

1 1, 2, 3 John – Who, What, Why, When?

◆ **Written by whom?**

- John, the son of Zebedee. He was a first cousin of Jesus, a fisherman, one of Jesus' inner circle, and 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' (John 13:23). There is no opposition to him as the author, for the following reasons:
 - The style is very similar to the Gospel
 - There are similar phrases and expressions in the Gospel and these books
 - The writer mentions eyewitness testimony
 - There is an authoritative manner throughout the books
 - There are suggestions of advanced age, which agree with early church tradition about his age when he wrote his books
 - There are indications of a close relationship with the Lord

◆ **Written when and where?**

- Somewhere between AD85 and AD 95, after the writing of the Gospel, which is considered to have been written around AD 85.

◆ **Written to whom?**

- Addressed to believers in general, but it mentions no one by name. It is generally assumed by early church fathers to have been circulated to the churches of the province of Asia.

◆ **What form?**

- A general letter, meant to be circulated.

◆ **What's it about?**

- John's readers were being confronted with an early form of Gnostic teaching. It threw off all moral restraints.

◆ **Written for what purpose?**

- John wrote with two basic purposes: (1) to expose false teachers and (2) to give believers assurance of salvation.
- John specifically struck at the Gnostic total lack of morality.
- John gave eyewitness testimony to Jesus' Incarnation, seeking to confirm their belief in Christ's actual, physical humanity.

2 1 John – Chapter 1– Scripture Questions

1. With what physical senses had John experienced contact with the Word of life? (vs. 1)
3. What appeared to John? (vs. 2)
4. With whom was John's fellowship? (vs. 3)
5. Why was John writing this letter? (vs. 4)
6. How can we tell someone is lying about their fellowship with Jesus? (vs. 6)
7. How can we tell someone is telling the truth about their fellowship with Jesus? (vs. 7)
8. If we claim to be without sin, we _____ ourselves, and the truth is not _____. (vs. 8)
9. What will Jesus do if we confess our sins? (vs. 9)
10. What does it mean if we claim that we have not sinned? (vs. 10)

The word translated 'fellowship' is, in Greek, 'koinonia'. It is the spiritual union of the believer with Christ, as well as communion with the Father and with fellow believers.

3 1 John – Chapter 1- What Did It Mean to Them?

Christian tradition says that John was the last of the original twelve apostles to die. He lived in Ephesus in Asia Minor at the end of his life, preaching and teaching until the very end.

This first letter was meant to push back against false teaching and encourage faithful believers. The false teachings were generally called Gnosticism, though there were many variations. The main point (for them) was that God was holy, spirit was good; the material world was unholy and the physical body was evil. Human souls could be redeemed, but they were trapped in the body. Only a special, secret knowledge could save a soul, but after it was saved the body could do anything it pleased without affecting the soul. John writes very emphatically that this is not the case: if we live in the light, we must also walk in the light.

As the church spread and gained followers, it was understandable that outside philosophies would begin to be a threat. It is a human impulse to merge previous knowledge with new learning, and the need for instruction, correction and encouragement by eyewitness accounts of the life of Jesus became more and more important. John found it necessary to remind his readers that (contrary to what they were hearing) Jesus was completely human and completely divine. One of the Gnostic false teachings was that Jesus only appeared to be human. They believed that Jesus was a man born as other men, though very righteous and wise. Because he was righteous, the Christ-spirit was merged with him at his baptism and left him before the Crucifixion. Needless to say, John was adamant that this was not true.

John also encourages his faithful readers, affirming the importance and value of fellowship. He uses the word ‘koinonia’, a Greek word that refers not only to the physical community but the supernatural relationships between God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the faithful believers in the Christian community.

There were three claims being made by the Gnostics: 1) Behavior had no effect on the relationship with God, 2) Sin wasn't possible when one was in a relationship with God, and 3) It wasn't actually possible for them to sin. Needless to say, John opposes these claims. God is light, and if we are in a relationship with him through Jesus we will avoid anything that even resembles darkness. Through confession and obedience, we will walk in the light with Jesus.

