

Note: Course resources utilized included NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible notes, ESV Bible and ESV Study Bible notes, John Sailhamer's Pentateuch as a Narrative, Stephen Dempster's Dominion and Dynasty, Tom Schreiner's The King in His Beauty, Carson, Moo, and Naselli's Introducing the New Testament, T. Desmond's Alexander's From Paradise to the Promised Land, Carson, Moo, and Morris Introduction to the New Testament, The Gospel According to John by D.A. Carson from the Pillar New Testament Series, The Letters of John by Colin G. Kruse from the Pillar New Testament Series, Bethlehem College and Seminary Old and New Testament Survey, Thirdmill.org website and others (TGC and TGC Online Commentaries).

Today we will take a closer look at the four works bearing John's name- The Gospel According to John, and the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Epistle of John.

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Let's begin with John's Gospel.

Full of grace and truth- presented with both remarkable simplicity and profound depth. The Gospel According to John is a book to be read again and again. Each time you read it, the inspired text yields new insights and a richer understanding of Christ.

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Historical tradition testifies that John, the son of Zebedee- wrote the Fourth Gospel. According to Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–215), "last of all, John, perceiving that the external facts had been made plain in the Gospel, being urged by his friends, and inspired by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel".

Add to established tradition the fact that the gospel exhibits this eyewitness quality. John fits the bill. As one of the Twelve, and part of the inner three- he was an eyewitness to the entirety of Jesus' three-and-a-half-year ministry. John was with Jesus at the Last Supper. He was in the high priest's courtyard following Jesus's arrest. He witnessed the crucifixion, the empty tomb, and witnessed several later appearances by the risen Jesus.

Along these lines- as you read the gospel, the author refers to the "disciple whom Jesus loved" on more than one occasion. This is thought to be John, and such detail drives home the fact that the one who writes the account must have been there with Jesus- an eyewitness who knew and was known by Jesus. So the author, far from detracting from the Christ-centeredness of this inspired account with constant references to himself, draws attention instead to the love of Christ. And we are not to think that the experience of being loved by Jesus was unique to John. Lazarus was described in this way. As John opens the 13th chapter John writes- "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." John is giving expression to a common experience- a testimony to how Christ is able to supply each of us with this profound sense of being especially loved.

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As you read John's Gospel- you are struck by both similarities and differences when compared to Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Fundamentally, and most importantly- John's gospel is an inspired account of the one gospel, the good news concerning Jesus Christ. It presents us with the historical facts concerning **what God** has done in Jesus Christ through Christ's life, death, and resurrection- reconciling lost and guilty human beings to himself. These things are non-negotiables that characterize all 4 inspired accounts.

There are other significant similarities- But perhaps most striking to us are the differences. For instance- John does not recount Jesus' parables, exorcisms, the account of the transfiguration, or the institution of the Lord's Supper. John rarely mentions the kingdom of God. The kingdom is a common category within the other three gospels.

John includes a considerable amount of material not mentioned in the other Gospels. Almost all of the material in John chapters 1–5 is exclusive to John. John alone recounts the resurrection of Lazarus. John gives us chapters 13-17, which include Christ's Farewell Discourse and High Priestly prayer- and these are unique to John.

So as we step back- and take in the similarities and differences- we see that John, with this inspired account, has supplied us with greater depth and insight into Christ's person and work and ministry. As he tells the story from another angle, He enables us to hear the symphony of the gospel accounts with an unmistakable richness.

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When did John compose this gospel? When pressed, thoughtful scholars tentatively offer up the years AD 80–85. This date allows for time between the writing of John's Gospel and the writing of John's three letters. The overwhelming consensus is that the Gospel of John came first- and the letters follow after- and were most likely composed in the early 90s AD. John's letters appear to be combating an early form of Gnosticism- and are a response, in part, to a Gnostic misunderstanding of the Fourth Gospel.

Similar to Matthew- some say that John's Gospel was written to encourage churches that were dealing with the difficulties associated with isolation and estrangement from the local Jewish synagogues of the day. While this is certainly possible, **the primary purpose for this Gospel appears to be evangelistic.**

We get a good feel for John's objective as we read John's own purpose statement- his express intention in writing- John 20:30–31 (ESV): *I'll have you turn there in your copy of the Scriptures.*

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

This text of Scripture tells us a few things- number one, it is highly likely that John's original audience had some understanding of what it meant to be the Messiah, perhaps they had some sort of Messianic expectation- John writes "these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ".

