

Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Lecture 33, 1 John

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in New Testament History and Literature, lecture 33 on the Johannine Epistles.

All right, just a couple of announcements.

By way of reminder, this is your last week of this class as far as lectures and class discussion. Although there will be an exam next week, as I said, it'll probably be Monday, but I will not be here. So, this will be your last week of formal classes.

And then, as I said, Monday there will be, excuse me, exam number four. Right now, the second thing is that it looks like Thursday night will be the next extra credit review session for exam number four. I'll let you know for sure about that.

But right now, it looks like Thursday night at eight. And hopefully, again, in this room, your last extra credit for the four exams. And then the exam will be on Monday.

So, what that means is we have quite a bit to cover this week. I want to today wrap up our discussion of a group of epistles that we're looking at that we call the General Epistles, and then move into Revelation to spend a little bit of time in that book on Wednesday and Friday. And then that'll be it until, actually, I'll be back in time for final exams.

All right. Let's open with prayer, and then we'll get on with the New Testament.

Father, thank you for the day you've given us, for the beautiful weather again. Thank you for your faithfulness and your provision for us. Father, we thank you for the hope that your Son, Jesus Christ, gives us in the midst of all the events that take place on the world scene that can sometimes cause confusion or question or wonder, that we have a hope and a secure hope in your Son, Jesus Christ. Father, I pray that as we are confronted with that reality by examining and paying attention to the documents that testify to that, that we will be reminded of that hope and particularly reminded of the need to live that out, the desperate need to live that out in the present. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen. All right.

We've been looking at a collection of documents that we have labeled the general epistles, or another name for them is the Catholic epistles. By Catholic, we do not mean what we often mean. Again, sometimes you'll see some writings refer to the epistles as the Catholic epistles, but we're not talking about epistles written by or associated with the Roman Catholic Church.

But we're referring, to the term that was used to refer to the church universally or generally. Starting with the book of Hebrews, we've begun to look at a selection of writings that could be then labeled the general epistles. The reason is that in stark contrast to Paul's letters, which are all addressed to rather specific churches and or persons, epistles starting with Hebrews, although Hebrews could have been and probably was addressed to a more specific audience, but it lacks a name.

Hebrews does not tell us who wrote it or who it was addressed to. But all the other letters, James and 1 Peter particularly, indicate that they are written for Christians who are scattered rather widely and broadly, as opposed to individuals or persons in one specific geographical location. So hence the term general epistle or Catholic epistle.

The document that we want to, or documents we want to look at today, continue in that tradition. And actually, we will conclude, hopefully, today, conclude the group of writings that we call the general or the Catholic epistles. And that is the letters of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John.

But before we do that, I do have a little exercise for you. All right. As I said, the last section before we talk about Revelation, the last group of books I want to consider within this broader collection of the general or Catholic epistles, again letters that were written to address Christians broadly, or at least a couple of them there's no specific indication of the readers.

We'll see today that actually two of the letters we're going to look at very, very quickly today, they're very, very short, are probably not best labeled general epistles because they do seem to be addressed to a specific church, although it doesn't tell us exactly where that church is in the letter. So, there's a lot that we're going to have to leave out and we can't be entirely sure of as far as who these letters were written to, why they were written, and where the church would have been located or what problem they were addressing, etc. So, we'll propose some possibilities, but at the same time recognize that there's not a lot of evidence to be really certain.

But the group of letters I want to look at are 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John. We've already looked at Jude in connection to 2nd Peter, but 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John. Now the first thing that you notice, well starting with 1st John, but in a sense all three of these, is like the book of Hebrews, 1st John does not have an indication of authorship.

In fact, it doesn't even start like a letter, which has led some to wonder if it's really a letter at all, although that's what we call it, the letter of 1st John. But you'll notice it doesn't begin like a letter. It doesn't have any indication of who in the world wrote it.

It just jumps right into the first verse by saying, we declare to you that what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we've seen with our eyes, what we've looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life, we declare to you what we have seen and heard that you may have fellowship with us. So that's how the book of 1st John begins. No indication of who wrote it, no indication of what problem it was addressing, or where the letter was sent.

