

John (Part 1)

Distinctions Between John and the Other Gospels

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Tonight we are going to begin a study in the New Testament, and I am going to warn you from the very beginning that it will probably take us a good while to go through the book of John.

Tonight we are going to be going into the background, and there is such a wealth of material here that we could very easily spend—if we wanted to spend one night on each chapter, plus tonight—twenty two weeks, that is almost half a year. However, there is such a wealth of material here I perceive that in some cases we may spend two, three, or four nights on some of these chapters. The reason is we will be able to digress onto things that I feel are essential to understanding.

We are going to use the book of John as a basis, and it is going to provide the background and the outline, but we may get into other subjects that come up in the book of John and go into them in a bit of detail as well.

I was thinking that in the first chapter, for instance, that after what I plan to give next week, we might just spend a week or two proving that Jesus *is* the Christ—there are things that we can pick up historically, and put them into the flow of the first chapter of John. I hope that you will find it interesting, and that you will not find it boring because we spend so much time in one area. I will try to make it as interesting as I possibly can, and hopefully your understanding will increase a great deal.

Why is there even a book of John? Were not Matthew, Mark, and Luke sufficient to do the job? It is something that needs to be considered, and it needs to be considered deeply, because I think that God felt that Matthew, Mark, and Luke were not sufficient. The three accounts were not enough, and there had to be a fourth. As we go through this background tonight, we are going to see why a fourth book was necessary. It is very interesting that, even though it was written probably around 95 or 100 AD, it was not an afterthought in any way, shape, or form. It was written by somebody with extremely keen insight into Jesus Christ. It was obviously written by someone who had spent a great deal of time thinking about what he was going to be putting into this book. We are going to see that there is something that distinguishes John from all the other accounts of the life of Jesus Christ.

As a generality, we are going to see that difference is that John is different. Now how

different, you will see by the time we get to the end of the book in chapter 21. Matthew, Mark, and Luke have a great many similarities. They may see something from a slightly different angle. The events they describe even may appear at a slightly different place in the context of the book. Whereas Matthew tends to write topically, Luke pretty much has things chronologically arranged. But John is not held in by chronology at all. He kind of wanders around. Although there definitely is a chronological order to what he wrote, he is not bound by it at all. Yet he does not really write topically, either.

There are a great many differences between John and the other three gospels. Again, we can say generally that John omits much of what they include, and John adds what they do not even speak of.

John has no account of the birth of Jesus Christ. We will just begin at the beginning. John says nothing at all about (except in a general way) the baptism of Jesus Christ. He says nothing at all about the temptation that appears in the other three. Did you know that John says nothing at all about exorcising a demon? The other three have numerous accounts of the exorcising of demons. Did you know that John does not have one parable in it? Did you know that? The others have a lot of parables.

Something else: there is no direct public preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom of God in the book of John. Of course, everything that he reports there is *about* the Kingdom of God, but it is not like Matthew, who said that "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel." Mark says, "Jesus came into Galilee after the death of John, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God." John says no such thing. You will find no direct teaching of the Kingdom of God.

The Lord's Prayer is not in John's gospel.

The other books have accounts of Jesus associating with publicans and sinners. John completely avoids it.

In the other three accounts, Jesus' ministry is almost restricted to Galilee. The other three accounts only mention one foray into Jerusalem, and that was the last Passover when Jesus was killed. John's account, on the other hand, is just the opposite. Almost everything centers on Judea and Jerusalem, and there are only brief forays into Galilee. That supplies teaching that the others do not even begin to touch on.

John has no mention of the transfiguration. John has nothing at all about the Last Supper, in the sense that the other three do, although of course he mentions the footwashing, which the others do not. John has nothing at all about the prayers in

Gethsemane, where the others mention those accounts. There is no account of the ascension to heaven, either, and other things as well.

One of the major differences is something that maybe you are not aware of, but once I say it I think you will begin to become aware of. That is, that teaching in Matthew, Mark, and Luke is given in very short accounts. Almost all of the action in the events that are given by those men take place in a very few, short verses—maybe 8, 10 verses—and then it moves on to another account. John is not like that at all. When John tells you about something, it generally takes a whole chapter—25, 30, 40 verses. He goes into explicit detail that the others just gloss over. There is a reason for that, which we will get to as we go along.

Even the approach in these long discourses of Jesus that John records is confrontational. It is argumentative. It is not preaching in the sense that you see in the other three, but rather it contains accounts of—well, I do not like to use the word debate—differences of opinion between the people who are listening and Jesus who was speaking.

