

EXPOSITION OF JOHN (Introduction Part I)

Message #1

Various Texts

For many Christians, the most precious book in all of the New Testament is the Gospel of John. Martin Luther loved John and said it is the “chief gospel, unique, tender and true” (Thomas Whitelaw, *Commentary on John*, p. v.). Philip Schaff, the famed church historian, said “The Gospel of John is the most original, the most important, the most influential book in all literature” (*History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 1, p. 314). Of all of the books in the N.T., this is typically one of the first books read either prior to salvation or shortly after salvation. Perhaps more verses of Scripture are memorized from this book than any other in the entire N.T. Many have gone to theological war with people in false religions and people promoting false doctrines, firing verses from John, such as:

John 1:1 - in defense of Christ’s Deity - "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God."

John 1:14 - in defense of Christ’s humanity - "And the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we behold His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."

John 1:17 - in defense of dispensationalism - "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ."

John 8:58 - in defense of Christ’s eternality - "Truly, Truly I say to you before Abraham was born, I am."

John 10:28-29 - in defense of eternal security - "And I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish and no one is able to snatch them out of My hand, My Father who gave them to Me is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand."

Time and time again, these verses have been used from this book of John. Even major sporting events feature a sign with a verse from John on it and almost all people in the world have at least been exposed to **the most famous verse in all of John, John 3:16** - "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes on Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." Yet for all of our familiarity with some of the verses of John, the truth is most actually know very little about the book we call “The Gospel of John.”

QUESTION #1 – Why study the book of John?

(Reason #1) - Because John is one of only 66 books found in the Bible.

God magnifies His Word above everything and if a book is one of the 66 books in the Bible, we had better do our very best to understand it. **The fact that John belongs in the Bible has never been questioned.** Dr. Merrill Tenney observed, "From a very early date the Gospel of John has been part of the N.T. canon" (*John*, Expositors Bible Commentary, Vol. 9, p. 18). In fact, the earliest known manuscript still in existence today, of any portion of the New Testament, is a papyrus fragment 2 1/2 inches by 3 1/2 inches written on both sides which contains portions of five verses from the Gospel of John (18:31-33, 37-38). The entire manuscript of John would be approximately 20 feet in length. This famous fragment of John’s manuscript is named "p- 52." It is the John Rylands Fragment and it is kept in the John Rylands Library in Manchester, England. This manuscript was written before the end of the first century and it is possible it is the very one John wrote.

John was quoted as God's Word by Clement of Rome (A.D. 95); Polycarp (A.D. 110); Papias (A.D. 130); Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150); Tertullian (A.D. 150); Origen (A.D. 185).

John was specifically said to be a book in the Bible by Irenaeus (A.D. 130); Justin Martyr (A.D. 150); Cyril of Jerusalem (A.D. 315); Eusebius (A.D. 325); Jerome (A.D. 340); and Augustine (A.D. 400).

John is listed by the canon listings of books which belong in the Bible: Muratorian Canon (A.D. 170); Apostolic Canon (A.D. 300); Cheltenham Canon (A.D. 360); Athanasius Canon (A.D. 367).

John is a book found in the early translations - Old Latin (A.D. 200); Old Syriac (A.D. 400).

John is a book declared as a book of the Bible by all the major councils - Nicea (A.D. 325); Hippo (A.D. 393); Carthage (A.D. 397 and 419).

All of this evidence proves that the Gospel of John is one of the rare 66 inspired books that God gave to man - therefore we need to study it.

(Reason #2) - Because John is a book that is very deep and very difficult to understand.

John is a book shallow enough for a child to wade in and deep enough for a theologian to drown in. It is usually assumed that the Gospel of John is easy to understand. Often times this Gospel of John is referred to as the "simple gospel." Do not be fooled by the simplicity of language for this book is very deep and very difficult to accurately unravel. In fact, Jerome said, "John excels in the depths of divine mysteries" (McGee, *Thru the Bible*, Vol. 4, p. 362). Dr. Ryrie said this Gospel of John was "the most theological of the Four Gospels" (*Ryrie Study Bible*, p. 1675). Dr. Rodney Whitacre a Cambridge scholar and professor of Biblical studies said that for the first 15 years of his Christian life, the book of John was the most confusing book in all of the Bible (*John*, p. 11).

