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COUNTERFEIT MONEY OR GENUINE GIFT?  
GIFT, GIVING, AND SALVATION  
IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
Robert Earl Brunansky  
December 2013

**APPROVAL SHEET**

COUNTERFEIT MONEY OR GENUINE GIFT?

GIFT, GIVING, AND SALVATION

IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

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To my wife, Randi, whose constant love and encouragement enabled me to persevere to the end, and to our children, Natalie, Alexis, Jonathan, and Isaac, who endured the long hours and time away that this project required.

Psalm 128:3-4

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AYBD</i>	Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary
BDAG	Bauer, W., F. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed.
<i>DEJ</i>	<i>Dictionary of Early Judaism</i>
<i>EDNT</i>	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
ESV	English Standard Version
<i>Gk. Apoc. Ezra</i>	<i>Greek Apocalypse of Ezra</i>
LSJM	Liddell, H. G., R. Scott, H. S. Jones, and Roderick McKenzie. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . 9th ed. with revised supplement.
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NA <sup>28</sup>	<i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> , Nestle-Aland, 28th ed.
<i>NIDNTT</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i>
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
<i>Pasch.</i>	<i>De pascha</i>
<i>Sib. Or.</i>	<i>Sibylline Oracles</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
TLG	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Graecae</i>

TR	Textus Receptus
UBS	United Bible Societies
UBS <sup>4</sup>	<i>The Greek New Testament</i> , United Bible Societies, 4th ed.

## PREFACE

The idea for this dissertation began to develop in a doctoral seminar on the hermeneutics of the gift taught by Dr. Mark Seifrid at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. At the beginning of the seminar, I was not aware that the topic of the gift was so controversial, but under Dr. Seifrid's instruction, I quickly learned what the controversy was and how significant it is for Christian theology. I want to thank Dr. Seifrid for his careful and patient teaching, feedback, and encouragement throughout the process of writing this dissertation.

I am thankful to the Lord for the many others who have contributed to the completion of this project. The church I pastor, Desert Hills Evangelical Free Church, allowed me time to study and write while fulfilling my pastoral duties. Greg and Ginger Masse, Jon MacKinney, Ruth Friesen, Dr. Charles Rasmussen, and others read through the drafts of this dissertation and provided invaluable feedback.

The staff at the James P. Boyce Centennial Library went above and beyond the call of duty, regularly mailing me books and articles since I wrote this dissertation in Arizona and did not have access to the library's resources locally.

My parents gave of their time and treasure throughout my childhood to provide me with a Christian education, which established a firm foundation in my heart with the Word of God for a lifetime of study.

My family sacrificed much to give me the time to complete this work. My wife often took on the responsibility of a growing family without my assistance, not only throughout the writing of this project but through the entire doctoral program. Her love and encouragement fueled this project when my motivation waned.

None of my work would have been possible without my Lord and Savior,

Jesus Christ, the true gift of God to everyone who believes. Though I would give this dissertation to Him, I know that in reality He has given it to me. To Him be the glory.

Robb Brunansky

Glendale, Arizona

December 2013

CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

**The Problem of the Gift**

One of the more serious challenges presented to theologians over the past century pertains to the idea of the gift. Philosophers and sociologists have debated whether or not such a thing as a gift exists.<sup>1</sup> Such debate calls into question the biblical teaching that salvation is God's free gift to sinners (cf. John 4:10; Rom 3:24; 5:15-17; 6:23; 2 Cor 9:15; Eph 2:8). If a gift is an impossibility (or, in Derrida's terms, "the impossible"),<sup>2</sup> then not even salvation itself is truly a free gift. God perhaps appears to be giving, but in reality He is creating an economic exchange, giving with one hand while receiving (taking?) with the other. Humanity, meanwhile, is not receiving a gift, but instead is being made dependent and subject to God as He obligates people to Himself by means of this "gift." Such a challenge calls into question the very nature of God Himself along with the salvation He gives to sinners.<sup>3</sup> The nature of gifts and what the NT as

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<sup>1</sup>At first consideration, it might seem absurd to debate whether there is such thing as gift since nearly everyone at some time has received a "gift." Yet that is just the question. Is the object that appears and presents itself to consciousness in the event of giving and receiving really gift, or is there any such phenomenon of gift? Or is the phenomenon called *gift* while in reality it is something else, perhaps an economic transaction? The reasons for this debate and the various approaches to gift will be delineated in the history of research, so space will not be given to that discussion here.

<sup>2</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 7.

<sup>3</sup>It is possible that some would object to this discussion at the outset, arguing that a discussion of the phenomenon of gift by definition must not allow the intrusion of the transcendent, or it passes out of the realm of phenomenology into a kind of metaphysics. The goal of this dissertation, however, is not to probe the limits of phenomenology, but to examine the NT discussion of gift and give it a voice in the contemporary controversy. The NT assumes the intrusion of the transcendent in the incarnation and the very events connected with the gift of salvation. In other words, the NT explodes the boundaries of a purely immanentist phenomenology, and, if the voice of the NT is to be heard regarding the phenomenon of gift, it must be allowed to speak on its own terms and not be bound at the outset by immanentist presuppositions.

represented in the Fourth Gospel is claiming when it asserts that salvation is a free gift given by God to humanity are the questions that this dissertation seeks to address.

Beginning with Marcel Mauss' seminal work *Essai sur le don*, scholars from various disciplines have been intrigued with the nature and meaning of the gift. The discussion of the gift has touched areas as diverse as philosophy, sociology, law, economics, political science, and theology. While this dissertation will inevitably interact with several of these disciplines, the primary area of concern is that of theology, especially a theology of gift that is developed from an exegesis of key texts in John's Gospel. The reason for this is two-fold. First, thorough treatments of the soteriology of John's gospel as a subject of its own have been sparse.<sup>4</sup> While this dissertation will not attempt to fill that void *in toto*, it will attempt to fill a specific aspect of it. This dissertation will examine the nature of Johannine soteriology, discussing precisely what John means by "salvation" and how he conceives of it as a gift. The author knows of no such treatment of Johannine soteriology available to date.<sup>5</sup> Second, John's Gospel is especially suited for an examination of a theology of gift. John's Gospel is replete with gift, giving, and receiving terminology. Perhaps the most famous verse in the Bible, John 3:16, says that God *gave* His Son so that believers might have eternal life. John's hope that his readers would have this life through believing motivated him to pen his Gospel (John 20:31). In John's account of Jesus and the Samaritan woman, Jesus speaks of "the

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For more on the epistemological issues and perspectives of this dissertation, see chap. 5 below.

<sup>4</sup>J. G. van der Watt, ed., *Salvation in the New Testament: Perspectives on Soteriology*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 101, observes that "relatively little has been published on soteriology as an independent theme, seen in the light of the flood of publications on this Gospel [of John]." He illustrates, "For instance, Tong (1983), writing a dissertation on aspects of Johannine soteriology, refers only to five sources having any reference to soteriology in their titles." The thirty intervening years between Tong's dissertation and the present work have not done much to improve the situation.

<sup>5</sup>Risto Saarinen, *God and the Gift: An Ecumenical Theology of Giving* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 37-40, gives a cursory examination of this theme that touches on aspects of it and suggests other aspects of study.

gift of God” (John 4:10) that springs up to eternal life (John 4:14). From start to finish, John presents salvation as God’s free gift to the world so that the world might be saved rather than condemned. John’s Gospel, therefore, is the “most prominent biblical source” on the theme of gift.<sup>6</sup> In examining the nature of gift in John’s Gospel, this dissertation will speak to the current discussion of gift as well as trace a central aspect of Johannine soteriology, both of which are pressing needs in contemporary theological discourse.

### **The Gift In Contemporary Discussion**

Due to the cross-disciplinary nature of this dissertation, contemporary theories of the gift cannot be traced along a single line. Instead, the contemporary discussion will be discussed along two lines. First, an overview of the major works discussing the concept of gift will be given. Most of these works are philosophical in nature, focusing on the concept of gift itself in varying contexts. Second, a few works on the Gospel of John will be examined. These works do not focus on the topic of gift specifically, but because of their exegetical and theological nature, they have something to contribute to the discussion. Special consideration will be given to the conception of salvation in these works to tie them more closely to a theology of gift.

### **Works Focused on the Concept of Gift**

**Marcel Mauss.** Any contemporary discussion of gift must begin with Marcel Mauss’ seminal work *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, originally published in 1924 in French as *Essai sur le don*. Mauss’ work ignited contemporary debate about the nature of the gift. In the light of the modern society in which he lived, which had just been ravaged by the first World War, Mauss looked back to archaic societies to understand their economies, laws, and systems, with an aim to

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 37.

inform his own time of a better way forward.<sup>7</sup> As he did his research, he found that such archaic societies had economies that were based on gift-exchange rather than monetary systems or even systems of bartering. Such societies functioned because a gift that was received carried with it an obligation to reciprocate. Mauss thus took up the question, “What power resides in the object given that causes its recipient to pay it back?”<sup>8</sup> His purpose for seeking to answer this question was two-fold. First, he wanted to understand the nature of transactions in societies that preceded our own and how their economies functioned without the existence of money proper.<sup>9</sup> Second, he wanted to deduce a few moral conclusions related to pressing problems of his generation due to their contemporary laws and economic organization.<sup>10</sup>

As Mauss conducted his research, one of his first realizations was that people in these more primitive cultures believed that a thing given had its own spirit (*hau*), and that spirit was something of the giver. Obligation to reciprocate, therefore, was imposed because the thing received was not inactive; it possessed the *hau* of the giver.<sup>11</sup> The *hau* by its very nature always longs to return to its original owner; therefore, when someone gave a gift, that person actually was giving a part of himself to the recipient. In Melanesian societies, Mauss recognized that to give a gift was actually to make a request, while to receive a gift was to obligate oneself to the giver.<sup>12</sup> The Melanesians thus

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<sup>7</sup>In Mauss’ words in Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls (2002; repr., New York: Routledge, 2009), 91, “These facts not only throw light upon our morality and help to direct our ideals. In their light, we can analyse better the most general economic facts, and even this analysis helps us dimly to perceive better organizational procedures applicable in our societies.” Mauss’ concluding chapter is an attempt to show how the facts he gathered should inform and shape contemporary society’s morality, economics, and politics.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 26-42, especially 34-37.

replaced a system of buying and selling with a system of gift-exchange.<sup>13</sup>

When Mauss went to study the *potlatch* of the American Northwest natives, he recognized three primary obligations related to gift-exchange.<sup>14</sup> The first obligation in the *potlatch* was the obligation to give. Through giving, members of the society maintained their honor and rank within the community. The *potlatch*, then, was the basic distribution of goods within society, the basic act of recognition of others within one's community. Because the potlatch served this function, it also carried the obligation to receive what was given. Receiving demanded attendance; everyone in the community was required to attend the *potlatch*. Failure to attend would have made it impossible to give, causing one to lose his standing within the community, and it also would have made it impossible to receive. Each gift received carried with it a burden, and the one who refused to receive was in essence refusing to participate in society. Finally, there was an obligation to reciprocate. This obligation formed the essence of the *potlatch* as the exchange of goods. One who could not reciprocate became a slave. Reciprocation did not have to be immediate, but it could be as no time restrictions were placed upon reciprocation.<sup>15</sup>

Following the unfolding of his research among these primitive gift-exchange economies, Mauss explained how these principles survived in ancient systems of law and economy, finishing his work by drawing some moral conclusions. First, the unreciprocated gift always makes the recipient inferior to the giver, especially when it is received without any thought to reciprocate. Mauss therefore argued that people should seek to give at least as much as they take to make a harmonious society.<sup>16</sup> They should

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 41-42.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 50-55.

<sup>15</sup>This point will become contentious in later development of the discussion, especially in the work of Pierre Bourdieu, as will be discussed below.

<sup>16</sup>Mauss, *The Gift*, 91.

emerge from an isolationist sense of self, giving freely and yet obligatorily, for happiness is “in peace that has been imposed, in well-organized work, alternately in common and separately, in wealth amassed and then re-distributed, in the mutual respect and reciprocating generosity that is taught by education.”<sup>17</sup>

Mauss did not intend to direct his conclusions primarily at theological discourse, but rather he wanted to shape the political and sociological thought of his day. However, the theological implications of his work have not gone unnoticed, and many later writers have sought to develop them further.

**Émile Benveniste.** Benveniste, in his 1949 essay “Gift and Exchange in the Indo-European Vocabulary,” seeks to build upon Mauss’ work. For Benveniste, Mauss’ research was well-executed with regard to “archaic” societies, but Mauss fell short in demonstrating his thesis in “ancient” Indo-European societies due to scant evidence.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Benveniste argues that convincing evidence is nearly impossible to find because of how it has been tainted by interpretation. However, the one area where such distortion is less likely is the Indo-European languages and a study of the gift vocabulary of such languages. Benveniste begins with the root *\*dō*, noting that the verb ‘to give’ is expressed by a verb from this root in most Indo-European languages.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, analyzing this root leads to the conclusion that the concepts of ‘to give’ and ‘to take’ were notions that “were organically linked by their polarity and which were susceptible to the same expression.”<sup>20</sup> After a discussion of the Greek and Latin terms for gift and giving and their relationship to the concept of hospitality, Benveniste concludes that in ancient Indo-

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 106.

<sup>18</sup>Émile Benveniste, "Gift and Exchange in the Indo-European Vocabulary," in *The Logic of the Gift*, ed. Alan D. Schrift (New York: Routledge, 1997), 33.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 34.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

European societies, gift exchanges were something different than “utilitarian commerce.”<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, gifts were expected to be lavish in ancient culture.

Benveniste then makes a move to connect ancient Indo-European culture to the archaic cultures Mauss studied. Benveniste analyzes the language of religious meals, including the language of sacrifice.<sup>22</sup> From the incredible expenditures and lavishness of these religious, sacrificial ceremonies, he argues that “the institution known as potlatch” was a part of Indo-European culture, and although there are some differences, “the essential features are really the same.”<sup>23</sup> In the end, giving and receiving is predicated on the value of an object, whether that object be a material object or even a person. And value is only meaningful in a context of exchange.<sup>24</sup> Benveniste thus attempts to corroborate Mauss’ conclusions and extend them to ancient Indo-European culture, something perhaps more relevant to his (and Mauss’) audience than the Melanesians. In Benveniste, as in Mauss, the idea of *free* gift is swallowed up by the concept of exchange.

