

Dr. Robert Peterson, Johannine Theology, Session 2, The Johannine Style, Part 1 Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Peterson, Johannine Theology, Session 2, The Johannine Style, Part 1, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Robert A. Peterson's lecture, "Johannine Theology, Session 2, Johannine Style, Part 1," explores the distinctive literary features of the Gospel of John. Peterson highlights eleven key aspects of John's style, beginning with its **unique vocabulary**, contrasting word usage with the synoptic gospels and referencing C.K. Barrett's commentary. The lecture further examines **explanatory notes** John includes to clarify names, symbols, and events for his readers. Peterson also discusses John's effective use of **misunderstandings** by Jesus' listeners to reveal deeper spiritual truths and engage the audience, followed by an analysis of **irony**, where the statements of Jesus' opponents often carry unintended deeper meaning. The session sets the stage for further exploration of Johannine style in subsequent lectures.

2. 25 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Peterson, Johannine Theology, Session 2 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → Gospels → John).



Peterson_JnTheology_Session02.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Johannine Theology, Session 2, The Johannine Style, Part 1

Briefing Document: Johannine Style in the Gospel of John (Peterson)

Overview:

This briefing document summarizes the main themes and important ideas presented by Dr. Robert A. Peterson in the second session of his teachings on Johannine Theology, focusing on "Johannine Style, Part 1." Peterson outlines eleven key stylistic features of the Gospel of John, drawing heavily on C.K. Barrett's commentary while also referencing Andreas Kostenberger's work. He emphasizes that understanding John's distinctive style is crucial for gaining insight into his theological ideas. The session covers distinctive vocabulary, explanatory notes, misunderstandings, and irony.

Key Themes and Important Ideas:

1. Distinctive Vocabulary:

- **Emphasis on Unique Word Usage:** John's Gospel employs a vocabulary that significantly differs from the Synoptic Gospels in terms of both the frequency of certain words and the complete absence of others. Peterson highlights that while John's overall vocabulary is small, many of his most frequent words appear relatively rarely in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.
- **Examples of Frequent Johannine Words:** "To love" (ἀγαπάω, ἀγάπη): Used 44 times in John, compared to 30 times combined in the Synoptics.
- "Truth/True" (ἀληθής, ἀληθινός): Used 45 times in John, compared to 10 times in the Synoptics.
- "To know" (γινώσκω): Used 56 times in John, roughly the same as all three Synoptics combined.
- "I am" (ἐγώ εἰμι): Used 54 times in John, compared to 34 in the Synoptics, often highlighting Jesus' self-identification.
- "Jews" (Ἰουδαῖοι): Used 66 times in John, primarily referring to the Jewish leaders who opposed Jesus, versus 16 times in the Synoptics.
- "World" (κόσμος): Used 78 times in John, versus 13 in the Synoptics, with a significant predominance in John's usage.

- **Examples of Rare or Absent Johannine Words Common in Synoptics:** "Baptism" (βάπτισμα): 0 times in John, 10 times in the Synoptics.
- "Kingdom" (βασιλεία): 5 times in John, 130 times in the Synoptics.
- "Demon" (δαιμόνιον): 6 times in John (always in accusations against Jesus), compared to 11 in Matthew, 11 in Mark, and 23 in Luke. Notably, John records no exorcisms.
- "Righteousness" (δικαιοσύνη): 0 times in John, 30 times in the Synoptics.
- "To preach the gospel" (εὐαγγελίζω) and "gospel" (εὐαγγέλιον): 0 times in John, 22 times in the Synoptics. Peterson clarifies that this doesn't mean Jesus doesn't convey the substance of the gospel, but he uses a different idiom, focusing on the truth the Father gave him to share for eternal life through belief.
- "To repent" (μετανοέω) and "repentance" (μετάνοια): 0 times in John, about 25 times in the Synoptics.
- "Parable" (παραβολή): 0 times in John, 45 times in the Synoptics.
- **John's Summarization of Jesus' Words:** Peterson argues that John, like Luke in Acts, summarizes Jesus' words in his own distinctive style ("John-speak"). He emphasizes the distinction between the "ipsissima verba" (very words) and the "ipsissima vox" (very voice) of Jesus, suggesting that while we may not have the exact words, we have God's inspired and accurate summary of Jesus' message through John's unique style.
- Quote: "What I'm trying to say is God used the apostle John, superintending his whole life, as B.B. Warfield said, especially when he put his pen to the page to give the very words that God wanted him to use. He used his own style to summarize accurately the words and deeds of Jesus. So, when he says Jesus said such and such, we don't always have the very words. We have the very voice of Jesus."

