

Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Session 33, John's Epistles Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 33, John's Epistles, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Dave Mathewson's Lecture 33 focuses on the Johannine Epistles: 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John. The lecture explores the historical context, authorship, and intended audience of these letters, noting the traditional association with the Apostle John. **Mathewson examines the purpose of 1 John as assuring believers of their salvation amidst the influence of secessionist false teachers, particularly in the context of Gnostic-leaning influences.** The three tests for assurance of salvation -- love, obedience, and belief in the incarnation -- are described. **2 John is discussed as a warning against welcoming false teachers into the house church, and 3 John is addressed to a leader to deal with a troublemaker named Diotrephes.** Mathewson notes that there is considerable debate on the arrangement of these three epistles and also notes that the lecture is the last formal lecture before exam four.

2. 14 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 33 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Major Prophets → Daniel).



**Mathewson_NTLit_S
ession33.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 33, John's Epistles

Okay, here's a briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from Dr. Mathewson's lecture on 1, 2, and 3 John.

Briefing Document: Johannine Epistles (1, 2, & 3 John)

Main Themes & Key Ideas:

- **General/Catholic Epistles:** Dr. Mathewson situates 1, 2, and 3 John within the broader category of "general" or "Catholic" epistles. This designation indicates that, unlike Paul's letters, these letters are addressed to a wider, more general audience of Christians rather than specific churches or individuals (though 2 & 3 John may be exceptions).
- **Authorship & Audience of 1 John:** 1 John is anonymous; it does not explicitly state its author or recipients. Church tradition strongly suggests that the author is John the Apostle. The audience is believed to be a group of Christians who have been left behind after false teachers (possibly with Gnostic leanings) have seceded from their church.
- Quote: "By reading the letter carefully, and by paying attention to church tradition, we can maybe piece together a possible picture...there is a very strong opinion that John, the apostle of Jesus Christ, was the author of this letter."
- Quote: "1 John does address a church where these false teachers have left it and left a group of Christians behind."
- **Purpose of 1 John:** The primary purpose of 1 John is to assure believers of their salvation and eternal life, particularly in the face of doubt and spiritual abuse inflicted by the departing false teachers.
- Quote: "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." (1 John 5:13)
- **Three Tests of Genuine Faith (1 John):** The core of 1 John's argument revolves around three tests to help believers confirm their spiritual status:

1. **Love for one another:** Demonstrating love is a sign of being God's true people.
2. **Obedience to Christ's commands:** Holding to and living by Christ's teachings is crucial.
3. **Confession that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh:** This counters Docetic or Gnostic tendencies that deny the full humanity of Jesus.
 - Quote: "If you confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh...they also need to cling to and assert his humanity as well."
 - **Apparent Contradiction in 1 John Regarding Sin:** Dr. Mathewson addresses the seemingly contradictory statements in 1 John regarding sin:
 - On the one hand, John states that those born of God do not sin (1 John 3:6, 9).
 - On the other hand, John says that if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and make God a liar (1 John 1:8, 10).
 - Dr. Mathewson proposes several interpretations:
 - **Persistence in Sin:** The NIV interprets this as "continue to sin" or "persist in sinning."
 - **"Already, Not Yet" Tension:** This reflects the tension between the ideal (Christians *shouldn't* sin) and the reality (Christians *do* sin). The "already" is that Christians have died to sin, but the "not yet" is that they haven't reached perfection.
 - **Contextual Relevance:** The "don't sin" statement is a reminder when Christians are comfortable with sin. The "we all sin" statement is for those doubting their salvation.
 - **2 John: Warning Against False Teachers:** 2 John is addressed by "the elder" (likely John the Apostle) to "the elect lady and her children" (possibly a literal woman leading a house church, or a metaphor for the church itself). The letter warns against welcoming false teachers (possibly those with Gnostic influence) into the church.
 - Quote: "The letter warns against welcoming false teachers (possibly those with Gnostic influence) into the church."
 - **Interpretation of 2 John 9-10:** Dr. Mathewson clarifies that the instruction not to receive someone into your "house" refers to not allowing false teachers to

establish a base and spread their teachings within the house church, not about personal hospitality in one's home.