If you were to take the other three accounts and study them very carefully, you would find that the ministry of Jesus only lasted a little over a year. But when you put John in, you find that the ministry was longer than three years. He has a wider-ranging approach, chronologically, than the others do, and of course goes into much greater detail.

The others show one account of the cleansing of the Temple—where Jesus overturned the tables and drove out the moneychangers. John makes it very clear that there were two. There was one at the beginning of the ministry, where Jesus announced, "This is what I'm going to do—I'm going to clean up the Temple," and there was one at the end.

John alone tells of the marriage at Cana, where He turned the water into wine. The others do not say a word about that. John alone tells about Nicodemus. John alone tells about the woman at Samaria. John spends more time on the Holy Spirit than the other three put together.

John gives more insight into what the disciples were like. The others mention the disciples. The others mention what the disciples might have said. But John describes what they were like—their character, and their reactions other than words.

Where there are agreements between Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and something is reported in one, two, or three, as well as in John, John goes into greater detail. For

example, in the miracle of the feeding of all those people—the five thousand, or the four thousand, and I am not sure which one it was—it is John alone that tells you that the loaves were made out of barley. He does not just say they are loaves, he says that they are *barley* loaves.

When John gives an area in which something takes place, he tells you specific details about it. He will tell you it was "three miles" (I am using a modern length) from such-and-such a place. The others do not say things like that. He is the one who tells you there were *six* stone water pots. He just does not say 'water pots.' There were exactly six. He is the one who tells you that there were *four* men gambling for the belongings of Jesus, and that Jesus' robe was seamless. The others mention it, but they do not tell you that it was seamless.

John knows the exact weight of the amount of spices that were used to anoint the body of Jesus. The others merely report that He was anointed. The others report the anointing of Jesus by Mary prior to his death, but John alone remembers the odor filled the whole house.

You are beginning to get an insight into what John was like. John was a man who noticed intimate details of things. He was a man, apparently, whose attention nothing escaped. Even things that most would overlook—someone would say, "Boy, the fragrance is really strong." John says, "The fragrance filled the whole house," almost as if he went around with his nose to find out exactly where everything was.

He has very explicit knowledge of Jerusalem and Judea. I mentioned just a little bit earlier that John tells you "it was three miles from such-and-such a place," or "five miles from here to there." Again, John tells you that there were exactly five porches by the pool of Bethesda. He tells you about Solomon's Porch, and a lot of other intimate details.

What circumstances led to the writing of this book? Why did there need to be a fourth account of the life of Jesus Christ? We have to begin with when the book was written. The commentaries are pretty unanimous in agreeing that the book was written somewhere between 95 and 100 AD. If they choose to name a more specific date, they tend to believe it was closer to 100 AD. The fact that it was written that late accounts for a great deal of the understanding of why what is in the book of John is written there, and why it is so different from all of the others.

Let us go to Romans 15. Here Paul is talking about the contribution of the Gentiles to the saints in Jerusalem, apparently undergoing some kind of a famine and had need of

food.

Romans 15:27 It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things. . .

That is, the Jews' spiritual things. Salvation is of the Jews; the writers of the books of the Bible were Jews; the disciples that went out and brought the gospel to the Gentiles were Jews, so all of the Gentiles in that sense, up to that point had been indebted to the Jews in spiritual things.

Romans 15:27-29 . . .their duty [the duty of the Gentiles] is also to minister to them in material things. Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain. But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.

The book of Romans was written to a group of people that had not yet heard the apostle Paul, and undoubtedly heard the gospel. But that has a great deal to do with why the book of John was written, and that is that by the time we get to 70 AD, the influx of Gentiles in the church was increasing, and the influx of Jews into the church was decreasing, if it had not just about altogether stopped.

Most of you are aware of what took place in 70 AD—the destruction of the Temple. An organized system of life in Judea virtually ended. With it, virtually, came the end of the preaching of the gospel in the area of Judea. From that point on, most of the preaching undoubtedly was done in Gentile areas. This means, in practical fact, most of the people who were coming into the church had non-Jewish backgrounds. At best, if I can put it that way, they had a Hellenistic-Jewish background. But in most cases, what they had was a completely Hellenistic background, and they were Gentiles. In other words, most of the people coming into the church at this time had a Greek influence to their secular education.

