

CHAPTER FOUR—PRACTICING THE TRUTH

At the beginning of chapter three it was mentioned that the Johannine conception of truth—the focus of chapter two—combines with John’s emphasis on witness (and hence, revelation) to provide part of the distinctive nature of Johannine Christology. Having addressed this latter theme of witness in chapter three, it now remains to consider the idea of truth in the Fourth Gospel from the perspective of application. This is not to imply that the preceding study has been absent of application. It is, however, to point out that much of the above has been concerned with the theological foundation which shows the corresponding practical response to be perfectly logical. It can also be pointed out that this response is in agreement with the first Epistle (1:6; 2:4; 3:18-19). The summarizing idea of these three passages is that any claimed fellowship with God that is not characterized by obedience to his commands is a lie. The truth is not in the individual and it is not being practiced. This serves as a stern warning against any claim to know the truth, but which is found to be spurious by an inconsistent life.

For the purposes of this study three aspects of Christian living will be considered: abiding (8:31-32), sanctification (17:17-19), and worship (4:23-24). The exclusion of others should not be taken as an implicit minimizing of their presence or importance. Rather, these three elements have been chosen because they are specifically connected with the word “truth.” In fact, one finds that in using these three, other elements are also brought into the discussion.

Before beginning, it should also be reiterated that faithful Christian conduct is not a cause for boasting, as if it came about by human effort. To be sure, there must exist the conscious determination to obey, the seriousness of which is such that Jesus likens it to taking up one’s cross (Luke 9:23). But it never leads to an attitude of self-righteousness because the Christian recognizes that it is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who enables such application.

1. ABIDING IN THE TRUTH

In the section on the true vine, the theme of abiding was briefly addressed in the context of the vine imagery from John 15. Now, the goal is to develop this theme further, using John 8:31-

32 as the starting point. In this passage, Jesus says that those who abide in his word are truly his disciples. It is these people who will know the truth and therefore be made free by it. Before looking at this text from the positive light in which it was meant to be taken, it is first necessary to observe the negative reaction it received from those to whom it was spoken. They immediately take offense at Jesus' statement by appealing to Abraham to defend their supposed freedom which they claim to already possess. They confidently boast that because they are Abraham's offspring and have never been slaves to anyone, it is therefore foolish of Jesus to speak of their needing to be set free (v. 33). By appealing to Abraham one could suggest that they are referring back to God's appearance in Genesis 12 and the promise concerning the land, which would tend to make v. 33 an objection of political import; although it is true that Genesis 12 could be in mind without the political aspect. In any case, the politics of the land is probably not what they are referring to, given the rather obvious examples of Jewish political slavery in the past (most notably, Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon) as well as their present subjugation under Rome. If so, then a spiritual freedom is what they are asserting based on their physical membership within Abraham's family, and their consequent reception of the Law. As Stephen Motyer correctly notes, whether a political freedom or a theological freedom, both supposed freedoms are illusory. "Either 'freedom' would leave Israel in slavery to sin, because both prescriptions have already been found wanting."¹

This is why Jesus told them in vv. 34-36 that all who sin are slaves to sin, and can only be delivered by the Son. As vv. 31-32 show, those who truly have been set free by the Son will hold fast in true discipleship to him. Jesus is not promising freedom to those who practice some formal or half-hearted measure of verbal confession but whose lives show that they are far from him. Nor is it promised to those who demonstrate an initial interest in the truth of Christ, but who spurn him once they learn further of his claims upon all who would identify themselves with him. One's relationship with regard to Jesus is shown to be genuine or counterfeit based on

¹Stephen Motyer, *Your Father the Devil? A New Approach to John and 'the Jews'* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997), 179.

whether or not he or she abides. One must remain as close to Jesus and be as committed to Jesus' teaching as a branch is attached to the vine. Tasker provides one of the best definitions of abiding in Jesus' word when he writes of "welcoming it, being at home with it, and living with it so continuously that it becomes part of the believer's life, a permanent influence and stimulus in every fresh advance in goodness and holiness."²

Concerning the presence of truth in this passage, it is only those who abide who know the truth. Thus, while knowing the truth of God's revelation in Jesus is a cognitive apprehension, it is truly understood when such intellectual grasp produces a distinctively Christian conduct as a disciple. The second thing to see is that the truth has a liberating ability. It is not only a body of material that must be understood and acted upon. It performs an activity.³ This is another indication that the truth of the person of Jesus cannot be separated from the truth of his message. Moreover, it also says something of the abiding validity of the liberating power of the New Testament Scriptures which testify to this truth and by the power of the Holy Spirit continue to liberate sinful men and women through Christian preaching.

1.1 THE ABIDING OF JESUS

As insistent as the Fourth Gospel is that those who claim to be united to Christ demonstrate the reality of their connection by their practice, it is equally insistent that necessary for this to take place is the abiding of Jesus in the believer. Thus, there is a mutual abiding, but it is not a mutual dependence. There can be no human abiding unless there is first divine initiative not only in terms of salvation, but in sanctification as well. This is why the salvation from sin and the bearing of fruit are both to the Father's glory.

²R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press and Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960), 117. George R. Beasley-Murray also grasps the concept well when he explains *meinēte* as signifying a "settled determination to *live* in the word of Christ and by it, and so entails a perpetual listening to it, reflection on it, holding fast to it, carrying out its bidding" (*John* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999, revised edition], 133).

³Johann Kinghorn, "John 8:32—The Freedom of Truth," *International Review of Mission* 79 (1990): 314.

