

# THE MORAL VISION OF JOHN

(Midwestern Lecture #1)

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In a world turned upside down, where the killing of the unborn is cast as the virtuous expression of a woman's "right to choose," where same-sex marriage is touted as the pinnacle of interpersonal fidelity and commitment and those who oppose it on the grounds of the unequivocal teaching of both Testaments of Scripture are branded as intolerant, bigoted, and enemies of morality, it seems more important than ever to strive to regain our moral compass.

Where shall we turn in our effort to reset this compass and to reorient our moral vision? Shall we listen to the "talking heads" and self-appointed "experts" of the cultural and media elite who parade their wisdom night after night on cable television news panels? Will our best guides be legislators, or judges, including those on the United States Supreme Court? Anyone who has followed the public debate surrounding the pressing issues of our day for any length of time will concur that help for adjudicating these questions will not come from these individuals or institutions.

Emphatically, there is only one reliable source and authority for our ethical reflections and formulations: God's inspired and inerrant Holy Word. To be sure, Scripture does not explicitly deal with some of the moral dilemmas of our day, such as cloning, stem cell research, or other ethical quandaries brought about by the advances of modern medicine. Yet while Scripture is not exhaustive, it is sufficient in that it provides an ethical framework for decision-making that postmodern man ignores at his great peril.

Time does not permit me to look at biblical ethics at large. Nor will I deal with one particular ethical issue confronting us. My focus will be more limited, and my scope more general. In my quest to track the Bible's moral compass, I will seek to determine Jesus' ethics by studying one of the four canonical Gospels, the Gospel of John. It is my hope that such a study will ground our ethical reflection more profoundly in the soil of Scripture's teaching and of Jesus' example.

## Preliminary Considerations

Before turning to a demonstration of this thesis, however, I must spend a few minutes trying to clear away and adjudicate several important preliminary matters. First, when I speak about "John's" moral vision, what do I mean? In recent years it has been increasingly suggested that behind John's Gospel stands a community that traces its origins to the apostle but that is engaged in its own struggle against a non-messianic Jewish synagogue. This community, which is responsible for John's Gospel, it is alleged, was expelled from the synagogue on account of its conviction that Jesus was in fact the Messiah.<sup>1</sup>

This reconstruction, also known as the "Johannine community hypothesis" in its various expressions, is in fact quite different from the traditional identification of the author of John's Gospel as the apostle John. With regard to my present topic, if the "Johannine community

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<sup>1</sup> The classic expression of this thesis is found in J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968; rev. ed. Nashville: Abingdon, 1979). See also Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist, 1979). Unfortunately, Hays's treatment in *Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), esp. 146–47, presupposes the Martyn-Brown version of the "Johannine community hypothesis" (see *ibid.*, 157, n. 15), identifying as the life-setting of John's Gospel—and ethics—the "communal crisis of identity" precipitated by the community's expulsion from the synagogue (which, according to Hays, is "referred to three times in the course of the Gospel"), which renders the Gospel's "exhortations for love within the community sound less exclusionary and more like an urgent appeal for unity within an oppressed minority community." See also Hays's comments on p. 154.

hypothesis” were true, we should speak no longer of *John’s* moral vision—except perhaps in a fairly distant sense—but of the moral vision of the *Johannine community* in light of its recent experience of synagogue expulsion.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the connection with *Jesus’* moral vision would be significantly more remote than if the apostle John were the Gospel’s author.

This is not the place to engage in a full-fledged critique of the “Johannine community hypothesis.”<sup>3</sup> For our present purposes, it has to suffice to say that this hypothesis rests on a rather precarious foundation and is not able to bear the weight that is put upon it by its adherents. For this reason the “Johannine community hypothesis,” which at one time has enjoyed virtually paradigmatic status in Johannine studies, has in recent years been subjected to serious critique by some of the world’s foremost biblical historians and been abandoned even by some of its most ardent supporters.<sup>4</sup>

Problems associated with the “Johannine community hypothesis” in its various expressions include (but are not limited) to the following. The first is the “mirror-reading,” “two-level” hermeneutic practiced by many of its adherents.<sup>5</sup> The most egregious example of this is the reference to synagogue expulsion in John 9:22 (see also 12:42; 16:2). On the basis of the

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<sup>2</sup> A case in point is Allen Dwight Callahan, *A Love Supreme: A History of the Johannine Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), who says the Gospel has a writer but no author and that the epistles were written by an “anonymous editorial board of disciples” (p. 3). According to Callahan, love vs. doctrine represents the “root conflict” in the Johannine community, and the writer’s answer is that love, not doctrine, is to be the focus of the “Johannine community.” But a brief look at 2 John 9–10 should lie the matter to rest. See the perceptive review by Scott Shidemantle in *JETS* 48/4 (2005): forthcoming.

<sup>3</sup> See Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 3.

<sup>4</sup> See esp. Martin Hengel, *Die johanneische Frage* (WUNT 67; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993); Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for all Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); and Robert Kysar, “Expulsion from the Synagogue: A Tale of a Theory” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Toronto, November 23–26, 2002). See also the stunning virtual absence of reference to the “Johannine community hypothesis” in the recent monograph *Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums* (ed. Jörg Frey and Udo Schnelle; WUNT 175; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> The original use of this term is found in the writings of J. Louis Martyn, esp. the second edition of *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (1979). Unfortunately, the method is also embraced by Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 153–54.

presumption that the Gospel first and foremost tells about the history of the Johannine community rather than about Jesus' earthly ministry it is argued that the reference to synagogue expulsion in John 9:22 is anachronistic—it refers to the situation in around A.D. 90, not the time of Jesus' ministry in the A.D. 30s and the formerly blind man who is the overt subject of synagogue expulsion.<sup>6</sup>

However, this kind of reading seems to implicate the author (or authors) of John's Gospel in an improper retrojection of a practice into the days of Jesus' earthly ministry that according to those scholars did not in fact occur until decades later. While this may be true with regard to a concerted, formal policy as to how to deal with members of Jewish synagogues who confessed Jesus as Messiah, the incident in John 9 clearly represents an impromptu decision by the Pharisees to expel the man in order to discourage further growth of the Jesus movement. The other two references to synagogue expulsion refer to people's *fear* that they might be cast out of the synagogue (John 12:42) and Jesus' prediction that synagogue expulsion would be a destiny faced by his followers *in the future* (John 16:2). None of these passages speak of the kind of settled formal policy with regard to synagogue expulsion that some date to the A.D. 90s. Hence the charges of anachronism in the Johannine passages referring to synagogue expulsion evaporate when checked out more closely in context, and the entire hermeneutic of a "two-level reading" of John's Gospel finds no warrant in John 9:22, the passage most often cited in support of such an interpretive strategy. The obvious implication from the failure of the "Johannine community hypothesis" for the present study is that it continues to be appropriate to speak of "John's" moral vision rather than that of a later, more remotely related Johannine community.