4 1 John – Chapter 1 - Application Questions

1. The early church wrestled with different ideas about who Jesus was and how they should follow him. What ideas do people have today about Jesus that cause conflict? How do we settle these questions?
2. The tradition of personal testimony runs strongly through church history. What would be some ways we could document our personal testimonies? How would it help us as a church?
3. John doesn't back away from talking about sin. Should we talk more about sin? Why or why not?
4. The Gnostics denied that their immoral actions were sinful. They claimed that their spirits were pure. Today (like the Gnostics) our culture seems to judge based on thoughts rather than actions. Which actions matter the most? Wouldn't a list of acceptable actions be helpful?

5 1 John – Chapter 2 - Scripture Questions

1. How may Christians be sure that they know Christ? (vs. 3)
2. How is God's love made complete in a person? (vs. 5)
3. How can a person know that he or she is in the light? (vs. 9-10)
4. For what three things did John commend those who were newcomers to the faith? (vs. 14b)
5. Who will live forever? (vs. 17)
6. What is the evidence that the last hour has come? (vs. 18)
7. When a person is anointed by the Holy Spirit, what will they be able to recognize? (vs. 20)
8. How can an antichrist be identified? (vs. 22)
9. What is promised to those who remain in the Son and in the Father? (vs. 24-25)
10. How should those who stay with (remain in) Christ live until he comes? (vs. 28)

LAST HOUR: Like the other NT writers, John saw the whole time period beginning with Christ's first coming as the 'last days'. They believed this because neither former prophecy (from the Old Testament) nor new revelations indicated the coming of another era before the return of Christ.

6 1 John – Chapter 2 - What Did It Mean to Them?

All commentators agree that John was very aged when he wrote this letter. He often called his readers ‘dear children’. He clearly loves them and wants them to grow in spiritual maturity. He talks, as well, about the fellowship or communion that should exist in the community of believers. It is a mystical relationship and a down-to-earth practical relationship, one that exists in both God the creator and day to day human interactions. One of the reasons he seems to say the same things over and over is that he is trying to get at this cosmic relationship. He pushes back against the Gnostic teachings in part because these teachings threaten the fellowship established and maintained by the Holy Spirit.

In John’s view, sin hampers fellowship, since it is rebellion against God’s will. To the Gnostics, sin was not evil, but was simply a misfortune for which the individual was not really responsible. In their minds, knowledge of God was the real issue of life; this knowledge was gained through mental activity, apart from the physical part of life. What the mind knew was essential; what the body did was unimportant.

Christian doctrine sees the problem of sin as both in the mind and in the flesh. Jesus said, “The things that come out of the mouth come from the heart (mind), and these make a man unclean. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, and slander.” (Matthew 15:18-19) Jesus also taught that as a person thinks, so is that person. So Christians must not make sin (rebellion against God’s commandments) a way of life. We can certainly slip and fall into sin, but if we do the fellowship is not broken; we have an advocate before God, Jesus Christ.

When John warns his readers not to love the world, he is not referring to the natural creation; we learn in Genesis that God considered that natural world very good. The word here refers to people who are ruled by their lusts, their ambitions, and their jealousies. They are under the rule of the evil one, and are enslaved by human desires. Christians who held on to the truth that they had learned would, on the other hand, remain in Christ. That fellowship with God and Jesus Christ would remain unbroken throughout eternity.

John warns that the ‘last hour’ is here. In a real sense the last hour occurs for each of us in our lives. Since time is measured in this life but not after this life, we all live in the last hour as far as our earthly existence is concerned.

7 1 John – Chapter 2 - Application Questions

1. John says that if we claim to live in Jesus, we must ‘walk’ as he did. What are some of the things that Jesus did which we should imitate? How do we carry out this imitation?
2. There is a strong focus in these verses on individual actions. Should churches be concerned about getting their members to have unified beliefs and actions, or should this be a strictly individual concern? Why or why not?
3. We’ve all seen and heard teachings that focus on the time of Christ’s return. One element, says John, is the presence of a great many people who are against Christ (antichrists). There certainly seems to be a lot of this around today. Are we in the ‘end times’, the ‘last hour’? If so, is there anything we should be doing differently?
4. John says he was writing to warn his readers about people who were trying to lead them away from following the Gospel that they had learned. How much responsibility do we have for telling truth from lies, in terms of the Gospel? If we are fooled by a slick teacher, will God punish us?

