

10. The Letters of 1, 2 & 3 John

Robbins, 55-58

Marianne Meye Thompson, *1-3 John*, IVP New Testament Commentary

1. **The structure of 1 John is not at all agreed upon by commentators. This outline is set out by R.R. Jones.**
 - **Prologue 1:1-4**
 - **God is Light 1:5 to 2:27**
 - A. Communion with God and confession of sin. (1:5 to 2:2)
 - B. Communion with God and obedience (2:12-17)
 - C. Attitude towards the world. (2:12-17)
 - D. Warning against the antichrists. (2:18-27)
 - **God is Righteous 2:28 to 3:10**
 - A. The righteous children of God. (2:28 to 3:10)
 - B. The righteous love of the children of God. (3:11-18)
 - C. Confidence before God. (3:19-24)
 - D. Warning against the spirit of antichrist. (4:1-6)
 - **God is Love 4:7 to 5:12**
 - A. The Nature of true agape. (4:7-21)
 - B. The Cruciality of faith in Jesus. (5:1-12)
 - **Epilogue 5:13-21**
2. **Introduction**
 - **The Occasion and Purpose of 1 & 2 John**

The nature of the problem, broadly speaking, is the 'nature and implications of salvation'.

 - Denial of the atonement of Jesus Christ
 - Claimed to be without sin
 - The centrality of Jesus Christ
 - **The Purpose and Genre of 1 & 2 John**

The main purpose of these 2 epistles is to combat a tangle of erroneous teaching and practice.

1 John lacks a genuine correspondence style, as is variously called a sermon or a tract or a pastoral manual. Yet, like Paul's letters 1 John is intended for a specific audience and directed to a particular situation. (Some suggest it was written to be read out loud in smaller segments to a congregation.) 1 John has a gentle pastoral tone to it. The author encourages his readers, to assure them of their standing as God's children. He assures them of those things in which they can have confidence.

- B. Gave Himself, flesh and blood (4:2 & 5:6-8)
- C. Those who trust, might live through Him (4:9 & 5:10-13, 20)
- D. The Children of God have passed from death to life (3:14) through faith in God's Messiah (2:22-23)
- E. Son of God (2:23-25 & 4:9, 13, 14 & 5:5, 9-12)

So as long as we continue in this world, we also continue to depend of Jesus Christ's mediating work of atonement and intercession (2:1-2). Salvation is not a status we have attained, but a gift we receive.

- **Christian Discipleship**

- A. Jesus' example of Righteousness (2:6 & 3:16-17)
- B. Self-giving Love (3:16)
- C. Righteousness in Life (2:6 & 3:4-10)
- D. Love of Others (4:7-8, 16, 20, 21)

The image of the Christian life in this letter, is taken from the image that comes from the pages of the Old Testament which is the 'Path' or 'Walking' that is found in the Psalms and Proverbs. This image of discipleship as "walking" in a certain way suggests not a level to achieve, but rather a style of life to which one is committed.

The word *truth* in Johannine theology does not refer only to doctrine or belief. It also covers the way one lives: truth always includes orthodoxy (correct belief) and orthopraxy (correct practice). Neither has precedence over the other, for *truth is always both belief and practice*. One cannot know the truth and fail to do the truth; one cannot do the truth without knowing it.

- **Love, Unity and Fellowship**

- A. God first loved us (4:19) (This is a KEY verse.)
- B. Do not love the world, or things of the world (2:15)

Christian love for each other grows from God's prior love. Our ability to love depends on the power of God's love in us, enabling us to love others.

Christians are not to allow the world to shape their lives, but to love God and allow that love to direct all that they are and do.

- **The Preservation of Sound Teaching**

- A. Affirm and Hold On (1:1)
- B. Old Command (2:7)
- C. Message declared to them (1:5)

Faithful to teaching is teaching that they understand to be tradition of the community. Tradition is used here in it's technical sense as '*tradere*', which means 'to pass on'. Chain reaction from eyewitnesses in which each succeeding generation forms a link. The challenge today is for the church to cast it's teaching in ways

that are at once faithful to the message that it has been handed, and that communicates to the culture it ministers too.

- **The Importance of Discernment**

- A. 1 John 4:1-6

Discernment is a theme that runs throughout 1 John, but it is directly addressed in one section only. (4:1-6)

Discernment is the ability to distinguish truth from error, whether that truth be manifested in doctrine or practice. Discernment is a gift of the Holy Spirit, but is not confined to the individual or to inner experience, but is for the community of believers for the preservation and safeguarding of the church.

