

Dr. Robert Peterson, Johannine Theology, Session 3, The Johannine Style, Part 2 Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Peterson, Johannine Theology, Session 3, The Johannine Style, Part 2, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Robert A. Peterson's lecture, "The Johannine Style, Part 2," examines several key literary features prevalent in the Gospel of John. **The session focuses on understanding John's unique approach** through the analysis of double meanings in his vocabulary, the use of chiasm to structure passages and emphasize ideas, and his frequent variations in language. **Peterson also highlights John's strategic use of Old Testament allusions** to provide deeper interpretive context. Furthermore, **the lecture explores John's ethical dualism** contrasting concepts like light and darkness, and concludes with an analysis of his use of hyperbole for impactful communication. **Ultimately, Peterson argues that recognizing these stylistic elements is crucial** for a richer and more accurate comprehension of Johannine theology.

2. 26 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Peterson, Johannine Theology, Session 3 – 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 3, The Johannine Style, Part 2

Briefing Document: Johannine Style in the Gospel of John (Dr. Robert A. Peterson)

Executive Summary:

This briefing document summarizes the key stylistic features of the Gospel of John as presented by Dr. Robert A. Peterson in Session 3 of his Johannine Theology series. Peterson highlights several distinctive elements of John's writing, arguing that these are intentional literary devices used to engage the reader, emphasize theological truths, and reveal deeper meanings. The session focuses on double meaning, chiasm (inverted parallelism), variation, the use of Old Testament ideas, symbolism, ethical dualism, and hyperbole as characteristic of Johannine style. Understanding these stylistic features is crucial for accurate interpretation of the Gospel.

Main Themes and Important Ideas/Facts:

1. Double Meaning:

- John frequently employs words with twofold meanings, which are not coincidental but deliberate.
- Peterson cautions against the hermeneutical principle that a word has only one meaning per context when studying John. He argues that John intentionally "broken the rule" for good effect.
- **Examples:** "Dwelt" (ἔσκηνωσεν) in John 1:14, which means to live for a short time but also relates to the Old Testament word for "tabernacle" (σκηνή), suggesting Jesus "tabernacled with us" and replaced the Old Testament tabernacle. Peterson notes, "John is saying that Jesus' life was a short period of time on earth, relatively speaking, but also that it's a hint that he replaced the Old Testament tabernacle."
- "Born again" (ἄνωθεν) in John 3:3, which means both "again" (a second time) and "from above" (from God). Peterson emphasizes, "You must be born again a second time, a spiritual birth after your physical birth, and you must be born again from God and not just from your mother."
-

- "Living water" in John 4:10-14, referring both to running water and symbolically to eternal life or the Spirit who brings it.

2. Chiasm (Inverted Parallelism):

- John uses the pattern A, B, B', A' to bind passages together and emphasize specific ideas.
- **Example in the Prologue (John 1):**A: The Word (vv. 1)
- B: The Light (v. 8)
- B': The true Light coming into the world (v. 9)
- A': The Word became flesh (v. 14)
- Peterson explains, "It functions to highlight the incarnation of the word, the illumination of the world by the light... the most important topic of the prologue, which is the second person of the Trinity becoming a human being."
- **Example in Chapter 6 (vv. 36-40):** Demonstrates a chiastic structure related to seeing/believing and Jesus preserving those given to him by the Father.
- **Example in Chapter 12 (vv. 38-41):** Shows how Isaiah 53 (A) and Isaiah 6 (A') frame the unbelief (B') despite the signs (implicit in v. 37 and connected to B - the prophecy's fulfillment). Peterson notes, "It tends to pull the text together, and it shows, by the way, that Isaiah 53 is predictive of the unbelief of the covenant people when their Messiah came and presented himself to them."

3. Variation:

- John frequently varies his vocabulary and word order, which is a significant feature of his style.
- Leon Morris's work on this is acknowledged, with Peterson suggesting that Morris might have overemphasized the insignificance of individual variations.
- Peterson posits that while many variations might be simply stylistic, instances where John *does not* vary his vocabulary could be a way of placing emphasis.
- The use of both "agapao" and "phileo" for love, and different words for "no," "sheep" and "lambs" are cited as examples of this variation. Peterson cautions against automatically assigning different levels of love to these terms due to John's tendency towards variation.

