Journal of Dispensational Theology – Spring 2013

Contents

Editorial ............................................................................................................................................. 5

Identity of the First Epistle of John: Context, Style, and Structure ........................................ 7
Ron J. Bigalke

The Compatibility of the New Covenant and Future Animal Sacrifice .................................. 47
Jerry M. Hullinger

Harvesting the Soul: The Necessity of Hermeneutics to a Valid Theological Method ............ 67
Kenneth R. Cooper

Book Reviews

Chan, Francis and Mark Beuving. Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples .................................. 86

Cone, Christopher. Redacted Dominionism: A Biblical Approach to Grounding Environmental Responsibility .............................................................................................. 88

Grudem, Wayne, C. John Collins, and Thomas R. Schreiner. Understanding the Big Picture of the Bible ................................................................. 90

Horton, Michael. For Calvinism. Olson, Roger E. Against Calvinism ....................................... 91

Plantinga, Alvin. Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism ................ 94

Tripp, Paul David. Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry ... 83
Journal of Dispensational Theology

JODT (ISSN 1947-9492)

Volume 17, Number 50 (Spring 2013)
(formerly The Conservative Theological Journal)

Executive Editor
Christopher Cone

General Editor
Ron J. Bigalke

Book Review Editor
Gary E. Gilley

Editorial Committee
Josh Bailey
Patrick E. Belvill
David E. Olander
Charles Ray

The Journal of Dispensational Theology is published three times per year (spring, summer/fall, winter) by the Society of Dispensational Theology in cooperation with Tyndale Theological Seminary as a means for conservative evangelical scholarship from a traditional dispensational perspective. Tyndale Theological Seminary, its administration, or its faculty does not necessarily endorse all the interpretative views represented by each of the respective authors.

Manuscripts and communications can be emailed to editor@tyndale.edu. Authors of articles are expected to use A Manual for Writers by Kate L. Turabian as the style manual. Please avoid formatting articles or using non-standard fonts. Potential contributors are encouraged to peruse the most recent volume to observe submission guidelines or to view those specifics online.

Books for review should be sent to the address below
Editor, JODT
701 W. Pipeline Road
Hurst, TX 76053

Change of address notification, subscriptions, and renewals can be submitted online at www.tyndale.edu/journal.html or through written communication to the above address.

Subscription Rates
United States non-Tyndale student: $25 per year
Foreign non-Tyndale student: $35 per year (includes Canada and Mexico)
All subscriptions payable in United States currency

© Copyright 2013 by Tyndale Theological Seminary. Printed in the U.S.A. All rights reserved. Materials in this publication may not be reproduced without prior written permission. The editorial committee reserves the right to reject articles and advertisements for any reason whatsoever.
Journal of Dispensational Theology – Spring 2013

Contents

Editorial............................................................5

Identity of the First Epistle of John:
Context, Style, and Structure...........................................7

   Ron J. Bigalke

The Compatibility of the New Covenant
and Future Animal Sacrifice..........................................47

   Jerry M. Hullinger

Harvesting the Soul: The Necessity of Hermeneutics
to a Valid Theological Method......................................67

   Kenneth R. Cooper

Book Reviews

Chan, Francis and Mark Beuving. Multiply:
Disciples Making Disciples.............................................86

Cone, Christopher. Redacted Dominionism: A Biblical Approach
to Grounding Environmental Responsibility..........................88

Understanding the Big Picture of the Bible............................90

Horton, Michael. For Calvinism.
Olson, Roger E. Against Calvinism....................................91

Plantinga, Alvin. Where the Conflict Really Lies:
Science, Religion, and Naturalism.....................................94

Tripp, Paul David. Dangerous Calling:
Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry........83
EDITORIAL

The notion of atonement is related to sacrifice throughout the Old Testament; it is the means by which God provides for reconciliation. The sacrificial offerings reminded the worshippers that a rupture existed in the relationship between humanity and God. The divine judgment upon all humanity is just, and the sacrifices themselves constituted a provision for reconciliation. Of course, the Old Testament sacrifices anticipated the once-for-all sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. One word that is used to explain the benefits of the death of Christ is “propitiation.” The New Testament refers to the wrath of God as necessitating propitiation. The word “propitiation” (Gk. hilasmos; Heb. kapporeth) indicates that God was truly appeased through the death of Christ, and those who receive the benefits of Jesus’ work are not only forgiven but also are not regarded as under the righteous wrath of God. The love of God is not contrary to His holy justice. Some modern theologians are critical of the concept of propitiation because it may be equated with customs in pagan mythology. God, they argue, was not appeased in the manner of the pagan gods who had to be placated by gifts and offerings deemed necessary for an ill-tempered kind of wrath (cf. Homer’s The Iliad regarding the actions of Agamemnon in sacrificing his daughter when Princess Helen was captured). God’s wrath is holy justice against those for whom their guilt and sin have violated His character. First John explains this relationship between the love and justice of God as complementary. Often, however, discerning the identity of the First Epistle of John prevents interpreters from appreciating the Apostle’s unique contribution to the biblical revelation. The first article herein seeks to aid the interpreter to better understand the Johannine emphases. Jerry Hullinger’s article expands upon his previous research with regard to the compatibility of the New Covenant with future animal sacrifices in the millennium. The article is significant for the Journal of Dispensational Theology because the dispensational belief has been frequently criticized as negating the once-for-all sacrificial work of Christ. Whereas many commentators believe it is impossible to affirm the literal details of Ezekiel 40—48, the second article employs the principles of consistent literalism since to do otherwise would be to assume a subjective approach to the entire passage. The final research article by Kenneth Cooper addresses this subjective approach to biblical hermeneutics, and affirms literal interpretation as the “most effective hermeneutical method.” Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15). The publisher hopes these articles and book reviews herein will help you “present yourself approved to God.”

Ron J. Bigalke, M.Apol., M.Div., M.T.S., Ph.D.
editor@tyndale.edu
IDENTITY OF THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN:
Context, Style, and Structure

Ron J. Bigalke

In comparison to other New Testament epistles, the First Epistle of John contains a number of significant differences in content, style, and structure. However, there is also a very distinct continuity because the First Epistle of John bears witness to the same Lord and it is imbued with the same authority. The purpose of this article is to elucidate the identity of the First Epistle of John through understanding of its setting (historical context), style (literary type/genre), and structure (unit boundaries).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

The Johannine Epistles are frequently categorized with the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation as authored by the Apostle John. The five writings would thus comprise the Johannine corpus. However, there is not unanimous agreement with regard to the authorship of the writings. Three viewpoints currently dominate scholarly discussion with regard to authorship of the Johannine corpus.

The first view is that the Apostle John was the sole author of the Gospel, the Epistles, and Revelation.1 The second view is entirely contrary to the first in that three different authors are thought to have composed the Johannine corpus. The assertion is that the Apostle John was an eyewitness to the testimony of Jesus; however, a different individual (nicknamed “the evangelist”) wrote the Gospel of John. The presbyter

* Ron J. Bigalke, M.Apol., M.Div., M.T.S., Ph.D., state director, Capitol Commission Georgia; author and lecturer, Eternal Ministries; missionary, Biblical Ministries Worldwide; professor of theology and apologetics, Tyndale Theological Seminary; Ph.D. candidate, University of Pretoria, South Africa

(elder), who is also called John, wrote the Johannine Epistles. A third individual wrote the Book of Revelation. The third view is somewhat an amalgamation because the assertion is that the author of the Gospel of John and the Johannine Epistles is the same, but the author of the Book of Revelation was a different, second author.

Among the three viewpoints, the only unanimous agreement is that the same author wrote the Johannine Epistles. Indeed, the consensus view is “the author of 1 John is the same as the author of 2 and 3 John.” One of the reasons to posit that the Apostle John was the sole author of the Gospel of John, the Johannine Epistles, and the Book of Revelation is the internal evidence, particularly the language, thought, and style of these writings. Brown charted similarities of phrases and words between Second and Third John with First John and the Gospel of John. He demonstrated that 70 percent of significant words in Third John are also identifiable in either First John or the Gospel of John. Furthermore, 86 percent of significant words in Second John are identifiable similarly in either First John or the Gospel of John. Von Wahlde demonstrated that there are substantive differences, and rightly concluded, “most of these can be attributed to the

---


context of letter writing as opposed to the more formal context of either Gospel or ‘tract’ (1 John).” Consequently, “it seems best to conclude that, in spite of differences of language and terminology, the author of 1 John is the same as that of 2 and 3 John.”

The similarities of language and terminology are a primary reason to posit that the author of First John is the same as the author of the Gospel of John. For instance, the prologues of First John and the Gospel of John are remarkably similar, and indicate eyewitness testimony with regard to the historical Jesus. Furthermore, the purpose of First John and the Gospel of John are consistent: to elicit faith in Christ and to know the certainty of eternal life (cf. John 20:31; 1 John 5:13).

The Johannine Epistles are important because they provide clarity with regard to the circumstances and issues that the church was experiencing by the end of the first century. Even as the church grew

---

8 Von Wahlde, Gospel and Letters, 9.

9 The author of this article contends that the Gospel of John was written approximately AD 85-95 by the Apostle John. The Johannine Epistles were written during the general time that John wrote his Gospel. First John was written AD 85, and was included with the New Testament Homologoumena. The Second (ca. 85-90) and Third (ca. 90) Epistles were regarded as New Testament Antilegomena for various reasons with regard to their inclusion in the biblical canon. Although canonical acceptance was gradual for the Second and Third Epistles of John, these books were cited as inspired by the earliest sources and did have an early apostolic recognition. Similar to the Pauline and Petrine Epistles, the Apostle sent his letters to cities, individuals, and regions with the express need for response to specific ecclesial issues (see Ron J. Bigalke Jr., “Literature, Early,” in The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization, 4 vols., ed. George Thomas Kurian [Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011] 2:1357). According to 3 John 9, the Apostle wrote other letters that are non-extant. The allusion to the previous letter should not be regarded as 2 John. Diotrephes, the influential church leader who rejected John’s authority, apparently either received the letter or prevented its delivery to Gaius. Since traveling evangelists and teachers in the first two centuries of the church promulgated the Gospel, these missionaries were welcomed into homes and given provisions for their journey when they departed. Gnostic teachers, however, also adopted this practice. John urged his readers to be discerning with regard to traveling teachers, and to refuse hospitality and support to false teachers “who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh” (2 John 7). The circumstances and content of 2 John do not appear to indicate that it is the prior letter referenced in 3 John 9. Consequently, the three extant letters of John, which were written at three different times with three different audiences and purposes, were included in the biblical canon.

numerically, there was also opposition. The incipient church was
dependent upon traveling evangelists and teachers to communicate the
Gospel, which would result in the Lord “adding to their number day by
day those who were being saved” (e.g. Acts 2:47). Consequently, there was
significant communication among local churches by means of
correspondence and personal visitation. As a consequence of these
circumstances, the early church needed to be vigilant in their discernment
because many false teachers sought to distinguish themselves as being
legitimate leaders. First John 2:18 warns, “Children, it is the last hour; and
just as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists
have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour.”

The First Epistle

Establishing the accurate reading of the Greek text is always crucial for
exegesis and interpretation. Codex Vaticanus is the best manuscript of the
Johannine Epistles. Codex Sinaiticus is subsequent in textual accuracy,
whereas Codex Alexandrinus is generally expansive and inconsistent
regarding the Johannine Epistles. Extended interpolations in 1 John 2:17,
4:3, and 5:6-10, 20 can be identified in several Western manuscripts
(particularly considering the Vulgate). Papyrus 9 is an early third century
text (albeit fragmentary) of 1 John 4:11-12 and 14-17; it is, however,
unreliable for its careless copying as evident in the crude and irregular
handwriting, and even indecipherable spellings.

As reflected in its title, certainty is lacking with regard to the
recipients of the First Epistle of John. The simplest title, ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ A, is
identifiable in Codex Alexandrinus (A) and Codex Vaticanus (B). Codex
Sinaiticus (N) has a slightly expanded form: ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ A,
whereas Codex Ephraemi (C) does not contain any title. Codex Angelicus
(L) includes the epithet καθολική, which indicates that the First Epistle
was general or circular (in the sense of universal), and thereafter appears
in the majority of titles. Although not addressed to any particular church or
individual, the Epistle was certainly sent to those churches familiar with
John’s ministry (possibly the seven churches of Asia Minor). As a
consequence of its “general” addressees, the Epistle does not contain the

---

11 There were also significant and unique transitions in leadership due to
the martyrdom of the twelve apostles (of course, John being the only apostle to
die naturally). At the time of John’s writing, the church was developing the revealed

12 Bruce M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament,
typical introduction and conclusion as characteristic of other New Testament writings. While there is an evident structure to the Gospel of John, analysis of the Johannine Epistles may be difficult since the author did not write dialectically.

John resumed the response to the escalating expressions of false teaching that both Peter (in his second epistle) and Jude addressed. The specific aberrant teaching to which John elicited response in his First Epistle is not readily apparent. His letter is not entirely polemical but does provide substantive warning against a Gnosticism that was becoming ever more persuasive. Although Gnosticism may be expressed multitudinously, there was agreement among its proponents with regard to the essential evil of matter. The primary manifestations of this teaching involved those who denied the humanity of Christ as mere illusion, and those who distinguished the man Jesus from the divine (aeon) Christ that resided on the body of Jesus at His baptism and departed at the crucifixion.

There are historical accounts with regard to John’s interaction with the Gnostic teacher in Ephesus named Cerinthus who affirmed Docetic theology. Docetists believed Jesus was truly God but merely appeared to be human (δοκέω, “to appear” or “to seem”). Docetism distorted the biblical revelation concerning Jesus by teaching that the incarnation made Him merely appear human. Affirming Docetic Christology, Cerinthus taught that the “Christ” descended upon Jesus at His baptism “in the form of a dove from the Supreme Ruler, and that then he proclaimed the unknown Father, and performed miracles.” According to this heretical interpretation of Scripture, the Christ did not suffer upon the cross and therefore remained pure as a spiritual being.

Although Gnostic teachings were not entirely pervasive until the second and third centuries, an incipient Gnosticism was prevalent enough that John admonished his readers to “test the spirits” whether they confessed the incarnation (1 John 4:1-3), which would indicate that John was writing against either Docetism, an incipient Gnosticism, or some similar teaching. Therefore, it is not entirely certain that John was responding to Cerinthian theology since his warnings do not correspond exactly with the representation of those heretical teachings provided by Irenaeus. Moreover, because the Docetic and Gnostic teachings were multifaceted, both John and Irenaeus may not have responded to every issue those heresies presented. The teaching of Cerinthus was serious enough that John would not even enter a public bath in Ephesus when he

perceived Cerinthus to be present. He “rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming, ‘Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within.’”\(^4\)

Similar to the Apostle Peter’s earlier writings, John proposed that the church demonstrate resolve with regard to the false teaching (which eventually developed into the religious movement that was particularly influential among the second century church) by affirming the knowledge “concerning the Word of Life” and “the testimony of God.”\(^5\) According to First John, sanctified living and love for fellow Christians is the consequence of this knowledge. John was intentional to communicate that three dynamics are adequate for discerning false teaching: (1) the Lord’s resurrection; (2) the Holy Spirit’s work; and, (3) the believer’s sanctified life.

**Reason for Writing**

In seeking to understand First John, the reader may discern a twofold purpose for the writing. Firstly, believers in Jesus Christ are assured to have eternal life (5:13) and encouraged to have complete joy (1:4). Secondly, the Epistle was written to correct false Gnostic teachings in contradiction to the certainty of the apostolic message. The symphonic character of First John is evident as basic themes appear in cyclical series. Some of these themes are related to the concept of “life” (1:1-2; 2:25; 3:13-16; 4:9; 5:11-13, 16, 20), “light” (1:5, 7; 2:8-10, 16), “darkness” (1:5-6; 2:8-9, 11), “abide” (2:6, 14, 24, 27-28; 3:6, 9, 15, 17, 24; 4:12-13, 15-16). Other distinguishable and recurrent ideas are “love,” “witness,” “sin,” and “believe.” Throughout this research, the differing views (either “τὴν ζωὴν τὴν ζωήν” or “κοινωνίαν”) concerning the primary message of 1 John will be understood as complementary.\(^6\) Van der Merwe likened this

---

\(^4\) Ibid. 1:416. Irenaeus remarked, “Such was the horror which the apostles and their disciples had against holding even verbal communication with any corrupters of the truth” (ibid).

\(^5\) In various cognates, Peter employed the word “know” and “knowledge” sixteen times in his second epistle (1:2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 12, 14, 16, 20, 21[twice]; 2:9, 20; 3:3, 17, 18). Only one usage is in reference to the Lord (2:9); the other usages emphasize the “true knowledge” that all Christians “already know.” The remedy against false teaching is the knowledge from the prophetic message, which was validated by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and revealed “by the Holy Spirit” (1:16-21).

distinction to a spiral as "an expression of thought-structure" wherein "the author regularly returns to a point where he has been before, but by bringing in a new element he moves a step further." Consequently, "it would be impossible to explore one without saying something about the others as well."\(^7\)

The Christians to whom this Epistle is addressed were being confronted with teachings antithetical to those revealed by the Holy Spirit to the Apostles. Much of the content of First John relates to false teaching. While John was exiled to Patmos (Rev 1:9) he wrote the Johannine Epistles, the book of Revelation, and combated Gnostic heretics. According to tradition,\(^8\) the Apostle lived the latter years of his life in Ephesus (until the reign of Trajan).\(^9\) The Apostle Paul was first to proclaim the Gospel to the Roman province of Asia (cf. Acts 18:19-21; 19:1-41; 20:17-38). Having established several churches in the Ephesus territory within a period of nearly three years, Paul appointed Timothy to continue the ministry and departed for Macedonia (Acts 20:1). He urged Timothy to instruct certain self-appointed teachers not to teach erroneous and godless doctrines (1 Tim 1:3, 6-7; 2 Tim 2:16-18). When John wrote the Book of Revelation, the church in Ephesus (and in several other Asiatic cities) was still confronted by "evil men" and false apostles (Rev 2:1-3, 6).

The Johannine Gospel and Epistles elucidate that Gnosticism articulated an erroneous conception regarding the nature of Jesus' deity (and additionally denying His deity). John, therefore, emphasized the genuineness of Jesus' human nature when he wrote, "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Moreover, he stated the following: "blood and water" exited the dead body of Jesus when His side was pierced (19:34); the resurrection body of Jesus bore "the imprint of the nails" from the crucifixion in His hands and side (20:25-28); the testimony of the Apostles concerning hearing, seeing, beholding, and touching "the Word of Life" (1 John 1:1); the Holy Spirit causes every spirit from God to confess


\(^8\) Another post-New Testament tradition is that Ephesus is the location for the death of Mary Magdalene. Additionally, "Mary's house" is a venerated shrine in Ephesus for the mother of Jesus; however, the evidence for Ephesus as the location for her residence or burial is less ancient and dependent upon text from the Council of Ephesus.

