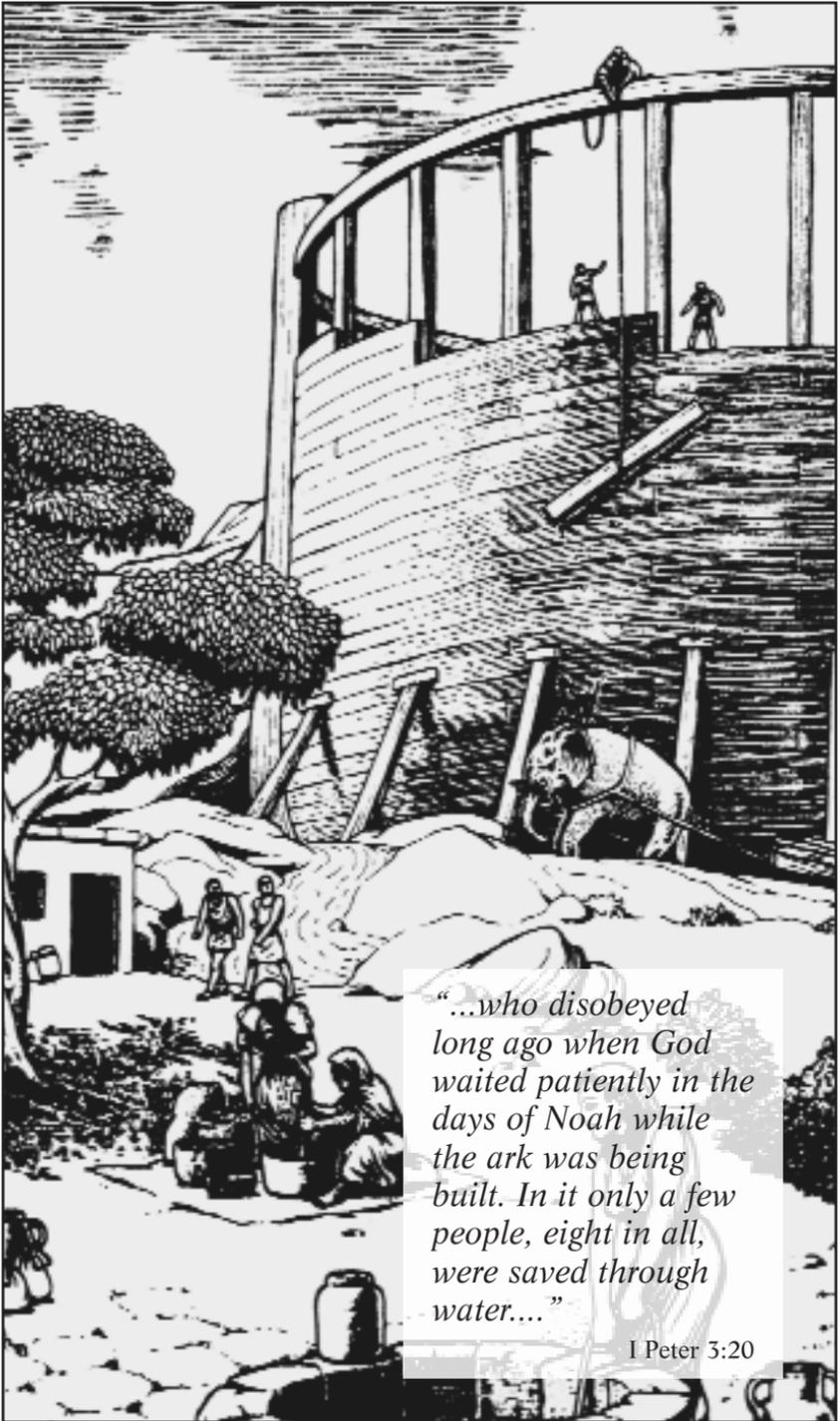
1. How does the death of Christ relate to the previous passage about suffering (vs. 8-17)? To the next passage about preaching (vs. 19-21)?
2. Who are the “spirits in prison” (v. 19) and what is Christ’s message to them? Which interpretation do you favor and why (see “Window on the Word”)?
3. How does baptism “save” anyone (v. 21)? Or does it?
4. Retrace the references to Christ in this passage of Scripture. *Where, when and with whom* does Christ interact at each stage?