2. Explanatory or Editorial Notes:

- **Purpose of These Notes:** John frequently includes explanatory notes to clarify various aspects of his narrative for the reader, particularly a non-Jewish audience (as Peterson suggests John wrote from Ephesus).

- **Examples of Explanatory Notes:** Explaining names and titles: In John 1:38, after the disciples call Jesus "Rabbi," John adds "(which means teacher)." In John 1:42, after Jesus calls Simon "Cephas," John interprets "(which means Peter)."
- Explaining symbols: John 12:33 clarifies that Jesus' statement in 12:32 about being "lifted up from the earth" indicated "by what kind of death he was going to die," referring to crucifixion. Peterson notes the irony of this "lifting up" signifying both crucifixion and exaltation.
- Qualifying previous statements or correcting false impressions: John 4:2 clarifies that "Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples," implying Jesus authorized but didn't personally perform baptisms.
- Relating events to other events: John 11:2 identifies Mary as "the one who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair," linking this Lazarus narrative to a prior event (possibly drawing on the Synoptic tradition).
- Identifying characters: John 7:50 identifies Nicodemus as "the one who had gone to him before," referencing the encounter in chapter 3.

3. Misunderstandings:

- **Jesus' Spiritual Language vs. Earthly Interpretations:** John often portrays Jesus' hearers misunderstanding his spiritual pronouncements by interpreting them on a purely earthly level. This stylistic device serves to engage the reader and highlight the deeper spiritual truths Jesus is conveying.
- **Examples of Misunderstandings:** John 2:20: The Jewish leaders misunderstand Jesus' statement about destroying the temple and raising it in three days, thinking he refers to the physical temple that took 46 years to build, while John clarifies he meant "the temple of his body." This misunderstanding ironically foreshadows Jesus' resurrection.
- John 3:4: Nicodemus, a "teacher of Israel," misunderstands Jesus' teaching on being "born again," asking if a man can re-enter his mother's womb. This highlights Nicodemus' initial spiritual blindness.
- John 4:15: The Samaritan woman misunderstands Jesus' offer of "living water," thinking he refers to a source of physical water that would save her from the labor of drawing water from the well. Jesus, of course, is speaking of eternal life given by the Holy Spirit.

- John 6:26: The crowds who were fed miraculously misunderstand why they are seeking Jesus, thinking it is for another free meal rather than for the significance of the signs he performed. This misunderstanding exposes their lack of true faith.

4. Irony:

- **Opponents' Unwitting Truths:** John frequently uses irony by presenting statements from Jesus' opponents that are intended to be derogatory, sarcastic, or incredulous but inadvertently reveal a deeper truth that the speakers themselves do not grasp.
- **Engaging the Believing Reader:** This irony is designed to be recognized by the believing reader, further engaging them with the narrative and highlighting the divine perspective.
- **Examples of Irony:** John 4:12: The Samaritan woman asks Jesus, "Are you greater than our father, Jacob?" a question dripping with incredulity. The irony lies in the Christian reader's knowledge that Jesus, being divine, is indeed far greater than Jacob.
- John 7:41-42: The debate over whether the Christ comes from Galilee reveals the misunderstanding of those who reject Jesus based on his Galilean residence, unaware that he was born in Bethlehem, fulfilling the scriptural prophecy they cite.
- John 11:49-52: Caiaphas, the high priest, states that it is "better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish," as a matter of political expediency to eliminate Jesus. The profound irony is that his statement, uttered in his official capacity, becomes an unintended prophecy of Jesus' substitutionary atonement for the entire nation and "to gather into one the children of God who were scattered abroad."
- Quote: "The irony of ironies is the high priest, in his official capacity, speaks a word of political expediency, basically saying, we need to rub out Jesus. We need to kill him. We need to eliminate him. But his words are an ironic, unintended prediction of Jesus' substitutionary atonement."

Moving Forward:

Peterson indicates that the next session will continue exploring Johannine style, focusing on features such as chiasm, variation of style, Old Testament ideas, symbolism, ethical dualism (as opposed to ontological), and hyperbole.

Implications for Understanding John:

Understanding these stylistic features is crucial for a deeper and more accurate interpretation of the Gospel of John. The distinctive vocabulary reveals John's theological priorities, the explanatory notes aid comprehension, the misunderstandings highlight spiritual truths, and the irony underscores the divine significance of events often missed by Jesus' contemporaries. Peterson's emphasis on John's role as a summarizing theologian writing in his own style encourages a nuanced approach to interpreting Jesus' words in the fourth Gospel.