John is out to prove that Jesus is the Christ. This indicates some level of familiarity with this Old Testament category.

Therefore- the original recipients- the target audience would have likely been Jews or Jewish converts.

Perhaps these Jews, or God-fearing Gentiles were rubbing shoulders with Christians who were proclaiming that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed one, the promised king. As they pressed Jews and Gentile converts with these claims- they would need to make their case for Christ. They would need to prove it- to show how he is the Messiah. John's gospel does this in a remarkable way. In the final analysis, John's gospel appears to have an evangelistic quality- and in its original context, very likely written to evangelize Jews living outside of the Holy Land as well as Jewish converts.

As we consider John's own purpose statement, we also surmise that John's purpose for writing was to demonstrate that Jesus is the divine Messiah by recounting specific extraordinary signs that Christ performed- in order that those who read or heard John's gospel might put their faith in him and have eternal life.

John 20:30–31 (ESV): 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

What exactly does John mean by "signs"? This is a favorite word of John- he repeatedly uses this word- "signs". What is he driving at? What is telling us?

"Signs" are significant displays of supernatural power. The other 3 Gospels generally describe these works of power as miracles. But for John- they are "signs"- because they point beyond the miraculous event itself- to greater realities. Signs signify something significant-

John draws our attention to 7 specific signs.

There is Christ changing water into wine during the wedding at Cana in Galilee. This was the first sign Christ performed.

This sign shows us that the promised age of blessing is inaugurated with Christ's appearing. As Christ breaks into this groaning, decaying world- his house warming gift if you will, his initial work of power, cannot be hidden, and overflows to all people. He comes bearing gifts- and the gift of what he did in Cana signals the dawning of the age of blessing- the old is passing away and the new is here- and everything about this Jesus, much like the wine he brought into existence, is far superior to what came before him.

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A pattern characteristic of many of the signs is that they point backward to that which was prophesied beforehand- while at the same time point forward to a day when the glory displayed with each sign will be fully realized. These dynamics are significant. The well-versed Jew or God-fearing Gentile would know that the prophesied coming Davidic King, the Christ, will usher in a new creation- showing himself to be the Messiah through signs- through works of power. And so we get confessions like this one- John 7:31 (ESV): When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?

So John, in his Gospel, through these select signs, is proving, is demonstrating to us that Jesus is that New David that ushers in that New Creation.

As it pertains to the sign of changing water into wine, the sign points backward, to when Isaiah prophesied concerning the coming Messianic age characterized by “a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.” Isaiah 25:6 (ESV). It looks back on Amos’ declaration that “the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it” in the day that Messiah comes- Amos 9:13 (ESV). So the sign points back to these former words. But the miracle at this wedding feast in Cana points us forward as well- to the marriage supper of the Lamb- a foretaste of the coming age of blessing for all of God's people- his church- his bride.

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There are other significant signs-

There is the healing of the official's son, the second sign, there is the healing of the disabled man by the pool, there is the restoration of sight to man born blind- signs like these look back on Isaiah 35, which speaks of a day when God will strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees- saying to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! A day when “the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.”

So they point back to former words spoken by the prophets. And these signs point forward to a day where there will be no more sorrow, no grief and pain- a day where “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall

there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” Revelation 21.4

The raising of Lazarus from the dead in John 11.

When Jesus feeds the five thousand, another sign found in John chapter 6- the people make the connection between what had just taken place and what was prophesied beforehand. They declare that he was the prophesied Prophet like unto Moses, who is come into the world, and wanted to make him king by force. They were probably asking themselves, could this be the promised Davidic King? And rightly so- for the feeding of the five thousand has Ezekiel 34 written all over it.

Ezekiel 34:23 (ESV): 23 And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd.

One other sign I have not mentioned is Jesus walking on the water, also found in John 6- reminiscent of Job's words speaking of what God does- Job 9:8 (ESV): “who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea”. The sea is often used to represent chaos, something that cannot be tamed, something deadly, something to be feared. Jesus walking on water demonstrates God's control over all nature, including the chaotic sea. This is a display of his utter sovereignty, exercised for our well-being and ultimate good. As the Lord treads on the waves that threaten to swallow us- he says to us- John 6:20 (ESV): “It is I- I am; do not be afraid.”