LIVING
out the Word

1. What hope does the Flood story offer you?
2. What hope does the life, death and resurrection of Christ offer you?

WINDOW
on the Word

Preached to the spirits in prison (v. 19). *This difficult passage has been given three possible interpretations: (1) Christ, after his death and before his resurrection, descended to hell (the prison where spirits were incarcerated) where he preached to fallen angels (“sons of God”); (2) Christ, during his ascension, proclaimed his victory on the cross to the fallen angels; (3) The cross of Christ and his resurrection released spiritual prisoners (Luke 4:18; Ephesians 4:7). The **water** which symbolizes **baptism** (v. 21) is the water of judgment and death at the time of the Flood. Baptism here means not just the physical water, but the spiritual reality of faith, repentance and forgiveness through Jesus. In this symbolic sense, baptism can be said to “save” us.*



“...who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water....”

I Peter 3:20

DAY 9

What... Me Change?

1 Peter 4:1-11

OPENING
up to the Word

Are you a quick-change artist in any sense? (a) your clothes, (b) your moods, (c) your entertainment habits, (d) your career? Would you be willing to change your lifestyle to be popular?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. How did Christ “suffer in his body” (4:1; see 3:18)? How does this suffering and “same attitude” relate to the believer who lives for God?
2. Is there anything about the Christian lifestyle that might seem strange to non-Christians?
3. Is there any accountability (vs. 5-7) for the way we live? If so, when?
4. What does “deep love” look like in action (vs. 8-11)?

LIVING
out the Word

1. What was your life like before meeting Christ, compared to what it is like today? Does anything from your old lifestyle still give you trouble?
2. What changes would you like to make this week—by God’s grace and in keeping with God’s will? (a) be more self-controlled, (b) love others, (c) speak uplifting things, (d) serve others, (e) praise God, (f) share God’s grace.
3. Do you ever feel like you don’t have much to offer? What is Peter’s counsel to that?

WINDOW
on the Word

Done with sin (v. 1) speaks of Christ, whose death (not just his physical suffering) resulted in his identification with and triumph over sin. Through Christ, the believer has nothing to do with sin after his or her baptism, which symbolically identifies with Christ in his death. Short of identifying with Christ, nothing a believer does can remove sin from his or her life. **Christ preached... to those... now dead** (v. 6), meaning that Christ preached to either: (1) Christians who have since died; or (2) those in hell, where Christ is said to have gone (compare 3:19-20). The **end of all things** (v. 7) probably refers not to this lifetime, but to history as we know it, which will pass away when Christ returns.

No Guts, No Glory

DAY 10

1 Peter 4:12-19

Which hurts more—suffering for doing right or for doing wrong?

1. What painful trials are being suffered by these Christians (v. 12; also 1:6-7; 2:19-23; 3:13-17)? (a) persecution for doing good, (b) consequences for doing wrong, (c) self-inflicted wounds to purify themselves of sin, (d) imitation of Christ.
2. How and when does joy result from suffering (vs. 13-16)? (a) attitude determines altitude, (b) it's darkest before the dawn, (c) when the Spirit of God descends upon the believer, (d) when you praise the Lord anyway, (e) when Christ is glorified—now and in the future.
3. Why is the “time for judgment” both good news and bad (vs. 17-18)?

1. Have past sufferings helped build your faith in God?
2. Are you currently experiencing a trial? Do you think it is merely because you are a Christian—or because you were “meddling”? Examples of meddling might include: (a) confronting people about their sins—so-called “confrontational evangelism,” (b) prying into private lives, (c) causing family discord, (d) causing monetary loss.
3. When things get tough, how do you remain centered in and on Jesus Christ?

