

Introduction to the New Testament History and Literature

Lecture 12 Johannine Christianity: the Letters

Transcript

<https://oyc.yale.edu/religious-studies/rlst-152/lecture-12>

Overview

The Jesus of the Gospel of John often speaks in riddles so that his dialogues with characters such as Nicodemus appear confusing, rather than clarifying. The focus, however, of the Gospel of John is on Christology. In the Gospel, Jesus is divine. So it is also in 1 John, where many of the themes of the Gospel are echoed. 1, 2, and 3 John possibly present us with correspondences of the Johannine community, a sectarian group insisting on the divinity and humanity of Jesus, against the Docetists and other differing forms of early Christianity.

1. Riddles and Division in the Gospel of John

[1] *Professor Dale Martin:* We're going to continue with the lecture on the Gospel of John that I talked about last time. I want to finish up with some of the material on John that I didn't get to as much as I'd like to, and then we're going to switch to the letters of John—1, 2, and 3 John, so we're going to do both of those things. Now, remember, the rubric under which today's lecture happens is not just the Gospel of John and not just the letters of John. As I've brought up several times, the method that I'm teaching you right now in this class is the historical critical method as it was developed in the twentieth century in Europe and North America. This means that we're not reading these texts for just what the texts say about theology or even the early church or doctrine, or ethics or something like that. We're trying to read the text in a way against the very intention of the text. We're taking the text as being something like a window that we can look through to try to construct, as best as we can guess at it, what kind of social context, what kind of political context, what kind of church, what kind of social groups produced these texts and found them to be compelling, found them to be believable.

[2] There are lots of other ways to read this. Obviously the Gospel of John is very important for Christian doctrine. It's the most Christological of the Gospels, it has the highest form of Christology, that is the Christology—

it's the most divine rather than simply being human and so it's very important for doctrine, and for theology, and for faith. What I'm doing right now is just one particular way of reading, which is reading this text as a clue, as a series of clues and traces that we might use to reconstruct what we think was going on in the first century with the growth of Christianity. I'm trying to show you by this that there are different kinds of Christianity that grew up in different places, different geographical settings, and different times.

[3] So what we call Johannine Christianity is what we're going to talk about today. And we're also—one of the wonderful things about the John literature is that by having the Gospel, which is written at one time, and then having 1 John which is the letter written after that time we can tell, that shows us a development of this form of Christianity and then by having 2 and 3 John, which we believe were written still later than 1 John, that gives us a third stage. In fact, what I'm going to be talking about is three or four stages in the development of Johannine Christianity as one branch of early Christian literature. In order to do this—I talked last time about how one of the things going on in the Gospel of John is Jesus and the Gospel of John seems to start off lots of conversations and they lead to division, so the causation of division is one of the themes of the Gospel of John and to show that we're going to walk through a couple of chapters.

[4] First look at chapter 3, this is the story of Nicodemus, so get your Bibles out and follow along with me, because we're going to look at this in depth and then we're going to look at chapter 8 a bit, and then we're going to move off. I said division is the issue, so what we're going to talk about is what the division is. One of the ways that this author does this is he sets up Jesus in these dialogues that don't actually work very well. Jesus is not good on interpersonal communication in the Gospel of John. I'm sorry to have to tell you that. We'll talk about why that's the case. Jesus talks in riddles, so the question we're going to have is why does Jesus talk in riddles in the Gospel of John? What do we get out of that? Chapter 3, "There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews, he came to Jesus by night and said to him"—now by night, darkness is kind of a thematic issue in the Gospel of John, right? Notice I'm not going to bring up all these themes this time, but keep noticing these themes that I talked about last time as they occur even in this little passage.

"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, and no one else can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

[5] How the hell does that follow from what Nicodemus just said? He's gives Jesus a compliment, "you're a teacher from God, no one else can do these signs, ... apart from the presence of God..." Jesus says, "No one can see the kingdom of"—what is there, is there a thank you? Can Jesus say, "You're smart"? "You just got something there"? No, Jesus starts off changing the subject. Jesus changes the subject in the Gospel of John quite a lot. "No one can see the Kingdom of God without being born from above." Now you're reading it in English translation. My text just said "from above," does anybody's translation have something different there besides "from above"?