\(^9\) Cf. Irenaeus, \textit{Against Heresies}, III.III.4; Eusebius, \textit{Ecclesiastical History}, III.XXIII, IV.XIV.
“that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh” (4:2); and, Jesus Christ “came by water and blood” (5:6).^{20}

The error of Gnostic teaching regarding the person of Christ was the consequence of conceptions regarding the nature of God and the world. The effect of Gnostic teaching is to deny the efficaciousness of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. According to Gnostic teaching, Christ could not die if He did not possess a true physical body, nor could there be any efficaciousness to His death, if Christ was not true God by nature. Consistent with the Greek worldview, the Gnostics denied the bodily resurrection of the dead (cf. Acts 17:32).^{21} The First Epistle of John, in particular, not only corrected the error of Gnostic teaching concerning the Person of Christ, but also it expounded the nature of Christian morality, which was necessary as a consequence of the Gnostic teaching regarding soteriological conceptions. As the privilege of the elect, Gnostic teachers claimed to attain an exclusive kind of spiritual enlightenment that allowed them to achieve an exalted and superior level of knowledge as an effective salvific energy. Gnostics maintained that salvation was not achieved faith (πίστις), but rather through esoteric knowledge (γνώσις) that was not available to the uninitiated. The emphasis upon γνώσις was consistent with the Greek conception of “sin” as merely intellectual as opposed to moral culpability (and thereby necessitating regeneration).

When the knowers (Gnostics) attained γνώσις, which revealed to them a knowledge of the nature of the transcendent god, their own original consubstantiality to him, and an awareness of their heavenly origins and destiny (predetermined destiny of bliss), they were released from the bondage of their material bodies (“the prison-house of the soul”^{22}), and also the evil world-creating and world-ruling powers (archons). Having

---

^{20} Whether the statement of 1 John 5:6 is interpreted as a reference to the birth process, the crucifixion, or to both birth and death, the reference is certainly testimony to the genuineness of Jesus’ humanity.

^{21} Only Judaism (with the exception of the Sadducees, Matt 22:23; Acts 4:1-2; 23:6-8) and Christianity affirmed the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead.

^{22} Throughout the Phaedo, Plato contrasted the soul and the body, and employed the Pythagorean expression, “the body is the prison house of the soul.” It seems apparent that the essential details of the Gnostic religion were developed by teachers familiar with Platonist metaphysics, as such concepts were widely accessible in the Mediterranean world from the first century BC. Aristotle was overtly opposed to Plato’s Archetypal world. Thomas Aquinas argued that the essential relation between the Creator and His creatures is the realm of ideas that are unified in reality with His essence.
been unshackled and no longer somnolent, the elect are able to live their earthly existence as desired, which may result in life as either an ascetic (demonstrating withdrawal from the material world) or sensualist (living in unrestrained manner so as to demonstrate freedom from the bondage of the material world). Consequently, a primary emphasis for writing the First Epistle of John was in regard to Gnosticism. For instance, First John 1:5—2:2 specifies Gnostic concepts in 1:6, 1:8, and 1:10, which are countered by the Christian concepts in verses 1:7, 1:9, and 2:1-2. The entirety of John’s specific teaching is either affirmed or denied by the proposition that eternal life is possible solely upon belief in the Lord Jesus, and through a vital redemptive relationship to God the Father through His Son Jesus Christ. One cannot disavow the consequence of darkness and share in that darkness, if “he is in the Light.” The one who knows the truth lives according to God’s commandments, which have been revealed through the Lord Jesus and His apostles (cf. 1 John 2:3-24).

As John continued the teaching of his epistle, he contrasted “the one who practices righteousness” as righteous and “the one who practices sin” as belonging to the devil (cf. 2:25—3:12). The practice of righteousness fulfills the purpose for the first coming of the Son of God (3:7-8). Moreover, the apostle provided a detailed explanation concerning the nature of love (3:13-24). Living in obedience to the will of God as demonstrated in love for “the brethren” is what Jesus Christ has commanded and what He expects of those who abide in Him. The demonstration of love—through both action and word—is obedience to the commandment of God’s Son Jesus Christ (3:23; cf. John 13:34-35). Therefore, in the first six verses of chapter 4, the Apostle contrasted “the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” Following this brief parenthesis, John provided a detailed exposition concerning the love of God for those who “might live through Him.” God’s love is the reason that He sent His only begotten Son into the world as the propitiation for sin (4:10).

Therefore, those who are His are commanded to follow the example of divine love through love in their own lives (4:7—5:3). Both righteousness and love are two necessary and practical demonstrations of a vital redemptive relationship to God the Father through His Son Jesus Christ. John concluded his first epistle by indicating the nature of Christianity for the purpose of providing confidence to the believer in Jesus Christ, and to expose those whose beliefs and teachings were antithetical to those revealed by the Holy Spirit to the Apostles (5:1-21). The

---

23 Obviously, in disquieting defiance of the Lord’s teaching concerning “the truth” of His word making one free; “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin” (John 8:34).
importance of understanding the entirety of John’s teaching is related to knowing that one has “eternal life.” The purpose for the writing of the First Epistle of John was to provide an objective analysis of oneself with regard to the eternal (5:13). Eternal life is through belief “in the name of the Son of God, and is evident through love of God and observance of His revealed commands which is manifested in the practice of righteousness.

**STYLE OF THE FIRST EPISTLE**

First John does not contain the typical characteristics that would designate it as an epistle. The early church was depended upon the epistolary format as a common method of communication. Several factors were particular to the early church that influenced the manner in which the letters were composed. The epistles were used for affirming the unique authority of the Apostles, for correction and discipleship, for greetings and encouragement, and for the proclamation of the gospel message. Congregations could be addressed with regard to both doctrine and practice. The epistles were written upon papyri and adopted the conventions of Greek letters with some modifications unique to the Christian experience. The typical epistolary format began with a prescript (*praecriptio*), which included a sender (*superscriptio*), addressee (*adscriptio*), and greetings (*salutatio*). The prescript was often followed by the sender’s thanksgiving to God (*eucharistein*). The body or message of the epistle was subsequent to the thanksgiving, and the epistle was typically concluded with a closing or postscript.24

The genre of First John differs from the epistolary format. When one examines twenty-one New Testament works that are “normally classified as epistles, I John is the least letterlike in format.”25 The nearest parallel to First John in the New Testament canon is Hebrews and James, since “Hebrews lacks the customary opening, while James likes the customary ending,” yet “1 John lacks both.”26 First John does not include an author nor does it designate the recipients.27 First John does not contain a

---

closing or postscript. Consequently, there has been much diversity with regard to identifying the genre for First John.

First John has been regarded as a "tractate," which was intended for the church worldwide. The classification of First John as a tractate would explain why there is no designation of an author or specifically designated recipients. However, such a classification does not explain how the absence of these typical epistolary characteristics would encourage the early church to accept First John as inspired, and thus, authoritative.

Another possibility for the genre of First John is to regard it as a circular epistle. The classification of First John as a circular epistle would explain the "particularity" of the contents and the lack of the epistolary format, in addition to justifying the absence of "opening and closing greetings" and the omission of personal names since it "was intended for a number of different churches." A third possibility for the genre of First John is to regard it as "homily" or encyclical. First John can certainly be described as hortatory, which would be consistent with a pastoral encyclical. The somber character and unequivocal commands of First John, in addition to the terms of endearment, might be an indication of a pastoral homily. However, one would expect that a pastor would identify himself.

Brown understood First John as a commentary on the Gospel of John. He regarded the "peculiar format" as "influenced by the author's attempt to refute the secessionists" as a commentary on the Fourth Gospel "to which they also appealed as a justification for their views." Smalley regarded First John simply as "a paper" (however, not in the academic sense). The paper was certainly written with consideration of the Gospel of John, "for purposes of teaching and further discussion, of the Christological

---

30 Kruse, Letters of John, 28.
31 Ibid. 28-29.
33 Brown, Epistles of John, 90. Marshall noted, “John considered it necessary to write a careful statement of the apostolic understanding of Christianity for the benefit of his friends so that they might see where it was distorted by the seceders and confirm their own understanding of it and their place in the company of God’s people” (Epistles of John, 14-15).
and ethical issues that were causing debate and even division within the Johannine church.”\textsuperscript{34}

First John does not contain the typical epistolary format, yet it can still be understood as a letter for reasons noted by Aune. “Early Christian letters tend to resist rigid classification, either in terms of the three main types of oratory or in terms of the many categories listed by the epistolary theorists. Most early Christian letters are multifunctional and have a ‘mixed’ character, combining elements from tow or more epistolary types.”\textsuperscript{35} The author of First John was an authoritative individual (i.e. an Apostle). However, the recipients are identified with general and figurative terms, such as “little children” and “beloved.” Specific information was provided with regard to the false teaching of the secessionists (2:18-24). First John thus appears to be written in response to a particular situation. John wrote his letter to both encourage and instruct those Christians in and near Asia Minor with regard to the gospel and their relationship to it.\textsuperscript{36}

**STRUCTURE OF THE FIRST EPISTLE**

In seeking to understand First John, there have been various methods of describing how it is structured. Interpretations have emphasized characteristics of content (doctrine and paraenesis), style (antithesis and repetition), or outline divisions. According to the theory adopted by Raymond Brown, which is similar to Marinus de Jonge and James Houlden,\textsuperscript{37} a Johannine community that sought to confront changing circumstances formulated the Epistles of John.

Brown suggested that the author of First John structured the plan of the letter as an imitation and commentary on sections of the Gospel of John. The two plans progress from the “more obvious to the more obscure.” The first part addressed the secessionist adversaries (1:5—3:10), which would parallel the interaction with the Jews in John 1:19—12:50. The second part focused upon the theme of divine love to the author’s adherents (3:11—5:12), which would parallel the believing group in John.

\textsuperscript{34} Stephen S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John (Waco, TX: Word, 1984) xxx.


\textsuperscript{36} Andreas J. Köstenberger, A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) 126.


Rudolf Bultmann analyzed the relationship between the Johannine Epistles and the Gospel of John, in addition to the interrelationship of the three Epistles. He concluded that the structure of First John was based upon “a prior written Source” and “a later redaction,” which means “the text of First John was reworked to bring it into conformity with ecclesiastical tradition.” The writer of First John used and commented upon an earlier Source for the primary component (1:1—5:13) of the Epistle. Based upon the phrase ἀπαγγέλλων καὶ ὤμιν providing grammatical support, Bultmann outlined 1:1-4 as the proemium. He regarded 1:5—2:27 as an original, independent writing, “or perhaps more appropriately, a rough draft,” which means “the Epistle could have been concluded with 2:27.” First John 2:28—5:12 would be “a compendium of various fragments collected as a supplement to 1:5—2:27” (i.e. not a unified composition, but certainly coherent regarding content, and therefore, exegetical approaches should demonstrate this unity and organic thought). Bultmann admitted the temptation to regard the fragments as representative “sketches or meditations” by “the author” of 1:5—2:27 or his disciples. The postscript of 5:13 states the purpose of the Epistle, and the ecclesiastical redactor supplemented with the appendix in 5:14-21.

George Strecker analyzed First John as an oral discourse, which is similar to the emphasis of Robert Kysar and Pheme Perkins, and accentuated the polemical emphasis of the Epistle. The recipients of the Epistle were multiple congregations that constituted the Johannine community as a whole, as opposed to a particular local congregation. As a homiletic writing that combines the genres of both letter and sermon (albeit written in the form of a letter), Strecker regarded the content of the

---

39 Bultmann, Johannine Epistles, 2-3.
40 Bultmann rejected questions concerning higher criticism of the entire Epistle in the area of source criticism and redaction criticism, but was sympathetic to the Johannine school hypothesis. See R. Alan Culpepper, The Johannine School: An Evaluation of the Johannine-School Hypothesis Based on an Investigation of the Nature of Ancient Schools (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975).
41 Bultmann, Johannine Epistles, 43-44.
42 Ibid. 83.
homily as alternating between paraenesis and dogmatic exposition. His exegetical method demonstrated “that the conflict with the opposing teachers is restricted mainly to the dogmatic sections,” while the letter as a “unified whole” communicates “the author’s affection for the Christian community, as opposed to “the existing polemical situation.” He proposed the following outline: 1:1-4, prelude; 1:5—2:17, paraenesis; 2:18-27, dogmatic exposition; 2:28—3:24, paraenesis; 4:1-6, dogmatic exposition; 4:7—5:4a, paraenesis; 5:4b-12, dogmatic exposition; and, 5:13-21, final paraenetic remarks.44

In seeking to understand First John, and the meaning of ἐλασμός within the Epistle, it would seem best to regard the letter as symphonic. Basic themes appear in a series of cycles.45 The writer of this Epistle recorded a series of affirmations to his converts, as noted by the recurrent words “little children” and “beloved.” A leader within the church directed this Epistle to Christians who were being confronted with teachings antithetical to those revealed by the Holy Spirit to the Apostles. Much of the content of First John relates to false teaching. For instance, the structure of 1:5—2:2 refers to false propositions, which are answered through a Christian apologetic. The false teaching is stated in 1:6, 8, and 10, followed by the Christian concepts in 1:7, 9, and 2:1-2. The entirety of the teachings is predicated upon the proposition that a sanctified life is not possible without a living-redemptive relationship to God the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ.

First John 1:5—2:2, therefore, is a pericope that appears to be a hortatory discourse focused upon sin and forgiveness.46

44 Strecke, Johannine Letters, xliii-iv, 3, 18.
45 Some of these themes are related to the concept of “life” (1:1-2; 2:25; 3:13-16; 4:9; 5:11-13, 16, 20), “light” (1:5, 7; 2:8-10, 16), “darkness” (1:5-6; 2:8-9, 11), “abide” (2:6, 14, 24, 27-28; 3:6, 9, 15, 17, 24; 4:12-13, 15-16). Other distinguishable and recurrent ideas are “love,” “witness,” “sin,” and “believe.” Throughout this research, the differing views (either τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον” or “καὶ ἐνυφίαν”) concerning the primary message of 1 John will be understood as complementary [Dirk van der Merwe, Salvation in the Johannine Epistles, in Salvation in the New Testament, 437-64].
(1:5) Principle: καὶ ἔστιν αὐτὴ ἡ ἀγγελία ἢν ἀκηκόσμεν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀναγέλλομεν ύμῖν, ὅτι ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἔστιν καὶ σκοτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδεμία.

(1:6) False proposition: Ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ’ αὐτοῦ

Heteropraxy: καὶ ἐν τῷ σκότει περιπατῶμεν,

Refutation: ψευδόμεθα καὶ οὐ ποιοῦμεν τὴν ἀληθείαν.

(1:7) Command and Promise: ἐὰν δὲ ἐν τῷ φωτί περιπατῶμεν ὡς αὐτός ἔστιν ἐν τῷ φωτί, κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ’ ἀλλήλων καὶ τὸ σήμα Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ καθαρίζει ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἀμαρτίας.

(1:8) False proposition: Ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι ἀμαρτίαν οὐκ ἔχομεν,

Refutation: ἔστω τοὺς πλανῶμεν καὶ ἡ ἀληθεία οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἡμῖν.

(1:9) Command and Promise: Ἐὰν ὁμολογῶμεν τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν, πιστῶς ἔστιν καὶ δίκαιος ἵνα ἀφῆ ἡμῖν τὰς ἀμαρτίας καὶ καθαρίσῃ ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἀδικίας.

(1:10) False proposition: Ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι οὐχ ἡμαρτήκαμεν,

Refutation: ψευδότην ποιοῦμεν αὐτὸν καὶ ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἡμῖν.

(2:1) Orienter: Τεκνία μου, ταῦτα γράφω ύμῖν

Command and Promise: Ἰνα μὴ ἀμάρτητηθε. καὶ ἐὰν τις ἀμάρτη, παράκλητον ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον.

(2:2) Command and Promise: καὶ αὐτὸς ἱλασμός ἔστιν περὶ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, οὐ περὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων δὲ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ όλου τοῦ κόσμου.
Verse 5 states the principle:47 “God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.” The central message of verse 5 is the basis for the remainder of this pericope.48 It appears that three propositions affirmed by the false teachers were quoted first (cf. “if we say” in 1:6a, 8a, 10a), then refuted (vv. 1:6cd, 8bc, 10bc), and contrasted with the commands and promises of the true doctrine (1:7, 9; 2:1b-2). The heterodoxy of the first proposition from the false teachers manifested itself in heteropray (1:6b; the second and third propositions are not equated with specific heteropray). The vocative in 2:1a does not introduce a new section; rather 2:1-2 is a subunit of the 1:5—2:2 pericope.49 John’s use of the pronoun ταῦτα (2:1; i.e. “this message,” “these things”) refers to 1:10 particularly, and to 1:5-10 generally concerning sin and forgiveness within the church. Consequently, the application of the principle of 1:5 is threefold: (1) walking in the Light assures fellowship and cleansing through the blood of Jesus (1:6-7); (2) confessing sin assures forgiving and cleansing (1:8-10); and, (3) the means of fellowship, cleansing, and forgiveness is through the Advocate,50 the propitiation for the sins of the world (2:1-2).51 Whereas the earlier focus was upon opponents and their false teaching, the mood is changed to relate these things (1:5-10) to Christians. Due to the guilt of the whole world, the “Advocate with the Father” pleads on behalf of those whom propitiation for their sin has been made (2:1-2).52

47 Each occurrence of οὐτός in First John, followed by δέ or ἵνα indicates progression of content, which these particles introduced. The only exception would be the second οὐτός in 5:11.

48 The principle is also the basis for the entirety of 1:5—2:27.


51 Jesus Christ is the ἰλασμός Himself. The relationship of ἰλασμός in 2:2 with παράκλητος in 2:1, and with the confession of sin in 1:8, 10, creates an interesting question whether παράκλητος should be understood in combination with ἰλασμός, or apart from it.

52 The Septuagint translators used this Greek noun to translate the “mercy seat” on the Ark of the Covenant, thus First John 1:5—2:2 appears to convey these Old Testament tabernacle connotations. (See Leon Morris, The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross [London: Tyndale Press, 1955] 125-85; and, W. Hall Harris, “A
Grammatico-historical exegesis of First John will involve consideration for the grammatical-language context in addition to the historical context of the text of Scripture, and will thereby analyze the coherent units of text in their discernable context, which is to interpret the text in accordance with its normal (literal) sense. The methodology should be to employ grammatico-historical analysis intentionally as a means of examination beyond the sentence level of the text through focus upon factors such as audience (immediate recipients), cohesion (the manner in which discourse components are related), cultural context (discourse aspects distinctive to the immediate recipients), genre (literary style), repetition (word or thematic emphasis), and structure (argumentum organization within the discourse)—although the text will be regarded as the primary object of inquiry.

By semantic-structural analysis is meant the attempt to research the organization of pericopes beyond the sentence level, and in relation to the larger linguistic units, thereby charting the flow of the argument of the pericope. By grammatico-historical is meant the art and skill of explaining or interpreting the text itself (i.e. the words in context,


54 The normal sense is the grammatical-historical sense, that is, the meaning that the original writer expressed (Robert D. Preus and Earl D. Radmacher, eds., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984] 884-85).


58 Grammatical interpretation includes lexicology, morphology, parts of speech, and syntax. Historical interpretation includes the initial circumstances, context, and setting in which the words of Scripture were written.
according to form and syntax); it is the attempt to understand all the geographical, historically, and similar elements in the pericope. Since the God of the Bible reveals Himself in action and word in time and space, these elements have significance; it is therefore necessary to identify the Sitz im Leben to understand the message.  