8 1 John – Chapter 3 - Scripture Questions

1. How does the Father show his great love for us? (vs. 1)
2. What two things can God's children be sure of when Christ appears? (vs. 2)
3. Why did Jesus appear? (vs. 5)
4. How can we tell the difference between the children of God and the children of the devil? (vs. 10)
5. What is the message heard from the beginning of Jesus' ministry? (vs. 11)
6. How do we know that we have passed from death to life? (vs. 14)
7. In what practical way can Christians show love "with actions and in truth"? (vs. 16, 17)
8. How can we set our hearts at rest when we are troubled by our failure to live up to Jesus' example? (vs. 18 – 20)
9. What are the two basic commands of God to Christians? (vs. 23)
10. How do we know that God's presence is in us? (vs. 24)

A true prophet speaks from God, being 'carried along' by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). False prophets, such as the Gnostics of John's day, speak under the influence of spirits opposed to God.

9 1 John – Chapter 3 - What Did It Mean to Them?

John's opening verses of this chapter are filled with a sense of amazement and appreciation. He and his readers were stunned that the Creator of the universe actually cared about them. The believers who had come from a pagan background would have been particularly stunned, as their former gods were well known for a lack of concern for their followers. John increases the amazement with the idea of being children of God. The concept of being adopted into a royal family, given privileges and benefits in this family, comes from God's mercy towards those who accept Christ. This family relationship is not only a present reality, it promises potential for the future. This future will be realized when Jesus Christ appears again.

The false teachers (gnostics) considered themselves enlightened—above the moral law. They turned this freedom into license, perverting God's commandments. John insists that our family connection to Jesus and the desire to live in him means believers must walk as Jesus did.

'Devil' is the English word for Greek diabolos, "accuser, slanderer." Jesus spoke of the devil as the enemy, the evil one, the ruler of this world, a murderer, a liar, and the father of lies. We don't have a clear picture of the devil from Scriptures. His origin story as a rebellious, fallen angel are hinted at but not detailed in the Bible. This being is, in a way, the personification of evil influences and activities in the world. His 'children' are those who practice deliberate sin, who refuse to practice righteousness. Sinning as a way of life, John says, is the major characteristic of those in his family.

John uses the example of Cain's failure as a way to talk about love in the family of God. This ties in with John's discussion of the differences between God's family and the family of evil. Cain's murder of Abel, his brother, is an example of the way in which the world of sin and selfishness treats the children of God. John reminds his readers that Jesus laid down his life for us: his action is a perfect definition of what the word love means, in contrast to death.

Belonging to "the truth" is not a matter of guessing that one is in God's grace. To love in actions and in truth is proof positive that one belongs to God. Faith rests not on feelings but on historical facts and the promises of God, regardless of the way one's heart may condemn.

10 1 John – Chapter 3 - Application Questions

1. John says that when Jesus returns we will see him as he is, and we will be like him. What do you think this means?
2. The main way by which children of God can be distinguished from the children of the devil is their deeds. Children of God do right and practice unselfish love. What are some ways our church shows unselfish love? What are some ways we could improve the actions of our church?
3. Eternal life is an essential part of the fellowship that John speaks about, the love between members of the family of God. What do you think will happen during this eternal life?
4. John is very definite that children of God behave in certain ways, and that this behavior is evidence of God's presence. This almost sounds as though we don't have any initiative, that we will be compelled to behave unselfishly. Which comes first, God's compelling will or our commitment to obedience?

11 1 John – Chapter 4 - Scripture Questions

1. How can we determine who has the Spirit of God and who has the spirit of the antichrist? (vs. 2, 3)
2. Why could John's readers be reassured that they were from God and had overcome the antichrists? (vs. 4)
3. Which two spirits was John concerned about? (vs. 6)
4. Where does love come from? (vs. 7)
5. What two things did God do that show God's love for us? (vs. 9, 10)
6. What should we do, since God loved us? (vs. 11)
7. We have seen and can testify that the Father sent his Son to be the _____. (vs. 14)
8. God is _____. Whoever lives in _____ lives in God, and _____ in him. (vs. 16)
9. Is it possible to hate a brother or sister in Christ, but still love God? (vs. 20)
10. What command did Jesus give to those who follow him? (vs. 21)

Jesus gave this command to his disciples after the last supper: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34, 35)

12 1 John – Chapter 4 - What Did It Mean to Them?