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<sup>6</sup> But see the critique by D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 83–85, 369–72.

A second preliminary consideration relates to the reliability of John's Gospel. Again, this is not the place to attempt a rehabilitation of the integrity of the Gospel's witness. The last few years have seen the publication of several significant works, including Craig Blomberg's *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel* (over against Maurice Casey's *Is John's Gospel True?*) and my own commentaries on John in the Baker Exegetical and Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary series,<sup>7</sup> which have demonstrated in some detail the trustworthiness of John's witness. It is no longer tenable to dichotomize between the Synoptics as interested in history and John as concerned with theology, as if the latter concern involved a disregard for history, especially in light of John's emphasis on eyewitness and truthfulness.<sup>8</sup> We may therefore proceed in the confidence that by looking at John's Gospel we will discover not only *John's* ethic, but also a reliable representation of *Jesus'* ethic, albeit refracted through the lenses of John's own perception and theological thought.

A third prolegomenon relates to John's relationship to the Synoptics. It is sometimes claimed that John's ethic differs significantly from that of the other Gospel writers. John, it is argued, similar to the Qumran community stressed the need for mutual love among Jesus' followers, but did not instruct believers to love their neighbor, more broadly defined, as does Luke, or even their enemies, as in the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>9</sup> John's vision was sectarian, while

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<sup>7</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *The Reliability of John's Gospel* (Leicester: Apollos, 2001); Köstenberger, *John* (BECNT); *idem*, "John," in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (ed. Clinton E. Arnold; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 2.2–216.

<sup>8</sup> See also Richard Bauckham, "John for Readers of Mark," in *The Gospels for all Christians*, 147–71; Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Jesus as a Rabbi in the Fourth Gospel," *BBR* 8 (1998): 97–128; and Leon Morris, *Studies in the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969).

<sup>9</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 139, cites as examples Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus* (trans. Gerhard Krodel; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 59; J. L. Houlden, *Ethics and the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 36; and Jack T. Sanders, *Ethics in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 100. See also the discussion in Hays, *ibid.*, 145.

that of the other evangelists transcended narrow intracommunitarian concerns.<sup>10</sup> The problem with this portrayal that is most immediately obvious, however, is the strong emphasis on mission in John's Gospel. While not denying the existence of a strong dualism between believers and the world in John, the Gospel does not urge hostility or retreat, but rather evangelistic outreach in keeping with Jesus' own practice and in obedience to his parting commission. Hence John famously refers to God's love for the world prompting the sending of his one-of-a-kind Son, and when he tells his fellow believers not to love the world, this relates merely to the allures and temptations emanating from it rather than shutting down the believing community's mission in and to the world.<sup>11</sup> While John's moral vision may therefore be said to be unique and distinctive, it complements that of the other evangelists rather than standing in actual conflict with it.

Fourth, to set the framework for our study below, it will be helpful to note that the literary investigation of John's Gospel has been launched in full force with R. Alan Culpepper's 1983 monograph *The Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, in which the author analyzes the Johannine narrative in keeping with now widely accepted literary categories such as plot, characterization, implied author and reader, narrator, and so on. Culpepper's study is not without its problems. Not without some justification, he has been charged with imposing characteristics of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century novel onto the biblical material.<sup>12</sup> Even more importantly, Culpepper studies the text in

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<sup>10</sup> Traces of this illegitimate stereotype are found in Hays's speaking of the "strongly sectarian character of the Johannine [moral] vision" (*Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 139) and of conceding that "the sectarian character of this material is undeniable" (p. 140).

<sup>11</sup> Having said this, it is clear that John's definition of mission is not that mission is "everything the church is sent into the world to do," as John R. W. Stott famously wrote in *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1975), 30, but Spirit-led, evangelistic outreach that preaches forgiveness of sins on account of Jesus' vicarious cross-death. See David J. Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> See esp. the critique by D. A. Carson in *TrinJ* 4 (1983): 122–26, partly reproduced in Carson, *John*, 63–68,

virtual isolation from its historical moorings, neglecting to ask questions regarding real-life referents of characters featured in the Johannine narrative.<sup>13</sup>

While the notion of textual autonomy is in fact problematic, for unduly reductionistic, Culpepper's study demonstrates the coherence and cohesiveness of John's Gospel as a finished literary product.<sup>14</sup> This calls into question competing literary theories of a source or redaction-critical nature that claim to have uncovered various layers of tradition belonging to different authors, periods, or schools.<sup>15</sup> The (unforeseen) benefit of Culpepper's work, then, is that his study establishes, albeit by somewhat doubtful means, John's literary integrity, so that it is entirely plausible and defensible to accept at the very outset of our literary study of John's moral vision the notion of textual integrity and coherence and to analyze literarily the final text of the Gospel without undue preoccupation with alleged "seams" (*aporiae*) or layers of tradition.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, a disclaimer is in order. While taking a literary approach to the investigation of John's moral vision, the present essay proceeds in the conviction that the literary presentation of a given biblical theme is not an end in itself but rather a means to an end. What is more, the end does not justify the means—our literary method of evaluation should be suitable for the subject of investigation. The end of literary study is theology, the apprehension of a biblical writer's theological message.<sup>17</sup> So if some of the following paper is taken up with drawing out various

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<sup>13</sup> This is also a weakness of the exceedingly influential work by Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

<sup>14</sup> This is insightfully noted by Carson, *John*, 67.

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., the work of Robert Fortna or the later Raymond Brown.

<sup>16</sup> See the brief discussion of "Literary Foundations" in Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 42–44.