The only appropriate response to signs like these is faith- believing in Christ. Seeing the signs- confessing him to be the Christ. Therefore Christ can say- John 14.11- Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

As we think about how the gospel unfolds, many have observed a helpful division in John. There is a prologue and an epilogue, an opening and closing- but the bulk of the gospel consists of two main parts- chapters 1-12, referred to as the book of Signs, and chapters 13- 20, referred to as the Book of Glory). And as you read John you notice that he front-loads his gospel account with the presentation of these signs.

But this is not to say that matters taken up in the second half of John are any less significant.

As the first 12 chapters unfold, all the movement within the plot has been preparing us for the second half of the book, where we encounter the cross and resurrection.

In chapter one we hear of the victory of the Lamb of God- John 1:29 (ESV): who takes away the sin of the world. In this text we find intonations of the sacrificial, substitutionary lamb of Isaiah 53 and perhaps the Passover lamb- both realities that remind us of Jesus' eventual death.

In John 10:11 (ESV) we hear about “the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.”

John 11 we get a prophecy concerning the sacrifice of one man for the nation.

So even in the early chapters there is a build-up taking place. And that brings us the second half of John.

This section is commonly referred to as the book of Glory. In designating these later chapters as the book of Glory- we must be careful to say that all of John is a revelation of Christ's glory. For instance, John tells us that by changing water to wine Christ “manifested his glory”- John 2:11 (ESV): Each sign is a manifestation of his glory-

But the glory taken up in the later half of John is a peculiar kind of glory. Not glory as we traditionally conceive of glory.

Beginning in John chapter 12 we see Jesus begin to say some remarkable things centering on glory-

John 12:23–24 (ESV): “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

John 12:27–28 (ESV): 27 “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name.”

Here the notion of glory is taking on a different hue. It is not pure, unmixed triumphalism as we would conceive of it. Glory- the way Christ conceives of glory- must include the astounding wonder of his complete, perfect obedience- culminating in his death on the cross. Therefore, for John, Christ's death represents perhaps the supreme manifestation of His glory within the book.

And as far as signs are concerned, Jesus crucifixion and subsequent resurrection represent a glorious sign in its own right- it is considered the 8th sign– it is the most significant, miraculous event in human history- elsewhere referred to as “the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the

great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Matthew 12: 39-40.

So there is a peculiar glory that Christ references as we move into the later half of John’s gospel.

Later Christ would pray- John 17:5 (ESV): *And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. This refers to the glory of his preexistence- extending into eternity past, the Father and Son and Spirit existing in a shared glory.*

But the path back to this kind of glory has been clearly marked out. The only way to this original glory is through the shameful, cursed, wrath-bearing, reproach of the cross.

So these later chapters are the book of glory. The glory of the resurrection- yes. The glory of Christ’s eventual exaltation- a return to the glory Christ had before the world existed- yes.

But a glory that comes only through this glorious expression of obedient love for the Father and self-sacrificing love for us, that, when properly understood, is seen to be glorious, and draws us to himself.

Therefore Christ can say- John 3:14–15 (ESV): as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

And John 12:32–33 (ESV): And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

Therefore we sing- “My sinful self, my only shame, my glory all the cross.”

So the book of Glory- chapters 13-20 provide us with Jesus’ cross and resurrection and exaltation. These are events so momentous, so glorious, and so solemn, that we must first come away with Christ. He brings us, as it were, in chapters 13-17, into the intimate setting of the upper room, away from the outside world. It is here Christ delivers his farewell discourse, some of his last words as he is about to depart this world. Here Jesus explains to his disciples the significance of all that is getting ready to take place. It is here that he prays for his disciples, and prays for us, in a remarkable way- in what has become known as his High Priestly prayer. —

One theme that emerges in this portion of Scripture, with a depth that is found nowhere else in the gospels, is Christ teaching about the Holy Spirit in chapters 14, 15, and 16.