4. Study Guide: Peterson, Johannine Theology, Session 2, The Johannine Style, Part 1

Johannine Style: A Study Guide

I. Key Features of Johannine Style

- **Distinctive Vocabulary:** John employs a smaller set of core words with high frequency, many of which appear rarely or are absent in the Synoptic Gospels (e.g., *agapao/agape*, truth, to know, I am, life, world, Jews). Conversely, common Synoptic terms are often missing or infrequent in John (e.g., baptism, kingdom, demon, gospel, parable, repentance). This suggests John's unique theological emphasis and the possibility that he summarized Jesus' teachings in his own idiom, focusing on the "voice" rather than the exact "words" (*ipsissima vox* vs. *ipsissima verba*).
- **Explanatory Notes (Editorial Notes):** John frequently interjects explanations to clarify names (Rabbi, Cephas), interpret symbols (lifting up = crucifixion), correct misunderstandings (Jesus not personally baptizing), relate events (Mary who anointed the Lord), and identify characters (Nicodemus from chapter 3). These notes serve to guide a potentially non-Jewish audience and highlight the deeper meaning of events.
- **Misunderstandings:** Jesus' dialogues often involve his hearers misinterpreting his spiritual language on a literal, earthly level (e.g., the temple, being born again, living water, the crowds seeking physical food). These misunderstandings serve various purposes: to highlight spiritual truths, reveal the ignorance of the hearers, engage the reader, and sometimes, ironically, to foreshadow future events (like the resurrection).
- **Irony:** John masterfully uses irony, where the opponents of Jesus make statements that are derogatory or inadequate in their intention but are, in fact, true or deeply meaningful on another level that the reader understands (e.g., "Are you greater than our father Jacob?", Caiaphas's statement about one man dying for the nation). This technique engages the reader by creating a contrast between the speakers' limited understanding and the greater reality.
- **Double Meaning (Double Entendre):** While not explicitly detailed in this excerpt beyond the "lifting up," the text hints at this feature, particularly in the discussion

of misunderstandings where Jesus' words carry a spiritual and a literal interpretation simultaneously (e.g., "living water").

II. Quiz

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. Provide two examples of vocabulary that is frequent in John's Gospel but less common in the Synoptic Gospels, and briefly explain the significance of this difference.
2. Describe the purpose of John's explanatory or editorial notes, and give one specific example from the text.
3. Explain how misunderstandings function as a literary device in John's Gospel, and provide one example of a misunderstanding discussed in the excerpt.
4. Define irony as it is used in Johannine style, and give one example of an ironic statement made by Jesus' opponents.
5. According to the lecture, what is the difference between the *ipsissima verba* and the *ipsissima vox* of Jesus, and which does John primarily convey?
6. Why does John omit accounts of Jesus performing exorcisms and being tempted by the devil, according to the speaker?
7. What was the initial negative view of John's Gospel in critical scholarship, and what development led to its rehabilitation?
8. Summarize the speaker's explanation for why everyone in John's Gospel seems to speak with a similar style, regardless of who they are.
9. Explain the irony in Caiaphas's statement regarding the death of one man for the people.
10. How does John use the misunderstanding of the crowds seeking Jesus after the feeding of the 5,000 to reveal their true motives?

III. Quiz Answer Key

1. Two examples are *agapao/agape* (to love/love) and "truth." The high frequency of these terms suggests John's emphasis on the nature of divine love and the concept of truth revealed through Jesus, which are central to his theological perspective.

2. John's explanatory notes clarify information for the reader, especially a potentially non-Jewish audience. For example, in John 1:38, he explains that "Rabbi" means "teacher," making Jesus' title understandable to a wider readership.
3. Misunderstandings occur when Jesus speaks of spiritual realities, but his listeners interpret them on a literal level. For instance, Nicodemus misunderstands Jesus' teaching on being "born again" by thinking of physical rebirth, highlighting his spiritual blindness.
4. Irony in John involves Jesus' opponents making statements that they intend to be negative or dismissive but which unintentionally reveal a deeper truth understood by the reader. An example is the Samaritan woman asking, "Are you greater than our father Jacob?" which is ironically true.
5. *Ipsissima verba* refers to the exact words Jesus spoke, while *ipsissima vox* refers to the essence or voice of his teaching. The speaker suggests John primarily conveys the *ipsissima vox*, summarizing Jesus' message in his own inspired style.
6. John minimizes or omits these events to focus on the larger conflict between Jesus and the "prince of this world" (the devil), culminating in the ultimate defeat of Satan at the cross.
7. Initially, critical scholarship viewed John's Gospel negatively, considering it more theological and influenced by mystery religions or Gnosticism, which were seen as later developments. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, revealing a first-century Judaism similar to John's, led to a reassessment and rehabilitation of his Gospel's historical context.
8. The speaker explains that John, under the Holy Spirit's inspiration, summarized the words and deeds of Jesus in his own distinctive style. Therefore, regardless of who is speaking in the Fourth Gospel, their words are filtered through John's "John-speak."
9. Caiaphas, intending to make a statement of political expediency—that it is better for one man (Jesus) to die than the whole nation perish—unintentionally prophesies Jesus' substitutionary atonement, where his death would indeed save not only the nation of Israel but also gather God's scattered children.