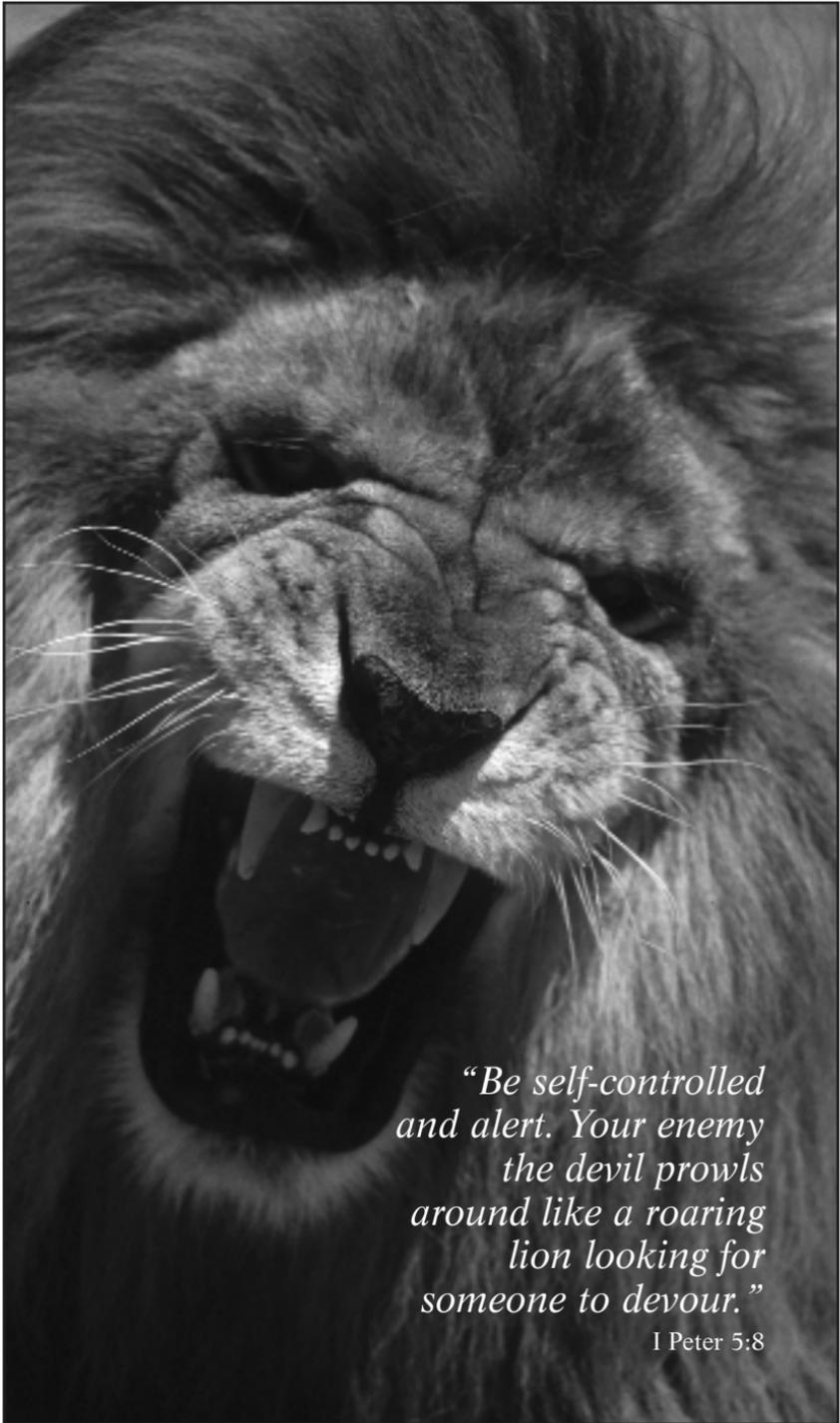
*The phrase **commit themselves** (v. 19) is a technical one, borrowed from the ancient world of banking. Having no safe place to leave money when they embarked on a long journey, people entrusted their close friends with their worldly possessions. To have things committed to you for safekeeping was a high honor. Things committed to God are eternally safe, as when Jesus committed his spirit to God (Lk 23:46).*

OPENING
up to the Word

DIGGING
into the Word

LIVING
out the Word

WINDOW
on the Word



*“Be self-controlled
and alert. Your enemy
the devil prowls
around like a roaring
lion looking for
someone to devour.”*

I Peter 5:8

Leadership

DAY 11

1 Peter 5:1-11

Would you rather lead or follow? Why? Everyone has some kind of leadership abilities—what are yours?

