

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Johannine Theology,

Session 1, Johannine Theology Overview

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This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson in his teaching on Johannine Theology. This is session 1, Johannine Theology Overview.

Welcome to our course on Johannine Theology, which is the theology, especially of the Gospel of John, a little bit of his letters, and let's pray to the Lord.

Gracious Father, thank you for giving us your word. Thank you for the beloved disciple and his Gospel and letters and book of Revelation. Encourage us, teach us, correct us as we think about these things together.

To expand our understanding of this fourth Gospel, we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. John's theology, or the adjective Johannine Theology, is the subject of this course.

It's a subset of Biblical theology. Perhaps a discussion of the theological encyclopedia is in order. Exegetical theology is a study of the Bible, especially using the original languages.

Biblical theology then builds upon exegetical theology to trace the Bible's teachings historically through the Scriptures, from the Old Testament into the New. It follows the Biblical storyline. A subset, still a division if you want to call it that, of Biblical theology is the study of the different Biblical corpora, it's plural of corpus, in the Scripture.

So, for example, a study of Paul's theology, Pauline theology, or the teaching of Luke-Acts would be a study of Lucan theology in that it focuses on one author and his writings. It is Biblical theology rather than exegetical, which works from the text to seek to understand it, the sweeping big sense of Biblical theology tracing doctrines from creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. Then that leads toward systematic theology, a more comprehensive presentation of the Bible's teachings, which also takes into account, not in a straight line, as exegetical theology, Biblical theology, systematic theology are in a straight line, but historical theology, the study of how the Church has understood the Scriptures and its teachings, comes in at an angle, if you will, right at this point, that is to contribute toward our understanding of systematic theology.

How could we begin to understand a systematic theology of the Lord's Supper, for example, without considering historical theology? We would work with the Biblical data, the exegesis, and Old Testament background, and then for the Lord's Supper;

for example, all we have is the institution of the Supper in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It is not in John. The celebration of the Supper, even this, is debated in the breaking of the bread in Acts 2 and Acts 20.

I think the second one is especially the Lord's Supper, and I suspect the first one is too. Then, the discussion of Paul in 1 Corinthians 10, often neglected, right around 16 and 17, and then, of course, Paul's presentation of the institution of the Supper in 1 Corinthians 11. That's all important, the exegesis, and then going from Old to New Testament, for example, with the Passover, because at the Passover, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, transforming the third cup of the blessing of the Supper into the cup of the Lord's Supper, that kind of a thing.

But how could we possibly understand a systematic theology of the Lord's Supper without considering Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and Memorialist views of the Supper? So, in any case, we're dealing with Biblical theology, not in the broad Biblical sweep of the idea of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation, but in a more localized sense, specifically studying the teaching of the Gospel of John and a little bit into John's letters. Because of its genre, we will leave the Book of Revelation and its teachings for another time, another course, and another presenter. Overview of our Johannine Theology course.

We start with John's style because a consideration of his style is an introduction to his thought. We look at the structure of the Gospel of John, which seems to be tripartite to me; that is, it has a prologue in chapters 1, 1 to 18, and an epilogue in chapter 21. Between 119 and the end of chapter 20 is the body of the Gospel of John, and that breaks into two big divisions, as we'll see.

The Book of Signs, chapters 2 through 12. The Book of Glory, chapters 13 through 20. Prologue, Book of Signs, Book of Glory, epilogue.

Purposes of the Gospel of John. Helpfully, John tells us in John 20:30 and 31 that the main purpose of his Gospel is evangelism, and there's no question about that as we read it. However, the Book of Glory does not seem to be mainly about evangelism, except for indicating the main facts upon which evangelism is based.

The death of Christ is in chapter 19, and his resurrection is in chapters 20 and 21. But the farewell discourses and final prayer of Jesus in chapters 13 through 17 are not primarily for the purpose of evangelism, so I have a second purpose, and that is the edification of the people of God. There's possibly a third purpose of apologetics, which we'll consider when we get there.