[6] *Student:* [Inaudible]

[7] *Professor Dale Martin:* "Without being born anew," "again." The problem is the Greek actually can be translated either "being born again" or "being born all over again," or

"being born from above." The same Greek word means both things. Now this is the one place, basically, in the Bible which born-again kind of language comes out, so it's kind of ironic that there's whole branches of American Christianity which base their entire theology and ideology on the idea, have you been born again? Because really it's just from this passage, the other Gospels don't talk about being born again. It's a rather rare metaphor in early Christianity. It comes from this chapter right here, and it comes from a Greek word that could be just as easily translated "be born from above" as "be born again." My English translation—translators have decided to translate, "from above," but notice it's confusing for the hearer because Nicodemus then answers as if he heard it to be, "being born again," so Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus said, "Nicodemus I'm speaking metaphorically and spiritually here, you need to understand that I don't mean particularly that someone has to be actually born physically from their mother again." No, Jesus doesn't say any of that, right? That's what Jesus should have said, probably, if Jesus really wanted to communicate with Nicodemus, but apparently, in John, Jesus is not that interested in communicating very directly with Nicodemus because Jesus says, "Truly I tell you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and spirit." What the hell does that mean?

"What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes."

[8] What does that mean? Does it help you to know the Greek word translated here "spirit" is also the Greek word which can be translated as "wind." Notice that the Gospel of John is playing with you with puns, there's already two puns in this passage. One, does the Greek word—is the Greek word "being born again" or is it "born from above"? Well you're not told in the text, in fact it sounds like it may mean a little bit of both. Is this Greek word, *pneuma*, is it supposed to represent the spirit as a

theological term or is it supposed to represent breath or wind? It seems to be doing double duty. Anyway, with all that stuff about wind blowing where it will, so it is with everyone who is born of the spirit Nicodemus tries one more time said to him, “How can these things be?” In other words, Jesus can you give me an explanation of what you’re talking about? It’s not an unreasonable request.

Jesus answered, “Are you a teacher of Israel and you do not understand these things? [Well that’s helpful.] Truly I tell you. we speak of what we know and testify to what we’ve seen, yet you do not receive our testimony. If I had told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the servant in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”

[9] Well at this point Nicodemus just gives up. We don’t hear about Nicodemus anymore in the story so apparently he’s decided, I can’t get a straight answer out of this guy. Notice also how Jesus starts off in a dialogical stance with Nicodemus but never answers his questions, and then Jesus almost gets kind of, well nasty, toward the end. He kind of just almost insults Nicodemus rather than just explaining what he means. This is kind of the way Jesus sometimes talks in the Gospel of John, and my question is going to be, why? Is Jesus just lacking in social skills?

[10] Look in 8:31, another little interesting dialogue. Jesus has been teaching and now “Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him.” Now notice the scene starts out—often in the Gospel of John the Jews are talked about as if they’re something other than Jesus is. Of course Jesus is a Jew, his disciples are Jews, they’re all Jews in this story but the term “the Jews” gets packed in the Gospel of John with this otherness and this is a reflection of the sectarianism I talked about last time. Now notice Jesus is now starting to talk to the Jews who believe in him. These are not the Jews who have rejected him, that’s very important to see at this point in the chapter. These are the Jews who now believe in him.

“If you continue in my word you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.” They answered him, “We are the descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying you will be made free?”

Jesus answered them, “Well I was speaking metaphorically. I meant that, let’s say you’re slaves to sin and, if you follow me, then I will make you truly free in a spiritual sense, I mean.”

[11] That’s not what Jesus does, right? All right 34:

Jesus answered them, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household. The son has a place there forever, so if the son makes you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are descendants of Abraham, yet you look for an opportunity to kill me [Wait a minute, Jesus, these are the people who believe in you.] because there’s no place in you for my word. I declare what I have seen in the Father’s presence. As for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father.”

[12] They answered him, Well Abraham’s our father, we’re Jews.

Jesus said to them, “If you are Abraham’s children you would be doing what Abraham did. But now you are trying to kill me and a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God, that’s not what Abraham did. You are indeed doing what your father said.” They said to him, “We are not bastards, we are not illegitimate children, we have one father God Himself.

[13] So they try another tactic, well if he won’t be satisfied with Abraham as being the Father, okay, we’ll have God as our Father.

Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father you would love me, for I came from God, and now I am here. I did not come of my own, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? Is it because you cannot accept my word? You are from your father the devil.”

[14] The devil? These are the people who believe in him, and Jesus ends up the whole thing as I told—they finally end up saying, yeah the Jews in verse 48 the Jews are saying, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” Now they’re both being antagonistic, and finally the chapter ends way down there as I talked about last time verse 56,

“Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day, he saw it and was glad.” Then the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” Jesus said to him, “Very truly I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.”