So from the beginning of the preaching of the gospel by Jesus Christ up until about 70 AD, the church was predominantly Jewish, with a very small portion Gentile. However, the Jews declined, and the Gentiles increased. The whole Bible is written from a Jewish standpoint, if I can put it that way; Israelitish would be better—written from an Israelitish standpoint, with the Gentiles only coming into play as they came into contact with the Hebrew people, or with the Israelitish people. There had to be a need found in order to

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present the truth about Jesus Christ in a way that they—the Gentile peoples—could relate to without having to have a background in Hebrew thought.

If a Gentile came at the Old Testament, or even if he came by way of reading the writings of Matthew and of Luke—Luke apparently was a Gentile—both books, in the first three chapters begin with an account of the birth of Jesus Christ and with genealogy. Both books show that the roots of the Messiah were Israelitish. Both books show that this man descended from David, an Israelitish king, and from Abraham, the progenitor of the Israelitish people. The Gentiles have no background of thought in that area unless they happen to be extremely well-educated. How many of those people would there be coming into contact with the church? Very few.

Most of the people would be common people just as you and I are, coming out of probably the middle class of that day. Their educations were Hellenistic, so they had no teaching at all in Hebrew thought modes, no teaching at all—or very little teaching—in Israelitish history. I ask you, how much teaching do you have in Japanese history? Or in Chinese history, or Russian history, or German history?

Do you realize how difficult it would be for you to come up to speed if the message had an all-German background, or an all-Russian background? The thought modes, the history—everything would be strange to you. That is why the book of John was written. Since most of the people coming into the church by this time were from a Gentile background, we have the gospel presented in a way that met the kind of teaching, the kind of thought processes, and the kind of historical background from which they came. It filled a gap which was very much needed.

Acts 17:22-23 Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you:

You know the result of that preaching: they laughed him to scorn. They wanted to debate with him. It did not fit with the parameters of their thinking. This was very early in the life of the church, and there was nothing prepared at that time for those people—something that would approach them from their point of view, so that the Greek did not have to abandon all of his intellectual heritage in order to come into the church, and change into a Hebrew-thinking person. It is an interesting idea, but would it not be much better if we could present it to them in way that would be much more easily

recognizable and understandable? Sure.

It is part of the same principle by which we are operating today: we try to present the message of Jesus Christ—the gospel of the Kingdom of God—in a way that is more easily grasped by those who are going to receive it. So Mr. Armstrong, when he went to visit people in those countries over there, did not present the gospel in a way that an American would think, necessarily.

He used simple terminology that people all over the world could grasp. He talked about getting, about giving. He talked about the need for change in government, the insolvability of the problems that man has created, and on and on. He did it without bringing the Bible into play in a direct way, though without a doubt he was using the principles in the Bible as a form of teaching for these people. So when he talked to the Chinese, he could reach them in that way. Paul did this very thing.

I Corinthians 9:18-23 What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel. For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.

Paul was trying to approach these people in the best way possible, so that all of us could share in the glory of God. This is exactly what is done in the book of John, and why it is so different from all of the others.

John was especially equipped to be able to write this in a way that apparently none of the others was—not even the apostle Paul. Do you know why the apostle Paul, though he had been reared in a Greek, Hellenistic area was not able to present things as John could? The answer is really simple: he was not an eyewitness to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Only John, who lived through the period when Judaism and the Jewish world fell apart in 70 AD, was around when the church became almost totally Gentile. His roots went all

the way back to the beginning. Because he was a Jew who spent a lot of time in Gentile areas (this book was very likely written from the city of Ephesus), he had become well-acquainted with Hellenistic thinking to go along with his Jewish roots. So he alone of all the men who had been with Christ and all of the apostles was fitted to do this job.

It came along at a time that was just right, because from that time on the church, as far as we are able to see, though it followed the Israelitish people around, was always coming in contact with the Israelitish people **surrounded** by Gentiles. It provides them a means of getting the gospel by becoming a teacher with whom they can find some agreement.

Understanding that, John still had to find a lever, a key, or maybe a better way to put it would be, "something the Jews had in common with the Greek-thinking world." From this commonality, he could then present the gospel, beginning with something that they had in common. Do you what that was? It certainly was not language. But they both had a conception about something that was so similar that John was able to use it as the key which would unlock the way by which he would present the gospel. It was the *logos*.

I do not know whether you realize that, but the Jews had previous exposure to the *logos*. John was not the first Jewish person who came along who talked about the *logos*. There were many people before John who were Jews who associated the *logos* with the God of creation. "In the beginning was the Word"—the *logos*. That was something that the Jews were using commonly as well. But because it was something that they had in common, he was able to start with that and go from there.

