



SCHOOL FOR MINISTRY
The Episcopal Diocese of San Diego

NEW TESTAMENT 2

3.2 The Johannine Epistles: I, II & III John

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This week we will be reading the three Letters traditionally attributed to John – the “Johannine Epistles.” *Which* John, precisely, is a matter of great debate – John the Disciple, John the Evangelist, John of Patmos (author of Revelation), or John the Presbyter? The Letters are anonymous, so it’s a matter of endless speculation. Because of stylistic differences, most scholars think that the Johannine Epistles were not written by the same author as the Gospel of John – but may well have been written for the same community (the “Johannine Church”) by a single individual (there is considerable thematic and stylistic unity among the Letters), towards the end of the 1st Century C.E. Generically, the three letters are distinct: I John is a sermon full of exhortation and encouragement, warning against false teaching that appears to have crept into the community; II John is a personal letter to an “elect lady” and her children that are clearly loved by the author (is this an individual, or a euphemism for the church?), warning about false teachers; and III John is another personal letter to “Gaius” about “Diotrephes,” a recently excommunicated heretic who is causing disruption in the community. Many scholars today believe that the unifying factor in the Johannine Epistles is the corrupting effect of an early version of “Gnosticism” within the community.

Assignment #11 for Class on Saturday 6th April 2019

Reading

Please read through the three Johannine Epistles. I suggest reading the Introductions to the Letters in your Oxford Annotated NRSV Bible beforehand; and then reading through the Letters one by one. Each letter is short and can be read at one sitting. Go back and re-read the Letters again at a subsequent time, using the annotations in your NRSV to help with clarification and interpretation. I would also like you to do some research on the complex phenomenon known as “Gnosticism.” The Wikipedia article is not a bad place to start, and you can follow up some leads from the Further Reading and External Web Sources at the bottom of the Article, or by searching elsewhere on the internet using reputable, scholarly sources.

Thinking & Responding

For this week’s Response Paper, I’d like you to address the challenge of what appears to be an outbreak of “Gnosticism” in the Johannine community. *What is “Gnosticism”? Why is Gnosticism a particular vulnerability in the Johannine Community (especially the Theology of the Gospel of John) - particularly when it comes to Christology? How does the threat of Gnosticism help us to understand the central issue in each of the Johannine Epistles? How do these Letters help us understand the distinction between “orthodoxy” and “heresy” in the early church?* Please write your Response of approximately 600 words in total on these two subjects (12-point font, double-spaced, one-inch margin, with your name at the top of the paper). **Please e-mail me your papers as MS Word Attachments** so that I can grade them remotely, and send you Feedback and Comments in Track-Change.