[15] There’s that strong Christological claim of Jesus being God himself, and of course they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple. Notice there are these things going on, Jesus speaks in riddles in the Gospel of John. Jesus does not do what a good Yale instructor is supposed to do, which is explain things to you. Jesus talks in riddles. When they ask questions he responds in—with non-sequiturs. And then when they act like they want to believe in him he pushes them and then starts picking at them, and accusing them of stuff and eventually the scene ends up with everybody is all frustrated, Jesus is accusing them of trying to kill him, and sure enough then they do start to try to kill him. Notice how in the Gospel of John repeatedly these issues come down to Christology. Who is the person of Jesus? The point at which they pick up the stones to throw at him is when he makes this claim by quoting Exodus, the very name of God, that Jesus himself is God.

2. Differing Christologies in Early Christianity

[16] Now with all that going on let’s look at how this then plays itself out in the first letter of John. Just to back up, remember how diverse we’re finding Christianity, and we’re going to start seeing that diversity now representing itself in Christology. We have seen it already in geography, right? We’ve seen that, and according to the Book of Acts, the Gospel spread out in concentric circles from Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria to the ends of the earth, but we also saw how in Acts if you read it critically between the lines you can see it didn’t really spread that way. There were

anonymous Christians who went off out of Jerusalem after a certain period of persecution and they took the message to Cyrene and to different parts of the east of the Mediterranean and these were anonymous people, we don’t know them, they weren’t Peter.

[17] Then later Paul and Barnabas take things around, and Phillip goes off to Samaria, and maybe there’s this Ethiopian eunuch in the Book of Acts who’s converted, and he may take the Gospel back to Ethiopia. So the spread of Christianity historically was much messier then it really is portrayed in any straightforward way in the New Testament. It seemed to have been spread by just people going to their home villages and hometowns and taking back this message that they heard in different places. The way the Gospel spreads, the way Christianity spreads is differently. We saw, for example, that in Thomasine Christianity, which seems to have been very popular in Syria and then all the way into India, that’s a form of Christianity that’s slightly different from the form of Christianity that’s rising up in Rome at the time. Although church tradition says that Peter was the one who took the Gospel to Rome and founded the church there, well, we have good reasons as you can tell why we historians tend to doubt that. Why? Because we attend—we believe basically that again anonymous Christians who are lost to history probably were the first ones who took the Gospel to Rome, and then Peter became connected—with that tradition. There’s a certain kind of Christianity that’s growing up in Rome, there’s another kind of Christianity that’s growing up in Syria and India, there’s another kind of Christianity that’s growing up in Antioch and in that part of western Syria, and there’s another kind of Christianity we don’t know anything about at this point that’s probably growing up in Egypt, we just don’t have enough sources to know what kind of Christianity may have been growing up in Egypt.

[18] There’s different geographical regions experiencing different kinds of Christianity, and those different kinds of Christianity are diverse with respect to the Torah, the Jewish law right? If there’s another—if there is still a form of Christianity that’s predominantly Jewish that’s located in Jerusalem and it’s led by James the brother of Jesus, who seems to have been famous for advocating a certain

kind of law observant Torah obedient form of discipleship to Jesus, then you've got a form of Jewish Christianity that still seems to be keeping the law, and we've seen that reflected possibly in the Gospel of Matthew, with its teaching that the law is still something that people ought to obey. We've seen though that the Gospel of Mark teaches a Christianity that maybe it—some people say Mark was written in Rome, other people say maybe Mark was written in Syria or in Galilee, but it's some kind of Christianity that's now predominantly Gentile, although it still has Jewish elements, but these are people who are not keeping the law. They seem to believe that they don't have to keep the Jewish law. Then we've got the form of Christianity in Luke that we saw where the Torah, the law, represents a certain ethnic tradition of the Jews, so if you're Jewish you should keep the law but if you're a Gentile you don't need to keep the law. Then we saw from the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of John where is the concern about the law at all? It's not really there. You can read all the way through the Gospel of John, sure there are some controversies about the Sabbath, about what you can do on the Sabbath, but disputes about observation of Jewish law are not really at issue in the Gospel of Thomas and they're not really at issue in the Gospel of John.