4. Old Testament Ideas:

- The Gospel of John is "replete with Old Testament allusions," which are often key to interpreting passages.
- **Examples:** John 1:17 ("The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ") is understood against the Old Testament background of *hesed* (steadfast love) and *emeth* (faithfulness). Peterson argues this is not an absolute disjunction but a hyperbole emphasizing the surpassing nature of God's grace and truth in Jesus compared to the Mosaic revelation. He states, "The meaning is the grace, love, and faithfulness of God are so great in the person of Jesus that those elements of God's character in the Old Testament are almost negligible by comparison."
- John 1:51 ("Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man") alludes to Jacob's ladder in Genesis 28. Peterson explains, "the connection between heaven and earth is now replaced by Jesus... he's the ladder between heaven and earth... Jesus is the mediator."
- Martha's understanding of resurrection in John 11:24 ("I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day") reflects Old Testament teachings in Daniel 12 and Isaiah 25-26. Jesus then goes "one better" by declaring, "I am the resurrection and the life."
- John 15:1 ("I am the true vine") is to be read against the Old Testament concept of Israel as the vine or vineyard of the Lord (Isaiah 5). "True" in this context means "fulfilled, complete, and new," indicating Jesus as the one who fulfills the failed role of Israel.

5. Symbolism:

- John utilizes various symbolic representations.
- **Examples:** Jesus' body as the temple (John 2:19), and Jesus as the bread of life (John 6:35).

6. Ethical Dualism:

- John's dualism is ethical, not ontological (like Manichaeism). It contrasts good and evil, light and darkness, truth and falsehood, above and below, spirit and flesh, death and life.

- **Examples:** John 3:19-21: The coming of light (Jesus) into the world reveals people's love for darkness (evil works). Peterson states, "Here is an ethical dualism between the light and the darkness."
- John 3:31: The distinction between one who comes from above (Christ) and one who is of the earth (John the Baptist).
- John 5:24: The contrast between death and life, with believers passing from death to life (spiritual resurrection).
- John 15:1-10: The dualism between the fruit-bearing branch (true disciples with eternal life) and the branch that does not bear fruit (representing judgment and being burned). Peterson asserts, "No fruit, no eternal life. Fruit, eternal life."

7. Hyperbole:

- John employs "sanctified overstatement" or hyperbole, often presented in absolute terms but intended as comparisons.
- **Examples:** John 1:17 (discussed above) is a hyperbolic comparison of the grace and truth in Jesus to that in the Old Testament.
- John 3:17 ("For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him") is contrasted with passages implying judgment (e.g., John 9:39). Peterson clarifies that while salvation is the primary purpose, condemnation and judgment are byproducts of rejecting the light.
- John 15:22, 24 ("If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin... If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin"). Peterson explains this is not a denial of original sin but a hyperbolic statement emphasizing that their guilt in rejecting Jesus, the great revealer, is far greater than their prior guilt. He says, "Compared to your guilt at rejecting the son of God in his words and signs, your prior guilt, which was considerable, is negligible."
- John 9:39 ("For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind") needs to be understood in light of John 3:17. Jesus' primary goal was salvation, but his coming inevitably brings judgment.

8. Intentional Contradictions (Surface Contradictions):

- John sometimes presents what appear to be contradictions to prompt deeper thought and investigation from the reader.
- **Example:** John 5:31 ("If I bear witness about myself, my witness is not true") seems to contradict John 8:14 ("Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true"). Peterson suggests this is a deliberate strategy. He explains that in 5:31, Jesus is referring to bearing witness *contrary to the Father's witness* or *out of harmony with other witnesses*, appealing to the legal principle of needing at least two witnesses. In 8:14, Jesus is asserting the truth of his testimony within the context of his divine authority and unity with the Father.