In addition to the references to Jesus' abiding in John 15, there are other expressions which convey the same meaning, including ideas from the Johannine Epistles. From the Gospel, Jesus speaks of the need to have the Father's word abiding in people (5:38), and in 14:17 the Spirit of truth is said to abide in the followers of Jesus. Likewise in the Epistles, John speaks of the need to have God's love abiding in the child of God (I John 3:17); and in III John he says that it is the truth which abides and will do so forever (v. 2). All of these expressions of abiding point to the person and work of Christ. It is because of him that these elements abide in the believer, producing both attitudes and conduct that mark individuals and the church corporate as the people of God.

1.2 ABIDING IN JESUS

Having discussed the foundational abiding of Jesus, attention should now be directed to the need to abide in Jesus. Like Jesus' abiding, the believer's abiding is expressed in a plurality of ways. As already mentioned, the responsibility of the disciple of Jesus can be described as abiding in Jesus' word (8:31). In the final discourses Jesus can also speak of the necessity of abiding in his love, accomplished by obedience to his commandments (15:9-10). Again, the same teaching is found in the Epistles. I John talks of abiding in the light (2:10); and II John warns about not abiding in the teaching of Christ (v. 9). These various descriptions all point to the need for increasing holiness in all who profess to belong to Jesus. As I. de la Potterie explains: "C'est donc en definitive l'union au Christ, dans la plénitude de la foi, dans la pleine efficacité de sa parole et dans le rayonnement de sa charité, qui constitue le véritable disciple de Jésus."⁴

This means that loyalty to Jesus is primary, even to the forfeiture of one's own life. In other words, one must so value his relationship to Jesus, marked by being a faithful servant, that one is

⁴Ignace de la Potterie, *La Vérité dans Saint Jean*, two vols. (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977), II: 564. "It is therefore in the definitive union to Christ, in the fullness of the faith, in the full efficacy of his word and in the radiance of his love, which constitute the true disciple of Jesus."

willing to renounce all inclinations to serve and honor himself. When that self-sacrifice is made, the individual will be honored by the Father (12:25-26). Furthermore, it is also possible that commitment to Jesus will result in the literal loss of life (16:2). In all this, Jesus' promises of peace and victory are sure, based on his own overcoming of the world (16:33).

It must be emphasized that the basis for continual abiding is not found anywhere within the individual, but is rooted in the character of God. The love that believers have for their Lord and for each other finds its establishment and commitment in the unity and love that exists between Jesus and the Father (10:37-38; 14:10, 23; 15:9-10; 17:11, 21, 23, 26). Thus, the categories are not merely ethical or moral, but profoundly spiritual and theological.⁵ This introduces the importance of the corporate reality to abiding in Jesus. In John there is the need to personally come into the light, receive the testimony, believe God's revelation. But as strong as this individual response is, the Fourth Gospel equally stresses the fact that these individuals bond together as closely as sheep to a shepherd and branches to a vine. Those who belong to Jesus form a community whose eyes are focused on him. At the same time, how this community behaves toward itself serves as a direct witness concerning the truth of God's revelation in Christ to the world.⁶

One element of this corporate dimension to abiding is Christian unity, seen in John 17 and existing in a number of ways. First there is what can be called an ontological unity. Jesus prays that both his disciples and all who will come to believe through their witness might be one, just as he and the Father are one (vv. 11, 21-22). The basis for believers' unity is not similarity in personalities, abilities, or other such external connectors, nor even a common purpose for the advancement of the Christian Gospel. Rather, the basis is the unity that exists between the first and second members of the Godhead. This brings Christians from varying denominations and doctrinal convictions to rally around the Gospel entrusted to the apostles, thus presenting a

⁵Mark L. Appold, *The Oneness Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1976), 34-41.

⁶*Ibid.*, 265-266.

united effort before a watching world. Second is a unity in the experiencing of Jesus' joy (v. 13). Third is the common realization that because of their commitment to Christ the world hates them because they are not aligned with it (v. 14). Fourth is a unity in sanctification and sending (vv. 17-18). As those separated from the world, believers are together growing in holiness. Related to this aspect of sanctification, they have also been set apart for witness throughout the world, commissioned by Jesus Christ himself. "The achievement of unity among the disciples is essential to their unity with God and Jesus Christ (17:21) as well as to their successful witness to the world (17:21, 23). It belongs to the very character and essence of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ (cf. 14:21-24; I John 1:3): that is, it is not just a desirable but dispensable by-product of that revelation."⁷

The other element of this corporate dimension to abiding is Christian love. Love for one another is the summarizing commandment which Jesus gives in John 15:12. This Christian virtue is quite prominent in the first Epistle. Anyone who claims to be united to Jesus and yet hates his brother still remains in darkness (2:10-11). The same idea is seen in chapter 3, using Cain as a negative example (vv. 11-12). Indeed, loving one another is evidence that one has passed from death into life (v. 14). Like the relationship between Jesus' commandment and love in John 15, the same idea is also found in I John 3:23. The summarizing commandment of God is to believe in Jesus Christ, his Son, and to love one another. Carson is therefore correct to speak of love for God and love for other believers as an "unbreakable chain."⁸ One cannot truly love God without also loving God's people. And love for God's people demonstrates the genuineness of one's love for God. The largest section on love in I John is 4:7-21. Here John roots love for one another in the reality of having been loved and born of God, the heart of which is the sending of Jesus Christ into the world to be the propitiation for sin (vv. 9-10). Thus, there

⁷D. Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 148.

⁸D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press and Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 521.

is no basis to separate doctrine from life, a theology of the head from a theology of the heart and hands. That, too, is an unbreakable chain.