[19] What is at issue in the Gospel of John is Christology. What do you believe about Jesus? Let's look at the different kinds of Christologies you get in early Christianity too before we move onto the letters. First Mark, the Gospel of Mark, what is Mark's Christology? What is his doctrine of Christ? Well for one thing, according to Mark, Jesus is the Son of God, now that doesn't necessarily mean yet that Jesus is completely divine or equal to God. You can be called a Son of God without necessarily being God himself in this period of Christianity, but at least Mark certainly considers Jesus the Son of God. He also, though, considers Jesus to be the Messiah, the Christ, who has to suffer and Jesus' suffering is for the purpose of ransoming us sinners. Now the Christology that Mark's working with is Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, it's mandated that he suffers, so it's God's will that the Messiah suffer. And that's one of the reasons he writes his Gospel is to convince his readers that Jesus' suffering and execution wasn't an

accident and it wasn't a catastrophe, and it wasn't a calamity, it was God's will, it needed to happen. So the suffering Son of God is part of Mark's Christology.

[20] If you get to Luke, as I've said before, this whole idea that Jesus' death was a ransom is not in Luke. In fact, Luke excises that part of Mark when he's copying that part of Mark, and he leaves out that ransom passage from Mark because that doesn't fit his Christology. For the Christology of Luke, do you remember, Luke and Acts, what is the Christology of Luke? Anybody want to venture a remembrance? The martyr prophet exactly. Jesus is the martyr prophet who's an example for Stephen, or Paul, or all of us who are followers of Jesus, we're all martyr prophets, we're called to be martyr prophets, that's not a ransom for many. Luke doesn't have a doctrine of the atonement, the Christian doctrine that says, the death of Jesus was to pay for the sins of humanity or to redeem human beings from the debts of sin, so that's Luke's.

[21] The Gospel of Thomas, there's no death at all in the Gospel of Thomas. The Christology of the Gospel of Thomas though is that Jesus comes across as practically an already resurrected figure. He's a knower, he's a figure of wisdom who's come from the Father, who's come from above, and he comes to give his disciples true knowledge. So Jesus as the revealer of hidden knowledge is the main Christology of the Gospel of Thomas.

[22] Now the Gospel of John, this is when you get closest to what will be seen as orthodox Christianity. A lot of orthodox Christology was set at least, at one of the main periods, at the Council of Nicaea. So we call this the Council of Nicaea in 325 of our era CE, there was a council called together by the Emperor Constantine who was tired of all these Christians squabbling, especially about Christology, and he got bishops and people from around the empire, and he tried to get them to come to an agreement. They wrote what has come down to be called the Nicene Creed. And a lot of Christians, Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, Anglicans, some other churches, will actually say the Nicene Creed in church as part of the literature. Can anybody say it?

[23] We believe in—some of you know it, yes, you know the Nicene Creed, so that Nicene Creed about Jesus being very God, from very God, God from God, light from light, begotten not made, because that was one of the Christological—so was Jesus Son of God because he was born from eternity as divine or did God say at one point okay he's a really good guy I'm going to graduate him to divinity status? That was one Christology. The Nicene Creed said, no, Jesus did not become divine he always was divine. The orthodox Christology was set to a great extent by the Nicene Creed in 325, but how do we get from the year 30 when Jesus is crucified, the year 70 when the Jerusalem temple is destroyed and the Gospel of Mark may have been published, the 50s when Paul was writing his letters, maybe a year in the 90s when the Gospel of John is writing, from those times all the way to year 325 where there's a whole lot of fighting going on between Christians trying to solidify what the orthodox Christology should be?

[24] Of these different sources we've talked about, the one that comes the closest to the Nicene Creed is this Christology of the Gospel of John, because according to John, Jesus is fully God, co-equal with the Father, he's I am, that is identifying himself with the figure who appeared to Moses in the burning bush, he's the descending and ascending redeemer, he's also the lamb of God sacrificed for the people, and in his sacrifice he takes away the sins of the world. All those elements that would end up becoming orthodox Christianity, orthodox Christology, those can be found in the Gospel of John.

[25] Now how do we get from there to 1 John? Any questions about that? What I want you to really see is I want you to be able to anchor down, not just take my word for it that well, Professor Martin knows all things about all things, and he tells me that there are these different Christology's and these different early Christian documents and so that's what I'm going to write back on a paper. I don't want that. What I want you to do is be able to actually anchor down these ideas into these particular texts that come from particular different places in early Christianity, so any questions about that? Yes sir?

[26] *Student:* [Inaudible]

[27] *Professor Dale Martin:* The Christology of Matthew is quite a bit like Mark. Matthew also believes that the death of Jesus, for example, was as a ransom for people and for sins. Matthew also believes that Jesus is the Son of God and that he is the Messiah. Exactly how divine Jesus is in the Gospel of Matthew is up for grabs, it's not clear, but he still—he definitely seems to believe that Jesus is divine in some sense. Matthew's Christology is not too much different from Mark's. The one thing that makes him a bit different is that he seems to also take Jesus to be something like a new Moses who either—who not is giving a new law but is interpreting the Mosaic Law in the proper way, so Jesus as a law giver and Jesus as a teacher is also important for Matthew's Christology. Any other questions?

