
Gordon Clark’s book *Johannine Logos*, is a short monograph, almost a commentary, on the gospel of John and a few of the major themes in this gospel. The gospel of John is the most hated book in the Bible and the most beloved book, Clark states, for the same reason, that one might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His name. Clark’s study of John’s gospel is concerned primarily with the contents of the gospel, the intellectual or doctrinal teaching of the book, but not so much the higher criticism or introductory material.

Clark does initially confirm that the gospel was written at a relatively early date, probably before AD 100. John’s book is different in scope than the other three, as John himself writes in John 20:30. Clark notes that while the other three synoptic gospels give extended accounts of the three years of Jesus’ ministry, John, on the other hand, does not give an extended account, but only gives selections of these three years totaling about 20 days. In fact, John 13 – 19 occurs in one day. A second difference is that John’s gospel is a personal reminiscence; John essentially wrote about what he saw. A third difference is that while the gospel is a personal eyewitness account, the content is different. The synoptic gospels are primarily a public view of Christ, while John is an intimate, private view of Christ. A fourth difference is a difference in purpose. Matthew wrote to the Jews to show them that Jesus was the Messiah. Mark wrote to Roman Gentiles. Luke wrote a detailed account and chronology. John, on the other hand, was evangelistic in nature.
Clark begins with the prologue, and he starts by determining what the term “logos” means. Clark surveys the Greek lexicons and the Greek history of the word. He demonstrates that the word Logos was used in Greek philosophy as the single divine spark, the universal law that does not change, the original fire of the universe. It is wisdom that directs the course of nature. Gnosticism made false use of Logos, and there is some confusion as to what it was in their religion. It was the Father-Intellect that may or may not have been in the beginning. Most of the Gnostic writing was after John’s gospel, so there is no indication that it derived any ideas from the NT. In the OT Septuagint, from Genesis to Ruth, the translators used the term “rheema” for the word of God. However in the prophets, they clearly preferred the term Logos. In Greek, the meaning of Logos can be combined with the idea of thinking or the expression of thought. The English cognate is “logic,” or valid reasoning. Other meanings may include the divine logic or the divine wisdom.

In opposition to much secular thought and the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Clark explains why the first verse is so critical, and why it confirms the deity of Christ. The deity of Christ is the main message of the gospel of John. To mistranslate the first verse is to misconstrue the whole book. The main difference between the pagan theories of the Logos and the Christian Logos is that the latter became flesh and walked among us. The verse also states that the Logos was with God and was God. As Clark has already discussed in his book on the Trinity, it is perfectly logical that something can be the same in one sense and different in another sense. It is therefore perfectly logical for the Logos to be in one sense with God and in another sense God.
The gospel of John begins in eternity past and moves to creation. Verse 5 is the results of the fall. John the Baptist enters as witness to the light, and then the gospel proceeds to the historical Jesus.

Verse 12 clearly differentiates people. For nearly a century, the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man has been taught as the essence of Christianity. However, in verse 12, Jesus asserts that some men are children of God and some are not. All men are biological descendants of Adam, but the human race is broken down into a spiritual duality. Christianity asserts that only those who believe in Jesus Christ have the right to become children of God.

Verse 13 is clear, yet controversial. The believer is born of God and not born of something else. It is a gift that God gave to some people but not to all people. It is not by “blood” or ethnic or paternal relations. It is not by the will of the flesh, or not by desire in human nature. It is also not by man’s will or intellect that a man can become a follower of Christ. God causes spiritual birth just as parents cause the physical birth.

The incarnation is depicted in verse 14. The main difference between pagan philosophies and Christianity is the incarnation. God’s immediate purpose in the incarnation was to save the world. There was no need to condemn the world; it was already condemned. That the Logos became flesh is the culminating verse of the prologue.

Clark examined the term Logos and continues to examine the term Rheema and Rhemata (plural), usually meaning word and words, ordinarily spoken words. Clark asks, and attempts to answer, the question whether the two terms are identical in meaning,
contrasted in meaning, or related in some way. Clark lists every instance of both terms in John, beginning with Logos. The use of Logos in John, Clark notes, makes it clear that Logos means a sentence, a doctrine, an object of intellectual comprehension. God, as a rational being expresses himself in the propositions of the list that Clark assembles. They are the very mind of Christ as revealed in Scriptures. Accordingly, there is no great gap between the propositions alluded to and Christ himself. They are the mind of God.

Clark notes that contemporary theologians often contrast Logos and Rheema: Word and words. The Word is divine, authoritative, infallible, but the words (Rheemata) on the other hand, are human, fallible, and mythological. Clark looks at the Bible to determine if this is indeed correct. Jesus is never called the Rheema as He is called the Logos. Rheema in a very literal sense means the sounds that come out of one’s mouth when one speaks. These are not thought; they are symbols of thought.

Clark notes on numerous occasions that Christ in John uses the words interchangeably. In John 5:45 – 47, Jesus attributes to Moses’ written words the full divine authority of truth. Because the Pharisees did not believe Moses’ written word, they cannot believe in Christ’s words. At the beginning of John 5, the message of Christ is a Logos, but at the end of the chapter the same message is called the rheemata, even though they designate the same thing. Other examples are John 6:63 and 68, and John 8:20 and 8:47. After numerous examples, Clark concludes that rheemata are not just human words infected with sin and error, but are given by the Father and the Son. These same divine words are given by Jesus to his disciples. Therefore John’s gospel opposes the contemporary thought that Logos and Rheemata have some gap between them.
Clark then addresses the concept of truth, since that concept is a big part of John’s message. The word occurs 24 times in the gospel. While many contemporary theologians, writes Clark, often defend a type of truth different from the ordinary conceptions of truth. Beforehand, truth consisted of propositions; a truth was a sentence. Today, Clark states, truth is an encounter, meaning that if I meet someone on the street, that is truth. Truth is not the sentences this person may say to me, but it is simply the event of the meeting. Revelation is an event. We meet God, and even though he says nothing to us, that meeting itself is revelation and truth. Clark shows that this is not John’s concept of truth.