Conclusion:

Dr. Peterson emphasizes that John's distinctive style, characterized by these various literary devices, is not accidental but purposeful. It serves to engage the reader intellectually and spiritually, unveil deeper theological truths, and highlight the significance of Jesus Christ. Recognizing and understanding these stylistic features is essential for a richer and more accurate interpretation of the Gospel of John. The lecture concludes by announcing that the next session will focus on the structure of the Gospel.

4. Study Guide: Peterson, Johannine Theology, Session 3, The Johannine Style, Part 2

A Study Guide to Johannine Style (Peterson, Session 3)

Key Concepts to Review

- **Double Meaning:** John's intentional use of words with two valid interpretations within a single context.
- **Chiasm:** An inverted parallelism (A, B, C, B', A') used to structure passages and emphasize key ideas.
- **Variation:** John's frequent changes in vocabulary and word order, often for stylistic effect rather than significant semantic difference.
- **Old Testament Ideas:** Allusions and references to Old Testament concepts, passages, and events that are crucial for understanding John's theology.
- **Symbolism:** The use of objects, actions, or concepts to represent deeper spiritual truths.
- **Ethical Dualism:** John's presentation of opposing concepts (light/darkness, truth/falsehood, life/death) as representing moral or spiritual choices and realities, not ontological divisions of eternal principles.
- **Hyperbole:** A deliberate exaggeration used for emphasis or comparison, often presented in absolute terms but intended to highlight a greater truth.
- **Apparent Contradictions:** Seemingly contradictory statements used strategically to prompt deeper thought and investigation.

Quiz: Short Answer Questions

1. Explain the hermeneutical challenge presented by John's use of double meaning. Why does Peterson argue that these are intentional and not coincidental?
2. Describe the function of chiasm in Johannine literature. Provide one example from the prologue of John discussed in the lecture.
3. According to Peterson, what is the significance (or insignificance) of John's frequent variation in vocabulary? How does this understanding affect the interpretation of terms like "agape" and "phileo"?

4. Explain how understanding the Old Testament background of John 1:17 ("grace and truth came through Jesus Christ") alters its interpretation. What Old Testament concepts are relevant here?
5. Differentiate between ontological dualism and the ethical dualism found in John's Gospel. Provide one example of ethical dualism discussed in the lecture.
6. How does John use the Old Testament story of Jacob's ladder in John 1:51? What theological point is he making?
7. Define hyperbole as it relates to Johannine style. Give one example of hyperbole from John's Gospel discussed in the lecture and explain its intended meaning.
8. What is the purpose behind John's inclusion of apparent contradictions in his Gospel, according to Peterson? Provide an example of such a contradiction.
9. How does the concept of ethical dualism relate to the judgment described in John 3:19-21?
10. Explain how John 15:1-10 utilizes Old Testament ideas related to the vine and what the term "true" signifies in this context.

Quiz Answer Key

1. The hermeneutical challenge is that it goes against the principle that a word has only one meaning in a given context. Peterson argues they are intentional due to their frequency and the meaningful ways in which both meanings often contribute to the theological point John is making.
2. Chiasm binds passages together and emphasizes certain ideas by presenting them in an inverted parallel structure. In the prologue, the pattern "word (v. 1), light (v. 8), true light coming (v. 9), word made flesh (v. 14)" highlights the incarnation of the Word.
3. Peterson suggests that variation is so common in John that its mere presence is often insignificant; however, the *lack* of variation can be a way of placing emphasis. Because of this, differences in vocabulary like "agape" and "phileo" may simply be stylistic variation rather than indicators of different levels of love.
4. Understanding the Old Testament background reveals that "grace and truth" reflects the Hebrew "hesed" (covenantal steadfast love) and "emmet" (faithfulness). This context shows that John 1:17 is not an absolute disjunction

between law and grace/truth, but a hyperbole emphasizing the surpassing greatness of God's grace and truth in Jesus.