Before concluding this section on abiding, one more aspect of Christian love must be mentioned. This is the idea of selfless service, for which Jesus himself provides the example in John 13. Christian love does not keep a log of each kind act performed, expecting reciprocation. Instead, it gives joyfully and generously, willing to expend itself according to the model of Jesus' own self-emptying (Phil. 2:1-8). Moreover, the extent of this love is such that it will even cause one to lay down his or her life for another, again the pattern being Jesus in his obedience unto death (John 15:13; I John 3:16). As Tertullian reflected, "But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. *See, they say, how they love one another...how they are ready even to die for one another...*"⁹

2. SANCTIFICATION IN THE TRUTH

The previous section on abiding cannot be separated from the Johannine conception of sanctification. Though there are different emphases in the two ideas, to abide in the truth involves carrying out Christ's purpose for his own, and to be sanctified in the truth entails a committed abiding. Jesus prays in John 17 that the Father would sanctify the disciples in the truth, which is God's word. Just as Jesus was sent by the Father into the world, so he has sent his disciples. Also, Jesus sanctified himself, that his disciples would be sanctified in truth (vv. 17-19).

Chapter three of the present study mentioned John 17:17, 19 in talking about the human response to revelation resulting from the internal witness. This treatment will look at the passage from the perspective of abiding. The believer witnesses out of love for God and love for the world, some of whom will become part of the Christian community through this witness.

⁹Tertullian, *Apology*, XXXIX, Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 3, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995, reprint), 46.

Abiding therefore produces mission to the world. But abiding is also connected with another aspect of sanctification, namely, personal and corporate holiness.

2.1 SANCTIFIED UNTO MISSION

Most commentators see in John 17:17-19 a reference to the future mission of the disciples to proclaim the message of the Father's revelation in Christ. The idea of being sanctified is thus understood in the sense of being consecrated or set apart for a divine purpose (Ex. 28:41; Jer. 1:5). However, de la Potterie argues that here, being sanctified “n’implique *aucune référence formelle et directe à la mission, c’est-à-dire au ministère de prédication des disciples dans le monde.*”¹⁰ Presumably, this is because he understands the sanctification of the disciples as being solidly in the truth, grounded in the revelation of the Father.¹¹ To the extent that de la Potterie's definition wants to recognize the aspect of sanctification which stresses the holiness of one's life and conduct, one can see the validity of his view for the specific context at hand. But any analysis involving this aspect of sanctification must fit this emphasis into the more prominent idea of being set apart for a particular calling, which in this case extends throughout the whole of the Christian life.

In this respect, the view of the present author is that de la Potterie does not adequately think about sanctification as a setting apart for mission, which is the main thrust of this portion of Jesus' prayer. But other treatments which say very little or nothing about personal holiness are also failing to see the full significance of Jesus' words. In vv. 15-16 Jesus prays that the Father not remove his disciples from the world, but that they be kept from the evil one. Even though they will remain in the world, they are not of it, even as Jesus is not of it. Then, in v. 17, Jesus asks that they be sanctified in the truth. Jesus' request that they be kept from evil while in the world seems to indicate a concern for their spiritual condition while living in a world that

¹⁰de la Potterie, *op. cit.*, II: 741. “...does not imply a formal and direct reference to the mission, that is to say to the ministry of the preaching of the disciples in the world.”

¹¹*Ibid.*, II: 782.

remains hostile to them and which would like to see them succumb to the evil one. Therefore, Jesus prays for their sanctification. Jesus told Peter earlier that he and the other disciples (except Judas Iscariot) are already clean (13:10). They do indeed belong to Jesus. But their remaining in the world requires sanctification in the truth. This aspect of sanctification is a characteristic of all who belong to Jesus, and thus of all who will live out their divine consecration of witness to the world. It can even be said that one's sanctification in terms of mission will be less effective if personal holiness is not a daily concern of those who claim to belong to Jesus. In that case, they are at that moment not what the Father and Jesus desire of them, and discipline or pruning will be necessary to increase their fruitfulness (15:2).

Having defined sanctification in 17:17, the next step is to think about this witness to the world in terms of being in the world but not of it, and the relationship with the world that results from this. Köstenberger has argued that the community of believers is united in love for the purpose of bearing witness to Jesus before the world.¹² This ties in with the above discussion on the proper definition of "sanctification" in this passage. Contrary to this, Popkes earlier concluded that although such a relationship does exist between the believers' unity in love and their mission, he said, "In diesem Sachkontext wird auch erklärlich, weshalb Johannes das Innenverhältnis der christlichen Gemeinde gegenüber den Außenbeziehungen bevorzugt behandelt."¹³ Not only does Popkes fail to see the strong presence of mission in this part of John 17, he plays the "inner" and "outer" relationships against each other, which is not the sense one gets from the text itself.

Related to this unity of believers in love for the purpose of mission is the issue of the Christian community's view of the world. It must be explained how this witnessing to the world—which obviously implies a certain love for the world—fits with the Johannine emphasis

¹²Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Studies on John and Gender: A Decade of Scholarship* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 157-158.

¹³Wiard Popkes, "Zum Verständnis der Mission bei Johannes," *Zeitschrift für Mission* 4 (1978): 66. "In this pertinent context it also becomes clear, and so John prefers to deal with the inner relation of the Christian community against the outer relationship."

on not loving the world. And from this, one must address the matter of the nature of the witness itself. Because Jesus chose the disciples out of the world, the world hates them (15:19). They are no longer of it, that is, they no longer order their lives according to its philosophy and principles of operation. The same idea is found in 17:14, indicating that the reason for the world's hatred of the disciples is that Jesus has given them the Father's word, which is instrumental in their no longer being of the world. I John fills in the rest of the relationship between believers and the world by telling believers not to love the world, nor the things of it. In fact, by definition it is impossible to love both the world and the Father because the elements which characterize the world, and in which it glories—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life—come from the world and not the Father (2:15-16).

