

Thirteenth and Fourteenth Summary of the New Testament John and 1st John

The Gospel of John is symbolized by the eagle. Its rich word-pictures of the Lord Jesus Christ produce a soaring and exalted panoramic that leaves all doubt behind: Jesus Christ is truly God in the flesh! Notice how St. John describes the true divinity and humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:1 & 14) The Gospel of John (as well as the first epistle, 1st John) refute docetism, the heresy that claimed Jesus only "appeared" to be a human being and would not allow the divine to touch the flesh of man. So what did St. John do? As you've just read from John 1:1 & 14, he makes it clear that the eternal, divine Word "became flesh." This is why the ancient Christian Church asked, "How could Christ heal what he did not possess?" If Christ was only partially human, the part he did not share with us could not be healed. It was Gregory of Nazianzus who said, "What Christ did not take, he did not redeem." St. John already knew this. At the same time, St. John includes the exalted "I AM" statements. Here they are in order of appearance:

1. I am the Bread of Life (6:35-48)
2. I am the Living Bread (6:51)
3. I am the Light of the World (8:12)
4. I am from above, I am not of this world (8:23)
5. I am the Gate for the Sheep (10:7)
6. I am the Good Shepherd (10:11)
7. I am the Resurrection and the Life (11:25)
8. I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:6)
9. I am the True Vine (15:1)

I must say that whenever I dialog with someone who has never read the New Testament and they ask me to recommend a first book or letter to read, my answer is always the same: St. John's Gospel. Not only is it written in the most simplistic Greek that translates into a simple English, but it contains these "visuals" so to speak, word-pictures that speak a thousand words about the Lord Jesus Christ.

St. John's Gospel is also known as "The Maverick Gospel," since it does not share the "synoptic" status of the other three gospels. It is in many ways unique. For example, John's Gospel is the only one containing the so-called "Farewell Discourse" of the Lord Jesus (chapters 13-17). The discourse includes intimate details (chapter 13) in connection to the night in which Jesus' was betrayed and arrested before His crucifixion; and the discourse supplies fascinating details (vital to the Church on earth) about the ministry of The Holy Spirit in chapters 14-16. Chapter 17 records the "High Priestly Prayer" of the Lord Jesus Christ which includes His prayer for you, the Christian here on earth today! Jesus prayed, "My prayer is not for them [the disciples] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (17:20-21) Again, this is how Jesus prayed for you! /// John's Gospel is delightfully extensive in covering so many themes, but here are a few that are pretty much indispensable:

1. John 3:16 contains two aspects of our justification (an objective and subjective sense). It includes an "objective" sense in that it teaches that God loved the WORLD in connection with the saving work of Jesus Christ. That is, our salvation in Christ is universal in the sense that Christ died for EVERYONE; this is the objective truth of the Gospel. As a result, we may share with ANYONE the accomplished fact: Jesus has paid for their sins. That is, it is wrong to say that Jesus WILL PAY for your sins IF you believe. NO, all sins are paid for period. Again, this is accomplished action, so to speak in terms of forgiveness existing as a potential benefit obscures the significance of the Gospel. /// The second half of John 3:16 contains the necessary truth that there is only one way in which to BENEFIT from this objective Gospel: we must have SUBJECTIVE faith. We must trust in Christ as our Savior from the heart. This is the only way in which the objective Gospel may actually have personal application: through faith; "that those who believe in him shall not perish but have eternal life." /// Now here's the key to understanding the relationship between the two: It is the clear proclamation, preaching, teaching, sharing, etc. of the FIRST sense that the Holy Spirit uses to CREATE the SECOND sense. In other words, the message that God loved the world through Jesus Christ (and everything Jesus did to save us) is the message that ACTUALLY CREATES SAVING FAITH! God draws us to Christ through this universal Gospel. When we hear it, God creates faith through this Word of Christ. (Rom 10:17)

2. John 5:24: This one is simple, but HUGE: It answers the question, "When does eternal life begin for someone?" Answer: It begins not in heaven, but when that person hears Christ's Word and BELIEVES. At the point of faith in Christ, that person has "crossed over from death to life."

3. Chapter 6, the Bread of Life Discourse: This discourse robs people of the notion that there is any human contribution to salvation. John 6:29 turns the question of "What must we do to do the works God requires?" on its head with the answer, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." That is, the only work involved in salvation is God's work and this passage teaches that FAITH ITSELF IS A GIFT; FAITH IS "THE WORK OF GOD." Jesus goes on to teach that "whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (vs. 54) The concept of this metaphor [note: some theologians believe John 6 is not a metaphor, but points to the Sacrament] becoming real on the night Jesus is betrayed is very important (Schuler, pg. 359). That is, Jesus will actually give His true body and blood in His Supper/Holy Communion for this very thing (the eating of His body and drinking of His blood) to happen. I want you to note, however, the reaction of the vast majority of the people who were following him: "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" (vs. 60) Then at verse 66 we have recorded that "[f]rom this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him." So many people have this impression that Jesus' popularity just sky-rocketed as He received more and more followers over time. Just the opposite is true. By speaking the truth and revealing who He truly was and what His true mission was, Jesus offended people left and right. He lost disciples and the number of those against Him increased. This is an important reality-check for those who would follow Jesus. John 15:20: "'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also."