The most characteristic distinctive of the structural study is analysis beyond sentence boundaries. “The definition of the textual unit (or unities), i.e. that unit which extends beyond the boundaries of the sentence and is larger than the sentence, is one of the most attractive problems” for this approach. Semantic-structural analysis presupposes the text as the fundamental aspect of language because communication is inherent in the text as opposed to the sentence. While it is often challenging not to begin biblical research with an emphasis upon a certain word and the phraseology containing its usage, and then progress to emphasis upon the clause to the larger units, and ultimately to the Johannine text itself, the recognition that the text is the fundamental linguistic unit necessitates first identifying the unit boundaries within the Johannine discourse. However, a cursory examination with regard to commentaries on the Johannine Epistles will quickly demonstrate that structural analyses are often in variance with one another. Moreover, as demonstrated by Anderson in his exegetical summary, even the first

59 Exegesis is from ἐξηγεῖσθαι which means “to explain” or “to interpret” (from the preposition ἐξ and ἦγεῖσθαι), as opposed to eisegesis (from ἐἰσηγεῖσθαι, “to introduce”) which is to interpret the text of Scripture by introducing one’s own ideas. Exegesis is a critical interpretation, or “drawing out,” of a text or portion of Scripture. A. B. Mickelsen, Interpreting the Bible (1963; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 56-57; Walter F. Bauer, William F. Arndt, and Frederick W. Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 2nd ed., rev. F. W. Gingrich and F. W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) 343.


word of the text of the First Epistle of John demonstrates the need for structural analysis.\(^{65}\)

Surveying commentaries and introductions to the Johannine Epistles reveals a multiplicity of methodology with regard to the structure of the Epistles. Proposals have generally emphasized characteristics of content (doctrinal and paraenesis), style (antithesis and repetition), or outline divisions. The lack of agreement among commentators as to the division of the First Epistle of John has resulted in numerous interpretative conclusions. For instance, Brooke remarked, "While some agreement is found with regard to the possible division of the First Epistle into paragraphs, no analysis of the Epistle has been generally accepted. The aphoristic character of the writer's meditations is the real cause of this diversity of arrangement, and perhaps the attempt to analyse the Epistle should be abandoned as useless."\(^{66}\) Moreover, as a consequence of difficulty in ascertaining the structure of the text, interpretations are formulated frequently upon theological persuasions and historical reconstruction.

Since macrostructural analysis seeks to approach the text holistically, one should seek to identify unit boundaries as opposed to focusing merely upon the sentence. The attempt to identify a relationship between each section constituent and subsection constituent that contributes to the intent of the entire text necessitates a concentrated effort to explain word grammar and sentence grammar at the microstructural level. In other words, discerning why a certain verb tense was used is more relative to the author's theme for writing, as opposed to being merely syntactical, especially considering that other options in verb usage were possible (yet only one would communicate the particular message that the author wished to convey).

There have been many attempts to provide structural analyses for First John. However, with the exception of the prologue (1:1-4) and the conclusion (5:13-21),\(^ {67}\) it is nearly impossible to identify agreement among commentators, which can be frustrating for the majority of believers who seek to understand the First Epistle of John macrostructurally. As a consequence of this challenge, some commentators have suggested that it is impossible to identify an evident structure in First John. Strecker, for

\(^{65}\) It is not that such structural analysis is superior to other hermeneutical methodologies, especially historico-grammatical interpretation; rather, it is necessary to demonstrate fundamental language functions and text structures.


\(^{67}\) Köstenberger, *Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 171.
example, commented, “But for the most part 1 John is seen as a relatively loose series of various trains of thought hung together on the basis of association. Many exegetes therefore regard their suggested outlines more as aids to the reader’s understanding than as genuine attempts to discover a clear-cut form within the letter.” Such pessimism, however, seems unnecessary since there does appear to be a definite structure, which the analysis within this dissertation will demonstrate and allow the reader to discern. The structure in which the thought process was developed is fundamental for understanding the contents of First John. As a consequence of diverse proposals with regard to the structure of First John, it seems appropriate to address this diversity first and then conclude by demonstrating how microstructural analysis indicates the structure.

**STRUCTURAL PROPOSALS OF THE FIRST EPISTLE**

Brown noted that diversity with regard to structural analysis is not merely characteristic of modern biblical scholarship. Augustine confessed that First John possessed a lack of sequence and thought development, and John Calvin likewise communicated the absence of continuity. Operinus published a commentary in 1741 in which he demonstrated that John’s purpose for writing was announced in his preface, and this formed the basis for the remaining composition throughout his epistle. Almost all subsequent commentators worked from the persuasion that Operinus articulated. Not until the latter half of the nineteenth century did scholars exert diligence to resolve the structural difficulties of First John. During this time, Westcott remarked, “It is extremely difficult to determine with certainty the structure of the Epistle. No single arrangement is able to take account of the complex development of thought which it offers, and of the

---


69 The preceding comments are not intended to imply that commentators are either uninterested or unwilling to resolve structural issues because scholars have indeed and continue to propose numerous suggestions. See, for instance, Brown, *Epistles of John*, 116-29; Marshall, *Epistles of John*, 22-27; and, P. J. van Staden, “The Debate on the Structure of 1 John,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 47 (1991): 487-502.


many connexions which exist between its different parts.”\textsuperscript{72} Writing concurrently, Plummer admitted that John did not write dialectically, but adamantly refused the notion that John’s structure was disorganized.

It is quite true to say with Calvin that the Epistle is a compound of doctrine and exhortation: what Epistle in N.T. is not? But it is a mistake to suppose with him that the composition is confused. Again, it is quite true to say that the Apostle’s method is not dialectical. But it cannot follow from this that he has no method at all. He seldom argues; one who sees the truth, and believes that every sincere believer will see it also, has not much need to argue: he merely states the truth and leaves it to exercise its legitimate power over every truth-loving heart. But in thus simply affirming what is true and denying what is false he does not allow his thoughts to come out haphazard. Each one as it comes before us may be complete in itself; but it is linked on to what precedes and what follows. The links are often subtle, and sometimes we cannot be sure that we have detected them; but they are seldom entirely absent. . . . The \textit{spiral movement}, which is so conspicuous in the Prologue to the Gospel and in Christ’s Farewell Discourses, is apparent in the Epistle also.\textsuperscript{73}

A few years later than Westcott and Plummer, Häring argued for the ability to “erkennt man vollends deutlich, in welchem Verhältniss die beiden Grundgedanken in der ganzen Ausführung des Briefs stehen.” He recognized structure in First John based upon an “ethische und christologische These.”\textsuperscript{74} Between the prologue (1:1-4) and the conclusion (5:13-21), these two primary emphases were expressed repeatedly within three primary divisions: A. 1:5—2:27; B. 2:28—4:6; and, C. 4:7—5:12.\textsuperscript{75} Häring’s recognition of this associated and intertwined structure, which was alternated between an “ethische und christologische These” within the threefold division,” influenced subsequent commentators profoundly.

Von Soden’s work, \textit{Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments}, became the most important with regard to the text of the New Testament since

---

\textsuperscript{72} Westcott, \textit{Epistles of St. John}, xlvi.


\textsuperscript{74} Theodor von Häring, “Gedankengang und Grundgedanke des ersten Johannesbriefs,” in \textit{Theologische Abhandlungen}, Adolf Harnack et al. (Freiburg i. B.: J. C. B. Mohr, 1892) 184.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid. 184-87.
Westcott and Hort’s Greek New Testament. He distinguished “drei Gedankenkreise voneinander trennen” in the First Epistle of John: I. 1:5—2:28 combats the idea of “gut and böse” in the life of a Christian; II. 2:29—3:22 defines the assertion of morality (both outwardly and inwardly) more distinctly; and, III. 3:23—5:13 addresses the mutual relationship between faith in Jesus Christ and the fulfillment of His command to love. Von Soden asserted that the “drei Gedankenkreise voneinander trennen” are closed related; therefore, the divisions continually intersect with one another.


Also writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, Law observed: “The impression might be, indeed, that there is no such progress [in the First Epistle of John], but that the thought, after sundry gyrations, returns ever to the same point . . . here it seems as if, while the things said are of supreme importance, the order in which they are said matters nothing.” Law rejected this impression, as characteristic of some scholars, that First John possesses “no logical structure . . . no ordered progression of thought.” Nevertheless, he noted, “And this estimate has a measure of support in the fact that there is no portion of Scripture regarding the plan of which there has been greater diversity of opinion.” Law concluded such an estimate “is nevertheless erroneous,” and argued (in agreement with Plummer) for a “spiral” structure to the Epistle.

The word that, to my mind, might best describe St. John’s mode of thinking and writing in this Epistle is “spiral.” The course of thought does not move from point to point in a straight line. It is like a winding staircase—always revolving around the same centre, always

---

78 Ibid. 191.
recurring to the same topics, but at a higher level. Or, to borrow a
term from music, one might describe the method as contrapuntal. The
Epistle works with a comparatively small number of themes, which
are introduced many times, and are brought into every possible
relation to one another. . . . And the clue to the structure of the Epistle
will be found by tracing the introduction and reappearances of these
leading themes.\textsuperscript{80}

Brooke’s commentary—written a few years after Law’s work—was
not as positive with regard to the division of the First Epistle. He noted, “no
analysis of the Epistle has been generally accepted; therefore, “The
aphoristic character of the writer’s meditations is the real cause of this
diversity of arrangement, and perhaps the attempt to analyze the Epistle
should be abandoned as useless.”\textsuperscript{81} Perhaps recognizing the necessity to
arrange John’s meditations for continuity in his commentary, Brooke
reproduced the structural analyses of von Soden, Härting, and Law. He
concluded that Härting’s was “the most successful attempt to analyse the
Epistle” as to demonstrate “that there is a real underlying sequence of
thought.”\textsuperscript{82}

The influence of Plummer and Law is apparent in Dodd’s reference
to the thought progression of First John as “spiral,” yet Dodd was not
optimistic as they were with regard to discerning an organized
arrangement of the Epistle. He also referred to aphorisms, as did Brooke
previously. Similar to other commentators, Dodd indicated that the
argument of First John is challenging to divide into an orderly structure.

The argument is not closely articulated. There is little direct
progression. The writer ‘thinks around’ a succession of related topics.
The movement of thought has not inaptly been described as ‘spiral,’
for the development of a theme often brings us back almost to the
starting-point; almost, but not quite, for there is a slight shift which
provides a transition to a fresh theme; or it may be to a theme which
had apparently been dismissed at an earlier point, and now comes up
for consideration from a slightly different angle. The striking
aphorisms which are the most memorable things in the epistle do not
usually emerge as the conclusion of a line of argument. They come in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{80} Ibid. 5.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Brooke, \textit{Johannine Epistles}, xxxii.
\item \textsuperscript{82} Ibid. xxxiv. Brooke also noted the “substantial agreement” between
Härting and Law, yet criticized the latter for not being as beneficial “in tracing the
[probable] sequence of thought” (ibid. xxxvii).
\end{itemize}
flashes, and their connection with the general line of thought is sometimes only hinted at.

Any attempt to divide the work into orderly paragraphs and sections must be largely arbitrary, and will indicate only in a broad way the succession of topics.83

Wilder affirmed "the theme of love" as dominating the primary section of the Epistle. He distinguished two primarily polemic sections: 2:18-27 and 4:1-6. Wilder also noted a "cyclical" structure. "An earlier commentator compared its course to that of the river Meander, which flowed through the province of Asia, while the adjective 'cyclical' has been applied to it by modern students."84 With tremendous creativity, Bogaert referred to First John as the Canticle of Canticles of the New Testament; therefore, it contains "Semitic thought patterns."85 He believed that love is the primary subject, but it was not always evident whose views were being expressed, and there appeared to be minimal progression in the action.

Bultmann explained the apparent futile attempt to identify the structure of First John is due to his contention that the Epistle "could have been concluded with 2:27 and originally probably was."86 According to his opinion, "a prior written Source (Vorlage) underlies the text of 1 John, which the author annotated."87 Bultmann, however, did not develop this Vorlage completely; rather, it is presented sporadically throughout his commentary and in the footnotes.88 Bultmann’s contention that there are

85 Maurice Bogaert, "Structure et message de la Première Épître de saint Jean," Bible et Vie Chrétienne 83 (1968): 33-34; cf. Edward Malatesta, Interiority and Covenant (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978) 1-6. Law would have seemed to concur with the latter assertion. He wrote with concern "that the closeness with which the style has been moulded upon the Hebraic model, especially upon the parallelistic forms of the Wisdom Literature, has been sufficiently recognized (Tests of Life, 2). "It is not suggested that there is in the Epistle a conscious imitation of Hebraic forms; but it is evident, I think, that no one could have written as our author does whose style of thought and expression had not been unconsciously formed upon Old Testament models" (ibid. 4).
86 Bultmann, Johannine Epistles, 43.
87 Ibid. 2.
88 Brown charted “Bultmann’s Reconstructed Source for I John” in a comprehensive manner by listing the various couplets and triplets (Epistles of John, 760-61).
“no new ideas, but the same themes treated in 1:5—2:27 recur” throughout 2:28—5:12 means the latter section “is obviously not a coherent organic composition, but rather a compendium of various fragments collected as a supplement to 1:5—2:27.” His argument for an abbreviated version of First John, however, is not based upon any external textual evidence (because there is none). Bultmann’s conjecture is based solely upon the epistolary content, and is “a theory rebutted by others for the paradoxical reason that they cannot explain why anyone would have added pieces that say little or nothing which was not already said in 1:5—2:27!”

Brown referenced others who found an apparent “lack of sequence,” such as de Ambroggi who posited “free association of ideas,” and Houlden (similar to Law) who used the term “spiral” for the Johannine arguments. According to Houlden:

At times the argument approaches the circular. . . . But it is better to describe the argument as a whole . . . as spiral; that is, while there is circularity of movement involving a small number of ideas, there is also progression as new themes are introduced. . . . Each cycle includes a consideration of the central themes with some subordinate question in mind; or, alternatively, using the great, constant words and ideas for material, it radiates from some new notion or question, introduced or brought into prominence for the first time.

Brown noted the benefit that may result from even a cursory comparison of First John with the Gospel of John and book of Revelation since they contain “a definite structure, even though it is difficult to discern the exact lines dividing one pericope from another and sometimes the thought is repetitive.” Brown’s outline demonstrates a division into two parts (eleven units), as a reflection upon the Gospel of John.

1. PROLOGUE: Reflections upon the Gospel of John
   Prologue: “In the beginning was the Word”

   PART ONE (1:5—3:10): The obligation of walking in light in response to the gospel of God as light, a response that divides the secessionist Antichrists from the author’s Little Children.

---

2. 1:5: “This is the message: God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all”
1:6—2:2: Three boasts and three opposite hypotheses, reflecting different understandings of the gospel.
3. 2:3-11: Three claims of intimate knowledge of God, which are to be tested by the way one walks.
4. 2:12-17: Admonitions to believers who have conquered the Evil One and so must resist the world.
5. 2:18-27: Warning against the secessionist Antichrists who deny the Son and the Father.
6. 2:28—3:10: In face of the coming encounter with Christ and God, the contrast between God’s children and the devil’s children.

PART TWO (3:11—5:12): The obligation of loving in deeds in response to the gospel that we should love one another according to the example of Jesus as Christ come in the flesh.
7. 3:11: “For this is the message: we should love one another”
3:12-24 Admonitions to the author’s Brothers and Little Children with regard to the need to demonstrate love in deeds.
8. 4:1-6: The Spirits of Truth and Deceit, governing respectively the secessionists who belong to the world and the author’s beloved adherents who belong to God.
9. 4:7—5:4a: The absolute necessity to love one another in order to love God.
10. 5:4b-12: Faith as the conqueror of the world and the believer’s relation to testimony.

Consequently, this “suggests that there may be structure in I John as well.”

Bruce summarized the problem with regard to identifying both the purpose and structure of First John.

Attempts to trace a consecutive argument throughout I John have never succeeded. For the convenience of a commentator and his readers, it is possible to present such an analysis of the epistle . . . , but this does not imply that the author himself worked to an organized plan. At best we can distinguish three main courses of thought: the first (1. 5—2. 27), which has two main themes, ethical (walking in light) and Christological (confessing Jesus as the Christ); the second (2. 28—4. 6), which repeats the ethical and Christological themes with variations; the third (4. 7—5. 12), where the same two essential

93 Brown, Epistles of John, 117.
themes are presented as love and faith and shown to be inseparable and indispensable products of life in Christ.94

The challenge to identify the structure of First John is not only limited to earlier scholarship, but also applies to modern scholarship. Bruce’s summary statement of the problem in 1970 has since improved. One reason for this progression is the emphasis upon the text as the foundational linguistic unit.95

The historical information on the possible socio-cultural setting of the Johannine community (although hypothetical) should be linked up with the text-immanent analyses. To bind the text together, its cohesion and coherence on the surface level should be analysed to respond methodologically to the syntactic dimension. The logical and temporal relations underlying the text from the conceptual patterns of the semantic organisation of the text, and the pragmatic dimension, then, makes the use of the syntactic and semantic analysis and describes the meaning to be materialised in the relation between narrator and audience.96

The analysis of such cohesion and coherence for the entirety of the First Epistle of John, and then the syntactic and semantic components is the next matter to consider for this article.

STRUCTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FIRST EPISTLE

As already noted, semantic-structural analysis involves the meaning of a text. Therefore, analysis seeks to exegete all the information conveyed by the surface structure. To analyze semantic structure it is first necessary to delineate its characteristics (which are closely related to the presuppositions already stated). For example, Malatesta organized First John schematically. His intention was “to facilitate a sharper awareness and better understanding of the peculiar style and rhythm of these

letters.”97 His analysis commenced with the clause and especially identified various textual aspects, such as: thematic words, correspondences and oppositions, concentric patterns, parallelism, and inclusio. Following the identification of these textual characteristics, the text was arranged into individual units to make the particular structure more readily apparent.98 In addition to a prologue and an epilogue, Malatesta presented the Greek text of First John in “three parts which successively and ever more profoundly treat the same general theme ‘Criteria of New Covenant Communion with God.’” The subdivisions of these three parts address “the Christian ethic in general, then charity, and finally faith.”99 The threefold structure was formulated as follows.100

Prologue: Apostolic Witness to Life and Communion (1:1-4)

1. First Exposition of Criteria of New Covenant Communion with God (1:5—2:28)
   Perspective: God is Light (1:5)
   This communion considered in terms of light
   No explicit indication of the connection between love and faith

   Perspective: God is just (2:29)
   This communion considered in terms of sonship
   Mention of the connection between faith and love (3:23)

   Perspective: God is Love (4:8, 16)
   This communion considered in terms of love
   Development of the relationship between love and faith

Epilogue: Prayer (5:14-17) and Summary of Letter (5:18-21)

Malatesta’s arrangement of the text emphasizes how John’s thought was progressively expanded. The thought process of First John is singulary, yet “it can only be expressed gradually and so one paragraph leads to another, as from section to section the same subjects are treated ever more

98 Ibid. 5.
99 Ibid. 4.
100 Ibid. 7-47.
profoundly.”

The threefold structure may be further divided into an additional three elements (A, B, and C), which are related to the general structure as parts of the whole.

A. Walking in the Light and Freedom from Sin (1:5—2:2)
   B. Knowledge of Communion with God and Observance of the New Commandment of Love (2:3-11)
   C. Believers Contrasting with the World and with Antichrists (2:12-28)

A. Doing Right and Avoiding Sin (2:29—3:10)
   C. Discernment of Spirits (4:1-6)

B’. Love Comes from God and Is Rooted in Faith (4:7-21)
   C’. Faith in the Son of God Is the Root of Love (5:1-13)

The third and final level is a combined progression of both the literary structure and the theological structure. Each level must be analyzed to discern the unified thought. The observational elements that form the basis for the analysis include “a careful attention to literary traits, the author’s personality, the nature of his message, and the purpose and genre of this particular Letter.”

Malatesta explained, “To experience the faith and love of which he speaks is both to understand the author and his message and to realize the Letter’s raison d’être. Perhaps no other single writing of the Bible places so forcefully and so explicitly its entire contents under the sign of an experience the readers are invited both to share and to discern.” First John was written “under the sign of an experience the readers are invited both to share and to discern.”

