

## *Walking Out the Word:* **The Epistles of John**

### **Important Background to the First, Second and Third Epistles of John:**

- **The First Epistle of John:** The technique and terminology show that this epistle is written by the same author of the Gospel of John. Traditional scholarship points to the apostle John as the author. He was one of the original eyewitnesses of Jesus (1:1-2). Now an old man who was living in Asia Minor serving as the Bishop over the Ephesus congregations, John was known to come in the midst of brethren who were disagreeing, touch them, look deep in their eyes and say simply “love one another.”
- Traditional historians recount that the Roman emperor Domitian commanded that the apostle John be boiled to death in oil. When they tried to kill him in this way he only continued to preach and did not die. The officials also tried to poison him, but it didn’t kill him. Finally they banished John in 97AD to isolation on the island of Patmos where he encountered the Lord Himself, and wrote *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*.
- The apostle John is believed to have written 1 John around 90 AD. It was a circular letter sent to the churches around Ephesus. This letter reveals John’s intimacy with God and with the people that he is writing to. He wrote this letter to assure the recipients of their eternal life (5:13). John was confronting false teachers who were spreading false doctrine. (2:22, 26; 3:7; 4:1). John was trying to root out, what in the second century became known as Gnosticism. Gnosticism taught a dualistic perspective where the spirit was seen as good and that matter was evil. This led to the denial of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and of His bodily resurrection. John wrote to expose this heresy since he himself had walked, talked, and touched Jesus, watched him die and was witness of the resurrection.
- **The Second Epistle of John:** In the second epistle, John refers to himself as the “elder” and addresses the letter to the “elect lady and her children” which either refers to a specific woman or perhaps is a personification of the local church and its’ members. Here John is most concerned about false teachers and the teaching of false doctrine. He warns them not to “receive” them or even to “greet” them (2 John 10). He did this in a time where Roman inns were filthy, visiting teachers would turn to the church for hospitality. However, this privilege had been abused by religious charlatans.
- **The Third Epistle of John:** In this brief letter, John specifically writes to Gaius, and greets him personally praying that he may “prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers” (3 John 2). He specifically encouraged Gaius to walk in generosity and to rebuke Diotrephes for being uncharitable and forbidding hospitality. Here John is addressing the opposite problem than he addressed in 2 John. He is exhorting Christians to provide hospitality for genuine teachers. John depicts the church as a family that should be generous and hospitable.

### **Things to talk about in Walking Out the Word:**

- *Opening:* In this introduction, talk how, as long as the Apostle John walked in faith, obedience and intimacy with Jesus, his life was indestructible. Have you had times where you received God’s physical protection?
- *1 John:* Why does John emphasize that he has seen and touched Jesus? Why is he writing this letter? What phrases does John use in 1:3, 7; 2:3, 5, 6 to describe what it means to *know* God? What happens when we love the world (2:15-17)? What does it mean to continue to abide in Christ (3:1-10)? What is the heart of the message in 3:11-24? Who do you know that is in need of God’s love and you can share the words of John with them?
- *2 John:* Do you stand up for the truth and reject false doctrine and false teachers so that you don’t “receive” them or “greet” them (2 John 10)? Or do you tend to want to be everyone’s friend?
- *3 John & Closing:* Are you generous in your hospitality? Close in praying for an increased connection between you and others. Pray that you would be intimately connected to Jesus and intimately connected to His church.