

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Johannine Theology, Session 3, The Johannine Style, Part 2

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This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson in his teaching on Johannine theology. This is session 3, The Johannine Style, Part 2.

Please pray with me. Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for the gospel of John. Open it up to us more widely. Encourage us, correct us, and lead us in your everlasting way; we pray through Jesus Christ, the mediator of the new covenant. Amen.

We're still in the orientation phase, this time studying John's style. We've looked at his distinctive vocabulary, explanatory or editorial notes, misunderstandings, and irony. Now we go to double meaning. The apostle John often plays on the twofold meaning of words.

Students who have learned the hermeneutical principle that a word has only one meaning in any given context tend to regard with suspicion examples of Johannine double entendre, double meaning, or label them perhaps coincidences. However, they're too frequent to be coincidences. John has broken the rule, of course.

Single meaning is the basic rule. There would be no double meaning if there weren't a single meaning, but he has broken it to good effect.

Let us not be guilty of dictating to the biblical writers what they can or cannot do. Let us humbly study the word to see what they did. Already in the prologue, the Word became flesh, John says, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory.

The word dwelt means to live for a short time, but it is from an old test, the root of an Old Testament word in the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint, which relates to the word tabernacle, hence tabernacled with us. Well, how did you? Why do you say that's possibly right? By the way, it does mean dwelt, but it's a double meaning. We say it also reflects that tabernacle root because of these words.

We have seen his glory, glory, and tabernacle go together. 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. In chapter two, we've already seen that he replaces the Old Testament temple with his body, which is the truest and greatest temple, if you will.

In chapter three, you must be born again. That word anothen means again, and it means from above. And as a matter of fact, both make perfectly good sense.

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. Are these all coincidences? No. Students of John's writings do not think they are.

They find them to be examples of John using double meaning to engage the reader again. That's what he's doing with these things. The famous saying in the gospel of John is about a river in which a child can walk and an elephant can swim.

We're in elephant waters now. Surely, somebody reading it for the first time wouldn't see these things. But here's the deal.

They are there. They are there to pique our interest, to grab our attention. And I've already said it.

John 4:10 to 14 speaks of the living water to the Samaritan woman, which would mean running water. It's live. It's running.

It's alive. Get it? And Jesus, of course, uses it for a double meaning to speak of spiritual water, so to speak. It's symbolic of eternal life, which the spirit gives, or perhaps it's symbolic of the spirit who brings eternal life.

You can make a good case for either one. They both make sense. But whichever one you choose, it implies the other.

Regular parallelism, I'm on number six now, chiasm. Regular parallelism follows the pattern A, B, B, A, or A, B, C, C, B, A. You can have as many members as you want: A, B, C, D, E, E, D, C, B, A, like that. We usually put little raised numeral number ones by the reflection.

So, A, B, B', A', like that. John uses chiasm to bind passages together and to emphasize certain ideas. So, in the prologue, we have these designations for Jesus.

He is not called Jesus right away, and that makes sense because, as the pre-incarnate son, he wasn't Jesus yet. Both Joseph and Mary were told to name Jesus. So as the pre-incarnate son, maybe he's called the son, right? No.

The Christ? No. The second person of the Trinity? No. No, he's called, first of all, the word in verse one, twice, three times.

And then he's called. His next title is the light. And at least he's called that in verse eight. So, here's how it works.

John designates the pre-incarnate son as the word, and then he calls him the light. And if he were following regular parallelism, we would have this pattern: word, light, incarnation as word, incarnation as light, but he reverses that order. It's word in verse one, it's light in verse eight, it's the true light coming into the world, a B prime in nine, and the word made flesh, of course, in verse 14.

And again, this is recognized by every commentary. Many, many commentators recognize it. One's big enough to deal with stuff like this. See it. How does it function? It functions to highlight the incarnation of the word, the illumination of the world by the light.

The true light was coming into the world. Verse nine, the word became a human being, a man of flesh and blood, 14. This is the only time in the gospel of John in the prologue that the incarnation is actually stated.

We have the results of it many times. Jesus calls himself the one sent by the Father, or he says, The Father sent me. And he said, you're from below, I'm from above, those kinds of things.

But here explicitly, we have the true light coming into the world, pictures the world as sinful and as ignorant, devoid of the knowledge of God; the true light comes in and brings knowledge of God and brings purity and sanctification for everyone who believes. So, John uses this chiasmic pattern, inverted parallelism, to unify a section of his text and to point out, in this case, the most important topic of the prologue, which is the second person of the Trinity becoming a human being. We have a chiasmic structure in chapter six, verses 36 to 40.