Fourth, I am saying. These are statements in the Gospel of John where Jesus says, I am the, and fill in the blank. I am the gate into the sheepfold.

I am the bread of life. I am the true vine, and so forth. I am the way, the truth, and the life.

There are seven I am sayings, interestingly clustered in the Book of Signs from chapters 6 through 11, only in the Gospel of John. No, I am sayings. I just misspoke.

There is a cluster there in the Book of Signs. In the Book of Glory there are two more I am sayings, however. 14.6 is the most important one of all, and then chapter 15, I am the true vine.

So, five of the seven clusters in the Book of Signs. Two appear in the Book of Glory. Seven different I am sayings, but not seven different meanings.

Three different meanings, and John again helpfully summarizes the meaning of all of the seven signs. He summarizes the three meanings of the seven signs in one sign, which is 14.6. I am the way, I am the truth, and the life, Jesus said. And just to preview what we're going to find, I'm the way, which means he's the Savior.

He is the gate or the door into the sheepfold. He's the way, it's the Greek word the way or road, John 14.6 in the context, the road to the Father's heavenly house, which has many rooms. I'm the way, which means no one comes to the Father except by me.

He's the unique Savior of humankind. I'm the truth. Already in chapter one of the prologue, which introduces so many themes, Jesus is presented as the revealer of God in creation.

Primarily, however, John shows him to be the revealer of God in redemption, and when he says, I am the truth, it means he is the revealer of God. He's the light of the world, as he says, and then shows, by doing a unique miracle in all of scripture up until that point, the healing of a man born blind. I'm the way, the Savior.

I'm the truth, the revealer of God. I am the life, which means he's the life-giver. Am I referring to John 10, who lays down his life for his sheep? No, that is crucial, of course, but life giver, by that I mean he bestows eternal life on his people.

He bestows eternal life on all who believe in him. This is the meaning of most of the I am sayings and most of the signs as well. So here in John 14.6, Jesus summarizes the three meanings of the seven I am sayings.

Jesus is the way, the Savior, and he's the truth, the revealer of God, who has never been revealed like this in Jesus' character, words, and works, and he is the giver of eternal life. Signs. If we chart out the signs, if we chart them in the chapters of the gospel of John, we find the seven, we find seven signs.

By the way, John wants us to count because for the first and second sign, he says, this was the first one, changing water to wine, and then healing of the nobleman's son, he says, this is the second one. He doesn't keep counting, but it's not my own private view. It's customary in Johannine studies.

He wants us to keep counting. If we do, we hit seven signs in the Book of Signs, which is where it gets its name from. The seventh one is in chapter 11.

And that is the greatest of the seven. Not only does it heal a man born blind in chapter nine, but as the man himself says, nobody has ever heard of anybody healing a man born blind. And you don't know where this guy man is from.

He is from God, you dummies. It is hilarious. An uneducated blind man who now is taking to task the leaders of Israel, the educated leaders, and teaching them the ABCs of biblical religion.

Anyway, Jesus ups the ante. And harder than healing a blind man's eyes is raising a dead man. And that's what he does in chapter 11.

No more signs. The Book of Glory is absent of signs until chapter 20. When Jesus is raised from the dead.

Is that the greatest sign? Some think so. I do. Because of Jesus' prediction in chapter two, destroy this temple in three days, I'll raise it up.

In a request for a sign, that was his answer. The text even tells us that John gave us one of his editorial comments. He was referring to the temple of his body.

And after his resurrection, his disciples believed his word and the scriptures, astonishingly, putting Jesus' words on par with the Old Testament. And then, in chapter 21, the miraculous catch of a fish would be a nice sign. But the seven signs cluster in the book of signs. The seventh one, the resurrection of Lazarus, points to the resurrection of Jesus, which is either the substance of the signs or the great sign greater than all of them, to which all of them ultimately point. Signs are John's word for Jesus' miracles, selectively recorded in chapter 20.