1. To what groups does Peter direct his final paragraphs? Who are the “elders among you”—among your family, your church or denomination?

2. What is the role of an elder? What temptations does he face? What responsibilities? What relationships? What examples to follow?

3. Both the young men and the elders are told to be submissive, humble, self-controlled and alert. How do these things help us fight the lion-like enemy of our faith—the devil (v. 8)?

1. In what area does your family need your leadership? (a) spiritual house cleaning, (b) spiritual growth, (c) relationships, (d) attitudes, (e) discipline, (f) advice, (g) humble service?

2. How can you be alert to, and resistant against, Satan’s tactics this week? (a) humble yourself, casting every care on God, (b) study the Bible daily, (c) guard against greed and pride, (d) be self-controlled, (e) solidarity with and intercession for others, (f) invite Jesus to live in you.

OPENING
up to the Word

DIGGING
into the Word

LIVING
out the Word

Grace for Life

1 Peter 5:10-14

OPENING
up to the Word

When you picture God, what do you see?

DIGGING
into the Word

- 1.** Quickly re-read 1 Peter. What pictures of God come to mind when you read this letter as a whole?
 - 2.** What pictures of God does Peter close with (5:10-11)?
 - 3.** What pictures of the Christian life are suggested by this letter as a whole?
 - 4.** In summary, what pictures of the Christian life does Peter close with (5:10-14)?
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LIVING
out the Word

- 1.** Has God already restored you and made you “strong, firm and steadfast” (5:10)? In your own way, give praise to “the God of all grace” for restoring you to a place of ministry and for preparing you for eternal glory.
- 2.** In what areas of your Christian life is God calling you to “stand fast” (5:12)? Pray toward that end, relying on “the true grace of God,” to whom all power and glory belongs.

“And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.”

