



CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

BIBLE SURVEY

THE UN-DEVOTIONAL

1 PETER &
1, 2, 3 JOHN

Week 4

Loving People in Deed

1 John 3:11-24

OPENING
up to the Word

What kind of lover are you? (a) a giver, (b) a taker, (c) a hugger, (d) a talker, (e) a doer.

DIGGING
into the Word

1. What is the message “heard from the beginning” (2:7; 3:11; 1:1)?
2. How do Cain and Abel (see Ge 4) illustrate John’s point about loving one another (3:11-15)? How does Jesus illustrate this point (3:16)?
3. If “no murderer has eternal life” (3:15), what hope is there for people like... (a) convicted murderers who confess their sins and place their faith in Jesus? (b) Moses and David—OT believers who were guilty of murder? (c) Terrorists, Klansmen, Neo-Nazis, anti-Semitic people—anyone who hates?
4. Who then has assurance of eternal life? (a) no murderers or hateful people, (b) only believers in Jesus Christ, (c) only those who obey all of God’s commands, (d) only those who help the needy, (e) anyone whose heart does not condemn them, (f) anyone who does not reject God’s gracious offer of eternal life through faith in Christ.

LIVING
out the Word

1. What hindrances or incentives to prayer do you draw from this chapter?
2. How does God comfort the person whose conscience may be troubled by a lack of love?

WINDOW
on the Word

*The message “heard from the beginning” (3:11; also 1:1; 2:7, 13-14, 24; 3:8) stands in contrast to “new light” or “advanced doctrine” claimed by spiritual elitists. Just as love is a verb of action—not primarily one of feeling—so also in John’s context, anyone who hates (3:15) is not wrestling with negative emotions, as much as having an uncaring attitude that fails to actively show mercy to the poor (3:17). **Love of God** (3:17) is ambiguous in this context: it can either refer to the believer’s love for God or to God’s love for the believer, which fills our hearts, enabling us to love others. It can also refer to both.*

Do I Know You?

1 John 4:1-6

How do you recognize a good deal when you see it? (a) it just feels right, (b) the price is right, (c) the references check out, (d) it meets a long list of criteria, (e) you're not always sure.

1. How can you recognize a true Christian from a false teacher, or true doctrine from false doctrine (4:2, 6)?
2. What is a false teacher's attitude toward Christ (4:2-3; see also 2:20-23)? Where do such false ideas come from (4:3, 5, 6)?
3. Why be concerned about this problem of false spirits, false prophets and Christ-less religion? Or is this test best left to a seminary class?

1. What power can you access that is infinitely greater than the world's? Have you experienced this power of God?
2. What happens if and when a religionist quotes 1 John 4:6 and wants you to listen to their special revelation from God? How would you dispute their claim, or would you?
3. Is there an objective basis for accepting or rejecting subjective claims of experience, or is all truth relative?

***The Spirit** that assures you are a Christian (3:24) may also be tested for truth in other matters. The **test** is doctrinal and objective: No heretical group publicly acknowledges that Jesus of Nazareth (who was fully human) was also Christ the Son of God (fully divine). If they do believe in Christ's deity, they do not believe he could have died. A **spirit or messenger from God**—will acknowledge Jesus for who he is, but one from Satan or the world will not.*

DAY 23

OPENING
up to the Word

DIGGING
into the Word

LIVING
out the Word

WINDOW
on the Word

Got a Whole Lotta Love

1 John 4:7-21

OPENING
up to the Word

What is your favorite illustration of love—in music, poetry, song, movies or your personal experience?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Whose love is the primary cause in making a difference in this world—God’s love for us or our love for God?
2. Which kind of love *is*, and always *was*? Which kind of love isn’t always, but is after we’re born again?
3. What do these “love notes” teach about God? About Christ? About the Spirit?
4. How does God show evidence of his love? What evidence would be most convincing to a skeptic?
5. How does the Holy Spirit work in and through believers?
6. How can someone *fear* (punishment), but have a heart full of *love* (from God or for God)?

LIVING
out the Word

1. What’s the difference between loving God, loving your neighbor or loving your favorite food?
2. Where do you struggle the most to show love? (a) at work, (b) at home, (c) at church, (d) in the athletic arena, (e) while driving.
3. How can someone be spiritually transformed, reborn from above, but not show any love? (a) impossible, (b) evidently they are not a new creation in Christ, (c) we can’t be the judge.