I am going to add something to this in just a little bit, but I want to concentrate for just a little while on the *logos*. The Greeks looked upon the *logos* as the Word, or, a little bit more completely, as reason. Another way of putting it would be the "thought of reason." This is the way the Greeks would look at it. Remember, they were not familiar with the God of the Bible. I am sure that they had their own Creation account, but knowing that those things came right out of paganism, you know that they were probably a mess—as we would look at them.

But the Greeks, like others, could look at the Creation, and being of an intellectual bent of mind, he would see there order. He would see dependability. He would see how regularly the sun came up, and the moon came up, and all the phases of the moon. He would see how the stars seemed to move in the same courses all the time. They observed these things. They saw how the seasons changed. They saw weather patterns. They would try to reach a conclusion. "Who did all this?" Their answer would be the *logos*, which was their word for the mind of God, or for reason.

The Greeks reasoned that it was the mind of God dwelling in a man that made him a rational being and set him apart from the animals. I do not know whether you recognize that or not, but that thought is still present in religion today. All you have to do is read the commentaries that come out of Protestantism, especially, and Catholicism to a lesser degree, but nonetheless they feel that every man has a "spark of God" in him—that there is a bit of the mind of God there. Now, we are *creations* of God, but we do not have the mind of God.

So the Greeks reached a wrong conclusion—that every man had a spark of God—but they at least came to a conclusion that there was a creator, and that the Creator was responsible for setting man above the beasts, and making man able to reason. We find from the Bible that man is not "all there." He is not all there until he has the Spirit of God. Man *is* a creation of God, and man has been given the power of reason. But the **mind of God** is not there yet. The Greeks were on the right track. They did not know to whom to give the credit, so they said, "It was the *logos*"—the mind of God, the reason of God.

What John did was this: in essence, what he said was, "For all of your lives, you Greeks have been fascinated by the guiding and controlling mind of God. That mind of God was present, incarnate, in Jesus of Nazareth." That is why he began the way that he did: "In the beginning was the *logos*"—and then he goes on to present Jesus of Nazareth as God in the flesh—God incarnate. He *was* the mind of God.

The second thing that he built on: the Greeks, because of their background, and because of what is called Gnosticism—which is taken from a word which means "we know" or "to have knowledge"—had a conception of two worlds. There was a world that you and I are able to see—the material world. Their approach to it—this is the common, ordinary Greek—was, "Well, it is alright, but it is only a shadow. It is real, but it is only a shadow. It is not reality." What was reality was that world that they termed as being one of perfection and beauty.

Plato was a very clear proponent of this kind of thinking. He presented the idea, or the concept, of "forms." That idea went like this: for every chair that you and I are able to see and is material, it is only a shadow of the substance—the reality; that somewhere there was a *perfect* chair. You and I could not see it, but it was nonetheless there. They did this with **everything**. A chair might seem to be a dumb thing to you and me, but they carried this concept into every area of life.

John picked up on that, because it so permeated their thinking. It is good that you get this, (and in the next Bible Study I will probably go over some of this again), because it is essential to understanding the book of John. John picked up on this because the

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Greeks were coming close to the truth. They did not have it, but they were coming close.

A word that appears a number of times in the book of John is translated in the King James "true" or "truth." It is the Greek word *alethes* or *aletheia*. *Aletheia* means "truth," or is translated "truth," and *alethes* is translated "true." Those translations are not wrong. But a better translation would be our English word "real."

Part of understanding the book of John is that John presented Jesus as **reality**. He *is* reality. This is what we are aiming for—that He is reality.

John 1:9 That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.

The word "true" appears there as the fourth word. "Real" is really more descriptive. It comes closer to getting at what John was driving at. Jesus was the *real* light, as compared to the light that we are able to see.

Another one is found in John 6. This just gives you an overview.

John 6:32 Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true [real] bread from heaven.

The manna was only a type—only a symbol. When they ate it, they needed to eat it again. But the Word of God is reality that leads to eternal life, which is *real* life, because physical life is only a *shadow* of what is coming. Just like the holy days are called in Colossians 2 *shadows*. The holy days *are* shadows. They are not the reality. They are shadows of what is coming, or what has been (in the case of the Passover). That has been fulfilled—the reality has occurred. All of the sacrifices that were typical of Christ were the *shadows* of what was coming. The reality occurred when Christ died on the stake.