The words of the Gospel of John are not the problem. In fact, it has been observed by grammarians that most words in the gospel of John are one syllable or two syllable words. John Philips said there are only about six hundred words in John's vocabulary (*Exploring the Gospel of John*, p. 5). When I formally studied Greek, all early readings came from John because the words were relatively simple. **The problem is with the meaning of the words.** The seemingly simple words are extremely deep and very complex in true meaning. This fact caused one critic to doubt that this Gospel could have come "from the pen of an old Galilean fisherman" (Marcus Dods, *The Gospel of Saint John*, p. 677).

Let me give you a good example from the last part of John 14:20 - "You in me and I in you." You have four pronouns (You, me, I, you), two prepositions (in, in) and one conjunction (and). Simple grammar. But to properly explain this and understand it demands an exploration of the profound depths in theology. In John 21:15-17 Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves Him. Seems simple enough; however, upon examining the verbs "love" Jesus and Peter are using two different words for love and Jesus changes His word on His last usage. What does that mean?

When you first look at a mountain in the distance it looks so easy to hike up and conquer. But when you actually get to that mountain you discover it is not as simple a task as it initially appeared. John is a book like that. It is a high mountain to climb and it is not easy therefore this book demands our careful attention and inspection. John is one book that demands serious study.

(Reason #3) - Because John is a book that clearly reveals truth about Jesus Christ and develops faith in Jesus Christ.

This book of John was a book designed to teach true Christology and it has impacted the world. As we will later develop, we believe this to be the very purpose of the book of John. God's purpose was to so profoundly reveal Jesus Christ that people would believe the truth about Him and truly develop a faith that is solid. This book develops the true identity, the true Person and true work of Jesus Christ like no other gospel record. Dr. Martin Luther said that if some tyrant succeeded in destroying the Bible and only a single copy of Romans and of the Gospel of John had escaped him, Christianity would be saved (Frederic Godet, *Commentary on John's Gospel*, p. 2). Dr. Ivor Powell said that he fell in love with this fourth gospel because this book enabled him to not only blossom in his faith in Christ but actually come to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ was "his dearest friend" (*John's Wonderful Gospel*, p. 9).

Any book specifically designed to develop true faith is a book worth careful study and that is why we study the book of John.

QUESTION #2 – Who wrote John?

When one reads the book of John, one soon realizes that the author does not name himself once anywhere in the book. This is much different than with a letter from Paul who typically identifies himself at the beginning of his letter. Truth is, none of the writers of the first four books of the N.T. identifies himself. However when one examines the evidence, it will be concluded that **John was written by the Apostle John.**

(Proof #1) - The internal evidence.

1. John was written by a disciple literally "the" disciple who was an eyewitness of the events described in the book. John 21:24 - i.e. He knows days and hours. 1:35, 39; 2:1; 4:6, 40, 43, 52
2. John was written by "the disciple whom Jesus loved." John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20
 - A. The disciple whom Jesus loved was one of the seven named in John 21:2, 7: Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, two sons of Zebedee and two unnamed disciples.
 - B. The disciple whom Jesus loved was seated next to him at the Last Supper. John 13:23
 - C. The disciple whom Jesus loved was one of the twelve since they were the only ones at the Last Supper. Mark 14:17; Luke 22:14
3. John was closely connected to Peter and is one of the inner three - Peter, James and John. John 20:1-10; Mark 5:37-38; 9:2-3; 14:33
4. James, the brother of John (Matthew 4:21; 10:2), died in the year A.D. 44 before the book was written so he could not have been the author. Acts 12:2

5. The disciple who wrote John, could not have been Peter, because Peter is mentioned several times in a descriptive way. John 20:2-10
6. The disciple whom Jesus loved was at the cross and entrusted with the care of his mother . (John 19:26-27). This could not be Peter for he had abandoned Christ.