In the second chapter, John warned against the presence of antichrists among those who had ‘gone out’ from them (left the community of believers). Now he has a second warning, this time against the ‘spirit’ of antichrist, the one who inspires the false prophets. John gives them a way to test this spirit: it can be detected because it will deny that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. The believers will overcome these false prophets, John says, because they belong to God. The Spirit in them is greater than the false spirit. John acknowledges that the world will listen to these false prophets, but promises that the children of God listen to the teachings of the apostles. Belief of the Gospel is the true test of the Holy Spirit’s presence and work.

Love is evidence of God. John first spoke of the love of siblings in Christ as a test of living in the God of light. He expanded on the command to love, teaching that those who were born of God showed their family connection to God by the love they showed one another. Now, he speaks of the way that loving fellow believers completes the identification with the Father’s own being and activity. Love comes from God. Since God is invisible, however, the only way we can ‘see’ God is by the presence of love in another person. When we love one another, love exists as God intended it to be.

Perfection, or completeness, of love brings confidence. John’s readers had been shaken by the false teachings of the Gnostics. This had made them question their salvation, made them fear that they were failing to live up to the Gospel. John’s encouragement about the reality of their life in Christ must have made them feel much better. Since love and fear are incompatible, to love as Jesus loved means that we are living as he lived, and so fear has no place. For the Christian love is first an experience of the Father’s love for us. That ‘love’ is so powerful and life changing that when we know it, we are forever removed from the ‘fear’ of God. This fear is not to be confused with reverence for God. Reverence will only deepen through the experience of God’s love. This experience makes us eager to be more obedient to him.

The final teaching about the life of love is obedience to the teaching of Christ. It was the command of Jesus that “whoever loves God must also love his brother” (Mark 12:30-31, John 13:34). John makes it very clear that obedience expresses itself in a single command: Love one another. Love for God and love for neighbor are inseparable: one is not possible apart from the other. If you love God, you cannot refuse love to the image of God that is seen in fellow believers. We are to love our neighbors in God, and God in our neighbors.

13 1 John – Chapter 4 - Application Questions

1. John gave his readers an easy test for deciding if they were being taught authentic gospel by local teachers. Do we have tests available to us today? How do you determine if what you hear from preachers and teachers is authentic gospel?
2. The idea of love is central to this chapter. How would you describe love?
3. John believes in love as an action rather than a feeling. Have you experienced this ‘love in action’ from anyone? What kind of a long-term effect did it have on you?
4. Some people are extremely hard to love. What should we do about this difficulty? Is it a sin for us if we simply can’t behave lovingly toward someone?

14 1 John – Chapter 5 - Scripture Questions

1. Who is a child of God? (vs. 1)
2. How do we know that we love the other children of God? (vs. 2)
3. What is the content of the faith that overcomes the world? (vs. 5)
4. What three witnesses testify that God gave us eternal life in Jesus Christ? (vs. 7, 8)
5. Why is God's testimony about Jesus Christ greater than man's testimony? (vs. 9)
6. What is the testimony that God has given us? (vs. 11)
7. John wrote these things to those who believed in the name of the Son of God so that they may know that they have _____. (vs. 13)
8. John describes the two types of sin. What does he call these two types? (vs. 16, 17)
9. If "the whole world is under the control of the evil one," why is the one born of God (Jesus) not in the power of the evil one? (vs. 18, 19)
10. What did the Son of God come and give us, so that we may know the one who is true? (vs. 20)

THREE WITNESSES: The Old Testament law required 'two or three witnesses' in any legal situation. In verses 7 and 8, water symbolizes Jesus' baptism, and blood symbolizes his death. These are mentioned because Jesus' ministry began at his baptism and ended at his death.

15 1 John – Chapter 5 - What Did It Mean to Them?

John now focuses on the relationship of the three fundamental elements so important to him in the knowledge of God: faith, love, and obedience. To him, faith requires not only that something is believed, or held true, but that someone has accepted it into one's life. A commitment has been made and a relationship has been established. Faith in Jesus as both the Christ and the Son of God is the basis for being a part of the family of God. It is necessary to believe that he is the Messiah foretold AND the truth of his divine nature.