As the result of his pastoral concern, John presented criteria for believers to help them distinguish authentic fellowship with God “from the deviant behavior and unchristian attitudes of those who falsely claim to be united to God.” John approached “his expositions in the light of his contemplation of the mystery of God’s love in Jesus Christ.” His appeal to this mystery in love and faith “underlies the entire text.” The primary issue against Malatesta’s structure, however, is his argument that First

---

101 Malatesta, Interiority and Covenant, 40.
102 Ibid. 37-41, 77-79.
103 Ibid. 38.
104 Ibid. 39.
105 Ibid. 40.
John should be interpreted on the basis of covenantal thought. The
Johannine emphasis upon mutual abiding (viz. Christ in [εἴνα \( \dot{\eta} \)] the
believer, and the believer in Christ) is confused with the interiority of the
law in the New Covenant (cf. Jer 31:31-34). There is neither an allusion nor
reference to covenant (διόθηκη) in First John.

Longacre analyzed the text of First John as hortatory discourse.\(^{106}\)
His works complement the previous analysis by his doctoral student, who
contented that First John should be regarded as written to be exhortative
as opposed to informative, that is, “a hortatory (not simply expository) text
with the perlocutionary function of persuasion.”\(^{107}\) “1 John was written
primarily to persuade its readers to act consistently with what they say
they believed, rather than to inform them about what was desirable to
believe.”\(^ {108}\) Longacre argued, “the brute statistics of the book (as far as
the type of verbs that occur) are misleading\(^ {109}\); that the command forms are
central; and that the book moves from mitigated (almost disguised)
commands to overt commands at the structures which we call the peaks of
the book.”\(^ {110}\)

Longacre’s exegesis is based upon a fivefold analysis: (1) dividing
“the book into structural paragraphs which [he believes] are indicated by
certain features of the surface structure of the book;” (2) discussing “the
distribution of the verb \( \gamma\rho\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\) (‘write’) in Greek;” (3) adopting “the point
of view that the book is fundamentally not an expository but a hortatory
discourse;” (4) identifying “the peaks in the introduction and the peaks in
the body of the book;” and, (5) considering “the macrostructure of the book
in the van Dykian sense of the word.”\(^ {111}\)

Identifying the distribution of vocatives provided Longacre with his
first indicator for determining the message of First John. The vocatives
indicate that First John can be divided into structural paragraphs,\(^ {112}\) as

\(^{106}\) Longacre, “Exhortation and Mitigation;” idem, “Towards an Exegesis of
1 John,” 271-86.

\(^{107}\) Helen Louise Miehle, “Theme in Greek Hortatory Discourse: Van Dijk
and Beekman-Callow Approaches Applied to 1 John” (unpublished Ph.D.

\(^ {108}\) Ibid. 178.

\(^ {109}\) “The overt command forms, by contrast, constitute only 9%”
(Longacre, “Towards an Exegesis of 1 John,” 278).

\(^ {110}\) Ibid. 277.

\(^ {111}\) Ibid. 271-72.

\(^ {112}\) Textual changes were also discerned: “Other considerations such as
\( \text{\`i\`d\`e\`te} \) in verse 21 and discontinuities of subject matter mark these suggested
paragraphs as units of the text” (ibid. 276).
follows: 1:1-4; 1:5-10; 2:1-6; 2:7-11; 2:12-17; 2:18-27; 2:28-29; 3:1-6; 3:7-12; 3:13-18; 3:19-24; 4:1-6; 4:7-10; 4:11-21; 5:1-12; and, 5:13-21.\(^{113}\) It is unusual that Longacre regarded 1:1—2:29 as the introduction for the Epistle, so that “the body of the book” is located in 3:1—5:12.\(^{114}\) Longacre did not label the sixteen paragraphs with any themes, nor did he indicate any thought development. The result of his 16-paragraph division is “a string of natural paragraphs.”\(^{115}\)

Identifying the distribution of the verb \(\gamma\rho\alpha\phi\omega\) was the second indicator for determining the message. Having posited a “string of sixteen paragraphs,” Longacre sought a “natural grouping” of the paragraphs based upon the occurrence of \(\gamma\rho\alpha\phi\omega\) in the introduction and the conclusion. John constructed the introduction (esp. 1:5—2:28) to inform those who received his epistle as to his reasons for writing. \(\gamma\rho\alpha\phi\omega\) is distributed frequently throughout the introduction (1:1—2:29), which is unusually long and “contains most of the themes of the body of the work, yet the performative verb \(\gamma\rho\alpha\phi\omega\) does not occur in the body of the work (3:1—5:12). With the last occurrence in 2:26, \(\gamma\rho\alpha\phi\omega\) does not appear again until 5:13, which begins the final paragraph. Based upon the distribution of \(\gamma\rho\alpha\phi\omega\), Longacre contended that the main body of First John is 3:1—5:12.\(^{116}\)

As a third indicator for determining the message, Longacre counted and considered the kinds of verb used, which is thought to designate the type of discourse that First John is. Longacre was specifically concerned as to whether First John should be regarded as expository or hortatory. Static and relationship verbs were examined and seen to dominate, which means “the general cast of the surface structure of 1 John looks decidedly more expository than hortatory.” Longacre, however, clarified that determining the type of discourse cannot “be so simply stated by appeal to verb classification and counting.”\(^{117}\) The reason is that hortatory verb forms function quite differently than the static and relationship verbs in First John because they occur at the “peaks of the book.” Therefore, “the surface structure” and word count seem to indicate an expository character to First John; however, with a stronger and weightier functional significance, the “hortatory-type verbs predominate.”\(^{118}\)

\(^{113}\) Ibid. 272-76.

\(^{114}\) Longacre, “Exhortation and Mitigation,” 5, 20.

\(^{115}\) Longacre, “Towards an Exegesis of 1 John,” 276.

\(^{116}\) Ibid. 276-77.

\(^{117}\) Ibid. 278.

\(^{118}\) Ibid. 279.
The fourth indicator is the “peaks of the book, i.e., points of cumulative development.” Longacre considered 1 John 1:1—2:29 as containing two peaks: ethical (2:12-17) and doctrinal (2:18-27). Peaks also occur in reverse parallel in 4:1-21: doctrinal (4:1-6) and ethical (4:7-21). Considering “the macrostructure of the book in the van Dykian sense of the word” is the final indicator for determining the Johannine message. Based upon the hortatory character of First John, the peaks “are the places where overt imperatives” and ὑπομνήματα verb forms are “characteristically” located. The peaks within the Johannine discourse “peculiarly develop the main message of the book,” whereas the immediately preceding information indicates evident statements with regard to the macrostructure of First John (“i.e., the gist of a work, what it is all about”). Consequently, the paragraphs immediately preceding the dual peaks in chapter 2—verses 12-17 and verses 18-27—state the macrostructure of First John “in more overt form.” Based upon the assertion that καί νῦν has transitional “summary force,” 2:28-29 provides “closure” to the introduction (1:5-29), which may be regarded as a legitimate feature if the vocative τέκνια “signals onset of a new paragraph.” Likewise, the paragraphs immediately preceding the dual peaks in chapter 4—verses 1-6 and verses 7-21—clearly reveal “the central thrust of the whole work.” John wrote in 4:1-6 with regard to the divine commands that are obligatory for believers (viz. “that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another”). The macrostructure is restated in the subsequent paragraph to 4:7-21, which is 5:1-12. Specifically, verse 1 restates the microstructure: “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.”

Longacre’s analysis is based upon “the peaks of the introduction and especially in the peaks of the body of the work” to determine the

---

119 Ibid.
121 Longacre, “Towards an Exegesis of 1 John,” 279.
122 Ibid. 272.
123 Ibid. 281.
125 Longacre, “Towards an Exegesis of 1 John,” 280-81.
126 Ibid. 283.
message of First John.127 His analysis is similar to du Rand,128 yet also considered the preponderance of the communicative circumstances. Identifying “peaks” may be apparent relatively, however, inclusive questions with regard to the Johannine structure have been multifaceted.

The reason for examining structural analyses of the First Epistle of John was to discern those elements that may be neglected by traditional commentators. Anderson’s interpretive summary of the first word of the text of First John illustrates the need for this analysis.

Most commentators think that instead of ὁ ‘what’ referring to any specific noun, it has a more complex reference. It does not refer to Jesus directly, but to that which the writer declares about Jesus [Brd]. It refers to the person, words, and acts of Jesus [AB, Brd, ICC], to both the gospel message and the person of Jesus [Herm, NIC, NTC], to both the gospel message about Jesus [Ws, WBC], to the account of Ἰ ὁ γεγεινόν ‘the message’ (1:5) which is identical with the person of Jesus [Herm], to Jesus and all that he is and does for us [Ln], to Jesus as the Word and the life he manifested [EGT], the content of the Christian doctrine [HNTC]. Another thinks that it refers specifically to the Word, but the neuter form suggests that the Word cannot be adequately described in human language [TH].129

The remainder of the first clause, ὁ Ἰ ὁ γεγεινόν ἐπὶ ὁ χάριν, similarly demonstrates the need for more exhaustive analysis, as evident in the summary by Anderson or even one’s own perusal of various commentaries. Moreover, the exegetical summary of discourse units by Anderson130 indicates the need for hermeneutical methodologies that can be integrated into the exegetical analysis for the purpose of achieving a more consistent and valid structure of the text. The relationship between the thematic structure of the text and the discourse units is important to discern so that one does not interpret a biblical text in a partitive manner without regard for the holistic structure.131 Porter noted how the macrostructures of a text “convey the large thematic ideas which help to govern the interpretation of the microstructures.”

127 Ibid. 284.
129 Anderson, 1, 2, & 3 John, 10.
130 Ibid. 9.
Macro-structures serve two vital functions. On the one hand, they are the highest level of interpretation of a given text. On the other hand, they are the points at which larger extra-textual issues such as time, place, audience, authorship and purpose (more traditional questions of biblical backgrounds) must be considered.\footnote{Stanley E. Porter, Idioms of the Greek New Testament, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994; reprint, London: Continuum, 1999) 300.}

To identify the macrostructure is to adopt an holistic approach to the text of Scripture. Macrostructures help to identify discourse units, whereas traditional hermeneutical methods tend to emphasize a clause or sentence of a biblical book. By identifying the macrostructure, one more discern the relationship between each section and subsection to the complete text. Therefore, the endeavor to identify the microstructure assists in answering specific noun or verbal usage within a clause or sentence. “The microstructures are the smaller units (such as words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and even pericopes and paragraphs) which make-up macrostructures.”\footnote{Porter, Idioms, 300.}

**Structural Analysis of First John 1:1—2:27**

The structural analysis of First John indicates the important aspects of the Epistle. For instance, the emphasis in the prologue (1:1-4) is upon the authentic and authoritative proclamation of the gospel message. John’s hope was for his readers to appropriate this message for the purpose of fellowship (1:3) and for their joy to be made complete (1:4). The basis for understanding the first structural unit of First John is found in the summary statement of 1:5 ("God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all"). Subsequent to the foundational statement of 1:5, the claims and false propositions between John and his opponents comprise the first primary structural unit (1:5—2:2). The negative apodoses were introduced by a protasis with the ἐὰν ἐπιμαχέων clause (1:6, 8, 10), whereas the positive apodoses were introduced with protases containing only ἐὰν (1:7, 9; 2:1). The somberness of the assertion in 1:10 (ἐὰν ἐπιμαχέων ὅτι οὐχ ἡμοιώτηκαμεν) necessitates the assurance provided to the believer in 2:1-2. The sins of believers are forgiven based upon the advocacy and propitiation of Jesus Christ.

One may also discern that the notion of κοινωνία in 1:1-4 and 1:5—2:2 does not appear in 2:3-11; rather, the emphasis is upon knowing God and loving God, in addition to the new commandment (2:3-5, 10).
next unit (2:12-14) is transitory, and is addressed to those who do not walk in the Light and further explains what characterizes such fellowship. The next unit (2:15-17) contains the overt command to “not love the world” for it “is passing away.” First John 2:12-14 parenthetically contrasts the selfless love that characterizes one who is in the Light (2:7-11) with the selfish love that characterizes the unbelieving world (2:15-17). The intent of 2:18-27 is both expository and hortatory, with much emphasis upon abiding, and concluding with the overt command to abide in God. John’s injunctions exhort his readers to abide and mature in the Father and the Son.

**Structural Analysis of First John 2:28—5:21**

First John 2:28 is best understood as beginning a new section, which continues to the end of the Epistle. The reason why 2:28—3:10 is understood as a unit is because it allows for the content with which it begins to parallel 2:12 and 2:18. The next structural paragraph begins in 3:11 with the assertion ὅτι αὕτη ἡ ἁγγελία, which is parallel to the assertion in 1:5. The unit ends with 3:18, and functions as the midpoint of the Epistle. First John 3:18 restates the assertion of 3:11 as a mitigated exhortation based upon the instruction and application given in 3:12-17. The love of Jesus and love for other believers demonstrates that one abides in the love of God, and thus, is abiding in eternal love (as opposed to abiding in death, as those who hate). First John 3:19-24 is the first indication of a potential chiastic structure to the First Epistle of John because the emphasis upon having “confidence before God” (3:21) is comparable to 2:28—3:10, wherein emphasis was given to the relationship between “confidence” and “righteousness.”

First John 4:1-6 and 4:7-21 indicate prominence upon what is ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ. Christians are to test the spirits because not all are ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ. Believers are to love because it is ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ. The command to test the spirits (4:1-6) is an exhortation to maturity through correct doctrine, which reminds the reader of the emphasis in the prologue with regard to the apostolic message. The command to love (4:7-12) is emphasized in relation to abiding in God (4:13-21). Love is ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, and it proves whether one abides in Him (3:11-18); therefore, the command to abide in God is evident again in 4:7-21, in close parallel to the prominence given upon God’s love and the love of the believer in 2:3-17.

The structural paragraph of 5:1-12 begins with the confession “that Jesus is the Christ” (cf. 4:2-3), and this belief is the evidence as to whether one is truly fathered by God. The unit is subdivided into the propositional
(5:2-5) and the evidence for those propositions (5:6-12). Coherence in 1 John 5:1-12 is evident by the following repetitions: belief in Jesus (5:1, 4-5, 10); loving fellow believers (5:1, 2-3); and, heeding God’s commandments (5:2-3). The semantic correspondence within 5:12-13 (ἐξέλθετε τὴν ζωὴν in v. 12 and ζωὴν ἐξέλθετε in v. 13) indicates that the first half of 1 John 5 concludes with verse 12. The remainder of the Epistle provides an apologetic whereby one may proclaim the truth of God’s Word so that one may know whether they have eternal life. First John 5:13-21 is the conclusion and epilogue, with 5:21 providing an appropriate exhortation and warning.

CONCLUSION:
How Discerning the Identity of First John Assists in Interpretation

First John is indeed different than the common first century letter, especially in comparison with the contemporaneous examples of Second John and Third John, which do possess nearly all the first century characteristics of the epistolary format. Although the grammar and syntax of First John is simple, there does appear to be a rather evident structure, which may even be understood to exhibit a concentric format.¹³⁴ Structural analysis of First John allows the content to define certain units (such an examination also helps to explain the thematic repetition of First John). Moreover, one may develop an outline that is representative of the primary Johannine emphases. The structural analysis will assist interpretation of First John.


---

A Prologue: Eternal Life (1:1-4)
B Three Witnesses (1:5—2:2)
(to deny sin is to make God a liar) (walk)
C The love of God and the believer (2:3-17)
D False christs (2:18-27)
E Believer’s confidence
(2:28—3:10)
(do not sin)
F Love proves abiding
(3:11-18)
E’ Believer’s confidence
(3:19-24)
(do keep God’s commands)
D’ False prophets (4:1-6)
C’ The love of God and the believer (4:7-21)
B’ Three Witnesses (5:1-12)
(to deny Jesus is to make God a liar) (testimony)
A’ Epilogue: Eternal Life (5:13-21)

The first aid in interpretation is evident in the chiastic outline, which indicates the theological development of First John, and demonstrates that the Epistle was not written as a series of unrelated aspects of doctrine and ethics that tend to spiral in a somewhat disorganized manner. Secondly, by indentifying the fourteen structural units of First John, one may give greater attention to the manner in which certain motifs and terms appear and then recur throughout the Epistle. Moreover, the observation of the development of the themes throughout First John allow one to identify the progression of thought in addition to the intensification of meaning (cf. 3:11-18).

Third, one is encouraged to consider the extent of similarities and dissimilarities between parallel units. When such an approach is adopted, one may discern the thematic and theological magnificence of First John. Fourth, the semantic-structural analysis of First John indicates many motifs that are fundamental to the thought progression of the Epistle, such as emphasis upon confidence, eternal life, false teachers, love, walking in the Light, and the testimony of God. Although debate with regard to the genre of First John will likely continue, there is an evident structure to the message of First John, which indicates the importance for internalizing the revelation and perhaps even to memorize its contents.

The message of First John is concerned with how the believer may have assurance of fellowship with God, and to exhort the Christian to abide
in Him. From the beginning of the Epistle, it is evident that John was not content with immaturity by those who assumed such fellowship. Consequently, the message of First John is to provide much hortatory content to assure the believer, who is not perfect and who does sin, yet who tests the spirits and abides in God, and who is able to do so based upon the work of Christ, who the Father lovingly sent to the world. The evidence of one’s fellowship with God is by walking in righteousness and by heeding the testimony of God.
THE COMPATIBILITY OF THE NEW COVENANT
AND FUTURE ANIMAL SACRIFICE

Jerry M. Hullinger

Dispensationalists have generally argued that the Temple of Ezekiel 40—48 will be realized and functional during the millennium. The dispensational belief has received sharp criticism from those of a nondispensational persuasion. While there are many legitimate issues to be discussed, this article will focus upon one factor which will lend credence to the dispensational approach. The one factor is that the realization of the Temple seen in Ezekiel 40—48 is closely connected with the restoration of Israel in Ezekiel 36—39; or, stated differently, the full realization of chapters 36—39 is seen in 40—48.1 If this is true, then the enactment of the New Covenant2 will be seen to be compatible with the future Temple and millennial sacrifices.

* Jerry M. Hullinger, Th.M., Th.D., professor of Bible, Piedmont International University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina


THE PROVISIONS OF THE NEW COVENANT

There are several provisions to be found in the New Covenant.\(^3\) First, Israel will be regathered. Second, Israel will be one nation ruled by one king. Third, Israel will no longer be idolatrous. Fourth, Israel will be cleansed and forgiven. Fifth, God will tabernacle among Israel in a visible way. Sixth, Israel will be known to the Gentiles as a nation blessed of God. In addition, the Covenant promises the fullness of the Holy Spirit, the universal knowledge of God, an obedient heart on the part of the nation, and the establishment of a new city that will be characterized by holiness and immovability. The present age reveals that Israel is not experiencing these provisions nor have they ever experienced them. Furthermore, they are not being blessed by God in a covenant sense, they are not recognized as the people of God, and God is not visibly dwelling in their midst. Moreover, the sequence of events stated by Jeremiah in his New Covenant text (ch. 31) revolve around the nation being regathered and restored to the land and then experiencing blessings. There has never been such a historical sequence. Therefore, it is concluded that the New Covenant has not been fulfilled by the nation but will be during the kingdom age envisioned in Ezekiel 40—48.\(^4\)

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE NEW COVENANT

The opinion of this writer is that the New Covenant referenced by Ezekiel and Jeremiah was unconditional and immutable in purpose and nature.\(^5\) The statement of this position was articulated by Freedman.

Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Second Isaiah recognized the essential validity of both covenant types . . . through an eschatological fulfillment of their ultimate intention to produce a society well pleasing to God and


\(^4\) The conclusion is supported by its unconditional nature (see text), the fact that the items have never been fulfilled, and the time frame suggested previously concerning the realization of the Temple in 40—48.

\(^5\) Jeremiah is the only writer who used the phrase “New Covenant.” However, both Isaiah (55:3; 59:21; 6:8) and Ezekiel (16:60-62; 36:24-28; 37:26-27) include similar promises and content which can be equated with the term.
embodying his purposes among men. . . . Yet they were convinced that
the divine promise to the Fathers and their descendants had not been
annulled. . . . Both covenant types would be fulfilled and transcended
in the age of the New Covenant. . . . every man would be filled with the
Spirit of God, and all would obey His will. The Covenant would never
be broken.6

The position stated herein can be validated by several
observations. First, the covenant is called "eternal" (Isa 24:5; 61:8;
Jer.31:36, 40; 32:40; 50:5). Greenberg noted, "the five-fold repetition of
'verrey' stresses the irrevocability of the new dispensation. . . . The future
restoration will have a guarantee of success."7

Second, the repetition of the "I will" phrase demonstrates that God
is taking the obligation of this fulfillment upon Himself.8 Therefore, unlike

6 Freedman, "Divine Commitment and Human Obligation," 421. Freedman's reference to "covenant types" refers to the obligatory and promissory
type genres. Fruchtenbaum added: "When dispensationalists speak 'of an
unconditional covenant,' they do not mean that the content of the covenant
contains no conditions, obligations, or commands. What they do mean is that God
intends to fulfill the terms of the covenant regardless of whether man fulfills his
obligations" (Arnold Fruchtenbaum, Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic

7 Moshe Greenberg, "The Design and Themes of Ezekiel's Program of
Restoration," Interpretation 38 (1984): 182. See also, Moshe Weinfeld, "יָד שָׁלוֹם" in
Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, 15 vols., eds. G. Johannes Botterweck,
Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 2:270.
In answer to the objection that "eternal" does not always mean "unending," see
Walter Kaiser Jr., "The Land of Israel and the Future Return," in Israel: The Land
Ironically, amillennialists see no problem in appealing to the word "eternal" when
speaking of the unending nature of heaven and hell.

8 Implied in these statements is the belief that there is a national future for
Israel which is evident from the unconditional nature of the covenant and even
post-exilic passages such as Zechariah 10:8-12 and Romans 9—11. Concerning the
importance of Romans 9—11 in this regard, Cranfield remarked, "It is only where
the Church persists in refusing to learn this message . . . and so fails to understand
God's mercy to itself, that it is unable to believe in God's mercy for unbelieving
Israel, and so entertains the ugly and unscriptural notion that God has cast off His
people and simply replaced it by the Christian Church. These chapters
emphatically forbid us to speak of the Church as having once and for all taken the
place of the Jewish people. And I confess with shame to having myself used in print
on more than one occasion this language of the replacement of Israel by the
church" (C. E. B. Cranfield, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to
the Mosaic Covenant, the ultimate success of the New Covenant rests upon God's faithfulness.9 Beecher concurred: “In its character as expressing God’s purpose of blessing for the human race, we should not expect it to depend on the obedience of disobedience of a few . . . The promise is for eternity, and Israel shall be maintained in existence, that the promise may not fail.”10

Another support revolves around the statement in Jeremiah 31:35-37 that if the heavens could be measured and the foundations of the earth searched out, then God would abandon the nation of Israel. The statement certainly argues for the ongoing purpose of God revealed in the covenants.

A fourth support for the unconditional nature of the New Covenant is that the covenant is largely occupied with issues of salvation from sin and the impartation of a new heart which is solely the work of God. As a consequence of the ineradicable human tendency to do wrong, God must make a unilateral commitment to the human race in order to see the fulfillment of His purposes. He will have to transform people’s minds and hearts so that they will want to obey, as they are empowered by His Spirit to do so. The point herein was stated well by Klein.

Ezekiel’s eternal covenant will be cut in the future. Like Jeremiah’s new covenant it emphasizes forgiveness and new obedience. Yahweh

---

9 Jeremiah contrasted the New Covenant with the Mosaic Covenant when he said that the New Covenant would not be like the one made with Israel’s forefathers (i.e. the Mosaic). The contrast implies that the Israelites will not break the New Covenant as they broke the Sinaitic one. Such assurance is based upon the fact that God will give Israel a new heart and the inner empowerment of the Holy Spirit. As Unterman explained, “The giving of the New Covenant may be described, perhaps, as an internal act which takes place within the recipient and transforms the torah into an organic part of the individual” (Jeremiah Unterman, From Repentance to Redemption [Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1987] 98). The establishment will rest upon the covenant faithfulness and love of God.


---

*the Romans*, 2 vols. [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975-79] 2:448). There is in a sense a paradox here. If Israel has not been cast aside, why is she in the state she is in today? The answer lies in the fact that Israel’s enjoyment of unconditional promises (i.e. the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants) was conditioned upon obedience to certain stipulations (i.e. the Mosaic Covenant). Upon failure to obey the Mosaic Covenant, the promises were temporarily forfeited. However, because the original promises were unconditional, God took it upon Himself to provide—in the future—the ability for Israel to become obedient, and thereby enjoy the original blessings (i.e. the New Covenant).
remains faithful to forgiveness as the sine qua non of a new covenant. . . Like his older contemporary Jeremiah, Ezekiel was aware of the necessity for covenant obedience. Jeremiah solved the problem of recalcitrant Israel by announcing that Yahweh would inscribe the heart with law. Ezekiel promises a whole new heart and a new spirit. Gone forever will be the hardened heart of stone, and in its place will be a heart of flesh. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel seem to be saying that God expects a change in behavior from those who love him, and they recognize that such good deeds can only be done with the aid and help of God.  

A fifth support for the future fulfillment of the New Covenant revolves around Ezekiel’s stress upon the name of God. There is a great concern in the book of Ezekiel for God’s reputation and the vindication of His character. LaSor expressed this concern thusly: “The vindication of God’s character is an important emphasis for Ezekiel, as seen in his use of the expression ‘they shall know that I am the Lord.’ When He is finished, his people will be like Him in holiness.” Furthermore, Luc noted that Ezekiel could not avoid another crucial question after the Judahite crisis.

How could God’s name not be despised in the eyes of the nations when they would inevitably interpret the event as weakness on the part of Israel’s God? That this was a major concern of Ezekiel can be seen from the following statement of God: “I had a concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel profaned among the nations where they had gone.”


13 Alex Luc, “A Theology of Ezekiel: God’s Name and Israel’s History,” Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 26 (1983): 141. Virtually all writers agree with regard to this point. Simon J. DeVries commented, “Ezekiel’s primary concern seems to have been the vindication of Yahweh’s honor. . . . Thus Ezekiel’s view of history and of the covenant is decidedly theocentric” (“Remembrance in Ezekiel: A Study of an Old Testament Theme,” Interpretation 16 [1962]: 59). See
The concern for God’s name in the book is shown by the recurring phrase “then they will know” that I am Yahweh.” Zimmerli observed that of the 947 verbal occurrences of the stem יד (to know), not less than ninety-nine are found in Ezekiel, with virtually all of them making significant theological statements. Bullock calculated that the phrase “you shall know” occurs more than sixty times in the book, more than any other prophet.

The result of this concern for the name of Yahweh is an indirect assurance of salvation to Israel, which is absolutely necessary if God’s name is to be vindicated because of Israel’s sin. “Instead of Israel’s history moving towards the objective of the knowledge of YHWH in the heathen world via Israel’s sanctification, it had moved in the opposite direction and


Bullinger suggested that “name” is figuratively a metonymy of adjunct denoting nature, inner being, or essence to that which it belongs (E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible [London: Eyre and Spottiswoorde, 1898; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003] 608).

Herbert Huffmon expanded the idea of “to know” in relation to the technical terminology of the Ancient Near Eastern treaties and concluded that “to know” involves the recognition of the authority and claims of a sovereign (“The Treaty Background of Hebrew Yada], Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research 181 [1966]: 31-37).

Zimmerli, I Am Yahweh (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982) 29-30. Zimmerli also affirmed that the verbal element “then you will know” is derived from legal language in the context of a process of proving (e.g. Exod 20:2). He defined this self introduction as the “form of self-revelation of a person in his name.” In Ezekiel, the formula is only connected with two kinds of divine action: punishment or restoration of Israel (Ezekiel, 2 vols. [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979, 1983] 1:38).

resulted in a history of scandal via Israel’s profanation.” The knowledge of God is also an implication of the oracles of judgment and salvation, and is the teaching of the dry bones vision that brought hope to the exiles. Fox concluded that the message of the dry bones not only preserved the nation’s hope and will to survive, but also implanted in them an understanding that their future would be a transformation of character by the power of God.

Sixth, Ezekiel 40—48 convincingly argues for a restored Jewish temple and land with the resultant phrase, “the house of Israel will never again defile my holy name” (43:7).

A final support deals with the relationship between the covenants and God’s hesed. God’s love has pledged himself to an unalterable course of action to the nation of Israel. Though lengthy, the following citation from Merrill is appropriate.

In an even tighter parallelism, Psalm 89:28 reads, “I will always preserve My faithful love (hesed) for him, and My covenant with him will endure.” The reference here is to David and the Davidic covenant through which the Lord promised David and his dynasty an unending reign (vv. 20-29; cf. 2 Sam. 7:12-16). Isaiah, clearly dependent on both the original word to David and its reiteration in the psalm, spoke the message of the Lord who said, “I will make an everlasting covenant with you, the promises (hesed) assured to David” (Isa. 55:3). Micah reached even further back in sacred history, recollecting the ancient promises to the patriarchs with which the Davidic covenant had such vital linkage: “You will show loyalty to Jacob and faithful love (hesed) to Abraham, as You swore to our fathers from days long ago” (Mic. 7:20). Daniel connected hesed and covenant even more closely, making them virtual synonyms. In his great prayer he prayed, literally, “Ah, Lord—the great and awe-inspiring God who keeps His gracious covenant (hesed)” (Dan. 9:4). The construction is a hendiadys to be translated “covenant of hesed.” The Lord’s hesed, as an element of his character is unending. The derivative nouns ‘emet

18 Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, 495.
20 Michael V. Fox, “The Rhetoric of Ezekiel’s Vision of the Valley of the Bones,” Hebrew Union College Annual 51 (1980): 6, 15. A comparison should be made here with the plagues brought upon Egypt at the time of the Exodus. The stated purpose of such plagues was that the Egyptians might know that Yahweh was the true God. One is suspicious that if the plagues brought upon Egypt were future and part of a prophetic book (like Ezekiel), the astounding nature of the plagues would not be taken literally by non-dispensationalists.
and ‘emuna commonly occur with hesed in covenant contexts; and these are best translated reliability or trustworthiness.\textsuperscript{21}

Therefore, the elaborate vision of Ezekiel 40—48 including Temple, glory, and sacrifices is assured based on the name of God which Ezekiel is jealous to honor. If the events of chapters 40—48 are not fulfilled as specified by the prophet, then God’s plans and covenants with the nation have been frustrated and His preeminence as God will not be established.

\textbf{THE NEW COVENANT AND “CALVINISM”}

The well-known \textit{sine qua non} of dispensationalism is the glory of God. The claim to this truth has been challenged by many covenant theologians who cling to Question #1 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Some nondispensationalists argue that dispensationalists cannot be truly Calvinistic in their soteriology.\textsuperscript{22} However, there is an important parallel to be drawn between God’s gracious election and Israel’s future.

Calvinistic theologians (dispensational or not) agree that the doctrine of unconditional election includes God’s selection of both individuals and the nation of Israel.\textsuperscript{23} God’s glory in saving (or not saving for that matter!) is really the heartbeat of Calvinism. If God chooses individuals, fulfills His promises to them, and keeps them for His glory, would it not make sense that God would do the same for the nation that He has chosen? The following quote from Thomas Ice is insightful.

In concert with the Calvinistic impulse to view history theocentrically, I believe that dispensational premillennialism provides the most


\textsuperscript{22} R. C. Sproul, \textit{Willing to Believe} (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997) 190-204; John Gerstner, \textit{Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth} (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth and Hyatt, 1991) 2. Though not within the scope of this article to support, it is this writer’s firm contention that reformed soteriology is compatible with dispensational eschatology. Even some Presbyterians will, at least, embrace premillennialism as the best view of Christ’s return (Gordon Clark, \textit{What Do Presbyterians Believe?} [Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2001] 271).

logical eschatological ending to God’s sovereign decrees for salvation and history. Since dispensational premillenialists view both the promises of God’s election of Israel and the church as unconditional and something that God will surely bring to pass, such a belief is consistent with the bible and logic. A covenant theologian would say that Israel’s election was conditional and temporary. Many Calvinists are covenant theologians who think that individual election within the church is unconditional and permanent. They see God’s plan with Israel conditioned upon human choice, while God’s plan for salvation within the church is ultimately a sovereign act of God. There is no symmetry in such logic. Meanwhile, dispensational premillenialists see both acts as sovereign expressions of God’s plan in history, a logical consistent application of the sovereign will of God in human affairs.

I personally think that if systematic dispensationalism is rightly understood then it still logically sense only within a theocentric and soteriologically Calvinistic theology. . . . Dispensationalism is a theology that I believe is properly derived from biblical study and lets God be God.24

24 Thomas Ice, “The Calvinistic Heritage of Dispensationalism,” The Conservative Theological Journal 4 (2000): 129, 147. In defining sovereignty, John Feinstein made the statement that “God’s will and purposes are immutable” (No One Like Him [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001] 294). Surely, there is enough biblical evidence that a large part of that will includes God’s promises to Israel. Oddly, most commentaries on Romans give a futuristic interpretation of Romans 11. James Boice wrote: “During my student days I was told that the future explanation of Romans 11 was a dispensational view only and that no Reformed theologians held to it. Having studied these views carefully, I find instead that the majority of the great commentators on Romans, including Reformed commentators, recognize that the passage is speaking of a future day of Jewish conversion. Moreover, they see a future gathering-in of Israel as the point to which the chapter has been moving” (Romans: God and History [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993] 1362). At the least, this implies literal interpretation and a distinction between Israel and the church at some level, as well as the glory of God as a tenet of dispensationalism since Romans 9—11 ultimately is a justification of God’s character. Boice then cited eight reasons from Charles Hodge’s commentary on Romans that the passage is looking forward to a time of future blessing for ethnic Israel (granted, Hodge was postmillennial, but Boice could just as easily cited from John Murray’s commentary). Some amillennialists deny that they teach supersessionism. A case in point is the release by Samuel Waldron, Macarthur’s Millennial Manifesto (Owensboro, KY: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2008) 6, 11, 12, 29, 30, 33. Despite his aversion to terms like “replacement” and “supersessionism,” statements to the effect that the church is the “continuation of Israel” (p. 7), “Israel in a newly reformed and expanded phase of existence” (p. 7), a “reconstituted
Thus far, several necessary points have been suggested to demonstrate a connection between the New Covenant and animal sacrifices in Ezekiel 40—48. First, there is a link between the New Covenant section (chs. 36—39) and the Temple vision of Ezekiel in chapters 40—48 as it presents the outworking of the Covenant. Second, the provisions of the Covenant include such things as the land, a new heart, the Temple, the physical presence of God, and a universal knowledge of God for the nation of Israel (which, of course, implies their continued national existence). Third, the nation has never experienced these blessings, and therefore the fulfillment of this Covenant is posited in the future (together with the Temple of Ezekiel 40—48). Fourth, this Covenant is Israel” (p. 33), and that God is fulfilling his promises to Israel by simply saving some ethnic Israelites (p. 30) while denying a future, national conversion of Israel (Appendix One) belies the same underlying philosophy (for a critique, see Jerry Hullinger, review of MacArthur’s Millennial Manifesto, by Samuel E. Waldrone, Journal of Dispensational Theology 13 [August 2009]: 84-90).

25 Some have expressed skepticism that what Ezekiel prophesied will come true. David Greenwood suggested that this was patently false prophecy, and that the predictions regarding a restored Northern Kingdom are errant (“On the Jewish Hope for a Restored Northern Kingdom,” Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 88 [1976]: 367-85). However, among most scholars there is a lack of consensus on who participates in the benefits of the covenants. The general covenant opinion is that the promises are being now realized in the church while the general dispensational opinion is that the covenant will be fulfilled by Israel in the future (with debate regarding church participation).

unconditional and therefore guaranteed in its realization because of the person of God. *Fifthly*, this covenant is a means by which God demonstrates His glory by fulfilling His purposes in election. With this as a basis, the following points can be made regarding the relation between the New Covenant and the resumption of animal sacrifices during the kingdom period.  

---


*Fourth*, some “older” dispensationalists (at one time) suggested that there were two new covenants (Walvoord and Chafer). However, because of the textually tenuous data for this view it has been abandoned by present day dispensationalists (Craig Blaising, “Development of Dispensationalism by Contemporary Dispensationalists,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 [1988]: 278). A **fifth** view (and more satisfactory) is that future Israel will experience the fulfillment of the New Covenant, but the church will participate in some of the blessings in the future, and is now participating in the soteriological benefits. The fifth view protects the unconditional nature of the covenants, provides a future for Israel, and deals honestly with the New Testament data (C. F. Keil, *The Prophecies of Jeremiah*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 47; Werner Lemke, “Jeremiah 31:31-34,” *Interpretation* 37 [1983]: 187; Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, 235; Charles L. Feinberg, “Jeremiah,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 10 vols., gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 6:575-77; Rodney Decker, “The Church’s Relationship to the New Covenant: Part 2,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 [1995]: 454). Decker noted well that terminology like “partial fulfillment” is not necessary, and therefore it is better to speak of “participation” to speak of the present aspects.

---

26 Feinberg offered this helpful summary of the New Covenant (“Jeremiah,” 6:574):
- The Time (v. 31)—the time is coming;
- The Maker (v. 31)—the LORD;
- The Name (v. 31)—new;
- The Parties (v. 31)—house of Israel and Judah;
THE RELATIONSHIP OF SACRIFICES TO THE NEW COVENANT

Given the points previously summarized, the following statement is proposed: the prophets foresaw the future operation of the New Covenant to include the renewal of animal sacrifices. To the modern thinker, it seems incompatible for these two items to go together. To the prophets, however, there was no incompatibility whatsoever. Whitcomb commented as follows:

Isaiah not only foresaw God’s New Covenant with Israel, but also a temple in the holy land (2:2-3; 56:3; 60:13). Here animal sacrifices would be offered on its altar by Egyptians (19:21) and Arabs from Kedar and Nebaioth (60:7) through priests and Levites (66:21). . . . Jeremiah, in stating the total demise of the temporary old covenant (31:32) and in anticipating the national regeneration provided in the permanent New Covenant (31:31-34; 32:38-40; 33:6-13; 50:5), included animal sacrifices offered by Levitical priests as permanent aspects of the new covenant for national Israel.

One may conclude that the prophets foresaw a New Covenant age, which is yet to be experienced, which will include animal sacrifice. Again, the crucial point to be kept in mind is: the prophets were comfortable in linking the promises of regeneration and a new heart with animal sacrifices. The point herein suggests that animal sacrifices and Christ’s sacrifice were functionally different and therefore compatible.

The contrasted Covenant (v. 32)—not like the old covenant: based on merit and works, susceptible of infraction, no enablement, did not give life.
The Nature (vv. 33-34)—not dependent on external law nor human interpretation; law written on the heart; gives intimate knowledge of and fellowship with God; forgiveness of sin; peace of heart.
The Immutability (vv. 35-37)—the unchanging purpose of God reflected in the fixed order of nature.
The Physical Aspects (vv. 38-40)—rebuild Jerusalem in holiness and permanence.
The Guarantor (vv. 31-40)—“declares the Lord” or “the Lord says” as though to swear by Himself.  