WINDOW
on the Word

*Of the 43 occurrences of the word **love** in 1 John, 27 are in this 15-verse section. The ultimate expression of that love is God’s provision of Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for our sins (4:10). We love one another because love originates with God (4:7), because that love frees us from fear (4:11, 18) and because loving others is also how we can know God intimately (4:12, 21).*

Two Kinds of Love—

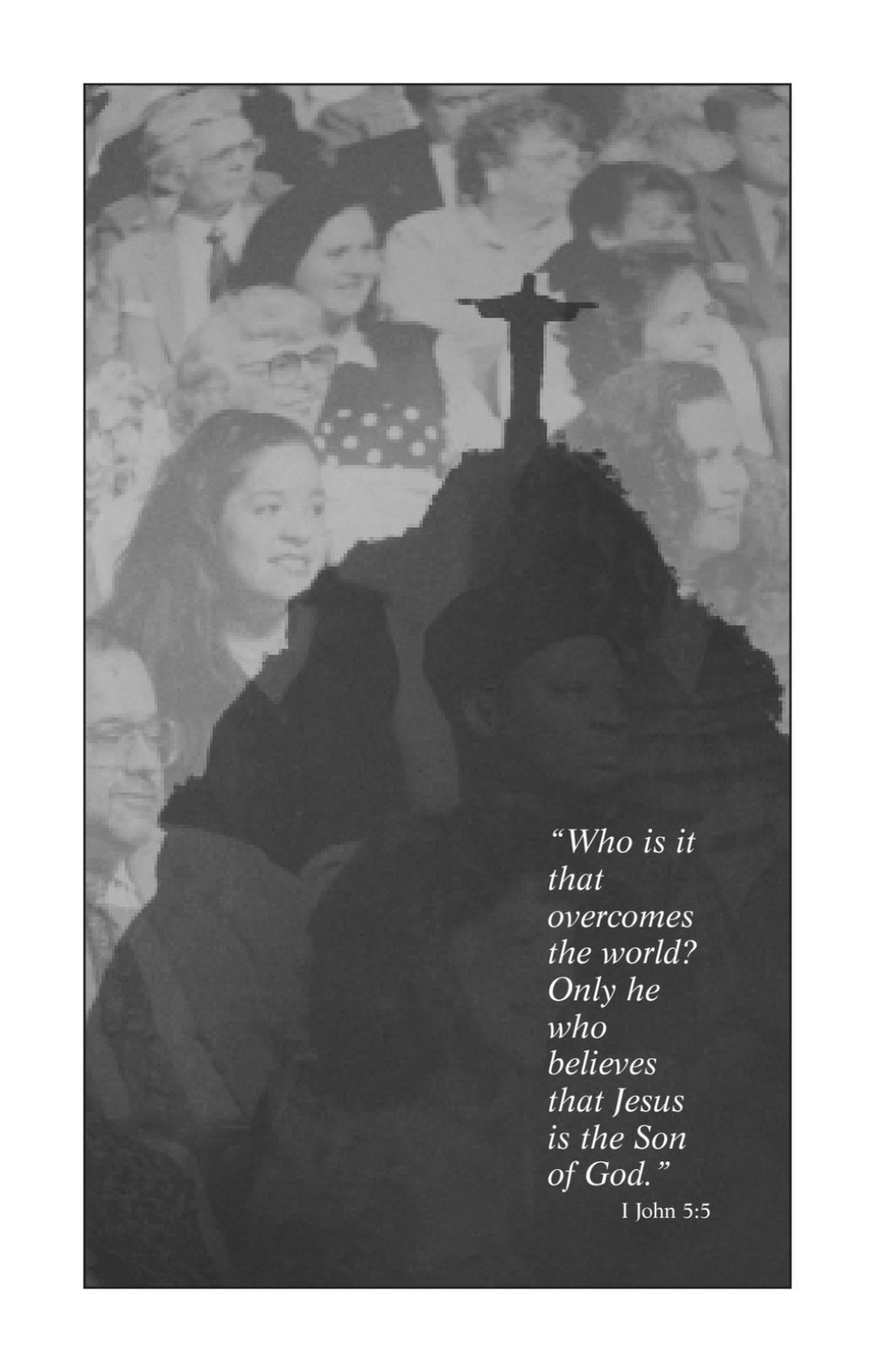
Agapao and Phileo

It has been said that *agapao* refers to “the love of God” and *phileo* is only “the love of men.” But this distinction is only a very small part of the difference, and as such is in itself incorrect. Both of these words may convey intense emotion or may be relatively weak in their meanings. These words do not indicate degree of love, but kinds of love.