Jesus testified that he had overcome the world. Those now a part of God's family have also overcome the world. The 'world' is that selfish way of thinking and living that is the opposite of loving the children of God and meeting their needs. Christians are engaged in spiritual warfare against worldly ideas and practices.

The connection between love for God and obedience is meant to protect us against thinking of love for God as simple emotional feelings. Agape love requires action. Thinking of love for people, it means being willing to lay down one's life for them. Thinking of love for God, it means a life of willing obedience and service. John adds this: 'for his commands are not burdensome.' He doesn't mean that it will not be difficult to accomplish this type of loving behavior. But when God enters into us and we trust his Son, this 'yoke' becomes gentle and light. We are given a desire and yearning for the Father. Trying to live a righteous life becomes a joy: following the commands of God bring freedom and liberty, far away from the slavery of living by our own desires.

'Water' and 'blood' are key words of the true understanding of Jesus' life here on earth. It was the Son of God who came into the world. This same divine Son, now in a human body, was baptized and received the Spirit. It was the Son who, with the Father's approval and in fulfillment of the Father's intention, shed his blood on the cross to redeem humanity. Although the false teachers may have acknowledged Christ as the Savior, the divine Son of God, they denied his true human existence. John sees this as a denial of God's redemptive activity, and rejects it completely. He says that both the Spirit and the Father are witnesses to the truth about Jesus Christ. Confidence in this truth gives us an absolute trust in the power of approaching God in prayer.

16 1 John – Chapter 5 - Application Questions

1. Faith in Jesus as both the Christ and the Son of God is the basis for being a part of the family of God. People have added many, many conditions to this over the years. Why do you think humans feel compelled to put conditions on membership in the family of God?
2. One advantage that John's readers had was that John himself was an eyewitness of Christ. We don't have any eyewitnesses today. What do we have, apart from the Spirit within us, that could be considered testimony about the truth of Jesus Christ?
3. John seems to expect that confidence of the fellowship with God would be expressed in an active prayer life. He says they can ask anything, as long as it agrees with God's will. What makes a prayer life "active"?
4. An idol is anything that substitutes for the true God, up to and including false ideas about God. What are some examples of idols in our culture?

17 2 John - Scripture Questions

1. How does the writer identify himself? (vs. 1)
2. What is the main word used by the writer in his greeting? (vs. 1-3)
3. Why was the author joyful about news he received concerning the “chosen lady and her children”? (vs. 4)
4. Above all else, what did the writer want the readers to do? (vs. 5, 6)
5. What is the identifying mark of a deceiver and the antichrist? (vs. 7)
6. Why shouldn't a Christian receive into the house nor greet someone who does not continue in the teachings of Christ? (vs. 10, 11)
7. Why is this letter so short? (vs. 12)

The 'chosen lady' referred to either an unknown Christian woman in the province of Asia or a figurative designation of a local church there. 'Her children', then, would be either children of that Christian lady or members of that local church.

18 2 John - What Did It Mean to Them?

Church tradition says that this letter was written from Ephesus. Nobody knows where the letter was sent, though it was probably shared around between churches. There are at least two explanations of the words ‘the chosen lady’. It may refer to an excellent lady of upper social rank and superior character who supported the church with her wealth and influence. It may also refer to the church at large, to churches in a particular region. This second idea seems more likely, due to wording in the letter itself. For example, the author refers to “some of your children walking in the truth.” This sounds like a church in which some members remain steadfast while others stray.

The use of female imagery to represent God’s people Israel is well-known in the Bible. In the New Testament, the word ‘chosen’ is used to refer to Christians. Lastly, John uses the words ‘dear children’ in his letters, even when it is clear that he is writing to adults. He writes that he loved the church in the truth, where ‘the truth’ is the Gospel revealed in Jesus. Every sincere Christian loves the church because it is the body of Christ, that Christ who “loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25).

John was joyful because he found that some of the Christians to whom he was writing followed the truth. They were living life in an authentic way, living honestly before God and others. They were following the command to love one another as Jesus had commanded.