So, if you were a postal carrier, and if this was in fact a letter, and you were told to deliver it, you would have a really rough time, because there's no indication of where it's supposed to go. But by reading the letter carefully, and by paying attention to church tradition, we can maybe piece together a possible picture. Interestingly, the church history, and by church history, I primarily mean the church fathers, those leaders, and writers in the two or three, four centuries after the writing of the New Testament, all claim that 1st and 2nd and 3rd John, these letters, were written by John.

Although there is a dispute as to which John, there were a number of possible Johns that could have written this letter and some of the persons that talk about John as the author, it's not clear exactly which John it is. But there is a very strong opinion that John, the apostle of Jesus Christ, was the author of this letter. Although again, the letter doesn't tell us, and we're completely dependent on the early church fathers, on the testimony of very, very early Christians to determine that.

But another reason why some think that John wrote it is those words I just read, we declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands. Some would suggest that only one who was present with the person of Jesus Christ could have written something like this. And so many conclude then that John, most likely John the apostle, according to early church testimony, would be the most likely candidate.

So, I'm going to leave it at that, as John the apostle of Jesus Christ is as good a candidate as any for the authorship of this book. But just again, so you know, the labels 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John were not written by the author of these letters. They were put there by early Christians as an indication of who they thought the author of the letter was.

Now as far as the readers, when you compare 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John and the Gospel of John, many have actually constructed, historically have constructed, a very interesting scenario of how these letters all fit together. For example, and it's interesting when you do read 1st John, it has a number of similarities with the Gospel of John, the 4th Gospel, and we'll talk about why that could be the case. But some would suggest that the Gospel of John, John is the fourth, this isn't referring to the

name John, but the fourth Gospel John, some suggest that one of the things that the Gospel of John was addressing was a Gnostic type of heresy or false teaching.

Remember back in the very early days of this class, we talked a lot about different religious options, one of them being Gnosticism. Now it's important to recognize while Gnosticism did not develop as a full-blown teaching of religion until the 2nd century, towards the end of the century when the Gospel of John and 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John were supposedly written, towards the end of the century, many feel that all the elements of Gnosticism were already developing and would later emerge as this full-blown Gnosticism, with a capital G, but a small g Gnosticism may have already been present in the 1st century. We saw that one of the hallmarks of Gnosticism was an emphasis on the spiritual, an emphasis on salvation being an escape from the physical body, from the imprisonment of the physical world.

Salvation comes by the possession of a secret knowledge that is only available to an elite few, and not everyone else, and so some feel that the Gospel of John, in part, may have been addressing this kind of teaching. If it wasn't yet this full-blown Gnosticism of the 2nd century, it may have already been present in an initial form in the late 1st century, with again, with this emphasis on the spiritual, the salvation being spiritual, a denigration of the physical, salvation escaping the physical body, and spiritual existence, salvation consisting of a secret knowledge that was available only to the elite, an elite few. Now, where 1st John comes in, as many feel, that then 1st John was addressed to some of those who espoused this Gnostic type of heresy.

They had already infiltrated the church by the time 1st John was written, and now they are leaving the church. We'll see why that's the case, but these heretics, or these false teachers, these Gnostic type of teachers now, have left the church, and now we'll see what that means for interpreting 1st John, but now they have left behind a group of Christians that now John addresses in the letter we know as 1st John, but these teachers that the Gospel of John may have been refuting have now infiltrated the church, and are now leaving it. They are succeeding from it, and leaving behind a minority of Christians that now John addresses with 1st John.

2nd John, then some feel that these persons who have left the church are now attacking the church from the outside, so these same Gnostic type of teachers emphasizing the spiritualism, spiritual salvation, and emphasizing the possession of this secret knowledge, now they are attacking John's church from the outside, and then finally 3rd John may reflect a situation where the church is now in danger of actually being overtaken by these false teachers, and some would even move further and include Revelation chapter 2, where the very first church that John addresses in Revelation is the church at Ephesus who has lost their love, and some have suggested then that even Revelation would suggest a further stage beyond this. So, there's kind of a progression some see in these letters historically in relationship to

how the church is faring in the context of this teaching. Now, I have to confess I'm a little bit suspicious of this.