<sup>17</sup> In my classes, and in my forthcoming hermeneutics text, I employ the figure of the "hermeneutical triad": history, literature, and theology, with the first two elements at the base and theology at the apex.

theological implications, the reason is that theology is the goal of the Bible's literary presentation—the text in its particular literary expression is but the form, the vehicle, the means.

Having established that we may indeed expect to find in John's Gospel an expression of John's moral vision, and, in fact, Jesus' vision; having affirmed the distinctive, yet complementary contribution of John's ethical outlook to the New Testament canon; and having established the limitations and parameters of the literary investigation of the particular theological theme with which we are concerned, we turn now to a closer examination of John's moral vision.

### An Inventory of Johannine Ethical Vocabulary and Preliminary Investigations

Texts are made up of words, so literary analysis properly starts with *specific terms* used in a given piece of writing. In exploring John's moral vision, therefore, it will be useful to screen the Gospel for potential ethical vocabulary. It will also be instructive to see how one or several concepts are developed in the Johannine narrative in form of a *literary theme* or cluster of related themes. One important literary principle that will guide us here is to see how the stories John included demonstrate or embody moral examples that the reader is expected to emulate (you could call this the “incarnational angle” of John's moral vision).<sup>18</sup> Indeed, it is a well-acknowledged general literary principle that writers embody or incarnate their meanings, in the present instance ethical meanings, in concrete literary forms.

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<sup>18</sup> Though see the cautions registered below. For a critique of the “incarnational model” of mission as applied to John's Gospel see Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 212–17.

While this methodology seems sound in principle, however, it is not easily carried out in practice with regard to determining the Johannine ethic. There are at least three difficulties. First, one might seek to view John's moral vision through the lens of his presentation of Jesus' *signs and major discourses*, which makes up the bulk of chapters 1–12. The problem with this, however, is that Jesus' signs are consistently presented as *messianic* in nature (e.g., 2:11; 4:54; 12:36; 20:30–31), so that it is unclear how the “*signs*” could provide a *pattern of ethical behavior* to be emulated by Jesus' followers.

As Richard Hays notes,

The difficulty, however, is how this formal assertion of Jesus as ethical pattern is to be unpacked in terms of specific behaviors. Jesus in the Fourth Gospel does not actually do much of anything except make grandiloquent revelatory speeches. The actions that he does perform are primarily of a miraculous character: changing water into wine, healing the blind and lame, and raising Lazarus from the dead. Can these serve as patterns for the community's action?<sup>19</sup>

The fact that the term *sēmeion* (“sign”) is never used in John's Gospel with reference to Jesus' followers (the reference to believers' “greater works” than Jesus in John 14:12 notwithstanding) also seems to suggest that founding John's ethic on Jesus' “signs” as narrated in the first half of John's Gospel would be rather precarious.<sup>20</sup>

Second, not only the “signs,” but also Jesus' *discourses* and *major dialogues with individuals* in the Fourth Gospel are primarily devoted to *messianic revelation* and the

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 143.

<sup>20</sup> On Jesus' “signs” in John's Gospel see Andreas J. Köstenberger, “The Seventh Johannine Sign: A Study in John's Christology,” *BBR* 5 (1995): 87–103.

*impartation of important spiritual truths* rather than to *ethical instruction*. This will become clear in our study of Jesus' interaction with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman in John 3 and 4 below.

Third, the literary exploration of John's moral vision in the Johannine narrative is also rendered more difficult by the *seeming delay of the full expression of John's ethic until fairly late in the Gospel*. The first twelve chapters of John's Gospel are primarily designed to show the Jewish rejection of Jesus' messianic mission (see esp. John 12:36–41); only in John 13 does Jesus seem to turn his attention more explicitly to the ethical instruction of his followers.<sup>21</sup>

What is John's moral vision, then? As mentioned, a good place to begin is taking inventory of the ethical vocabulary in John's Gospel. In doing so, however, one encounters yet another difficulty: the virtually complete absence of terms conveying a conventional understanding of ethics and morality, including expressions such as "repent" or "repentance," a reference to believers' "works," or the words "righteousness" or "righteous."<sup>22</sup> It quickly becomes clear that John's ethic proceeds along rather different lines than the conventional definition of morality. Rather than focus on moral integrity or the need for righteous conduct, both the Gospel and the epistles reveal an ethic that is primarily centered on love. Love terminology, in turn, interfaces with vocabulary related to commandment-keeping and mission.

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<sup>21</sup> At a closer look, this should not surprise us. If Nicodemus' and the Jews' greatest need was spiritual regeneration; if the Samaritans' greatest need was worship in spirit and truth; and if the Gentiles' greatest need was to be drawn to Jesus subsequent to his exaltation at the cross; it stands to reason that teaching Nicodemus, or the Samaritan woman, or the Gentile centurion, on their need for Christlike love would have been premature. Since Jesus' love commandment presupposes regeneration and faith in Jesus as God's Son, it is entirely appropriate that his explicit teaching on the subject is delayed until a later time.

<sup>22</sup> "Repentance" vocabulary (such as *metanoia*, "repentance," or *metanoēō*, "repent") is completely absent. The five instances of terms related to "righteousness" (*dikaios*, "righteous," *dikaiosynē*, "righteousness") are not relevant. Regarding believers' "works," see the telling interchange in John 6:28–29 which identifies faith in Jesus as the only "work" required. The reference to believers' "greater works" than Jesus in John 14:12 is no real exception.

A closer look at “love” terminology in John’s Gospel also confirms our initial impression that John’s ethic comes to the fore fully only in the second half of John’s Gospel. While the first twelve chapters of John include only *three theologically significant instances* of the *agap-* word group—John 3:16 (by the evangelist), with its reference to God’s love for the world, and the virtually identical affirmations of the Father’s love for the Son in John 3:35 (also by the evangelist) and John 10:17 (Jesus)<sup>23</sup>—John 13–17 features as many as *thirty-one* instances of the *agap-* word group alone.<sup>24</sup> After two strategic instances of “love” terminology in the opening verse of the Farewell Discourse, these are clustered in four major passages: (1) John 13:34–35; (2) John 14:15–31 (esp. 14:21–24); (3) John 15:9–17; and (4) John 17:20–26.<sup>25</sup>

This strongly suggests that love is at the heart of John’s moral vision, and that this motif forms the heart of Jesus’ ethical instruction of his followers in the Farewell Discourse. Nevertheless, in light of the above-registered observation that writers embody or incarnate their meanings (in the present instance, ethical meanings) in concrete literary forms and characters, we will select two major narratives from the first half of John’s Gospel, Jesus’ encounters with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman in John 3 and 4, for literary analysis.