- **Assurance and Confidence**

- A. Forgiveness (1:9)

- B. Standing with God (3:1-3)

Those who make it their aim to 'walk in the light' and recognize their need for forgiveness of God when they fail, do not need to be anxious about God's graciousness to them. Assurance rests on what God does and has done for those who trust in Him.

4. **The structure of 1 John by section**

- **Witness to the Word of Life (1:1-4)**

- The Life Revealed (1:1-2)
 - The Life Experienced (1:3-4)

- **Walking in the Light: The Fundamental Pattern (1:5-2:27)**

- The Character of God (1:5)
 - The Atonement of Christ (1:6-2:2)
 - The Incompatibility of Light and Darkness (1:6-7)
 - The Necessity of Confession (1:8-9)
 - The Intercession of Jesus Christ (1:10-2:2)
 - Obedience to God's Commands (2:3-6)
 - Obedience: The Basis for Assurance (2:3)
 - Obedience and Knowledge of God (2:4)
 - Obedience and Love for God (2:5)
 - Obedience and the Example of Jesus (2:6)
 - The Fundamental Command: Love One Another (2:7-11)
 - The New Command (2:7-8)
 - The Incompatibility of Love and Hate (2:9-11)
 - Encouragement to the Faithful (2:12-14)
 - Forgiveness in Christ (2:12)
 - Steadfast Knowledge of Christ (2:13a)
 - Victory in Christ (2:13b)
 - Assurance of Knowledge of God (2:13c-14)
 - Warnings Against Unfaithfulness (2:15-17)
 - Do Not Love the World (2:15)
 - The Essence of Worldliness (2:16-17)
 - Warnings Against Antichrists (2:18-27)

The Appearance of Antichrists (2:18-19)
The Anointing of "the Holy One" (2:20-21)
The Great Lie (2:22-23)
Exhortations to Faithfulness (2:24-27)

- **Remembering Who We Are: The Children of God (2:28-3:24)**
 - The Privileges of the Children of God (2:28-3:3)
 - Confidence with God (2:28-29)
 - The Children of God (3:1-3)
 - Family Likeness (3:4-10)
 - Jesus' Sinlessness, Human Sinfulness (3:4-6)
 - Warning Against Deception (3:7)
 - The Work of the Son of God, the Work of the Devil (3:8-10)
 - A Rift in the Family (3:11-17)
 - Disobeying the message (3:11-13)
 - Hearing the message (3:14-15)
 - Jesus' Example: Love That Brings Life (3:16)
 - Jesus' Action: Life That Brings Love (3:17)
 - The Confidence of the Children of God (3:18-24)
 - An Unsettling Lack of Confidence (3:18-20)
 - Reassuring Confidence in Prayer (3:21-22)
 - Confidence from Obeying God's Command (3:23-24)

- **Walking in the Light: Belief and Love (4:1-5:12)**
 - Discerning the Spirits (4:1-6)
 - Spirit-inspired Prophets (4:1)
 - Spirit-inspired Confessions (4:2)
 - Spirit-inspired Allegiance (4:3)
 - Spirit-inspired Victory (4:4)
 - Spirit-inspired Response (4:5-6)
 - Let Us Love One Another (4:7-12)
 - The Source of Love (4:7-8)
 - The Model of Love (4:9-10)
 - The Command to Love (4:11-12)
 - Abiding in Faith and Love (4:13-5:5)
 - God Is the Standard of Love (4:13-16)
 - God Encourages Us in Love (4:17-18)
 - God Is the Source of Love (4:19-20)
 - God Commands Us to Love (4:21-5:5)
 - Testimony to the Son (5:6-12)
 - The "Blood and Water" Witness to Jesus Christ (5:6)
 - The Spirit's Witness to the Son (5:6-9)
 - God's Witness to the Son (5:10-12)

- **Closing Exhortations (5:13-21)**
 - The Children of God Have Confidence in Prayer (5:13-17)
 - Prayer for Life (5:13-15)
 - Sin unto Death, Sin not unto Death (5:16-17)
 - Concluding Assurances and Admonitions (5:18-21)
 - Confidence in God's Keeping Power (5:18-19)
 - The Coming of the Son of God (5:20-21)

5. **The structure of 2 John by section**

- **Greetings to the Church (vv. 1-3)**
- **Living in Love (vv. 4-6)**
- **Living in Truth (vv. 7-11)**
- **Closing Greetings (vv. 12-13)**

6. **The structure of 3 John by section**

- **Living in Truth (vv. 1-2)**
- **Working Together with the Truth (vv. 3-8)**
- **Imitating Truth (vv. 9-12)**
- **Closing Greetings (vv. 13-14)**