It just seems that it's constructing a whole scenario based on not a lot of evidence. In fact, as we're going to see, 3 John, there's really no evidence in 3 John that there's any problem with false teachers at all. There could be, but there's really no evidence, and the best case could be made for these.

We'll see that 1 John is indeed addressing a church of a group of Christians that are now left behind after these false teachers have left them, and now John addresses this small group of Christians that have now been left behind. And 2 John does seem to address the situation of warning the church not to allow these false teachers to teach perhaps this Gnostic type of teaching, not allowing them into the church. But other than that, this scheme is probably a little bit too cut and dried.

In fact, it's really impossible to tell whether this order is the correct order. Remember, the New Testament is not arranged chronologically. We can't be certain that 1st John was written first, and then 2nd John next, and then 3rd John in that order.

It could have been, but we can't be certain. At the least, the least we can say is 1 John does address a church where these false teachers have left it and left a group of Christians behind. And 2nd John does address false teachers trying to get into the church from the outside, but whether they were written in that order or not is impossible to say.

So, I'm not going to assume that this is the correct order in which these books were written, but we will follow them in the order in which they appear in the New Testament. Now, as far as the background of especially 1st John, the problem that 1st John was addressing, as I said, is secessionists or these false teachings who have seceded from or left the church. And again, think about it for a moment.

If these false teachings, if they're not yet the full-blown Gnostics of the 2nd century, but if they do have Gnostic tendencies already, that is, again, an emphasis on salvation being spiritual, denying the physical, emphasizing the possession of secret knowledge, the possession of a knowledge that belongs to an elite few that have this knowledge. By emphasizing that, it appears now that these false teachers have left the church, they've seceded from it, and what they have left behind is a group of Christians who are now basically, we might say, feel spiritually abused or they're spiritually beaten up and wounded because the false teachers, with their emphasis on the spiritual and their emphasis on the possession of the secret knowledge, have now gotten this group to doubt whether they are truly God's people or not. The false teachers have gotten them to call into question their status as God's people.

After all, if they don't buy into the teaching of this false teaching, and if they are not part of the elite few that possess this knowledge, then now they are outsiders. And once the false teachers leave the church, they leave behind this small group of embattled Christians who are questioning their spiritual status, whether they are truly God's people or not. And so, it seems to me, then, that John is addressing, the main purpose of John can be found in chapter 5 and verse 13 of 1 John, where he says, I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

That's basically why John writes. To put that together with the scenario, again, for those who have been tempted to doubt their spiritual status because, again, these false teachers have left them battered and wounded spiritually and questioning their status, now John writes to assure the readers of the fact that they do, in fact, have eternal life, that they are God's true people. He writes to assure them of their spiritual status in the wake of these teachers damaging them spiritually and now leaving and succeeding from the church.

Now the way John does that in this letter is, in the next section in your notes, you'll notice there are three, actually three tests. The plan of 1 John revolves around three tests. So how do they know, how can they be assured that they have eternal life? How can they be assured that they, and not these false teachers who have left, how can they be sure that they are the true people of God? How can they be certain of their spiritual status? John basically gives them three tests and what he does in his letter, he cycles through these tests about two or three different times, much like we saw James cycle through the themes of faith and endurance and wisdom and speech, etc.

1 John takes three tests that the readers can utilize to demonstrate and to be assured of their true spiritual status. And the first one, the first one that gets cycled two or three times through the letter is that of love. That is, if they demonstrate they have love for each other, then they can be assured that they are the true people of God and they can be assured of their spiritual status.

So that is test number one. The second test is obedience to the commands of Christ. There's been a lot of questions as to what, how they would have been, or why the false teachers would, what they were doing that would have gotten them to perhaps question their obedience to the commands of Christ, whether the false teachers were antinomian or whatever.

But the point is that John assures them that if they hold on to the commands of Christ if they walk in obedience to Christ, they can be assured that they are God's children. The third one is a confession that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. And John repeats that a number of times.

If you confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, or what he condemns the false teachers for is that they do not confess that Christ has come in the flesh. Why do you think he emphasizes this? Why doesn't he say, if you believe that Jesus is the son of God, or if you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of David, or why doesn't he use the language, for example, Paul talks about Jesus as the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. Why doesn't he tell them, if you believe that Jesus is the invisible God, the image of the invisible God, or if you believe Jesus is the son of God, why do you think he says, if you believe Jesus has come in the flesh? Perhaps to link it back to fulfillment in the Old Testament, which again, this teaching may have been denying and rejecting.