Agapao refers to love which arises from a keen sense of the value and worth in the object of our love, and *phileo* describes the emotional attachment which results from intimate and prolonged association. That is why in the Scriptures we are never commanded to “love” with the word *phileo*. Even when husbands and wives are instructed to love one another, the word *agapao* is used, for it is impossible to command that kind of love which can arise only from intimate association.

On the other hand, the saints are admonished to appreciate profoundly the worth and value in others, and *agapao* is used to convey this meaning. All Christians are not necessarily to have sentimental attachments for one another (*phileo*). This would be impossible, for our circle of intimate friends is limited by the nature of our lives. But we can all be commanded to appreciate intensely the worth of others.

— Eugene A. Nida,
God's Word in Man's Language, p. 6

A black and white photograph of a church congregation. In the foreground, a large, dark silhouette of a cross is superimposed over the image. The background shows a group of people, including men, women, and children, looking towards the front of the church. The lighting is soft, and the overall mood is solemn and reverent.

*“Who is it
that
overcomes
the world?
Only he
who
believes
that Jesus
is the Son
of God.”*

I John 5:5

Get a Life!

DAY 25

1 John 5:1-12

Has anyone ever told you to “Get a life!”? How did you react?

1. How is one born of God and what results from that experience (5:1-5)?
2. What *victory* is this (5:4)?
 - (a) the victorious cross of Christ—by which sin, Satan and death have all been overcome;
 - (b) the born-again experience of believers—by which we have overcome the world;
 - (c) the persevering faith of believers in Christ—by whom we overcome and by whom we are assured of eternal life.
3. What does it mean to overcome “by water and blood” (5:6; see notes)?
4. What convincing testimony does God provide to the truth of the gospel (5:6-12)?
5. What happens if we accept that testimony (5:11-12)? If we reject it?

Victory in Christ is believable, available and absolutely assured. So is anything keeping you from enjoying the victorious Christian life?

The phrase “by water and blood” (5:6, 8) has led to considerable debate among modern commentators. Various interpretations have been proposed, including: (1) Jesus’ birth, as by the water and blood of Mary’s womb; (2) both Jesus’ baptism (water) and Jesus’ death (blood); (3) the crucifixion, during which water and blood flowed from Jesus’ side; (4) OT symbols of purification and redemption; (5) NT ordinances of baptism and communion. This perplexing phrase, though unclear to us, was probably known by John’s readers as a teaching point necessary to bolster his arguments for Christ’s real life and real death, over against the cultic teachings of those who had left the church (see Introduction to 1 John: Setting and purpose).

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

Blessed Assurance

1 John 5:13-21

OPENING
up to the Word

As a child, when you asked your parents for something, did they always listen attentively? Did they always give you what you asked for?