5. Ontological dualism posits two eternal, opposing principles (good and evil), which the Bible rejects in favor of ontological monism (one good God). Ethical dualism in John presents opposing concepts like light and darkness as representing moral choices and the contrasting realities of those who follow God and those who don't.
6. John uses the image of Jacob's ladder, connecting heaven and earth with angels ascending and descending, to symbolize that Jesus himself is now the connection or mediator between heaven and earth.
7. Hyperbole is a sanctified overstatement used for emphasis or comparison. In John 1:17, the statement that the law was given through Moses while grace and truth came through Jesus is a hyperbole that emphasizes the superior nature of the grace and truth revealed in Jesus compared to their presence in the Old Testament.
8. Peterson suggests that apparent contradictions are a strategy to engage the reader and prompt deeper investigation into the meaning of the text, leading to a richer understanding. An example is the seeming contradiction in John 3:17 (Jesus did not come to condemn) and John 9:39 (For judgment I came into this world).
9. The ethical dualism between light and darkness in John 3:19-21 illustrates that the coming of Jesus (the light) reveals people's true nature. Those who love darkness (evil deeds) avoid the light and thus bring judgment upon themselves, while those who do what is true come to the light and are shown to be acting by God.
10. John 15:1-10 draws on the Old Testament idea of Israel as God's vine (e.g., Isaiah 5). In John's context, "true" doesn't mean false in opposition, but rather fulfilled, complete, and new. Jesus is the true vine because Israel failed in this role, and he now produces good fruit in those who abide in him.

Essay Format Questions

1. Discuss how John's use of double meaning contributes to the theological depth and engagement of his Gospel. Provide specific examples from the lecture to support your analysis.
2. Analyze the significance of chiasm as a structural and rhetorical device in the Gospel of John. How does it function to emphasize key themes and connect different parts of the narrative?
3. Evaluate Peterson's perspective on the role and interpretation of variation in John's style. How should this understanding influence our approach to word studies and the nuances of Johannine language?
4. Explore the importance of understanding Old Testament ideas for a proper interpretation of the Gospel of John. Discuss how specific Old Testament allusions illuminate key aspects of John's portrayal of Jesus and his mission.
5. Compare and contrast the ethical dualism presented in John's Gospel with the concept of ontological dualism. How does John utilize ethical dualism to convey his theological and moral message?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Double Meaning (Double Entendre):** The literary device where a word or phrase has two valid interpretations within the same context, both of which contribute to the overall meaning.
- **Chiasm:** A literary structure that employs inverted parallelism (A, B, C... C', B', A') to create emphasis and connection between related ideas in a text.
- **Variation:** The practice of using different words or altering word order when referring to the same concept or repeating phrases, often for stylistic effect.
- **Old Testament Allusion:** An indirect reference to a person, place, event, or passage from the Hebrew Bible that enriches the meaning of the New Testament text.
- **Symbolism:** The use of concrete objects, actions, or concepts to represent abstract ideas or spiritual realities.
- **Ethical Dualism:** A theological or philosophical framework that presents a stark contrast between good and evil, light and darkness, truth and falsehood, as representing moral choices and spiritual realities.
- **Ontological Dualism:** The belief that reality is ultimately composed of two fundamentally different and irreducible substances or principles, such as good and evil or matter and spirit.
- **Hyperbole:** A deliberate and obvious exaggeration used for emphasis or to make a point, often not intended to be taken literally.
- **Hermeneutics:** The branch of knowledge that deals with interpretation, especially of biblical texts, focusing on the principles and methods of understanding their meaning.
- **Progressive Dispensationalism:** A theological system that understands God's plan as unfolding in distinct administrations or dispensations, but sees more continuity and overlap between them than classical dispensationalism, particularly regarding the fulfillment of Old Testament promises.

5. FAQs on Peterson, Johannine Theology, Session 3, The Johannine Style, Part 2, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on Johannine Style Based on Dr. Peterson's Session 3:

1. What is meant by "double meaning" in the Gospel of John, and why does John employ it? John frequently uses words with twofold meanings, where both senses are valid within the context. This is not seen as accidental but as a deliberate stylistic choice. For example, *anōthen* in John 3:3 means both "again" (a second time) and "from above" (from God). John uses double meaning to engage the reader, pique their interest, and convey deeper theological truths by operating on multiple levels of understanding simultaneously.

