

I understand that English-speaking people have a metaphorical idiom – “the elephant in the room.” It means an obvious problem that everyone knows about, but nobody wants to discuss.

I’ve never seen an elephant, but I understand they are maybe five or ten times as big as a Roman chariot horse. And, our rooms are much smaller than yours, so I get the picture of how big a problem an elephant in the room really is. It obscures your view and creates other problems just by not acknowledging that it exists.

We early Christian leaders had an elephant in the room. We did not have that metaphor though, so we used another one. I call it... the George Foreman Grill Problem. Let me illustrate it by telling you of an imaginary conversation that James and I could have had when I returned to Jerusalem after an evangelism trip.

I show up for church on Sunday as I’ve done for years. A typical Sunday, not Easter, not Super Bowl Sunday. Just a typical Sunday. I wait and wait for the typical large crowd to show up, but there is a much smaller group than I expect. As I think about it, I realize the crowds have been dwindling for some time, but I have refused to acknowledge it. I go over to James and point out what I see.

James nods sadly, and says, “It’s the George Foreman Grill Problem.”

I’m completely baffled. “George Foreman Grill Problem? I love my George Foreman Grill! What does that have to do with church attendance?”

James smiles, “Of course you love your grill, Barnabas. So do many thousands of other people. That’s the problem.”

I know James is leading me into a trap, but I can’t see where he is going. “What --- is ---- the ---- problem?”

“In its first fifteen years, over 100 million George Foreman Grills were snapped up by excited new owners. Everyone was SO excited when they got their grill. Over time, the excitement faded. As the new wore off, the drudgery and work of maintenance, cleaning, and daily use made them less attractive. Almost all of those grills have been broken, abandoned, or forgotten in some cabinet. People are excited to get them, but most don’t stay that enthusiastic for very long.”

When James finishes, I just stare at him. I know he is right. We Christians have the George Forman Grill Problem to the extreme. We spend all of our time in a life-and-death race to make disciples, but we do not retain nearly as many as we should. Persecution, false teachings, pressure from family members and peers, the daily sameness of living as Christians should. Belief turns to doubt, faithfulness turns to disinterest. New believers are so excited at first, but so many fall away.

Now, I'm not talking about theological ideas about salvation or what it takes to go to heaven. I just want to talk about the reality of how hard it is to keep people on their path as disciples, devoted to Jesus. If you look for it, you see that we [the] New Testament writers obliquely addressed the topic over and over, but it was like an elephant in the room. We wanted to talk about adding Christians, but were reluctant to discourage our members by talking about the ones who dropped out.

Before you think I am exaggerating the problem, let me put some numbers to it. On the first day of the church's existence, we had about three thousand added to our number, so we had more than 3,500 believers.¹ Not long after, we had about 5,000 men believers, along with a lot of women, which surely totaled at least 6,000.² With that start and with just a paltry 20% growth rate per year, we would have had three-and-a-half million believers by the year 65 AD. Instead, we *maybe* had believers totaling a few tens of thousands of people.

We were doing pretty well about going to the whole world to preach about Jesus, but we were not doing so well about actually making disciples of the whole world.

Once, Jesus gave a particularly difficult teaching. On hearing it, many of his disciples said it was a hard teaching. So difficult that they wondered who could accept it. From that time on, many of his disciples turned back and did not follow him any longer.³ Jesus did not soften his message. He knew the importance of having completely dedicated followers. And, the importance of NOT having followers who were not completely dedicated, such as Judas.

Jesus foretold what was going to happen to many in his famous parable of the Sower.⁴ The seeds on the path represent those who hear the Gospel but never fully understand it or become committed to it. We lost many people like that.

The seeds on the rocky ground referred to those who heard the Gospel and received it with joy. But, they did not get deeply rooted, so they went away in times of trouble or persecution. We lost many people like that. But we knew persecution was coming, so we [the] New Testament writers often warned about enduring through persecution. We did not send soft warnings

¹ Acts 2:41 plus at least 500 pre-existing disciples

² Acts 4:4

³ John 6:60-66

⁴ Matthew 13:18-22

either. Like with Jesus' followers while he was alive, many of the early Christians decided to quit following Jesus just at the threat of persecution or hard times.

It was pretty easy to warn and teach against the obvious negatives of being a Christian in the Roman Empire and in Israel. What we leaders were not expecting was the people represented by the seed falling among the thorns. Jesus said they were unfruitful because of the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth.

Paul had a most painful experience with this type of falling away with a good friend. When he wrote *Colossians* and *Philemon*, one of his dear fellow workers was Demas.⁵ A few years later, when Paul wrote *Second Timothy*, he complained that Demas had deserted him because Demas loved this world.⁶ I guess Demas was tired of not having a lot of money. Tired of not being popular with others outside of the church. Tired of living a life worthy of the Lord Jesus.

We early Christians had another very large issue. Almost all of the Christians for the first many years were Jews. After they became Christians, there was constant pressure from the Jewish authorities for them to return to Judaism. While they were Christians they were under severe social and economic pressure to return to Judaism. Sometimes they and their families were restricted from the Temple and synagogues. Their families often begged them to return to Judaism. Many Jews just tired of the plainness of our worship, and returned to the lavish Temple.

It would have been bad enough if we had just lost our members back to Judaism, but not all of them went back. Many of them stayed Christians and just tried to make Christians adhere to the customs and laws of Judaism. These Judaizers were very persuasive and caused great confusion. They caused many Christians to lose the freedom they had gained. They even confused Peter and me once, to my great regret.⁷ We lost many Christians to false teachers and Judaism.

So, we Christian leaders had two interrelated problems. How could we keep Christians inspired and growing, and being active in the church? And, how could we make sure as many people as possible had the opportunity to receive salvation and eternal life? In order for our movement to flourish, both of those questions had to be addressed and solved.

As you read the New Testament letters, keep these two interrelated questions in mind. You will see how we encourage people to be an active part of their church, and encourage them to believe and act in such a way as to receive eternal salvation. We are not always talking about complex doctrinal issues and salvation issues. Sometimes we are just talking about the simple

⁵ Colossians 4:14 and Philemon 1:24

⁶ 2 Timothy 4:10

⁷ Galatians 2:11

fact we wanted...and needed...for people to be faithful members of their church. We needed to be able to have access to them, and we needed them to help us make disciples.