DIGGING
into the Word

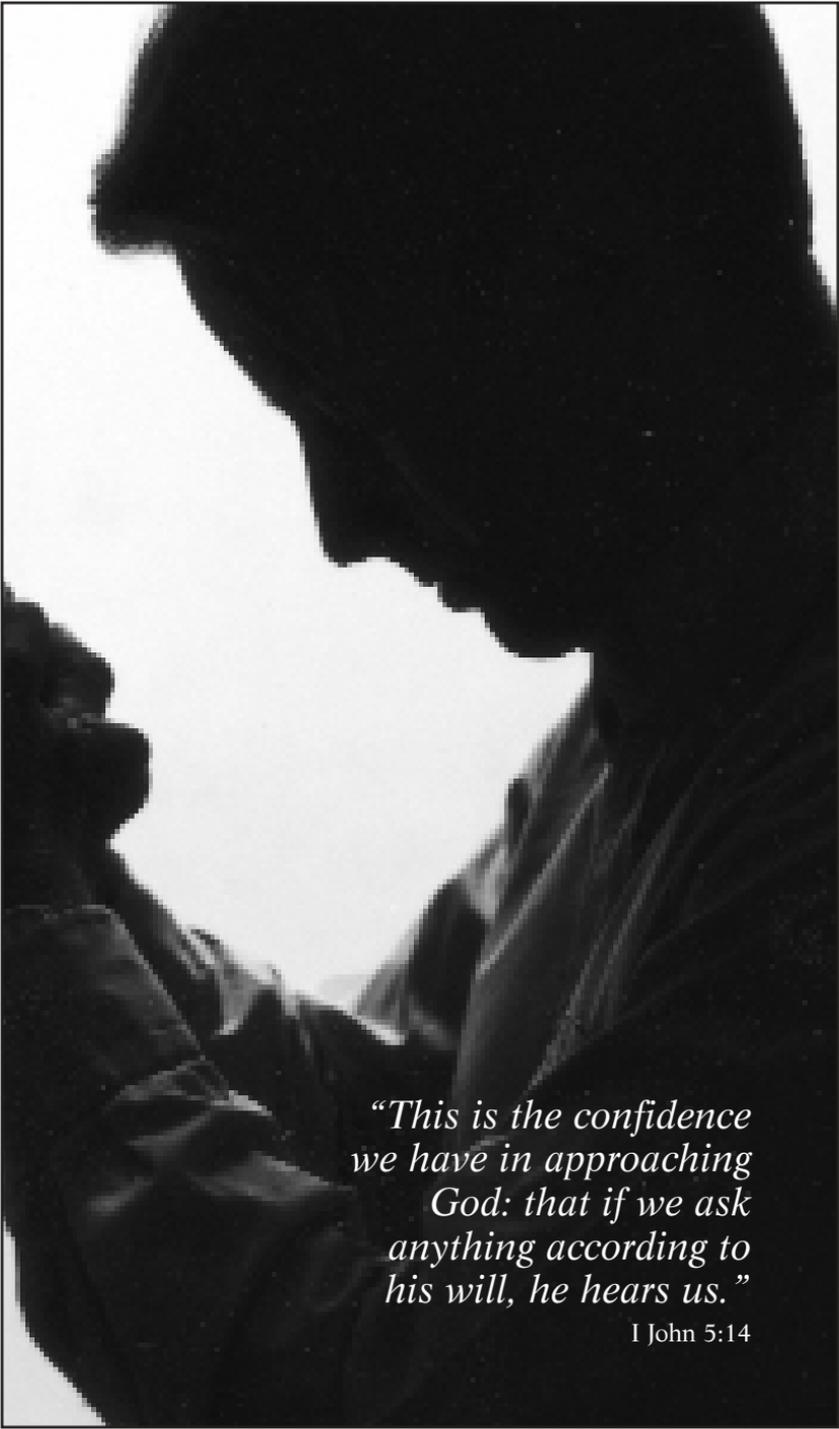
1. What was John's purpose for writing this letter (5:13; compare John 20:31; see also the introduction to 1 John)?
2. What incentives for the Christian's prayer life does John offer (5:14-16)? Are there conditions or limitations placed on that privilege?
3. Who is said to be "born of God" (5:18; see notes)?
4. What convincing assurances does John close with (5:18-20)? Look for "we know" statements.

LIVING
out the Word

1. What modern-day "idols" (5:21; see notes) interfere with the enjoyment of God's life and the ministry of intercession?
2. The instruction for "brother-keepers" to pray to God about a brother, persistently and confidently, paints a sharp contrast for those of us who would sooner talk to a sinning brother about God than to God about a sinning brother.

WINDOW
on the Word

*The meaning of the phrase "sin that leads to death" (5:16) is lost to many modern readers. This frightening phrase did not refer to a specific sin, but to an attitude or lifestyle of non-repentance. We should petition God with confidence (boldness of free speech, 5:14) for a brother (friend or Christian) who commits a sin (5:16). Such sin is defined as either: (1) **wrongdoing**—including sins of omission (5:17, 4:17, 20); (2) **lawlessness**—that is, breaking the law (3:4) or (3) **idolatry**—substituting anything in the place of God (5:21). Such sin, however incompatible with the Christian life, is forgivable.*



*“This is the confidence
we have in approaching
God: that if we ask
anything according to
his will, he hears us.”*

I John 5:14

Love or Truth

Wrap-up of 1 John

OPENING
up to the Word

Were you a good test-taker in school? In what subjects did your light shine?

DIGGING
into the Word

- 1.** How are the twin themes of love and truth interrelated and kept in balance by John?
 - (a) John pastors a church of *truth*, always arguing for high doctrinal standards.
 - (b) John pastors a church of *love*, forgetting matters of right and wrong when someone just needs to be loved.
 - (c) John always *speaks the truth in love*, even if that means someone may be offended.
 - (d) John shows *love-in-action* and extends fellowship to any person, indiscriminantly.
- 2.** Why was the three-fold test of belief-behavior-love necessary for the first-century church?
- 3.** Why is that test—and the need for maintaining truth and love—still necessary for the 21st-century church?