I was just going to say because they've just been influenced by these people. Okay. Yeah.

If he's, along with the Old Testament background, then perhaps, if he's addressing Christians who have been influenced by this Gnostic teaching that denies physical, would have perhaps denied Jesus was a human being, then it's necessary for him to reassert that. It probably would not have been questioned among John's readers that Jesus was God. What may have been, they may have been tempted to doubt, in light of the false teachers, was whether Jesus was truly a human being.

Remember, we talked about Docetism. I think we talked about Docetism back in the early days of this class. Docetism was a heresy later on in the church that denied Jesus' humanity.

It said, Jesus only seemed to be human. It comes from the Greek word, *dokeo*, which means to think or to seem. And from that, we get Docetism.

That is, Jesus only appeared to be a human. He only seemed to be human. And these teachers, if they had strong Gnostic tendencies, may have then taught that Jesus was not truly a human being or denied his humanity because of their strong contrast between the spiritual and the physical.

Remember, salvation consisted of escaping from the physical body and from the physical world. So now, in light of that, John sees it necessary to reassert the humanity of Christ. So they can know that they are truly God's children by confessing, unlike the false teachers who have just left them, they can now know that they truly are God's children if they confess that Jesus Christ has indeed come in the flesh.

That doesn't mean that they need to deny that he's God as well and that he's deity, but it does mean that they also need to cling to and assert his humanity as well. So these three tests, in a sense, then, as I said, get cycled throughout the book over two or three times. I think about three times, probably, as John's answer to, again, how

do we know that we have eternal life? How do we know that we are truly God's children? In light of the spiritual abuse and now the fact that we have been bruised and wounded spiritually by these false teachers who have left us and we're kind of a minority, embattled group of Christians, how can we know that we are truly God's people? So, John says, well, if you love each other, if you obey Jesus' commands, and if you confess, Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.

Now, 1 John is one of the books that, to me, has one of the most, a set of the most perplexing statements in them. The first one, the first group of statements is found in 1 John 1, and especially in verse 3. I'll read the ones in verse 3. This is what John says, I'm sorry, chapter 3, verses 6, 9, and 10. Listen to what he says, no one who abides in him, referring to him will refer to Jesus or God when I read these verses, no one who abides in him, in Jesus, sins.

No one who abides in Jesus sins. No one who sins has either seen him or known him. That's pretty strong language.

Listen to verse 9. Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God's seed abides in them. Using birth language and biological language, metaphorically, he says, now, because you are children of God, God's seed abides in you, you cannot sin. It says they cannot sin because they have been born of God.

Verse 11, I'm sorry, verse 10. The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this way. All who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters.

Now, that's rather absolute and startling language. John comes right out and says, if someone sins, if you claim to be God's children, you don't sin. And anyone who sins has not been born of God.

Because if you are born of God, if God's seed dwells in you, again, metaphorically, then you will not sin. You cannot sin, in fact, is the language he uses. That's rather startling language.

What are we supposed to make of that? Again, John doesn't even qualify. He doesn't say if you sin occasionally, or if you don't make it a habit to sin if it's not your lifestyle to sin, he just comes right out and says, if you claim to be God's children, you are not able to sin. And anyone who sins has not been born of God.

Now, to couple that with another couple statements of John, back in chapter 1 and verses 8 and 10. Here's chapter 1, verse 8. If we say that we have not sinned, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. Verse 10, if we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar and his word is not in us.

So my question is, how do we make sense of this? To me, doesn't that seem like an outright contradiction? I mean, in strong language, John says, again, simply, if you claim to be God's children, you are not able to sin and anyone who sins simply has not been born of God. Then he turns around and says things like, but if you say you don't have sin, you're a liar and you make God out to be a liar too if you claim that you've never sinned. So here we have a contradiction and so I guess this isn't the word of God after all, because John blatantly contradicts himself.