**Pierre Bourdieu.** In 1972, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu published *Esquisse d’une théorie de la pratique* (translated into English as *The Logic of Practice* in 1980). Bourdieu’s intention was to discover why societies are constructed as they are, in their variety and similarities. He concluded that social structures developed through “endless struggles or practices over scarce resources, particularly scarce symbolic resources.”<sup>25</sup> Bourdieu was sympathetic with much of Mauss’ work, but he contended that Mauss’ structuralist approach was simplistic. The concept of “total services” in a culture of gift-

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 39-42.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>25</sup>Bryan S. Turner, "The Logic of Practice," *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 4 (1993): 75.

exchange failed to account for two critical components of any practice, namely, time and irreversibility. For Bourdieu, Mauss' theory was too mathematical, as if an action could be plugged into a formula, and each successive action be accurately predicted based on the structure of the society.<sup>26</sup> Bourdieu rightly recognized that reality is not that simple. However, Bourdieu also rejected the phenomenological approach of Levi-Strauss, arguing that observing phenomena externally failed to account for the underlying value system of a society, or, in Bourdieu's terms, "symbolic capital."<sup>27</sup> Gift, then, cannot be reduced to a system of "total services," nor can exchange be allowed to turn free agents into automatons that are simply following "automatic laws."<sup>28</sup>

Bourdieu sought to build upon Mauss' work by adding in the importance of time as well as symbolic value to gift-exchange. Bourdieu argued that a gift-exchange required difference and time-delay. A counter-gift would actually be an insult to the original giver unless it was "deferred and different."<sup>29</sup> For example, to give back immediately the same object to the giver would be to refuse the gift. To give another object of equal value immediately to the original giver would constitute a trade, not a gift. Why does Bourdieu introduce the element of time? He does so because he wants to show why acts that are actually irreversible, as in gift-exchange, appear reversible at the phenomenological level. The reason such acts of exchange have the appearance of reversibility is because society participates in a "collective misrecognition" of the real nature of gifts.<sup>30</sup> Everyone understands that gifts demand counter-gifts, but everyone intentionally acts as if this is not the case when giving and receiving gifts. Gifts have the

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<sup>26</sup>Pierre Bourdieu, "Selections from *the Logic of Practice*," in *The Logic of the Gift*, ed. Alan D. Schrift (New York: Routledge, 1997), 190-91.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 204-5.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 190.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 198.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

appearance of generosity not because people are genuinely generous but because society has silently agreed to the charade of gift-exchange. Bourdieu illustrates his point with the story of a Kabyle mason. Traditionally, when a mason finished his work, he was given a meal as a generous gift. However, one particular mason in 1955 left a day early, before the meal had commenced, and asked for 200 francs, the value of the meal, instead of the meal itself. Such an action was met with outrage, revealing the true motives of the townsfolk in giving the meal (and guaranteeing the mason would not be working in that town again).<sup>31</sup> The importance of symbolic capital becomes clearer through this example as well. Through this demonstration of lavish “giving” to the mason (as opposed to bare economic exchange), they sought to tie him to a relationship with them, a relationship in which he could be called upon to help them in potentially dire situations of need. Symbolic capital, therefore, is “the network of affines and relationships that is held through the set of commitments and debts of honor, rights and duties accumulated over the successive generations.”<sup>32</sup> Through gift-exchange everyone in society seeks to accumulate symbolic capital, which can then be transformed into economic capital, and back again.<sup>33</sup> For Bourdieu, as for Mauss, there is no free gift. All gifts should be understood within theory of practice in which participants silently agree to misrecognize economic transactions as gifts for the sake of obtaining symbolic capital. The implications of this theory for a biblical theology of gift are clearly frightening.

**Jacques Derrida.** While other scholars were extending and re-shaping Mauss’ work, Jacques Derrida was deconstructing it. Derrida questioned the very foundation of Mauss’ hypothesis. He asked two basic questions of Mauss. First, how can he prove that

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 207.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 212.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 211.

his translation as *gift* of the various phenomena observed in diverse cultures is legitimate?<sup>34</sup> Second, and more importantly, Derrida asked, “What is the semantic horizon of anticipation that authorizes him [Mauss] to gather together or compare so many phenomena of diverse sorts, which belong to different cultures, which manifest themselves in heterogeneous languages, under the unique and supposedly identifiable category of gift, under the sign of ‘gift?’”<sup>35</sup> While the first question is one of language, the second is one of category. Derrida argued that “Mauss’ *The Gift* speaks of everything but the gift.”<sup>36</sup> Mauss is actually describing economy, but economy is diametrically opposed to the concept of the gift, which requires freedom in giving and receiving. To speak of obligation when speaking of the gift is to nullify the gift.

Derrida’s solution to the dilemma he raised against Mauss is that “the gift is the impossible.”<sup>37</sup> Gift itself presents an unsolvable aporia because, for Derrida, the gift must be related in some way to economy, and yet the gift by definition is that which “interrupts economy.”<sup>38</sup> Derrida rejects both Mauss’ position that a counter-gift can be given back immediately and Bourdieu’s argument that a counter-gift must be deferred. For Derrida, a gift can only exist if there is “no reciprocity, return, exchange, counter-gift, or debt.”<sup>39</sup> He adds, “There will not have been a gift, whether this restitution is immediate or whether it is programmed by a complex calculation of a long-term deferral or difference.”<sup>40</sup> Therefore, the only way a gift can be given as gift, the only way a present

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<sup>34</sup>Derrida, *Given Time*, 25-26.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid. The term *differance* is a word coined by Derrida to indicate a difference in both time and space. Here, he seems to be saying that the gift is annulled by a return gift even when the return gift is

can be present as present, is if it is given unilaterally, meaning the giver receives nothing, neither object nor symbol, in return, and the recipient owes nothing in return, comes under no sense of obligation whatsoever. This situation, however, is impossible. The only way it could occur is if the gift is not “present as gift,”<sup>41</sup> for “if it presents itself, it no longer presents itself.”<sup>42</sup> Significantly, Derrida is not positing that there are no events that have the appearance of the gift. He acknowledges that phenomena present themselves that appear as if they were events of gifts being freely given. He acknowledges that humanity has an inner-longing for the gift, even if it is impossible. Alas, the gift is the impossible because of its “double bind.”<sup>43</sup> Derrida, then, rejects Mauss’ concept of gift altogether, arguing that what Mauss calls *gift* is really no gift at all, and that the conditions required for a gift to be given are the same conditions that nullify the reality of the gift.

**Jean-Luc Marion.** Jean-Luc Marion was a student of Jacques Derrida, and he accepts Derrida’s basic premise that, when the gift is viewed along an economic horizon, it is an aporia.<sup>44</sup> However, Marion argues that there is another horizon against which the gift can be considered, which he calls the horizon of “givenness.”<sup>45</sup> By analyzing the gift along the horizon of givenness, Marion attempts to rescue the gift from Derrida’s double bind and show how gifts are not only possible, they are foundational for the existence of all phenomena. But how does one think of the gift along the horizon of givenness?

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different objectively and deferred in time, possibly indefinitely.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>44</sup>Jean-Luc Marion, "Sketch of a Phenomenological Concept of Gift," in *Postmodern Philosophy and Christian Thought*, ed. Merold Westphal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 130.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 131.

Marion's answer is that one must "reconduct" the gift away from economy toward givenness.<sup>46</sup> By reconducting the gift toward givenness, Marion means to reduce the gift according to phenomenological principles, namely, the bracketing of all transcendence. By doing so, he hopes to avoid tautology, that the gift is equivalent to givenness, as well as contradiction (contradiction, that is, with the phenomenological method), that givenness would demand some transcendence. The bracketing of all transcendence is a direct response to Derrida's condition of the impossibility of the gift. The transcendence of the giver, the recipient, and the objectivity of the object of the gift are all bracketed in order to reduce the gift to givenness. Such bracketing turns Derrida's conditions of impossibility on their head, instead making "the alleged 'conditions of the impossibility of the gift' (neither recipient nor giver nor gift) become precisely the conditions of the possibility of the gift's reduction to pure givenness . . . . The objection then becomes its own response."<sup>47</sup> Marion recognizes that his reduction is liable to the charge that the gift, under the bracketing of all transcendence, would lose its identity as gift, so he unfolds how the bracketing does not destroy the identity of the gift, but rather preserves it.

Marion begins by showing how the giver is bracketed in givenness. The fundamental question is what it means that a giver gives a gift. Marion rejects the notion that this means the transfer of property from giver to recipient, for that threatens the gift by leading back to economy. Moreover, a gift does not always involve the transfer of property, or, for that matter, any object at all. When someone gives love or a blessing to someone else, no thing is actually given. Therefore, a gift given cannot be reduced to an object, but "the object becomes the simple occasional support for the gift."<sup>48</sup> Gift arises,

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 132.

not when an object is given but when “givability arises,” which occurs when the giver realizes that he is obligated to a prior gift. In this sense, the giver can be bracketed because it is not the giver who gives; instead, the gift itself that preceded the giver gives. That is, “The gift decides the giver,” and “The gift *itself* gives in giving the giver.”<sup>49</sup>

Next, Marion proceeds to show what it means to bracket the recipient by moving to the recipient’s perspective in the giving of the gift. The recipient must decide to accept the gift given for it to perfectly fulfill itself as gift. Marion uses the example of the call to illustrate his point. The recognition of the call and the unique acceptance of it demonstrate its reality even if the call is not some object or thing that appears in reality. From the perspective of the recipient, then, the “gift ultimately consists in the fact of self-decision, exactly as is the case in the perspective of the giver.”<sup>50</sup> The gift not only decides the giver but also the recipient.

Having bracketed both giver and receiver, Marion is in position to analyze the gift itself. The gift must be seen from the starting point of givenness. When the gift is seen from this starting point, the giver and receiver are no longer causes of the gift (a critical problem Marion seeks to overcome because, if the giver and/or recipient are causes, the gift is lost in the horizon of the economy) but instead are acted upon by givenness. The gift, therefore, can fulfill itself as that which gives itself “in a regimen of reduction.”<sup>51</sup> Moreover, since the gift decides itself, it is no longer dependent upon “any extrinsic relation – not upon exchange nor upon the giver nor upon the recipient.”<sup>52</sup>

Having given his exposition of the gift according to the horizon of givenness, Marion takes a theological turn to indicate how not only is it preferable to view the gift

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<sup>49</sup>Marion, “Sketch,” 132-34.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 134-35.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 137.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

this way, but it is necessary. When the recipient is bracketed, the gift is given without return. Theologically, this lack of reciprocation is seen most clearly when the recipient retreats and is invisible so that those who give no longer recognize to whom they have given. Marion illustrates his meaning using the judgment of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25. In the judgment, Jesus declares to the sheep that they gave to Him, but the sheep retort that they never saw Jesus when they gave to the needy. Jesus, the real recipient of the gift, brackets out Himself as He retreats into invisibility, so that not even the donors know to whom they have given. Moreover, the giver can be bracketed out as seen in anonymous gifts that are received. Such gifts create an “unsolvable debt.”<sup>53</sup> They function along the horizon of givenness in that they have no known beginning while manifesting the reality of givenness itself. Marion, then, has taken phenomenology to its limits (or, some might argue, beyond its limits) to preserve the gift by removing it from the horizon of the economy and viewing it within the reduction of givenness.

**John Milbank.** While Marion, Derrida, and others attempted to think gift through a phenomenological approach, John Milbank maintained a metaphysical approach, arguing that it is impossible to think rightly of gift from a purely immanentist scheme. He argued that “a vauntedly non-metaphysical theology always collapses back into the *worst* metaphysics” because such a phenomenological approach must think of “God and Revelation as ‘objects’ and ‘individual’ things, which we first ‘experience’ in an immediate fashion.”<sup>54</sup> Milbank thus argued that the concept of gift cannot rightly be considered from within an atheistic scheme, which tries to think of the emergence of the ontic *ex nihilo*. The gift only exists as gift when it is seen in the light of the revealed word of the Bible. Milbank’s position represents a significant departure from prior discussion

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 142.

<sup>54</sup>John Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic," *Modern Theology* 11 (1995): 141.

on gift, especially the phenomenological approach. Marion explicitly sought to reject the need for a theological approach to the gift, seeking to overturn Derrida's arguments from within Derrida's phenomenological system. Milbank, however, directly argues for the need for a Christian metaphysic, indeed, a "Trinitarian" metaphysic, if one is to comprehend the gift.

Milbank is thus freed from the chains that bound Marion, whom Milbank argues is stuck between a Derridean nihilism and a Trinitarian view of the gift and gift exchange. Milbank, therefore, sees no need to rescue the gift from exchange, arguing instead that exchange is what makes the gift possible. The unilateral gift is unnecessary for Milbank, even undesirable, as unilateral giving would not demonstrate love or intimacy, but only an obsession from a distance.<sup>55</sup> Exchange, therefore, does not need to be eliminated, but purified. Bourdieu was thus correct in defining the gift as that which is given with expectation of a reciprocal gift that would be temporally delayed and objectively different than the original gift. Bourdieu's error was in his unwarranted assumption that "economic self-interest in a sense only defined and produced *by capitalism*, is everywhere fundamental."<sup>56</sup> What is necessary is "purging" the gift of "all archaic agonistic components."<sup>57</sup> Such purging only comes about through Christian *agape*, which renders possible not "pure gift" but "purified gift-exchange."<sup>58</sup> In giving gifts, then, expectations are right and proper when those expectations flow from Christian *agape*. Such proper expectations might include gratitude on the part of the recipient, a return gift when appropriate, and good use of the gifts received rather than squandering and wastefulness. Milbank thus turns the discussion a new direction, rejecting the

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 124.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 129.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 131.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

arguments of Marion and Derrida and purifying Bourdieu's scheme of gifts in which all consent but none acknowledge the deception that occurs. By removing the gamesmanship, the "agonistic" elements of exchange, Milbank hopes to achieve a true concept of the meaning of both gift and exchange.

**Robyn Horner.** Horner's work on the gift is primarily focused on readings of Derrida and Marion and their use of phenomenology (and deconstruction, for Derrida) to understand the gift and how it might relate to the transcendent. Her work is unique in that it is primarily theological in its aim, but it seeks to achieve its theological goals by virtue of phenomenology rather than exegesis and/or metaphysics. Her primary concern is how it might be possible "to speak of God as gift."<sup>59</sup> Her answer is achieved by an examination of the history of phenomenology, beginning with Husserl, Heidegger, and Levinas, and then focusing on the direction Marion and Derrida took their thought. She concludes that God and the gift "come from the same aporetic space" and that it is "highly appropriate" to speak of God as gift.<sup>60</sup> In a sense, she is very sympathetic to the concerns of Marion. However, by stating that God and gift come from the same aporetic space, she moves away from Marion toward Derrida. Marion's position would be closer to seeing God as the gift not as aporetic but as saturation, or excess. Derrida, however, sees the gift as aporia. Through a careful application of Derrida's model of the conditions both of the possibility and the impossibility of the gift (both of which must be fulfilled for there (to be) gift), Horner concludes that the truth of the gift and the truth of God cannot be known, for such knowing would immediately make them vanish. God and the gift can only be believed. Faith is what apprehends God and gift; therefore, "we will never know whether God gives, or what God gives; we can only believe, struggling with traces and

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<sup>59</sup>Robyn Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 241.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 246.

with words half said and needing to be unsaid, that there (is) gift.”<sup>61</sup> Such believing, though, is not wishful thinking, but an attempt to preserve God as/and gift and maintain a distinction between knowing and believing. Horner thus forges her own concept of both God and gift by finding the common elements in Marion’s and Derrida’s phenomenology. She rejects the idea of gift as exchange, but not the concept of gift entirely, even if it can never be known as such.