Putting all of the facts together we cannot help but conclude that the author of John was the Apostle John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, who was one of the sons of Zebedee.

B.F. Westcott said that there were five internal proofs that John had to be written by John:

1. The author was a Jew, he knew Jerusalem well - i.e. John 5:2; 10:22-23; 18:1.
2. The author was a Jew of Palestine with a great knowledge of geography - John 11:18.
3. The author was an eyewitness of what he describes; he had to be one of the twelve.
4. The author was an inner-circle apostle; he had to be either Peter, James or John.
5. The author was the Apostle John, it could not have been Peter or James, both were dead.

(Proof #2) - The external evidence.

The fact that the Gospel of John was written by the Apostle John has a very unusual support base in Church history. Philip Schaff said for nearly 18 centuries all knew “without a shadow of doubt” that the fourth Gospel “was the work of John the Apostle” (*History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 1, p. 320). Some argue this should not be used for determining who wrote it and to this we ask “Why not?” Should we dismiss the testimony of those who knew John or lived closest to him and accept the view of someone in the 19th or 20th century?

The Church historian Eusebius, who wrote his famous church history covering the first 300 years of Christianity, who was a close friend of the Emperor Constantine, who declared Christianity to be legally and fully tolerated in A.D. 313 wrote: "John, we are told, who hitherto had relied entirely on the spoken word, finally took to writing for the following reason. The three gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) already written were in general circulation and copies had come into John's hands. He welcomed them, we are told, and confirmed their accuracy, but remarked that the narrative only lacked the story of what Christ had done first of all at the beginning of His mission. This tradition is undoubtedly true. Anyone can see that the three evangelists have recorded the doings of the Savior from only one year, following the consignment of John the Baptist to prison, and that they indicated this very fact at the beginning of their narrative. ... We are told, then, that for this reason the apostle John was urged to record in his gospel the period which the earlier evangelists had passed over in silence and the things done during that period by the Savior. ... Thus John in his gospel narrative records what Christ did when the Baptist had not yet been thrown into jail, while the other three evangelists described what happened after the Baptist's consignment to prison... **Of John's writings, besides the gospel, the first of the epistles has been accepted as unquestionably his by scholars both of the present and of a much earlier period; the other two are disputed"** (Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, pp. 132-134).

Also Polycarp, who was the Bishop of Smyrna, who lived near the end of the first century spoke of his personal contact with John. Irenaeus, who was the Bishop of Lyons, personally heard Polycarp testify - "John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, had himself **published a Gospel** during his residence in Ephesus in Asia" (*Against Heresies*, 3.1).

This testimony of Irenaeus has been corroborated by many other writers such as Theophilus of Antioch, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian. Dr. Merrill Tenney summed the matter up when he said: "The earliest tradition of the church ascribes the fourth Gospel to John the son of Zebedee, one of the first of Jesus' disciples, and one who was closest to Him" (*John*, p. 5). **Clearly the Gospel of John was written by the Apostle John !**

QUESTION #3 – When was John written?

We believe with most conservative scholars that John was written between A.D. 95-100 . Five main evidences establish this:

1) The Gospel of John is known in Church History to be the fourth Gospel, which means the early church believed it was the last of the Gospel accounts to be written chronologically. By the late 2nd century, Irenaeus said there cannot be any more or less than four gospels (Craig Keener, *The Gospel of John*, p. 141).

As we earlier observed, Eusebius said this book of John was written after John had already seen Matthew, Mark and Luke. Matthew was written around A.D. 50, Mark was written around A.D. 55, and Luke writes his account around A.D. 60 and obviously John wrote his gospel later than this date.

2) Many in church history testify of this date stating John wrote it as an old man in his 90's.