2. How does John utilize parallelism and, more specifically, chiasm in his writing? John employs regular parallelism (A, B, B', A') and, significantly, chiasm (inverted parallelism: A, B, B', A'). Chiasm is used to bind passages together and to emphasize particular ideas. A key example is found in the prologue (John 1:1-14), where the order of "the Word" and "the light" is reversed around the central statement of the "true light coming into the world" and "the Word made flesh." This inversion highlights the incarnation of the Word and the illumination of the world by the light.

3. What is the significance of "variation" as a feature of John's style? John frequently varies his vocabulary and word order, sometimes even when referring to similar concepts (e.g., using both *agapao* and *phileo* for "love"). While the mere presence of variation might not always be significant, consistent lack of variation can indicate emphasis. It's important not to automatically assign distinct theological meanings to every variation (like *agapao* always being superior to *phileo*) as it could simply be part of John's common stylistic practice.

4. How does the Old Testament influence and inform the Gospel of John? John's Gospel is deeply rooted in Old Testament ideas and allusions. Understanding the Old Testament background is often crucial for correctly interpreting John's meaning. For instance, the concept of "grace and truth" in John 1:17 reflects the Hebrew *hesed* (covenantal steadfast love) and *emmet* (faithfulness) commonly paired in the Old Testament. Similarly, Jesus' statement in John 1:51 about seeing heaven opened and angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man alludes to Jacob's ladder, signifying that Jesus is the new connection between heaven and earth, the mediator.

5. What is the nature of "dualism" in John's Gospel, and what are some examples? The dualism found in John is primarily ethical, not ontological. It does not posit two eternal opposing forces. Instead, it highlights the contrast between good and evil, truth and falsehood, light and darkness, life and death. Examples include the contrast between those who love the darkness (sin and ignorance) and those who come to the light (truth and salvation) in John 3:19-21, and the distinction between those who are "from above" (Christ) and those who are "of the earth" (humanity) in John 3:31. The dualism between spiritual death and eternal life is also prominent, as seen in John 5:24.

6. How does John employ "symbolism" in his Gospel? John uses various symbols to convey deeper theological meanings. For example, Jesus referring to his body as the temple (John 2:19) symbolizes that he is the ultimate place of God's presence. His declaration "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35) symbolizes that he is the one who truly satisfies spiritual hunger and thirst. The "living water" offered to the Samaritan woman (John 4:10-14) symbolizes eternal life or the Spirit who brings it. Jesus' statement "I am the true vine" (John 15:1) uses the Old Testament imagery of Israel as a vine but presents Jesus as the fulfilled and complete vine, with true disciples being the branches.

7. What is "hyperbole" in the context of Johannine style, and what purpose does it serve? Hyperbole in John's Gospel is a sanctified overstatement, a statement made in absolute terms that is intended as a comparison for emphasis. For example, John 1:17, when stating that the law was given through Moses but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ, is not an absolute dismissal of grace and truth in the Old Testament. Instead, it hyperbolically emphasizes the surpassing greatness of the grace and truth revealed in Jesus. Similarly, Jesus' statement in John 15:22 and 24 about not being guilty of sin if he hadn't come is a hyperbole to highlight the greater culpability of those who reject him despite his words and works. These overstatements serve to grab the reader's attention and underscore important theological points.

8. How does John use apparent "contradictions" in his Gospel, and what is the intended effect? John sometimes presents statements that appear contradictory on the surface, such as Jesus saying he did not come to judge the world (John 3:17) and later stating that he did come for judgment (John 9:39). These apparent contradictions are a deliberate stylistic strategy to make the reader think more deeply and investigate further to understand the nuances. In the case of judgment, Jesus' primary purpose was salvation, but judgment is a byproduct of his coming, especially for those who reject him. Similarly, the seemingly contradictory statements in John 5:31 and 8:14 regarding the truthfulness of Jesus' own testimony are resolved when understood within the context of legal principles requiring multiple witnesses; Jesus' witness is true because it is in harmony with the Father's witness.