10. The crowds sought Jesus not because they understood the significance of his miraculous sign of feeding them but because they desired another free meal. This misunderstanding reveals their superficial faith and their focus on physical needs rather than spiritual understanding.

IV. Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze the significance of John's distinctive vocabulary in conveying his theological themes, providing specific examples discussed in the lecture.
2. Discuss the various purposes and effects of John's use of misunderstandings as a literary and theological tool in his Gospel.
3. Explore the effectiveness of irony as a stylistic feature in John's Gospel, explaining how it engages the reader and reveals deeper truths about Jesus.
4. Compare and contrast John's approach to recording Jesus' words and deeds with that of the Synoptic Gospel writers, as suggested by the lecture's discussion of *ipsissima verba* and *ipsissima vox*.
5. Evaluate the speaker's perspective on the historical reliability of John's Gospel in light of its distinctive style and the use of literary devices like misunderstandings and irony.

V. Glossary of Key Terms

- **Agapao/Agape:** Greek words for the verb "to love" and the noun "love," frequently used in John to describe God's love and the love Jesus commands his followers to have.
- **Synoptic Gospels:** The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which share a similar perspective and content in their accounts of Jesus' life and ministry.
- **Ipsissima Verba:** Latin for "the very words," referring to the exact words spoken by Jesus. The speaker suggests we do not have these verbatim in the Gospels.
- **Ipsissima Vox:** Latin for "the very voice," referring to the essence or underlying meaning and characteristic style of Jesus' teaching. The speaker believes the Gospels convey this.
- **Editorial Notes (Explanatory Notes):** Comments inserted by the author (John) to provide additional information, clarification, or interpretation of events, names, or symbols within the narrative.
- **Irony:** A literary device where there is a contrast between what is said or appears to be true and what is actually the case. In John, it often involves Jesus' opponents unknowingly speaking profound truths.
- **Misunderstanding:** A situation in the narrative where Jesus' words are interpreted incorrectly by his hearers, often on a literal rather than a spiritual level, used by John for various literary and theological purposes.
- **Chiasm (Inverted Parallelism):** A literary structure where parallel elements are presented in an ABCC'BA pattern. While mentioned as a feature of Johannine style, it was not detailed in this excerpt.
- **Ontological Dualism:** A philosophical or theological concept that posits a fundamental division in being or reality, often between the spiritual and the material. The speaker notes that John's dualism is ethical, not ontological.
- **Ethical Dualism:** A theological perspective that emphasizes the conflict between good and evil, light and darkness, truth and falsehood, often associated with choices and moral alignment rather than a fundamental division in being.
- **Hyperbole:** Exaggerated statements or claims not intended to be taken literally, used for emphasis or effect. While mentioned, no specific examples were detailed in this excerpt.

5. FAQs on Peterson, Johannine Theology, Session 2, The Johannine Style, Part 1, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about Johannine Style (Based on Peterson's Lecture)

1. What makes the vocabulary of the Gospel of John "distinctive"? The Gospel of John employs a smaller overall vocabulary compared to the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), but it uses certain key words with significantly higher frequency, such as "love," "truth," "to know" (referring to knowing God and Jesus), "I am," "life," "world," and "Father." Conversely, many common terms found in the Synoptics are rare or entirely absent in John, including "baptism," "kingdom" (in its common Synoptic usage), "demon" (outside of accusations against Jesus), accounts of exorcisms, "righteous," "power" (as miracle), "mercy," "to preach the gospel/gospel," "to preach," "repentance/to repent," "parable," and "tax collector." This selective use of language contributes to John's unique theological emphasis and presentation.