We needed to develop a very strong base, because the Holy Spirit was preparing the church for a huge growth spurt.

Quick...name all of the books of the Bible written by Jesus. Oh, you can't name any? No wonder, he didn't write any of them. Ok, now name all of the famous verses in the Bible written by Jesus. Oh, you can't name any? No wonder, he didn't write any of them, well, write them "down". Our only record of him writing down anything is when he wrote something in the dust.⁸

In your house you may have many Bibles, your cell phone may even have a Bible app on it, and your bookstores are loaded with Bibles. However, in 65 AD, the New Testament had not been compiled, and there were few copies in existence of the contents that had been written.

It is extremely hard to grow a religious movement without having specific sacred writings. As they progressed onward from 65 AD, church leaders wrote more letters and gospels, and were more intent on gathering and passing around the things that had already been written. These writings would comprise the bulk of the New Testament, and be very influential in converting and retaining true disciples of Christ.

Through the leading of Holy Spirit, we addressed our elephant in the room. We set the stage for a huge growth in the number of Christians.

The elephant in your collective room is the same one we had. Fewer and fewer people today believe it is important to go to church or to be active with their faith. This is proven both by polls and church attendance. And maybe it's for different reasons than in my time, or maybe, many of the same. I wonder how will you address the elephant in the room?

⁸ John 8:1-8

Who wrote the book of *Hebrews*? I'll give you three clues, and then guess the answer using your knowledge of the Bible.

First clue: The author had an expansive knowledge of Jewish religious rites and history, but wrote in excellent Greek. Second: The author was a friend of Timothy at a time when Timothy had just been released from jail.¹ The third is more subtle: Even though *Hebrews* is one of the longest books in the New Testament, ninth longest to be exact, the author considered it to be quite brief.²

The answer: nobody knows who wrote *Hebrews*.

Although a casual reading of *Hebrews* might lead you to think Paul wrote it, many modern and ancient scholars had good reasons to think he didn't. It was not generally recognized as one of Paul's letters when the New Testament was compiled. If it had been, it would have been shown as the third longest of Paul's letters and placed after *Romans* or *First Corinthians*.

If the author is one of the other people shown in the New Testament, the author is most likely me, or Barnabas. Other less likely possibilities are Luke, Silas or Priscilla and Aquila. If none of them, Clement of Rome has been suggested as the author.

In sum, no one knows with certainty who wrote the book of *Hebrews*. Yet, it is still considered a valuable, and canonical, (an aside) sanctioned, part of the New Testament.

With all that information, maybe you can understand why I, was chosen to talk about the first half of *Hebrews*, and Barnabas was chosen to talk about the second half.

Hebrews was probably written in the decade of the 60's AD, in the time before the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD. Although the title was not part of the original text, the audience for the letter was very likely Greek-speaking Jewish Christians who used the Septuagint version of the Bible. The Septuagint was a Greek translation of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew language.

¹ Hebrews 13:23

² Hebrews 13:22

The reason for the writing of Hebrews may very well be found in Hebrews chapter 10: verse 38, where the author is concerned that these Jewish Christians will “shrink back.” The question is what would they shrink back from?

Possibly they would shrink back from being Christians because of persecution from the Romans or Jewish authorities. This is not highly likely because they were probably not located where the Jewish authorities ruled, and the Romans were not typically persecuting Christians yet.

From the warnings and information in *Hebrews*, it is more likely that the author was worried that the Jewish Christians would revert back to Judaism. Although the Bible never seems to directly address this situation, it must have been a big problem to the early Christians. The family, social and economic pressures, these were enormous for any Jew who became a Christian. The persecution from Jewish authorities was intense both religiously and physically. The leaders could prohibit anybody from worshiping in the Temple or synagogues, and this would have been devastating.

In a much more subtle way, just the worship style may have exerted huge force for Jewish Christians to revert. The Christians had teachers with little formal training, teaching in *house* churches. They were used to the synagogue. A few letters from church leaders were being circulated, but the New Testament had not been compiled. No pomp and circumstance, no sacred writings. In contrast, the Jews had the elaborate Temple, religious rites that had been followed for fifteen centuries, educated leaders, and the Scriptures. On the surface, it must have seemed that God favored the Jewish way over the Christian way.

Here is why the book of *Hebrews* is important for you to know. It is a book of choice. Should you choose Christianity or another way? Which is better? The choice you make has rewards and consequences. The ancient Jews had to choose whether to follow their ancient religion wholly, or be devoted to Christianity with Judaism taking a distant second place role. Perhaps you have to choose whether to follow another religion, no religion, or try to live without full commitment to anything. Whatever the choice you have to make, the book of *Hebrews* will help you understand how to make it.

Spoiler Alert: Jesus is better. As you are reading the book of Hebrews, you can keep this in mind...the answer is always, “Jesus is the better choice.”

One of the few exceptions to that rule is in the opening to the letter. The author makes the statement that the Son is the exact representation of God’s being. He is the radiance of God’s glory. God made the universe through his Son.

The introduction of the next subject seems a little odd to hearers today without some background. In the time of Jesus, some Jews exalted and revered angels because they were possibly involved in the giving of the Law. In the eyes of those Jews, angels were inferior only to God.

The author of Hebrews states that Jesus is superior to angels, and goes on to prove it with Old Testament Scriptures. He even says that angels are ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation.

Through suffering when he was tempted, Jesus is able to help those who are tempted. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus brings many to salvation. Yes, Jesus is superior to the angels.

The greatest of all the Jews was Moses. He was a faithful servant of God, and the law came to the Jews through Moses. Yet, Jesus is superior to Moses because Jesus is the Son, not just a servant.

The Jews wandered in the desert for forty years under the leadership of Moses. This predicament and punishment was because of their rebellion and hard hearts. The writer of Hebrews warns his hearers against having sinful and unbelieving hearts, to stop and turn to God. Why do people become hard-hearted? Because of the deceitfulness of sin.

The author of Hebrews gives a further warning against unbelief and disobedience. These have kept people from entering into rest with God. Nobody can trick God, either. For God's word is living and active, penetrating enough to divide soul and spirit, and it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing is hidden from God, but all is laid bare before him to whom each much give an account.

So, Moses was the greatest of the prophets, but Jesus is superior to Moses.

The author has demonstrated that Jesus is superior to the angels and to Moses, but how about the high priest? Jesus is the great high priest!

