

PREFACE

The Gospel of John has been described as “a pool in which a child can wade,” as well as “an ocean in which an elephant can swim.” The author felt the truth of both of those statements throughout this study. The Fourth Gospel is at the same time simple enough that even a child can understand its message and come to saving faith in Jesus Christ, and also profound enough to command a lifetime of serious study by the world’s most able scholars, even then never fully succeeding in plumbing the depths of its content.

When the author became aware of the rich and varied uses of the *alētheia* word group in the Fourth Gospel, he was fairly quickly struck by the relative lack of scholarly investigation beyond those of entries in theological dictionaries and articles in academic journals. And of the more comprehensive treatments, nothing was done since de la Potterie’s magisterial study in 1977. As the introductory work of the present thesis continued, the author also discovered that one’s approach to the issue of backgrounds in John took on particular importance because of the semantic ranges of the Hebrew *’emet* and the Greek *alētheia*, and the extent to which these lay behind and comprise the Johannine conception of truth.

Believing that more than any other movement or writing, the Old Testament Scriptures serves as the driving force of the Gospel’s content, the author then began to think about why the Gospel was primarily written. Convinced that, given the presence of the Old Testament in John, the Evangelist was most likely seeking to communicate the truth of God’s revelation in the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth to those who would best appreciate it, the logical primary audience remains Jews and Jewish proselytes.

But the author also realized that the language and style of John’s Gospel would be able to speak quite effectively to those with far less knowledge of the Old Testament. This was not unknown to previous scholars, even to those who hold a similar view on the Gospel’s background. Nevertheless, not only was there a need to investigate on a more thorough level the Johannine idea of truth in the context of the Old Testament background; there was the more pointed concern to show how this conception of truth could still be able to reach those with more

knowledge of Greek philosophy than of the Jewish Scriptures. This idea was lacking from those contributions that reflected a strong commitment to an Old Testament background.

In addition to this, it became apparent that one cannot discuss the idea of truth in John without setting it within the larger framework of revelation. In the past God had spoken through Moses, the giving of the Law, the Prophets, all of which became part of the scriptural witness. But all these pointed to God's final and fullest revelation given in his Son. And because Jesus is indeed the truth, as he himself explicitly claimed, it necessarily follows that every portion of this revelation is true and reliable in every way. Moreover, because this revelation has been given, there is the need for those to serve as witnesses to it. These witnesses, both divine and human, are themselves revelation by virtue of their divine origin and their consequent inclusion as part of the overall New Testament witness to Jesus.

Finally, the revelation of this truth involves the application of distinctively Christian conduct, viewed from the perspective of abiding, sanctification, and worship. The human reception of this divine revelation is never merely intellectual or mental acquisition. Rather, from knowledge of the truth, by the abiding presence of the Spirit, comes the desire and ability to offer up one's life in love and service of God, also manifested in carrying forth this revelation to others.

The first chapter will address those introductory matters relevant for understanding John's unique view of truth, which is centered in Jesus Christ. This is necessary to prepare the way for the remaining chapters. That the Johannine conception of truth is centered in Jesus involves two aspects: Jesus as the revelation of truth, and Jesus as the revealer of truth.

The first of these two aspects will be treated in chapter two. Truth is the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. The chapter will discuss eight ideas that explain this view of truth, showing not only their Old Testament origin and how Jesus is the fulfillment of these ideas, but how they would connect with those less familiar with biblical thought.

The second aspect is the focus of chapter three. Because truth comes only from God, it must be made known since human beings are unable to acquire it on their own. Thus, there is the need for revelation, which can only be received for what it truly is by witnesses testifying to it.

Hence, one cannot talk about truth in John without also talking about the need for the revelation of it. And one cannot recognize, let alone understand, this divine revelation without the corresponding need for witnesses to this truth. Also, because Jesus is both the revealer and the revelation itself, he is thus the preeminent witness to this divinely-revealed truth precisely because his is a self-authenticating witness which receives divine affirmation by the Father of the Son.

The final chapter looks at the Johannine idea of truth from the perspective of application, or the practical response to the theological foundation, using three specific aspects of Christian living because they are directly connected with the word “truth.” Truth in John must never be conceived of in terms of mere intellectual acquirement. To be of the truth means that the whole of life reflects that divine reality.

Given the fact that the Johannine idea of truth is of major theological significance for understanding the Fourth Gospel, the methodological approach for this study is a theological and exegetical one. That is not to say that other models are irrelevant, such as a historical, narrative, or social-scientific one. It is to say, however, that at their best these others may aid in supplementing or enhancing the theological/exegetical approach; they are not to control the study such that the theological/exegetical method is made subservient or relegated to the periphery of one’s focus. If other major studies on truth in John are to follow using another method as one’s point of departure, they must do so only with a thorough theological foundation having been laid. Moreover, in this study the theological/exegetical methodological approach is applied with the assumption that the Fourth Gospel in particular, and the Bible as a whole, is a trustworthy account of God’s dealings in history. Just as the majority of current biblical scholarship has abandoned a strict separation between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, so this thesis argues from the perspective that serious analysis of the biblical text is not at odds with a prior stated commitment to a traditional approach toward such matters as theological themes, historicity, and authorship. It must of course be acknowledged that traditional assumptions are no less scientific than other assumptions, and that each assumption deserves to be treated

seriously when it shows itself to be interested in honestly interacting with those assumptions with which it disagrees. A traditional approach will obviously influence the analysis and conclusions of the work in question; but the same is true for any other approach.

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MICHAEL D. ROBERTS
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