Pentecost—every time we keep it—it is a shadow of what has occurred. The reality occurred roughly 50 days after the resurrection of Christ when the Holy Spirit was given. Every time we keep the day of Trumpets, it is a shadow of what is coming. It is *typical*, but the reality is going to come whenever Christ comes. Christ is reality. He is the *real* Man—the way God *intends* man be. We are only striving to become like that. We are

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only shadows of what He was. That is the idea that he has grasped upon. Christ is the *logos*; Christ *is* reality.

Let us go to another one in John 15. This word just keeps turning up in key places.

John 15:1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser."

It is an analogy there. A vine gives life to its branches. He says very plainly that

John 15:2-4 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

Unless we are attached to the true vine, unless we are attached to the *real* Christ, we are never going to bear the right fruit. There are an awful lot of false Christs out there.

All the way through the book, from time to time John will bring the word up. He wants to keep reminding people what he is aiming for here. He is writing to people who think in these parameters. So if you and I are going to understand it, we have to understand where he is headed—and where he is headed is to present Christ as reality in every form that he possibly can that is important to our spiritual growth. Christ was reality in a world of shadows. He was reality, and everything else is a pale imitation of what He was.

What this amounted to in practical fact was this: John had to approach things differently from the other three. A good example of this is the miracles: healing; the making of the water into wine; the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Whenever Matthew, Mark, and Luke approach a miracle, they present it generally as an act of compassion—an act of mercy—that was done in order to alleviate some suffering. I challenge you to find that same approach in the book of John. John presents all of Jesus' miracles as *signs*. In fact, he explicitly uses that word, *signs*—over and over and over again. What does a sign do, pray tell? A sign advertises. A sign tells you what is located at such-and-such a place. A sign gives direction. What was this a sign of? It was a sign of the reality of God.

Let us go back to John 2. Here is the sign at the wedding of Cana of Galilee. Remember what I said about Matthew, Mark, and Luke—they present Jesus' miracles as acts of

compassion, or acts of mercy.

John 2:11 This beginning of signs. . .

It was a miracle—but he does not call them miracles, he calls them signs. He does this very explicitly. They were done, not as acts of compassion—which they definitely were—but apparently John understood that would not register in a Greek's mind as well as it would on a Hebrew's. Instead, he used them as indications of the glory of God—something that advertised, or pointed to, or was descriptive of, the glory of God. Certainly we can see this—that an act of mercy on God's part is to His glory as well. But John chose to emphasize this other aspect—something that was going to bring honor.

In chapter 9 and verse 3 is the healing of a blind man's eye:

John 9:3 Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.

That takes you another step further. God is glorified in His works. The emphasis in John, again, was not on compassion, it was not on mercy; it was to emphasize the way God works, and the way He thinks. I am leading to something here. In John, it is not that there is no love. He is emphasizing the reality of God *breaking into* human affairs.

This is very important to you. I began my ministry here by giving a sermon asking you whether you **see** God. Is God a reality to you? Do you see God breaking into human affairs? Do you see God interested in your life—in healing you, in prospering you, in changing your mind, your heart, your character, so you can be in His Kingdom?

Do you see Him involved in getting you a job, in keeping you from danger, in leading you around things that would otherwise be disruptive to you? Do you see Him correcting you? Do you see Him instructing you?

Do you see Him in every aspect of your life? Do you see God breaking into the reality of your existence? Do you see signs all around you that God is interested in your life?—that He cares, and He is concerned? **That** is what the book of John is about. He is showing a God who is not just compassionate, but rather a God that is interested in *every* aspect of life.

Is it not John that talks about "I came, not that you might have life only, but that you

might have life *more abundantly*?" He sees the miracles as signs that God is willing to intervene in the affairs of common, ordinary people in order to show Himself strong and concerned. That is the way he is presenting God—in Christ who is the reality. He is God incarnate.

In order to make sure that we get the point, all of the miracles are not just dropped whenever they occur. But for every one of these signs, he goes into a long discourse explaining it—explaining its spiritual application. John is not just interested in the compassionate nature of God; he is interested that we see God at work in every area of life, and aiming toward the perfection of character—of heart and mind—leading toward the resurrection in the Kingdom of God.

So the healings are just signs that point in that direction. This is where God is taking you. So then he sees the sign, not as an isolated act, but as a vehicle to show you and me what God is, and what He is always doing. I said *always*. This is not an isolated act that He did back in Judea, or in Galilee, in the first century AD. Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." Malachi says, "I am God, I change not." (Malachi 3:6)

John is saying, "This is reality." God is just as willing to intervene in your life in the twentieth century as He was in the first century. And what He did in the first century is a sign to you that He will do it!