3) Irenaeus cited Polycarp as saying John wrote it when he lived in Ephesus in Asia which fits these dates. Polycarp was a personal friend of John and Irenaeus who said he could take you to Ephesus and show you where he and Polycarp sat while he was teaching him. Irenaeus said Polycarp described discussions with John, as John told him what Jesus taught and did (Dods, p. 660).

4) John 21:18, 23 demands that Peter and John live to be an older age with John outliving Peter. As we shall see, since the reason for the book was to generate belief in Christ, it stands to reason that when John included this information, people were in a position to know Peter had been executed and John had outlived him.

5) In John 9:22; 12:42 and 16:2 we read about Christians being expelled from synagogues. In John 16:2, Jesus predicts a future time of expulsion and execution. According to Rabbi Gamaliel II, the Rabbis of Palestine issued this expulsion edict in **A. D. 85** (Gary M. Burge, *John*, p. 28). John must have been written after A.D. 85.

Therefore we believe a very logical dating of the Gospel of John is A.D. 95-100. What this means, then is that when John wrote this Gospel, the Church Age was well under way. By the end of the first century, Gnosticism and Judaism were attacking the Person of Christ and John saw the need to clearly establish truth pertaining to Jesus Christ in a new vital Church Age way. John had spent most of his life talking about Jesus Christ, now he decided to write about Him.

One argument against John writing this gospel is that he would have been so old that he could not have remembered everything. Older people tend to have lapses in memory. Craig Keener cites an amazing list of academic accomplishments of older people in history. Cato a Roman political official was in service at age 86. The philosopher Priscus was still training disciples past age 90. Socrates took music lessons to learn to play the lyre at a very old age. Isocrates was still composing things at age 94 (*The Gospel of John*, Vol. 1, pp. 102-103). Polycarp was Pastor of

Smyrna at age 86. In our time, John Walvoord taught eschatology until he was 92 and John Miles is still teaching doctrine at age 90. So old age does not mean you must automatically diminish in mental prowess. Besides, Jesus addressed this very point when He said that the Holy Spirit would bring to memory things He wanted the Apostles to record (John 14:26; 15:26-27).

John lived through some of the kookiest and monstrous political leaders in all of history. He keeps his focus riveted on the Lord. Many were ruthless and evil. Yet he lived his life as solid as a rock because of his relationship to Jesus Christ.

QUESTION #4 – Why was John written?

Every book God inspired and put into His Word has specific purpose . In fact, every book ever written has some purpose. Even a secular novel has a purpose - in order for a story to be a story it must be about something and have something to say. When it comes to the four Gospels, Matthew and Mark do not say precisely what their purpose is. However, when it comes to Luke (1:1-4) and John, both tell us exactly what their purpose is.

God's inspired purpose for John and John's stated purpose for John is found in John 20:31 .

John has carefully selected data from the life and teachings of Jesus Christ for the purpose of generating faith in the Church Age. This is why John is so different than Matthew, Mark or Luke. **Ninety-two percent of John's material is not found in the synoptic gospels.**

For example, there are eight major miracles in John's gospel and six of them are peculiar to John's Gospel - 1) Water to Wine (2:1-11); 2) Healing Nobleman's son (4:46-54); 3) Healing the impotent man at Bethesda (5:1-9); 4) Giving sight to the blind man (9:1-7); 5) Raising Lazarus from the dead (11:17-44); 6) Giving a huge catch of fish (21:1-14).

In fact, some liberals have said John is so out of harmony with the other synoptists that he doesn't belong in the Bible (Whitelaw, p. vi). **What they fail to realize is that John is written for the Church Age believers to develop their faith.** That is what makes it so different. Craig Keener in citing Thomas Brodie said that in John you find Matthew, Mark, Luke/Acts and **Ephesians** (*The Gospel of John*, Vol. 1, p. 37). This Gospel has been written so that when people today read it and study it, they will come to believe in Jesus Christ and believe the truth about Jesus Christ.