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<sup>23</sup> The only other instance of the *agap-* word group in the first half of John’s Gospel is the reference to Jesus’ love for Lazarus (John 11:5). For a defense of attributing John 3:16 and 3:35 to the evangelist, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 113–14 and 133.

<sup>24</sup> Five additional instances are found in John 18–21, namely references to “the disciple Jesus loved” (John 19:26; 21:7, 20; cf. 13:23) and to Jesus’ commissioning of Peter (John 21:15, 16). Negative references involving “love” are found in John 3:19; 5:42; 8:42; and 12:43.

<sup>25</sup> The occurrences of the other major Johannine word for “love,” *phileō*, corroborate this pattern of usage but add little to the overall semantic profile. The use of *phileō* in 5:20 corresponds to the use of *agapaō* in 3:35. For the references involving *phileō* in 11:3, 36, see the use of *agapaō* 11:5. With regard to 20:2, see 13:23; 19:26; 21:7, 20. Concerning the use of *phileō* in 21:15–17, cf. the use of *agapaō* in 21:15–16. For the negative references involving *phileō* in 12:25 and 15:19, cf. 3:19; 5:42; 8:42; and 12:43. The references to the Father’s love for believers and to believers’ love for Jesus involving *phileō* in 16:27 correspond to the references involving *agapaō* in the Farewell Discourse discussed above.

## The Anticipation of John's Moral Vision in the First Half of John's Gospel

The narration of the Nicodemus incident spans John 3:1–15. The conversation commences with a reference to Jesus' performance of signs (John 3:2; cf. 2:23). The emphasis in Jesus' response lies on the necessity of spiritual regeneration, which takes up essentially the entire interchange with Nicodemus (John 3:3–9). Throughout the narrative, there is also an emphasis on Nicodemus'—and, by implication, the Sanhedrin's—ignorance and unbelief. This is indicated by the repeated use of verbs of knowing (John 3:2, 8, 10, 11) and believing (John 3:11, 12, 15), or more specifically, references to people's ignorance and unbelief (cf. John 4:39, 41, 42).

The account of Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus in verses 1–15 is followed by the evangelist's own commentary in verses 16–21. While references to “love” are entirely absent from the actual narrative in verses 1–15, the evangelist frames the incident from the outset in terms of “love”: “For God *so loved* the world . . .” (v. 16). A second instance of “love” terminology is found in verse 19, where people in the world are said to “love” darkness rather than light. Hence, what at first appears to be framed as a “battle of *knowledge*” between two Jewish teachers, Nicodemus “the Teacher of Israel” (v. 10) and Jesus, who is called “rabbi” by Nicodemus (v. 2), in the evangelist's own subsequent commentary turns out to be a tale of contrasting *loves*—God's love for the world, which prompted him to send his one-of-a-kind Son (v. 16), and the world's self-love and preference of darkness over the light (v. 19).

On the one hand, then, John's love ethic is only touched at briefly in the evangelist's explication of the Nicodemus narrative in John 3:16 and the contrasting references in John 3:19–21. In another sense, however, John's love ethic is already present in Jesus, whose mission consists in expressing God's love to the world. As the paradigmatic Sent One from the Father,

Jesus, in his encounter with Nicodemus, already embodies the coming of Love to the world. At the same time, the teaching that Jesus' followers must love *each other as Jesus loved them* in order for their mission to the world to be effective awaits the second half of the Gospel.

The second narrative, Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4:1–42, focuses squarely on the progressive revelation of Jesus' true identity. The woman first calls Jesus “a Jew” (v. 9). Later, she acknowledges him as “a prophet” (v. 19). Finally, she asks, “Could this be the Messiah?” (v. 29). While Jesus' actions toward the woman were doubtless prompted by love, this point is not explicitly made by the fourth evangelist; the account does not contain a single instance of “love” terminology. Rather, the overt emphasis is on *truth*: those who want to worship God must worship him in spirit *and truth* (John 4:23–24), and the Samaritans know that Jesus is “truly” the Savior of the world (John 4:42).

Nevertheless, as in the case of the Nicodemus narrative, if not more explicitly, there is a sense in which John's love ethic is already present in Jesus. I say “more explicitly,” because embedded in the narrative of John 4:1–42 is Jesus' instruction of his followers with regard to *mission* in John 4:32–38. In the context of his outreach to the Samaritans, Jesus makes clear that his followers will be called to enter into their predecessors' labor and to reap the fruit of their efforts. Hence in the mission of Jesus, and in his confrontation of the Samaritan woman with her sin and need for a Savior (cf. John 4:42), God's love is shown to have come into the world and to engage in a mission to reach out to those separated from God.

The lessons that emerge from our study of John 3 and 4 are at least three. First, if John's ethic centers on love, this emphasis cannot easily be gleaned from these narratives, though the evangelist's commentary on the Nicodemus narrative in John 3:16–21 provides important

confirmation for our thesis. God's love stands squarely behind Jesus' mission to the Jews, represented by Nicodemus; yet the overt focus of the narrative is on their need of spiritual regeneration. John 4:1–42, for its part, does not contain a single instance of “love” terminology. While love is clearly not absent in Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman, it is hardly the overt focus of the evangelist's narrative.

Second, the fact that John's love ethic only surfaces later in the Gospel narrative underscores the hermeneutical wisdom of discerning doctrine on the basis of didactic rather than narrative passages (the Farewell Discourse rather than John 3 and 4). A study of narrative passages may corroborate findings attained by an analysis of didactic material, but it may be tenuous to derive one's understanding of a given aspect of John's theology primarily from narrative material.