In the purpose statement, John says Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written so that you might believe in Christ, as Christ the Messiah and the Son of God, and by believing, have life in his name. John was selective; Jesus did many other signs; he selected seven, or perhaps eight, or perhaps nine, certainly eight, at least and maybe nine, if Jesus' resurrection is to be counted as a sign to demonstrate the identity of Christ, and to elicit faith, saving faith in him.

But Jesus' word for his signs is not signs. It works, ergo. He keeps, he speaks of the works the father gave me to do.

John 17. Father glorify your son that your son may glorify you. I finished the work you've given me to do.

Amazingly, the great high priestly prayer in chapter 17. Although it was before Jesus went to the cross, in his mind's eye, he had already gone to the cross. And as verse 24 of chapter 17 indicates, in his mind's eye, he is so resolved to go to the cross that he is as good as risen and returns to the Father.

17:24. Father, I want those whom you've given me to be where I am. To see my glory, the glory you've given me before the creation of the world because you loved me.

Time sayings. Time is saying, by the way, that our claim in some of these distinctions in John is not that they're absolutely distinctive. Some of these appear in the other gospels, for example.

But it is their prevalence and their importance in the fourth gospel that make them distinctive time sayings, or when Jesus says things like my time has not yet come, or the Jews wanted to lay hands on him, but they did not because his time had not yet come, indicating the providential protection of the father. Then, at the end of chapter 12, at the beginning of 13, it says that his time has come. It is the appointed time for him to do his work or his works.

His works are the words he comes out of his mouth and the deeds he does. His works are especially about his death and resurrection. Time sayings are bigger than that because they actually go all the way to the end. As in chapter five, time is coming, the hour is coming, and the hour and time are somewhat interchangeable.

The hour is coming when the dead will hear the voice of the son of man, and those who are in their graves will come out. John five, around 28 and 29. That is a prediction, a prediction, of course, as of the resurrection of the dead at the voice of Jesus, the Lord Jesus.

It is John 5:28 and 29. Time sayings give historical order to the gospel of John. They're very important that way, along with the feasts.

They mark time. They point to the biblical story. That's important because John is existential in the sense that we say to somebody, a seeker, read the gospel of John.

It's as if Jesus is speaking right to you. That's because he is speaking right to you. And so Bultmann could emphasize that feature of it.

There's that existential, that direct communication between Jesus and the sinner, the reader, which has led many people to Christ because they agree with the temple police in chapter seven, who went to arrest Jesus and came back empty-handed. And what's the matter with you? The Pharisees want to know. What is your problem? Where is he? And they said, never has any man spoken the way this man has spoken.

I laugh at the Pharisees and the scribes. A blind man can see better than they can, a former blind man. The temple police, who are no scholars at all, they can hear better than the leaders, but the leaders are blind and deaf to the claims of Christ.

Responses to Jesus are what we want to deal with. Two big responses to Jesus, and like most other themes, not everyone, but many, many themes, are introduced in the prologue. He came to his own; his own did not receive him.

As many as did receive him, he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believed in his name—two responses already in the prologue. The first one is negative, and the second one is positive.

Is that important? Oh yes, it's important. It outlines the gospel of John because from the prologue through the end of 12, the Book of Signs is largely met with failure. Although Jesus had done so many signs in their presence, they still did not believe in him, 12:37.

That is horrible, absolutely horrible. That's the right verse, 12:37. And of course, so that summarizes, of course, some people believed, but in general, the words and deeds of Jesus were met with Jewish unbelief.

John 20:30, and 31, as personified in Thomas, who believed when he saw, we don't think he actually needed to touch. Jesus said touch. He believed Jesus pronounced him blessed for believing and pronounced more blessed those who believe without seeing. Then, the purpose statement again says that the signs are written that people might believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, they may have life in his name.

So, the responses to Jesus outlined already in the prologue really outlined the book in terms of responses to the Son of God. 12:37 summarizes the majority response to the messages and miracles of Jesus in the Book of Signs, and that is thumbs down. 20, 30, and 31 summarize the believing response of the 11 disciples in chapter 13 in verse 1. Jesus brings the disciples into the upper room and shuts the door to the world.