The Gnostics—this is a little bit added on top of this—had as one of their basic doctrines that they carried this idea of the ordinary Greek a little bit further. That is, that there were two worlds. There was the world of the material, and then there was the *real* world. The Gnostics carried things a little bit further. They had the idea that matter is essentially evil—meaning it was evil by nature. That was Gnostic thought.

John had to deal with that because Gnosticism was one of the more influential religious ideas by 100 AD. It was a religion that had made very great inroads into the Hellenistic world. In order for that influence to be met, God had to provide an account of the life of Jesus Christ that would provide an influence against that kind of teaching—the kind of teaching that was *not* that influential when Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written. So what we find here in John is an adaptation to the times. Gnostic thinking has continued right on down to today. Some of Catholic thought is almost lifted wholeheartedly from Gnosticism, mixed with some Mithraism and a couple of other religions as well.

Something had to be done to meet that teaching. Let me give you a couple of thoughts that broke off from, or developed from, this idea that matter is essentially evil. The

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Gnostics had the idea that God was just the opposite of matter—that as matter was essentially evil, God was pure and perfect. As a result, they arrived at a result that a pure and perfect God could not touch matter, because He would be stained by it. He could not touch matter. The inevitable conclusion was, then, that God did not create the world. They would conceive the idea—kind of spiritualize away—that the *logos* did it. But the *logos* was pure reason. The *logos* did not create.

The Greeks—the Gnostics—had to come up with an explanation for the existence of the creation without a God who could touch it (almost sounds like evolution). This is going to sound weird, because it is. But John was confronted with it. God, they said, put out a series of "emanations." Do not ask me what an emanation is—ask the Gnostics.

The best way that I can think of to explain it is that it was like a vibration. Did you ever see one of these pictures where you have, say, on the left side of the page you have a picture of a man, and it is good and solid. Then the artist, right beside it, drew an outline of the side of the man, and it was a little lighter shade than the man himself. Then the next one over was another outline of a man, but it was a little but lighter shade, until finally you get down to the end of the page, and there is this vague outline of a man.

It is like each one of these outlines of the man who keeps getting vaguer and vaguer as you move toward the end of the page—each one of them in an *emanation* from the original. God did this—He kept putting out emanations. Finally, He got to an emanation that was so far away from God that he could touch matter without polluting God.

There is one more thing to this. They came up with the idea that as the emanations were sent out from God, that these were intelligent beings—that each emanation was an intelligent being of its own—but each emanation knew less and less about the God at the beginning. So finally, when we get to that final emanation—the one that actually did the creating—he is so far from God that he is actually hostile to God.

I do not know whether you are getting this, but there is a germ of truth in this. The Greek looked at the world, and to him, it was hostile to life. Everywhere he looked he found war. Everywhere he looked he found it hard to make a living. Everywhere he looked there was competition and strife and envy and hate and bickering and fighting within families and divorce—does that sound familiar? So he came to the conclusion that a God of love could not have possibly created the earth—it had to be created by somebody who was hostile to God and hostile to man.

They were giving credit for the creation of the earth to Satan the Devil. He is indeed the "god of this world." They did not put that name on him; they just said that it was an

"emanation." We can look at in retrospect—twenty centuries later—and say, "Well, that's funny—that's strange—that's weird." They did not have the information available to them that we have from the Word of God to be able to think about what they were thinking about. They could not arrive at a true conclusion.

So we have, the Greeks say, an emanation that was ignorant of God, and hostile to God, and was the actual creator of the world, and therefore hostile to man as well. This relegated God—the Original—to a being who had nothing at all to do with the world—it was too evil for Him to touch.

Are you beginning to see why John opened the book the way he did? "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word **was** God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:1, 14) John chose, in his approach, not to approach Gnosticism by making a list of everywhere that it was wrong; he chose to attack Gnosticism by presenting the truth in a way that indirectly attacked the ideas of Gnosticism. We will see more of this as we go along.

This doctrine produced other strange ideas. The Gnostics came to believe that Jesus was indeed one of the emanations, but He was not the emanation who created. He was an emanation who was closer to God. So He was one of a chain of lesser beings that led back to God, but He was not that God who created, and He was not in the beginning with God.