Third, the Johannine narratives concerning Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman are by no means the only possible places where one finds a proleptic expression of John's moral vision. Jesus is motivated by cruciform love in everything he does in this Gospel. This is not limited to his various “signs” (such as the miraculous replenishing of the wine at the Cana wedding or the healings narrated in chapters 5 and 9); it pertains also to Jesus' speaking the truth in love to his opponents who are motivated by self-interest and do not truly love God the way they should (cf. John 5:42; 8:42; 12:43). With this we turn to an exploration of John's moral vision in the second half of his Gospel.

## The Full Expression of John's Moral Vision in the Second Half of John's Gospel

### *Introduction*

While the first half of John's Gospel contains precursors of John's moral vision—most notably, the evangelist's gloss on the meaning of the Nicodemus narrative in John 3:16—it is the second half of the Johannine drama that reveals Jesus' ethic to its fullest extent. From a literary standpoint, the *footwashing narrative* in John 13:1–15 (with its negative corollary, Judas' betrayal, in John 13:16–30) serves as a preamble to the Farewell Discourse by featuring Jesus as the *incarnate example of a love ethic* that is further explicated in didactic terms in the remainder of the discourse (John 13:31–17:26).

The significance of the footwashing in John's Gospel as an expression of John's moral vision is further underscored by the fact that, as an exemplary act of Christ encapsulating the Johannine ethic, the footwashing is utterly unique and without paralleled in the rest of the Gospel.<sup>26</sup> Everywhere else, Jesus is the one-of-a-kind Son of God, who performs his startling messianic “signs”; who as the Good Shepherd dies a substitutionary cross-death for the sins of humanity; and who reveals God, whom no one has ever seen, as only God incarnate is able to do. In the footwashing alone do we find *an act of Jesus that believers are specifically urged to emulate in their relationships with one another*. This didactic use of a particular act would have resonated both with John's Jewish and Gentile readers. His Jewish readers would have been familiar with the pattern of “mystifying gesture-question-interpretation,” which was common among the rabbis.<sup>27</sup> His Greek-speaking audience was used to being told of exemplary expressions of virtue that served as moral benchmarks for them to attain.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Contra James D. G. Dunn, “The Washing of the Disciples' Feet in John 13:1–20,” *ZNW* 61 (1970): 247–52 (cited in R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], 118, n. 40), who calls the footwashing “one of the long line of metaphors and pictures” in John's Gospel.

<sup>27</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Jesus as Rabbi in the Fourth Gospel,” *BBR* 8 (1998): 115–17.

<sup>28</sup> For examples, see Köstenberger, *John*, 408, n. 47.

*The Narrative Preamble: The Paradigmatic Nature of the Footwashing*

The stage for the footwashing is set by a lengthy *preamble* provided by the *narrator* in John 13:1–3 that serves the dual role of introducing the second half of John’s Gospel as a whole and the footwashing as the opening scene. The preamble wastes no time in setting the ensuing events—culminating in Jesus’ crucifixion—in the context of sacrificial, perfected love:

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father [a Johannine euphemism for Jesus’ cross-death].

Having *loved* his own who were in the world, he *loved* them *to the end* (John 13:1).

With this preamble, the evangelist casts the footwashing as a paradigmatic—or “hypodeigmatic”: the Greek word for “example” in John 13:15 is *hypodeigma*—demonstration of Jesus’ love for his followers.<sup>29</sup> Love—perfect love—is hence the legacy Jesus bequeaths on his disciples, together with his peace (John 14:27; 16:33) and joy (John 15:11; 16:20–24; 17:13). The genre of farewell discourse is perfectly suited as a literary vehicle for conveying Jesus’ final legacy.

In a highly dramatic *contrasting* fashion, the narrator follows up the reference to Jesus’ expression of love with that to the devil’s instigation of Judas’ betrayal in verse 2. The statement is intensified in at least four ways: (1) the perfect participle *beblēkotos*, “cast”; (2) the reference to Judas by his full name, “Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot”; (3) the compact double genitive absolute; and (4) the somewhat convoluted syntax of the second half of the verse, “cast into the heart in order that he might betray him.”

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<sup>29</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 144, calls the footwashing an “enacted parable.”

The emphatic reference to Jesus' complete knowledge at the outset of verse 3 (by way of another perfect participle) reiterates the similar reference in verse 1 and chiastically frames and envelops the reference to Judas' diabolically-prompted betrayal in verse 2, graphically illustrating the all-embracing, sovereign nature of Jesus' love and knowledge. Also reassuring are the references to "the Father" as the one to whom Jesus is about to return and as the one who had given all things into Jesus' hands in verses 1 and 3.

After the general, larger theological setting-in-scene in verses 1–3, verses 4–5 provide the more immediate setting of the supper (the reference to the supper, *deipnon*, in v. 4 harks back to v. 2), narrating at some length Jesus' preparations for the footwashing and the unfolding of the proceedings associated with it. The blow-by-blow account of the sequence of events, from Jesus' getting up to his taking off his outer clothing, to his wrapping a towel around his waist, to his pouring water into a basin, to his beginning to wash his disciples' feet, to his drying them with a towel, graphically represents the unfolding of this most amazing act before the disciples' very eyes, which no doubt had an agonizing effect on them as they looked on in utter shame, embarrassment, and astonishment.

With the narration of Jesus' arrival at Peter (called by his fuller name "Simon Peter" as elsewhere in the first reference to Peter in a given narrative in John's Gospel) in verse 6 the account reaches its focal point. Peter's protest is underscored by the emphatic juxtaposition of the personal pronouns (not required in the Greek) "you" and "my": [literally,] "Lord, *you my* washing the feet?" Jesus' initial effort to reassure Peter in verse 7 fails to dissuade him, and his protest only intensifies: "You shall never, ever wash my feet!" (John 12:8; conveyed by a triple negative, *ou mē . . . eis ton aiōna*).