- **3 John: Dealing with Division:** 3 John is addressed to an individual. It concerns a man named Diotrephes who is causing division in the church by seeking power and a following. John instructs the recipient on how to deal with Diotrephes, emphasizing that there is no place for divisive troublemakers in the church.
- **Relationship Between the Letters:** Dr. Mathewson notes that while it's tempting to construct a historical progression of the problems addressed in 1, 2, and 3 John (false teachers leaving, attacking from outside, and potentially overtaking the church, respectively), there isn't enough evidence to be certain of this chronology. Furthermore, 3 John may address a completely separate issue of power struggles within the church, unrelated to false teaching.
- Quote: "It's really impossible to tell whether this order is the correct order. Remember, the New Testament is not arranged chronologically."
- **Limitations of Interpretation:** Dr. Mathewson emphasizes the challenges of interpreting these short, cryptic letters, particularly 2 and 3 John. The lack of specific details about the author, recipients, and context makes it easy to impose pre-conceived scenarios on the text rather than letting the text speak for itself.
- Quote: "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."

4. Study Guide: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 33, John's Epistles

Johannine Epistles Study Guide

Quiz

1. What are the two common names for the group of letters that includes 1, 2, and 3 John?
2. Why are these epistles referred to as "general" or "Catholic" epistles?
3. What is notably missing from 1 John that distinguishes it from typical letters of the time?
4. What is Gnosticism and how might its early forms relate to the context of the Johannine Epistles?
5. According to Mathewson, what is the main purpose of 1 John, as stated in 1 John 5:13?
6. What are the three tests John uses in 1 John to assure believers of their spiritual status?
7. Explain the apparent contradiction in 1 John regarding sin, as highlighted in the lecture.
8. In 2 John, who is "the elect lady," and what are the two interpretations discussed in the lecture?
9. Explain the historical context of 2 John 9-10 regarding welcoming or not welcoming certain individuals into one's "house."
10. What is the primary issue addressed in 3 John, and who is the central figure causing this issue?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The two common names are General Epistles and Catholic Epistles. By "Catholic," the lecturer clarifies that it doesn't refer to the Roman Catholic Church but to the universal church.
2. These letters are called "general" or "Catholic" because, unlike Paul's letters, they are addressed to a broader audience of Christians scattered widely, rather than specific churches or individuals.

3. 1 John lacks a clear indication of authorship and doesn't begin like a typical letter with a sender and recipient. It jumps directly into its message without a formal introduction.
4. Gnosticism emphasized the spiritual over the physical, viewing salvation as escape from the physical body through secret knowledge available only to an elite few. Early forms may have influenced the false teachings addressed in the Johannine Epistles by denying Jesus' humanity.
5. The main purpose of 1 John, according to 1 John 5:13, is to assure believers who have been spiritually wounded by false teachers that they have eternal life and are truly God's people.
6. The three tests are: (1) love for one another, (2) obedience to the commands of Christ, and (3) confession that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.
7. The apparent contradiction is that John says those born of God do not sin, yet also states that those who claim they have not sinned are liars. This is explained as a tension between the "already" (Christians *should* not sin) and the "not yet" (Christians *do* still sin).
8. "The elect lady" is the recipient of 2 John, interpreted either as a literal woman leading a house church or metaphorically as the church itself.
9. In the first century, churches often met in homes, and itinerant preachers traveled to spread their teachings. John warns against inviting false teachers into the *house church* to give them a platform for their heretical teachings, not necessarily about personal homes.
10. The primary issue in 3 John is an individual named Diotrephes causing division within the church by trying to establish a power base and gather a following, although the letter does not explicitly connect it to false teaching.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the historical context of the Johannine Epistles, including the possible influence of early Gnostic tendencies, and how this context informs our understanding of the letters' content and purpose.
2. Explain the three tests presented in 1 John as ways for believers to be assured of their spiritual status. How do these tests address the specific concerns of the audience to whom John was writing?
3. Analyze the tension in 1 John regarding sin, considering both the statements that Christians do not sin and that those who claim to be without sin are liars. How does Mathewson resolve this apparent contradiction, and what are the implications for Christian living?
4. Compare and contrast the situations addressed in 1 John and 2 John. How do the letters' messages reflect the different threats facing the community, and what strategies does John employ to address those threats?
5. Discuss the challenges in interpreting the Johannine Epistles, considering the limited information about the author, audience, and specific circumstances surrounding the letters. How do these challenges affect our ability to reconstruct the historical context and understand the letters' meaning?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **General Epistles/Catholic Epistles:** Letters in the New Testament addressed to a broader audience of Christians rather than specific individuals or churches.
- **Gnosticism:** A religious movement emphasizing spiritual knowledge and viewing salvation as an escape from the physical world.
- **Docetism:** The heretical belief that Jesus only *seemed* to be human, denying his true humanity.
- **Secessionists:** Those who have withdrawn or separated from a group, in this case, referring to false teachers who left the church addressed in 1 John.
- **Antinomianism:** The belief that Christians are freed from the moral law and that obedience is not necessary for salvation.
- **"The elect lady":** A term used in 2 John to refer to the recipient of the letter, interpreted either as a literal woman leading a house church or metaphorically as the church itself.
- **House Church:** A small gathering of Christians who meet for worship and fellowship in a private home.
- **Itinerant Preachers:** Traveling teachers who would go from place to place, sharing their messages with different congregations.
- **Diotrephes:** An individual mentioned in 3 John who is causing division within the church by seeking power and influence.
- **Already/Not Yet:** A theological concept referring to the tension between what has already been accomplished through Christ's death and resurrection and what is yet to be fully realized in the future.
- **Indicative/Imperative:** A grammatical and theological concept where the indicative refers to what is already true in Christ (our new identity), and the imperative refers to the commands and calls to action that flow from that reality (how we should live).