A second thing—kind of a variation—is because they believed that God was so holy that He could not touch anything that was material, and that Jesus was one of the emanations, and therefore part of that chain (yet not evil like that end one, but somewhere in between), He was not really a man. He only *seemed* to be a man. What you saw was not reality. The reality was somewhere beyond—somewhere inside. They came up with the idea that Jesus did not even leave any footprints.

They extended this right to the crucifixion because they believed what they did about these emanations, and they placed Jesus as one of the emanations, that Jesus could not suffer. See, God cannot suffer, and so Jesus cannot suffer, so therefore the **real** Jesus left the body before the crucifixion, and only the shell, the phantom, suffered. The real Jesus did not suffer.

This leads to some of the things that appear in the book of John to a far greater extent than they do in any of the others. John shows Jesus' humanity more clearly than any of the other books. He shows Jesus getting **angry**, turning over the tables and running after people and sheep and everything else, and kicking them out! He shows Jesus getting

angry at the Pharisees, and the scribes. He shows Jesus suffering tiredness. He shows Jesus thirsting. He shows Jesus hungry. He shows Jesus suffering grief and crying. He shows His humanity.

On the other hand, he also counterbalances it by showing the pre-existence of Jesus Christ: ". . .before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58). In John 17:5, Jesus asks the Father that He restore to Him the glory that He had before. In John 1:1, it says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." So he shows His pre-existence.

He shows Jesus' discernment, His omniscience (if you want to put it that way), His tremendous insight into the character of the minds and hearts of men—he does it right from the beginning in the encounter with Nathanael Bartholomew: "I saw you sitting under the fig tree." Bartholomew could not understand that.

He shows that Jesus was His own man: "I lay My life down; no one takes it from Me. I give it for the life of the world." He is uninfluenced by people in a way that would cause you and me to come into agreement with our fears. You do not see any of that at all in Jesus Christ. He was His own man—He did the right thing, which was His own thing.

What about the author himself, John? Let us look at a few things about him. I want you to think about these verses that we are going to go through here, and see if you can reach a conclusion. It is just kind of an interesting thing—no big import at all. Here, Jesus is choosing His disciples:

Mark 1:19-20 When He had gone a little farther from there, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the boat mending their nets. And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him.

These verses tell us that John was the son of Zebedee, that he had a brother, James, and that the way that they are named there, it is likely that James was the older of the two, John was the younger. It also shows that they were well-off enough to have hired servants. How well off, I do not know, but there is some indication in the Bible that they were pretty well off—they were not poor. There is an indication that the family had at least two houses, one in Galilee and one in Jerusalem, and that John was accustomed to moving amongst the upper crust of Hebrew life. So it looks as though the family of Zebedee was pretty well off. They were not poor people by any stretch of the imagination.

Incidentally, in one place that I looked—I did not chase this out, but I will pass this on to you—John's family is shown to be one of the chief financial supporters of Jesus' ministry. Again, when we come across that, I will try to remember to point it out to you.

Luke 5:7-10 So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.

There was a partnership here. The sons of Zebedee were in partnership with Simon Peter. They had business dealings together. The indication is there that there were at least two boats, and maybe a whole fleet of them operating, since they had hired servants. So it looks as though (and I think that this is a fairly safe conclusion), Peter, James, and John—and their families (Peter's father's name, in one place is given as John, and in another place it is given as Jonah), Simon son of Jonah; and Zebedee, the father of James and John—there was a long association between the parents, and then of course the sons. The families were mixing together for quite a period of time, and they knew one another quite well before they became associated under Jesus.

Mark 15:40-41 There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome, who also followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.

Here is Matthew's account of the same thing:

Matthew 27:56 . . .among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

Just putting those two accounts together: Salome was Zebedee's wife and James' and John's mother.

John 19:25 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

The tendency for you to is to read "Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, *Mary, the wife of Clopas*." That is not what it says. When we put the other two accounts with John 19, it adds a very significant fact. Salome was Mary's sister. Therefore, John and Jesus were cousins. John the son of Zebedee was Jesus' cousin.

This is very interesting, because they lived in Galilee, and they were cousins of one another—they knew one another from boyhood! They grew up together! They knew one another like this. I think that is exciting for us to understand. The writer of the gospel was Jesus' physical cousin, as was John the Baptist as well. You can begin to see that when God put things together, He worked within families that knew one another. They grew up together—a really close association.

Peter, James, and John then became the trio that Jesus set apart for His very closest associations and teachings. Almost everywhere you look where something significant took place, who was there with Jesus? Why, it was the fellows He grew up with—Peter, James, and John. So they received the most insightful and the closest of all the teachings.