Jesus' second response overwhelmingly accomplishes its purpose, however, and Peter flip-flops to the opposite extreme, wanting Jesus not only to wash his feet but also his hands and head (v. 9). As Jesus calmly retorts, washing the feet is sufficient; the disciples are already clean (note that now the personal pronoun "you" is in the plural, v. 10), though not all of them—a not-so-subtle reference to the betrayer, as the narrator is quick to point out in an aside in verse 11.<sup>30</sup>

Hence the *focal point* of the footwashing narrative consists in a *single scene*, Jesus' interchange with Peter. *Dramatic suspense* is created by Peter's objection and Jesus' initially unsuccessful, but eventually effective, clarification of the significance of his stunning action. Peter and Judas, the two major characters besides Jesus in John 13:1–30, thus serve as contrasting examples of disciples: the one, Peter, is already clean, that is, effectively cleansed by Christ's imminent death on the cross; the other, Judas, removes himself from the circle of Jesus' love by his already-sealed act of betrayal (note the perfect participle *beblēkotos* in verse 2).<sup>31</sup>

A whole web of previous and subsequent references to Judas' act and its consequences is spun by the evangelist throughout his narrative, linking John 13:10–11 with the carefully woven fabric of the Johannine discourse (cf. John 6:70–71; 12:4–6; 13:21–30; 17:12). Cleanness, as effected in a literal sense by the footwashing but as metaphorically represented by the spiritual cleanness afforded by vital association with Jesus, hence becomes the ruling conceptuality in the footwashing narrative. The narrator's comments in verse 12 succinctly conclude the narrative up to this point, corresponding to the opening setting-in-scene in verses 4 and 5.

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<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that Jesus, remarkably, appears to have washed even Judas' (the betrayer's) feet, demonstrating the love of enemies he taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:43–48), though this point is not made explicitly by the fourth evangelist. Yet while Jesus apparently washed Judas' feet, he does not proceed with his final instruction of his followers until subsequent to Judas' departure from the Upper Room (cf. John 13:30).

<sup>31</sup> Peter is also paired with the "disciple Jesus loved" in the second half of John's Gospel: see Köstenberger, *Missions of Jesus and the Disciples*, 154–61.

Jesus' words of explication in verses 13–17 provide a strong exclamation point by drawing attention to the complete reversal of status implicit in the footwashing: “Now that *I, your Lord and Teacher*, have washed your feet, *you also* [lowly disciples] should wash one another's feet” (v. 14). Whatever perceptions of differences in status there might be among his followers, Jesus calls them to lay these aside. If the one whose status was clearly higher than that of others, that is, the Teacher and Master of his disciples, laid it aside to serve those of lower status, how much more ought those who do not really differ in status at all—Jesus' followers—put aside any false perceptions of status superiority in favor of selfless, others-oriented service.

By capturing the essence of the significance of Jesus' act on the cross, the footwashing narrative, depicting first its enactment and subsequently its explication and expansions on its significance, thus provides an *antecedent commentary on the meaning of the cross*. When the reader finally arrives at the account of Jesus' crucifixion, he has already been provided with the clue to unlocking the cross's true meaning and significance: Jesus' commitment to sacrificial, selfless service as the outward demonstration of his perfect love for others.

By implication, claims of love that are not accompanied by service remain hollow and inadequate, and outward displays of piety must give way to lowly service of one's fellow believer. Just as Peter (albeit reluctantly) yields to the necessity of divine cleansing, so all believers should recognize that they, too, have dirty feet—before they can wash the feet of others, they must first have Jesus wash theirs. Pride must not get in the way of service, be it a false sense of one's moral pedigree or a misperception of one's status.

Not only is John's love ethic incarnated in the footwashing narrative proper (John 13:1–17), the *negative corollary*, still in the opening narrative, is provided by the strongly contrasting

*example of Judas*, who rejects Jesus' love and removes himself from the loving circle of fellowship surrounding Jesus and his disciples (John 13:18–30). Unlike the other members of the Twelve, Judas did not “remain” in Jesus' love (John 13:10–11; cf. 15:2, 6, 9).<sup>32</sup> Jesus' remarks in verses 18ff resume and further explicate his statement in verse 10 that not every one of the disciples is clean. The continued presence of both Peter and Judas and the identity of location provide literary *cohesion* between the footwashing in verses 1–17 and the exposure of Judas the betrayer in verses 18–30.

In verses 18ff, the narrator skillfully explores the mystery surrounding the betrayer's identity in the original context—though the reader has been let in on Judas's identity early on in the narrative—by narrating the sequence of events from Peter's motioning to the beloved disciple, to the beloved disciple's inquiry of Jesus, to Jesus' identification of a sign—his dipping of a piece of bread and giving it to a certain individual. In the narrative, only Peter and the beloved disciple appear to come to know the identity of the betrayer. The reference to Satan entering into Judas in verse 27 harks back to the anticipatory reference to this event in the preamble in verse 2 (an *inclusio*). Also conspicuous is the complete absence of “love terminology” in verses 18–30, with the exception of the reference to the “disciple Jesus loved” in verse 23. (Incidentally, the apostle John's self-reference as “the disciple Jesus loved” is in itself a poignant expression of his ethic. The fact that he knew himself loved by Jesus is central to his

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<sup>32</sup>The evangelist had hinted at this at the first major juncture indicating the failure of Jesus' mission at the end of chapter 6 (cf. John 6:70–71). Judas' antagonism became even more explicit in his objection to Mary's act of devotion in John 12:4–8. For a comparative analysis of John's account of the anointing in relation to the Synoptics see Andreas J. Köstenberger, “A Comparison of the Pericopae of Jesus' Anointing,” in *Studies in John and Gender* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 49–63.

sense of identity and mission. And as the rest of John's love ethic, the title "the disciple Jesus loved" is delayed until chapter 13.)

Moving on in the narrative, Judas' departure in John 13:30 is the signal for the Farewell Discourse proper to begin, as is indicated by the prominent closure statement, "and it was night." The implicit message is that by betraying Jesus, Judas departs from the "light" and steps into the "darkness," conveying his rejection of Jesus' love ethic (cf. John 1:5; 1 John 4:16 *et passim*). Subsequent to Judas' departure, Peter's misguided pledge of loyalty furnishes an example of the insufficient nature of human loyalty apart from the Spirit's enablement (John 13:36–38).