On one hand, he says that Christians can't sin and don't sin. Then he turns around and says that, no, if you do, if you say you don't, you're a liar and you make God out to be a liar. Or what do we do with this? Is there another way to understand this? I mean, is John that daft that he would write something, and a couple of pages later, he would write something completely opposite? Or is there another way to understand what's going on here? Well, I mean, first of all, why do you think, I think, I think this one most of us don't have any problem with experientially, especially, I mean, most of us would agree a Christian's sin.

To claim that we do not sin on this side of eternity, to claim that we have no sin and we've never sinned, or somehow we can reach a state where we'll never sin in deed or thought is simply an impossibility. And we'd agree with John. Yeah, someone that says they can't sin makes God, simply deceives themselves and makes God out to be a liar.

But what about, I would guess this first one's a little more difficult. What do you think John is doing and saying? Why would he talk like that? And by the way, you probably recognize the verse that comes in between these, if we confess our sins. So, it's not as if John is saying, oh, it's okay to sin.

Go ahead. It's no big deal because you sin anyway. But in between that, this is where you find that verse.

But if we confess our sins, Christ is faithful and just forgives us from our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. So, Christians, even when they do sin, they turn to God and forgiveness. They turn to the Father to ask, to confess their sins, and find forgiveness.

So again, we probably don't struggle with this one. It's the first one that probably seems a little bit odd to us. How might we explain the kind of the juxtaposition of these two stark statements? What might lead John to say Christians don't sin? If you're born of God, you're not able to sin.

Anyone who sins has not been born of God. Persisting in sin? Interestingly, if you have an NIV, if you have the new international version, it actually interprets these

verses with the word continues to sin or persist in sinning. So, it's not just if you've been born of God, you are not able to sin.

The NIV would say something like you are not able to continue to sin or you are not able to persist in sin. Or those who are born of God or if you continue to sin, if you persist in sin, then you are not born of God. So, the NIV would agree with that, the new international version that what John is talking about here is continuing and persisting in sin, making it a habit and a lifestyle.

So, this one would be Christians do sin, everyone recognizes that, but Christians don't sin, that is they shouldn't practice sin as a lifestyle. They shouldn't persist in it and continue in it. But I think John's statement is even stronger than that.

I think he's saying Christians don't sin, period. You should be able to guess what I'm thinking by now. I think this is that now but not yet tension dressed up in another disguise, in another guise.

The already is Christians don't sin. That is by virtue of now, it's the same language, it's like Paul saying you've died to sin. How can you live in it any longer? Christians don't sin.

Yet the not yet is the reality is that Christians still do sin. So, I think John is still reflecting that same tension, kind of in another guise or another form. Yeah, Christians don't sin.

Again, I'm using Paul's language, but it'd be similar to Paul saying we've died with Christ to sin. We've been raised with Christ in the newness of life. Christians don't sin.

It's inconsistent to claim to be born of God and yet to still have sin. Yet, the not yet is reality is Christians still do sin. So, I think it's kind of another way to put it.

This is the indicative and this reflects the imperative. Now, the other way of looking at it as well, I think this also, as it functions within 1 John and within the New Testament, I think both of these need to be heard at different times. When we're tempted to think that sin is just normal, and when we have the attitude, well, Christians are going to sin, so I might as well not worry about it or sin anyway.

Or when we use our faith in Christ or the death of Christ as an excuse to sin, when we think we can live however we want, then we need to hear this one. No, there's something fundamentally wrong and inconsistent about Christian sinning. Yet, when we're frustrated by our attempts to live holy lives, when perhaps we're tempted like these Christians were by the false teachers, when we're tempted to doubt our

spiritual status and wonder if we've done something that separates us from Christ's love, then I think we need to hear this one.

Yeah, Christians do sin, but at the same time, they turn to the Father for forgiveness. So, I think both of these play an important role, and we need to hear both of them at different times in our lives. Whether we're comfortable with sin and tempted to ignore it and think it's no big deal, we need to hear the first one.

When we're wracked by it, when we're upset and doubting our status and wondering if we've done something that somehow God could never overlook and forgive, then we, and our frustration with trying to overcome sin, then we need to hear the second message as well. So, that's how I understand the tension. And certainly, it's right that John would, I mean, certainly I would agree that Christians do not persist in sin and continually sin, but again, I think John is saying something a little more than that, reflecting the tension between the indicative imperative or the now, what is already true, but what is not yet, is now emerging in 1 John again.