**Oswald Bayer.** In developing his ethical system, Oswald Bayer rejects Kant’s categorical imperative, instead identifying what he calls the “categorical gift.”<sup>62</sup> The beginning of ethics, then, is not founded upon an imperative, but on God’s unconditional gift to every person, namely, their existence as creatures created *ex nihilo*. However, such an understanding of ethics immediately raises Derridean concerns that gift is a phantasm since it is really a guise for obligation. Bayer, anticipating this objection, insists that God’s gift of both creation and new creation are not “conditioned – not even secondarily – by the expected response of the creature and the creaturely gift in return.”<sup>63</sup> While the categorical gift does demand a counter-gift from the recipient, the counter-gift “need not be understood as its *causa finalis*.”<sup>64</sup> God’s goal of an ethical response by His creatures to the free gift of creation is not equal to a condition. For Bayer, then, the problem is not counter-gift but properly identifying what counter-gift(s) is appropriate as a response to God’s free gift. Bayer’s solution is a Trinitarian concept of the gift. The counter-gift that is appropriate, that even upholds the freedom of givenness, is the response empowered by

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 247. Horner encloses the word “is” in parentheses.

<sup>62</sup>Oswald Bayer, *Freedom in Response: Lutheran Ethics: Sources and Controversies*, trans. Jeffrey Cayzer, Oxford Studies in Theological Ethics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 13.

<sup>63</sup>Oswald Bayer, "The Ethics of Gift," *Lutheran Quarterly* 24 (2010): 452.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 458.

the original gift.<sup>65</sup> “The event of giving and receiving must instead be understood as a Trinitarian event of relationships, in which the Giver not only stands over against me, but also is within me, in so far as he takes up his dwelling within me as Spirit.”<sup>66</sup> Because God gives not merely some-thing but some-one, Himself, to His creatures, giving and receiving is relational with the Giver Himself dwelling inside His creatures and empowering their counter-gift.

In many ways, Bayer’s understanding is close to that of Milbank. Milbank and Bayer would agree that something prior to the *ego* of the giving subject must be given to it, and that it is given categorically, universally. They also would agree that exchange does not annihilate gift, but that gift only exists as gift within exchange. The point of distinction is the empowering of the counter-gift. For Milbank, the counter-gift is enabled by the outpouring of *agape* into the human heart by the Triune God, whereas for Bayer, the counter-gift is empowered by the presence of the Triune God Himself within the human recipient who offers the counter-gift. It is not *merely agape* that enables the purified exchange, but it is the God, who is *agape*, resident within His creatures, who empowers appropriate counter-gifts. This distinction, while subtle, is critical to Bayer’s exposition of gift because it serves to preserve a proper Creator/creature distinction with gift exchange, especially in the context of biblical ethics.

**Kathryn Tanner.** Tanner approaches the subject of the gift from the perspective of theological economy as a response to modern versions of capitalism. In working toward her ideal of an “economy of grace,” Tanner interacts with various models of gift. She rejects that gift, as it should be theologically understood, has anything to do with the primitive societies studied by Mauss and other sociologists. Such societies do

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 458-59.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 457.

not preserve gift or grace but merely set up a different type of capitalism, a self-centered system of exchange under the guise of gift.<sup>67</sup> Tanner also rejects the model of purified gift exchange (in a somewhat unique and strange way conflating Milbank's and Derrida's understanding of gift) as she understands it. A gift should not be completely disinterested, as if it is something done only to fulfill one's duty. Moreover, could such purification of motives ever really be achieved, or would the gift vanish if the requirement was pure altruism?<sup>68</sup> Tanner's greatest objection to this eclectic model is that it is too focused on interiority, and she is aiming at a social/economic model explicitly focused on exteriority.

The solution Tanner puts forward is one of unconditional giving. Such a model, she argues, does not require a purified exchange because giving without conditions would result in the increase of well-being of the giver as well as the recipients, and that is as it should be. Therefore, she asserts, "Disinterest is no longer the norm for giving."<sup>69</sup> Tanner defends this model by arguing that God gives unconditionally to His creatures. In giving unconditionally and unilaterally to His creatures, God gives the model for the way His creatures should give. Tanner's understanding of God's unilateral giving is radical, as she states that God's "gifts are ours, a part of us in an inextricable fashion, even when we persistently refuse them."<sup>70</sup> Tanner's solution to the problem of reciprocity is to eliminate it altogether. God gives even when His creatures reject. What He gives is theirs no matter their response. Such a radical view of unilateral giving extends even to the benefits of salvation given through Christ's humanity and death on the cross. Tanner thus resolves the problem of those who reject God's gifts by arguing that His gifts are so categorical they cannot be rejected even when creatures seek to reject

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<sup>67</sup>Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 50-56.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 56-61.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 62.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 67.

them. For those who do receive them and seek to use them in the way God intended, their response is also a gift, including their faith. Therefore, God does not receive back from creatures, nor could creatures ever adequately give Him anything in return.<sup>71</sup>

Where, then, does human giving fit into the economy of grace, or is there such a thing as human giving? Tanner argues that human giving not only exists but is the primary purpose of God's giving to humanity. God is not the one who has need of a counter-gift, or of reciprocation, but other humans do have needs, and the proper response to the giving God is for creatures to give to one another unconditionally. God's giving is not corrupted by this expectation because God gives whether humanity responds to His giving rightly or not. Moreover, any return that does come to God (glory, praise from creatures, however faint it might be) cannot corrupt the free gift character of God's giving because "God gives whatever the case may be,"<sup>72</sup> whether He receives praise from men or not. Tanner's model for giving and gift, then, is unconditional giving of gifts that need not be divested of self-interest, since the point of God's gifts is to benefit all of His creatures.

**Miroslav Volf.** Miroslav Volf has written a wide-ranging book on the concept of the gift and the related topic of forgiveness. The primary concern of Volf's work is how to address the lack of generosity prevalent in contemporary society so that generosity rather than self-centered taking or trading becomes possible and meaningful. Volf describes this quest as building a "bridge on which we could travel from the land in which even what looks like generosity is a form of self-centeredness to a land where generosity is our true self-interest."<sup>73</sup> He therefore spends the majority of his effort on

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 67-68.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 71.

<sup>73</sup>Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 20.

discussing an ethic of giving and forgiving. However, Volf's foundation for learning how to give in a graceless culture is what he repeatedly refers to as "God the giver."<sup>74</sup> People need to understand the character and nature of God as giver to learn to give in a meaningful way. Such understanding demands dispensing with misconceptions of God. The two misconceptions Volf debunks are God the negotiator and God the Santa Claus, arguing that God neither makes deals nor showers people with gifts free from obligations and demands that derive from these gifts. Volf explains, "God the giver has made us to be givers and obliges us therefore to give."<sup>75</sup> These obligations come from the fact that God is both giver and Creator. To live for a purpose contrary to the one for which we were created as human beings is to dishonor the Creator who has given us everything and upon whom we are wholly dependent.

The concept of the glory of God creates a tension within Volf's argument. He cites Barth as one who disapproves of God if God is giving so that He might receive glory.<sup>76</sup> Volf's solution to the problem of the glory-seeking God is to define God's glory as His love, for "in seeking God's own glory, God merely insists on being toward human beings the God who gives."<sup>77</sup> Therefore, people cannot give anything to God. God is a "unidirectional" giver, even though He still receives delight or pain from His creatures as they obey or disobey Him.<sup>78</sup>

Having dealt with this tension to his satisfaction, Volf resumes his discussion of the obligations God's gifts place upon human beings, citing four obligations: faith, gratitude, availability, and participation. In Volf's view, none of these obligations

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 41-42.

nullifies God's unidirectional giving. Faith is to be in the posture of receiving from God. It is pure receiving, for if faith gave anything it would then be transformed (or corrupted) into a "silly work."<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, faith honors God because it tells the truth about who God is and who people are in relation to God. Gratitude, the second obligation, also is rejected as a return gift to God for His gifts to His creatures. Gratitude cannot be giving anything back because then (1) a grateful person would be under no obligation to give a counter-gift, and (2) those who reciprocated would be under no obligation to be grateful.<sup>80</sup> To give thanks is in reality to give nothing to the donor. If these arguments are true in the human realm, they are more so in relation to God and human beings, for God already possesses everything and His gifts establish our very existence. His gifts, therefore, do not serve to show us how small and insignificant we are, but to establish relationship with us by giving us existence within the sphere of God's blessing.<sup>81</sup> The final two obligations, availability and participation, relate to a person's willingness to be a channel for God's gifts to flow through him to others. From this point Volf leaves the topic of God as giver and begins to describe an ethic of generosity based on his description of God's gifts.

Volf's work is both interesting and insightful. However, it raises four significant questions relating to God as giver and humanity as recipients from God but givers to others. First, if generosity is our true self-interest, is the bridge from a world where gifts only appear to be gifts because of self-centeredness to a world where generosity is understood as true self-interest a bridge to nowhere? If what motivates generosity is the promise of a more fulfilled life and more gracious cultural experiences, has the motivation undermined generosity itself and turned it back into itself as nothing

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 47

more than a sanctimonious self-centeredness? Second, Volf fails to adequately prove from Scripture that God's glory and His love are interchangeable. Moreover, it makes God creature-centered, which undermines God's aseity. If God's glory depends on Him giving to creatures, which is a legitimate possible conclusion one might draw from Volf's discussion, God is dependent in some way on the existence of the creature to be all that He is as God. Another solution exists to the perceived problem of God being God-centered that does not turn God outside of Himself for anything, including His own glory and love. A third question pertains to the idea that God's *gifts* are what oblige people to obey Him. Since God interacts with His creation in a variety of ways, including the two Volf recognized, giver and Creator, it seems that speaking of God's gifts as what oblige people to do or not do certain things should be considered more carefully. Volf moves in a helpful direction in identifying God as Creator, but identifying God as Creator and God as Giver as virtually interchangeable ideas misses potential distinctions between these two ways God is related to His creation. Finally, is it correct to say that the human response to God is not giving to God? If faith "honors God," from whom does this honor come? Is the honor *given* to God? Does God *receive* the honor? By whom? From whom? And, while it might be true that when a person gives thanks, that person gives no *thing*, is it true that he gives *nothing*? It is difficult to see how these things can be so. Even if we only accept Volf's statement that God receives delight from His creatures, it seems that God's gifts are not strictly unidirectional. On Volf's criteria, this assertion appears to be an over-simplification at best, or a contradiction at worst. Unfortunately, due to the range of topics Volf covers, these questions do not receive enough attention, leaving the reader looking for help that never arrives.

**Risto Saarinen.** Risto Saarinen approaches the topic of gift from the perspective of ecumenism. His goal is to understand how the biblical teaching on the gift

can help ecumenical dialog.<sup>82</sup> He seeks to accomplish this objective in three steps. First, he surveys contemporary discussion on the gift and evaluates six different positions, seeming to favor Milbank's purified gift exchange model. Then, he examines the gift in the Gospel of John, doing a brief word study of *διδωμι* and its cognates. Finally, he overviews Martin Luther's theology of giving, concluding that Luther leans heavily toward a "unilateralist" position on gift.<sup>83</sup> In the end, Saarinen opts for a position that is a hybrid of Milbank and Luther, arguing for asymmetrical gift exchange, while seeing helpful tools in all the various positions on gift.

The asymmetrical exchange model puts emphasis primarily on the giver while trying to maintain the freedom of the recipient.<sup>84</sup> This gift model is utilized to seek to bridge the gap between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism on various areas of disagreement, including justification, the concept of sacrifice, and the role of Christ as example. Saarinen spends the majority of time discussing how his gift model applies to these ecumenical discussions. One of his more interesting claims in this regard is that for the phenomenon of gift to occur both giver and receiver have to be "living beings."<sup>85</sup> Outside of the obvious conflicts this statement has with the positions of phenomenologists like Marion, it raises the theological question of how life can function as a gift. Saarinen leaves such questions unresolved. While his book does attempt to deal with the gift at both a philosophical and theological level, its ecumenical focus minimizes the significance of both aspects of his discussion.

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<sup>82</sup>Saarinen, *God and the Gift*, 147.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, 57-58.

<sup>84</sup>There are echoes of Horner's conclusions when Saarinen says, "A small act of faith is needed when a gift is believed to be a free gift" (*ibid.*, 6). By calling attention to the recipient's "small" act of faith, Saarinen wants to preserve the freedom of the recipient without becoming Pelagian and without raising the recipient up to the level of the giver.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

**Kelly Kopic.** Kelly Kopic entered the discussion on gift with his monograph *God So Loved, He Gave: Entering the Movement of Divine Generosity*. Kopic attempts a biblically rooted, theological study of the gift directed toward a popular audience. While his audience is not primarily scholars, it is evident throughout the work that Kopic is aware of the scholarly debate about the gift and seeks to add his own commentary to the discussion. He also hopes to point to positive, practical results of understanding salvation as a gift of God.

Kopic clearly defines what he understands gift to be in two places in the book. He begins from the perspective of the giver: “By definition, gifts are unnecessary.”<sup>86</sup> In the flow of the discussion, Kopic is asserting that a gift is something (though not necessarily an object) transferred from one party to another without coercion of the originating party by the terminating party. Kopic explains that God’s original creative work was a gift because “nothing forced his [God’s] hand.”<sup>87</sup> God was not required to create the universe by any external law, pressure, or power. Creation was created gratuitously. When a gift is viewed from the perspective of the giver, the quality that makes the act of transfer the giving of a gift is its freeness. From the perspective of the receiver, Kopic takes a slightly different approach. Discussing the Apostle Paul’s conversion, he writes, “This is a gift, not a result of Paul’s own effort.”<sup>88</sup> A gift, then, is something the receiver possesses without exerting any effort to obtain it.<sup>89</sup> In both of these basic definitions of gift, Kopic seeks to preserve the freeness of the giving and

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<sup>86</sup>Kelly M. Kopic and Justin Borger, *God So Loved, He Gave: Entering the Movement of Divine Generosity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 17.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 173.

<sup>89</sup>To give Kopic the benefit of the doubt, “something” once again does not necessarily have to refer to an object. While he does not make this explicit, a charitable reading would infer this from his other statements mentioned earlier.

receiving, so that both giver and receiver are not under compulsion but either giving or receiving freely. Therefore, the gift for Kaptic, while never being defined absolutely, but only in reference to giver and receiver, is a free exchange, an exchange in which the donor does not have to give and the donee has done nothing to earn what was given. Furthermore, the gift is always linked to love.<sup>90</sup> A gift must be given freely out of love for the donee.