Every high priest, except Aaron, was selected among men and appointed to represent them in matters related to God. Since the high priest of the Jews was a sinful person, he had to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as those of the people.

However, Jesus was without sin, so he did not have to sacrifice for his own sins. Even so, he is able to sympathize with our weaknesses because he was tempted in every way, just as we are...he just didn't sin. So, we can approach the throne of grace with confidence that we will receive mercy and find grace. Because he learned obedience from what he suffered, he was made perfect and became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. He was designated by God to be the great high priest.

Barnabas will tell you more about Jesus being the great high priest, I want to tell you about some warnings from the author of *Hebrews*. These warnings are in the last half of Chapter Five, and in Chapter Six. As you read these warnings, you realize that the author knew his audience personally, or knew a lot about them. You also get the idea that these warnings were not meant just for the recipients of the letter, but for the broader Christian community.

He warns that they are slow learners and have forgotten the elementary truths of God's Word. They are so immature that they can't distinguish good from evil. He tells them to move on to maturity, and the foundations of repentance and faith in God.

He warns that it is impossible for those who have been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit and tasted the word of God to be brought back to repentance if they fall away.

With those warnings, he encourages them by telling them that God is not unjust and will not forget their work and the love they have shown by helping God's people. He encourages them to show diligence to the very end, in order to make their hope sure.

The author tells them that God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose clear, so he confirmed it with an oath. Since it is impossible for God to lie, we can hold onto his promises with confidence.

No matter who the actual author of *Hebrews* is, know this: Jesus is greater than the angels and greater than Moses. He is our great high priest. It is wise to choose Jesus, and dreadful to choose something else. What will you choose?

The Pharisees were religious sticklers for a very good reason. They wanted to make sure they qualified for eternal life. They thought they knew the Scriptures, but what they really needed was not more knowledge, but a Rosetta Stone.

The Rosetta Stone was found in Egypt in 1799 AD. It had three versions of a decree that issued two thousand years earlier. The decree was in Ancient Greek and two different versions of Egyptian hieroglyphic script. It was this stone that allowed scholars to finally interpret Egyptian hieroglyphics which had been only gibberish to them before.

Let me back up. The book of *Hebrews*, though no one knows who wrote it, is an excellent example of what Paul and I used to do. We would first go to the Jews and try to convince them to become Christians by using the Scriptures in the Old Testament. The Jews held the Scriptures to be sacred, so all we had to do was use the Scriptures to prove what we told them about Jesus was true. *Hebrews* gives you a very good idea of how we would do that.

Since you know we used that method, it may seem obvious to you. But it was not obvious back when we did it. Let me remind you of a little incident that John describes in his *Gospel of John*. The Jewish leaders were trying to kill Jesus because he said God was his father, which made him equal with God.¹ Jesus told them that they search the Scriptures because they thought the Scriptures could bring them eternal life.²

That was true. All of us Jews thought we could achieve eternal life if we could just follow God's laws well enough. So, we searched the Scriptures daily to make sure we didn't miss even one little word which could cause us to be disqualified. The Pharisees were fixated on this.

But the Pharisees needed a Rosetta Stone that would allow them to interpret Scripture correctly. And Jesus gave it to them, even though they refused to listen to him. Jesus told them, "The Scriptures testify of me."

So simple, yet a hidden mystery since the beginning of time. The Scriptures testify of Jesus. With that key, we Christian leaders were able to use the Scriptures that the Jews intimately knew to show them what the Scriptures really meant. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we

¹ John 5:18

² John 5:39

changed their world. We were able to prove to them that the Scriptures have the power to make you wise to salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ.³

The ancient Jews were intimately familiar with every detail of Abraham's life, since he was the beginning of the Hebrew nation. They knew that Abraham rescued Lot after he had been kidnapped by four kings.⁴ On Abraham's return, he stopped to be blessed by Melchizedek, the king of Salem who was also a priest of God. Abraham gave him a tenth of everything.

That is the only mention of the mysterious Melchizedek in the Old Testament... except in David's Psalm 110, which was partly used by Jesus in another context. Psalm 110:4 says, "You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek." With the Rosetta Stone of scripture interpretation, you can easily see that David was talking about Jesus being a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek, which preceded the priesthood through Aaron.

So, Jesus is superior to Abraham. Jesus is superior to Aaron. Jesus is superior to Melchizedek. Jesus is holy, blameless, pure. He sacrificed for the sins of all sinners once for all when he offered himself. He has been made perfect forever.

Jesus is the guarantee of a better covenant than the first covenant. The first covenant had intricate religious observations with the priests and Temple. Its sacrifices had to be continually repeated.

Jesus is the guarantee of the new covenant, which makes the old one obsolete. However, Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people, and will appear a second time to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

This was incredibly good news to the Jews. Once and for all! No more daily and annual sacrifices. No more feeling guilty every moment of every day. Jesus took care of sins for his people once and for all! With that good news, it was easy for us to call on them to persevere and hold onto the hope we profess. It was easy to encourage people to spur each other on toward love and good deeds. To urge them to encourage each other.

Which brings me to one of the most famous chapters in all of the Bible. Hebrews 11 is known as the Faith Chapter, or the Faith In Action Chapter. It is one of the most encouraging chapters in the Bible.

The first verse of Hebrews 11 has surely been quoted billions of times. "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

³ 2 Timothy 3:15

⁴ Genesis 14

Chapter 11 is a recitation of the faith of Old Testament heroes and how they put that faith into action. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham...on and on. Each of them had faith and put their faith into action.

Want an example of faith in action? Abraham had so much faith that he reasoned God could raise the dead, so he was willing to sacrifice his only son since God would raise him from the dead. Incredible! Nobody had ever been raised from the dead, but Abraham had so much faith that he reasoned God could and would do it. Reasoned, remarkable.

With that in mind, let's back up to verse 3 of Chapter 11. By faith, we understand that the whole universe was formed when God commanded it, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. Using Abraham as an example, by faith we can reason, we can understand, that the whole universe was formed at God's command. We don't have to understand when he did it, why he did it, or how he did it. But, we can reason that God did it.

Stay with that type of thinking and move to verse 6 of chapter 11 to see one of my personal favorites in the book of *Hebrews*. The first part of the verse says that it is impossible to please God without faith. Then the verse goes on to explain why that it true with the word *because*. *Because why?* Anyone who comes to God must believe two things: that God exists, and that God rewards those who diligently seek him.