I don't have notes on this; I do it just on the run, so I sometimes make mistakes. But 36, I said to you, you have seen me, and you do not believe. All the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me, I will never cast out.

For I've come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of the father, that everyone who looks on the son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

There is a chiasmic pattern here. See if I can pull it out. Verse 36 speaks of seeing and believing, but it's negated, seeing and not believing. Verse 40, everyone who looks on the son and believes in him.

So, there's A and A prime. Again, we use a raised number one to say A prime matches A, but it's prime. It's not identical. In some texts, actually, it could be identical, but it's not identical; it's very similar.

We'll talk about John's variations, which are an important part of his style, in a moment. That's 36. All the Father gives me will come to me; whoever comes to me, I will never cast out.

That's 39, that's B, that's B, Jesus preserving the people of God. B prime is down in 39. God's will is that he should lose nothing, that I should lose nothing of all he's given me, but raise it up on the last day.

So, seeing and believing, Jesus kept the people the Father had given to him, the people who believed in him. A, B, C, all the father gives me will come to me, whoever comes to me I will never, okay we did that one, I've come down from heaven, 38, not to do my own will, but the will of whom who sent me. That's C, and here's C prime, and this is the will of him who sent me.

C and C prime both have that concept. Jesus has come to do the Father's will. And so, A, B, C, C prime, B prime, A prime.

There's an interesting one in chapter 12. I don't know if I've seen this one. I tell I've told my students over the years that if I ever have an original thought, you ought to be very suspicious of it.

I don't, I don't claim to be creative, but John 12:38 to 41 is fascinating. That's not the one I was thinking of, but this is okay. Father, glorify your name.

No, that's wrong, that's 28. Ah, it is the one I was thinking of, 38. 37 is the key to the whole first half of the gospel of John, the whole book of signs.

It parallels the great purpose statement as we saw, and here it says, though he had done so many signs before them, the Jews, the world, they still do not believe in him. So that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled. And here's that word, Lord, who has believed what he heard from us and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed, in a quotation from Isaiah 53.

So, in the word of Isaiah, A, in verse 38, A, I'm using A in two different senses. Verse 38, the first part, verse 38, the second part is B, the quotation of Isaiah 53. Speaking of belief, 30, 39, they could not believe B prime for, again, Isaiah said, quoting the prophet, and now he quotes Isaiah six.

He has blinded their eyes, hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them. A, B, B prime, A prime, Isaiah, he speaks of the prophet's word, quotes chapter 53. Quotes Isaiah 6 speaks this time of the prophet's word and unbelief.

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. Variation is another feature of John's style. As a matter of fact, variation is so much a feature of John's style that amazing things obtain.

What do you mean? Leon Morris, who wrote a wonderful commentary on John, a solid evangelical commentary, boy, and I revere Leon Morris and his work and his influence, hesitate to speak against, I'm not speaking against him, but overall, his wonderful commentary on John could be improved, a good way to say it, because perhaps he reads John too much like a synoptic gospel, and perhaps the great man of God, Leon Morris, doesn't have enough of John's distinctive in view as he writes it. In any case, his commentary is good, and his studies in the fourth gospel are also good. One chapter in that book is called Variation, a Feature of the Johannine Style.

Morris easily demonstrates John's frequent variations of vocabulary and word order, and he concludes that variation is to be expected. It is just common in John. As a matter of fact, he draws the radical conclusion of this.

Variation is such a common feature of John's style that its presence is pretty much insignificant, but as a matter of fact, it may be significant when he does not vary his vocabulary; it's a way of placing emphasis. John varies it, so the difference between love and love, agape and phileo in chapter 21, is just part of his variation. John uses two different words for no. He says sheep and sheep and lambs, and he says, love and love.

It looks like he's just varying; he varies his vocabulary, and he varies things. As a matter of fact, Morris, Leon Morris, who's now with the Lord, was part of an older generation of New Testament scholars who sometimes were encyclopedic in their study of words, and here's an example. He studies every time in the fourth gospel, something is repeated, and he shows almost every time there's a variation in word order of vocabulary.

Then he studies things happening three times, four times, five times. The epitome, and I've lost count, is that six or eight times is John 15 with abiding. John says abide, abide, abide, every branch that abides in me bears my, if you don't abide, abide, oh my word, and Morris shows every single occurrence of abide in John 15 shows variation.

So, he had to be careful. Can't John make a point by variation? Yes, he could, but you better be careful. The mere point of his, the mere, the mere occasion of his varying probably means zip.

So, chapter three, I've heard, you know, sermons and so forth, you can't see the kingdom of God, you can't enter it, you can't even see it. I think it's probably just

Johannine variation. And since *phileo* is used of the father's love for the son, sometimes, it's wrong to say automatically *phileo* is a lesser love than *agapao*.