The question that deconstructionists like Derrida inevitably would ask is, “How is this not an economic exchange? How is this in any sense really a *gift* if it is a transaction, even if it is free?” Moreover, it could be added that if love must be present in the donor when giving the gift, is the donor really acting freely, or is the donor under the compulsion of his love? Kaptic makes a somewhat surprising move to answer these questions. Rather than trying to save the gift from economy, he embraces economy as the proper realm of the gift (or, to use Marion’s terminology, economy is the proper “horizon” of the gift). His entire discussion of the subject of gift begins with the premise that God owns all of creation, and that God exercises His rightful ownership of creation by giving it away. He says, “God creates and thus owns, not as a tyrannical agent seeking to seize power, but as a benevolent Lord who makes in order to give.”<sup>91</sup> What rescues the gift from cold economics is not removing it from economy but placing it within an economy of benevolence. Kaptic is so bold as to claim, “As difficult as it might be for our modern sensibilities, the idea of God purchasing us by and through the gift of Jesus is hard to avoid when reading the New Testament.”<sup>92</sup> By juxtaposing “purchasing” and “gift” within a matter of words, one could be forgiven for thinking Kaptic is intentionally assaulting “modern sensibilities,” especially those of deconstructionists.

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<sup>90</sup>Kaptic and Borger, *God So Loved*, 18.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, 73.

Kapic goes on, however, to explain further why his benevolent economy is a proper place for the gift to present itself. He recognizes that his premise will arouse at least two objections, namely, that God is only giving to get, and that no matter how the economic exchange is couched, it is still economy and therefore still opposed to the gift.<sup>93</sup> Kapic responds in two ways to these objections. He first argues that God's gift "does not primarily consist in any *thing* we can hold in our hands, but in whose hands we are held."<sup>94</sup> That is to say, God's gift to humanity is making humanity His own so that humanity belongs to Him. Furthermore, God's gifts cannot be reduced to frightful economy because of God's fullness.<sup>95</sup> Although God's gift does purchase something, it purchases what already belonged to Him. Moreover, God has no needs, so God doesn't give to get in any human sense.

While Kapic's work is refreshing in its exegetical approach, he leaves too many questions unanswered. For example, he says that because of God's fullness, God cannot be giving to get, but then he adds, "This delight and love flow to the creatures as generosity and back to God as thanksgiving and praise."<sup>96</sup> According to Kapic, this is the design of the flow of divine generosity. Indeed, it is its terminating point. If God is not giving to get, how should one conceive of this thanksgiving and praise that God's creatures ostensibly give to Him, with their giving being the climax of the divine circle of generosity? Kapic does not help the reader by writing, "As God's giving does not impoverish him but enriches him, so we, as we offer back to God the gifts he has given

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 74, emphasis his.

<sup>95</sup>Kapic does not shy away from economy, as long as economy is understood in a transformed sense, as God's economy, and not as economy in the way humans generally conceive of it, as mere transactions to increase the status, wealth, or well being of the giver. See *ibid.*, 126.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 25.

and sanctified in us, are enriched in his glory and are satisfied in and through him.”<sup>97</sup> How is the fullness of God compatible with God being “enriched” by His giving? And, most troubling of all, Kaptic writes, “Only by the full and willing sacrifice of God through the Son and sealed by the Spirit can he give everything away to get everything back.”<sup>98</sup> On the one hand, Kaptic argues that God is not giving to get, but here he explicitly claims that *the very reason God gave was to get*. While Kaptic deals with the Trinitarian nature of God’s giving, it is unfortunate that he does not do so here in this context, where it could be argued that God’s giving to get is actually His giving to *give*.

Kaptic’s approach has promise in that he approaches the subject exegetically, but ultimately he falls short of a truly helpful contribution that supports the reality of God’s gift because of how many questions he leaves unsatisfactorily answered. In fact, in many ways his work does more to confirm Derrida’s suspicions than to refute them.

### **Works on the Gospel of John**

The amount of literature on the Gospel of John is too vast to deal with extensively here, so preference will be given to those works that focus on Johannine soteriology with a close connection to the theme of the gift. Specific commentaries on John’s Gospel will be addressed throughout chapters two through four where various passages are exegeted, so the commentaries will not be discussed here.

**Jan G. van der Watt.** Van der Watt’s work on Johannine soteriology is structured around the conflict between Jesus and the Jews. The major soteriological question in the Gospel, according to van der Watt, is, “Where and with whom is God?”<sup>99</sup> Van der Watt generally follows the Bultmannian view of salvation in terms of revelation

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 142.

<sup>99</sup>van der Watt, *Salvation in the New Testament*, 102.

in answering this question. Salvation is “accepting Jesus as the Revelation of God and by accepting (believing in) him, becoming part of the family of God through birth from above.”<sup>100</sup> Salvation thus also has to do with one’s “social identity.”<sup>101</sup>

Regrettably, van der Watt does not give any detailed attention to the phenomenon of revelation, either in the person of Jesus or in the written Word. The close relationship, especially in Marion’s work, between gift and revelation needs to be explored further. Van der Watt instead assumes the reality of pure gift, writing that salvation through sending the Son is “an act of pure *grace*” and God’s “gift to the world.”<sup>102</sup> The inherent tension between these kinds of statements and statements that assert the necessity on the part of the one receiving salvation to “accept” Jesus in a certain way (and not other ways) remains. How is salvation purely of grace yet, in some way, conditional upon the response of the saved? This question has possible answers, but they are not explored in van der Watt’s work.

**Andreas Köstenberger.** Köstenberger has surprisingly little to say regarding the gift in John’s gospel. For example, in his otherwise thorough treatment of the Johannine Writings, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, the terms grace, gift, and giving are all absent from the subject index. In places where the history of research has shown fertile soil for discussion of the gift, such as the doctrine of the new creation, Köstenberger does not mention it.<sup>103</sup> Even in sections that discuss such topics as election and predestination, believing, and the new birth, the concept of gift is omitted.<sup>104</sup> In his

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 128.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 127.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 109 (emphasis his).

<sup>103</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 337-55.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 470. Köstenberger states, “There is no more theologically significant word that occurs more frequently in John’s gospel than the word ‘believe,’” citing its 98 occurrences. While he is

commentary, however, Köstenberger at a few points engages in some discussion of gift and its significance. For example, when discussing John 3:16, he states that John's use of the verb "gave" rather than "send" "draws attention to the sacrifice involved for God the Father in sending his Son to save the world."<sup>105</sup> Such language raises difficult and important questions concerning the nature of the gift. If the gift was sacrifice, in what sense was it still pure gift? Or, is "sacrifice" perhaps used figuratively without any cultic connotations? Later, when discussing the Father giving people to the Son, Köstenberger writes, "Though the focus in the present verse seems to be on the Father's work of 'giving' people to Jesus and on his receptive attitude, it is nonetheless true that persons must 'come to him. This underscores the need for a positive human response to the divine initiative."<sup>106</sup> Once again, there is a tension with the way the Father's free giving in John's Gospel is related to human receptivity and response, a tension without any relief. The concept of gift is explored with a sort of theological bracketing of the giver when discussing human response and of the receiver when discussing divine initiative, while the gift is always in play (while not quite in play) yet on the verge of extinction.

**Craig Koester.** Koester devotes a section in his chapter on God in John's Gospel to God as the "Creator and Giver of Life." Though not dealing with the philosophical discussion of gift directly in this section, he makes some important points that deserve further attention. He argues that existence itself is a gift of God, something "given."<sup>107</sup> Creation, likewise, is a gift from God, but more than that, creation points to

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undoubtedly correct in this observation, the verb *δίδωμι* and its cognates occur 93 times in John's Gospel, emphasizing the theological significance of the concept of giving along with believing.

<sup>105</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 129.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 212.

<sup>107</sup>Craig R. Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), chap. 2, loc. 499-509, Kindle.

the nature of God as the life-giver, especially in the ministry of Jesus, climaxing in His raising of Lazarus.<sup>108</sup> These two points, that God gives beings being before they come to be and that He gives life to the dead are significant elements in John's theology of gift. Koester also helpfully notes John's distinction between God's gift of physical life and His gift of the life that "comes through faith."<sup>109</sup> He does not examine why only some who exist are given the life that comes through faith, but he notes that "people will seek life," adding somewhat ironically, "that is a given."<sup>110</sup> But from where, and by whom? Perhaps to ask such a question is to take Koester's words more literally than he meant them, and yet, his words provoke significant questions pertaining to the gift. Koester's discussion of gift is one-sided, and intentionally so. He has no interest in discussing the human side of giving/receiving relationship when it comes to life. In a move that resembles Marion's strategy of explaining the gift, he completely brackets the donee when discussing the role of God as giver, bringing into focus his understanding of life and being as God's free gift. When discussing the human aspect in another section, he simply states that human beings "have no innate ability to generate relationships to God."<sup>111</sup> Koester thus takes a unilateral position on the gift, leaving the questions of how God's gift is unilateral but not universal and how exactly the recipient of life through faith can be brought back in to the gift event without disrupting God's unilateral giving unanswered.

**Conclusion.** Other works on John's Gospel could be surveyed, but they would serve to duplicate what has been covered in these selected works. The gift has not been

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<sup>108</sup>Ibid..

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., chap. 2, loc. 509-17.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., chap. 2, loc. 517-22.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., chap. 8, loc. 3244-49.

completely ignored in Johannine studies, but it has remained at the periphery, while other important topics have received the majority of the discussion. Most Johannine scholarship broaches the subject of the gift tangentially through discussions of soteriology, although these are not as common as one might wish.

### **Thesis**

The thesis of this dissertation is that John's Gospel presents salvation as a free gift given by God to humanity. While John recognizes the difficulties that exist in human giving, especially the way the world gives (John 14:27), he insists that God's giving is different. First, God's giving transcends human giving in that God is a unilateral giver to humanity. God does not enter into a gift-giving exchange with humanity as an equal partner, both parties each giving and receiving something from the other; to the contrary, God stands in the position of Giver, while humanity is always in the position of receiver of God's gifts, especially the gift of salvation. Second, God's gift is and is free in that it is exhaustive since in giving the gift of salvation God gives Himself to humanity. His gift is no thing, nor is it objective, *per se*; it is not a finite, quantitative amount, outside of which other things or amounts exist that could be returned to God. God's gift of salvation is really His gift to His creatures of all that exists. It is an exhaustive giving of no *thing* but not *nothing*; instead, it is the gift that transcends *everything*. Only God, the Creator of all that exists (John 1:3), could give in this manner. However, these two points do not lead to the conclusion that God gives humanity gifts like one might "give" something to an inanimate object. Humanity is called, even commanded, to respond to God's gift of salvation. God's gift must be received by humanity through faith, which itself appears to be a type of giving. What differentiates humanity's response to God's gifts from exchange or reciprocity is the role God plays in humanity's believing and receiving the gift. God is actually the One who creates and sustains the response He commands of His people, revolutionizing the type of giving that occurs between God and humanity. The

circle of giving, it will be shown, is actually intra-Trinitarian, a circle in which humanity is caught up as participants, but not in the manner gift exchange or reciprocation is generally conceived. God, because of who He is and the nature of His giving, can and does give salvation to sinners as a free gift. Salvation is not counterfeit money, nor is it true money. Salvation is aneconomic; salvation is genuine gift.

## CHAPTER 2

### GOD AS UNILATERAL GIVER

According to the Fourth Gospel, Jesus understood the problem of the gift. A gift, in the wrong hands, is poison. When Jesus was departing from this world, especially from the disciples, by way of the cross, He sought to comfort them by means of the gift. He told them, "Peace I bequeath to you. My very own peace I give to you." The gift of peace was to assuage their fears, as Jesus encouraged them, "Do not let your heart be frightened, nor let it be fearful" (John 14:27). The gift of peace defies comprehension, not merely on the level of the nature of this peace, but also as to how one might *give* peace. What does it mean to leave something with someone if I retain it for myself? And how can I give someone that which is my own and still call it my own? As shown in chapter 1, Mauss resolved this problem by resorting to the *hau* of the gift, the spirit within the object of the gift that always belonged to the original giver and tended back to the original giver. In such a system, as Derrida has argued, the gift is nullified, even impossible. Nothing is actually *given*. In this instance, however, if Jesus does not actually give the disciples His peace, then His encouragement to courage is empty and meaningless. If Jesus does not, or, worse, cannot, give His own peace to His disciples, not only should they ignore His encouragement, they should abandon Him altogether. His gifts are no better than poison, and His exhortation to courage is a self-serving sham.

Jesus, understanding not only the elusive nature of peace but also of the gift itself, places these pivotal words in between His gift and His words of comfort: "I do not give to you like the world gives." This statement has no direct object, only a dative, declaring that His *giving* is specifically to the disciples. But what of the gift? It is out of

the picture because the problem is not so much the gift as it is the giving. What transforms a gift into poison is the hand of the giver. Most commentators have missed this point completely, seeing an understood accusative distinguishing the gift of peace Jesus gives from the gift of peace the world gives.<sup>1</sup> However, Jesus is not interested in distinguishing His gift; He is interested in distinguishing His giving. As Godet rightly notes, “The contrast relates rather to the act of *giving* than to the object of the gift.”<sup>2</sup> Jesus assures His disciples that He is giving them the gift of peace, and His peace is not poison.

John 14:27 will be the subject of future inquiries as to the nature of Jesus’ gift, but it is vital at the outset to see that the Gospel of John recognizes the problem of the gift, redefines it as a problem of giving, and then sets forth a solution to the problem by distinguishing the giving of God and Jesus from the giving of the world of humanity. Divine giving is elevated above worldly giving, and, as transcendent giving, it is not something someone can arrive at by intuition. Studying the nature of gift and giving among cultures ancient or modern will tell us nothing about divine giving and gift if the Gospel of John is true.<sup>3</sup> John’s Gospel paints a complex and beautiful portrait of divine giving, and each aspect of the portrait must be considered to understand the whole.

The first aspect of the portrait of divine giving and gift concerns the unilateral

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<sup>1</sup>For example, Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 583-84, details the way Jesus’ peace might be differentiated from the world’s, but he says nothing about how Jesus’ *giving* is different from the world’s. Donald A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 506, contrasts Jesus’ peace with the *pax Romana*.

<sup>2</sup>Frederick Louis Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. Timothy Dwight, Zondervan/Accordance electronic ed., *Godet's Commentaries on Luke, John, Romans, and 1 Corinthians* (Altamonte Springs, FL: OakTree Software, 2006), par. 6112 (emphasis his).

<sup>3</sup>David Cheal, *The Gift Economy* (London: Routledge, 1988), 172-73, argues similarly that modern gift giving cannot be understood using models put forward by Mauss and his successors because modern society is radically different from the primitive societies studied by Mauss. If ancient models of gift giving are meaningless in light of the differences in culture between primitive and modern societies, it is a reasonable possibility that models of human giving, whether ancient or modern, have little to offer in properly understanding divine giving, especially divine gifts given by a transcendent God.

nature of God's giving. Only when the unilateral nature of divine giving is rightly understood can the meaning of the gift and the nature of reciprocity be examined within their proper context. John presents divine giving as unilateral giving. God stands in the position of Giver, and humanity stands in the position of recipient. That is to say, there is no divine/human exchange. There is no reciprocity. There is only gift, not counter-gift. Apart from seeing God as a (the) unilateral giver to humanity, John's statements about salvation as gift are always perverted and corrupted into exchange, grace is turned into merit, and the Creator is reduced to an equal with His creatures.