The disciples are clearly troubled- they are confused and concerned about Jesus' imminent departure. They feel abandoned. And Jesus reassures them that he will not leave them as orphans. And here Jesus promises to send the Advocate- the Paraclete. A counselor and comforter. And this Advocate will be with them in much the same way as Jesus will be with them. He is the Spirit of truth, he will teach them all things and bring to their remembrance Christ's words- he will enlarge upon and shed light on what Christ has taught them- especially in light of the cross, resurrection, and ascension. The Spirit will join with the disciples in testifying about Jesus to the world. Therefore he will strengthen them, enable them in their evangelism and witness- and will continue Christ's work by convicting the world about sin. He will be their helper. Here we begin to understand that the Spirit is integral in effecting our spiritual union with Jesus- Jesus gives us the glorious vine and branches exhortation in the midst of his teaching concerning the Holy Spirit- therefore, we abide in spiritual union with Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Supremely- the Spirit seeks to glorify Christ- John 16:14 "He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." His work isn't vague or amorphous- the wind blows wherever it pleases- but the Spirit's work is profoundly Christ shaped, as He is integral in Christ being formed in us - the chapters are glorious in their teaching about the Holy Spirit.

At this point, I want to explore important themes that emerge in John's gospel. Among John's more important contributions are the following:

-Jesus is identified as the Word. John 1:1 (ESV): In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

There have been many attempts at defining what John means by the Word- some lean heavily on Greek word studies, and Greek thought, and that Word means something like reason. In the beginning was the "reason"- But we must not lose sight of who the author is and the context. John was of Jewish descent, and his thought was shaped by Jewish categories. This means the Old Testament. And as he opens his Gospel, he clearly has the Old Testament in view- he writes- "In the beginning was the Word". "In the beginning is a clear allusion to Genesis 1.1- "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth".

In a manner similar to Genesis, the Word in John is the agent of creation- John 1:3 (ESV): All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

In Genesis 1- God creates by means of his word as well- As God speaks things into existence.

Later in the Old Testament we read-

“By the word of the LORD the heavens were made” (Ps. 33:6).

And we come to appreciate that God’s word not only creates, but is the agent of restoration and renewal:

“He sent out his word and healed them” (Ps. 107:20).

By His Word God accomplishes his will upon earth: “He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly” (Ps. 147:15).

Nothing can hinder or prevent his word from being realized. God says of his word, “It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Isa. 55:11).

So when John refers to Jesus as the Word, it seems best to think of the Word in light of the Old Testament- Jesus, as the Word- is the one who created, saves, restores, reveals, and transforms us- God speaks and these things take place. It is a comprehensive category that captures well the things that John purposes to communicate about Jesus.

In verse 14 we are told that the Word “became flesh” (1:14). The agent of creation- the creator himself, the Word, enters into the world. Because of this act of self-humiliation- the Word became flesh- we can sing these words-

*Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
Hail, the incarnate deity.
Pleased as Man with men to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel.*

We are told in John 14:9 (ESV) that “Whoever has seen Christ has seen the Father.” As the Word became flesh, Jesus reveals and discloses the Father to human beings, making known to us what God is like. That is what the Word does- it reveals.

*As we consider how it is that Christ reveals to us the Father- it is important that we consider another theme prominent in John- **Christ as the Son**. Fundamental to all else that is said of him, Jesus is peculiarly the Son of God, or simply the Son.*

John 5:19–20 (ESV): the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. 20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.

John 12:49–50 (ESV): For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. 50 And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.”

Jesus, therefore, discloses- nothing more and nothing less- than the words and deeds of God. And in doing so, Jesus reveals to us the Father. Therefore Jesus can say things like John 14:9 (ESV): Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.

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Let’s take a moment and talk about John’s use of the Old Testament.

Although John does not cite the OT as frequently as Matthew does, his thinking is clearly shaped by the Old Testament, and in his gospel he develops a number of huge categories that are patently Old Testament.

In the first place- John insists that Jesus replaces or fulfills certain people and institutions from the old covenant-such as the tabernacle and temple, the bronze serpent, the Passover, Jesus is the fulfillment of the vine mentioned in several Old Testament passages- Israel was a vine that did not produce fruit- but Jesus is the true vine who does produce fruit, John tells us that the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

The tabernacle and temple is a category that John develops in a wonderful way- When John writes, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt or tabernacled among us” (John 1:14), he compares Jesus’ body to the Old Testament tabernacle. When Jesus says, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days,” John tells us that he was speaking about the temple of his body. The idea that Jesus represents the ultimate temple fits well with the belief that in Christ the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9).

There are many other trajectories of truth from John’s gospel that tethers John to the OT in an unmistakable way.