Talk about getting back to basics, I can't come to God unless I believe that he exists. So, if I don't believe God exists, I can't come to him. My assumptions and my beliefs dictate the outcome.

Yet, as remarkable as all of these heroes were, God has something far better in mind for those who believe in Jesus, who keep their eyes fixed on him. How do we know we are seriously committed? We are told to throw off everything that weighs us down, every sin that torments or entangles us. Then we can run the race that is set before us.

When I first heard that verse read, I envisioned an Olympic runner. The runner has a heavy weight on his back, feet chained together. He can barely struggle into the arena. With a mighty effort, the runner throws off the weight, and escapes the chains that entangle him. He is now free to run the race unencumbered.

What can we do with this kind of faith? Everyone should be able to endure persecution. Everyone should be able to endure the discipline that God provides for those who are his children. Discipline that produces an abundance of righteousness.

The author of *Hebrews* concludes with many simple encouragements:

Be thankful.

Worship God acceptably, with reverence and awe.

Keep loving each other as family members

Don't forget to entertain strangers...they might be angels in disguise!

Be pure in your marriage, and keep away from adultery.

Keep free from the love of money and be content with what you have.

Don't be carried away with strange teachings.

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority.

All these things are simple and obvious to agree with but not easy to do. The author of Hebrews, though no one knows for sure who wrote it, ends with a request that his audience pray for "us" and send greetings from those in Italy. Wouldn't it be fun to know who "us" is? It's a Rosetta Stone, because then, you would know who wrote the important book of *Hebrews*.

If you have ever wondered how an uneducated fisherman could write *First and Second Peter* in excellent Greek, you need look no further than Peter's acknowledgment of Mark and me at the end of his first letter. We were both excellent scribes, both well educated. I, however, was also a prophet. And one more thing Peter noted, and of everything, it is the highest compliment, but we'll get to that.

I am best known for accompanying Paul on the Second Missionary Journey. I was chosen to accompany Paul when he took the letter from the Jerusalem Council that made it easy for non-Jews to become Christians. From that account you can learn some things about me: I was a leader in the Jerusalem church, I risked my life for the sake of Jesus, and the prophet thing.¹

But I was a close friend of Peter, I know, I know, I was best known for being a friend of Paul, but I was also Peter's friend. About the only other person who could claim that favored status was Mark, he was even closer to Paul and Peter than I was.

You should also know that both of these letters, First Peter and Second Peter were written in the early to mid-60's AD, more than three decades after Peter left the Sea of Galilee to become a fisher of men. The Holy Spirit's power was often demonstrated powerfully in Peter in his speech, his memory, and his actions. When you read this letter, you are awed by how much Peter matured from his impetuous beginning.

Peter wrote this letter to Christians who had backgrounds as Jews and Gentiles. It is a letter of general instruction, not meant to solve specific problems like many of Paul's letters were meant to do. As such, it is surely applicable for Christians of all ages who want to live like, well, Christians. Little Christs.

Peter opens his letter with words that might be a bit mysterious today, but were surely familiar to his audience: "To those who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit." Wow, whoa, concepts of predestination, foreknowledge, and sanctification just thrown in as an introduction. And then he continues with words about new birth, living hope, and resurrection. This is no light-weight writing and you don't need a prophet to point that out.

Rather than leave these difficult concepts, Peter goes on to tell us that we have an inheritance that can never perish. It is so valuable that we should rejoice even when we have to suffer grief

¹ Acts 15:22-27, Acts 15:32

in all kinds of trial. Suffering just proves the genuineness and high value of faith, which results in the praise and glory and honor of Jesus.

Peter reveals that the Old Testament prophets tried to obtain what they prophesied about, but they were unable. The glories and mysteries of Christ were reserved for Peter's hearers. How joyful that must have made them! They were more important than the Old Testament prophets.

So, it is imperative that his hearers live lives worthy of their calling. Lives that are holy. Lives that are worthy of the high cost Christ paid.

Keep in mind that many of his hearers may not have understood what it meant to lead a holy life. Peter introduces them to some aspects of that kind of life...be done forever with evil, deceit, pretense, and jealousy.

Christ's followers are to be a new type of people...holy, a holy nation, separate, chosen. One of my favorite descriptions of Christ's followers is that they are to be peculiar. Not peculiar as in weird or strange, but peculiar as in distinctly different. One of these distinctions is living on earth as temporary residents or strangers.

Have you ever noticed when traveling to a new town one that is not your own, You may search reviews of their local restaurants and coffee shops but you really don't search their high school sports, or city council decisions, or upcoming road construction and detours. It just doesn't concern you. So, like that. A visitor. Temporary resident. Stranger.

Peter makes the observation that Christians should behave in such a way that when disaster comes, they may glorify God. That observation has sometimes been interpreted as disasters happening to Christians. In a twist to that interpretation, in the next centuries after Peter's life, many disasters happened within the Roman Empire. The church grew despite those disasters because Christians provided aid, stayed through disease and plagues, helped war victims, and glorified God in all circumstances. When they acted peculiarly, as God's people, others were attracted to Christianity.

Peter echoes Paul's letters in many respects. He mandates that Christians should obey every man-made authority. He mandates that household servants and slaves should be submissive to their masters. Wives should be submissive to their husbands, and so make their faith attractive. In fact, all people should behave in a submissive way, just as Jesus did. These mandates must have caused quite a stir among many people who were used to complaining about their Roman masters and their high tax policies.

Like Paul, Peter drops little nuggets that grab your attention. Peter says that husbands should understand and honor their wives as equal heirs of the grace of eternal life. What happens to husbands that don't do this? They find it impossible to pray properly. Not difficult, not hard. But IMPOSSIBLE to pray properly.

Peter sums it up by saying that Christians should live with true love for each other. Acting with sympathy, generosity, and courteousness. How about this other nugget? The eyes of the Lord watch the righteous, and he hears their prayers. BUT, the Lord is against those who do evil.

Also, like Paul, Peter does not pull any punches. He says that following Christ means pain and suffering. But, Peter indicates the suffering may come in an odd way. It comes from not living a life of indulging self. From not living like non-believers. From having former friends think you odd for not joining with them as they follow their lustful and carousing ways, a de facto standard of acceptable living. From having them think you are odd that you don't value the things they do. Ultimately, they will have to answer for their ways of living.