To establish that God is a unilateral giver in John's Gospel, I will examine the Prologue with a special focus on how John describes both God and humanity in relation to the gift. The Prologue of John's Gospel is a logical starting point to lay the foundation for a Johannine theology of gift because the Prologue sets the stage for all that is to follow in John's narrative of the Word becoming flesh (John 1:14). Scholars across various spectrums of theological backgrounds recognize that the Prologue is the cornerstone of the Fourth Gospel. For example, Carson calls the Prologue "a foyer to the rest of the Fourth Gospel."<sup>4</sup> Wright says of the Prologue, "These opening verses are, in fact, such a complete introduction to the book that by the time you get to the story you know a good deal about what's coming, and what it means."<sup>5</sup> Witherington agrees, describing the Prologue as "a key for the hearer or reader to understand what follows."<sup>6</sup> Schnackenburg sees the Prologue as a "theological 'opening narrative'" that serves to "throw proper light on his [the Word's] unique significance for salvation."<sup>7</sup> In a work

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<sup>4</sup>Carson, *John*, 111.

<sup>5</sup>N. T. Wright, *John for Everyone* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 1:2.

<sup>6</sup>Ben Witherington, III, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 47.

<sup>7</sup>Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, trans. Kevin Smyth (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987), 1:224.

such as the Gospel of John, for such a variety of scholars to find a point of nearly unanimous agreement is unique and telling. The Prologue is the foundation of the Fourth Gospel and, as such, is the proper place to begin unfolding its understanding of the gift and the gift's relation both to God and humanity.<sup>8</sup>

### **John 1:1-3 – The Gift of Creation**

The opening phrase of John's Gospel, ἐν ἀρχῇ, recalls the opening words of Genesis, drawing the reader's attention to a creation motif.<sup>9</sup> However, John's Gospel begins not with the divine act of creation but with what, or more precisely, who existed when the work of creation was initiated.<sup>10</sup> The Evangelist begins by asserting that the Word existed in the beginning, placing the emphasis on the *who* of creation rather than the *what* in order to define the relationship of ὁ λόγος to θεός (vv. 1-2).<sup>11</sup> It is only after

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<sup>8</sup>The precise structure and origin of the Prologue are not pertinent to the discussion to follow. For discussion of these issues, see Mary Coloe, "The Structure of the Johannine Prologue and Genesis 1," *Australian Biblical Review* 45 (1997): 40-55; R. Alan Culpepper, "The Pivot of John's Prologue," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1980): 1-31; Stephen S. Kim, "The Literary and Theological Significance of the Johannine Prologue," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166 (2009): 421-35; John A. T. Robinson, "Relation of the Prologue to the Gospel of St John," *New Testament Studies* 9 (1963): 120-29; Benedict T. Viviano, "The Structure of the Prologue of John (1:1-18): A Note," *Revue Biblique* 105 (1998): 176-84; Stephen Voorwinde, "John's Prologue: Beyond Some Impasses of Twentieth-Century Scholarship," *Westminster Theological Journal* 64 (2002): 15-44.

<sup>9</sup>The relationship of the Prologue to Genesis is well established in the literature. Perhaps Coloe, "The Structure of the Johannine Prologue and Genesis 1," 40-55, takes it a bit too far when she argues that the entire Gospel of John is patterned after the creation account in Genesis, with the Prologue structured after days one through six, and 1:19 through the end of the Gospel the seventh day of creation. Nevertheless, the point is well taken that the Gospel opens with a clear link to the creation narrative in Gen 1.

<sup>10</sup>Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 24, explains, "The words 'in the beginning' in John 1 have a broader meaning than they do in Genesis 1," adding, "they refer to something behind Genesis." The issue at the outset is not that God created the world, but the eternal existence of the Deity who *was* the moment moments began with creation.

<sup>11</sup>The background of John's use of the term λόγος is widely disputed. Köstenberger, *John*, 26-27, lists nine possibilities, narrowing down the list to three most likely candidates: (1) the Greek concept of universal Reason, (2) the OT concept of wisdom personified, and (3) the OT concept of the Word of God. With Köstenberger, I think that option three is the most probable interpretation, especially in light of Isa 55:9-11 and the mission language applied to the Son throughout John's Gospel. For an extensive treatment of the background issues, see Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody, MA:

John has established the nature of the Word and His relationship to God that he moves on to discuss the creation event in verse 3 and the Word's relationship to creation. These two themes, the Word's relationship to God and His relationship to creation, impact the Johannine conception of the gift and must be considered in turn.<sup>12</sup>

### **John 1:1-2 – The Word and God**

The first theme introduced in John's Gospel is the relationship of the Word to God.<sup>13</sup> Before defining the nature of this relationship, however, John begins by asserting the existence of the Word at the beginning: "In the beginning was the Word" (v. 1). As noted above, the opening phrase of this verse recalls the creation account in Genesis 1. Unexpectedly, the reader does not encounter something *becoming* in verse 1. Nothing is *made* or *created*. In the beginning the Word *was*. The significance of the verb ἦν becomes clear when it is contrasted with how John uses the verb γίνομαι in verse 3 to describe the created world. The Word, unlike created beings, did not come into existence; the Word existed, without explanation and without cause. When creation occurred, the Word was, indicating that the Word exists outside of time and space. The Word existed in eternity, without the existence of creation and without the existence of time or space.

The eternal being of the Word, existing outside time and space, creates a dilemma. For Jewish monotheists committed to the OT and the Mosaic Law, the only

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Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 1:339-63, who takes a nuanced version of position (3) above, describing Jesus as "the supreme revelation of God" because He is the embodiment of God's Word revealed in the Torah through Moses.

<sup>12</sup>Morris, *John*, 64-70, follows a nearly identical division of the first verses of John's Prologue. Morris, however, keeps vv. 4-5 with v. 3, as speaking about the Word and His relationship to creation. For reasons discussed below, it seems preferable to take vv. 4-5 as a description of the Word as He is in Himself, not as a description of the relationship of the Word with the creation event. So M. E. Boismard, *St. John's Prologue* (London: Blackfriars, 1957), 79-80.

<sup>13</sup>J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 47, notes how John's focus in these opening verses is on the "being" of the Word, explaining, "The Word must be identified, and can only be identified in relation to God, the God of Israel."

being who existed prior to creation is God.<sup>14</sup> To assert that the Word existed prior to creation immediately raises the issue of the Word's relationship to God. In what sense is it possible to say that the Word existed in the beginning when God alone existed in the beginning?<sup>15</sup> John continues by explaining that the Word was with God (καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν; v. 1). The Word's relationship to God was one of distinction within community. The Evangelist speaks of the Word as separate from God but in close fellowship with God. The pronoun πρὸς can express several nuances when used with the accusative case. One possible meaning in this verse is "with" in the sense of being in the presence of another person.<sup>16</sup> While BDAG cites this verse under this definition, it seems hard to understand how an eternal Word could be with, in the sense of proximity, God, the eternal Spirit who is not confined by space. Moreover, in what sense can God and the Word be said to be with each other in proximity in their existence without any *place* existing? No place was for them to be. Their existence prior to and outside of space makes nonsense out of any kind of definition that emphasizes proximity or nearness in space. A better interpretation of this term is to take it relationally.<sup>17</sup> The Word was with God in a relationship of loving communion.<sup>18</sup> Carson points out that this term is

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<sup>14</sup>As Köstenberger, *John*, 25, notes, "John's first readers would have expected the phrase 'In the beginning *God*'" (emphasis his).

<sup>15</sup>For a review of the various ways Judaism understood both wisdom and *memra* existing in the beginning, see Daniel Boyarin, "The Gospel of the *Memra*: Jewish Binitarianism and the Prologue to John," *Harvard Theological Review* 94 (2001): 243-84.

<sup>16</sup>BDAG, 875.

<sup>17</sup>*Contra* C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: S.P.C.K., 1978), 155, who can find "no clear meaning" when the Word and God are described in relationship rather than spatially, citing Prov 8:30 as an example of the spatial meaning. And yet, is there a "clear meaning" of location prior to space existing? As difficult as it is to conceive of the Deity existing apart from space, it is no more difficult than the Deity's existence apart from time. Both spacelessness and timelessness are outside the realm of human description and comprehension, but both remain true despite human finitude.

<sup>18</sup>BDAG, 874, says this term can mean "with" in the context of a friendly relationship, which seems preferable in John 1:1.

commonly used of persons with other persons “usually in a fairly intimate relationship.”<sup>19</sup> Such would appear to be the case here, as the Word and God exist together in harmonious relationship in the beginning.

John concludes verse 1 by emphatically declaring that the Word was God.<sup>20</sup> The Evangelist thus transitions from speaking of the community of God and the Word to the unity of God and the Word. Not only are the Word and God distinct and in relationship, but they also share the divine nature. The Word cannot be sharply severed from God, as if the Word and God were two separate beings. Moreover, this unity implies that when the Word acts, He acts as God, an implication that will become explicit in verse 3.<sup>21</sup> Through this statement, John presents the mystery of the unity that exists between God and the Word. What God is, the Word is. What God does, so the Word does in like manner. What God says is His Word, so that the words of the Word are the very words of God.

John summarizes his threefold description of the relationship between the Word and God in verse 2.<sup>22</sup> When John refers to the Word with the pronoun οὗτος, he recapitulates the last statement in verse 1 while directing the reader’s attention to the

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<sup>19</sup>Carson, *John*, 116

<sup>20</sup>The controversy over how to interpret the construction καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος is well known and will not be rehearsed here. The present writer understands this to be a statement of the Word’s deity. For discussion of this issue, consult the standard Greek grammars and Johannine literature.

<sup>21</sup>Barrett, *St. John*, 156, writes of John 1:1, “John intends that the whole of his gospel shall be read in the light of this verse. The deeds and words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God.” So also Witherington, *John’s Wisdom*, 54. Barrett jumps ahead a bit in his exegesis since the name “Jesus” has not been mentioned yet, let alone any of His words or deeds; nevertheless, he touches on the critical point this verse serves to make. The Word as God and as with God acts as God Himself in unity with the God with whom He was (and is). Without understanding this profound principle, the reader will be left in the same condition as many of Jesus’ interlocutors: confused, and perhaps even outraged, rejecting not only the gift but, more importantly, the Giver.

<sup>22</sup>As Morris, *John*, 70, notes, “Nothing new is added in this verse.” It serves to repeat and emphasize what John has just said in v. 1.

Word for the following verses.<sup>23</sup> John then repeats his claims that the Word existed in the beginning in relationship with God. The Word is thus identified with God, yet at the same time a distinction is preserved between the Word and God. Gift and giving are not mentioned in these opening verses in John's Gospel, yet the foundation these verses lay of the simultaneous distinction and unity of God and the Word is vital to building a proper interpretation of the gift in Johannine terms.

### **John 1:3 – The Word and Creation**

Having described the relationship between the Word and God, John transitions to a discussion of the Word and creation in verse 3.<sup>24</sup> The Word is the divine agent who brought all things (πάντα) into being.<sup>25</sup> The Evangelist's choice of the verb γίνομαι is significant for two reasons. First, it recalls the creation account in the LXX, where this verb is used 23 times to describe God's creative work.<sup>26</sup> Second, this verb differentiates the Word from creation, so that the Word is not a created being and cannot be said to have come into being. When the Evangelist introduces the Word, the Word *was* (εἰμί), but all other things that exist *came into being* (γίνομαι). Not only is the Word to be differentiated from creation, the Word is described as the one through whom all created

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<sup>23</sup>Carson, *John*, 117, understands οὗτος to mean "This Word who is God," which makes sense and preserves the symmetry of vv. 1-2.

<sup>24</sup>For a discussion of the possible background material for the Word's creative role, see Keener, *John*, 1:374-81.

<sup>25</sup>Morris, *John*, 71 n. 21, suggests the anarthrous construction indicates that all things in their individual state rather than in their totality is meant.

<sup>26</sup>This argues against the idea that soteriology is in view here rather than cosmology, even soteriology conceived redemptive-historically. While it is perhaps true that the Fourth Gospel is not interested in cosmology as a subject in isolation, it is virtually impossible to make sense of John's soteriology apart from cosmology. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John: Introduction, Translation and Notes*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 29 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1966), 6, further notes that this verse has been interpreted cosmologically since the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

things came to be, for “all things came to be *through Him*” (v. 3; emphasis added).<sup>27</sup>

John restates his thesis negatively in the second half of verse 3, emphatically declaring that nothing that was created was brought into being apart from the Word’s creative work.<sup>28</sup> In this restatement, however, the Evangelist makes one important change to the previous statement by changing from the aorist ἐγένετο to the perfect γέγονεν.<sup>29</sup> The perfect tense moves the reader past the initial creation event to view all of creation as it exists in its present condition as the creative work of the Word.<sup>30</sup> The Word therefore is not only the one who created all that exists but also the one who sustains all that exists.<sup>31</sup> Whatever exists in creation is the product of the Word’s creative work. As Keener has written, “‘All things’ (πάντα) emphasizes Jesus’ priority, hence supremacy, over whatever is created (3:35; 13:3; cf. Rev 4:11), hence over all humanity (17:2), whether or not humanity acknowledged it (1:10-11).”<sup>32</sup>

The significance of the Word’s creative work for the gift is monumental. The creation itself comes from Him as He brings it into existence. The very being of any

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<sup>27</sup>*Contra* Köstenberger, *John*, 29, it is not clear that the preposition “conveys secondary agency on the part of the Son.” As Ridderbos, *John*, 36-37, explains, διὰ is used other places generally of God (cf. Rom 8:31; Gal 4:7), and the only conclusion one can draw from John 1:3 is that the Word brought all created things into existence. A precise theology of the pre-incarnate relationship of the Word and God is not here explicated.

<sup>28</sup>Köstenberger, *John*, 30, notes that this is a common Johannine literary device to emphasize an important point.

<sup>29</sup>The punctuation of v. 3 is disputed. Does the sentence end with ἔν or with γέγονεν? The NA<sup>28</sup>/UBS<sup>4</sup> put the full stop after ἔν so that γέγονεν begins a new sentence. Most English versions translate v. 3 as a single sentence (NASB, ESV, NKJV, NIV, etc.). Barrett, *St. John*, 156-57 lists four convincing reasons for putting the period after γέγονεν. So also Köstenberger, *John*, 29-30. On the whole, Barrett’s reasoning makes more sense of the text, *contra* Brown, *John 1-12*, 6.

<sup>30</sup>Morris, *John*, 71, comments, “‘Were made’ (aorist) pictures creation in its totality, as one act, but ‘has been made’ is perfect, which conveys the thought of the continuing existence of created things.” Similarly Carson, *John*, 118.

<sup>31</sup>For a similar thought but in different language, see Heb 1:1-4 and Dan Näsaelqvist, “Stylistic Levels in Hebrews 1.1-4 and John 1.1-18,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 35 (2012): 31-53.

<sup>32</sup>Keener, *John*, 1:381.

created thing is therefore a *gift* from the Word, who does the work of God.<sup>33</sup> The Word *gives* life to all that lives, and He gives it unilaterally. The creation does not ask to come into existence and it does not consent to God's creative work through the Word.