LIVING
out the Word

- 1.** Consider your field of special interest. Is your expertise in that field best measured by tests on book knowledge, practical skill, personal relationships, leadership ability, team morale, production rates or fiscal year-end results?
- 2.** By comparison, upon Whom does your relationship with God depend?

Pop Quiz

What Do You Know, and When Did You Know It?

Throughout 1 John, several “spot quizzes” pop up, with the implicit question, “How do you know...?” John’s readers are expected to know the right answers to three tests: (a) test of right *belief*, (b) test of right *behavior*, and (c) test of right *love*. John “tests” on what is truly “knowable.” As a modern-day recipient of this letter, the issues you are dealing with will be addressed. Check out the following texts to see which ones you “know” (and follow) with certainty:

Q: Do you know you are abiding in God?
If yes, when? If not, why not?

Q: Do you know you are a child of God?
If yes, when? If not, why not?

Q: Do you know what love is?
If yes, when? If not, why not?

Q: Do you know you belong to the Truth?
If yes, when? If not, why not?

Q: Do you know that God lives in you?
If yes, when? If not, why not?

Q: Do you know the Spirit of God?
If yes, when? If not, why not?

Q: Do you know truth from falsehood?
If yes, when? If not, why not?

Q: Do you know whether you love others?
If yes, when? If not, why not?

*Answer key to the above questions:
See 1 John 2:5; 3:10, 16, 19, 24; 4:2, 6; 5:2*

Are You on the Guest List?

2 John

OPENING
up to the Word

At whose home could you drop in, uninvited, and be assured of good food and conversation late into the night?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Why was it important for this “chosen lady” and her children to love one another? (a) they weren’t getting along, (b) God commanded it, (c) to be an example to others.

2. Why the warning about giving food and shelter to false teachers (vs. 7-11)? (a) a good missionary is hard to tell from a bad one, (b) falsehood breeds followers, (c) even an innocent investment in wicked work spreads evil.

3. How does one know who to welcome and when? (a) by appearances, (b) by host-guest chemistry, (c) by ability to meet their needs, (d) by faith in Jesus, (e) by the calendar and other convenience factors.

LIVING
out the Word

Suppose you were warned about guests coming to dinner whom you were told you should turn away.

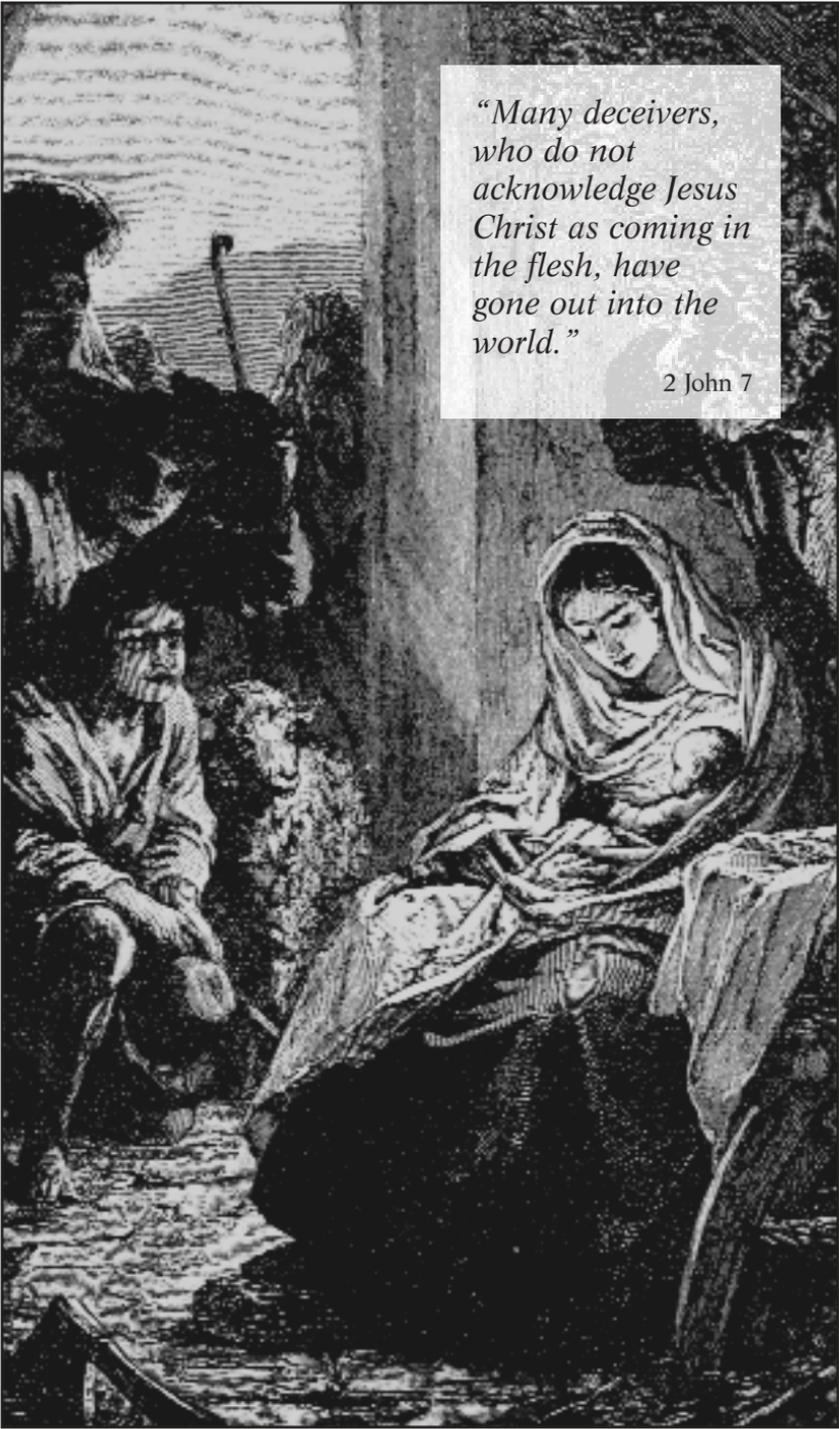
1. What would you be anxious about?