3. Themes in 1 John

[28] Okay look at 1 John, the first letter of John, right toward the end of the New Testament. Now, first, there are several different connections with 1 John to the Gospel that you can see immediately. Let's hop through the Gospel and see these. First look at the very beginning,

“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 concerning the word of life.”

[29] That all should sound familiar, there's the seeing motif, the hearing motif, and even the touching thing because, if you remember, it's in the Gospel of John that you have that famous scene where doubting Thomas wants to touch Jesus' body to make sure about—that this is the real Jesus.

“This life was revealed, and we have seen it and testified to it [testimony and testifying and witnessing is part of the Gospel of John also] and declare to you the eternal life [eternal life is one of the themes from the Gospel of John] that was with the Father and was revealed to us. [There's Jesus as the revealer.] We declared to you what we have seen and heard so that you may also have fellowship with us. And truly our fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.

We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

- [30] We're in the same world, the same linguistic, the same discursive, the same theological world as the Gospel of John. Look at 1:5, "This is the message we have heard from him and proclaimed to you that God is light and in him there is no darkness." That wonderful light/darkness motif. Look at verse 7:

If we walk in the light, as he himself in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his son cleanses us from all sin.

- [31] The blood of Jesus being significant there too. 2:29: "If you know that he is righteous you, may be sure that everyone who does right has been born of him." So born of him recalls this birth stuff we've just seen in John 3. And there are lots of others, if you just read through the first letter of John and you keep your ear attuned to those themes that you've already seen in the Gospel of John, you can just underline them and highlight them all the way through the letter of John, so they're there.

- [32] There are some interesting problems with this letter also. Look at 1:8:

If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned we make him a liar and his word is not in us.

- [33] All of us are sinners, yay! You just have to confess your sin and Jesus will cure you of sin. We're all sinners. Anybody who says they're not sinners has a problem. Now look at 3:5, "You know that he was revealed to take away sins and in him there is no sin, no one who abides in him sins." I thought we just said we are sinners. "No one who sins has either seen him or known him." That sounds a little problematic.

- [34] Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed to this person to destroy the works of the devil. Those who have been born of God do not sin

because God's seed abides in them. They cannot sin because they have been born of God. 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.

- [35] Now wait a minute, the first part he says, we all sin and we have to confess our sins. In this part it says, if you're in him you don't sin, and if you do sin you're in the devil. Look at 5:18, "We know that those who are born of God do not sin, but the one who is born of God protects them and the evil one does not touch them." Well which is it? Do Christians in John's church sin or do they not sin? Is there a contradiction here in the text?

- [36] That's not the only weird place in this letter, look at what he says about love in 2:5: "Whoever obeys his word truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him." Love is supposed to be there, 2:10, "Whoever loves a brother," now your English translation may say "or sister," but the Greek just says "brother" and maybe it's supposed to include sisters also but the gender of the Greek word is just "brother" at this point in the Greek. "Whoever loves a brother lives in the light and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling." Okay so that talks about loving one's brother, well who is the brother? It seems like the brothers for this writer are other members of the same community. He's not necessarily talking about your physical brother, your blood brother, but he's also not talking about just any human being. Notice how this works several times, so look at 2:15, so we're supposed to love and we're supposed to love our brothers but 2:15, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world." So we're not supposed to love the world, "Love not the world, do not love the world." Remember the word for world I said last time was cosmos, the entire universe. Does this sound a little odd if you think back on what may be the most famous verse in the entire New Testament? If you go to football games anybody know what the most famous football verse is? John 3:16, you see it on posters—do they still—they did that years ago do—they don't still do the posters I guess, right? Just one guy

does it all over the whole NFL? John 3:16—yes sir?

[37] *Student:* Well I was going to say during the VCS National Championship game before the quarterback wore a John 3:16 on his eye block.

[38] *Professor Dale Martin:* Did they win?

[39] *Student:* They did win and he made it the number one Google search [inaudible].

[40] *Professor Dale Martin:* Great! The Florida quarterback wore John 3:16 on his cheeks, these cheeks I suppose, and that's why they won, okay, good. What does John 3:16 say, let's quote it, "For God so loved the world—

[41] *Students:* "...that he gave his only begotten Son—"

[42] *Professor Dale Martin:* You all are wimpy. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son—," "—for God so loved the world." 1 John 2:15, "Do not love the world." Yes sir?