Let me remind you that the first letter of Peter was written at least three decades after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Many Christians had been deeply disappointed that Jesus had not returned as quickly as they expected. It was obvious that their sense of time and God's were different. Probably no stranger to that feeling, are you? It was also becoming increasingly clear that the last days, the day of the Lord, and other end times thoughts were not necessarily meaning what some people thought. And that may be true for you.

Peter approaches the end of his letter by talking about how people should live as the end of all things comes near. They should be calm, self-controlled, prayerful. Not fearful, freaking out, and shrieking at the top of their lungs at things of this world things like politics and economies.

Above all else, they should have real, deep love for each other. So often people think they already know what this means, when actually, they don't. Be good and faithful through persecution, and not give in to worldly ways. Stop and think, what are "worldly ways" and responses?

Peter ends his first letter with instructions for good behavior within the church. Leaders should look after the well-being of their flocks, so they can win approval of Jesus, the chief shepherd. Younger members should submit to the elders. Everyone should have an attitude of service and submission. Would you look at that...still applies today.

Reminding his readers of the spiritual war that rages, all Christians should be self-controlled and vigilant so they can resist the devil. The devil is like a roaring lion searching for his prey. Those that resist and remain faithful will receive all grace and share eternal life with God.

Peter finishes his letter by including greetings from his spiritual son, Mark, and from the church in "Babylon." Which Babylon? Maybe the true Babylon, maybe Rome, maybe an evil city like Babylon, maybe all of the above, who knows.

Oh, and he tells his readers that he is sending the letter by Silvanus...that's me, Silas. Silvanus, Silas. Potato, potato. He compliments me by calling me a faithful brother. And if you know Peter, there is no higher compliment. A faithful brother!

After a rocky start, Paul came to value me highly. He said as much in three of his letters.¹ Paul and I became close friends. But...not nearly as close as Peter and I. In one of his letters, Peter called me his son.² And I considered Peter to be my mentor, confidant and father.

Peter has been in my life almost as long as I have been an adult. We started out an unlikely pair. He a rough fisherman, thick Galilean accent, little formal education, friends in low places. Me a rich kid, upper class Jerusalem accent, highly educated, friends in high places. Those all became petty differences on the day of Pentecost when Holy Spirit came. From then on, Peter and I were on level ground...brothers in Christ, serving God.

I understand that some modern people call us Saint Peter, Saint Paul, and Saint Mark. Makes us sound so...so perfect. That's not how we thought of ourselves. We were servants, voluntary slaves of Jesus who had imperfect backgrounds. He denied Jesus, refused to associate with non-Jewish Christians. I...abandoned Paul and Barnabas on the First Missionary Journey. That eventually resulted in a split in their relationship. No, we were far from perfect.

However, when you read *Second Peter*, you can see how much progress Peter made. And, you can infer that I made a lot of progress, too. When you read this letter, you can't find a trace of a rough, uneducated fisherman...or a spoiled rich kid. In fact, if you read this letter closely, you will find some startling information.

Peter addressed his letter to a general audience. If you have a precious faith in Jesus, this letter is written to you.

In one of his most powerful statements, Peter opens with this knock-out punch: The divine power of Jesus has given us everything we need for a godly life, every thing we need to participate in his divine nature, everything we need to escape the corruption of this world. *Everything we need.*

As a response to these amazing privileges, we should make every effort to add these weapons to our spiritual arsenal: faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, godliness and love. If we do, we will be effective and productive for Jesus. We will not stumble and fall. We will receive a rich welcome into the kingdom of Jesus.

¹ Col. 4:10, 2 Timothy 4:10, Philemon 1:24

² 1 Peter 5:13

I thought Peter could have stopped writing after his welcome. Few of his hearers could even begin to understand what it meant to participate in the divine nature of Jesus. It boggles *my* mind, and I was with Peter and Paul for decades.

Rather than stopping, Peter shifts gears to talk about the prophecies of Scripture. Now, prophecies don't always mean foretelling the future, sometimes they speak truth into a situation.

He reminds his hearers that the testimonies of the apostles are true, they are not cleverly devised stories. The apostles were eyewitnesses to the things they testified about. And, they intend to make every effort to see that after they die, people will remember what the apostles testified about.

Following this line of thinking, Peter says that prophecy doesn't have its origin in human will, but prophets speak from God as led by the Holy Spirit. However, there are false prophets and teachers who introduce destructive heresies. These greedy people will exploit people with fabricated stories.

Now, I do have to admit that you get to see a flash of the old Peter when you see his anger against false teachers and the destruction they cause. He writes they bring destruction on themselves. He likens them to being in the situation of the sinning angels who God put in chains in darkness. In your terminology, he is saying false teachers are going to hell. Literally. God did not spare the sinning angels, or Sodom and Gomorrah. He condemns the wicked and saves the righteous.

Peter says these false teachers blaspheme in matters they don't understand. They are unreasoning animals born to be destroyed. They are blots and blemishes, experts in greed, enticing people to sin. When you read this passage, you get a taste of Peter's righteous anger.

I'm going to stop for a minute and talk about two nuggets of wisdom that Peter gives. The first – he says that people are slaves to whatever masters them. This is a theme that Peter and Paul often talked about. Many people of your time are probably offended by their conclusions.

Peter and Paul believed everyone was a slave, because everyone was mastered by something. Paul wrote that people are slave to righteousness or sin.³ Other things that master people are pride and greed. Others seem more benign... love or recognition, love of self. Comfort, luxury. The list goes on and on. Their solution was this: choose to become a slave to righteousness, to the Lord Jesus. He is a master who gives life, not death.

A second nugget of wisdom is this: for people who escape the corruption of the world by knowing Jesus, it would be better for them to have never known Jesus than to turn their backs

³ Romans 6:16-18

on him and go back to their old ways. This is a sobering warning to those who lightly choose to follow Jesus.

Perhaps those two warnings make me sound like a real downer. Maybe you are thinking, "I would be better off just ignoring all this Christian stuff. I don't want to think about being a slave to Jesus or being fully committed to him." I suspect Peter may have been thinking of people like that when he decided what to write in the last part of his letter.

Rather than backing up, slacking off, and sugar-coating his message, Peter raises the stakes. He says he wants to remind them that he wants to stimulate them to think wholesomely. He is going to do this by telling them about the coming Day of the Lord. These are serious matters. Matters of eternal consequence.