One that we must take time to appreciate is Jesus’ series of “I am” statements. Jesus reveals his divine nature through these statements. These “I am” sayings are rooted in the Old Testament. God reveals himself to Moses as “I AM WHO I AM” (Exod. 3:14).

The “I am” language features prominently in Isaiah- for instance-

*Isaiah 43:10–11 (ESV):
10 “You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord,
“and my servant whom I have chosen,
that you may know and believe me*

and understand that I am he.

*Before me no god was formed,
nor shall there be any after me.*

*11 I, I am the Lord,
and besides me there is no savior.*

For Jesus to take up these “I am” statements and apply them to himself, therefore, is nothing short of astonishing. With the “I am” statements- he is clearly identifying himself as God. With each statement he affirms his eternity and self-existence.

Jesus says “I am the bread of life”. “I am the light of the world”. Chapters 8 and 9 are filled with “I am” statements. John 8:24 (ESV): unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins”. John 8:28 (ESV): “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he”.

In a heated dispute with those who opposed him, Jesus claims, “Before Abraham was, I am” (8:58). To claim that he existed before Abraham was alive can only be understood as a claim to be God. And the Jews of Christ day understood the implications, and picked up stones to kill Jesus.

Jesus also declares, “I am the door of the sheep” (10:7) and “I am the good shepherd”. The King was to be Israel’s shepherd. Ezekiel 34.23 tells us that God “will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd.”

Ultimately texts like Ezekiel 34.15 and 34.31 make it clear that God himself is the shepherd- I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. You are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Lord GOD.”

Clearly, Jesus fulfills what we find in Ezekiel, in a remarkable way- as we see both the divine shepherd and the Davidic shepherd converge in the person of Jesus.

Jesus tells us “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25) and “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (14:6).

Jesus declares, “I am the true vine” (15:1; cf. 15:5).

Jesus also said to those arresting him, “I am”. And those arresting him drew back and fell to the ground at this pronouncement.

These “I am” statements are glorious, interwoven with many rich themes that find their origin in the Old Testament- each statement wonderfully qualified with the truth that “I am” conveys- Jesus’ divinity, eternity, and self-existence. This is our Savior.

Another prominent theme in John's Gospel is Life and Eternal Life.

John uses the word “life” thirty-two times and the term “eternal life” seventeen times. The term “eternal life” refers to the life of the age to come life in the new creation, to the hope of the coming age, when death would be defeated.

As we look closely at all 4 gospels- we see that eternal life is closely aligned with the idea of the kingdom- John rarely speaks of the kingdom- but kingdom themes are prominent in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

We see these two realities converge in the passage about the rich young ruler- who posed the question to Jesus- Matthew 19:16 (ESV): “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” A few verses later Christ would say Matthew 19:23–24 (ESV): “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

So it appears that Christ uses these two ideas somewhat interchangeably.

We see the same overlap in the account of Nicodemus- Christ explains to Nicodemus in John 3:3 (ESV): that “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

And later pronounces these words-

John 3:16 (ESV): 16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Therefore, entering the kingdom and believing to receive eternal life are closely related.

In talking about eternal life, I would be remiss not to emphasize this truth-John 6:40 (ESV): For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Faith, resting, receiving, trusting, and leaning on Jesus is how we freely receive life. John emphasizes repeatedly that eternal life belongs to those who believe in Jesus, come to him, and follow him.

Perhaps most importantly- life and eternal life can never be separated from Jesus himself.

Jesus is the way, and the truth, and the life (John 14.6). Life is intrinsically bound to Jesus.

Life finds its origin in Jesus.

John 1:4 (ESV): 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

Jesus is self-existent- as the Son, the second person of the Trinity- his life is underived.

John 5:26 (ESV): 26 For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.

And here Jesus is speaking of an eternal grant- a reality that has always been and always will be. Jesus has always had life in himself.

Jesus came to grant life. He grants it to whom he wishes. Jesus speaks the words of life. The life that Jesus gives comes to us via the cross, as he lays down his life for the sheep.

Furthermore, eternal life involves a relationship with God. John 17:3 (ESV): And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

In John's gospel, there is what we might describe as a "now" aspect to life and eternal life. John 5:24 (ESV): whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

Therefore we have life now and enjoy "life" now- We have life now because Jesus has conquered death by virtue of his resurrection. Through Christ's death and resurrection- we are now sharers in the life of the age to come— as we are inseparably joined to Christ.

