

An Attempt To Listen To God

An Introduction to John's

Three Epistles

By

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**Introduction**

It is almost an impossibility to read the scriptures without being convinced that God puts emphasis on “numbers”, i.e., 2, 5, 6, and 12. This is indicated in the opening page of the Scriptures where God had the recording of His activities on the various days. It is written: “And the evening and the morning were the first day” (Gen. 1:5), with the other numbered days following (8, 13, 19, 23, 31). It is also noticed that certain numbers have significances. For instance, the number forty always has to do with testing (Num. 13:25-26; Matt. 4:2). Others God splits up into two groups. When there is “seven” of anything it is always divided into a “three and a four” (Rev. 6-8). The seven seals are divided by four having the command “Come and see” (Rev. 6:1, 3, 5, 7), and this expression is missing in the last three seals (Rev. 6:9, 12; 8:1). When there is “four” of anything it is always divided into a two and two; and/or three and one.

Some illustrations of this are:

- 1) There are four comforters in Job:
  - a) Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophara - three friends
  - b) Elihu - the mediator.
- 2) Four persons were bound:
  - a) Samson (Jud. 16:21); Jehoiakim (2 Chron. 36:6) and Zedekiah (2 Kgs. 25:7); none of which were liberated.
  - b) Manasseh was freed. (2 Chron. 33:11)
- 3) Four prophetess's of the Old Testament:
  - a) Miriam (Ex. 15:20), Deborah (Jud. 4:4), Huldah (2 Kgs. 22:14); all of these were good
  - b) Noadiah (Neh. 6:14) who was bad.
- 4) Four gospels:
  - a) Matthew, Mark and Luke - deal with the same issues
  - b) John is distinctly different.

When we turn to the New Testament we observe there are four “one chapter books”, Philemon, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude. Three are written to individuals: Philemon (Phlm. 1:1); 2nd John (2 Jn. 1:1), and 3rd John (3 Jn. 1:1); but Jude is written to a company (1:20, 21). Furthermore, these four books are beautifully balanced for:

- 1) Philemon contained an encouragement to receive. (Phlm. 1:10-15)
- 2) 2 John - contained a warning to reject. (2 Jn. 1:10)
- 3) 3 John - an example of rejecting those who ought to have been accepted. (3 Jn. 1:10)
- 4) Jude - an example of accepting those who ought to have been rejected. (Jude 1:4)

**A Comparison of John's Gospel and His Epistles**

John wrote five of the New Testament books: his gospel, three epistles, and the Revelation. These deal with contrasting truths, but they complement each other.

John's Gospel	John's Epistles
Christ	Christian
Know who Christ is (Jn. 20:30-31)	Know what you believe (1 Jn. 5:13)
Reveals the truth (Jn. 14:6)	Applies the truth (1 Jn. 5:1)

## An Introduction to John's Three Epistles

Gospel	Epistles	Revelation
Christ in the world (Jn. 1:10)	Christ in the life (1 Jn. 4:13-14)	Christ in Heaven (Rev. 5:5)
Historical	Moral	Prophetical
Deals with the past	Deals with the present	Deals with the future
Believe (Jn. 20:31)	Be sure (1 Jn. 5:11-13)	Be ready (Rev. 2:5, 16; 3:3)
Life received (Jn. 3:16)	Life revealed (1 Jn. 1:2)	Life rewarded (Rev. 22:12)
Salvation (Jn. 3:17)	Sanctification (1 Jn. 3:3)	Sovereignty (Rev. 4:2, 4; 11:15-19; 20:11-15)

### A Comparison Between John's Three Epistles

1 John	2nd John	3rd John
Presentation of the truth, the Word of Life (ch. 1:1)	Protection of the truth (v.8)	Proclamation of the truth (v.7-8)
False profession (ch. 4:1)	False Doctrine (v.9)	False position (v.9)
How to recognize the truth (ch. 4:2)	Refuse those who do not hold the truth (v.10)	Encourage those who teach the truth (v.7-8)
Preservation of the individual (ch. 5:18, 21)	Preservation of the family (v.10)	Preservation of the assembly (v. 5-6)
The doctrine of love prohibits fellowship with false teachers (ch. 2:19)	The Christian doctrine prohibits hospitality with false teachers (v.10-11)	