Peter says that in the last days, skeptics will come. They will follow their own evil desires and laugh at Christians who are waiting for the coming of Jesus. They will point out that things never change, they are just the same as they always have been. Jesus hasn't come back, and he is not going to come back. They deliberately forget, or ignore, the facts.

God does make huge changes when he chooses to do so. At his command, he formed the heavens and earth. At his command, he caused the flood that deluged the world.

What these sceptics ignore is that time is of no consequence to God. To him, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like a day. He isn't being slow in keeping his promise of Jesus returning, he is being patient, not wanting anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance. God knows when the day will come, the day he gives the command, the day it all comes to an immediate end.

The heavens and earth are reserved for that day. That day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. The heavens will disappear with a deafening noise, the elements...the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything on it will be destroyed.

[long pause] Look around you...everything will be destroyed. Nothing...nothing left. [long pause]

With that in mind, what kind of people should you be? Peter recommends that you live holy and godly lives. Because those who do, get to look forward to a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness rules. Make every effort to be blameless and at peace with Jesus, because his patience means salvation.

Peter and Paul have always had a little friendly rivalry going. They love each other, but the blunt, intellectual Paul and the rough working class, Peter, see the world a little differently. In this letter, Peter takes the opportunity to give Paul a little dig. Peter writes that Paul's letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort. Now that is an understatement. Paul's letters contain lots of things that are hard to understand.

Because they are hard to understand, plenty of ignorant and unstable people find them easy to distort.

As he ends this letter, Peter warns his listeners not to be carried away by these false teachers. He wants his readers to grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus, and not fall from their secure position.

As Peter finished dictating his letter, I was taken back a few decades to an afternoon when Peter told me about one of his last encounters with the resurrected Jesus.

They were on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus asked Peter if he loved him more than other things. Peter told him that he did love him. Over the next few minutes, Jesus instructed Peter to feed the lambs of Jesus, to take care of his sheep.

I had to pull away and leave the others to be alone for a minute. I cried. Jesus had to be so pleased with his close friend, Peter. What better way to feed the lambs of Jesus, to take care of his sheep than to leave behind this letter. The letter you know as *Second Peter*.

There are three men named Judas or Jude in the New Testament. Judas Iscariot was one of the original twelve apostles and is the one who betrayed Jesus. Judas the son of James was another of the original twelve apostles. To help distinguish him from “Bad Judas”, he became known as Jude of James or Judas Thaddeus.

The third man was known as Jude, the brother of James.¹ That is me. I wrote one of the shortest books in the New Testament, appropriately named *Jude*. In fact, I start my writing by naming myself as Jude, the brother of James.

I also name myself as a slave or bondservant of Jesus Christ. This was a title that many New Testament writers used for themselves to denote their complete devotion and submission to their Lord Jesus Christ.

I intended for this letter to be circulated among the churches because many of them were experiencing a common problem. This problem was false teachers. Peter addressed this problem in much detail in his book, *Second Peter*. In fact, Peter and I use almost identical language in some cases. He and I were in complete agreement about the seriousness of the problem.

Many of the false teachers were teaching outrageous things hoping to get paid money for doing so. They were teaching that Jesus did not come in the flesh because flesh is sinful. Somehow, their twisted logic led them to believe that evil and immoral actions were not evil and immoral. They had no idea what dangerous ground they were on...or if they did, they didn't care.

I am diligent to write about salvation, but I also find it necessary to write at this time to exhort everyone to defend the faith that the saints have received. Defending the faith is necessary because false teachers have crept in unnoticed, and these people turn the grace of God into a license for immorality, and deny the only Lord Jesus.

In the first case, they pervert the Grace of God by denying that sinful actions are sinful. They give themselves and their hearers unlimited license to do just about anything they want. In the second case, they deny the Lord Jesus by saying that he did not come in the flesh.

Just as Peter did in *Second Peter*, I remind my hearers that God saved people on various occasions, but then destroyed those who did not believe or act appropriately. He did the same

¹ Many people believe that this Jude is the same as Jude the apostle.

with angels, and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. These punishments were not just a slap on the wrist, but included damnation by eternal fire. It's very serious stuff.

In a like manner, false teachers act immorally, reject authority, and speak evil of those who really do have authority. They speak evil of things they don't know or understand. Even Michael the archangel was afraid to act in this way. I mean, very serious stuff.

These false teachers have taken the way of Cain. They act as they want, without regard to how God wants them to act. They act greedily in order to gain money, just as Balaam did. Balaam betrayed his own people and God just to make money. Because they act in these empty and immoral ways, the blackness of eternal darkness is reserved for them.

I mention that false teachers have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion. By this, I mean that they are self-destroyed. Let me remind you about Korah's rebellion so you will see why. It's a story that the Jews knew well, but most Christians don't think about.

Korah led a rebellion of about 250 Israelite men against Moses and Aaron. These men represented themselves as being holy and with the Lord. They essentially wanted to take over the priesthood from Aaron, and leadership of the people from Moses.

Moses set up a contest to see who the Lord wanted in leadership. Korah and the other leaders were swallowed up by the earth, and the rest of the 250 were killed by fire from the Lord.

It didn't matter that the 250 were community leaders. It didn't matter that they thought they were holy. What they tried to do was wrong, and they were punished by death. They were not the true representatives of God. Moses and Aaron were.

In the same way, I want everyone to know that Peter, Paul and the other apostles are chosen by God to lead the Christian community. Any who oppose their teachings and leadership are self-condemned.

Let me pause for a moment. Some of you might be under the impression that all important Jewish and Christian writings are in the Old Testament and New Testament. Let me remind you that countless other religious writings existed after the Old Testament and after the New Testament. Many of these have been lost through time, but some still exist and are easily available.

I reference at least one of these extra-Biblical writings when I quote Enoch and his prophecy of God's judgement on the ungodly. With or without this quote, it is clear that God will punish the false teachers.

How are God's people to identify false teachers? They are grumblers, and complainers. They follow their own desires. They say flattering things in order to gain advantage. They mock those

who have spiritual authority. They cause division among God's people. They do not have the Spirit or follow the sound teachings of the apostles of Jesus.

Contrary to that, God's people are to build up their faith, pray in the Spirit, stay in the love of God. God's people are to have compassion, and help save those who are in danger of eternal fire.

