

"God's chief goal is to deepen each of our relationships with Him. He knows that if we don't see our need for Him, we'll never understand how sufficient & wonderful He is. Therefore, He continually challenges us to live beyond our natural abilities. God knows that challenges like loving someone we find difficult, will place the obedient in the position to come to Him constantly for a fresh supply of His love. We must pour out our own toxic (& preferential) affection, so our hearts can be filled with His affections. As we ask for our cups to overflow with agapao, the liquid, living love of God will not only surge through our own hearts; it will splash on anyone nearby! So: did John practice what he preached. I thought you'd never ask!

The original Greek word for children is '*teknion*', meaning "a little child". The seriousness of John's subject matter tells you that he wasn't writing to young children. John was an older man when he wrote 1st John; his flock was as dear to him as flesh & blood.

Jerome, one of the early church fathers, (approx. 340-420 A.D.), tells the story that John lived to an advanced age in Ephesus. So feeble was he that only with difficulty could John's Christian disciples carry him to the church building. John could hardly speak, but when he did, John said the same words: "**Little children, love one another.**" Eventually John's disciples grew weary of hearing the same phrase, so they asked him why he always spoke it.

"It is the Lord's command," he replied, 'and if this alone be done, it is enough.'

(Footnotes, from her page 208/to her footnotes: "John, a Last Word on Love", Biblical Illustrator, Summer, 1976, page 26)

Author Beth Moore adds: "My favorite account from the early church fathers concerning John was preserved by Clement. It begins with the statement. "Here a story which is not a story, but a true tradition of John the Apostle, preserved in memory."

"While visiting a new bishop (& his congregation) in Smyrna, John saw a young man of strong body, beautiful appearance, and warm heart. 'I commend this man', (John said), 'to you with all diligence, in the face of the church, and with Christ as my witness.'"

John returned to Ephesus. As promised, the bishop took the young man under his wing and baptized him. Time passed & the bishop "relaxed his great care and watchfulness. Some idle and dissolute youths, familiar with evil, corrupted him in his premature freedom" . . . Before long, the young man gave himself entirely to a life of sin, committed crimes, and even renounced his salvation. Eventually he, (John the elder) was summoned back to Smyrna and he asked for a report of the young man. Somewhat take aback, the bishop answered: "He has died."

John inquired, "How and with what death?" When the bishop described the young man's abandoned faith as death, John replied: "Well, it was a fine guardian whom I left for the soul of our brother. But let me have a horse & someone to show me the way." (Sounds a bit like the old Son of Thunder, doesn't it?)

When the elderly John found the young man, he (the young man) started to flee. John called out to him: "Why do you run away from me, child, your own father, unarmed and old? Pity me, child, do not fear me! You have still hope of life. I will account to Christ for you. If it must be, I will willingly suffer your death, as the Lord suffered for us; for your life, I will give my own. Stay, believe; Christ sent me." (These figures of speech meant John would give his life to see the young man return to Christ. John knew better than anyone that only Christ can ransom a man's life.)

The young man wept bitterly, embraced the old man and pleaded for forgiveness.

The account says that John led the young man back and "baptized him a second time in his tears. . . . He brought him to the church, he prayed with many supplications, he joined with him in the struggle of continuous fasting, he worked on his mind by various addresses and did not leave him, so they say, until he restored him to the church, and thus gave a great example of true repentance and a great testimony of regeneration, the trophy of a visible resurrection." (from R. Alan Culpepper's, "John, Son of Zebedee", (First Fortress Press, 2000, page 142-143)

Yes! John did practice what he preached. Wonder how many fewer castaways might leave our pews so empty...if we really practiced what John *the Apostle of Love* preached?

"The Beloved Disciple", Beth Moore, page 226

Many scholars through the centuries have believed that John journeyed to Rome for at least a brief stay. Tertullian, often called the "father of Latin theology", lived during the generation closely following that of the apostles (A.D.150-225). In a work called "On Prescription against Heretics", Tertullian, made a stunning claim: "The apostle John was first plunged, unhurt, unto boiling oil, and then remitted to his island exile."

Very few scholars question the reliability of the early traditions held about Peter's death on a cross to which Tertullian referred. Yes, he endured a passion like his Lord's; yet because he felt unworthy to die in exactly the same manner, early tradition says that Peter requested he be crucified upside down. Likewise, I've never read a commentary that cited reason to question the traditional information that Paul was beheaded like John the Baptist. We are, therefore, left to wonder whether the account of Tertullian regarding John the apostle was simple fiction.

I certainly don't know if the account regarding John's plunge into boiling oil is reliable, but if you ask me if such an event is possible, I could only answer yes! In Acts 12, God wasn't ready for Peter's work on earth to end, so He loosed his chains & caused him to walk right out of the prison. I can't even count the times the apostle Paul narrowly escaped death. I seem to recall a trio in the Old Testament who experienced fire without even the smell of smoke (see Daniel 3). Beloved, don't let the modern church make you cynical. Ours is a God of wonders, and don't you forget it! Never let the words of Jeremiah 32:17 only be a popular chorus. " Ah, Sovereign Lord, You have made the heavens & the earth by your great power & nd outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for You."

If Tertullian's account has any accuracy, the Romans may have tried to take John's life and in their foiled efforts banished him to exile on Patmos. His charge may have been failing to die when told. Though a number of chronological orders are proposed for John's stays outside Jerusalem and Judea, I lean toward the following proposition: John lived and ministered in Ephesus first. At some point he made a trip to Rome where he fell into persecution, then he was banished to Patmos, where most scholars believe he remained for about 18 months. Though I used to believe differently I am now most convinced by the commentators and early teachers who said he returned to the city of Ephesus where he spent the time until his death. With these thoughts in mind, perhaps in pencil rather than permanent marker, let's read on.