### A Comparison Between 2nd and 3rd John

2nd John	3rd John
The leaven of wrong doctrine (v.7)	The leaven of wrong practice (v.9, 10)
The lack of truth (v.7, 9,11)	The lack of love (v.9 compare 1 Cor. 13:5)
Instruction is given how to recognize those whom we ought not to receive (v. 9-11)	Instruction is given concerning those whom we ought to receive (v.11)

2nd John	3rd John
The error of receiving those into the home who should not be welcomed (v.10)	The error of not receiving into the church those who should be welcomed (v.10)
Is written to a lady, concerning problems on the outside (v.1)	Is written to a man concerning problems on the inside (v.1)
The woman, we know not her name (v.1)	The man's name is Gaius (v.1)
Problems outside the assembly, due to Gnostic teaching (v.10)	Problems inside the assembly, due to Nicolaitian teaching (v.9)
Woman who was hospitable toward the saints (v.10)	A man who was hospitable to the saints (v.6)
The apostle rejoices that some of another's children physically are walking in the truth (v.4)	The apostle rejoices to hear that some of his own children, spiritually are walking in the truth (v.4)

### The Major Themes in the Three Epistles of John

In these three epistles the overriding themes are “fellowship”, “truth”, and “love”.

#### 1) Why this emphasis on truth, love and fellowship?

- a) These are the tests of genuineness in the last days.
  - i) The major characteristic of the last days is deception (Matt. 24:4, 5, 11, 24) and thus the greater necessity for the truth.
  - ii) When there is a lack of love for the Lord and truth, there will be a love of error.
  - iii) When there is a love of error, there is a loss of christian fellowship.

#### 2) Fellowship

- a) Love in truth:
  - i) Love without truth is sentimentality
  - ii) Truth without love is legality
- b) The explanation of the truth is: “the doctrine of Christ” (2 Jn. 1:9) and in that is:
  - i) The confession that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. (2 Jn. 1:7)
  - ii) The confession that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. (1 Jn. 4:15)

#### 3) Difference between “agape” and “phileo”

- a) It has been said that these are two different levels of love: “agape” being God's love and “phileo” being a lower love, that which man can give. However, this cannot be supported by the scriptures as the following shows. Summarizing that which Trench writes in his “Synonyms of the New Testament” (agape) Love based on esteem, a matter of the will as a duty, more to do with the head. “Phileo” is love associated with the emotions.

- b) The evidence for this is seen by looking at “agape” and “phileo” in same contexts.
  - i) Those whom He chastens:
    - (a) "The Lord loveth (agapao) He chasteneth..." (Heb. 12:6)
    - (b) "As many as I love [phileo] I rebuke and discipline. (Rev. 3:19)
  - ii) For the Pharisees:
    - (a) The Pharisees “love [agapeo] the most important seats in the synagogues and greetings in the market-places." (Lk. 11:43)
    - (b) They “love (phileo) the uppermost rooms and chief seats”. (Matt. 23:6)
  - iii) The Father’s love for the Son:
    - (a) “The Father loveth (phileo) the Son.” (Jn. 5:20)
    - (b) “The Father loveth (agapeo) the son.” (Jn. 3:35)
  - iv) “Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved [agape]”... (Jn. 21:20)
  - v) “She came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved [phileo]” (Jn. 20:2)
- c) If agape means God’s love, then the following verses are very perplexing:
  - i) “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved (agapao) this present world.” (2 Tim. 4:10)
  - ii) “Men loved (agapeo) darkness rather than light.” (Jn. 3:19)
  - iii) “For they loved (agapeo) the praise of men more than the praise of God.” (Jn. 12:43)
  - iv) “Sinners also love (agape) those that love them.” (Lk. 6:32)
  - v) Balaam “loved (agapeo) the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Pet. 2:15)
  - vi) “Love (agapeo) not the world.” (1 Jn. 2:15)
- d) If “phileo” means friendship and is a lower word, then how is the following explained:
  - i) “The Father Himself loveth (phileo) you.” (Jn. 16:27)
  - ii) "But after that the kindness and love (phileo) of God our Savior toward man appeared.” (Titus 3:4)
- e) There must be great care in not building a teaching based on how the two words are used in John 21 as if that was the only place they are found.

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**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.  
John 16:13**

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