Apparently, though, some of the chosen lady’s children were not following the truth, being either deceived themselves or deceived by false teaching. The word ‘deceivers’ means ‘wandering, roving’. They were people who had at one time been in the church fellowship but were now gone since they would not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. They rejected the humanity of Jesus. John warns that his readers need to be alert and vigilant about these lies. He doesn’t want them to lose the reward gained by following the truth about Jesus. This doctrine is so true and so essential that John didn’t even want his readers to show hospitality to anyone who came to them without it.

Congregations in the early days of the church met in homes, and Christian teachers who were passing through were housed and fed by the young congregations. The visitors would teach in return for their room and board. To offer deceivers hospitality would be to share in their wicked work.

19 2 John - Application Questions

1. Letters to various churches were used to teach, encourage and correct the believers. What are the ways that believers today get this kind of 'education'?
2. Near the end of his life, John has condensed his understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as 'love'. How has your understanding of the Gospel changed over the years of your faith journey? What has become more important to you? What have you left behind?
3. It was important to John that the congregations he oversaw not financially support false teachers. Correct teaching was literally a necessity for salvation. Who is responsible for our congregation to make sure we are taught accurately?

20 3 John - Scripture Questions

1. How did the elder know that all was well with the soul of Gaius? (vs. 2, 3)
2. What was the elder's greatest joy? (vs. 4)
3. In the elder's opinion, what is an especially worthy thing for a Christian to do? (vs. 5, 6)
4. Why did the traveling brothers go out? (vs. 7)
5. How were the traveling ministers assisted, in order to work together for the Gospel? (vs. 8)
6. What specific things did Diotrephes do that the elder condemned? (vs. 9, 10)
7. Who did the elder call on his readers to imitate? (vs. 11)
8. Why did the elder commend Demetrius? (vs. 12)
9. Why is the elder's letter to Gaius so brief? (vs. 13, 14)

Because there was no overall structure of the congregations of believers, it was the custom during the early church years to provide hospitality and support for missionaries.

21 3 John - What Did It Mean to Them?

This third letter is written to an individual and is more personal than First John or Second John. Gaius may have had a church meeting in his home. While John expresses interest in Gaius as a friend, the main concern of the letter is that Christian visitors to the church be shown appropriate hospitality. Diotrephes is condemned for failing to do this. On the other hand Demetrius is commended for doing good. This may imply that Demetrius is a model of a Christian host to visiting preachers and teachers.

Gaius was a dear friend because he acted loyally toward visiting missionary-teachers, and that was exactly what John wanted Christians to do. Of course, John did not want this hospitality extended to deceivers. Gaius is commended because he was hospitable even though the visiting teachers were strangers. Evidently John knew about Gaius's loyalty through some of those same teachers who had visited John. They seem to have told the church in Ephesus of Gaius's helpful care when they visited him. It seems that Gaius not only took care of them while they were visiting, he also provided for them 'on their way', which means he gave them enough support to care for them during their journey to the next stop.

There may have been a letter between Second John and Third John, one sent to the church where Diotrephes was a leader. Whatever the letter was about, Diotrephes rejected John's authority. In other words, Diotrephes had put himself first in authority over the church. Besides failing to acknowledge John's authority, Diotrephes refused to show hospitality to 'the brothers', who may have been traveling teachers sent by John to counter the false teachers in the area. Diotrephes went so far as to forbid Christians in his church from showing hospitality to these brothers. If they refused, going on to show hospitality to the teachers, Diotrephes was evidently kicking them out of the church.

Gaius was either a member of the congregation where Diotrephes was grabbing control, or he knew the people and circumstances. Given John's encouragement to Gaius, it seems possible that Gaius was one of those excommunicated by Diotrephes. John has hopes to visit the church and plans to address the trouble issues. John gives a good example of a Christian for Gaius to imitate, Demetrius, who may have been another traveling teacher. His life and witness was a true testimony to his goodness.

22 3 John - Application Questions

1. John had heard from visiting brothers that Gaius was flourishing spiritually. Should we keep better track of how each of us is growing in our faith? How would we do that? What kind of measurement could we use?
2. Hospitality to Christians was highly valued as an expression of love towards the body of Christ. How is hospitality expressed in our time? Have you had any personal experience with hospitality extended to you simply because of common faith?
3. Diotrephes was apparently a leader in a church who had put himself first in authority, rejecting John's authority over him, going so far as to excommunicate members who didn't obey him. Is there any way to avoid damaging power struggles in a church?