All right, just quickly, yeah. Which one belongs to which? Whoops. Okay, yeah, the first one would reflect the already.

So, again, if I can use Paul's language, he says, we've already died to sin. That's, again, that's a rather stark statement. You've died to sin, how can you live in it any longer? I'm quoting Romans 6. And John's way of saying it is, if you're born of God, you don't sin.

And again, Paul says, you've died to sin, you can't live in it any longer. That's the already. In other words, there's something absolute that has happened by virtue of now belonging to Christ, by virtue of this rebirth that John talks about.

But then the not yet is, because we have not yet arrived, because we have not reached perfection, the second coming of Christ, and that's why Paul can go on and therefore, you still need to put to death sin in your mortal body. You still need to offer up yourselves as instruments of righteousness. So that's the not yet, the imperative.

Did that make sense? Okay, good, good. All right, 2 John. Again, I'd remind you, that it's not absolutely certain who the author of this is, although, again, a very strong Christian witness, an early Christian witness associates it with John.

And probably it is the same writer as what we call 1 John, but a fairly strong early Christian testimony associates it with the apostle John. But interestingly, in 2 John, notice how the author refers to himself. In 2 John, in the first verse, the elder, actually begins like a letter, but he doesn't give us his name.

He says, the elder. That's how the author refers to himself. He says, the elder, to the elect lady and her children.

Now, who is that elect lady? Some have suggested that literally refers to a woman who was the head of a church. The other possibility and I haven't done enough work on it to determine exactly what I think, but the other possibility is that the elect lady is a metaphor for the church itself. In the same way that the church elsewhere, elsewhere Paul will use female imagery to refer to the church.

The church is the bride of Christ. Revelation calls the church the completed people of God, the bride of Christ. So, some think that the elect lady here is just metaphorical for the church, just like calling the church the bride of Christ.

But others think it's more literal, that it refers to an actual lady, an actual woman, who is the leader of this house church. But in any case, most likely John is addressing a small contingent of house churches. Probably, again, the other thing I didn't mention with 1 John, but the other thing that early Christian tradition does is it associates these three letters, or at least a couple of them, with the city of Ephesus.

And so, 1 John and 2 John may be addressing a church or house churches in the city of Ephesus. But again, we can't be certain because the letter itself doesn't say anything about it. It just says, to the elect lady and her children.

That's all we know about the recipients. We really don't know anything else. But 2 John, then, is written by the elder.

The term that, again, if this is the apostle John, this is the term by which he refers to himself. And he addresses the elect lady, whether a literal lady who is the head of the church or metaphorically referring to the church. It appears that, again, false teachers, perhaps of a Gnostic type of influence, are now attempting to infiltrate this house church.

And so, John is going to warn them not to allow this false teaching, perhaps of the same kind of teaching that threatened the church in 1 John and has now left. Now, 2 John may be warning the church not to let those kinds of false teachers in. But again, I don't know if 2 John was written after or before 1 John.

It's difficult to tell. But this background helps us to understand a rather perplexing verse. This is verses 9 and 10 of 2 John.

With 2 and 3 John, there aren't chapters like some of the other short books, like Jude and Philemon. But here's 2 John 9 and 10. Everyone who does not abide in the teaching of Christ, but goes beyond it, does not have fellowship with God.

Whoever abides in the teaching does have both the Father and the Son. Do not receive into your house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching. For to welcome is to participate in the evil deeds of such a person.

Now, the reason I bring this up, is I was actually brought up in a tradition that said, you don't see this as much anymore, I don't think. But when I was growing up, we always had different religions, whether Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons and others, coming to our door and wanting to talk. And I was always taught, based on these verses, that you're not allowed, you shouldn't let them in your house.

Because John says, don't even let them in your house. To do so is to promote or to have fellowship with their teaching. And so, it's okay if you stood at the door and talked to them, but you weren't supposed to let them in your house.

And so that's how I was raised. But when you set this in the background, you have to understand two things. Number one is that most of the churches met in houses, in small house churches in the first century.

So, the reference to house here has nothing to do with my personal home. It's the primary reference is to the place where the church meets. It's when the church is meeting.