*The Explication and Expansion of Jesus' Love Ethic in the Remainder of the Farewell Discourse*

As we have seen, the footwashing narrative serves as a *preamble* to the full explication of John's love ethic in the remainder of the Farewell Discourse. *Jesus' act of love, and conversely Judas' act of betrayal, thus set the stage for Jesus' enunciation of his "new commandment" in John 13:34–35:*

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.<sup>33</sup>

The designation of Jesus' commandment as "new" is startling at first. Clearly, the command to love one's neighbor was not new (cf. Lev. 19:18). Love within the community was highly regarded at Qumran (e.g., 1QS 1:10), and neighbor love was emphasized by the first-century rabbi Hillel (e.g., *m. 'Abot* 1:12). What was new, however, was Jesus' command for his

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. *ibid.* In his first epistle, John reiterates that fulfilling this commandment constitutes proof that a given person is in fact a believer (1 John 2:7–11; cf. 3:23; 4:19–21; 5:2–3).

disciples to love one another *as he had loved them*—laying down his life for them (cf. the discussion of John 13:1 above and of John 15:13 below; see also 1 John 3:23; 4:7–8, 11–12, 19–21). In the present passage, Jesus’ followers are urged, not once, but three times (cf. John 21:15–17), to love one another, and this “new commandment” is grounded not merely in an external commandment, but in Jesus’ own example. This kind of sacrificial, self-giving, selfless love, a unique quality of love inspired by Jesus’ own love for his disciples, is to serve as the foundational ethic for the new messianic community and constitute the unique mark of Jesus’ disciples.

The *first major expansion* of Jesus’ love commandment is found in John 14:15–31, especially verses 21–24, where loving Jesus is defined as “obeying his commandments,” in the larger context specifically his “new commandment” of loving one another as Christ loved other people. Obedience is the proof of love. This gives concrete shape to the love required by Jesus. It is not merely a strong emotional attachment to Jesus (cf. John 13:36–38) or even a positive intellectual response to his teaching (John 2:23–25; 8:31). Not everyone who “believes” in Jesus or is called a “disciple” in John’s Gospel truly believes or truly turns out to be Jesus’ follower in the long run (cf. John 2:23–25; 6:60–71; 8:31ff). Loving Jesus means obeying his commandments, none of which is greater than love.

The *second major expansion* of Jesus’ “new commandment” is found in a passage that forms part of the literary “peak” of the Farewell Discourse, John 15:9–18. On the heels of John 15:1–8, a section which underscores the importance of sustaining a vital spiritual union with the exalted Christ through the Holy Spirit, John 15:9–17 reiterates and expands Jesus’ earlier instruction for his disciples to love each other:

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. . . My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. . . . This is my command: Love each other.

A close study of this passage reveals, first, that there is a close formal parallel between John 15:9 and the Johannine commissioning passage in John 20:21 (in turn echoing Jesus' final prayer in John 17:18). This parallelism implies that knowing *God's love in his Son precedes the call to Christian service and mission*. No one can go and tell others the gospel who has not first come to know for himself the love of God in Christ. Second, as believers embark on their mission, they are called to *remain* in Jesus' love (John 15:9–10), which points beyond one's initial realization of God's love to the need of *continuing* in love as believers relate to one another and engage in outreach to unbelievers (John 15:1–8).

Third, loving Jesus is said to find its necessary expression in "*obeying Jesus' commands*," that is, abiding by his teaching and following his instructions (John 15:10; cf. John 8:31; 1 John 2:3–8). Jesus' body of teaching thus becomes a "new law" for believers in keeping with, and yet transcending, the pattern set by the regulations found in the Mosaic Law, indicating the fulfillment of Jeremiah's vision that God will write his Law on people's hearts in the days of the new covenant (Jer. 31:31–34). As Richard Hays points out, "[T]he Law of Moses plays no explicit role in John's moral vision; it is read as prefiguring Jesus, and its meaning is seemingly

absorbed into his person.”<sup>34</sup> He continues, “Nowhere in John do we find any appeal to the Law as prescriptive of moral conduct; it cannot be assumed that the Torah implicitly remains normative for John’s community.”<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, the Law is encapsulated by Jesus’ “new commandment” of Christlike love among his followers for one another and for the world.

Fourth, the love of Jesus, which found its expression in the *concrete act* of the *footwashing*, is further accentuated in John 15:13: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (cf. 1 John 3:16). Hence the love of the Son expressed at the *cross*, which, in turn, is an expression of God’s love for the world (John 3:16), is at once the culminating act of the mission of the obedient Son (John 19:30) and the fullest expression of God’s love, encapsulated in the principle of “laying down one’s life for one’s friends.”<sup>36</sup> Significantly, this statement broadens the scope of reference *beyond the crucifixion* to the principle of *self-denying, others-oriented service*, in keeping with Jesus’ earlier statement in John 12:24–26,

Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies [a veiled reference to the crucifixion], it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Those who love their life will lose it, while those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

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<sup>34</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 138.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Hays in *ibid.*, 144–45, who writes that “Jesus’ death is depicted by John . . . as an act of self-sacrificial love that establishes the cruciform life as the norm for discipleship” (p. 145).

While “laying down one’s life” for others is not limited to martyrdom, it includes it, which stresses the costly nature of serving others in the community of believers as required by Jesus.<sup>37</sup>

Fifth, the immediate scope of “laying down one’s life,” according to Jesus, is “one’s friends,” that is, *other believers*. The members of Jesus’ new messianic community are united by a special bond—they all know of God’s love for them in Jesus (witness the author’s self-designation as “the disciple Jesus loved,” John 13:23 *et passim*). Their practice of this love within their own community, in turn, is the indispensable prerequisite for the successful accomplishment of their mission, as the following pericope makes abundantly clear.<sup>38</sup>

The *third major expansion* of Jesus’ love commandment is found in the final major cluster of references to love in the Farewell Discourse in John 17:20–26, the conclusion of Jesus’ final prayer. Here emphasis is placed on the importance of believers’ unity as they pursue their mission of proclaiming the gospel message. Jesus’ “love commandment” is thus expanded for a third time by underscoring the necessity of love and unity in the church’s fulfillment of its evangelistic mandate.<sup>39</sup> Importantly, this expansion provides an important complement to the original explication of Jesus’ “love commandment” in John 13:34–35, which, taken by itself, could be taken to imply that John’s moral vision was limited to love within the community of believers. As John 17:20–26 makes unmistakably clear, however, love among believers is not viewed as an end in itself, but as a means to an end—believers’ mission to the world. Hence John’s love ethic has found its full expression, from its initial incarnation in Jesus’ act of

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<sup>37</sup> So rightly Hays in *ibid.*, 145. Hays also mentions the “pragmatic spin” given the love commandment in 1 John 3:11, 16–18, where application is made to the issue of economic justice.