The audience of the Book of Signs is the world, especially the Jewish world. The audience of the Book of Glory is the disciples—witnesses to Jesus.

Witnesses to Jesus are introduced in the prologue, especially with John the Baptist. That's exactly how he's identified. He's not the Christ.

He's a pointer to the Christ. He is a witness. He was sent from God to bear witness to the light.

He's not the light, but he's sent to bear witness to the light that all might believe in the light through him. Witnesses to Jesus are throughout the gospel of John, the great Roman Catholic scholar of the gospel, Raymond Brown, and his anchor Bible commentary taught me this. John minimizes the actual time, the actual text where Jesus stands before Pilate and Herod in the trials toward the end of his life.

He includes it, sometimes with irony that's almost hilarious, which we'll look at later. But he includes it, but clips it, shortens it. Instead, he shows that Jesus was on trial his whole life.

And the Jewish leaders reject him. They condemn him. That's their verdict.

But God gives another verdict, and he does it through perhaps seven. Is that number recurring? Yes. Perhaps seven, but I get that by having another category, so maybe it's fallacious.

But many witnesses, at least seven. And this is found in two major passages in John, the witnesses to Christ. The big one is right in chapter five.

The Old Testament, the Father, Jesus' miracles, and John the Baptist all bear witness to the Son of God. There is not a lack of evidence. That's exactly what John is showing.

Jesus is on trial his whole life. Yes, there are trials at the end, and John has it. But he's on trial the whole time.

And the Father even bears witness from heaven. Father, glorify your name, chapter 12. Father, God speaks from heaven.

I have glorified it, and I'll glorify it again. And the people all say, hallelujah, we've heard the voice of... No, they don't. They say I think it thundered, or I think an angel spoke.

In other words, John is being ironic and even sarcastic. If the good Lord spoke from heaven, these people wouldn't get it. John's primary presentation of sin is as unbelief, and there it is.

God speaks from heaven, glorifying his own name in his son, and the hearers don't hear it. They don't get it. They use synoptic language.

They don't have ears to hear. Reflecting Isaiah 6. Chapter eight also has significant witnesses to Jesus and enough said—pictures of the Son of God.

John paints many pictures of Jesus. He is the revealer of God. He's the life-giver.

He's the Messiah, the Christ. He's the Son of Man. He's the Son of God and more.

John also paints pictures of Jesus saving work. Is it the doctrine of the atonement? It's bigger than that. It is his saving work.

Yes, the first mention is there in chapter one. He's the Lamb of God, as John the Baptist said, who takes away the sins of the world, a sacrificial priestly theme developed in the high priestly prayer. I sanctify myself that they, the disciples and other believers, might be sanctified, but his saving work includes him as the grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies and produces a great harvest, and he's the victor who overcomes the devil and the world on behalf of his people.

He is the life-giver, as we said. That's part of his saving work, his resurrection saves. As a matter of fact, chapter 10 says, I have, I lay down my life, I take it up again.

The Father has given me permission to lay down my life and to take it up again. The Holy Spirit occurs in the fourth gospel. Primarily, he's viewed as post-Pentecost, but not absolutely.

He does appear earlier than that, but many times we have a doctrine of the binity in the fourth gospel, and I say it like this. Well, here we have the Father and the Son presented as God. We don't have the Holy Spirit presented as God right here, but Christian theology says, based upon the whole gospel of John and what we know from the rest of the New Testament, that the Spirit is God as well.

So, we have the doctrine of a trinity, the trinity assumed or projected, something like that, because primarily John speaks in the farewell discourses, 14, 15, 16, of the Spirit as the Spirit of truth and the Spirit of life. Both of those are viewed as future ministries of the Holy Spirit, and perhaps the most important thing to say about the Spirit is he takes Jesus' place. He's Jesus' alter ego, and many of the ministries of Jesus, convicting the world of sin, revealing the Father, glorifying the Father, giving life, are taken up by the Spirit of truth, and he's also the Spirit of life.