Moreover, as Keener noted above, even when people refuse to acknowledge that the Word is the Giver of life, the gift is not nullified. They receive it *because* He gives it. They live because He has given life and brought them to be. The gift is therefore not dependent in any way upon the attitude or response of the recipient. When God creates, which He does when the Word creates, He gives being unilaterally, receiving no return gift, inexplicably giving both being and reception of being at creation.

### **Summary**

John 1:1-3 explores the relationship of the Word to God and to the created universe. The Word is timeless as He was when time began in the beginning.<sup>34</sup> The Word *was* in relationship to God, having fellowship and communion with God in eternity. The Word was not only distinct from God but was in union with God. He was the Word of God, so that His words and works were the words and works of God. As the Word of God, He brought creation into existence and sustains creation in its present condition. He is the Word who gives all things their being but who received being from nothing, standing as the unilateral divine Giver. When the Word gives, God gives. What the Word gives, God gives. The Word's gifts are unilateral, giving not only existence but the reception of the gift so that what He gives is gift, pure and free, received simply because He has given it.

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<sup>33</sup>This fact does not escape Köstenberger, *John*, 22-23, who recognizes that "God's creation *gifts* through the Word were life and light" (emphasis added). The themes of life and light will be explored in the next section of the current chapter.

<sup>34</sup>To say the Word existed *before* time is nonsense because terms like "before" only make sense in the context of time.

## John 1:4-13 – The Gifts of Light and Life

The next section of John's Prologue introduces two of the most important images in the Fourth Gospel: life and light. John 1:4-13 begins by discussing life, but then almost immediately John links life to light (καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων) and remains focused on the Word as the Light until verse 12, when the language of life returns through the metaphor of birth. Because this section intertwines these two themes, they will be taken together in this section, although they must be examined separately to understand how John conceives of these two images within the context of God's gift through the Word.

### The Gift of Light

Gerald Borchert has written, "'Light' according to the Prologue does not belong naturally to humanity. It is a gift or a power from outside the human situation that confronts the world."<sup>35</sup> Borchert's words leave a tangled mess of questions in their wake. Is 'light' a gift or a power? It seems unlikely light could be both since Borchert rules this out by offering one option "or" the other. Later, Borchert tends toward calling it a gift.<sup>36</sup> If, therefore, light is a gift, how can it "confront the world?" What sort of gift is confrontational except the challenge that masquerades as gift, as seen above in the work of Mauss? If the gift of light challenges the world through confrontation, its character as gift is called into question. While it is impossible to deny the element of conflict between Jesus, the Light of the world (John 8:12), and the people who rejected and ultimately crucified Him, light should not be understood as a confrontational gift, but as a unilateral

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<sup>35</sup>Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11*, New American Commentary, vol. 25A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 108-9.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 109. Borchert writes, "In v. 5 this Johannine idea is completed as the Life/Light-giver continues to shine (notice the present tense) into the darkness" (emphasis mine). By referring to the Word as the *giver* of light, Borchert implies that light is a gift rather than a power, assuming he meant "or" and not "and" in the quote cited earlier.

gift. A proper exegesis of the Prologue in conjunction with other passages concerning light symbolism in John establishes the unilateral nature of the gift of light.

In John 1:4-11, John gives the framework for understanding light as it relates to the created world. As noted above, the Genesis creation account echoes throughout the first five verses of the Prologue, so it is not surprising that light, which was what God created on the first day of creation, should take a central place in these verses. The first explicit mention of humanity (verse 4) is made in connection with light; the life inherent to the Word was the light of humanity.<sup>37</sup> Light is a basic necessity for human existence, and the Fourth Gospel begins by showing that this need was met in the life of the Word through a unilateral gift.

The creation context defines the way the reader should understand the original, intended relationship between light and the world. At creation, light was not in conflict with the world, and light was not confronting the world.<sup>38</sup> To the contrary, light was a gift given to make life in the world possible. Moreover, this gift was a unilateral gift. The human recipients of the light did not yet exist when the light was created. Humanity was created in a world that had already been given light. The gift of light to humanity was so one-sided that one almost could say that humanity was given to the light, so that they themselves are gifted as gift/recipients. In this context, the original relationship between the light and the world is not one of antagonism and hostility; instead, the world and light exist in harmony, the light providing the necessary conditions for the life of the world,

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<sup>37</sup>For a history of interpretation of this verse, see Peder Borgen, "Logos Was the True Light: Contributions to the Interpretation of the Prologue of John," *Novum Testamentum* 14 (1972): 115-30. Borgen concludes that the light was removed by the introduction of sin through Adam's fall. His exegesis fails to wrestle with the present tense φαίνει (v. 5), which indicates that the light continued to shine in spite of the entrance of sin into the world and humanity's desire for the darkness over against the light (cf. John 3:19-21). See Morris, *John*, 75.

<sup>38</sup>One conceivably could argue that light confronted the darkness in the primeval chaos of Gen 1:2, but the idea of conflict is noticeably absent from the Genesis account. Harmony sounds forth throughout the narrative as God repeatedly sees His creation and declares that it is good. Without sin in the world, conflict and confrontation would be impossibilities.

and the world springing forth to life under the radiance of its beams.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the gift of light, far from a challenge to the world, was given to make the life of the world possible within a framework of unity and harmony.<sup>40</sup>

The Evangelist makes no mention of a counter-gift given in response to the gift of light. In fact, he travels in quite the opposite direction. John 1:5 hints at the entrance of sin into the world and the resulting conflict between light and darkness.<sup>41</sup> After explaining the mission and role of John the Baptist as the witness to testify concerning the Word who was the Light (vv. 6-8), the Evangelist returns to a discussion of the Word as Light in John 1:9. The Evangelist does not introduce the notion of economy now that the world has been defiled by sin and is characterized by darkness; rather, he re-affirms the nature of the Word as benevolent to a world shrouded in darkness and full of hostility toward Him. The “true light gives light to every man.” As it was at creation, the gift of light is given indiscriminately to all people. While there is some debate about the precise nature of the gift of light and the scope of *πάντα ἄνθρωπον*, it seems best to understand the Evangelist to be referring to the knowledge every person has about God through being made in His image and living in His world.<sup>42</sup> It is precisely this

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<sup>39</sup>In this sense, John 1:4 indicates that the life that inheres in the Word is the light that makes life possible in the world. Apart from the life of the Word, life does not exist. So Köstenberger, *John*, 30.

<sup>40</sup>Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:241 n. 70, makes a significant point about the light of life, writing, “‘Light of life’ means primarily physical life on earth which man enjoys in the light of the sun, cf. Ps 56:14; Job 3:20; 33:28, 30; but since this life is given by God and lived out before God, it has also a deeper religious meaning, which is expressed for instance in Ps 27:1.” He then lists several other parallel passages showing how the physical light God created to make life possible for the creature is a metaphor for the light God gives in redemption. See also Ridderbos, *John*, 38.

<sup>41</sup>Kim, “The Literary and Theological Significance of the Johannine Prologue,” 430. So also Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 93-94.

<sup>42</sup>Three basic interpretations of this verse have been suggested: (1) The illumination is objectively given to reveal a person’s spiritual condition, either as a believer in Christ or as under the judgment of God. Light is therefore linked to judgment (so Barrett, *St. John*, 161; George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 12; Carson, *John*, 123-24; Köstenberger, *John*, 35-36). (2) The illumination is the light that leads to salvation,

interpretation that allows verse 10 to be so striking.<sup>43</sup> Although people lived in the world created by the Word and had been given an internal knowledge about God, they did not recognize the Giver when He came into the world He created and had given to them to enjoy. Far from being able to give a counter-gift to the Word when He finally arrived in the world, His anonymity prevented the world from recognizing His true identity and made it impossible for the world to give a gift in return for the gift of light it had received. The gift of light was a unilateral gift, given by a giver who remained anonymous to the recipients and who gave, not out of confrontation or challenge, but out of benevolence to allow the world to flourish in harmony with its Creator.

**Believing in the light: John 12:35-46.** The final occurrence of light imagery in the Gospel of John (John 12:35-46) corroborates the idea in the Prologue that light is a unilateral gift. Jesus, facing His imminent departure from this world, gives his hearers one final exhortation to follow the light. Sandwiched in the middle of Jesus' exhortation is the Evangelist's explanation of why the original hearers of Jesus' words did not believe in Him, resulting in Jesus' crucifixion. This passage has many possible points of inquiry,<sup>44</sup> but the primary theme to note in this passage for the present investigation is how the Evangelist presents and explains Jesus' words to show the unilateral character of

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although not everyone receives it. Therefore, not everyone is actually enlightened by the Light, but only those who receive the Light are enlightened (so Raymond Bryan Brown, "Prologue of the Gospel of John: John 1:1-18," *Review & Expositor* 62 (1965): 435; Ridderbos, *John*, 43; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:254). (3) The illumination is akin to general revelation, so that every person knows the truth about God and himself by virtue of the Word's enlightening work (so Michaels, *John*, 64; Morris, *John*, 83-84). The last option makes the most sense of the data in the verse and the surrounding context.

<sup>43</sup>Michaels, *John*, 65, notes, "The effect is to heighten the irony and tragedy of a new assertion: 'and [yet] the world did not know him.'"

<sup>44</sup>Such as those represented by Peder Borgen, "The Use of Tradition in John 12:44-50," *New Testament Studies* 26 (1979): 18-35; Scott A. Celsor, "The Human Response in the Creation and Formation of Faith: A Narrative Analysis of John 12:20-50 and Its Application to the Doctrine of Justification," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 30 (2008): 115-35; Richard L. Jeske, "John 12:20-36," *Interpretation* 43 (1989): 292-95; Judith L. Kovacs, "'Now Shall the Ruler of This World Be Driven Out': Jesus' Death as Cosmic Battle in John 12:20-36," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114 (1995): 227-47; Ignace de la Potterie, "L'exaltation Du Fils De L'homme (Jn 12:31-36)," *Gregorianum* 49 (1968): 460-78.

the gift of light.

Upon encountering Jesus' words in John 12:34-36, the reader initially could have the impression that becoming "sons of light" is a matter of economy since it appears to be the result of a series of transactions. Jesus has come, giving Light to the world through His words and works. Those who reciprocate to Him by believing in Him receive yet another "gift," the "gift" of becoming sons of light.<sup>45</sup> But are these "gifts" really gifts if they are just part of a series of transactions and exchanges? While the counter-gift (faith) might not balance the scales, it appears that such an imbalance nullifies the gift more emphatically since not only are people giving a return gift, but also they are put in a position of infinite inferiority. The Giver is really nothing more than a taker in disguise.

If this hypothetical scenario is allowed to play out, and belief is taken as the appropriate counter-gift to the gift of light, a serious problem arises for economy in verses 36-41. Jesus immediately hides from the people to whom He has just given this call to believe in Him. If the reader draws the conclusion that Jesus is making it impossible for His hearers to give a counter-gift in response to His invitation, the Evangelist does nothing to disabuse him of that notion in verses 37-41. He states clearly that those who heard Jesus' words did not believe in Him (John 12:37), and the reason they did not believe in Jesus was not because they rejected an economic view of salvation, but because God rejected it. The prophet Isaiah had foretold that Israel would not believe Jesus because God would not permit them to believe.<sup>46</sup> God blinded and

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<sup>45</sup>The question of whether faith is reciprocation is significant. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 712, writes that the essential ingredients of saving faith are knowledge, approval, and trust. The elements of approval and trust involve confessing the truthfulness of Jesus as well as entrusting (giving?) oneself to Him. Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 726, uses the standard language of *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia* to describe the nature of faith. He helpfully grounds all of these elements of saving faith in God's election from the foundation of the world and the Spirit's work of regeneration. The nature of the human response in its character as response will be taken up and discussed in chap. 4.

<sup>46</sup>When the Evangelist wrote οὐκ ἠδύναντο πιστεύειν in v. 39, the implication is without

hardened them, preventing them from giving the “counter-gift” of believing Jesus.<sup>47</sup> It is significant, then, that God Himself rejects the counter-gift by making it impossible to give through hardening and blinding. God will not have His unilateral gift of light corrupted by human exchange.

In the midst of God’s hardening and blinding work, some did in fact believe in Jesus, though with a deficient, secret belief. Jesus’ final statement serves to dispel any notion of gift-exchange for those who in fact do believe.<sup>48</sup> By directing the belief of His followers beyond Himself to the One who sent Him (John 12:44), Jesus distorts the notion of counter-gift beyond recognition. The unilateral nature of the gift is thus preserved as the “counter-gift” bypasses the Giver when the gift of light is received, and it terminates with an unseen and unknown Sender, whom no one has ever seen (John 1:18) and whom only Jesus knows (John 8:19). And yet here Jesus presents a paradox about the one to whom belief is directed. Although no one has ever seen Him, everyone who sees Jesus sees Him (John 12:45).<sup>49</sup> Through this paradoxical and enigmatic statement, Jesus once again removes Himself from view immediately after calling for His hearers to believe in Him. Those who come to Jesus do not come to *Him* nor do they see *Him*. He becomes the unseen Giver to whom no man can give in return, for just when a man sees Him, He sees Him no longer. Just when a man believes in Him, He does not

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question that the people who heard Jesus’ invitation were not able to believe and were, in fact, prevented from believing, uncomfortable as this notion may be.

<sup>47</sup>Witherington, *John’s Wisdom*, 226, tries to soften God’s blinding of those who rejected the Messiah by saying that Israel’s “unbelief had been incorporated into God’s plan all along.” Carson, *John*, 448, is correct, *contra* Witherington, when he calls the hardening a “judicial hardening” that God Himself performs, noting, “In that sense God himself, through the prophet, hardens the heart of people.” In John, the hardening happens through the Prophet *par excellence*, Jesus Christ.

<sup>48</sup>Whether those who believed in John 12:42-43 were sincere believers or superficial believers who ultimately were lost is immaterial to the point at hand. In John 12:44-46, Jesus addresses those who believe in Him without making any explicit commentary on the aforementioned secret believers.

<sup>49</sup>Michaels, *John*, 715, recognizes that Jesus “is fond of putting things paradoxically.” These paradoxes are resolved by “the principle that what is done to, or for, a person’s agent or emissary is actually done to, or for, the person who sent him.”

believe in *Him*. Thus, belief itself appears to become an aporia that mirrors the aporia of the gift. As soon as it appears, it disappears. Or, rather, as soon as it appears, it is re-directed and re-defined, not in *itself*, but in its *object*. The *gift* is, but the *counter-gift* is not. The gift is unilateral, for there is not counter-gift to the gift of light.