And though there is a "now" aspect to life and eternal life in John- there is still a "not yet" aspect to life in his gospel. For John, the not yet of life and eternal life will one day come to its consummated expression in the resurrection. There is more to come. And this creates a tension between the "already" and the "not yet" as we work through the various texts that speak of life and eternal life in John.

And here I want us to pause, and for each of us to make a mental note of one absolutely glorious text, where we see all of these things I have been pointing to wonderfully interwoven . One glorious text. The context is deeply moving- Lazarus- another follower whom Jesus loved- had become ill and died. As Jesus drew near to the village of Bethany- Lazarus had been dead for four days.

And Martha went out to meet Jesus as he was enroute- and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”

And then Jesus speaks these words-

John 11:25–26 (ESV): “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

*Here Jesus is the life. Here Jesus is the resurrection. Here we see that life can be ours through simple faith- Jesus tells us twice that “whoever believes in me” will live and not die. Here we see the **not yet** aspect to life- Jesus says “though he die, yet shall he live”. Here we see the **already** aspect to life- life is our now- “and everyone who lives- presently lives- and believes in me shall never die” and here we see eternal life- “everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”*

Glorious text with the multifaceted understanding of life and eternal life interwoven into Christ's words.

As we move into John's letters, it is helpful to appreciate that John often presents the world in polarities. He often uses contrasting language.

Prominent polarities in John's Gospel include light and darkness (1:5; 3:19–21), life and death (5:24), flesh and spirit (6:63), above and below (3:31; 8:23), truth and falsehood (1:17; 14:6), love and hate (3:19–21; 12:25), and faith and unbelief (1:12; 20:30–31).

But as we appreciate these contrasts, we should never think of these things as representing a type of dualism. In other words- John doesn't conceive of these opposing dynamics as a struggle between things that are somehow equally powerful, or that somehow the outcome of the struggle is uncertain and unsure. The cosmic battle between God and Satan is never cast as a struggle between equally matched opponents. God always wins. Jesus wins.

Therefore John can say things like John 1:5 (ESV): The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. This certain outcome spills over into his first epistle- so that John can say things like- 1 John 5:4: For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

In conservative circles, there is no real debate about who wrote these letters- although the first is anonymous, and the second and third the author identifies himself as “the elder”- all signs compellingly point to the same John, who wrote the Fourth Gospel, the son of Zebedee, “the disciple whom Jesus loved”. Like John’s Gospel, the author of 1 John is an eyewitness of Jesus’ ministry.

1 John 1.1- That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life

Many of the words and ideas in John’s letters resemble those found in John’s Gospel- life and death, light and darkness, love and hate, truth and lies. The early church fathers ascribe the authorship of both John’s Gospel and 1 John unequivocally to John the disciple and apostle of the Lord.

The letters of John were probably written from Ephesus, where, according to early church tradition, the apostle spent his last days. We have already discussed dates- just bear in mind that the general consensus is that John’s gospel came before John’s letters.

*These letters provide a snapshot of life in these churches. And it was **not** the best of times- it seems that the realities of living life in what was essentially a post-apostolic world was settling in on some of the churches. The problems concerned not only right thinking- orthodoxy- but right living as well. Sometime after John wrote his gospel, difficulties arose within this community. Some of the members espoused beliefs about the person and work of Christ that were unacceptable, denying that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, come in the flesh (1 John 4:2–3) and denying also, it would appear, that his death was necessary to provide for forgiveness of sins (1 John 5:6–7). A sharp disagreement arose, and those who embraced these erroneous views broke away from the community (1 John 2:19). These secessionists were not content to keep their beliefs to themselves. Some of them became itinerant preachers who moved in and out among the churches spreading their heretical beliefs (1 John 2:26; 4:1–3; 2 John 7). These secessionists claimed to have a special anointing of the Spirit along with spiritual insight- and those loyal to the gospel and apostolic doctrine were confused and wondered if they were somehow less than or lacking something essential. Some began to question whether they really knew God, or if they truly possessed eternal life, or were actually walking in the truth. 1 John was written to give*

them assurance. In doing so John provides divinely inspired criteria they could use to evaluate the false claims of the secessionists and with which they could reassure themselves (1 John 1:5—2:2; 2:3—11; 3:7—10, 14—15; 4:4—8, 13—15; 5:13, 18—20). This letter appears to have been sent as a circular letter- one that was to be passed along to the churches affected by the false teaching.