28 One finds a similar situation with Paul in Acts 21 when he was involved in animal sacrifice. In his expository studies on Acts, James Boice entitled his chapter on this incident: “When a Good Man Falls.” He proceeded to state that
THE STATE OF THE THEOCRACY DURING THE KINGDOM PERIOD

The Temple envisioned by Ezekiel in chapters 40—48 will be literally built during the kingdom age. Not only will the Temple be built, but it will also include all of the concomitants seen by Ezekiel, including sacrifices and the glory of the Lord. The purpose of this section is an attempt to correlate the findings from Leviticus and Ezekiel with the future theocratic administration.

One of the criticisms against dispensationalism is its belief that animal sacrifices will be re instituted. The criticism arises from a laudable concern to protect any possible besmirchment to the cross of Christ. However, from the cultic literature, sacrifice served a variety of important functions none of which involved the gaining of justification.

The Purposes of Sacrifice in the Kingdom

First, sacrifice will serve to restore the individual Israelite to the theocracy of which he or she is a part. Von Rad said:

Sin was thus an offense against the sacrat order. . . . But there was more to it still. Sin was also a social category. Through ties of blood and common lot, the individual was regarded as being so deeply embedded in the community that an offense on his part was not just a private matter affecting only himself and his own relationship to God. . . . The evil which an action had brought into existence inevitably had effects which destroyed individual and community alike, unless the latter solemnly and clearly cancelled its solidarity with the offender. Thus, in an utterly realistic and direct sense, an offender was a danger to the whole people.29

Whitcomb also affirmed this view of sacrifices in the millennium. “Future animal sacrifices will be efficacious and expiatory only in terms of the strict provision for ceremonial (and thus temporal) forgiveness within the

what Paul did “at this time of his life was wrong” (Acts: An Expositional Commentary [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997] 356; for a better alternative see Darrell Bock’s discussion, Acts [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007] 647-49). Whatever the precise scenario, the fact remains that Paul engaged in this ritual. Furthermore, he did so after Christ’s death, after the Jerusalem Council, and after writing Romans and Galatians—the two clearest, inspired statements of the gospel.

29 Von Rad, Old Testament Theology, 2:264, 266.
theocracy of Israel. Thus, animal sacrifices during the coming kingdom age will not be primarily memorial.\textsuperscript{30}

The truth of this assertion can be illustrated from the impairment caused by sin in this community relationship in the Old Testament. For example, if the consequences of sin were not removed, the physical destruction of the sinner was inevitable (Lev 26:14-39).\textsuperscript{31} The same will be true in the millennium. Any outbreak of blatant sin will be punished by physical death as Christ rules with a rod of iron (Ps 2:9; 72:1-4; Isa 11:4; 29:20-21; 65:20; 66:24; Zech 14:16-21; Jer 31:29-30). The function of sacrifices in the future will have nothing to do with eternal salvation or the forgiveness of sin before God but rather with the community adjustments within the theocracy (this will be elucidated as the discussion progresses).

Second, it is seen in the meal and peace offerings that thanksgiving and worship were part of the sacrificial system. There is no reason to think that this would not continue to be an important function during the kingdom period as shown by Ezekiel’s many references to these. Cave suggested that the meal offering represented the “full dedication of one’s material possessions to God.” Oesterley noted concerning the peace offering, “just as the very fact of friends eating together affected a union between them, so Yahweh, by coming into the sanctuary and joining the worshipers in the sacrificial feast made them one with Himself.”\textsuperscript{32} In addition, it was seen that the burnt offering functioned in part to demonstrate one’s complete devotion to God, which also could be a function of the burnt offering during the kingdom. Wood indicated that it “symbolized complete consecration of the life to God, being consumed entirely to the altar.”\textsuperscript{33} The brief examples herein demonstrate that there is nothing heretical in suggesting that sacrifices will be reinstated, for there

\textsuperscript{30} Whitcomb, “Christ’s Atonement and Animal Sacrifices in Israel,” 211.

\textsuperscript{31} Charles C. Ryrie agreed with this function of sacrifices. “Under the law the individual Israelite by birth was related to God through the theocratic state. He sustained this relationship regardless of his spiritual state. . . . When sin occurred, it was both a governmental and a spiritual offence, because of the nature of a theocracy. Thus an Israelite’s sin has to be viewed as affecting the position and privilege of the offending party as a member of the . . . commonwealth of Israel (Dispensationalism Today [Chicago: Moody, 1965] 128).

\textsuperscript{32} Davidson, Theology of the Old Testament, 319.


\textsuperscript{33} Leon Wood, A Survey of Israel’s History (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 87.
is nothing “backward” about the sacrifices, except that to the modern mind they are culturally different, and belong to a dispensation with which none are familiar.

A third reason for the reinstitution of sacrifices during the future theocracy is the very important fact that the divine presence will once again be dwelling in the land; it is clear that impurity was contagious to both persons and sancta. Furthermore, it was inimical to Yahweh who would refuse to dwell among His people if uncleanness remained untreated. Because God has promised to keep His presence on earth during the millennium (the New Covenant) His withdrawal is not an option. Therefore, it will be necessary to reinstitute sacrifices so that judgment against impurity will not break out on earth.\textsuperscript{34} Leviticus teaches that the purgation offering served primarily to purge the sancta of uncleanness. Furthermore, Ezekiel has numerous references to the same offering, and ascribes to it an identical function during the kingdom period. Therefore, this offering will be reinstituted in order to purge the sancta so that the divine presence will be protected.

A fourth function of renewed sacrifice during the millennium will be the reparations made on the human level as embodied in the reparation offering, which would preserve horizontal relationships between persons within the theocracy.

A final suggestion for the function of millennial sacrifices is that ceremonial cleansing will be made on behalf of people for their uncleanness or inadvertent sin. For example, a sin offering was required for ritual cleansing after childbirth (Lev 12:6-8), leprosy (Lev 14:13-17), contact with the dead (Numb 6:11, 14), or for those suffering from abscesses and hemorrhages (Lev 15:15, 30). Again, this cleansing would be related to the guarding of the sanctifying presence of the divine glory; it should also be kept in mind that these items had \textit{nothing} to do with personal sin, but simply with the impure state of the human race in a non-glorified condition.

Each of these functions of the sacrifices operates in a different sphere than does the cross of Christ. There is no contradiction between the two, as there was not in the mind of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{34} Sacrifices will cease following the millennial kingdom, because in the eternal state every individual will be glorified and there will, therefore, be no impurity, uncleanness, etc.

\textsuperscript{35} The assertion here does not mean to imply that Jeremiah and Ezekiel were necessarily thinking of Christ but simply demonstrates that they did not ascribe soteriological benefits to the sacrifices.
The Jewish Context of the Kingdom

Throughout this study, it has been argued that God’s program for the Jewish nation will be completed by God because of His promises. Therefore, it is important to remember that it has always been God’s purpose to bless the world through the nation of Israel. As God groomed the nation for this function, He gave them distinctives which made them unique from the other nations around them. Because of their rejection of the prophets and the Messiah, God temporarily set Israel aside. However, in keeping with the covenants and the New Testament (e.g. Rom 3:1-8; 9—11), it is God’s intention to restore again the nation and her distinctives during the kingdom age. That God would reinstitute the nation together with her distinctives is only fitting.

The vision given to Ezekiel was intended for the house of Israel (40:4). As Alexander noted, “this terminology is used by Ezekiel to describe Israel at any time of her existence—past, present, future.” The significance of this was stated by Freeman: “it is Israel at worship which the prophet portrays in 40-48.” Therefore, no matter how strange it seems to a twenty-first century Gentile, sacrifices are an integral part of Jewish history.

The Kingdom as a Different Dispensation

According to amillennialists, there can be no other dispensation between the present one and the eternal state. They assume that because Christians are in the church age, those with whom this prophecy deals must be in the same class and relationships. However, Ezekiel is dealing with the nation of Israel during the last days (while Hebrews is dealing with believers in the church age). As Kelly pleaded, “Let us leave room for the various evolutions and displays of His glory in the ages to come, instead of making His present ways . . . an exclusive standard.” There is no reason to believe that the

---

37 Hobart Freeman, An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets (Chicago: Moody, 1968) 323.
38 William Kelly, Notes on Ezekiel (London: George Morrish, 1876) 219. On this point, see also, Arno C. Gaebelein, The Prophet Ezekiel (New York: Our Hope, 1918) 311; Clive Thomson, “The Necessity of Blood Sacrifices in Ezekiel’s Temple,” Bibliotheca Sacra 110 (1953): 344. Merrill Unger made these helpful distinctions: “One has in view members of the body of Christ, the church, since their redemption while Christ is on high. The other is concerned with earthly Israel, and embraces the glory of Jehovah once more dwelling in the land of Canaan. . . . Others
conditions which prevail in this age of grace must continue from now until the end of time.

The Teaching of the Sacrificial System

While several specific functions have been suggested for sacrifices during the kingdom period, it is also reasonable to say that their reintroduction will be valid from a teaching point of view. On the one hand, they will be necessary by virtue of God’s presence, but conversely, they may have much to teach. There seems to be an unconscious tendency to disdain the Old Testament sacrificial system when, in fact, it was a marvelous display of the wisdom of God; it is doubtful that any scholar has fully grasped all that God intended to teach by that system. Therefore, it is reasonable to see a renewal of some aspects of it as God continues to teach humanity of Himself and His work. As Saphir has suggested, “Even the church has as yet only a superficial knowledge of the treasures of wisdom in the Levitical institutions and its symbols.”\(^{39}\) The sacrificial system is thus to be regarded as a great educational institution which develops the proper conception of sin and life and service to God and man.\(^{40}\) Therefore, God will “provide a final demonstration of the validity of animal sacrifices as an instructional and disciplinary instrument for Israel. The entire world will see the true purpose of the system.”\(^{41}\)

The Kingdom Different from the Mosaic System

Dispensationalism is often misunderstood to teach the reimplementation of the Mosaic system, which is a false representation, for it is not claimed by dispensationalists that the Mosaic order will be brought back during the millennium. While there may be similar elements, this does not mean there is complete correspondence. For example, the amillennialist would agree that it is wrong in the present age to commit murder. The same was true under the Mosaic order, but this does not mean that they are advocating a submission to the Mosaic Law; rather, this is simply an example of similarity and transference, the same as in the case of animal sacrifices. Consequently, it becomes clear that what is being proposed is not a

---

\(^{39}\) Adolph Saphir, Christ and Israel (London: Morgan & Scott, 1911) 182.


\(^{41}\) Whitcomb, “Christ’s Atonement and Animal Sacrifices in Israel,” 217.
reintroduction of the entire Mosaic scheme, but rather an institution of regulations which will be necessary because of the divine presence.

CONCLUSION

In his landmark work Dispensationalism Today, Charles Ryrie summarized dispensationalism by viewing the world as a household run by God according to his own will in various stages over the course of time.42 He also articulated the enduring *sine qua non* of dispensationalism: the distinction between Israel and the church, literal interpretation, and the glory of God.43 Nowhere have these three features been more challenged than in the interpretation of Ezekiel 40—48.

Ezekiel is but another stage in world history to come. Though this interpretation has been criticized, it is supported by numerous factors, and a viable alternative is still lacking.44 In this future Temple, Ezekiel foresaw the five main offerings mentioned in the Levitical code to be functioning. The bloody atonement offerings will be necessary because of the transcendent, physical presence of Yahweh as He dwells among mortals. Other offerings will express praise, thanksgiving, and devotion to God through the trappings of the Jewish theocracy. Spiritual salvation will come, as in every dispensation, through faith alone in the finished work of the Messiah. The millennial era of world history will be a doxological one as God is found to be faithful to his covenant promises. During that era, it will then be sung, *Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out... For of him, and through him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen* (Rom 11:33, 36).

---

42 Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, 31.
43 Ibid. 43-47.
HARVESTING THE SOUL:
THE NECESSITY OF HERMENEUTICS TO
A VALID THEOLOGICAL METHOD*

Kenneth R. Cooper

“Good theology provides the vision that guides and motivates those who desire God. Good theology fosters the love of God without which no one becomes good. . . . God will satisfy their deepest longings for love and belonging, for meaning and significance—to the praise of God’s eternal glory.” David K. Clark, To Know and Love God: Method for Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003) xxxii. Consequently, they should be theological in nature since doctrine also assumed a vital role in God’s church from the very beginning.

On the day of its birth, for example, Luke said that the early body of believers “were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship and to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). Significantly, doctrine (or the apostles’ teaching) lies first on the list of the objects of devotion. They devoted themselves first to doctrine so that the fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer were based upon the foundation of sound teaching. Perhaps it is no coincidence, therefore, that, when Paul reminded the young pastor Timothy of the inspiration of the Word of God and its value to his ministry, the Apostle also put doctrine at the head of the list of the benefits of the Word. “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). The first benefit of the Word of God is sound

* Kenneth R. Cooper, M.A., D.D., Ph.D., author and lecturer, Biblical Faith Ministries, Fort Worth, Texas

1 The author read an earlier draft of this article at the Southwest Regional of the Evangelical Theological Society, 18 March 2011.
2 Ibid. xxvii.
3 Ibid. xvi.
4 Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible, 1995 updated edition by The Lockman Foundation.
doctrines so that reproof, correction, and training would also be based upon the solid foundation of biblical teaching.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

Whether one calls it teaching, doctrine, or theology, it is evident that theology assumed a significant role in the growth and development of the early church. The Apostle Paul felt it sufficiently important that his letters to Timothy stressed the value of doctrine in every aspect of his ministry and personal life as a believer, as well as his position as a pastor. “Until I come,” the Apostle admonished, “give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching” (1 Tim 4:13). Within a few sentences, Paul further admonished the young pastor to “pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching” (1 Tim 4:16). Indeed, Paul placed such value on doctrine that he told Timothy: “The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching” (1 Tim 5:17).

In the light of these passages, one might ask what was the apostles’ teaching that led the way for theology to form the heart of the early church? In its simplest form, that teaching consisted of all the things Jesus taught His disciples. Not only did Jesus command His followers to make disciples of all the nations, but He also told them what to teach those new disciples: “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:20). To “observe all things” seems to indicate a vital link between one’s beliefs and one’s behavior, but at this time, this article will focus upon the beliefs. The important thing to note here is that Jesus provided the content of the doctrine, if only in embryonic form or a form that may have needed further illumination and elaboration under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The content consisted of what He had taught them. Furthermore, to several of them, He taught everything the Old Testament had to say about Himself (Luke 24:27, 44).

THE BODY OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

While this is a rather simplified description, it does indicate that from the beginning, theology formed the content of the church’s instruction: a theology with Christ at its center and Scripture as its source. As the church’s theology developed, it was all but simple in its expression of the doctrinal content of the Scriptures. Early theological expressions were not only built directly upon the Word of God itself but also consisted of explanations of the content of the Word as it reflected the nature and
character of God (this is not surprising since doctrinal issues arose early in the church’s development as new situations were confronted and new questions arose).

Elmer A. Martens noted, “From the first, it was the community of believers through its representatives that engaged in formulating doctrine (Acts 15).” Martens elaborated upon the issue first encountering the community of believers when he noted, “They moved from Scripture to doctrine in debating whether Gentiles needed to convert to Judaism to become ‘real’ Christians. Around the table were missionaries and church leaders, biblical scholars such as James, theologians such as Paul. The community of faith was the locus for decision-making about theology and ethics.” In making their decision, this body of leaders turned to the Scriptures and based their doctrinal decision upon the teaching of the Scriptures they had at their disposal, which in this case were the Old Testament prophets. Consequently, they set a precedent for beginning, developing, and establishing a theological system. Any such theological system should be based upon the Scriptures, and should be developed from and explain the message of the Scriptures.

Whether one develops a systematic theology or a biblical theology, one needs to follow the apostolic example. The Scriptures should form the foundation of any theology or theological system. Alister E. McGrath, in his analysis of the evangelical theological method, emphasized this clearly. “One of the most distinguishing features of evangelicalism,” McGrath noted, “is its emphasis on the authority of Scripture. Scripture is to be seen not simply as a repository of Christian theology, but also as a God-given resource for nourishment in the Christian life,” again joining belief and behavior.

Other contemporary theologians agree. Stanley J. Grenz, for example, declared, “The Scriptures are the sole primary source for theology.” Although Grenz acknowledged other sources for theological content, he noted, “Scripture must remain the primary norm for theological statements.” Finally, Grenz concluded, “Theologians have always viewed

---

8 Ibid. 19.
their discipline as in some way connected to revelation.”

Christian experience, tradition, philosophy, and history have exerted influence upon theology. Nevertheless, in the final analysis, Scripture must function as the confirmation of theological expression.

Nearly half a century prior to Grenz, Lewis Sperry Chafer identified the responsibility of the theologian as one engaged in

arranging and exhibiting the positive truth the inspired Scriptures set forth. The Bible being the chief source of all the material which enters into his science, the theologian is called upon to arrange the God-given material in its logical and scientific order. He is a Biblicalist, namely, one who not only regards the Bible as the sole rule of faith and practice, but as the only dependable source of information in realms where divine revelation speaks.

Basic to Chafer’s theological method was a clear understanding of the source of theology, the Word of God. In his analysis of Chafer’s theological method, Bruce A. Baker noted, “There can be no doubt that Chafer held to the supremacy of the Bible over every other academic discipline or form of knowledge. He had a fundamental precommitment to the truth of God’s revelation and placed it above everything else.”

Whether one considers older theologians, such as Luther and Calvin who were excellent expositors of the Bible, or contemporary theologians such as Grenz and Chafer, it is obvious that the primary source of their theology was the Scriptures themselves. To summarize and relate the Scriptures to method, Gerhard F. Hasel offered a comment. In an article addressing methodology and theology, Hasel noted, “The Biblical theologian must claim as his task both to discover and describe what the text meant and also to explicate what it means for today.” Essentially, therefore, theology focuses upon the message from God as revealed in Scripture and the significance of that message for today’s world. While other disciplines (e.g. history, tradition, and culture) may clarify the message or assist in deriving its meaning, the Scriptures are the message God wants His people to have.

---

9 Ibid. 22.
Nevertheless, in deriving Scripture’s message, some theologies moved “from Scripture to doctrine” by incorporating the methods and concepts of Greek philosophy prevalent in the culture of their day. Theologians may have incorporated these Greek ideas in an attempt to understand and/or relate Christianity to their own culture for whatever reasons. The best example of Greek influence is the allegorizing method of Philo and Origen. Allegoricism began in early classical Greece prior to Socrates and somewhat infiltrated the writings of Plato. According to David S. Dockery, “[T]he allegorical tradition began in the pre-Socratic period of classical Greece, which eventually influenced much of pagan, Jewish, and Christian philosophical and religious expressions.”

In Greece, the tradition consisted of ideas of philosophy in the language and imagery of myth. Philo attempted to combine his Jewish beliefs with Greek philosophy to be a “modern person of his time and a philosophical sophisticated man.” Indeed, Philo used allegory to attempt to derive the philosophical message of the Bible. Whatever the reason and whatever the goal, Plato and others influenced the thoughts and hence the theology of the writings of some of the church fathers of, at least, the second century onward, perhaps influencing not only their theologies but also their theological methods. Fortunately, by the twentieth century, allegorizing ceased to be a primary model of interpretation, according to Dockery. Instead, Dockery noted three primary models comprising contemporary hermeneutical approaches, two of which relate to the method addressed in this article: (1) "author-oriented" perspectives; and, (2) "text-oriented" perspectives.