2. Would you need a “face-saving” excuse?

3. What encouragement from 2 John would help you handle this assignment?

WINDOW
on the Word

*The author calls himself **the elder** (2Jn 1; 3Jn 1). In his later years, John the beloved disciple functioned as an elder statesman, probably at the Ephesian church. The **chosen lady** (v. 1) could be either an unknown (to us) Christian woman or a figurative reference or fond name for a local church, perhaps the unnamed church in 3 John 9. Likewise, **chosen sister** (2Jn 13) could be a different woman or another local church.*



*“Many deceivers,
who do not
acknowledge Jesus
Christ as coming in
the flesh, have
gone out into the
world.”*

2 John 7

Guess Who's Coming for Dinner!

3 John

OPENING
up to the Word

Has hospitality been extended to you when you needed it most? Likewise, have you opened up your home and heart to entertain guests overnight?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Why was it so important for Gaius to walk in the truth?
2. Why the encouragement to continue hosting the “brothers” and “strangers” in his home (v. 5), even Demetrius (vs. 11-12)?
3. What bad-news warning does this letter also contain (v. 11)?
4. What do you suppose would have happened if Gaius did not heed the warning about Diotrephes (vs. 9-10)? If Gaius had not done right by Demetrius (v. 12)?

LIVING
out the Word

Suppose you had received 3 John by mail in response to your questions about certain guests, door-to-door evangelists and propagandists who had dropped in.

1. What would you be anxious about? What prospect of joy would you be anticipating?
2. When “strangers” come calling, are you easily taken in? Or do you tend to play it safe?
3. How do you know whom to believe and welcome and whom to suspect and show the door?

To Be, or Not to Be —Hospitable

DAY 30

Wrap-up of 2 and 3 John

Are you often intrigued by new teaching, if it is presented convincingly enough? Or do you filter everything through whatever you've been told was "the truth"? Give examples.

1. Compare the two letters at various points. How are the two letters alike and unlike, at 2 John 1 and 3 John 1?

...at 2 John 4 and 3 John 4?

...at 2 John 12-13 and 3 John 13-14?

2. Compare 2 John with 1 John. How are the three letters alike and unlike, in their statements at 2 John 5 and 1 John 2:7?

...at 2 John 6 and 1 John 5:3?

...at 2 John 7 and 1 John 4:2-3?

...at 2 John 12 and 1 John 1:4?

3. How are 2 and 3 John different from 1 John in their opening and closing?

4. Which of the three seems more like a letter you received from a loving parent?

5. Which seems more like a short course in Christianity from a teacher?

Suppose you had received 2 John and 3 John in today's mail.

1. What subject matter or title would each letter have? How are the twin themes of love and truth intertwined?

2. How would you reply to the sender in each case?

3. To whom, if anyone, would you forward the letter in each case?

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word