[43] *Student:* [Inaudible]

[44] *Professor Dale Martin:* I believe so, I actually haven't checked, does anybody have a Greek New Testament? Michael has a Greek, Michael's going to look it up while I continue, this is 2:15 and see if cosmos or some other word is the word for world though. We'll get back to you on that question. Look at 3:1:

See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

[45] Love is part of that, look at 3:11:

For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

[46] This is loving one another; it's not talking here so much about loving the world. Look at 3:14:

We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death.

[47] Look at 3:23:

And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

[48] Look at 4:7:

Beloved let us love one another because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

[49] Look at 4:11:

Beloved since God loved us so much we ought to love [not the world but] one another.

[50] Verse 12:

No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God loves us in us and his love is perfected in us.

[51] What about the translation?

[52] *Student:* Same verb, same noun.

[53] *Professor Dale Martin:* Same verb, same noun in John 3:16 and 1 John 2:15, so is there a contradiction? That's just all I'm asking, the Gospel of John talks about God loving the world, the cosmos, and 1 John says Christians are not supposed to love the cosmos. Contradiction, we don't know, maybe not. Look at 4:16:

So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love and those who abide in love abide in God and God abides in them. [Keep reading.] Love has indeed been perfected among us in this that we may have boldness in the Day of Judgment. Because as he is so are we in this world. There is no fear in love but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters are liars. And for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen cannot love God whom they have not seen.

[54] The commandment we have from his is this: those who love God must love all of humanity.

What? No, I'm lying to you again; follow along in your Bibles. See, some of you went to sleep. Look at 21:

The commandment we have from him is this, those who love God must love their brothers.

[55] There's nothing in 1 John about loving the world, about loving humanity, about loving all humankind, all mankind, there's nothing like that in the first letter of John. What you do have in the first letter of John is that God is love, but that Christians, the followers of John, must not love the world. The world doesn't love them, they don't love the world. This is again a radically sectarian kind of stance, and in fact, there's nothing here about loving outsiders. According to the first letter of John, all this love that's talked about is basically centered only on the community of believers. It's an internal love, it's brotherly love but that means that the term "brothers" is taken to mean members of John's own community. There's nowhere that Christians in 1 John are told to love people outside the community. They're told repeatedly to love people inside the community. Yes sir?

[56] *Student:* [Inaudible]

[57] *Professor Dale Martin:* Out of brother—just to the community of believers? Well you just have to analyze the letter and see how does it occur here and just go through it, it occurs all the way through. For example, I think you could definitely prove it with letters of Paul, who specifically uses it for both Gentiles and Jews but only within the body of Christ. Whether that's the case here, you just have to read the letter. I would argue that it is, and it's precisely because I read the letter as setting up this dichotomy between the outside cosmos and the inside brotherhood, but it's just a matter of reading the letter. The word in itself wouldn't necessarily supply that. Any other questions? Yes sir?

[58] *Student:* Is that the same as [Inaudible]?

[59] *Professor Dale Martin:* Yes, I believe—well sometimes it's philia and sometimes agape.

[60] *Student:* [Inaudible]

[61] *Professor Dale Martin:* Okay, in the epistles it's almost always agape. Any other questions?

4. Sectarianism and 1 John

[62] In other words, what I'm reading in 1 John is representing again a radical sectarian group. These are people who see themselves as a community set apart from the cosmos. The cosmos is a place of darkness and a place of the devil and that sort of thing. In fact—so now what is the cause of this radical sectarianism? This is the most interesting problem of the letter. Look at 2:18:

Children, it is the last hour. As you have heard that the antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come.

[63] There are these antichrists, and notice it says:

They went out from among us but they did not belong to us. For if they had belonged to us they would have remained in us, but by going out they made it plain that none of them belongs to us.

[64] The people he's calling antichrist are people that used to members of his own community and they left the community for some reason. Now look at 2:22, "Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ." He's saying you must believe that Jesus is the Messiah, that's one thing, is that the only thing? Not necessarily; this is the antichrist, "The one who denies the Father and the Son," so some people, he's saying, have left the community because their Christology is not high enough. They're not allowing the true sonship of Jesus, they're not allowing the Messiahship of Jesus; maybe you're saying he's just a prophet or he's just a human being, that's one of the things that's going on. Look at 5:1:

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. Everyone who loves the parent loves the child.