As you read 1 John, you might begin to get a sense for its structure- it is not like some of Paul's writings- in that it does not follow a straight line- moving logically from one subject to the next. Instead it revisits the same subjects over and over, each time amplifying them further in what has been described as a spiraling structure. This is because 1 John, fundamentally, is not trying to unearth anything new or novel- rather through amplified repetition, John is trying to instill confidence and adherence to the known truths of the gospel- in face of the threat posed by the secessionists' teachings. Remember the whole problem is whether or not the apostolic teaching is truly enough. It absolutely is enough. And John structures his gospel to drive home this very important point. Unlike John's gospel, 1 John is not so much evangelistic but rather geared toward providing believer's with assurance. We see the same pastoral heart- same pastoral tone that we saw in John's gospel- but John's purpose is geared toward those who have already embraced Christ as the Messiah.

As a follow-up to the letter of 1 John, John wrote two other letters.

He sent the letter of 2 John to one of the churches involved (to the "elect lady and her children") to warn members about the secessionists and their heretical teaching (2 John 7—8). He urged the readers not to help these teachers by providing them with hospitality. To do so would be to take part in their wicked works. (2 John 11).

This may be understood in two ways: (1) They should not provide hospitality in their homes, which in the ancient world included guaranteeing their guests were worthy of acceptance by the rest of the community, something that could not be done if the guests were deceivers.

(2) They should not receive heretical preachers in the assembly of the house church- implying they should not give them opportunity to propagate their false teaching.

This does not mean that believers should not provide hospitality for strangers (cf. Heb 13:2) or that they should wholesale separate themselves from unbelievers (cf. 1 Cor 5:9—10); it is the false teachers that John had in mind.

The false teachers were not the only ones traveling around among these churches. There were also people of good standing who had gone out for the sake of the name" (3 John 7). These people needed the hospitality offered in Christian homes as they traveled about.

So John wrote the letter known as 3 John, to an individual named Gaius. He commended Gaius for providing hospitality to traveling preachers of good standing (3 John 5–6). Those who provide hospitality for missionaries and those who preach the truth are to be commended and are described as fellow workers for the truth.

John also warned him about a certain man named Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, he does not acknowledge apostolic authority- he speaks out against John. He refuses to welcome the brothers, practicing hospitality, and also stops those who seek to do so, and puts them out of the church. (3 John 9–10). It is not clear whether Diotrephes had aligned himself with the false teachers- or simply rejected John's authority as an apostle.

Theological Themes in 1 John

Many important theological themes emerge in 1 John.

The most important of these concerns the nature of God.

God again is revealed as the Father of Jesus Christ. God is light and in him there is no darkness. God is love, and this love was revealed in the sending of his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. God lavishes his love upon believers by making them his children.

Also important is what John writes about the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God come in the flesh, and to deny this is to deny God the Father also. Jesus gave himself to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins so that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Having given himself as the atoning sacrifice, Jesus now acts as our advocate with the Father if we sin.

Christ was revealed to destroy the devil's work, and he protects us from the evil one.

John's reassures his readers that they, in fact, have an anointing from God, the Holy Spirit, whom they have received from God, who will be instrumental in teaching them what they need know- especially concerning the apostolic doctrine- so that they do not need to give heed to the false teachings of the secessionists (2:27).

Those who believe in Christ have passed from death to life (3:14), having been born of God and having received eternal life (2:25; 5:11). Again there is a shared emphasis on life and eternal life.

Those who have been born of God love one another (4:7; 5:1), overcome the world (5:4), and do not succumb to sinful behavior, are being protected by Christ so that the evil one does not touch them (5:18).

Christ gives us understanding so that we may know the One who is true, God the Father (5:20).

Another significant theme is assurance.

The subject of assurance in this first epistle is interwoven throughout John's words- and it is a multifaceted issue. But one that is fundamentally founded on the person and work of Christ-

1 John 2:1–2 (ESV): 2 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 He is the propitiation- the atoning sacrifice-for our sins. The shamel, curse, the wrath-bearing, the reproach, the glory of the cross. This is the soil in which all true assurance grows.

My sinful self, my only shame, my glory all the cross.