5. FAQs on Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 33, John's Epistles, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

1 John, 2 John, & 3 John FAQ

- **What are the "General Epistles" or "Catholic Epistles," and why are 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John included in this category?**
- The General or Catholic Epistles are a collection of New Testament letters that are generally addressed to a broad audience of Christians rather than specific individuals or churches, as is the case with Paul's letters. These letters, starting with Hebrews, are considered "general" because they lack specific names or locations for their intended recipients. 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John are traditionally included in this group, although 2nd and 3rd John may have been intended for a more specific church.
- **Who wrote 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John, and how do we know?**
- The letters themselves do not explicitly state their author. However, early church tradition strongly suggests that John the Apostle, one of Jesus's original disciples, wrote these letters. The language and themes of the letters are similar to the Gospel of John, further supporting the idea that they share the same author. 2 John identifies the author as "the elder". 3 John says that the same author who wrote 2 John is writing it. Although authorship cannot be definitively proven, the historical testimony is compelling.
- **What is the historical and theological context in which 1st John was written, and what problem was it addressing?**
- 1st John was likely written to a church or group of Christians who were experiencing spiritual doubt and turmoil after a group of false teachers had left their community. These false teachers may have had Gnostic tendencies, emphasizing spiritual knowledge and salvation through it, while denigrating the physical realm and the need for physical obedience. They caused the remaining Christians to question their own salvation and spiritual standing. 1st John was written to assure these believers of their eternal life and true status as God's children.

- **What are the three tests that John provides in 1st John to assure believers of their spiritual status?**
- John presents three tests to help believers confirm their salvation and standing with God:
 1. **Love for one another:** Demonstrating genuine love for fellow Christians.
 2. **Obedience to Christ's commands:** Living in accordance with Jesus's teachings and demonstrating obedience to them.
 3. **Confession that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh:** Affirming the true humanity of Jesus, in contrast to Gnostic beliefs that might deny his physical incarnation.
- **How does 1st John appear to contradict itself in its statements about sin, and how can this apparent contradiction be resolved?**
- 1st John appears to contradict itself by stating both that those born of God do not sin (1 John 3:6, 9) and that those who claim to be without sin are deceiving themselves (1 John 1:8, 10). This apparent contradiction can be understood by recognizing the "already but not yet" tension of Christian life. In principle, Christians have "died to sin" (Romans 6) and have been born again, but in practice, they still struggle with sin in their earthly bodies. The former reflects what is already true about the believer while the later is a practical reality.
- **Who is the "elect lady and her children" addressed in 2nd John, and what is the main concern of this letter?**
- The "elect lady and her children" could refer literally to a woman who led a house church and her family, or metaphorically to the church itself. The main concern of 2nd John is to warn the recipients against welcoming or supporting false teachers who deny the true teaching about Christ. The letter urges the church to maintain theological and moral purity.

- **What specific instruction does 2nd John give regarding dealing with those who do not bring the correct teaching about Christ, and how should this instruction be understood in its historical context?**
- 2nd John instructs the recipients not to receive into their house or welcome anyone who does not bring the correct teaching about Christ (2 John 1:10). In the context of the first century, this instruction likely refers to not allowing itinerant preachers and teachers to use the church's meeting place (often a house church) as a platform for spreading false teachings. It was common for teachers to travel from place to place, and this letter urges the church to not provide a base of operations for false teachers.
- **What is the main issue addressed in 3rd John, and how does it differ from the issues addressed in 1st and 2nd John?**
- 3rd John focuses on a specific individual named Diotrephes, who is causing division and seeking power within the church. Unlike 1st and 2nd John, there is no clear indication in 3rd John that false teaching is the primary problem. Instead, the letter addresses the issue of a divisive troublemaker trying to establish a power base and disrupt the unity of the church. The primary purpose is to instruct the recipients on how to deal with Diotrephes.