In his 2005 presidential address to the Evangelical Theological Society, Craig A. Blaising observed, “there are many works on theological method tracing the various elements that factor in the task. There are numerous proposals for tying theology to the shifting winds of cultural change, and there are many to lend the weight of scholarly theories and proposals for a vision of remolding the heart of the Church.”

14 Ibid. 97.
15 Dockery, Biblical Interpretation, 182. The third method noted by Dockery is “reader-oriented” perspectives. The model, however, is almost exclusively subjective, and thus virtually useless in developing a truly biblical theology.
this observation, Blaizing reminded his listeners that they are stewards of
the written Word of God, which means they are to be faithful in executing
this stewardship not only in prayer but also in admonition. Furthermore, it
is the essential task of each evangelical who affirms the Scriptures as the
inerrant Word of God to be certain that those sermons, Bible lessons, and
theologies are derived from the inerrant Word of God. The Word of God,
then, is the substantial core of the evangelical theological method.

THE HEART OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

While Martens, McGrath, and others agree that Scripture is not the only
factor in establishing Christian theology, they do affirm that it is the most
important factor. Other factors, such as tradition and culture, have
intruded into the theological process—whether appropriately or not—and
have provided clarity of the Scriptures. Such factors may, and in fact often
do, impact one’s understanding of theology; however, each one needs to
pass through the test of Scripture prior to being incorporated into one's
theology or before influencing one’s theological method. Culture, tradition,
geography, and history all have a part in helping one understand the Word
of God, and thus have a part in helping one formulate his theology.

The Scriptures, however, are the standard that measures the
validity of one’s theology. “The Bible, for the Christian theologian, “ said
Mike Stallard, “is not only the starting point for theology but also the
measuring rod by which the other sources will be judged.”17 After all, what
is theology, and what is the basis of one’s theology? In its simplest form,
theology is the study of God (i.e. the knowledge of God, that is, the
understanding of God to the extent that one can understand Him). The
Scriptures are the special revelation of God, His way of revealing Himself
so that one can know Him. The prophet expressed it succinctly: “Surely the
Lord God does nothing Unless He reveals His secret counsel To His
servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). Commenting on this verse, theologian
Bernard Ramm said:

The prophetic word is the secret of God whispered to the prophet and
announced to Israel. These secrets are not available to the human
race at large. There is no religious epistemology which can bring them
to the surface. Only when the Person to whom the secrets belong

17 Mike Stallard, “A Proposal for Theological Method: Systematic Theology
as Model Building” [article online] (Baptist Bible College & Seminary, accessed 9
January 2011) available from http://faculty.bbc.edu/mstallard/wp-
speaks are the secrets made known! Special revelation is God whispering His secrets to His servants, the prophets.\textsuperscript{18}

Those secrets consist of more than just information God wants His people to have; they involve reflections upon the person of God. They reveal His thoughts, His manner of thinking, His personality, and His behavior (i.e. the acts of God). They reveal God Himself, in other words. Ramm further noted, “Revelation is the autobiography of God, i.e. it is the story which God narrates about Himself. It is the knowledge about God which is from God. In the broadest sense revelation is the sum total of the ways in which God makes Himself known.”\textsuperscript{19} Ramm differentiated between general and special revelation; but, for all practical purposes, Christian theology builds upon special revelation, that “autobiography of God” that leads one to a limited understanding of the heavenly Father and His will and His plans for humanity and His world.

THE SOUL OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

All this being the case, any valid theological method should begin with the Scriptures, build on the Scriptures, and then proceed, as Martens noted, “from Scripture to doctrine.” For Christian theology to be genuinely Christian, it must be a biblical theology, drawing its nourishment from that “God-given resource” so vital to God’s people throughout the ages. Consequently, to understand that resource and build a valid Christian theology upon it requires a comprehensible understanding of Scripture. The opening sentences of the revised version of Kevin Vanhoozer’s 2004 plenary address to the Evangelical Theological Society in San Antonio, Texas clearly expressed the importance of sound hermeneutics for Christian theology. “Biblical interpretation is the soul of theology. Truth is the ultimate accolade that we accord an interpretation. Christian theology therefore succeeds or fails in direct proportion to its ability to render true interpretations of the word of God written.”\textsuperscript{20}

Vanhoozer identified doctrine as the main product of theology’s interpretation of Scripture. Although this almost sounds like a redundant statement, it is not. Doctrine is the substance of theology, and the fact that

\textsuperscript{18} Bernard Ramm, \textit{Special Revelation and the Word of God} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961) 27.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. 17.

it is the main product of theology only reinforces the need for a sound hermeneutic, since the product of such a hermeneutic must be a sound doctrine and the source of that sound doctrine is the Scriptures themselves. Bernard Ramm wrote in his classic Protestant Biblical Interpretation, "Part of the task of hermeneutics is to determine the correct use of the Bible in theology and in personal life."21 Ramm’s statement merely reinforces the fact that a sound hermeneutic is necessary for a sound doctrine, since a sound doctrine must come directly from the special revelation of God. What then is a sound hermeneutic?

A sound hermeneutic is one that seeks to determine what God revealed to the reader, what God communicated to the reader. To be sound, a hermeneutic attempts to understand what the plain sense of the text means; it attempts to ascertain what the author of the text intended his readers to understand by the words of the text itself. Therefore, the first objective of a sound hermeneutic is to determine the author’s intended meaning.

**Authorial Intent**

Elliott E. Johnson, along with many others in the evangelical tradition, argued, “Within the tradition of the Protestant Reformation there is a strong heritage which affirms that a biblical passage has one meaning.” In connection with this affirmation, Johnson declared, “The first affirmation of this paper [on authorial intention] is that this single meaning is the author’s intended meaning.”22 Johnson is not alone in contending for the importance of author’s intended meaning. E. D. Hirsch Jr., addressing interpretation in literature in general, as well as in Scripture, noted, “Whenever meaning is attached to a sequence of words it is impossible to escape an author.”23 Johnson placed this principle in the Reformation tradition and rightly so. Calvin himself, for example, in discussing James 2, noted, “It is not possible to understand what is being said or to make any discerning judgment on the terms, unless one keeps an eye on the

---

intention of the author.”

24 I. Howard Marshall explained the aim of a sound hermeneutic in similar terms. Marshall said, “our aim is to discover what the text meant in the mind of its original author for his intended audience.”

25 The aim extends beyond the academy into the pulpit. Not just in one’s theology but also in one’s sermons must one seek the author’s intent. David Platt noted, “Preachers must honor the principle of authorial intent, recognizing that the ultimate author if Scripture is the Holy Spirit, God Himself” [emphasis in original].

26 Consequently, from Calvin to the present, authorial intention is a primary concern for a sound biblical hermeneutic, biblical theology, and biblical sermon.

A question that arises almost immediately from this contention is which author? Evangelicals claim that God Himself, using human instruments, wrote the Bible. The claim itself is biblical, since Peter noted, “[N]o prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet 1:21). Again, “All writing is God-breathed” (2 Tim 3:16, author’s translation). In 2 Timothy, Paul referred primarily to the Old Testament writing, but the point is made: God is the Author of the writing (as previously noted by Platt). He out-breathed the Scripture by His Spirit. Jeremiah provided a good Old Testament example: “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Write all the words which I have spoken to you in a book” (Jer 30:2; see also, Jer 36:2, 6, 11).

Whether the words were dictated by God or not is of little consequence. The source of even the words is God. The Spirit of God can move on a man, whether he is prophet, priest, poet, or what, in such a way as to guide the human author to choose words from his own vocabulary to convey the message from God. In this way, the words themselves are God-breathed even though the human writer penned them using his own vocabulary. The point here, however, is not to explain verbal inspiration and how it may have occurred; it is about author intention, and the point is Scripture results from a “dual authorship by [reflecting] simultaneously both true humanity and true deity in the product of the text.”

27 J. I. Packer’s

---


27 Elliott Johnson, Expository Hermeneutics (Grand Rapids: Academic Books, 1996) 51. Johnson’s comments were made with regard to the following essay: J. I. Packer, “Biblical Authority, Hermeneutics, and Inerrancy,” in Jerusalem
keen observation (noted by Johnson) with regard to dual authorship was “Scripture is as genuinely and fully human as it is divine. . . . In both cases [the written Word and the incarnate Word], the divine coincides with the form of the human, and the absolute appears in the form of the relative.”\(^{28}\) Johnson concluded, “True divine authorship affirms that the content was originated with God (2 Pet 1:20-21), resulting in Scripture’s having a divine source. God then providentially shared the meaning with the human author.”\(^{29}\)

The task of interpretation must take into consideration this dual authorship if one is to construct from the text a valid biblical theology; but for the text to make sense, the interpreter must also consider that the intention of one author coincides with the intention of the other Author. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. clarified this point beautifully when he noted, “The supreme rule of interpretation is to discover and to define exactly what the human writer had intended to express by the words he used as a result of receiving the revelation of God.”\(^{30}\) Kaiser argued further that God’s intention does not exceed or differ from the human writer’s intention. While Kaiser called this the supreme rule of interpretation, it is only the first rule, although perhaps the most important. If one is to develop a sound biblical theology—a sound study of God—one must develop it from the text, that is, from a clear revelation of God in His Word. Moreover, it must concern itself with all that the Author/author intended to reveal about God.

**Authorial Content**

The next step, therefore, focuses upon the content of the text. If one is to discern what the Author/author of the text intended, one need to examine closely the text itself. While this writer is not contending that one should ignore what others have learned from the text and shared in their writings, he is arguing that before examining the words of others, one examine closely the Word of God (i.e. His special revelation). How does one do this? To answer this, Donald K. Campbell noted, “We believe that [method by which we examine the special revelation] to be the literal method which approaches the Scripture in the normal, customary way in which we talk,

---

\(^{28}\) Packer, “Biblical Authority,” 145.

\(^{29}\) Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics*, 51.


write, and think. It means taking the Scripture at face value in an attempt to know what God meant by what He said.”

Authorial Interpretation

The literal method that is being advocated here has suffered by misrepresentation and by misunderstanding, as well as in some cases, ridicule. The literal method does not mean that one ignore symbols and figures of speech if and when they clearly appear in the text and the context supports them as symbols and figures. What then does it mean? Literal methodology means, according to Henry A. Virkler, “interpreting God’s Word the way one interprets normal human communication.” Paul Tan added:

To “interpret” means to explain the original sense of a speaker or writer [authorial intent, again]. To interpret “literally” means to explain the original sense of the speaker or writer according to the normal, customary, and proper usages of words and language. Literal interpretation of the Bible simply means explaining the original sense of the Bible according to the normal and customary usages of its language.

Clearly “the normal and customary use of the language” allows for symbols and figures of speech, but again only as the context indicates.

Perhaps the best expression of the literal method is the one penned in 1942 by David L. Cooper, known as the “Golden Rule of Interpretation.” Cooper wrote, “When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense, therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths,

indicate clearly otherwise.” The definitions, along with others not noted here, suggest the interpreter should explain a passage using the literal method even when the language itself or something in the context suggest a picturesque or symbolic meaning. Since Scriptures do not communicate nonsense, when one discovers the plain sense and it does not make sense as it stands, then one may look for a figurative or symbolic sense. Roy B. Zuck illustrated how this can work in a literal method. Zuck distinguished between what he called the ordinary-literal sense and the figurative-literal sense.36

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ordinary-Literal</th>
<th>Figurative-Literal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>normal, plain,</td>
<td>picturesque, out-of-the-ordinary usage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ordinary usage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plainly expressed</td>
<td>figuratively expressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>literal facts</td>
<td>literal facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Literal” (historical, grammatical) Interpretation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Therefore, whether the Scripture uses straightforward language or figurative language, the literal method of interpretation still applies.

The literal interpretation was one of the earliest methods on record, if not the earliest, used to interpret the Scriptures. For example, Nehemiah recorded an instance in which this method was applied. After the return from exile and the walls of Jerusalem had been rebuilt, Ezra and a group of scribes brought the Torah before the people for a public reading. Nehemiah wrote, “So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading” (Neh 8:8, KJV). The passage clearly indicates that the scribes affirmed the text (“read in

---

the book of the law of God distinctly”) and explained its meaning to the
people (“gave the sense”) in such a way that the people could understand it
(“caused them to understand the reading”). What better way to accomplish
this than by the literal method?

Therefore, the literal sense of the Bible established a valid method
by which to construct a theology that is truly biblical, that is, a theology
that transfers into the pulpit effectively; and, “If we are going to
understand God’s purposes, which are revealed in the Bible,” said James M.
Hamilton Jr., “we need biblical theology.”37 Hamilton further described the
nature and content of the theology that one can construct from the text, as
well as its purpose.

Biblical theology pushes us to understand the contribution individual
books of the Bible make to the Bible’s big story. We might call the
Bible’s big story its metanarrative. However we describe it, the point
is that the whole Bible fits together to tell us God’s revealed story of
where the world came from, what is wrong with it, what He is doing
to fix it, where we fit in the program, and what we can expect in the
near and distant future. But there is a greater end to all this
information: God is revealing Himself to us. We need biblical theology
to know God. Knowing God fuels worship. Biblical theology is for
worship.38

What Hamilton said with regard to biblical theology also applies to
systematic theology since both kinds of theology derive their content from
the Bible. Since theology is a study of God so that one can relate to Him, get
to know Him, and worship Him, one must turn to His revelation in the
Scriptures to accomplish these objectives. When one does, he discovers
reciprocity. Floyd V. Filson observed, “To deal seriously with the Bible we
must speak of God, His Lordship, His working in history, His purpose, His
dealing with human individuals and groups.”39

---

38 Ibid.
CONCLUSION

Whenever one opens the Scriptures, he is dealing with theology in some form or another because he is confronting God’s revelation of Himself, and some, or all of the items Hamilton listed. When one begins to construct a theology, for it to be valid and a true theology that represents the theos in theology, it must come from the special revelation of God in the Scriptures, and not go beyond the Scriptures for its content. Ramm expressed this point succinctly.

_The theologian must not extend his doctrine beyond the Scriptural evidence._ A scientist is at liberty to spin as many hypotheses as he wishes. In weeding out the true from the false he is guided by logic and experimentation. . . . What answers to this in theology? What is the control we use to weed out false theological speculation? Certainly the control is logic and evidence. The evidence is the Scriptures themselves. It is our conviction that many of our troubles in theology are due to the fact that theologians have extended themselves beyond the data of Scripture and have asked questions about which no answers can be given.\(^{40}\)

The theologian, therefore, needs to confine himself to the biblical data to construct a valid theology that reflects a true expression of God’s character, His nature, and His message to mankind. Furthermore, to examine the biblical data effectively to obtain from it an accurate representation of its truth and content, one needs to use a valid hermeneutical method. Essentially, a valid hermeneutical method equals a valid theological method since both aim at extracting from the Scriptures God’s message for man. As such, the clearest, most effective hermeneutical method is the literal method. Since theology should tell one God’s revealed story and explain it clearly to humanity, the most effective theological method is again the literal method of hermeneutics. Ramm said it perfectly while also explaining why.

The only sure way to know the meaning of Holy Scripture is to anchor interpretation in literal exegesis. Literal interpretation is not the Charybdis of letterism nor the Scylla of allegorism. It is rather the effective, meaningful, and necessary control for the protection of the right interpretation of Scripture.\(^{41}\)

\(^{40}\) Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation, 170.

\(^{41}\) Ibid. 125.
Ramm made the admonition stronger by applying the literal method to the task of the theologian as well as the interpreter. He noted, “It is the theologian’s or interpreter’s responsibility to guard the use of Holy Scripture by the hedge of literal exegesis.” When one returns to the basics and takes seriously a literal hermeneutic, then interpretation becomes, no, then interpretation is the biblical and living “soul of theology.”

[^9]: Ibid.
BOOK REVIEWS


Paul Tripp, who has ministered as a pastor, seminary professor, counselor, conference speaker and author, is the president of Paul Tripp Ministries and executive director of the Center for Pastoral Life and Care in Fort Worth, Texas. With this wide range and depth of ministry as a background, Tripp is certainly one who would understand well the dangers of the pastorate. Having talked with thousands of pastors throughout the world, as well as examining his own experience, Tripp knows how easy it is to fall into various traps that can greatly diminish, or even destroy, the servant of God. He wrote Dangerous Calling to warn about and evaluate those traps and prescribe a biblical solution. He called this work a diagnostic book “written to help you take an honest look at yourself in the heart- and life-exposing mirror of the Word of God” (p. 11). More specifically, Tripp said “It is a detailed exposition of what happens in the life of a person in ministry when he forgets to preach to himself the same gospel that he gives to others” (p. 222).

Some of the ministerial traps that Tripp identified and addressed include:

• becoming professionals rather than servants (pp. 21-25);
• defining spiritual maturity by theological knowledge, a problem often aggravated by seminaries (pp. 25, 44, 53-56, 84-85);
• not being realistic about one’s own spiritual problems (pp. 33-35, 97, 199, 206);
• attempting to serve without an adequate support base (pp. 73-82, 97);
• not preaching the gospel to oneself (pp. 99, 136, 222);
• losing the awe of God (pp. 113-163) and therefore ministering in fear of others (pp. 204-05);
• becoming mediocre, especially in preaching (pp. 137-50);
• thinking that one has arrived (pp. 151-224);
• inadequate private devotional life (pp. 183-97); and,
• envy and bitterness (p. 179).
Dangerous Calling exposes the lives and hearts of pastors in a realistic and biblical way. The delusional, false idea of pastoral life and ministry is removed to reveal the difficulty of the work and the weaknesses of the worker. The emphasis here is both helpful and disheartening as Tripp stated, “There is a way in which pastoral ministry will make you either sad or delusional” (p. 208). One would hope that there is a road between these two extremes—one described as realistic, wise, grounded in Scripture, and joyful even in the midst of much sorrow. Consequently, one issue with Dangerous Calling is it could leave the reader with a sense of despair. Tripp rightly exposed pastors’ many flaws and the dangers of ministering to people. He even offered excellent remedies, but when the dust has settled we are all still a mess (as Tripp claims he is), so where is the hope? Tripp returned repeatedly to preaching the gospel to self, meaning that one is to live and preach the grace and glory of God rather than an emphasis upon self and one’s own efforts. The admonition here is excellent and appropriate, yet still a bit more of the joys of ministry would have been welcomed.

Another observation is that Tripp seemed to be describing mostly the pastors of large and outwardly successful ministries, rather than the average pastor. He is deeply, and rightly, concerned about ministers who have allowed their success to “go to their heads.” Of course, such an experience is probably due to the nature of his ministry in which he speaks mostly at large churches and venues, rather than smaller works. In this reviewer’s experience, the average pastor seldom struggles with too much success, but with lack of results and a sense of failure. The resulting reaction by both successful and (self-described) non-successful (outwardly speaking) pastors, however, is the same—a tendency toward pride. In that way, Dangerous Calling does speak to one of the great heart issues of pastors everywhere.

As a matter of personal response, Tripp’s writing style in this book was not enjoyable because it often adopted a cadence form. A typical example is as follows:

There will be moments in ministry when you will be tempted to wonder if God is near and if he cares. There will be moments when it will seem as if your prayers have gone unanswered. There will be moments of trial when it will seem as if God is absent. There will be moments when you will feel misunderstood and alone. There will be moments when it will be nearly impossible to figure out what in the world God is doing. There will be moments when you will be tempted to wonder if it’s worth it, when selling iPads doesn’t seem like such a
bad idea. There will be moments when the bi-factorial pressure of ministry and family will seem too much to bear. There will be moments when it will feel as though God has given you neither the wisdom nor the strength to do what he’s called you to do. There will be moments when opposition is great and progress is scarce. There will be moments when the temptation to doubt God’s ever-present care will be great (pp. 216-17).