I Peter 5:10

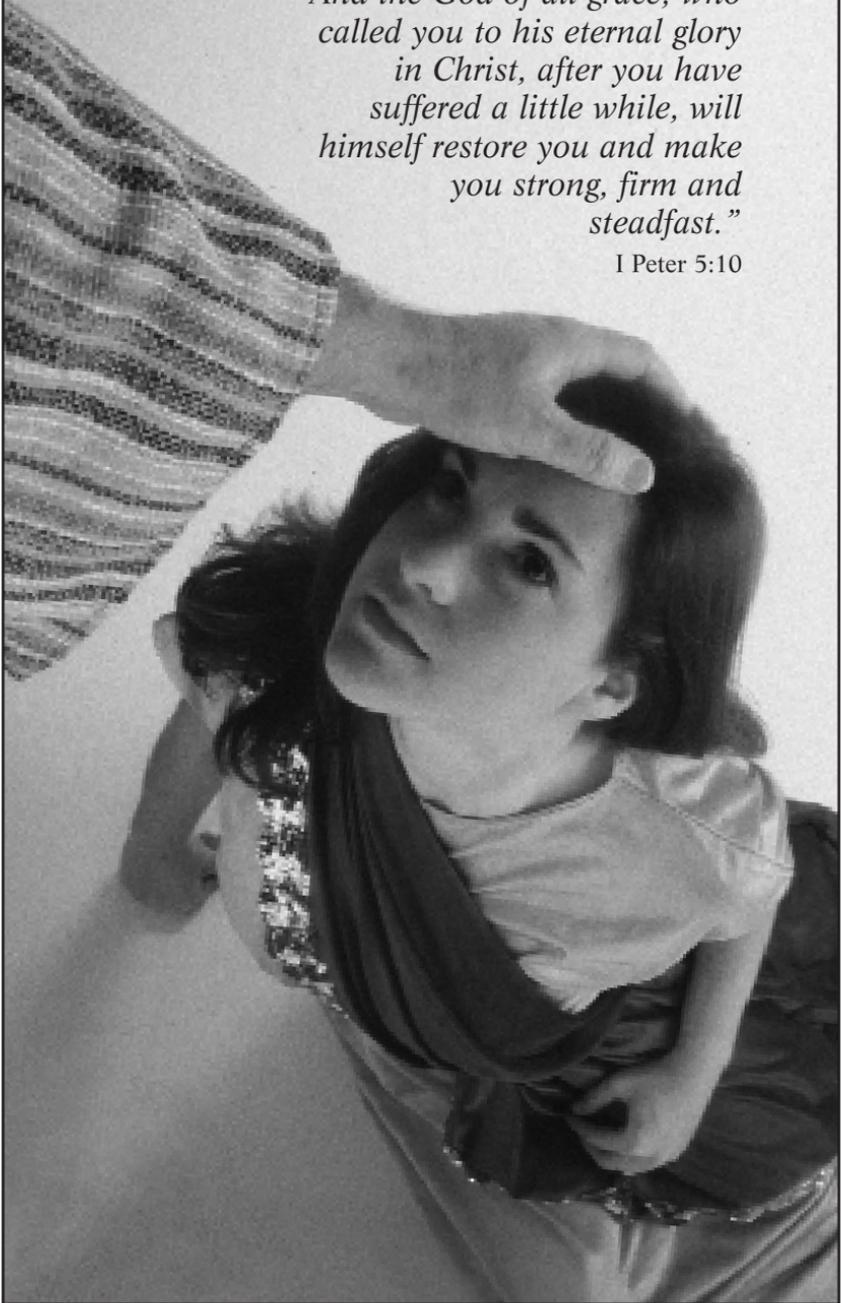


Photo by Randall Cole—PTM

Introduction to 1, 2 and 3 John

Authorship: Unlike most NT letters, 1, 2 and 3 John are unsigned. But early church fathers—Irenaeus (circa A.D. 140-203), Clement of Alexandria (circa A.D. 155-215), Tertullian (circa A.D. 150-222) and Origen (circa A.D. 185-253)—all identified the author as the apostle John and suggested no other possibilities. Internal factors—the authoritative, even apostolic character of these letters, the implied advanced age of its eyewitness and author (an “elder” addressing his readers as “children”), the evident intimacy between the “beloved” disciple and his Master, the similarities of certain expressions to the Gospel of John—all bear witness to the apostle John as the author of these letters.

Date: Dating ancient texts is not a precise science, but several internal and external factors give us a clue. John is believed to have died in exile toward the end of Domitian’s reign (A.D. 81-96). Since the three letters of John apparently borrow from the Gospel of John written during this period, and since a Gnostic heresy combated by John was beginning to grow at the end of the first century, these letters must have been written between A.D. 90 and 95.

Setting and purpose: The heresy combated by John fits the general category of Gnosticism, so-named because these heretics saw themselves as the spiritual elite who alone possessed special *gnosis* (Greek, “knowledge”). Claims of private revelation and “new light” are common in New Age religions today. John combatted an early, less-sophisticated form of Gnostic teaching known by scholars as the *Cerinthian* heresy.

Cerinthianism is named after its most famous proponent, Cerinthus, who denied (along with other Gnostics) that Christ was at all times, from birth to death, fully human and fully God. According to the Cerinthian heresy, the man Jesus became the divine Christ at his baptism—but Christ departed the body of Jesus sometime before the cross, leaving only the

shell of Jesus to die a criminal and martyr's death. For denying the incarnation and the cross, John called the Gnostics "antichrists" (2:18), "liars" (2:22) and children "born of the devil" (3:10).