<sup>38</sup> As will be seen further below, loving one another is putting first things first, without reducing believers’ obligations exclusively to reciprocal love.

<sup>39</sup> See further Andreas J. Köstenberger, “John’s Trinitarian Mission Theology,” *SBJT* (forthcoming).

washing his disciples' feet, to its explication in the new love commandment in John 13:34–35, to its three expansions, which culminate in the teaching that believers' love and unity are to be seen with the larger purview of mission.

## Conclusion

It has been our assignment to discern John's moral vision, and to do so by literary means. John's "love" terminology proved to be an important signpost for locating the focal point of John's ethic. While we found an anticipation of the evangelist's love ethic in his commentary on the Nicodemus pericope in John 3:16–21, and globally in Jesus' continual pursuit of his mission of expressing God's love for the world, it became apparent that the full expression of John's moral vision is not given until the second half of John's Gospel.

One of the most important findings of the present study is that the footwashing narrative serves as the incarnation of John's ethic by presenting Jesus' act of love as a paradigmatic event that functions as a preamble for the explication of John's love ethic in the remainder of the Farewell Discourse. Our literary investigation has shown that the initial explication is found in Jesus' love commandment in John 13:34–35, which in turn is followed by three expansions in John 14:21–24, 15:9–18, and 17:20–26.

John's moral vision is simple yet profound. Knowing the world's spiritual and moral darkness apart from the Light, Jesus Christ, John holds out no hope for those without Christ. He does not discuss keeping the Law; he does not explicitly address the issue of righteousness other

than to urge rejection of sin (1 John 3:6; cf. 3:4–10);<sup>40</sup> he does not engage the issue of works, other than to report Jesus' answer to those who asked him what they must do to perform the works required by God: "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (John 6:30).

John's moral vision, in a nutshell, is simply this. Sinful people must recognize that they are deeply loved by God and believe in the one God has sent (though John does not explicitly use the word "repentance"). By believing, they enter into the circle of love that exists between the persons of the Godhead, and they also enter into the triune God's purpose and mission: to spread the message of God's love for the world in his Son in the face of opposition and hostility. As John writes in his first epistle, "God is love," and "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:16, 19).

Nevertheless, believing oneself loved by God and entering into the triune circle of love is not devoid of moral moorings, which is indicated by John's (and Jesus') use of Old Testament language and particularly the repeated reference to Jesus' "commandments." "Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me" (John 14:21); "If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love" (John 15:10); "We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in him" (1 John 2:3–5).

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<sup>40</sup> "Righteous" (*dikaios*) in John's Gospel is only the Father (John 17:25; cf. 1 John 1:9; Rev. 15:3; 16:5, 7; 19:2), and the only two instances of the term "righteousness" (*dikaioynē*) in John's Gospel probably have Jesus as a referent (cf. 1 John 2:1, 29; Rev. 19:11; alternatively, reference is made to the world's lack of righteousness; see the discussion in Köstenberger, *John*, 472). The sole exceptions in the Johannine corpus where the *dikaio-* word group refers to righteous actions by believers are found in 1 John 3:7 (positive reference), 10 (negative reference), 12 (Abel); and Rev. 22:11.

This may not be in keeping with our definition of morality or ethics.<sup>41</sup> But what does that tell us? It may be an indication that our definition of these matters privileges certain biblical writers—Paul, Matthew—while neglecting others (John). Yet at the core, John’s moral vision is at least as valid, and perhaps even more profound, than that of other New Testament voices. In his simple manner of presentation, John cuts to the heart of a given issue, practicing what one may call a “sanctified reductionism.” Non-essentials are stripped away, leaving what is most essential.

In the present case, what is most essential is God’s love for a lost world, his sending of his Son to die for humanity on the cross, and people’s need to believe in the one God has sent. For those who do, however, the story does not end there. In fact, by believing they embark on a most amazing venture: joining the divine triune mission to the world by being taken into the sphere of the Godhead’s love and mission. There is no dichotomy between Jesus being Savior and Lord, no dichotomy between discipleship and evangelism, no dichotomy between salvation and sanctification. All there is is Jesus’ commission of his followers to serve as his representatives and to proclaim the good news of salvation and forgiveness in Christ and to “go and bear fruit—fruit that remains.”

What is more, with its emphasis on intracommunitarian love and mission to the world, John’s Gospel also highlights the clearly defined parameters of the community of Jesus’ followers on the one hand and of those who do not believe in Jesus on the other. This, in turn, has important social implications as well. Conversion, while spiritual in nature and entailing

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 146, who comments regarding 1 John 4:20–21, “This may not be the last word to be said about Christian ethics, but it is not a bad place to begin.”

regeneration (John 3:3, 5), must be accompanied by confession of Jesus and a transfer of allegiance from one's previous faith community to the new messianic community.

“Secret discipleship” is strongly disparaged (cf. John 9:18–23; 12:42–43), and indecision not an option.<sup>42</sup> Evasion of the world's hatred by failing to identify oneself clearly with Jesus and his followers is not consistent with Christian discipleship and places one outside the pale of the community of believers. Hence following John's moral vision entails not merely obedience but also courage: a willingness to emulate the example of Jesus, who was prepared to lose, and in fact did lose, his life for the sake of others, only to enter eternal life, which by virtue of our association with Jesus is ours already in the here and now and will be ours for all eternity.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See Andreas J. Köstenberger, “‘What is Truth?’ Pilate's Question in Its Johannine and Larger Biblical Context,” *JETS* 48 (2005): 33–62, esp. 50–52; repr. in *Whatever Happened to Truth?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005). Cf. Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 148, 155–56, whose discussion contains helpful insights despite his dependence on the “Johannine community hypothesis.”

<sup>43</sup> On John's eschatology see Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 148–50, 152–53.