Jesus nicknamed James and John the "Sons of Thunder." He knew what their temperament was like because He grew up with them. They were kids together. It is kind of interesting because there is a tendency to think of that in a bad way. If we were to apply that in a carnal way—and I think that is the way most of us have the easiest time doing—we think, then, of James and John as being proud, self-assertive. We think of them as being ambitious for honor, impetuous, maybe resentful whenever they are corrected—or maybe rejected; people who harbored a desire for revenge.

You can see some of this come out in Luke 9, where there are two accounts that are run together—one account being James and John rebuking a man for casting out a demon because he was not with Jesus' group, and then immediately on the heels of that the Samaritan town rejected Jesus—they did not want Him to stop by there—so James and John immediately thought of bringing fire down out of heaven and destroying that town. Christ looked beyond that, as He does with all of us. He looks beyond our carnal characteristics, and He sees something else. But that assertiveness could maybe be turned in a better direction.

I think we need to begin to turn our thinking to understand that the "Sons of Thunder" is really not a put-down at all. Rather it is indicative of men of very great zeal. They were men of action. It also would indicate to me a loftiness of character—thunder is something that happens in the heavens. Thunder is used in the Bible to exalt and glorify

and honor the strength of God's voice. When God speaks, everything shakes. Do you think that Jesus might have been indicating the powerful effectiveness of these men's message? I think so. They were going to *move* people, and *motivate* people, and *inspire* people with their voices—herd them into action. They were able to inspire and move. It is a thought, anyway. I do not think "Sons of Thunder" was a put down at all. It gives us insight into what those men were like.

There is no doubt from Matthew 20 and Mark 10 that they were ambitious men. These were the two, then, that sought the right hand and the left hand of Jesus in the Kingdom. You combine that with the thing in Luke 9, and you see people of very great zeal.

When we move along past the book of John to the book of Acts, John always appears as Peter's companion. Peter does the speaking, but John is always there. Acts 2, 3, 4, and 5—John is always there, kind of in the background. I think that, again, gives us some insight. God chose to show you and me that though John was not the spokesman that Peter was, he was nonetheless at the forefront, the fulcrum, the vortex of all the action. I think that what he did is he proved to be a brake—a counselor—for Peter in his impetuosity.

Peter's boldness might have carried him a lot further into more dangerous situations, and John was there with his keen insight into the mind of God, the mind of Christ, because he was the one who had the special relationship with Christ. He was the one who Christ loved. Of all the disciples, he was the one who was always set aside, you might say, or set out as being the one that Jesus loved. I think that he proved to be the counselor of Peter and a perfect balance for Peter's aggressive assertiveness.

There is one other thing that I think is just kind of interesting about John—even about the name John. I do not think that God does anything either by whim or by accident. There is purpose behind everything that He does. There was a man named John that God used to prepare the way for Jesus' first coming. There was also a man named John that wrote the last books of the Bible, one of which is the book of Revelation which prepares the way for Christ's second coming. Maybe there is something there—I do not know. Both men were cousins of Jesus, and both were named John.

John 20:30-31 And truly Jesus did many other signs [there is that word again] in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

John (Part 1) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

There is the purpose for which the book of John was written. It appears awfully late, but it is a reminder just as you get to the end of the book as to why these things were written. It is also why, when we are going through the first chapter, that I will spend some time proving to you that Jesus **IS** the Christ from sources within the Bible and without—from things that contain evidence that you need to have. It needs to be part of your mind, because if it is not your faith is going to be weak. Your faith is not going to be what it should, and maybe your belief will not lead to the kind of life that God indeed wants you to have. You will not see God breaking into your life the way that He intends to break in—whether it be in your marriage, on the job, or wherever.

He has presented these things so that you may believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of God. This is so important that some believe the whole book is divided into aspects of the word *belief*—aspects that have practical applications to our salvation. I will not go into them right now because it would take too long, but in looking over the book there seems to be a pretty good reason why the book is arranged the way it is.

From the introduction, it gives you the foundation of belief—see, He is God. Therefore, you can believe Him. This is the nature of the One in whom you believe. Then the presentation of evidence is given, step-by-step, leading up to the resurrection, which is the confirmation of your belief. It confirms that you believe in something worth believing in. Then the last chapter presents the commitment—do you believe?

I think you will find it interesting. It might help you to understand the book a little further.