4. John 8: Shows the significance of the "I AM" statements! They take us back to God

speaking to Moses in Exodus 3 where God reveals Himself as "I AM." Jesus says, "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham [who had been on earth 2000 years before Jesus was on earth] was born, I am!" Jesus here claims preexistence (an attribute of God) while possessing the Name of God. Those who heard it knew exactly what He was saying and as Scripture says, "picked up stones to stone him." (vs. 59) That is, they considered Jesus' words as blasphemous, understanding that He was claiming to be God.

5. Chapter 10 is renowned as the Good Shepherd chapter of the Bible. God's believers called "sheep" are described by Jesus Himself this way: "[They] listen to [His] voice; [Jesus] knows them, and they follow [Him]." (vs. 27) What a simple and beautiful description of a Christian: 1. The Christian listens to the Word; 2. As a result, they have assurance that they are known by Jesus; and 3. In this confidence, they follow Jesus. That's it!

6. Chapter 11: Is there now any doubt what resurrection is? Our physical bodies die and then those same bodies are raised. Chapter 5 proclaims this truth for what will occur on the last day (see 5:28-29).

7. Chapter 14:13-14: Perhaps the most straight-forward and powerful promise in regard to prayer. Many people, however, ignore the qualifier: "in my name." It makes all the difference in the world. This is not a promise for carte blanche (in terms of sinful whims and selfish desires), but it speaks to the child of God seeking the will of God and desiring the things of God. Furthermore, verses 17 and 23 teach point blank that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit live within believers. This is mind-blowing, but true. This is what the Church refers to as "the mystical union." While this is never to be confused with Hindu or New Age teaching that make human beings become one with their concepts of deity (no!) -- that is, the Christian teaching always maintains distinction between Creator and creation -- nevertheless, there is a communion, an intimate walking together between God and child of God. As a result, the Holy Spirit is your "advocate;" He is your comforter and helper. He speaks for you so that what is said against you by the accuser (the evil one) is overcome as the Holy Spirit keeps you in Christ.

8. Finally, John 20:31 states the purpose of God's written revelation to us: "that you [all of us] may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

1st John is known as the "love letter" in God's Word, the Holy Bible. It describes true love perhaps better than any other book or letter in Scripture. God's love is made complete in the Christian who "obeys" the Word. (1st John 2:5) This "obeying" is not a return to the Law of the Old Testament, but an extension of being in Christ and therefore, living in His love. That is, this is another way of describing faith in Jesus, and the fruit of faith! Such a life will inherently also do those "good works prepared in advance for us to do." (Eph. 2:10) Thus, a practical obedience is also demonstrated by grace through faith in Christ. However, this is not a new legalism, but a life in the Word and therefore in Christ. John does not hesitate to speak of the practical results of such a life: "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did." (1st John 2:6) Thus, there is some Scriptural import for WWJD (What

Would Jesus Do)? However, John is not describing mere imitation, but a life that is united to Christ. Indeed, in such a life it is Jesus Himself who acts and supplies the power (consider the metaphor in John 15 of Christ as the true vine and His children as the branches). As a result of being in Christ, we love our "brother." (2:10) and this proves that we live in the light (of Christ). By the way, this does not contradict the fact that we are called to love all people, but John does give special emphasis to fellow believers. The antithesis to love for God and brother (male and female) is to "love the world or anything in the world." (2:15) This kind of evil love is defined: "the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does." (2:16) God has "lavished" His love on us (3:1) and as a result we no longer "continue to sin" (3:6 & 9), or serve it as if it is our master defining our lives. John is not contradicting himself in respect to 1:8-9. We confess our sin daily, but the point here is that it is no longer dominates us. That is, we do not live in it habitually. Much to the contrary, the Christian daily confesses sin and resists sin. If we did "continue to sin (give in to it without confession and resistance)," we would declare our love for sin as our god. We would therefore reject God's gift of life and choose eternal death (3:14-15). Love, however, is clearly defined in the sacrifice of our Savior Jesus (3:16) and this leads us to action in loving others, esp. those in need. When we love one another, we know that we are born of God and know God (4:7) And to know God is to know that God Himself IS love (4:8 & 16). Love is clearly defined in the Gospel itself: "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." (4:9-10) As a result of such love, we also ought to love one another and this is how we know that God lives in us (4:11-12). It is comforting to note that our power to be able to love comes from God's love (4:19). With such love from God, we are enabled to respond to God's commands in what Lutheran theologians call "the new obedience." Here, the commandments of God are not seen as obligation (his commands are not burdensome, 5:3), but as response to God's love, the natural flow of the new creation in Christ. 1st John also contains a FANTASTIC promise about prayer (5:14-15), just be sure to note how such prayer is described: "according to [God's] will." In Christ, Dr. Espinosa