In fact, the verb "believe" shows up some 99 times in John, more than any other verb and it is obvious this is the major theme. (John Phillips says the noun "Father" is used 121 times, "believe" 99 times, "know"- oida 61 times, ginosko 56 times and "love" 57 times - *Exploring the Gospel of John*, p. 5.) **The word "believe" is often used in the present tense, which suggests that John is interested in stressing and developing an active, continual, habitual faith in Jesus Christ, as opposed to just a one-moment-in-time conversion experience.** There is a real personal factor in the Gospel of John in that we see the kind of information that brought the Apostle John to a profound level of faith. His own faith deepens and progresses through this book and so will ours. J. Vernon McGee claims that this book was written to believers to take them deep in faith because the Churches needed something more substantial than Matthew, Mark, or Luke, which were primarily Jewish. Apparently Augustine believed the same thing. Dr. McGee said you will never grow spiritual singing umpteen verses of "O Little Town of Bethlehem" and John doesn't take you to Bethlehem because he wants you to grow deep in your faith (J. Vernon McGee, *The Gospel According to John*, Thru the Bible, Vol. 4, p. 363).

As I have been preparing to do this book, I have come to the conclusion that I doubt very seriously that John expected non-believers were going to get a copy of this gospel and carefully read and study it. He did not set out to write this as an evangelistic tract. The logistics of this would be almost impossible. There is little doubt in my mind that he was writing this to and for believers in the Church Age. They can carefully read and study it and then use it not only to blossom in their own faith but as an evangelistic apologetic.

The thesis is this:

THE APOSTLE JOHN WRITES THE GOSPEL OF JOHN TO PRESENT FAITH PRODUCING TRUTH ABOUT THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST SO THAT BELIEVERS MAY BE STABLE IN THEIR OWN FAITH AND TO USE IT AS A FAITH GENERATING APOLOGETIC TO UNBELIEVERS IN THE CHURCH AGE.

John writes a biographical account of Jesus Christ for the Church Age to generate faith! W.H. Griffith Thomas said that there are two lines of faith that this book is designed to develop and to this we add a third:

- 1) To lead people in Church Age to the historical truth about who Jesus Christ really is -
 - A. He is the Jewish Messiah ; B. He is the Son of God ; C. He is God ;
 - D. He is the only true Savior .
- 2) To lead people in Church Age to understand saving faith in Jesus Christ so they can possess it and present it.
- 3) To strengthen the faith of those who have already believed on Jesus Christ in the Church Age.

Everything in this book is designed to present truth about Jesus Christ so people will develop faith in Him. One theologian remarked, **it is no accident that the Gospel of John has been so mightily used in the history of the Church to bring people to faith, for that is its exact purpose** (Edwin Blum, *John*, The Bible Knowledge Commentary, p. 268).

Tenney said you can dissect the book of John by the concepts of belief versus unbelief (p. 13).

- 1) The proposal for Belief. 1:1-18
- 2) The presentation for Belief. 1:19-4:24
- 3) The reactions of Belief and Unbelief. 5:1-6:71
- 4) The crystallization of Belief and Unbelief. 7:1-11:53
- 5) The crisis of Belief and Unbelief. 11:54-12:50
- 6) The assurance for Belief. 13:1-17:26
- 7) The rejection by Unbelief. 18:1-19:42
- 8) The vindication of Belief. 20:1-31
- 9) The dedication of Belief. 21:1-25

There is a very famous story in Church History about this Gospel of John that pertains to Bede who has been called the Father of English History (A.D. 673-735). The "Venerable Bede" became a Deacon in his church at age 19. He was a serious Bible expositor and pastor of a church by age 30. He was very learned in Latin, Greek and Hebrew. As Bede was near death in A.D. 735, he was working on his last project of life - to translate the Gospel of John. As he drew near the end of his life, he got weaker and weaker and his strength failed him. His close associates urged him to finish the project and cried to him - "Master, Master, there is but one chapter more."