The style, which is dominant throughout the volume, numbed this reader and resulted in the temptation to skip to the next paragraph. With these relatively minor issues aside, Dangerous Calling has much to say to pastors, missionaries, and others in ministry, thus it would be a good book to read and discuss with another ministerial friend.

— Gary E. Gilley  
Southern View Chapel (Springfield, IL)

Multiply is nothing like Chan’s original book Crazy Love. Whereas Crazy Love taught a truly radical, “crazy” (in the full sense of the word), and distorted understanding of Christian service and ministry, Multiply offers a balanced, biblical, and helpful approach to making disciples. In reading Multiply, there was the continual expectation for Chan to shun the “social gospel” component that dominated Crazy Love; however, it never occurred. With the exception of a couple of unexplained references to providing for the poor (pp. 129, 192), Chan was consistent with the biblical script regarding the importance and means of developing disciples.

Chan stated, “Multiply is designed as a simple resource that you can use to begin making disciples . . . the goals of the Multiply material are to help you understand the Scripture and to give you the tools to disciple others in this process” (p. 9). The plan includes working through Multiply and watching a five-minute video weekly with those being discipled. Throughout each chapter are discussion/applicational questions to facilitate this process. The book itself is divided into five parts.

1) “Living as a Disciple Maker,” in which a disciple is defined and the command to make disciples is emphasized.

2) “Living as the Church,” where the importance of the church is stressed and its role as a lighthouse rather than a bomb shelter is detailed (p. 66).

3) “How to Study the Bible.” In this part, Chan offered simple but helpful advice on the importance and methods of Bible study. The section would need to be supplemented in a discipleship program but it is a good start.

4) “Understanding of the Old Testament.” The fourth part is a useful, if short, overview of some of the main themes of the Old Testament. Chan recognized that Christians are no longer under the Mosaic Law (p. 192); nevertheless, the Old Testament is foundational to understanding the believer’s walk before the Lord today.
5) “Understanding the New Testament.” As with the previous part, this one gives the reader insight into some of the most important teachings found in the New Testament.

While the reader may disagree with a few statements along the way, *Multiply* is a biblically sound resource. Chan wrote nothing novel, and numerous other books and materials are available addressing the same issues. However, considering Chan’s popularity with younger believers, it is most refreshing to read of his commitment to biblically based discipleship. One difficulty for someone to use *Multiply* as a discipleship tool would be how to do it without providing a link directly to Chan’s unbiblical approach to Christian living as found in *Crazy Love*.

— Gary E. Gilley
Southern View Chapel (Springfield, IL)

One of the most controversial issues facing the world, and the church, today is that of environmentalism. Unlike the world, which develops its views pragmatically, or politically, or scientifically, or rationally, the church should always begin with the Word of God. What God says should be the reference point from which all other considerations are analyzed, which is exactly what Chris Cone attempted to do in this book concerning ecological concerns. How the Christian, in particular the evangelical community, should view the environment and handle its various crises ought to emerge from a thorough understanding of what Scripture says on the subject.

Cone spent a great deal of time interacting with Lynn White Jr.’s views (see pp. 4-9, 27-55), especially a paper written in 1967 entitled, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crises.” White indicted evangelicals as being “a primary culprit for environmental degradation,” primarily because they have accepted a worldview based on the Genesis creation account. Either evangelicals change their worldview or continue to behave in an anthropocentric way that is environmentally destructive (p. 6). In response, Cone examined the pertinent biblical accounts, especially Genesis 1, 3, and 9, to determine what Scripture actually teaches concerning the interplay between the environment and mankind. He posited four views found within the evangelical community.

- Despotism (or dominionism): man has been given a lasting dominion for his own purposes and that places him over nature (p. 22).

- Stewardship: a milder form of dominionism, most common among evangelicals, and this view sees mankind given a mandate to be stewards over God’s creation (pp. 24, 82).

- Citizenship: “Man is designed to be considerate co-citizen with all other aspects of nature, and that ‘anthropocentrism’ itself is man’s original sin and is responsible for the famous fall” (p. 25).

- Redacted dominionism: a doxological rather than anthropocentric model, which recognizes that all things exist to glorify God, and this function is not a responsibility only of humanity. All creatures have only instrumental value (p. 26).
Cone rejected the first three views and spent most of the book developing exegetical arguments in support of redacted dominionism. On a practical level, Cone argued that redacted dominionism, with its theocentric perspective, “has the added advantage of motivating humanity to a much less selfish existence in which we would be unwilling to abuse and even destroy the ‘kinds’ (Gen 1:21) around us” (p. 89).

Given the recent discussion of the so-called cultural mandate within the evangelical community, *Redacted Dominionism* is a needed and most helpful entry into the discussion. Cone demonstrated that redactive dominionism is the biblically correct understanding of the scriptural records. He is right that, due to the Fall, man is no longer qualified to govern creation as before sin entered (pp. 95-103). Mankind has now been given a new, redactive mandate espoused not in Genesis 1:26-28, but in Genesis 9:7 (pp. 100-103).

Any evangelical interested in the environmental and cultural mandate discussions should carefully read *Redacted Dominionism*. A follow-up volume would be good, which would interact with popularizers of the cultural mandate within the evangelical community such as Nancy Pearcey, Francis Chan, and David Platt, not to mention Brian McLaren and those involved in the “missional” church movement.

— Gary E. Gilley
Southern View Chapel (Springfield, IL)

Understanding the Big Picture of the Bible is a little volume, containing thirteen essays by twelve different evangelical scholars, who attempted to provide a helpful overview of Scripture, including the events between the Testaments. The work identifies unifying themes and follows patterns interspersed throughout the Bible in order to offer the reader a working framework for understanding the texts. Vern Poythress opened with an overview of the Bible storyline, followed by five chapters, by various authors, dealing with the Old Testament. Covered in this first part are the theology of the Old Testament and individual essays on each of the major types of Old Testament literature: the Pentateuch, historical books, poetic and wisdom literature, and prophetic books. Part two is devoted to the background of the New Testament, primarily a study of the intertestamental period. Part three provides four chapters on the New Testament, beginning with its theology and offers a chapter each on the Gospels and Acts, the Epistles, and Revelation. The final part of the book gives helpful timelines for Old Testament, intertestamental, and New Testament history.

Throughout the book, useful insights can be found but the volume suffers from trying to do too much with too little. A short work of barely 150 pages can hardly hope to provide even the most rudimentary overview of Scripture; and, when the attempt is made by the joint efforts of twelve men, the problem is exaggerated. Hopes were for a careful guide that would aid in teaching a basic Bible summary course but this is not that guide. Concerning the authors, strangely there was no biography supplied and no mention of their theological persuasions. A covenantal persuasion could be occasionally recognized in the oft-mentioned “already, not yet” concept of the kingdom (pp. 110-12, 117, 121); and, once the reader was assured that the church is restored Israel (p. 131). Nevertheless, most of the positions taken would be those agreed upon by all evangelicals.

For this reviewer, the most beneficial aspect of Understanding the Big Picture of the Bible was the very concise, informative charts, and timelines. One would have difficulty in attempting to construct all this information together from other sources, and these serve as a handy reference.

— Gary E. Gilley
Southern View Chapel (Springfield, IL)

“Debate” books, in which two or more authors contribute their viewpoints and then critique each of the other authors’ views, have become increasingly popular over the past twenty or so years. Included among these types of books is a subject that has been extensively debated since the Reformation and will continue to be debated until the end of time: Calvinism. The first work on this subject was probably Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom (InterVarsity, 1986). More recently, there was Debating Calvinism: Five Points, Two Views (Multnomah, 2004).

A similar trend is the publication of companion but opposing volumes. On the subject of Calvinism, there is Why I Am Not an Arminian (InterVarsity, 2004) and Why I Am Not a Calvinist (InterVarsity, 2004), and, most recently, For Calvinism and Against Calvinism, the objects of this review. There is a difference, however, between the latter books and the former books. Note that Against Calvinism is not titled For Arminianism. Although the author, Roger Olson, is, in his words, “a committed Arminian,” and has written a book defending his position titled Arminian Theology, his book addresses the five-point Calvinism of Reformed theology without necessarily espousing Arminianism. As he said: “This is a book intended to point out the weaknesses and even fatal flaws of high Calvinism, that is, radical Reformed theology. It is not intended to be a defense of Arminianism or any alternative to Calvinism.”

Michael Horton is the J. Gresham Machen professor of systematic theology and apologetics at Westminster Seminary in California. Roger Olson is professor of theology at George W. Truett Theological Seminary of Baylor University.

Although For Calvinism and Against Calvinism are companion volumes, they can be read independently. The only interaction between the books is the foreword contributed by each author to the other’s book. The books are not outlined in the typical TULIP format. Each book has eight chapters, with only four of them directly addressing one of the “points” of Calvinism (Horton combined effectual calling and perseverance of the saints into one chapter; Olson devoted two chapters to unconditional election, while not including chapters addressing total depravity and perseverance). Horton’s book also contains acknowledgments, a separate introduction, and an afterword. Olson’s book also contains a preface (his
introduction is his first chapter), and two appendixes. Both books contain endnotes, but neither one contains a bibliography or an index.

In his foreword to *For Calvinism*, Olson concluded, “anyone interested in reading the best case possible for Calvinism must read this book.” Having read hundreds of books espousing Calvinism in the course of writing *The Other Side of Calvinism* (Vance Publications, 1991, 1999), this reviewer must say that he does not share Olson’s opinion. There is little in Horton’s book that cannot be found in Loraine Boettner’s *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*—published in 1932.

Horton began, in his introduction, by employing the same tactics used by most writers espousing five-point Calvinism. He contrasted Calvinism with hyper-Calvinism, he renamed the TULIP, he expressed disagreement with the term *Calvinism*, he appealed to the Calvinistic Baptist Charles Spurgeon, he used the historical argument, and he referred to Calvinism as the doctrines of grace. Horton even began Olson’s book in the same manner, writing in the foreword that his “confessions reject hyper-Calvinism as well as Arminianism.” The rest of the book is predictable.

Everything that occurs, said Horton, “is not only foreknown but determined by God. . . . Mere foreknowledge without preordination means that God does not have any larger purpose.” Election is “unchangeable and unconditional.” The new birth “yields the fruit of repentance and faith, not the other way around.” However, not only are “repentance and faith” the “ordinary effects of the new birth,” the Holy Spirit “can raise from spiritual death in an extraordinary way anyone whom the Father has chosen in the Son.” Although Horton appealed to Scripture, his authorities were also the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Canons of Dort, the Second Helvetic Confession, and, of course, Calvin.

In his introductory chapter on the resurgence of Calvinism and the roots of the “new Calvinism,” Olson concluded with a bold statement in regard to egregious statements made by Calvinists about God’s sovereignty: “If I were a Calvinist and believed what these people teach, I would have difficulty telling the difference between God and Satan.” He charges Calvinists with misrepresenting non-Calvinist theologies as if they are all man-centered, humanistic, less-than-God-honoring, and even unbiblical.” Olson provided an overview of Reformed theology and the TULIP doctrine, and the variations that exist within them.

He then did something unique; he ignored the first point of Calvinism: total depravity; and, devoted one chapter to each of the main two elements in unconditional election: sovereignty and predestination. Olson said “yes to God’s sovereignty” but “no to divine determinism.” He
maintained, “the Calvinist account of God’s sovereignty is divine determinism” because “to affirm that everything that happens, down to the minutest details including even God’s own thoughts and actions; are determined is by definition to affirm determinism.” In his other chapter on the second point of Calvinism, Olson made the case that, despite the attempt of some Calvinists to prove the contrary, the offensive concept of “double predestination” (“that God has from eternity chosen some people to save and others to damn”) is inherent in unconditional election. Olson termed the doctrine of limited atonement “confusing at best and blatantly self-contradictory and unscriptural at worst.” He stated that even Calvin said things nobody would say who believed in limited atonement. In his chapter on irresistible grace, Olson addressed R. C. Sproul’s notion that God “monergistically and unilaterally” gives sinners the gift of faith and regenerates them so they can see Jesus “in his irresistible sweetness.”

Olson’s last chapter was his conclusion, wherein he addressed “Calvinism’s Conundrums.” He believes “Calvinism has too many and too profound conundrums that have no apparent solutions:” divine sovereignty and human responsibility, divine determination and evil, God’s glory and foreordination, unconditional election, and God’s character and sin. In a work as brief as Olson’s, one cannot possibly do sufficient justice to all Calvinistic themes. Olson made many good points, but often was not clear about whether he was referring to Calvinism in general or some variety of it in particular. The material in the two brief appendixes could easily have been incorporated within the chapters of the book. Had Olson written For Arminianism instead of Against Calvinism, this reviewer doubts whether he would have had some serious reservations about some portions of the book. However, as it stands, Against Calvinism is a worthwhile survey of Calvinism. For Calvinism is a defense of traditional, five-point Calvinism and Reformed theology, and is certainly a valuable work if one wants to read the latest defense of five-point Calvinism by one of its well-known proponents.

— Laurence M. Vance
Vance Publications (Orlando, FL)
Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism

Alvin Plantinga (1932- ) is an American Analytical Philosopher and the John A. O’Brien emeritus Philosopher at the University of Notre Dame. There are few names more significant than Alvin Plantinga when it comes to Christian philosophy, and there are few topics calculated to be more volatile than the relationship between science and religion. Plantinga’s most recent book, Where the Conflict Really Lies, has generated much interest, as now one of the foremost philosophers of religion has addressed this difficult topic.

Plantinga did not ease the reader into his work, but instead began the first sentence of his work with the claim: “there is a superficial conflict but deep concord between science and theistic religion, but superficial concord and deep conflict between science and naturalism” (p. ix). Not only does this statement provide the thesis of Plantinga’s 376 pages, but it also provides the outline for his work. The first part of his book is dedicated to the superficial conflict between science and religion; however, prior to beginning the discussion, Plantinga was careful to define naturalism and atheism as two separate entities, regarding naturalism as assuming the latter, but not vice versa.

Plantinga immediately addressed the “Four Horsemen” of atheistic evolution: Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris (p. x). He regarded their claims as being “loud and strident” but not containing substance (p. x). Subsequently, he sought to address this first aspect of his thesis. The impetus for considering this claimed conflict between science and religious belief is that “Modern science is certainly the most striking and impressive intellectual phenomenon of the last half millennium” (p. xi). If science were found to be in conflict with religion, then it would seem to discredit religion. Plantinga also argued that Christians should have a “particularly high regard” for science (pp. 3-4).

In order to consider the alleged conflict, Plantinga first addressed evolution. Here some readers may be surprised that Plantinga did not seek to argue against evolution itself; rather, he made a distinction between guided and unguided evolution. The former, Plantinga argued, is consistent with Christian belief—regardless of whether God actually used this means or not—while the latter is clearly not in accord with Christianity (p. 12).

The book then addresses Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett who both claim evolution is incompatible with religious or Christian belief. Plantinga considered both these voices in the modern debate and
concludes their reasoning to be similar: that unguided evolution could have occurred. Plantinga concluded that (at best) what Dawkins and Dennet exhibit is the epistemological possibility that it is biologically possible that life came to be without design (such an argument is rather meager). For those who would claim that God cannot or does not act within history because it violates scientific laws, Plantinga adequately explained that these laws assume a closed system, but by definition, God acting in history would imply a system that is not closed (pp. 78-86).

Plantinga did concede that there are some branches of science that do provide a superficial conflict with theism, which include evolutionary psychology and scientific scripture scholarship (p. 130). Regarding evolutionary psychology, Plantinga concluded: “finding a ‘natural’ origin for religious belief in no way discredits it” (p. 140). As Plantinga began to address scientific scripture scholarship, he asserted “striking parallels” between this and evolutionary psychology (p. 152). He explained that classical commentary on Scripture is content to explain what the text says, while Historical Biblical Criticism is a “different kettle of fish” (p. 155). Whereas the former seeks to explain the text for what it says, the latter seeks to declare what is true. He regarded this branch as an enlightenment project finding its foundation in Spinoza, and only allowing for reason and no amount of external authority (p. 155). Therefore, Historical Biblical Criticism is not scientific, despite its claims, because it begins with assumptions that only allow for limited interpretation. Because it assumes no outside authority or supernatural outcomes, it cannot claim to be scientific (p. 156). Plantinga referenced several scholars to demonstrate that Historical Biblical Criticism will only consider some of the evidence because of the beginning assumptions, and that orthodox Christianity begins with the assumption of authority and faith.

Plantinga then critiqued Ernst Troeltsch for assuming that God never does anything specially (miracles and resurrection) because such an assumption is not scientific (p. 158). Bultmann was also considered, at several points, for asserting, at the outset of his study, that God does not work supernaturally in history. Bultmann’s assertion is an unscientific claim, and as Plantinga later indicated, is also fallacious. He concluded that neither of these enterprises produces defeaters for belief.

The second part of Plantinga’s original thesis considered significant reasons that theism is in agreement with science. He began with an in-depth discussion of fine-tuning. His conclusion is that fine-tuning gives “some slight support” for theism (p. 224). He then considered biological arguments by considering Behe’s irreducible complexity argument. Plantinga concluded that this argument presents “us with epistemic
situations in which the rational response is design belief—design belief for which there aren't strong defeaters” (p. 264). Furthermore, there is a strong concord between Christian belief and the roots of scientific evaluation. Regarding this point, Plantinga argued that science relies upon various theistic assumptions for its methods to succeed.

Plantinga’s final consideration was the conflict between naturalism and science. While he did grant that there is superficial concord between the two, he demonstrated a significant conflict between naturalism and evolution; namely, that if both are true, then there is no reason to trust one’s cognitive abilities (pp. 311ff). Since evolution is survival aimed and not truth aimed (if it has an aim at all), one does not possess epistemological basis on which to trust cognitive evaluations. Plantinga claimed this to be a defeater for every belief that one believes (assuming naturalism and evolution are correct), including the belief in naturalism and evolution (pp. 339ff). Therefore, the conflict “is not between science and theistic religion: it is between science and naturalism. That is where the conflict really lies” (p. 350).

Plantinga provided essential and valuable insights into every topic contained in this work. His book is certain to become a necessary work for any individual interested in this discussion, but should not be expected to be the last word, or say all that could be said. Plantinga clearly demonstrated the superior nature of theistic epistemology over naturalistic epistemology as it pertains to science. Theists will find renewal to older arguments, while naturalists will discover significant challenges to their paradigm, and both groups will benefit from a careful consideration of this work.

— Nathan Muse
Maranatha Baptist Bible College (Watertown, WI)
Committed to the Gospel...
COMMISSIONED TO ENGAGE THE LEADERS OF OUR NATION

Presently ministering in 19 state capitols, Capitol Commission seeks to bring honor and glory to Jesus Christ by:

- **Evangelizing** those yet to experience a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (ROMANS 1:16)
- **Establishing** believers (COLOSSIANS 2:6-7)
- **Equipping** those called to spiritual leadership (EPHESIANS 4:11-12)
- **Encouraging and Enabling** the Church to participate with us (1 TIMOTHY 2:1-4)

Will you partner with us, that the Word of God may be preached in all U.S. State Capitols, in city government and among the leaders of the world? Please join us in our mission by investing your prayers, finances and/or time.

To receive a free booklet for your elected official please visit us online at: www.capitolcom.org/landing.aspx

www.capitolcom.org | ministry@capitolcom.org | 2600 Fairview Rd., Suite 200, Raleigh, NC 27608 | 919.803.4646