Distinctive features: 1 John employs a unique literary style. Of the more than 5,400 different Greek words found in the New Testament, only 303 words are used in these letters. The simple Greek of 1 John makes translating this letter good practice for beginning students of the Greek language. At the same time, this book provides a basic primer of tests for authentic Christianity, particularly its three-fold test: (1) the test of *right belief* (doctrine), (2) the test of *right behavior* (moral purity) and (3) the test of *right love* (social concerns). These core values of righteousness or basic Christianity, stated so simply by the apostle, make 1 John stand the test of time

The next two books, 2 and 3 John, addressed fewer subjects. They warned recipients about whom they let into their homes. True Christian teachers were to be welcomed, but false prophets rejected. Christians were to be hospitable, but not inadvertently to assist in the propagation of heresy. These two books are the shortest in the NT.

Outline: Following is a topical outline of 1, 2 and 3 John. Where practical, this corresponds to the subjects of the daily lessons.

I. PROLOGUE: TESTIMONY TO THE WORD OF LIFE, 1Jn 1:1-4

II. WALKING IN THE LIGHT; 1Jn 1:5-2:11

A. The Right Belief About Sin, 1:5–2:2

B. The Right Behavior, 2:3-6

C. The Right Kind of Love, 2:7-11

III. WALKING IN GOD'S LOVE, 1Jn 2:12–4:21

A. Loving God versus Loving the World, 2:12-17

B. Warning Against Antichrists, 2:18-27

C. Doing What Is Right, 2:28–3:10

D. Loving One Another, 3:11-24

E. Testing the Spirits for Truth, 4:1-6

F. Loving God Above All, 4:7-21

IV. EPILOGUE: ASSURANCE OF ETERNAL LIFE, 1Jn 5:1-21

A. Overcoming the World, 5:1-5

B. Believing in Jesus, 5:6-12

C. Approaching God in Confidence, 5:13-21

V. DISCERNING BETWEEN TRUE AND FALSE, 2Jn and 3Jn

A. Rejecting False Prophets, 2Jn 1-13

B. Embracing Genuine Teachers with Love, 3Jn 1-14

What Letter Is This?

1 John Preview

OPENING
up to the Word

*In your personal relationships
When push comes to shove,
Where do you put the emphasis—
On truth or on love?*

DIGGING
into the Word

1. From a fast first reading of the whole letter, what tone or mood do you pick up? How is 1 John different from 1 Peter in terms of your first impressions? (a) a tender love letter, (b) a grandfatherly reminiscence, (c) practical theology, (d) stern investigation, (e) eloquent prose.

2. To get the major idea that John wanted to impress upon his readers, it helps to underline words that are repeated most often and are central to John's meaning. Underline each occurrence of the words *love*, *light/darkness*, *truth/lie/liar* and *testify/testimony* or take notes in the space below.

- (a) love
- (b) light/darkness
- (c) truth/lie/liar
- (d) testify/testimony

3. What is the content of John's testimony?

LIVING
out the Word

Suppose you had received 1 John in today's mail.

- 1.** What parts of the letter seemingly have your name on them?
- 2.** Which parts move you to prayer and praise?
- 3.** Which passages will require you to slow down, reread and compose a reply?
- 4.** If you could, how would you reply to John in terms of a comment or question?

Nothing but the Truth

DAY 14

1 John 1:1-4

When, if ever, have you been called upon to tell the truth—the whole truth—and nothing but the truth? (a) in a court of law, (b) as an eye-witness to an accident, (c) in taking an oath of office.

1. What experiences or encounters contributed to the apostle John's first-hand knowledge of Jesus, the "Word of life," which he claims in 1:1-2? For example, look up (a) John 1:35-39; (b) Mark 9:2-13; (c) Mark 14:32-42; (d) John 19:26-27; (e) John 20:1-9.

2. What is John's purpose in writing this letter (1:3-4)?

3. From the declarative statements in 1:1-4, what can you infer about any notions that John is trying to counter?

1. As a modern-day recipient, are you dealing with an issue this letter might address?

2. Triggered by John's opening remarks, which of your own experiences or encounters with Jesus come to mind?

*Jesus was no phantom, but a physical reality. He was fully human, one who could be heard, seen, looked at and touched (1:1). **The Word of life** was embodied by Jesus (the Word incarnate, Jn 1:1, 14) who was the giver of eternal life (1:2).*

OPENING

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