So the first thing to recognize is the house here refers to the house church. The second thing to recognize is that in the first century, it was very common to have itinerant preachers and teachers who would go around spreading their teaching to different congregations. And to put those together then, what John is talking about here is for the house church to allow someone to come into their church and teach this as part of their worship services, as part of their community, to allow them in and to give them a base for their teaching and preaching.

That's what John is speaking out against. It has nothing to do with whether you let somebody in your house or not. It has everything to do with the church in the first century actually supporting and giving a platform for these false teachers teaching this kind of thing.

So, when Paul says, again, do not allow them in your house, my paraphrase is, when these itinerant preachers come along teaching this Gnostic type of teaching, if it's that, when they come around, do not invite them into your house church. Do not allow them to take, to have a basis in and to establish a base and to spread their teaching within your house church as it gathers for worship, is what I take John to be referring to. So again, the message, to summarize the message, John warns the congregation against accepting these false teachers into their midst.

He simply calls for them to maintain theologically and morally, to maintain purity, and not allow these itinerant traveling teachers who are promoting probably the same kind of teaching addressed in 1 John, now not to allow them into their church. Before I look very quickly at 3 John, any questions so far? And again, I'd reiterate, it's not certain whether 2 John came after 1 John. It'd make good sense, in a sense, to see the false teachers leaving and now trying to get back in, attacking the church from without, but still, that's not absolutely certain.

3 John. 3 John is the book that, again, when you read it carefully, there's really no hint that there was some kind of false teaching threatening the church. It could be, but there's just not enough evidence to tell.

Not only is 3 John itself such a short letter, but there are just no references at all to any kind of deviant teaching that is threatening the church or inside the church. So, I'm tempted to see 3 John as just kind of its own letter. It doesn't necessarily relate to the same problem that one finds in 1 or 2 John.

It's probably just a completely separate letter written on its own. But 3 John. 3 John concerns an individual named Diotrephes.

A good name to name your kids someday when you have them. Diotrephes. A man named Diotrephes is dividing the church by trying to establish a power base in the midst of the church and trying to gather a following.

That is, basically trying to split the church or divide it by trying to establish a following. Although, again, the letter doesn't tell us whether it's based on some kind of false teaching or what. It simply doesn't say that.

So basically, the message of 1 John is, that John writes to tell them how to deal with Diotrephes and has some very harsh words. They're simply not to put up with him. That is, the church is no place for divisive troublemakers.

Those who would try to establish a power base or cause division in the church. That's basically what 3 John is about. And again, I don't know whether it was written before the other two or after.

It's impossible to tell whether some false teaching was involved. But, again, 3 John may just be its own letter. Not related to any false teaching or not related to the same problems as with 1 or 2 John.

Yeah, that's possible. We're 2 and 3 John cover letters for 1 John, which is the theory proposed in your textbook. Again, 2 and 3 John are so brief and cryptic, that it's really hard to tell a whole lot about specifically what they were addressing and how they functioned in the relationship to 1 John.

That's a possibility. Right, any other questions about 1, 2, and 3 John? Again, you can see, in a sense, 2 and 3 John are not best labeled general letters because they do seem to be addressed to a specific church. But the problem is the letters themselves do not tell us what church or groups of house churches.

All we seem to be able to tell from 2 John, at least, and 3 John is that they were addressed to a specific church. Again, a strong early church tradition associates it with Ephesus. But the letters themselves are silent on that.

But, again, that's part of reading a letter. The author and the readers, as we said, it's like listening to one half of a phone conversation. The author and the readers know what's going on.

The writer of the letter doesn't have to tell them everything there is to know because they know and they share certain information that you and I are not privy to. So sometimes when we read letters like this, especially ones as short as 2 or 3 John, it's a lot more difficult to draw those kinds of conclusions as far as who exactly is the author, who are the readers, where are they, what problem were they facing, and we're much more dependent solely on the text itself. So, there's always a danger of constructing a scenario and then forcing it on the text as opposed to letting the text itself speak and determine how we read and understand it.

Wednesday and Friday then we'll turn the rest of our attention to the book of Revelation. So have a good day and I'll see you Wednesday. Thanks for watching.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in New Testament History and Literature, lecture 33 on the Johannine Epistles.