So from the Fourth Gospel and I John it is learned that the world hates the Christian community because the community does not belong to it, and the Christian community cannot love the world because the world is opposed to God. Notice that disciples of Jesus are not told to hate the world, even while they are told not to love it, as love of the world is defined in I John. But in the sense taught in John 17 believers do love the world, for the Father sanctifies them for the purpose of witnessing to it even though it hates them. Again, the reason is because there are some from among the world who will be called out of it by the internal witness of the Spirit through Christian mission. Köstenberger is correct to describe believers' separation as a "spiritual separation from the world that is necessary for their effectiveness in the world, not an expression of a negative attitude toward the world or evidence for a lack of concern for the world."¹⁴ What degree of mission Popkes does see as proceeding from Christian unity and love is to be understood as a "Mission durch Attraktion."¹⁵ It is certainly true that the unbelieving world should feel commended to the Christian church in observing how it conducts itself with regard to one another, as well as toward outsiders. But "Mission durch Attraktion" could be

¹⁴Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel: With Implications for the Fourth Gospel's Purpose and the Mission of the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 190.

¹⁵Popkes, *op. cit.*, 67.

charged, even if unintentionally on its part, with obscuring the equal reality that mission to the world involves a message that the world, left to itself, does not want to hear, and which will increase its hatred for the Christian community all the more. It is not a message of vague religious niceties, giving false assurance to those who have little or no idea of true Christian belief and discipleship. Rather, using the language of the Fourth Gospel, it is the message of him who as the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world (1:29), the message that declares that to be a part of the kingdom of God one must be born again from above (3:3), the message that as the light of the world, Jesus is the only one who can take a person from the darkness of unbelief and judgment to the light of salvation (3:16-18), the message that proclaims that unless people believe that Jesus is who he says he is, they will die in their sins (8:24). This message will indeed cause hatred and separation, even dividing family members (Matt. 10:34-36). But it is nevertheless the only message that through the work of the Spirit will convict the world of sin. To be sure, there are proper and improper ways to preach this message, but by no means must the sharp edges of this truth be softened so as not to cause offense. To do this is to actually do less than love the world, for a genuine love for the lost will tell them of the reality of their sin and its consequences, and the corresponding remedy in Jesus Christ.

One more component of this mission to the world needs to be mentioned, which Okure calls the corporate nature. The focus is not on any one disciple's efforts, but on the unified witness they present, seen by their love for one another and their zeal in carrying the Gospel throughout the world.¹⁶ This is seen with regard to the sanctification of Jesus' disciples for mission in 17:17-19. It is also seen in the verses following, which speak of the unity that will exist among all those who will come to believe in Jesus through the witness of the disciples, which in turn will serve as a witness to the world (vv. 20-23). Even the most effective of Christian missionaries never view their work as resulting from their own abilities or hard work. There are many from the believing community who play a part in the work, particularly important being

¹⁶Teresa Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission: A Contextual Study of John 4:1-42* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1988), 210-211.

constant prayer for God's blessing. And every aspect of the missionary enterprise—the support, the sending, and the fruit borne—is to the Father's glory.

2.2 THE SANCTIFYING WORD

In the Fourth Gospel truth is not only in reference to a particular statement or message. Because Jesus is the truth incarnate there must also be an active understanding of truth. However, this active sense can never be divorced from his verbal message because in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth the word of the Father has been decisively made known. In the present passage it is unlikely that Jesus is referring to himself as the incarnate Logos, though he is speaking of the words concerning himself which he has made known from the Father. That this is true is seen from earlier in Jesus' prayer, where he says that he has given to the disciples the words which the Father gave him (v. 8). Also, v. 14 speaks of the word that Jesus has given, as well as v. 20 where it is said that the word will go forth by the disciples, causing others to believe in Jesus. Moreover, a reference to the Old Testament should probably also be seen, Psalm 119:142 coming fairly close to John 17:17. For those who are given ears to hear, the Old Testament speaks of Jesus and points the way to him.¹⁷ Perhaps it can be said that the word of the Father to which Jesus refers is the Old Testament rightly understood only in the light of the message which Jesus is and brings.

2.3 JESUS' SANCTIFICATION FOR HIS OWN

In thinking about Jesus' sanctification generally, the basic idea is that the Father sent Jesus into the world for the specific purpose of accomplishing the divine plan of redemption. This would therefore include his perfect active obedience to the Father as well as his death, resurrection, and exaltation. But in 17:19 it seems that a particular aspect of this sanctification is intended, for Jesus speaks of his self-sanctification. Jesus would then not be pointing to his

¹⁷James Montgomery Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1970), 64-65.

general setting apart or consecration by the Father, but to the final stages of this sanctification, especially his imminent death. That this is known as the passive obedience of Christ is no less an obedience. It is marked off from the active obedience of his perfect life, which speaks particularly to the keeping of the whole law of God, because while Jesus was fully committed to the Father's will, he expressed his desire that if at all possible, that will be done through a means other than his suffering and crucifixion (Luke 22:41-44). Nevertheless, it was the will of his Father alone that Jesus had come to do, and if his passion was a necessary part, Jesus would willingly lay down his life of his own accord (John 10:17-18). Certainly when Jesus speaks of his impending death, the glory of his victory over it and subsequent return to his Father is part of this focus (13:30-32; 17:1-5). However, if in speaking of his own sanctification Jesus is thinking of the victims that were offered in sacrifice for sin, and that in his obedience he is functioning as both priest and victim, it may be that here the suffering and death become more prominent.