I draw a line in the sand, as did Peter and Paul. On one side of the line are the false teachers and those they mislead. They follow their natural instincts. On the other side are the apostles and their sound teaching, and those who follow that teaching to the glory of God. They follow the Holy Spirit. There are only two sides, and everyone...including all of those who say they believe in Jesus, will be found to be on one side or the other.

It is necessary that those who keep themselves in God's love must build themselves up in holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.

I urge the believers to be merciful to those who doubt, and save others by snatching them from the fire. How to do this? Share the Gospel with them and convince them of the salvation that is theirs through the Lord Jesus.

I don't want to brag, but I end my letter with one of the finest endings to any letter ever. It is all about Jesus and God, so how could any ending be much better?

"Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless for the presence of his glory with exceeding joy...to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion power, both now and forever. Amen" Amen.

Has any mother hurt like I did that day? No other mother has been the mother of Jesus, the Son of God.

Jesus was consecrated soon after his birth, and Simeon prophesied that a sword would pierce my soul. It felt exactly like that three decades later watching my Jesus die on the cross. Pierced. Indescribable, the pain.

I'm near the cross with some other women, John is close by. Jesus grunts in pain, he pushes up on his nailed feet to grab a fleeting breath. "Woman, here is your son...here is your mother."¹

Shortly, Jesus dies. A hand takes my arm...leads me away. My new son, John. God let a bunch of jealous, angry men kill his son, MY son. Why? Why?

You know the rest of the story of Jesus, so you know why. What you don't know is what happened to me after that day. There are many church traditions, and certainly many stories, but there is nothing in the Bible about me after the coming of Holy Spirit on Pentecost.²

What I can tell you is this; John took care of me for the rest of my life. I was only about fifty years-old when Jesus died, so John and I had many years together. We spent innumerable hours talking about our three favorite topics (counts on fingers) Jesus, love, and...God. This is what qualifies me to tell you about the book of *First John*, a book written by John about six or so decades after the death of my son.

John doesn't open his letter with a salutation to anyone, but later he says he writes to his dear children, to fathers, and to young men. To his dear children because their sins have been forgiven, and they know the Father. To fathers because they know Jesus and God, and to young men because they have overcome Satan, are strong, and the word of God lives in them.

John opens his letter by testifying to the fact that Jesus was with the Father, and then came to Earth to be with us. Jesus is the eternal Word of Life whom we have seen and heard.

¹ John 19:26-27

² Acts 1:14

This is the message Jesus brought: God is light, and in him there is no darkness. If we walk in the light, and have fellowship with one another and with Jesus – his blood purifies us of all sin. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive us and purify us of all righteousness.

Might not sound like a lot to you, but to the ancient Jews, that would have been incredibly good news. Through all their many sacrifices and careful, utmost obedience, through the ritual of a scapegoat, their sins were never fully and finally forgiven. They never had assurance of forgiveness for all of their sins. Through Jesus, John says believers can have full certainty of the forgiveness of their sins.

This is critically important, because John is extraordinarily clear – all people sin. If they claim otherwise, they are liars. Yes, Christians sin. Praise the Lord, Christians are enabled to be forgiven. Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

What should be our response to this unimaginable privilege? To keep the commands of Jesus! This is how we know that we know Jesus, we keep his commands. Whoever claims to live in him must live as he did.

How did Jesus live? With complete love. So, John isn't writing a new commandment when he makes his next observation. If you love your fellow brothers and sisters, you are in the light. If not, you are in the darkness, you walk around in the darkness, and are blinded by the darkness.

As important as it is to love each other, it is equally as important not to love the world or things of the world. From the world come the craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These things will pass away, but whoever follows God's will lives forever.

John probably wrote the letter of *First John* during a time of persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire. He acknowledges that many have left their lives as Christians. More than likely some left because of persecution, and others left just because their devotion to following Jesus dimmed and acting as a Christian became burdensome. The fact that these people left is a sign that they never really belonged in the first place. They weren't truly devoted. So devoted that their actions aligned with that devotion. These people are antichrists because they deny that Jesus is the Christ. They deny the Father and the Son.

Those who remain faithful, however, remain in the Son and the Father. They have eternal life. They have an anointing that teaches them about all things. Those that remain faithful may be confident and unashamed before Jesus when he returns for them. When he appears, we will be like him. In anticipation of that, all who have hope should keep themselves pure.

Remember that John's favorite topics, and mine as well, are love, Jesus and God, John brought those topics together in one of my most favorite sentences in the whole Bible. "See what amazing love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called his children." Amazing love, lavished on us! We are his children!

The reason Jesus came to earth was to destroy Satan's work, to lead his children to righteousness. This is how you can tell who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil. God's children do what is right and love their brothers and sisters. The devil's children do not do what is right and do not love their brothers and sisters.

If the children of the devil are tantamount to life-takers, the children of God are tantamount to life-givers. They lay down their lives, their material possessions for those in need. They love with actions and truth, not just with words.

God's children keep his commands and please him. To believe in the name of his Son, Jesus...to love one another...to live in him. We know we live in him by the Spirit he gave us.

There is an old story about a preacher, renowned for his speaking ability and when asked the secret of his success, said, "I tell them what I'm going to tell them, I tell them, and I tell them what I told them." That preacher probably read the book of *First John*. John never tires of saying the same things, which is fine with me because they are so important.

John's next topic may be hard for you to fully comprehend. In John's time, there was a group of Christians who could not fathom how a perfect, spiritual God could come to earth in fleshly form, because to them earthly things were sinful. This misunderstanding caused them to lead many astray, and would become a movement known as Gnosticism.

John clearly states that every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ came in the flesh is from God. Any spirit not acknowledging that is not from God, and is the spirit of the antichrist. These are from the world, and the world listens to them. They are the spirit of falsehood.

Modern psychologists have a technique called "word association." Imagine word association with the ancient Jews, and had them finish this sentence with one word: "God is..." You probably would have heard: God is harsh, God is just, God is jealous, God is righteous. How would you finish that sentence? (very long pause)

Here is how John finishes that sentence: God is love. Love! How this changed everybody's viewpoint of God! With this revelation, John can say that everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

This is love. Not that we love God, but that he loves us and sent Jesus as a sacrifice for our sins. How can we possibly comprehend that? An infinite God loving sinful human beings so much that he sacrificed his own Son on their behalf! That is love. If God loves humans so much, then we, humans, should love each other, too.