In fact, sometimes it could be mere love between human beings, but it isn't necessarily the case, because variation is a feature of John's style. I'm not going to show other examples. There are many of them, many, many, many of them.

Old Testament ideas. John's gospel is replete with Old Testament allusions. Each of the first 12 chapters contains ideas whose roots sink deep in Old Testament soil.

This is another important aspect of John's style. Sometimes, it is a key to interpreting a passage. John 1:17, for example, the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

I'm thankful for progressive dispensationalism, which has improved, excuse me, the older dispensational understandings. Theologies develop. My own covenant Calvinistic theology develops.

Anthony Hoekema has taught us that some Old Testament expressions concerning the land promise are to be fulfilled literally in the new earth. For example, that's an improvement of the covenantal tradition. I'm thankful for improvements in the dispensational tradition compared to the certainly old and even new school feel Bibles.

John 1:17, if understood against its Old Testament background, where grace and truth reflect the Hebrew, *hesed*, God's covenantal steadfast love and faithfulness are in the Old Testament, the great definition of God's name in Exodus 34, for example, and in many Psalms. Here I am again, just winging it. I'm afraid my flight will take me.

Ah, there it is. It's good. 1:17.

Great is the steadfast love *hesed*, toward us, God's and the *Emmet*, the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. This Old Testament combination is very common. And if it's an Old Testament combination, then it's present in the Old Testament.

Then what does John 1:17 mean? The law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. If that's an Old Testament concept, then it's not an absolute disjunction, is it? No, it is not.

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. It's like 2 Corinthians three: the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ makes the glory of God in the face of Moses in the book of Exodus as nothing as no glory. But Paul just said there was glory.

So, it's that kind of a deal. It's a, it's a, it's a, it's an example of hyperbole. John states in bald, absolute terms, what is really a comparison compared to the revelation of God in Jesus.

The mosaic revelation is merely legal by comparison. Absolutely. So, no grace and truth come from the Old Testament.

An Old Testament background identification is the key to one 51. Many people reading it for the first time can think it's some kind of an eschatological notion. Truly I say to you, Nathaniel, Jesus said, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of man.

Oh, it's not talking about Jesus coming again with the angels. No, no. The Old Testament background is Jacob's ladder in Genesis 28.

Jacob sees a ladder connecting heaven and earth angels going up and down. Here's the point: the connection between heaven and earth is now replaced by Jesus. In other words, seeing heaven opened, the very presence of God and the angels, and descending on the son of man, he's the ladder between heaven and earth.

In other words, Jesus is the mediator. It's not talking about his second coming, which John teaches. It is rather teaching about his being a mediator.

Old Testament ideas illumine the fourth gospel. 11:24. Before Jesus says I'm the resurrection and the life, Martha shows herself as a faithful Jew.

She understands her Old Testament. I know her brother Lazarus, who is dead, will rise again in resurrection on the last day. That's Daniel 12, too.

And a couple of passages in Isaiah that elude me right now, perhaps chapters 25 and 26. Have I written that in my Bible? That'd be a good idea, Peterson. Yes.

Isaiah 25, eight, and 26:19. I'm not going to turn there. Isaiah 25, eight and 26, 19, along with Daniel 12 too.

Many times, regarded as the clearest evidence, many who sleep in the dust of the earth shall arise, and it distinguishes the wicked from the righteous. Martha understands the Old Testament's teaching on resurrection. And Jesus, as usual, goes one better and says he himself is the resurrection and the life.

John 15, one. I'm the true vine. Of course, it is to be read against the Old Testament notion of Israel being the vine or the vineyard of the Lord.

Think of Isaiah five. True doesn't mean as opposed to false. Rather, in John's thinking, true means fulfilled, complete, and new.

Israel failed as the vine of the Lord. God looked and found bad fruit. Jesus produces good fruit in those who truly join him in faith union.

Symbolism. We've seen 2:19, where Jesus' body is in the temple. 6:35.

I'm the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger. Whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

John, I'm sorry, why do I do this? I beg your pardon. Dualism. John 3:19 to 21.

More than once, I've had bad references. I'm sorry. John 3:19 to 21.

Let me just say this. The dualism in the fourth gospel is to be understood as an ethical dualism, not as an ontological dualism. The Bible knows nothing of Manichaeism, the notion that there are two eternal principles, one the light and one the darkness.

I'll tell you where that is reflected. It's reflected in the Star Wars movies. There's a light and a dark side to the force.

No, that is an ontological dualism. That is, God, or in that case, gods, exist forever. The good and the bad.