The second point from 17:19 is that Jesus' sanctification produces the sanctification of his disciples. It is Jesus' obedience in laying down his life for his sheep (10:15) that enables the sanctification—both personal holiness and mission—of his followers. It is also Jesus' sanctification that provides for the coming of the Spirit to be with the disciples and to equip them with all that they need to do the will of the Father and the Son. There is in the flow of redemptive history a linking of Jesus' sanctification and that of his disciples in which they share in Jesus' sufferings and participate in his death. This is surely part of the mystical union with Christ that is found in the Fourth Gospel (15:1; 17:23, 26). Hence it is not only a Pauline trait. Finally, although it is not inherent in v. 19, nor even necessarily implied, it seems relevant to mention that a tight connection between Jesus' sanctification and that of his disciples is experienced literally in martyrdom. For some of God's people throughout church history, it has been his good and perfect will that these saints testify to Christ through their death. The biblical teaching of participating in Christ's death sometimes manifests itself in a literal way. And for them, as well as for the rest of those who belong to Jesus, his self-sanctification paved the way

not only for believers' sanctification of mission, but also to enable them to take their place in the Father's house, wherein the Son abides forever (14:2-3; 8:35).

3. WORSHIPPING IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

It is appropriate for two reasons that the theme of worship concludes this study on truth in John's Gospel. From the perspective of the present chapter on application it is the natural response of one who abides and is sanctified in the truth. And from the point of view of this study as a whole, it is not only the proper response to the truth of the Christian revelation; it is the Christian's divine privilege and glorious joy to live all of life as an act of worship unto him who is the truth. Ultimately, then, the concept of worship extends beyond the formal practice on the Lord's Day to include nothing less than every aspect of life. The Fourth Gospel shows the universal scope of worship in Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman. Thus, this final topic also provides the material which explains how the woman came to be a witness, discussed in chapter three.

3.1 BACKGROUND OF THE PASSAGE

Upon arriving in the Samaritan village of Sychar, Jesus went to Jacob's well to refresh himself from his journey. Having no means of drawing any water for himself, he asked assistance from a Samaritan woman. She is taken back that this Jew would ask her, a Samaritan, for a drink, but already at this early stage Jesus is using the opportunity and guiding the ensuing discussion to reveal his Christological identity to her. He answers her question by saying that if she knew the gift of God and who it is who is requesting this drink, she would have been the one asking for living water that can only be provided by God (v. 10).

The woman understandably believes Jesus is talking about a kind of water that will eliminate her need of coming to Jacob's well (vv. 11, 15). Jesus, however, is not speaking of a fresh, running spring, or any other kind of physical water, for that matter. He is speaking of the salvation that he alone provides, through the internal work of the Spirit (Isa. 12:2-3). This news

would naturally be of interest to the woman's family, and so Jesus tells her to get her husband, knowing perfectly well her sordid personal life. This will draw the woman into a deeper awareness of the identity of this Jewish stranger. Impressed by Jesus' knowledge of her failed relationships, she acknowledges him to be a prophet (v. 19). With such divine abilities, she reasons, perhaps Jesus can settle the worship war between Jews and Samaritans.

3.2 THE MOUNTAIN OF GERIZIM OR THE JERUSALEM TEMPLE?

The animosity between Jews and Samaritans was a long-standing one, going back to the fall of Israel to the Assyrians and the subsequent repopulation of the nation. Pagans were brought in from foreign cities and were instructed how to fear the LORD. But the result was religious syncretism, and as these peoples intermarried the Israelites who remained, these unions produced the Samaritans, a despised people with tainted bloodlines and idolatrous inclinations (II Kings 17:22-41). These elements worked themselves out in a rejection of the Prophets and Writings of the Hebrew canon, as well as a Pentateuch with alternate variants.

Because Samaritans only accepted their version of the Pentateuch, any passages from either the Prophets or the Writings which pointed to Jerusalem's priority were invalid (II Chron. 6:6; Psa. 78:68-69). They believed that early on, in Genesis 12, the foundation was laid for the LORD's dwelling on Mount Gerizim (vv. 6-7). Here at Shechem, God appeared to Abram and promised his descendants the land to which Abram had journeyed. In response, Abram built an altar to the LORD. Although this altar was not on Gerizim itself, the Mount overlooked Shechem, and adequately put the pieces of evidence in place for what Samaritans regarded as proof in Deuteronomy.

Moses presented to Israel the simple terms of God's covenant: blessing for obedience, proclaimed from Gerizim, and curse for disobedience, heralded from Mount Ebal (11:26-32). As Moses' instructions continued in chapter 12, he made reference to a future time when the Israelites "shall seek the LORD at the place which the LORD your God shall choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come" (v. 5). The

Samaritan Pentateuch changed this from a future reference to a past one, thereby referring to the ongoing validity of the place previously chosen by God.¹⁸ Helping to drive this idea was that in the Samaritan Bible language similar to Deuteronomy 27:2-7 appears after the recording of the Ten Commandments, thus connecting the very giving of the Law with Gerizim (which for them is the mount on which the altar is built, as opposed to the Masoretic text's Ebal).¹⁹ So strong, then, was the Samaritan influence of Gerizim that it was even believed to have been on that mount, rather than on Moriah, where Abraham nearly sacrificed Isaac.²⁰

As the Samaritan woman spoke with Jesus, it was this tradition of which she was a part, and in which she solidly placed herself (v. 20). In addition to recognizing the cultural and theological gulf that existed between Jews and Samaritans (v. 9), she also boasted that Jacob was their father (v. 12). She awaited the answer to this divisive question on the proper location of worship. She wanted to know whether the Jews or the Samaritans were correct, firmly convinced that she already knew the answer.

Jesus, however, transcended the question by placing the issue in its appropriate eschatological context.²¹ The fact is, as Tasker observes, that at neither location was worship pure and undefiled.²² The reason is because such worship was centered in the economy of the old covenant. Paul spoke of this covenant's fading glory, and that when it is read there yet remains a veil to be lifted. Such a removal of the veil occurs only in Jesus Christ (II Cor. 3:7-18). And the writer to the Hebrews speaks of the earthly sanctuary and all the elements of the tabernacle as copies, unable to make their worshippers perfect through the blood of bulls and goats offered by a human, and therefore sinful, high priest. But they point the worshippers to the perfect sacrifice of Christ, the mediator of a new covenant, who entered through the greater and more perfect

¹⁸F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel and Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 108.