**Seeing the light: John 8:12; 9:1-41.** While the Prologue of John's Gospel clearly indicates for the reader that the Word is the Light, Jesus' most direct statement about being the light occurs in John 8:12. In John 8:12, Jesus proclaims, "I am the light of the world; whoever follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but he will have the light of life." Surprisingly, the Evangelist departs from this statement in the next verse without the slightest bit of analysis or elaboration. The Pharisees do not address the content of Jesus' claim; instead, they focus on the claim's technical legality before the Mosaic Law. The rest of John 8 continues with discussions about Jesus' identity without reference to His claim to be the light of the world. Such a profound statement cannot finally be left alone, and John returns to it again in John 9. Rather than presenting a theological argument between Jesus and His opponents, the Evangelist narrates a miracle in which Jesus gives light to blind eyes to explain the significance of Jesus as the light of the world.<sup>50</sup> John 9:5 draws the link to John 8:12, as Jesus reiterates, "When I am in the world, I am the light of the world."<sup>51</sup> John 9 therefore serves as a lens through which Jesus' gift of light may be observed and understood. As the narrative unfolds, the unilateral nature of Jesus' gift of light that was introduced in the Prologue becomes evident.

The context of the healing narrative begins by suggesting that the gift of light

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<sup>50</sup>For an evaluation of the sources behind John 9, see Borchert, *John 1-11*, 310-12. For a critique of J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003) and his two-layer interpretation of John's Gospel, see Carson, *John*, 360-61.

<sup>51</sup>So Brown, *John 1-12*, 343.

is a unilateral gift.<sup>52</sup> The narrative begins with Jesus and His disciples passing by a man who had been blind from birth. Strangely, the man neither approaches Jesus nor requests the gift of light. The absence of the man's involvement in the giving of the gift, to the point that he neither asks to receive the gift nor is asked by Jesus if he wants the gift, is striking.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, since the man has been blind from birth, he has never seen Jesus. As the narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that the man does not know who Jesus is, and that Jesus is in a very real sense an anonymous giver to the man born blind. When Jesus sends the man away to wash in the pool of Siloam, He cements His anonymity. The man receives light away from Jesus' physical presence. Jesus gives the man the gift of light *in absentia*, making it impossible for the man to give a return gift because the Giver is not present, has never been seen, and His identity is unknown.

It perhaps may be objected that this gift is not really a gift at all since the man had to go wash in the pool of Siloam to receive it. To this objection, three responses are in order. First, that the man had to go somewhere to receive the gift in no way nullifies its character as a gift. The man himself testifies that through the washing he *received* sight (v. 11), and the narrative emphasizes time and again that Jesus is the One who opened his eyes (vv. 15-17, 21, 25-27, 30-33), without confusing the act of washing in the pool with a work performed in exchange for sight. Second, if the act of washing was something done in exchange for the gift (which would no longer be a gift if it were *quid pro quo*), to whom did the man give something in return? Jesus was not present when the man washed in the pool. The man, moreover, washed his own eyes, not the eyes of another, and

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<sup>52</sup>Michaels, *John*, 547, notes the connection between this healing and John's Prologue.

<sup>53</sup>Some commentators, such as Borchert, *John 1-11*, 314-15, have compared Jesus' giving of sight to the blind man in John to the original creation account in Gen 1-2. The fact that the man is given a gift in the manner John depicts does in fact echo the creation account, especially the giving of light to creation. The healing of the blind man thus provides a helpful foreshadowing of Jesus' power to give the gift of life to the dead, something that will be displayed in John 11 and discussed below.

certainly not the eyes of Jesus, making it impossible to discern who received something from the man in exchange for the gift of light, or how exactly Jesus might have benefited from the man washing in the pool. When the man washed in the pool, the entirety of the benefit was his own. Even in relation to those who witnessed the miracle, Jesus received no benefit since they scorned and condemned Him for it. Finally, it was the very sending of the man away that secured the unilateral nature of the gift. When Jesus sent the man to the pool, He had the opportunity to create the distance and anonymity that would prevent a counter-gift. The objection thus is turned on its head: the fact that the man had to go somewhere else to receive the gift *preserved* the character of the gift as gift.

The context of the narrative establishes Jesus as the hidden, unseen Giver, and as the narrative progresses, Jesus' hiddenness is maintained. Jesus is conspicuously absent throughout all the theological debate that ensues between the man and his neighbors, the man and the Jewish authorities, and the man's parents and the Jewish authorities. Jesus is not only hidden but unknown throughout the text. When the man is asked where Jesus is, he does not know (v. 12).<sup>54</sup> When he is asked who Jesus is, his answers are inconsistent and sometimes nothing more than confessions of his own ignorance. For example, he says he does not know whether Jesus is a sinner or not (v. 25) but then seems to lean toward adopting a position that Jesus is not a sinner (v. 31). Even when Jesus finds the man at the end of the narrative, the man still does not know who Jesus is, asking the person speaking with him to tell him where to find the Son of Man (v. 36).<sup>55</sup> If the man wanted to give his Healer a counter-gift, he could not. Even upon encountering Jesus, he does not know Jesus' identity.

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<sup>54</sup>Carson, *John*, 366.

<sup>55</sup>Barrett, *St. John*, 364, explains that the man's question could be interpreted in two ways: (1) What does the title "Son of Man" mean? Or, (2) What person bears the identity of the Son of Man? Barrett correctly notes that Jesus' reply to the man leads to the second interpretation.

The man's encounter with Jesus presents the biggest challenge to Jesus' gift of light as a unilateral gift. Jesus' anonymity is finally and fully erased, and He reveals Himself as the Giver, resulting in the healed man believing in Him and worshiping Him (v. 38).<sup>56</sup> Has this been the game all along? Did Jesus merely give to get? To put it another way, is the man's worship the end of the story, the ultimate and final gift, deifying God by turning God into a seeker of human gifts, or, to use C. S. Lewis' words, turning God into "a vain woman wanting compliments"?<sup>57</sup> The way the Evangelist relates the narrative prevents the gift of light from being absorbed by economy.

The threat of synagogue expulsion was noted in John 9:22, and the healed man's parents valued their community over defending their son before the authorities.<sup>58</sup> As the narrative progressed, however, it became increasingly clear that Jesus' gift to the formerly blind man linked him to the Giver in a way that threatened the status quo. The gift was in danger of becoming a curse at almost every point of the narrative. Finally, the pressure burst the dam, and the fury of the Jewish leaders was poured out, resulting in the man being expelled from the synagogue (v. 34). The gift of light had cost the man his relationships with those in his community, leaving him isolated and alone. It is only when the man has been rejected and forsaken by his people because of the gift of light (which

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<sup>56</sup>This point in the narrative becomes an insurmountable obstacle for Marion's view of the gift according to the horizon of givenness. All anonymity and distance between giver and recipient are removed, and they are brought face to face. No antecedent gift has determined Jesus' gift of light. Jesus is both the gift *and* the Giver. Marion's inability to bring the giver and recipient together while maintaining givability of the gift is resolved by the very thing he seeks to exclude: transcendence. See chap. 1 for an overview of Marion's position on the gift.

<sup>57</sup>C. S. Lewis, *The Inspirational Writings of C. S. Lewis* (New York: Inspirational Press, 1987), 178.

<sup>58</sup>Barrett, *St. John*, 361-62, believes the account here is "anachronistic" because being put out of the synagogue was not practiced in Jesus' time. *Contra* Barrett, Carson, *John*, 369-72, explains how John's claim that the Jewish leaders had threatened to expel followers of Jesus fits within Jesus' ministry as a plausible situation. While it is likely that John's readers faced many of the same threats as the man born blind and his parents, their experience has not been imported into the narrative. It is best to take the Evangelist's historical claims seriously and understand that local synagogues were excommunicating those who professed Jesus even during the time of Jesus' ministry.

teeters on the brink of poison, creating narrative tension) that Jesus finds him. The Evangelist specifically notes that what prompted Jesus to find the man was the persecution the man had suffered because Jesus had healed him (v. 35).<sup>59</sup> Jesus would not permit His gifts to be tainted and turned into poison. The healed man thus sees, believes in, and worships Jesus. Although men have rejected him, God has welcomed him and given him a new community with a new shepherd who would care for His sheep and never let them go.

When the healed man worshiped Jesus, Jesus was still the one giving. He gave Himself to the man.<sup>60</sup> The gift of light turns out to be the gift of the Giver, received through faith in the Son of Man.<sup>61</sup> Faith, however, must not be conceived as a human work or contribution that transforms God's gift into a cooperative work between two equal partners. Celsor gets this precisely wrong in his discussion of the gift of light and the response of faith, arguing, "The human response is *enabled* only by the gift of God's prevenient grace."<sup>62</sup> The implication of this line of reasoning is that God's gift puts the sinner into a position to engage in contract with God, to enter into an agreement with God

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<sup>59</sup>It is significant that Jesus found the healed man. The man did not seek out Jesus at the beginning of the narrative when Jesus healed him, nor did he seek out Jesus at the end of the narrative after he had lost all social ties. Jesus the Giver does the seeking and the finding. For further elaboration on this theme, see Michaels, *John*, 567.

<sup>60</sup>Lewis, *Inspirational Writings*, 178, makes the same point when he writes, "I did not see that in the process of being worshipped that God communicates His presence to men. . . . Even in Judaism the essence of sacrifice was not really that men gave bulls and goats to God, but that by their so doing God gave Himself to men; in the central act of our own worship of course this is far clearer – there it is manifestly, even physically, God who gives and we who receive."

<sup>61</sup>When the man believes in Jesus, receiving not only the gift but also the Giver, Jesus' words in John 8:12 are brought out in their fullest meaning. *Jesus* is the light of the world so that receiving light ultimately is receiving *Him*. The gift cannot be severed from the Giver.

<sup>62</sup>Celsor, "The Human Response," 134 (emphasis added). He doubles down on this assertion when concluding his article, writing, "This gift creates an *ability* to adhere to the will of God, an *ability* to walk in the light, to believe that the Son is the light, and to remain in that light" (135, emphasis added).

if the sinner does his part.<sup>63</sup> In the final analysis, faith is not receiving the Giver according to Celsor's argument. Faith would be something formed by the sinner rather than given by God. It therefore would become man's achievement, man's contribution, and man's gift to God.<sup>64</sup> Yet the narrative leads to the opposite idea.<sup>65</sup> The man finally receives the Giver when everything else but the gift has been lost. He cannot put the Giver at his disposal, not even by believing in Him; instead, his faith shows that he is entirely at the disposal of the God who gives Himself in the gift of light so that the man might receive Him and experience the gift in its fullness. The gift of light thus opens the pathway to Jesus' continual giving, giving not only light to a man born blind, but also giving him a new place where he belongs and a Father who will never abandon him, in contrast to his human father (cf. Ps 27:10). Jesus gives the man the Giver, so that Jesus' gift of light is a gift that can never be lost, returned, repaid, or destroyed, but only received.

**Summary.** The Prologue of John's Gospel presents light as a unilateral gift given by and in the person of the Word that came into the world. When the Evangelist introduced the gift of light in John 1:4, he established that the gift of light was not a

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<sup>63</sup>René A. López, "Is Faith a Gift from God or a Human Exercise?," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164 (2007): 276, writes, "The Scriptures present the view that people can exercise faith to receive God's offer of salvation. In His convicting work the Holy Spirit draws sinners to Himself and waits for their simple response of faith." In saying this, López not only transforms faith into works and gift into merit, he removes the gift aspect of salvation. Salvation is no longer a *gift* but an *offer*. God doesn't *give* salvation; people *take* it (or take God up on His offer?). Missteps such as this forcefully drive home the point that either God is a unilateral Giver, or there is no gift, only offers and contracts, merits and demerits.

<sup>64</sup>Jeske, "John 12:20-36," 294, takes his argument a bit too far when he argues that Jesus stands as recipient and only recipient in His relationship with the Father, but he makes a helpful point when he says, "That Messiah loses his life and calls his own to follow is the unbelievable challenge of that seeing which is believing. What it means is that all achievement is given up, achievement which has as its purpose to place God at our disposal."

<sup>65</sup>Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 64, correctly concludes, "To decide in favour of Jesus is a divine gift and possible only for the elect." For an explanation on the relationship of faith and election, see Reymond, *Systematic Theology*, 731-36.

challenge that undoes gift, but a genuine gift that provided the context in which life could flourish in harmony with its Creator. Although humanity corrupted itself through sin, the Word continues to give light even when people do not recognize Him and when they try to suppress the gift because of what the light reveals about them. John goes so far as to say that even the misrecognition of the Giver could not destroy the gift. The gift of light is given and received because the Word gives it to humanity.

These themes introduced in the Prologue were supported in other contexts of John's Gospel where light imagery was used. When Jesus concluded His public ministry, He did so speaking once again about the light. He explained how counter-gift was impossible. Even the faith of those who received the light was not considered their counter-gift to the gift of light because faith is always redirected from the Son to the Father. The Son is not seen even when He is seen, nor is He believed in when people believe. The seeing and the believing are thus transformed in their object, in one sense mirroring the aporia of the gift by disappearing as soon as they appear, but in another sense transcending it by maintaining their presence redirected to a new object. John also illustrated how the gift is given and received through the narrative of the man born blind. The gift of light does not begin a sequence of exchange, the worship of Jesus by the man born blind notwithstanding. Instead, it opens the channel for a never-ending stream of gifts from God to men, providing not merely light, but love, community, and security. The gift of light is unlike anything man gives or receives from within the created world. It is a transcendent, unilateral gift given by God through Jesus, His Son, who is both the gift of light given ("I am the light of the world!" in John 8:12) and the Giver Himself who enlightens every person (John 1:9).

### **The Gift of Life**

The second prominent concept of John 1:4-13 is the gift of life. That the

Fourth Evangelist speaks of life as a gift God gives humanity is so clear that virtually everyone who has written on the subject assumes it.<sup>66</sup> Herein lies the challenge, for life is a gift unlike anything given horizontally between people. Perhaps the closest analogy is conception, pregnancy, and birth, but even this falls short of approximating the divine gift of life because, as any couple that has struggled with infertility can attest, the gift of life is not something humans have within their power to *give*. To the contrary, in horizontal, human relationships, life is the prerequisite condition for all interaction, including concepts like giving and receiving. Saarinen highlights the necessity of life in the giving of gifts when he writes, “One semantic feature of the verb ‘to give’ is that both the giver and receiver are normally supposed to be persons or at least living beings.”<sup>67</sup> What Saarinen describes originally as normal (implying there could be abnormal exceptions) becomes an inviolable rule without exception when he brings the Lutheran Confessions to bear on the subject. According to Saarinen, these Confessions require the recipient of any gift to be “alive.”<sup>68</sup> Saarinen notes that the Confessions apply this requirement specifically to the sacraments, but he extends it to all giving, using a model of communication as an analogy of a model of gift-giving.<sup>69</sup> That life is a gift, which has been assumed by virtually every student of John’s Gospel, is called into question

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<sup>66</sup>For example, Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2:355, says that for a Johannine conception of life, “The starting-point is Christ, the life-giver sent by God who has come down from heaven and gives life to the world.” Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 84, remarks, “What is remarkable in reading John is his emphasis on the *gift* of life now” (emphasis added), without any probing into the character of life as gift. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, 284, writes, “Thus God is life, and as the life is the Life-Giver.” Examples could be multiplied *ad infinitum* of Johannine works that simply assume that life is a gift.