Bede wrote on until he was totally exhausted but his associates said, "There is but one verse more." Summing all of his strength, he translated the final verse of John and said, "It is finished." Witnesses said they responded, "It is finished." He asked to lie down so he could see the place where he always prayed. He laid down, closed his eyes and went to be with the Jesus he loved. His faith took him from seeing Christ in the Gospel of John, to seeing Him face to face.

If you will spend the next weeks with us honestly examining the data from this book of John, it will affect your faith. You will not be the same. Your faith will go to a new level. You will see Jesus as you've never seen Him before. That is what this Gospel of John is designed to do. This Gospel will allow you to see Jesus Christ in the Scriptures, before you see Him in heaven.

HELPFUL HISTORICAL FACTS FOR UNDERSTANDING JOHN

I. EMPERORS OF ROME (Darkened names were the rulers during John's lifetime)

1. **Augustus (B.C. 30-A.D. 14)**
2. **Tiberius (A.D. 14-37)**
3. **Caligula (A.D. 37-41)**
4. **Claudius (A.D. 41-54)**
5. **Nero (A.D. 54-68)**
6. **Galba (A.D. 68-69)**
7. **Otho (A.D. 69) (3 months)**
8. **Vitellius (A.D. 69) (1 month)**
9. **Vespasian (A.D. 69-79)**
10. **Titus (A.D. 79-81)**
11. **Domitian (A.D. 81-96)**
12. **Nerva (A.D. 96-98)**
13. **Trajan (A.D. 98-117)**
14. Hadrian (A.D. 117-138)
15. Antoninus Pius (A.D. 138-161)
16. Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 161-180)

II. CHURCH FATHERS (Darkened names actually knew John personally)

1. **Ignatius (A.D. 70-115)** - Second pastor of Antioch church in Syria, appointed by the Apostles.
2. **Polycarp (A.D. 70-155)** - Pastor of Smyrna - good friend and student of Apostle John
- 3) **Clement (A.D. 92-99)** - First Pastor of Roman Church - wrote famous letter to Corinth
- 4) **Papias (A.D. 60-150)** - Pastor of Hierapolis - he was a student of Apostle John and Polycarp
- 5) Irenaeus (A.D. 120-200) - Pastor of Lyons - one of Polycarp's pupils, known for study of the four gospels and he is the first church father to make full use of the New Testament.
- 6) Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-165) - Tremendous Samaritan thinking scholar who defended and died for Christianity. He was very knowledgeable of Synoptic gospels and John and Paul's epistles.
- 7) Tatian (A.D. 110-172) - An Assyrian who became a Christian by hearing Justin Martyr defend truth. He is especially known for defending the authenticity of the four gospels and one of his writings (*Harmony of the Four Gospels*) contains 95% of John's gospel.
8. Tertullian (A.D. 160-222) - born in North Africa to pagan parents, he became a lawyer and came to faith in Christ when he was 35 (A.D. 195). He is unparalleled as a Latin Church Father and apologist who devoted the rest of his life to defending Christianity. He was fierce in attacking false teachers and heretics.
9. Origen (A.D. 186-253) - Raised in Christian home, his father was martyred. Origen became one of the great theologians who specifically was known for copying Greek manuscripts.
10. Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 155-220) - Origen's teacher, recognized as a Greek scholar - said John's Gospel was the last written and it was a spiritual gospel.
11. Cyprian (A.D. 200-258) - became Christian in mid-life, then Pastor of Carthage, serious student
12. Jerome (A.D. 342-420) - translated Greek & Hebrew into Latin Bible-last 35 years in Bethlehem
13. Eusebius (A.D. 260-340) - Church Historian - called Father of Church history
14. Josephus (A.D. 37-100) - Jewish historian born 7 years after Christ's ascension. After Titus took Jerusalem in A.D. 70, he was taken to Rome, granted Roman citizenship, wrote history.