[65] That's the main part about Jesus being the Christ, but now look at 4:2, I'll start at the beginning of chapter 4:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are from God,

for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God, and this is the spirit of the antichrist.

[66] One of the things that's going on here—look at also 5:8, just briefly, and we'll move on:

These are three that testified: the spirit and the water and the blood. And these three agree.

[67] In other words, this author is objecting to some people who don't admit the Messiahship of Jesus, and that may have been reflected also in the Gospel. Remember some of the reasons—some of the people there's a division is because the writer of the Gospel of John believes that some people aren't willing to confess that Jesus is divine, that Jesus is the Messiah, that he's the Son of God. Now we get to a different situation, apparently there are other people who have now come up in the community who may be accepting that Jesus was the Christ but they're denying that he was fully human, they're denying that he was flesh and blood, and actually we do see different beginnings of different Christologies.

[68] The people—we have a term for this, these early Christians who said—they said that Jesus—maybe there was a human Jesus but that's not really the Christ, the Christ was this spirit that maybe looked like he was human—in fact some of them said, well if he walked along a wet beach he wouldn't leave footprints because he didn't have a physical body, he just was spirit. He just seemed to be a body, he seemed to be flesh and blood and that—the Greek word for “seem” he just looked like, we get this term we call Docetics. *Dokeo* is the Greek word for “to seem” or “to look like,” so other Christians used this term as a label for those Christians who said, Jesus wasn't truly flesh and blood, because how can a divine being be flesh and blood? That's a contradiction in terms. You can't have a being that's both God and flesh and blood because flesh and blood rots and dies, and goes away. God is eternal, so God by definition can't be flesh and blood, and so they said, if Jesus is divine he must not have been flesh and blood. He must have just seemed like

he was flesh and blood. Other Christians said, that's wrong and they call these people the “Seemsters,” Docetics. Docetism refers to a Christology that says Jesus is spirit; the Christ is spirit, but not really flesh and blood human.

[69] Notice how this author is arguing against different kinds of ideas and it shows a further split in early Christianity. You have some people believing that Jesus was human but not fully divine, other people believing that he was so divine that he wasn't even human, and this author is trying to hold together these two things. Now how this happened—so that's what's going on, the Gospel—the first letter of John shows a community that's again divided but now it's divided by some of the people within its midst going off because they thought, you can't have a flesh and blood God, and therefore, if you're going to have Jesus as God he can't be flesh and blood, so they've left the community.

5. *The Changing Community of 2 and 3 John*

[70] Let's look at 2 John, this is a little—I'm going to read all the way through this one because this is going—we need to sort of figure out what's going on. It's a very short letter. “The elder,” so he calls himself the elder, so he doesn't even give us his name.

The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth, and not only I but also all who know the truth, because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever ... I was overjoyed to find some of your children walking in the truth just as we have been commanded by the Father.

[71] He's talking to an elect lady and her children, most of us think this is a metaphor and he's actually addressing this to a church. The elect lady probably means the church itself, not a particular human person, but that's just a judgment call.

But now, dear lady, I ask you not as though I were writing to you a new commandment but one we had from the beginning, let us love one another.

[72] There's that love thing, so we're know we're still in the same kind of Christianity that we were with the others.

This is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment that you have heard from the beginning ... Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. [There are those people again.] Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Be on your guard so that you do not lose what we have worked for but may receive a full reward. Everyone who does not abide in the teaching of Christ but goes beyond it does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. Do not receive into the 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.

[73] The main purpose of this very short letter is to say, to another church that's in the same kind of community with this one, there are people who have left our community and the reason is they don't believe Jesus was fully flesh and blood. Don't even let them come to visit you, these are traveling preachers, and he says, don't receive them, don't give them money, don't give them food, don't put them up in your guest room, just completely shun them, so he's writing to another church because of this.

[74] Now look at 3 John: "The elder to the beloved Gaius," now it's the same person writing, he says, but now it's to a man named Gaius, not to the elect lady.

I pray that all may go with you, in good health ... Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the friends, even though they are strangers to you. They have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on in a manner worthy of God, for they began their journey for the sake of Christ accepting no support from non-believers.

[75] This is a letter that has been sent around, probably with other traveling preachers, but these traveling preachers seem to be representatives of the elder himself, the author. He's writing to a man named Gaius and says, you're a good guy, you receive our messengers, you receive the people that we're sending around to preach. "I have written

something to the church" –oh he did write a letter to the church, so now you see he wrote another letter to the church, he's writing this letter to an individual.