Clark lists and discusses every instance of John’s use of the word *aletheia*, or truth. In response to doing the truth in John 3:21, Clark notes that one cannot separate moral principles from logical ones, on the grounds that logical principles are intellectual and rational while the others are not. Moral principles, to be followed, must be known propositionally.

Clark uses several examples from John to demonstrate what “truth” is. In John 5, the illustration of the law-court shows the meaning of truth and true. A witness makes a statement, and it is either true or false. The statement may refer to a face-to-face encounter, but it is a statement nonetheless. There is no personal truth outside of a proposition. In John 8, truth and doctrine refer to what Jesus had presented in his discourse and possibly other sermons as well. It is truth and knowledge that liberate. Jesus does not ask them to have some emotional experience, but he requires them to believe. Again, it is the idiom – dawn – a picture of intellectual comprehension, that
clarifies the meaning. Satan’s work is not to give people bad emotions, but to prevent them from thinking the right thoughts.

Clark uses two examples from the 20th century to show how truth has gone out of style and has been replaced by relativism or emotionalism. John Dewey insists that not only the truths of science and history change, but the very forms of logic change. There are no external truths in Dewey’s philosophy. Clark also cites a sermon published by A.W. Tozer where Tozer distinguishes between two kinds of truth, but his second type is very vaguely defined. Tozer seems to have a low opinion of intellectual truth, and in another example, Tozer belittles intellectualism and intellectual truth by reducing belief and intellectual truth to merely repetition and memorization of words. Tozer does make some important points on illumination, but Clark notes that illumination does not add or subtract from the truth, but causes us to focus on the truth as it is.

Clark insists that the acceptance or rejection of God’s truth is the most important battle line. Everything else is subsidiary. Some people, including such philosophers as Kierkegaard, repeatedly state that it makes no difference what one believes, but how one believes it. A sincere Hindu may be better off than an insincere Christian. This is nonsense. If a Hindu who worships in truth because he is sincere is saved, then it is useless to command Christians to make disciples and teach the nations all that Jesus has commanded.

Clark in his last section explores the nature of saving faith since this is an important concept in John. Clark cannot understand why people hold that faith or belief is an emotional or mystic experience. Perhaps, he states, people look at the dramatic
conversion of Paul and expect that everyone should have a dramatic conversion experience. But there are many others who had no such experience. Therefore, he states, it is wrong to elevate anyone’s experience to the level of norm for everyone. Secondly, he cites the Romantic notion that sensory titillation is experience. In other words, unless one has ecstasies of joy or depths of despair, one does not have a Christian experience. However, Clark states that the best indicator of what a person believes is their conduct. Conduct, particularly habitual conduct, is the best criteria fallible men have for judging hypocrisy. What a person believes, really believes, even if he says contrary, will show in his living.

Clark explores in this section the nature of saving faith. John never uses the word faith (pistis) in his gospel, but abundantly uses the word “to believe” (pisteuo). Clark’s thesis is that there is no antithesis in believing Jesus as a person and what he said. Clark states that the verb “to believe” may have a clause or a proposition as an object, and that is the fundamental meaning of the verb. The immediate object of belief or faith is a truth (or falsehood), a meaning, the intellectual content of some work, and this content is called a proposition. Therefore, to believe a person is to believe what he says.

Clark goes on to explain that the typical Protestant definition of faith consists of three components: notitia, assensus, and fiducia. Notitia is the intellectual content known. Faith has an intellectual content. However, the confusion arises with the definitions of the second and third terms. Clark suggests that instead of using three terms, one should better that assensus is ones voluntary acceptance of a proposition, and this is more the essence of faith than anything else. Clark does a brief review of Calvin on this matter,
and along with other reformers, concludes that this act of faith is an act caused by the Spirit, and the conclusion is that faith is assent. Assent is by no means a mere nodding of the head. Belief is definitely intellectual and volitional. The good news, the information about Christ, must be understood and assented to, and this is belief.

Clark conducts a moderate study of what the heart is in the Bible, and shows that at least 70 – 75% of the time, the heart is the mind. It is the organ of understanding and knowledge. It is the heart that thinks. When someone contrasts the head and the heart, meaning the heart is something other than the mind, this contrast is unscriptural.

Clark states that therefore saving faith remains intellectual assent – not to any random proposition – such as there is only one God, but to the doctrine of the atonement. Assent is not the cause of eternal life. Assent, instead of being the cause, is the result of the Spirit’s regenerating activity. The unregenerate mind is at odds with God. People do not believe because they are not part of the chosen flock; they cannot believe because God has blinded their eyes. Therefore, regeneration must absolutely precede assent. Belief or assent is the life that the Spirit gives. The life of faith is a life of sanctification, and this is a work of God’s grace by which He renews His image in the regenerate subject. Therefore, it is knowledge of and asset to the Bible that advances the Christian life.