Those tags come from Sinclair Ferguson's marvelous book on the Holy Spirit. The book is called *The Holy Spirit, Condors of Christian Theology* in Varsity Press. John's theology also includes the church.

He doesn't use the church. Only Matthew uses that word of the gospels in chapters 16 and 18 of his gospel, but John has the idea of the church without the word church. We need to be aware of the word concept fallacy.

It works two ways. One way is to say you must have a particular word or words to communicate an idea. In this case, you must have the word church or churches, and that's wrong, simply wrong.

John never says the church, but the church is made up of sheep. It's made up of those who abide in the vine. It's the people of God whom the Father gave to the Son, and much more, which we will examine, a theme that is not so commonly examined but which is important.

Salvation is all over the place, and so we have six topics devoted to it. God's love, the source, the basis, the font of salvation, if you will, election, God's choosing people for salvation. Here again, we avoid the word concept fallacy.

John never uses the word election, predestined, or predestination, but with three pictures, he presents the concept of election. The Father gives people to the Son. The Son is the author of election in chapter 15.

I don't think I got to the third one before, I omitted it. In the third picture of the election, the Father gives people to the Son. Four times in John 17, that notion occurs.

It determines the high priestly prayer. It is incredible. Jesus is the author of election only in John 15, 16, and 19.

The third picture is the prior or antecedent identity of the people of God. In John 10, Jesus says, I know my sheep, I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. A couple of verses before, he says, perhaps around verse 26, after, by what authority do you do these signs? Do another sign, Jesus says.

I've done plenty of you don't believe. You don't believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me, and I give them eternal life.

Now, wait a minute. Did that say you're not my sheep because you don't believe? No. Isn't that true? Yes.

As a matter of fact, that is more common in John's gospel, not the very words, but the concept. Unbelief disqualifies one from eternal life. So, surely, you're not my sheep because you don't believe is true.

That's not what Jesus says here. He says you don't believe because you're not my sheep. The sheep, and I'll call them the goats, have a prior identity, oh, known only to God.

Disciples don't know who's elect and who's not elect, but God does. And this is the third picture of election in the gospel of John. My sheep are designated in that way.

There's an antecedent or prior identity to the people of God before they believe. My sheep hear my voice. It means they believe in Jesus, and they follow me.

It means they enter a life of discipleship. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. Election is an important theme of the fourth gospel, as D. A. Carson shows in his big book, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility, Biblical Perspectives and Tension*.

In his more popular book, he also shows *How Long, O Lord*, biblical statements on suffering and evil. That's not the right subtitle, but it's close. Eternal life occurs many, many times in the fourth gospel.

As many scholars have said, if the kingdom of God is the resounding word in the first three gospels, life, eternal life, is the word in the fourth gospel. As we'll see when we look at John's vocabulary, the kingdom of God is not absent, but it's very minimal. Eternal life is all over the place.

My word, it is 34 or 35 times it occurs in the gospel of John, a total of less than 20 times in the other gospels, always in John of eternal life. It is God's gift, divine sovereignty. It is what one receives by believing in Jesus, human responsibility.

It is already, and it is not yet. It is already, and this is eternal life, John 17:3, that they might know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. Knowing the Father and the Son now is eternal life.

Chapter 5, anyone who hears my voice and believes him who sent me has passed from death to life. Now, a couple of verses later in John 5, 28, 29, it's the not-yet dimension of eternal life. The voice of the Son of Man, those in their graves will come out, including those who have done good, and they will come out to a resurrection of eternal life.

Salvation also speaks of drawing, at least twice I can think of. John says the Father draws people to the Son. It means he affectionately uses Paul's language and calls them in time and space so that they would believe in the Son of God.

Drawing. Chapter 12, Jesus says he draws all people to himself. In this context, not only Jews but the Greeks had asked to speak to him.