No way. The Bible teaches an ontological monism. There's one true and living God, and he is totally good.

Sin is an intruder into his world. Instead, John's dualism is not metaphysical or ontological. It is ethical.

Above and below. Spirit and flesh. Truth and falsehood.

Death and life. John 3:19 through 21. This is the judgment.

Light has come into the world, and people love the darkness rather than the light because their works are evil. Here is an ethical dualism between the light and the darkness. Here is an echo of 1:9, and speaks of the incarnation.

Jesus, the light, has come into the world. People love the darkness. They loved sin, and they loved ignorance rather than the light because their works were evil.

They don't want to be exposed. Everyone who does wicked things, John 3:20, hates the light and does not come into the light, lest his work should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out by God.

This is an ethical dualism. The eternal light comes into the world and shines on human beings, highlighting their sin, and those who are convicted and repent and believe are saved. Those who hate the light and turn away from the light are lost.

3:31. He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthy way.

John the Baptist is distinguishing between himself and Christ. It is not John the Baptist's fault that it was a John the Baptist cult in the early second century. What more could John do? I am not the Christ, he says.

Just before this, I've been sent before him. I'm simply the bridegroom, the friend of the bridegroom. The people of God are the bride.

Jesus is the bridegroom. I'm just the best man. I'm just a friend.

Good grief. And he says he who comes from above is the son of God who comes from heaven; he's above all. He's so far above me that I'm not worthy to take the role of the lowest house slave.

I can't even untie his sandals. Who is from the earth? That's me. I'm a mere human being, John is saying.

Belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. Jesus speaks in a heavenly way on earth. Again, an ethical dualism.

5:24. Whoever hears my word, believes him who sent me, has eternal life. He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life.

In other words, he's spiritually resurrected. In other words, he is born again. He is regenerated.

The dualism between death and life. 15, 2. I'm the true vine. My father is the vinedresser.

Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away. He prunes every branch that bears fruit so that it may bear more fruit. The taking away, as the metaphor shows, as it continues, speaks of judgment.

They're gathered up, and they're burned in the fire. It speaks of those who are lost. Wait a minute, wait a minute.

Every branch in me, doesn't that speak of union with Christ? No, not yet. The passage does speak of union with Christ, but that particular language simply means both branches, if you will, are identified with Christ, and the fruit-bearing indicates who really is a true disciple. That's what he says here.

It'd be right if I got in the right chapter. Sheesh. I'm the vine, you're the branches.

Whoever abides in me and I in him, he disappears much fruit. If anyone does not abide in me, he's thrown away like a branch and withers. Branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

Ah, verse 8. By this, my father glorifies that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. Fruit bearing demonstrates discipleship. No fruit, no eternal life.

It is not just in this passage. It is a consistent biblical principle. Degrees of fruit, of course.

The parable of the soils is in Matthew 13 in Matthew's gospel. Yes, Matthew 13. The good soil produces fruit.

30 fold, 60 fold, 100 fold. I'm not sure about my folds, but there's three, there are three different degrees of fruit-bearing. The unsaved human beings indicated by the other three types of soil have no fruit and no lasting fruit.

No fruit, no eternal life. Fruit, eternal life. Then, there are degrees in that area.

In any, in any case, here is the dualism. The fruit-bearing branch and the branch that does not bear fruit. Hyperbole is the final feature of John's style.

It is a sanctified overstatement. We saw it in chapter one in verse 17. The law was given through Moses, and grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

If you recognize grace and truth are an Old Testament pair, combination, or couplet, then you understand this is not an absolute bald comparison between law and grace and truth, but it is a hyperbolic statement of comparison compared to the grace and truth revealed in the Old Testament, which is in the Old Testament. It's an Old Testament expression. Exodus 34, Psalm 117, and many other places compared to that, to the grace and truth revealed in Jesus.

The Old Testament grace and the truth are mere, appears to be mere, and the Old Testament appears to be merely legal by comparison. It's hyperbole. 3:17.

In other words, John is a great writer. It is a magnificent literary production based upon historical truth and facts and teaches great theology. God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, as stated in verse 3:17 of John, but in order for the world to be saved through him.

The purpose of the son's coming was not to bring condemnation. It was to bring salvation. However, he did bring condemnation.

It's like missionaries going into an unevangelized area. What is their goal? It is to bring salvation. Do they also bring condemnation? Yes.

Do they also bring judgment? Yes. Is it their goal? No. It's a byproduct of bringing salvation.

And so, Jesus could say in chapter 15, if I had not done the works that no one did, you would not be guilty of sin. It's right here, 15:22, and 24. That is not an absolute statement.