"But Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come"—in other words, Diotrephes seems to be the leader of a church and has not allowed the elder to send his letter to that church. He's intercepting letters and not allowing these things to be read aloud in the church. All these letters were supposed to be read aloud in churches.

[76] If I come I will call attention to what he is doing in spreading false charges against us. And not content with these charges, he refuses to welcome the friends and even prevents those who want to do so and expels them from the church.

[77] Diotrephes is refusing to welcome the messengers from the elder that the elder sent ahead of himself with the letter that makes up 2 John. You see what's going on here? There's a leader of this Johannine church, probably after the writing of the Gospel, probably after the writing of 1 John, and he writes 2 John as a sort of introductory letter to a church, and he says, I'm sending you some of my messengers, receive them, listen to the letter, give them what they need, help them out financially, put them up in your guest room, and then send them on their way so they can travel around to other Christian churches. Something's gone wrong though, maybe this is a different—maybe 3 John—we don't know, this is speculation, maybe 3 John is another letter that he had to write to an individual in that town because 2 John didn't work. Why? It may be that those people disagreed with him about his Christology also, so they may have received the very people that he thought they shouldn't receive. And so he writes 3 John to an individual saying, Diotrephes is causing a bunch of problems not receiving my messengers and not allowing my letters to be read in church.

[78] You see how this represents—this is all guess work. We don't know what's going on but we see several things about the letter. There's a greeting, there are well wishes, there's praise of the reputation and behavior of the recipients, he attempts to establish a

relationship, he talks to this person—he’s the father’s son or a patron client relationship and there’s a letter of recommendation. Send them on, this is what you do in the ancient world, you give a messenger—there’s no post office you know. You give a letter to someone who’s traveling and that person gets to a friend of yours to where it says, and they show the letter, that letter is read outside—read aloud to the group, and then you put that person up or those people up, you host them for a while, they talk and you share your messages, and then you send them on—you give them a little bit of financial support to send them on their way to the rest of the travel. That’s clearly what is going on and both of these letters are letters of recommendation, typical letters of recommendation.

[79] What makes it interesting is that 2 John seems to have been a letter of recommendation that didn’t work, maybe. And then 3 John had to be written to an individual because his letter couldn’t get through to the whole church. What’s the cause of this division? Clearly the cause of division in the Gospel of John is that some people are not accepting a high enough Christology, they’re not accepting that Jesus is truly divine. They might be accepting that Jesus is human but not that he is divine. The situation has shifted slightly by the time we get to the 1 John, the letter, because there it seems like yes he’s talked about some people are antichrist because they’ve denied that Jesus is the Messiah but other people are antichrist because they’ve denied that Jesus is flesh.

[80] He says they have gone out from among us, so the church has been split again on the issue of Christology but now the Christology is do you accept the full fleshness of Jesus, but then when you get to 2 John and 3 John, the split—is the split now doctrinal? Is it Christological? Or is this just a split over who gets to be the leader? Who gets to be the recognized leader of these churches? Is it the elder? Do his letters have to be accepted and his emissaries get accepted in different churches? Or is it this guy Diotrephes? Is he sort of trying to buck the elder for the leadership? Is there a dispute over

Christology? Do they disagree about Christology or is it now a purely a personnel leadership issue? It’s very difficult to see but you can very quickly see by looking at these four different documents, the Gospel of John, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, four different documents which may have been written in the—not by the same person, we don’t think they’re all written by the same person, but they’re clearly written by the same school of early Christianity. They share enough the vocabulary and enough theology. You can almost see four different stages of development and you see what we might expect.

[81] Remember I said that in growing up in Texas we always said “let’s make like a Baptist church and split.” Early churches also seem to split a lot, is that what we see here? Four different stages of a church with different kinds of divisions happening and, therefore different, kinds of Christianity developing due to these divisions; very possible. Any questions about that? Questions, comments, outbursts? Now what I’ve just given you is one reading of these texts, and I’ve done a lot of speculating. For example, you could just say, well 2 John may have been written to one church and 3 John is written to a totally different geographical region, that’s entirely possible. I think it’s interesting to put them in this way and read them this way, but that’s just one historical reconstruction because a lot of what I’m teaching you is let’s—how do you imagine history developing if all you have are these texts by which you construct the history of the early church? Next time we’re going to shift gears dramatically because now we’re not going to be talking about the historical situation of the text, we’re going to be talking about how do you get through all these texts to try to figure out the historical Jesus himself? Did Jesus of Nazareth really exist? What did he do? What did he say? What did he think of himself? That’s what we’ll talk about next time.

[end of transcript]