¹⁹Carson, *op. cit.*, 222.

²⁰John Macdonald, *The Theology of the Samaritans* (London: SCM Press, 1964), 394.

²¹Marianne Meye Thompson speaks of "two eras and their respective manifestations of the presence of God" (*The God of the Gospel of John* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001], 217).

²²Tasker, *op. cit.*, 77.

tabernacle to provide eternal redemption (9:1-10:4). This is why Jesus told the woman that an hour was coming when the Father would be worshipped neither at the temple on Gerizim nor at the one in Jerusalem.

Of the two locations, however, Jerusalem is still preferred, for Jesus did declare that unlike Samaritans, Jews do worship nearer to the truth because salvation proceeds from the promises made to them and are contained in the Scriptures that the Samaritans should have received. One is reminded of that particular portion of Jacob's prophecy concerning his son Judah in Genesis 49:

The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes,
And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples (v. 10).

The ultimate identity of this one is sharpened with Isaiah's prophecy of one who, though descending from David, will reign forever and will be called "Mighty God" (9:6-7). It is this sort of outlook that Paul is echoing when he expresses his deep sorrow for Israel's salvation in Romans 9:1-5.

Granting this, although it is true that Jesus is not directly ordering a renouncing of worship at either location, John McHugh seems to miss the idea in regarding Jesus' words about the Samaritans' worshipping what they do not know as a "sympathetic, even 'ecumenical,' approach." He goes on to explain this by saying that the Samaritans really are worshipping the Father. The reason why Jesus does not call for a renouncing of either their worship on Gerizim or the Jews' worship at the Jerusalem temple is because neither is required to do so, for "the place of worship is irrelevant. Both Jew and Samaritan must acknowledge that God, since he is Father of all, accepts true worship wherever it is offered."²³ One wonders, however, if McHugh is not confusing location with content. The problem was not that worship was being conducted on Gerizim or at the temple in Jerusalem, but that both Samaritans and Jews held that acceptable

²³John McHugh, "In Him was Life," in *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, A.D. 70 to 135*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1992), 133.

worship could only be done at their respective holy site. In a temporal sense, this was true of the Jerusalem temple because salvation is of the Jews. But that is precisely Jesus' point. The times are changing. It is not that the Samaritans really are worshipping the Father and can therefore worship on Gerizim since place is irrelevant. Rather, the location becomes irrelevant—and no less so for the Jews as well—because worship's focus changes with the sending of the Son. The Samaritans worship what they do not know because they have shut themselves out from the rest of God's written revelation under the old covenant. The Jews, for their part, recognize the fullness of God's written revelation in the Tanak, but with the coming of Jesus the focus shifts from the sacrificial system to the incarnate Lamb of God. The place of worship has thus become irrelevant, but not in the sense that one can continue to worship at the previous location according to the accepted modes. Instead, a fundamental shift in worship's centrality and hence meaning has occurred which eliminates the necessity of any particular location. McHugh is correct that God accepts true worship wherever it is offered. But this worship must be true in its content. It is not an ecumenical approach; it calls for both groups to recognize the error (in the Samaritans' case) and fulfillment aspect (in the Jews' case) of their expression and to see that with the advent of Christ the previous traditions must give way to the new eschatological age that he ushers.

3.3 WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

The coming hour of which Jesus speaks in v. 21 is said to be present in v. 23. This statement is not at odds with 17:1, where Jesus begins his prayer by acknowledging that the hour has come. In John 4 the hour as it relates to Jesus' glorification has not yet come. Events must still occur before that hour arrives. But one can speak of Jesus' hour in more general, redemptive-historical terms to describe the fundamental change or paradigm shift that takes place as the old covenant gives way to the new. One application of this is in the nature of worship. Jesus says in v. 23 that with the arrival of this hour worship is to be done in spirit and truth. Those who worship in this

way are the worshippers whom the Father is seeking. Before looking at the idea of worshipping in spirit and truth, two preparatory remarks should be made.

The first point is that it is the Father who is to be worshipped. This intimate name for God is used by Jesus (and never by the Samaritan woman) once in v. 21 and twice in v. 23. It is an important point because it identifies the true God about whom Jesus is speaking. He is not known by people who only acknowledge an alternate form of the Pentateuch. Nor is this God known even by pious Jews if they show themselves to be ignorant of true religion by rejecting the LORD's Messiah. God the Father is known in the revelation of his Son. Therefore the Son must be received if the Father is to be received and true worship is to take place.

The second point is that the Father is one who seeks people to be true worshippers. As has been seen before, while never sacrificing the necessity of human response, the initiative for salvation, sanctification, and worship lies solely with God. Thus, worship is never conducted in an attitude of self-sufficiency or performance. It is the sinner's grateful response to the divine work of the gracious God wrought within by the Spirit. And because worship extends beyond the formal meeting of God's people to all of life, one's whole life is lived with a humble and loving gratitude to God and aims at his glory alone.

Jesus lays the foundation for worship in spirit and truth in v. 24 when he says that such worship is necessary because God is spirit. Because God does not possess a physical body which anchors him to one particular location at any one particular time, worship cannot be thought of in such terms, either. Because of Christ, proper worship is not about whether Gerizim or Jerusalem is the correct place of meeting this God. What is paramount is that such worship be done in spirit and truth. Worship that is offered in this way is consistent with the character of God as spirit.