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin. Yes, they would. It is not an absolute.

They were. Jesus is not denying original sin. The meaning is this.

Let me get that both parts, 24. If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. Here's how you pick out these hyperboles.

They're not literally true. Here's the meaning. Of course, human beings were guilty.

That's why Jesus came into the world to save them. But their guilt before they came into the presence of the son of God, the great revealer of God, the great life giver, their guilt, their prior guilt, compared to their guilt after rejecting him, their prior guilt is as no guilt. Here's how this, here's how Matthew would say it, how Jesus would say it in Matthew.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. But John says it with this hyperbole. It looks like Jesus is denying original sin.

That's what tells us it's not literal. It's metaphorical. It is a hyperbolic statement given in absolute terms, but it's really a comparison.

Compared to your guilt at rejecting the son of God in his words and signs, your prior guilt, which was considerable, is negligible. In other words, your guilt now is to the

heavens. 9:39, all of this, or most of this, is to grab hold of the reader and not let them go.

Yes, I understand, a child reading, a first reading, you're not going to get all this. But as you dig in and read, whew, now I understand 3:17. 3:17 said he did not come to judge.

I have to read it along with 939, where he says he did come to judge. For judgment, I came into the world. Which is it? It's both.

And you're supposed to see the apparent contradiction. The son did not come into the world to condemn the world but to save the world. The father did not send the son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him.

Here, 939, for judgment, I came into the world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind. Ah, John's speech is in some ways is so elephantine, if I can talk like that, so remarkable. Jesus' goal was to save, not to condemn 319, like the missionary.

They bring condemnation, but it isn't their purpose. The people would be better off if there were no missionaries if they rejected the missionary's message because now their judgment is greater. What can be greater than being in hell forever? Being in hell forever is consistent with degrees of punishment in hell.

Woe to you, Capernaum. Woe to you, another Galilean city. For if the miracles done in you had been done in Sodom and Gomorrah, they would have repented.

The judgment of Capernaum and Bethsaida is worse than the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. Why? Greater light brings greater responsibility. Greater responsibility, rejected, failed, brings greater judgment.

There are degrees of punishment in hell. Romans 2, by your stubborn hearts, you are adding, increasing, you're adding up your judgment in the day of the revelation of God's righteous judgment. Storing up judgment is the language.

9:39, Jesus did come to bring judgment, not primarily, but a byproduct of his coming to bring salvation is he brings judgment. 531 and 814 go together. This is a surface contradiction.

5:31, if I alone bear witness, I think the ESV added a word there. I'm not saying it's not the proper meaning and solution to the problem, but I don't think it says if I am alone. John 5:31 says, yeah, there's no alone there.

If I bear witness about myself, my witness is not true. The ESV has solved the problem. I'm not saying it's wrong.

To translate the Bible, you have to interpret the Bible or any other document. If I bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true. In chapter 8, in 8:14, he says that if he bears witness about himself, his witness is true.

Wait a minute. That is a contradiction. It is a surface contradiction, and we admit it.

Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true. What's going on? The ESV's impetus is correct. Although, it's not my right to judge the judgments of a committee.

I'll tell you a funny story. I knew people translating and studying the Bible years and years ago, and they were working with the Ten Commandments, and they plainly understood that thou shalt not kill meant thou shalt not murder. Okay.

There's no question, but the committee was, in some term, some agitation for, they said, we can't change the Ten Commandments. I don't know whether they put a note or whatever, but they were so hesitant to change the ten holy words of God. And I respect that motivation, too.

But in any case, we're supposed to notice these contradictions, right? And then we're supposed to investigate further. You say that's John's strategy to make us think exactly. It's a strategy.

And in a 5:31, the ESV has solved the problem. I'm not sure they should do it in the biblical text like that. But anyway, if I, uh, I can do nothing on my own, verse 30, as I hear, I judge.

And my judgment is just because I seek not my own will, but the will of him who sent me. If I bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true. The meaning is exactly as they say: if I bear witness about myself, contrary to the father's witness, if I bear witness to myself out of harmony with the other witnesses like that, because the very nurse first says very next versus there's another who bears witness about me.

And I know that the testimony he bears about me is true. What he's doing is he's appealing to the legal, the testimony from the law, the principle that you need to at least two witnesses for a matter to be valid for a judgment to be valid. And he's appealing to himself.

So, if I bear witness of myself alone only in con and contradict the father, my witness is false, but he's not saying that his witness is false. It is in that context. Uh, anyway, John's style is just amazing.

It draws us in. It keeps us in. It makes us think it is quite the deal.

And in our next lecture, we will consider the structure of the gospel of John.

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