2. Why does John include "explanatory notes" or "editorial notes" in his Gospel? John provides these notes for various reasons, primarily to aid his readers' understanding. These notes can explain the meaning of Jewish names and titles (e.g., "Rabbi" means "teacher," "Cephas" means "Peter"), clarify symbols (e.g., Jesus being "lifted up" refers to his crucifixion), correct potential misunderstandings or false impressions (e.g., clarifying that Jesus himself did not baptize), relate events to other events or traditions (e.g., identifying Mary of Bethany as the one who anointed Jesus), and identify characters for readers (e.g., identifying Nicodemus as the one who came to Jesus earlier in chapter 3). This demonstrates John's role as both a historian and a theologian who seeks to clearly communicate the significance of the events he recounts.

3. How does John utilize "misunderstandings" in his narrative? John frequently depicts Jesus's hearers misinterpreting his spiritual or profound statements on a purely earthly or literal level. Examples include the Jewish leaders thinking Jesus meant the physical temple when he spoke of raising "this temple" in three days (referring to his body), Nicodemus's confusion about being "born again," and the Samaritan woman's literal interpretation of "living water." These misunderstandings serve several purposes: they can highlight the difference between earthly and spiritual realities, foreshadow future events (like the resurrection), expose the ignorance or spiritual blindness of some characters, emphasize Jesus's true identity and message, and engage the reader by creating a sense of dramatic irony and anticipation of the clarification.

4. What is the role of "irony" in John's Gospel, according to Peterson? Irony is a significant stylistic feature in John, where the opponents of Jesus often make statements that are derogatory, sarcastic, incredulous, or inadequate in their intended meaning, but which unknowingly contain a deeper truth or significance recognized by the believing reader. John often presents these statements without direct rebuttal, trusting that his audience will grasp the underlying irony. Examples include the Samaritan woman questioning if Jesus is greater than Jacob, the division among the crowd regarding Jesus's origin (unaware he was born in Bethlehem), and most notably, Caiaphas's statement about it being better for one man to die for the people (intended as political expediency but prophetically pointing to Jesus's atoning sacrifice). This irony engages the reader and underscores the spiritual blindness of Jesus's adversaries while affirming the truth of his identity and mission.

5. How does Peterson address the differences in vocabulary and content between John and the Synoptic Gospels? Peterson explains that the Gospel writers, including John and Luke (in Acts), often summarized the words and deeds of Jesus and other speakers in their own distinctive styles and vocabulary. He references the understanding that Luke summarized sermons in Acts using his own language, regardless of who was speaking. Similarly, Peterson suggests that John used his own characteristic "John-speak" when recording Jesus's words and actions. This doesn't mean Jesus changed his way of speaking, but rather that John, under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit, accurately conveyed the "voice" and meaning of Jesus, even if not always the exact "words." Peterson emphasizes that this is how the Bible works, with inspired authors using their own styles to communicate God's message.

6. How has the scholarly view of John's Gospel evolved over time, according to the lecture? Historically, particularly before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, some critical scholars viewed John's Gospel negatively, considering it more theological and thus less historically reliable than the Synoptics. Some even attributed its ideas to the influence of mystery religions or early Gnosticism. However, the Dead Sea Scrolls revealed a form of Judaism contemporary with the New Testament that shared similarities with John's portrayal of Judaism, leading to a rehabilitation of John's Gospel in scholarly circles. Scholars like Raymond Brown contributed to this "new look" by recognizing John as a separate but potentially reliable tradition alongside the Synoptics.

7. What does Peterson mean by the distinction between the "very words" (ipsissima verba) and the "very voice" (ipsissima vox) of Jesus? Peterson explains that while we may not have the precise, verbatim words spoken by Jesus (ipsissima verba), the Gospel of John, through the inspired writing of the Apostle John, accurately captures the essence, meaning, and authority of Jesus's teaching – his "very voice" (ipsissima vox). He argues that God superintended John's writing, using his unique style to provide a divinely authorized and accurate summary and interpretation of Jesus's words and deeds. In some ways, this inspired summary is even better than a mere verbatim transcript because it includes God's intended emphasis and understanding.

8. What is Peterson's overall approach to studying the Gospel of John and dealing with apparent discrepancies or complexities? Peterson advocates for an approach that takes the Bible's own claims about itself seriously, reflecting the spirit of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, which seeks to understand and defend a high view of Scripture while acknowledging its nuances. He believes in the inerrancy of the Bible and sees any apparent problems not as reasons for doubt but as areas for further understanding and study, often undertaken by others with specific callings. His primary focus in studying John is to understand its teachings, recognizing the author's distinctive style and the Holy Spirit's role in conveying the truth about Jesus. He is willing to learn from various scholars, even those with differing personal beliefs, to deepen his understanding of the biblical text.