The commentators are split over what it means to worship "in spirit." The issue is whether the word refers to the Holy Spirit or the human spirit. Brown rather confidently asserts that it "has nothing to do with worshiping God in the inner recesses of one's own spirit; for the Spirit is

the Spirit of God, not the spirit of man, as vs. 24 makes clear.”²⁴ However, that v. 24 makes that meaning clear is not at all apparent. One could make such an assertion if relying only on v. 23. But the addition of v. 24 suggests that “spirit” refers to the human spirit because of the connection made with the fact that God is spirit. If worship “in spirit” is to be taken as worship in “the Holy Spirit,” it would then imply that the first part of the verse is saying that God is the Holy Spirit because a correlation between the verse’s two halves is clearly intended. That simply does not fit the passage, nor the Johannine teaching on the Spirit as a whole. If the human spirit is in mind, the idea would then be that since God, as spirit, cannot be confined to a particular place of worship, it then follows that those who belong to him through the revealing work of Jesus are not bound to such centers of worship, either. What matters is not location—and the arguments that arise over it—but the spiritual life found in the inner recesses of the individual who is united to Jesus Christ and therefore to the Father. This in no way is advocating the erroneous idea that corporate worship is no longer necessary. It is to say that Christ’s coming has rendered meaningless attempts to monopolize God and his revelation according to external observance. But arguing for this approach does not ignore the presence of the Holy Spirit. The internal spiritual life which enables such spiritual worship is operative because of the Spirit’s presence and work, and one cannot worship as Jesus commands without this.

Unlike “spirit,” “truth” does not cause difficulty in interpretation, and is understood as it has been throughout this study. It is God’s final and definitive revelation of himself in the incarnate Logos of Jesus of Nazareth. True worship can only occur because of Christ and his accomplished work, applied to the individual by the power of the Spirit. And worship’s content will be that of the same, resulting in praise to the glory of God the Father. Authentic biblical worship is therefore strongly Trinitarian. As Whitacre explains: “So worshiping *in spirit and truth* is related to the very character of God and the identity of Christ. It is to worship in union

²⁴Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, two vols. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1966, 1970), I-XII: 180.

with the Father, who is spirit, and according to the revelation of the Son, who is the truth. Indeed, it is to be taken into union with God through the Spirit (chaps. 14-17).”²⁵

Consequently, Freed’s belief, stemming from his view of a relationship between John and Qumran, that the main focus of vv. 23-24 is ethical, seen in the daily practice of right attitude and action, fails to appreciate the theological depth present in Jesus’ teaching on worship.²⁶ The ethical dimension is not to be denied, for corporate worship leads to distinctively Christian behavior, which as has already been stated, is itself a form of worship. But in John 4 the focus is not ethics, but rather the transformation that takes place concerning worship as a result of the crossing over from the old covenant to the new. The focus is profoundly on the dramatic event in redemptive history, namely, the Christ-event, and how it inaugurates true Christian worship.

3.4 THE UNIVERSALITY OF WORSHIP

Gail R. O’Day observes that in v. 20 the woman speaks of Samaritan worship in past and present tenses. Jesus, however, focuses on the future change in worship, which in some measure has begun because of his arrival.²⁷ At the same time, the new worship which Jesus brings is thoroughly consistent with Old Testament prophecy. Foundational for this new worship is the promise of future salvation, which was discussed in the last chapter when considering the Holy Spirit in John 3. Isaiah writes of a time when the Spirit will be poured out as water on a thirsty land (44:3). This of course is tied with the internal work of Jeremiah 31:29-34 and Ezekiel 36:25-27. As has also been mentioned, Joel 2:28-32 is important because it indicates that the Spirit will be poured out on those outside the Old Testament covenant community of Israel.

Taking this foundation and applying it to worship, Malachi wrote that a time would come when pure worship would be offered to the LORD in every place, and that God’s name would be

²⁵Rodney A. Whitacre, *John* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 107.

²⁶Edwin D. Freed, “The Manner of Worship in John 4:23f,” in *Search the Scriptures: New Testament Studies in Honor of Raymond T. Stamm*, ed. J. M. Myers, O. Reimherr, and H. N. Bream (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 46-47.

²⁷Gail R. O’Day, *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 68.

great among the nations (1:11). Proper worship would be done not only by Israel, but by all who call upon the LORD, which is what happens in the advent of Christ. The firstfruits of this universal worship is seen in such responses as the Samaritan woman and those from her town who believed. As J. E. Botha explains: “Worship becomes universal and divisions of the past are suspended, the work of harvesting by the disciples is described in the same terms, and the belief of the Samaritans is part of a greater whole.”²⁸ This universal intention of Jesus is also seen in his statement that his food is doing the will of the Father because this divine will desires worship from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation.²⁹

Following the arrival of Jesus’ “hour” and its completion with the risen Lord’s ascension, a grand extension of this universal worship occurred at Pentecost. The age of the early church had begun, and the Christian Gospel would be embraced by those from every corner of the Roman Empire and beyond. But as powerful and far-reaching as that expression of worship is, the fullest fruition awaits its eschatological fulfillment. In Revelation 5, John is shown a scene of the throne of God and of him who has a scroll with seven seals. No one is able to open it and John begins to weep. Just then one of the elders tells John to stop weeping, for there is one who alone can break the scroll’s seals: the Lion of Judah, the Root of David. John looks and sees this one and notices that it is a lamb, and more than that, a lamb looking as if it had been slain. After taking the scroll, in response the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fall down in worship before this Lamb. Singing a new song, they proclaimed him to be worthy of breaking the seals because he was slain and purchased people for God from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. By virtue of their redemption they are made fit to be a kingdom and priests to God. Then John looked and saw a great throng of angels saying as one voice that the Lamb is worthy to receive power, riches, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing. Finally the whole of the

²⁸J. E. Botha, *Jesus and the Samaritan Woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 185.