Whoever lives in love, lives in God, and God in them. We love because God first loved us.

Here is an observation of John's: Whoever claims to love God, yet hates a brother or sister, is a liar. For whoever doesn't love the person they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. And, this is love for God: keep his commands.

Who overcomes the world? Only those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God. We can believe the testimony of God which comes by these three: the Spirit, the water and the blood. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Whew. John has told us what he is going to tell us, and he has told us. Now, he will conclude by telling us what he told us. Those who believe in the name of the Son of God have life. If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. Those who are born of God do not continue to sin. We are children of God. God is love.

These messages seem obvious to those who grew up believing in a loving God, but they were great news to those who grew up only knowing a harsh God. Why did so many know him as a harsh God? One reason is because so many worshiped idols and the things of this world instead of God, and God punished them for it. That is why John ends his letter of love on a short, harsh note.

"Dear children, keep yourselves from idols." Keep yourself from idols!

Idols aren't just ancient pieces of stone or wood. Anything that you love instead of God, that is an idol. How do you know whether you have any idols in your life? How do you spend your time? Your emotions, your resources?

God is love. He loves you. He wants you to love him.

Gaius was a common name in my time. People with that name are mentioned five times in the New Testament,¹ and it is possible that some of those mentions are of the same person. I am the Gaius mentioned in the tiny letter of *Third John*.

Before I tell you more about...me, first, let's talk about art.

You've heard the term "Starving Artist Show?" It refers to art shows that feature local artists, most of whom have a very hard time making their livings as artists. It has always been that way.

For about a thousand years after the demise of the Roman Empire, most Western art that has survived to modern times was done by artists or monks paid by the Roman Catholic Church or rulers who wanted to appease the Roman Catholic Church. For the next eight centuries a lot of art was done by artists who used religious themes, too.

Now, take a wild guess. Who do you think are the heroes of much of that Christian-themed art? Correct...the apostles...especially Peter, Paul, James, and John. They are almost always depicted as wise, powerful, authoritative, saintly. In much of the art they are depicted with haloes around their heads as a sign of holiness.

Based on those images and a quick reading of the New Testament, you could easily perceive that those apostles were actually that way. That everybody accepted them as wise and authoritative. Surely nobody would have questioned anything they said or did. After all, they spent time with Jesus and knew more than anyone what Jesus said and meant.

A closer reading of the New Testament reveals that Peter, Paul and John spent a lot of their time and effort contending against false teachers. James did not have to do that; he was beheaded by Herod Agrippa before the false teachers became active.

Imagine the bewilderment of new believers, like myself. Peter, Paul, John and their followers taught certain things. Other teachers taught things that were similar in our view, and often seemed much more logical. Who were we to believe? How were we to choose which teachers to believe. Sometimes it seemed to make more sense to believe nothing at all rather than get involved in their dissension and contention.

¹ Acts 19:29, 20:4; Romans 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14; 3 John

Bewildered. That's what we new believers were. Paul talked about unity, but then he and other teachers hurled threats at each other. John talked about love, but warned us about being hospitable to people who disagreed with his teachings. Peter...well, you know Peter. He had no patience with anybody who disagreed with him.

The first disagreements appeared in the 40's AD when some wanted non-Jewish converts to follow the Laws of Moses, including being circumcised. Uh, yeah...no. When that was settled, some teachers wanted Christians to follow certain teachings of the Jews on angels, or teachings of the Greeks on philosophies. Then alternate teachings on the resurrection, whether Jesus came in the flesh or not, the relationship of God and Jesus, and all sorts of teachings on behavior. There seemed to be no end to the types of false teachings out there.

In the same way, there seemed to be no end to the types of false teachers, and the ways they could corrupt people or take their money. The simple teachings of Jesus seemed to get more and more complicated and corrupted.

I tell you all of this not to be negative or to criticize our leaders, but to help you understand the mindset of those who loved the old apostle, John. When I say old, I mean old. He wouldn't tell us how old he was, but he seemed way more than seventy when he wrote *Second and Third John*, and that was very old by our standards.

John addresses *Second John* to the lady chosen by God and her children. It is unclear whether the letter is addressed to a real person, or to a church. Although that is not clear, it is clear that John claims to know the truth, as well as does the chosen lady and her children.

John rejoices that some, only some, of the children walk in the truth. He reminds the lady of the commandment given from the beginning: love one another and walk according to the commandments of God. By that, John meant the commandments taught by Jesus as interpreted by him and the other apostles.

He immediately launches an attack on false teachers by calling them deceivers and antichrists. They are the ones teaching that Jesus did not come in the flesh. These are transgressors who do not teach the true doctrine of Christ.

Then, John gets very specific. Christians are not to greet these false teachers or be hospitable to them. If we do so, we share in their evil doings!

John does not give us the easy out of listening to their teachings and being hospitable, then sending them on their way. He requires us to be publicly rude to people who profess to be Christians! That went against everything we had ever been taught, and against the norms of our society.

I think John did that because he knew how destructive their teachings really were. He had heard Jesus teach about a little yeast working through all the dough, and he knew that applied to false teachings. A little false teaching could destroy churches, families, and individuals.

John ends his letter rather briefly by saying that he doesn't want to write everything, but hopes to come and share his thoughts face to face.

John addresses his next letter, *Third John*, to me, Gaius. He says that he loves me and wants me and my soul to prosper. He rejoices that he had heard that I walk in the truth. That makes me smile, because I know he loves it when any of his spiritual children behave well.

He also commends me for treating Christians and strangers in a manner worthy of God. He especially compliments me for helping those who are working to spread the name of Jesus.

He then shifts gears, saying he wrote to the church but Diotrephes would not receive him. He berates Diotrephes by saying he loves preeminence, berates John with malicious words, and won't receive the brothers. Worse, he puts out of the church those who want to receive the brothers well.

John reminds us to imitate what is good, not what is evil. He is clearly telling us not to imitate Diotrephes. On the other hand, he compliments Demetrius, who is representing Jesus well and is of the truth.

John ends this letter briefly, by saying he wants to come see us in person, not just write things to us. He wishes us peace. The Apostle of love, for sure.

So, there you have it. I am to welcome those who represent the truth, and ignore those who teach falsehood. Who teaches the truth? Those who are from Peter, Paul and John. Any who teach differently from them are to be forcibly ignored. Apostle of Love, hmmm? Tough Love.