He seems to put them off, but he includes them in this great saying. The resurrection of the dead is taught in the fourth gospel, where Jesus says numerous times, I will raise the people that the Father gave me, the people who come to me, that means believe in me, the people whom the Father draws to me, I will raise them on the last day. He repeats it in chapter six, for example.

So, salvation culminates in the resurrection to eternal life for the people of God, for those who believe in Jesus. Salvation also involves God's work of preservation, keeping his people. This is the will of the Father, chapter six, that I lose none that he's given me, but raise them up on the last day.

Everyone who believes in me, who comes to me, I will not cast out. Jesus keeps the sheep. He preserves his people.

As a matter of fact, chapter 10 shows it is the work of the Father and the Son in harmony. I give them eternal life, John 10:26, and they will never perish. The Father who has given them to me is greater.

I've got to get to it, sorry. When you start botching a text, you go to the text—principle number four.

What are the first three principles? I've got no idea. My sheep hear me, I know them, they follow me, I give them eternal life, they'll never perish. And no one will snatch them out of my hand.

It's a picture of violence, tearing people away from Jesus, or perhaps of sheep from the shepherd's strong arms. The thought is that if he uses the strongest term, snatch, it includes lesser terms. So, he goes for the highest degree of opposition.

Not only so, not only does Jesus keep his sheep, but my Father who has given them to me is greater than all. There's an economic subordination of the Son to the Father as the Son comes into the world. Not an ontological subordination so as to make the Son less than God, but he is less than the Father functionally in that the God, the Son, becomes a human being and subordinates himself willingly to the Father for the work of salvation of the people of God.

My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one in context is not a statement about philosophical ontology.

We're one in our being, but it is a statement about the deity of the Father and the Son because I give them eternal life. They'll never perish. I preserve them, the Father preserves them, I and the Father are one in our divine work of preserving the sheep. Jesus does that work that only God performs.

Preservation is one aspect of salvation, traditionally called the perseverance of the saints. It is done by the Father and the Son in the fourth gospel. I do not immediately think of a case where it is done by the Spirit in Paul; I can think of cases in the fourth gospel.

I cannot think of one, but if I were to move towards systematic theology, I would say that since God is a triunity, he is three in one, and all his works are indivisible. We don't confuse the persons, but the works of God are one. It is the Father, Son, and Spirit who keep us saved, although I can't show a text in the fourth gospel already and not yet.

In concert with the rest of the New Testament, John shows that the major features of last things are fulfilled in Jesus and that they are yet to be fulfilled at the same time. We see it with the time sayings, and his time had come, end of 12. Jesus, knowing the time had come for him to leave this world and return to the Father, loves his own until the end, John 13.1. That's already, and yet the time for the resurrection of the dead, John 5.28-29, is not yet.

It is yet future. Eternal life in John is primarily already. It is primarily a fait accompli.

It's the present possession of believers. But it also is future. I mean, yes, it also is future.

Ah, John 12. So, predominantly, eternal life is now in the fourth gospel. Here's one place. Perhaps there's more than one, but here's one that comes to mind.

John 12:25. Whoever loves his life loses it. Whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life, which is contrasted with life in this world. It means life in the next world.

Whoever hates his life, so-called oriental comparison, compared with love for God, our love for anything else, is hatred. It doesn't mean literally hating your life. Whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

The commentaries on John show that that is a futuristic reference to eternal life. And so, it is with other themes as well. They're already, and they're not yet.

Already, there's the resurrection of the dead, John 5, the spiritual resurrection. Whoever hears my word and believes in him who sent me, that's how much Jesus is the revealer of the Father, has passed from death to life. He's been spiritually raised.

But John 5.28.29, it is only at the voice of the Son of Man in the future that the dead will come out of their graves. This is enough for our first lecture. We have had an overview of John's theology.

We will take up his style in our next lecture.

This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson in his teaching on Johannine Theology. This is session 1, Johannine Theology Overview.