²⁹Hendrikus Boers, *Neither on this Mountain Nor in Jerusalem: A Study of John 4* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 179-180.

created order worships by ascribing to him who is on the throne and to the Lamb blessing, honor, glory, and dominion forever and ever.

This is the Christian's hope, founded on the unbreakable promises of God's covenant with his people. And all the blessings that flow to the believer come because of the person and work of Jesus, the slain Lamb, who as the revealed truth of God is worthy of all worship in spirit and truth.

CONCLUSION

It was indicated at the beginning of this study that the concept of revelation is foundational to Christian theology because without it, nothing would be known about God or his ways at all. And what God has revealed is necessarily accurate and therefore trustworthy. While this is all correct in investigating the Johannine idea of truth, it goes beyond that because this divinely-revealed truth is the eternal Logos become incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. Truth's content, therefore, is not only a verbal message; it is an active message that consists in who Jesus is, which is the basis for the unique words and works that comprise his redemptive mission. He alone is the unique Son who, having come from the bosom of the Father, has made him known.

Consequently, Jesus is also the preeminent witness to this divine truth precisely because his is a self-authenticating witness which ultimately points to the Father's will in sending the Son. As Andrew Lincoln observes, "The truth of God and God's cause depends on the truth of Jesus' witness and his cause."³⁰ One can only know the Father through the Son, and when one looks to the Son, because he always honors his Father, one experiences the reality that to know the Son in genuine saving faith is to know and be received by the Father. Likewise, just as the Son's self-witness ultimately points to the Father, so the Father bears witness to the Son. Christ's works, the Old Testament Scriptures, and John the Baptist all serve as aspects of the divine witness of the Father. Also part of this unified, divine witness is the Spirit, whose ministry extends to

³⁰Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 224.

Christians and the world, what was referred to as his internal and external witness. Lastly, there are human witnesses who also serve to point to the truth of the Father's revelation in Jesus. Moreover, their testimony has been recorded as part of the New Testament Scriptures, thus rendering such witness to be of divine origin and intent, and therefore part of God's revelation. All this means that one cannot talk about truth in the Gospel of John without recognizing the importance of the idea of revelation and the related concept of witness.

This knowledge of the truth can never be relegated merely to the level of intellectual profit. It will produce a life that is thoroughly committed to abiding in Jesus. Inseparable from this will be sanctification in the truth, observed in a holiness of life and a setting apart unto mission. Also transformed is worship, which is now offered in spirit and truth as it focuses on Christ and his accomplished work. All of life will serve to honor the Father and the Son, resulting in a true and faithful witness throughout the world.

This present study sought to investigate the Johannine conception of truth within the context of the Old Testament as the background, with the aim of emphasizing the universal application of this key idea in the Fourth Gospel. Though not adequately observed in the literature, it is the author's conviction that an Old Testament background and a universal application are not incompatible, and the present study sought to demonstrate that belief. Moreover, this thorough commitment to the Old Testament combined with the desire to communicate the Christian Gospel to those outside the fold of Judaism is consistent with what is observed in redemptive history, even anticipated in the Old Testament itself. In addition, it is also true that, with regard to the purpose of the Fourth Gospel, a missionary or evangelistic focus is once again becoming popular. This of course should not minimize the important edificatory purpose which John's Gospel has served throughout church history. But the resurgence of an evangelistic aim helps support the justification of the thesis of the present study. Particularly striking and discussed in chapter two was the observation that the ideas associated with John's conception of truth would connect well with readers or hearers outside the reaches of Judaism. And it does this, not by altering the Christian message, but by showing how these terms find their fullest meaning in

Jesus Christ. Though rooted in the Old Testament, the effect is that these symbols “evoke associations from various quarters and transform them to convey a distinctive message. The effect is that Johannine symbolism may be approached in various ways, but it can be comprehended only in Christian terms.”³¹

Related to this is the necessary connection that exists between the Johannine themes of revelation/witness and truth. If one is to understand truth in the Gospel of John, one must know how the twin themes of revelation and witness relate to it. Without this, a thorough knowledge of the truth is not achieved, and this would adversely hinder one’s appreciation for how the Evangelist is seeking to speak to those outside of Judaism. Prior to this study, this relationship had not been explored comprehensively.

Lastly, a proper understanding of Jesus as both the revelation and revealer of truth must lead to a committed desire to love God with one’s whole being and to express such love in the faithful obedience of his commands.

The present study revealed to the author some other areas in the Fourth Gospel that deserve more attention than could be given. Johannine studies could benefit from more work being done regarding the relationship between the ideas of truth and light, again with the Old Testament as the commanding background. One might also wish to incorporate the rest of the Johannine corpus in such a study. Along the same lines, one could perform a similar analysis using the idea of life.

Also profitable would be a study that seeks to defend the historical and theological integrity concerning the consistency of John and the Synoptics. This would no doubt involve a considerable commitment to understanding how this topic has been treated from the rise of critical approaches to the present. While this subject would certainly involve significant theological and exegetical analysis, no less important would be the historical evaluation.

³¹Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 234.

Another possibility would be to look at the themes of redemption and sacrificial death in the Fourth Gospel. It may be that to justify a major study, one would need to consider the rest of the Johannine corpus, paying attention, for example, to the use of the terms “Lamb of God” and “Lamb” as seen in the Gospel and Revelation.

Lastly, the use of the Old Testament in the New remains a prominent topic, particularly in Pauline studies. Johannine studies could also benefit from more of this attention. The present work demonstrated some of the Old Testament’s presence in John. However, quite a bit more could also be done in a separate and focused study.