<sup>67</sup>Saarinen, *God and the Gift*, 9.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>69</sup>Saarinen specifically notes the requirements in communication of a sender, a message, and a receiver, noting they closely approximate the giver, the gift, and the receiver in gift exchange. For his elaboration of this analogy, see *ibid.*, 12-14.

fundamentally by Saarinen's model of giving.<sup>70</sup>

None of this is surprising, since the possibility of the gift itself has been called into question. Moreover, the possibility of the gift is typically considered along a horizontal horizon, taking human models of giving and using them to negate the reality of the gift even from a transcendent Being. However, if life is a gift, it cannot be given horizontally from one creature to another, and any theoretical model of human giving will fall short of explaining God's gift(s). Moreover, the gift of life *requires* that the recipient not be a living being. The gift of life thus gives us a helpful test case for understanding God's transcendent giving to His creatures. How does God give the gift of life according to the Evangelist?

**Born of God: John 1:12-13.** As noted above, the Evangelist begins to discuss life in John 1:3, but then breaks off his discussion of life until verse 12, detouring to speak about the light given by and in the Word. The opening verse of this discussion is foundational (even if it is interrupted for nine verses) because it defines the relationship between the Word and life. John asserts, "In Him was life" (v. 4). This short statement raises two significant issues.

The first issue this statement raises is the meaning of the term "life." Several suggestions have been made as to what precisely the Evangelist had in mind with this term in this context, with three possibilities most commonly asserted. Some argue that John has in mind the creation account in this context, and so the life in view is the life God dispensed at creation.<sup>71</sup> Others say that life means eternal life in the soteriological

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<sup>70</sup>Unfortunately, Saarinen does not delve into the question of the divine gift of life to creatures, either at creation or at salvation, so it is impossible to say how he would react to a vertical model of the gift of life from Creator to creature and/or from Redeemer to the redeemed.

<sup>71</sup>So Carson, *John*, 119, and Barrett, *St. John*, 157-58.

sense, arguing that John is not interested in creation as much as in new creation.<sup>72</sup> A third possibility is that John means life in the absolute sense of the life of God, which is eternal and uncreated.<sup>73</sup> While each of these options have strengths, and all of them are theologically accurate, the last option seems to best fit the context here. John says that this life existed in the Word using the imperfect ἦν, which has been used in verses 1-3 for the Word and His eternity. The imperfect tense suggests that the life in view is life that is eternal, as it exists in God independent of both creation and new creation. The life of God was in the Word, indicating that the Word eternally shares in the very life of God.

The second issue pertains to the phrase “in Him” and what the Evangelist means when he says that this life was in the Word. This question is less controversial, as most commentators and Johannine scholars recognize that this means the life of God is inherent to the Word.<sup>74</sup> The Word does not come to possess this life at some point in time, unlike creation, which receives this life when God gives it. The Word is not a receiver of life, but the One in whom life exists from all eternity, possessing and giving life to whomever He wills (as John will go on to show; John 5:21). The position of the Word as giver of life is hinted at in the next clause, as John describes the life that was in the Word as “the light of men” (v. 4). The very nature of the Word as life is one of perpetual giving. The Word’s life overflows into creation as divine gift.

After transitioning to a discussion of the gift of light through the Word in verses 4-11, John returns to the theme of life once again in John 1:12-13. Life is

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<sup>72</sup>Brown, *John 1-12*, 7, 27. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 11, leans this direction as well, conceding that new creation presupposes the original creation, but that the emphasis here is soteriological.

<sup>73</sup>So Köstenberger, *John*, 30; Michaels, *John*, 54; Morris, *John*, 73-74; Ridderbos, *John*, 38; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:241-42

<sup>74</sup>See, for example, Borchert, *John 1-11*, 108; F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel & Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 33; Kim, "The Literary and Theological Significance of the Johannine Prologue," 429; Simon Ross Valentine, "The Johannine Prologue – A Microcosm of the Gospel," *Evangelical Quarterly* 68 (1996): 295-97.

presented through a birth analogy, as those who receive the Word/Light are children of God who are born of God. The gift of life is first described as “the authority to become children of God” in verse 12. This particular phrase is complicated by the word ἐξουσίαν, which presents an interrelated lexical and syntactical problem. Lexically, this word could be translated “power,” speaking of someone’s ability to perform a certain task.<sup>75</sup> Others have argued the word should be translated “right” or “authority,” with an emphasis on the status of a person rather than his ability.<sup>76</sup> The lexical problem is complicated by the syntactical question of the word’s function in the sentence. Some, such as Whitacre, have placed great syntactical weight on this term, arguing that it indicates those who receive this power must exercise it to become God’s children.<sup>77</sup> Others, such as Michaels and Schnackenburg, have argued that it is syntactically insignificant, and the meaning of the verse would remain intact if it were omitted.<sup>78</sup> A mediating position seems required, one that retains the most likely lexical meaning of the term while giving it an appropriate syntactical weight in the sentence.

The word can mean nothing other than “right” or “authority” in this context.<sup>79</sup> Whitacre is undoubtedly mistaken when he argues for the translation “power” for this term. Such a translation would be unprecedented in John’s Gospel (cf. John 5:27; 10:18;

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<sup>75</sup>BDAG, 352.

<sup>76</sup>Morris, *John*, 87, writes, “His [John’s] thought is that of status.” Rejecting the idea that this term means “power,” Michaels, *John*, 69, exclaims, “It clearly does *not* mean that ‘those who received him’ have a choice of either becoming ‘children of God’ or not” (emphasis his)! He concludes that this speaks of God “granting them the status of children,” but, as noted below, he finds the term superfluous in this context.

<sup>77</sup>Rodney A. Whitacre, *John* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 55.

<sup>78</sup>Michaels, *John*, 69; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:262.

<sup>79</sup>O. Betz, “Might, Authority, Throne,” in *NIDNTT* 2:610, notes that in John’s writings the term is always related to Jesus’ authority as the sent Son. Therefore, the idea is never that of power in John’s writings. *Contra* I. Broer, “ἐξουσία,” in *EDNT* 2:9-12, who takes it to mean “capacity.” The verb γίνομαι in this sentence communicates a change of status by the creative power of God. So Borchert, *John* 1-11, 86.

17:2; 19:10-11). However, it is unlikely that such a term is nothing more than excess weight, easily cast aside without loss of meaning. A better way to understand what John means is to understand this term as a legal affirmation of Christians as God's true children, as opposed to unbelieving Jews who had rejected Jesus as the Messiah (cf. John 1:11) and were neither Abraham's nor God's children, but children of the devil (cf. John 8:44; 1 John 3:10). The point is not that believers have to do something to actualize their status as God's children; the point is that they have all the legal rights and authority of legitimate children of God despite the fact that they might have been rejected by the Jewish establishment because of their faith in Jesus or because they are Gentile believers. With this understanding in place, the reader is in a position to evaluate how people come to be children of God with all the rights and privileges thereunto appertaining, which is the gift in question in these two verses.<sup>80</sup>

On the surface, this passage seems to contradict the very point at issue as verse 12 begins by stating that the Word gave the right of becoming children of God to those who received Him.<sup>81</sup> Is this not a *quid pro quo* exchange, where those who want to be God's children must first give something to God (here perhaps welcoming the Messiah and showing Him hospitality through faith), and only then can they receive (obtain?) the right of becoming His children?<sup>82</sup> Two primary factors militate against this possibility.

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<sup>80</sup>It should be noted that John's idea of becoming children of God is not the Pauline idea of adoption. John does not speak of our status as God's children in terms of adoption but in terms of being born of God. Perhaps this distinction is what enables Paul to speak of believers as sons of God (υἱοὶ θεοῦ; cf. Rom 8:14-15, which employs adoption terminology), while John only refers to Jesus as Son and to believers as children of God (τέκνα θεοῦ). See BDAG, 995; Carson, *John*, 126.

<sup>81</sup>It is possible that an implied θεός is the subject of the verb ἔδωκεν. However, the antecedent of αὐτόν immediately preceding the verb is clearly τὸ φῶς from 1:9, which harkens back to ὁ λόγος in v. 1 as well as points forward to it again in v. 14, making it the more likely subject. If θεός were the subject, John would have indicated it clearly by putting it in the nominative nearer the verb and writing τέκνα αὐτοῦ instead of τέκνα θεοῦ at the end of the clause. See Köstenberger, *John*, 39; Ridderbos, *John*, 45.

<sup>82</sup>Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament with Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Indexes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 382 n. 71,

First, John's terminology must be taken seriously. John does not refer to those who become God's children as givers but as *receivers*, while He refers to the Word as the One who *gives*. To turn this around so that the children become the givers while the Word becomes the recipient is to ignore John's diction and to invent a text that does not exist.

The second factor that argues against seeing a circle of exchange in John 1:12-13 is the temporal relationships of the verbs. In verse 12, there is no indication of the temporal sequence of receiving the Word and being given the authority to become God's child.<sup>83</sup> However, as the Evangelist continues to clarify this giving and receiving, he describes receiving the Word in terms of believing in Him, moving from the aorist indicative to a present participle (πιστεύουσιν). The present participle in this context indicates continuous action, consistent with the Evangelist's theological viewpoint that a person must abide in Christ and His Word to be a true disciple (cf. John 8:31).<sup>84</sup> John ends this section by reverting back to the aorist ἐγεννήθησαν. The subject (οἱ) of this verb is pushed to the beginning of the verse, but what is its antecedent?<sup>85</sup> Some have

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contends that John 1:12 is speaking of nothing more than first-century Jews showing Jesus the hospitality a true prophet deserves. This interpretation is unconvincing, as almost every commentator notes that receiving Jesus is nothing less than believing in Him for salvation, which John parallels with receiving Jesus in this verse. This does not mean Wallace's conclusion that receiving Jesus is a *consequence* of salvation rather than a *condition* is incorrect, as that is precisely what will be argued below.

<sup>83</sup>Both ἔλαβον and ἔδωκεν are aorist indicatives. The text could be translated three ways without violating the grammar of the passage: (1) "As many as had received Him, He gave . . .," indicating the receiving preceded the giving; (2) "As many as received Him, He had given . . .," indicating the giving preceded the receiving; or (3) "As many as received Him, He gave . . .," indicating either no temporal relationship between the two actions or indicating they occurred simultaneously. Because of the ambiguity of the syntax, the context of the passage must be allowed to determine the temporal relationships, if any, between these two actions. See Herbert Weir Smyth and Gordon M. Messing, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 434.

<sup>84</sup>To "receive" Jesus, then, is the initial exercise of belief in Him as the Messiah and Son of God and is a unique, unrepeatabe event, which can be spoken of in terms of a completed action, while believing in Jesus is the continuous act of trusting His word out of belief that who He is and what He has said are trustworthy. Barrett, *St. John*, 164, succinctly summarizes, "Allegiance as well as assent is intended." See also Brown, *John 1-12*, 11.

<sup>85</sup>A text-critical problem that reads ὃς οὐκ . . . ἐγεννήθη instead of οἱ οὐκ . . . ἐγεννήθησαν has led R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), 67 to view the Word as the subject of v. 13. As Barrett, *St. John*, 164, rightly

argued that it refers to τέκνα and is a *constructio ad sensum*.<sup>86</sup> This is unlikely for three reasons. First, those who argue for this interpretation are unabashedly theologically motivated. They want to disallow the passage from stating that faith depends upon regeneration, and the best route to their predetermined interpretation is to make the phrase τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ a parenthesis, eliminating the present tense verb from the main sentence so that the aorists' temporal relationships are undetermined.<sup>87</sup> While theologically driven exegesis is unavoidable at some level and does not *de facto* rule out an interpretation, exegetes are bound to do their best to allow the text to determine their theology, not the other way around. Second, a much more likely syntactical antecedent is the participial phrase τοῖς πιστεύουσιν. Not only does it agree with οἱ in gender, it is also nearer in context. Finally, the sequence of the verses makes more sense if οἱ refers to τοῖς πιστεύουσιν rather than τέκνα. This sequence balances out verses 12 and 13 so that the progression runs ὅσοι . . . αὐτοῖς . . . τοῖς πιστεύουσιν . . . οἱ (nominative, dative, dative, nominative).<sup>88</sup> With this foundation, those who believe in Jesus' name are equated with those who *were born* of God. The sense of the passage is that those who believe do so as a result or consequence of their being born of God.<sup>89</sup>

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argues, the reading contained in NA<sup>28</sup>/UBS<sup>4</sup> is the more likely reading.

<sup>86</sup>Rudolf K. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, R. W. N. Hoare, and J. K. Riches (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), 59 n. 5.

<sup>87</sup>Köstenberger, *John*, 39 n. 60.

<sup>88</sup>To this argument could be added that this interpretation fits the flow of thought better, with these four terms identifying specific people while the term τέκνα identifies not specific people but a particular status given to the people being discussed.

<sup>89</sup>*Contra* Barrett, *St. John*, 164, who simply asserts, "The aorist is not pluperfect in sense," and Carson, *John*, 126, who writes, "In fact, these verses refrain from spelling out the connection between faith and new birth." Michaels, *John*, 40, does not see a logical connection spelled out here, but he does interpret John 3:1-10 to mean that being born of God is the cause of receiving and believing. Ridderbos, *John*, 47, however, gets it precisely correct when he writes, "It has to be asserted that the concluding statement in vs. 13 traces the entire gift of being a child of God, including the manner in which it is effected, to its deepest ground: 'procreation' by God."

The implications of this are twofold. First, if believing and receiving are conceptually parallel, with receiving being the initiation of the continuous act of believing, the life that is imparted to believers as children of God is given not *in response* to human hospitality toward or faith in the Messiah, but Jesus is welcomed as the Messiah and continuously trusted as a *consequence* of this divine life given through being born of God. This rules out a circle of exchange. What believers might appear to be giving actually turns out to be what they are receiving. The Evangelist is not playing games with words when he calls believers those who *received* and the Word the One who *gave*. Second, this life-through-birth is *only* available as a divine gift and *cannot* be obtained through exchange. That is the point of the threefold negation in verse 13, where John rules out any human involvement in someone being born of God.<sup>90</sup> People receive the rightful status of being God’s children through a unilateral gift that the Evangelist calls being born of God.

After laying the foundation of life as a unilateral gift in the Prologue, John unfolds and emphasizes this teaching throughout his Gospel. Three further examples help unfold how the Gospel of John builds on the Prologue to demonstrate that life is a unilateral gift God gives.

**Born of the Spirit: John 3:1-10.** What John introduced in John 1:12-13 is detailed in John 3:1-10, as Jesus explains what it means to be born of God and, more specifically, how this new birth happens and life is received as a gift from God. Nicodemus, a “ruler” (ἄρχων) of the Jews, has come to Jesus at night for reasons not made explicit in the text. With most interpreters, it seems best to see Nicodemus as a

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<sup>90</sup>Interpreters differ on the details of what each particular negation negates, but they are agreed that the Evangelist’s point is that this birth comes from God apart from human effort. The present argument is that the only way to claim this with logical consistency is by arguing that the divine birth is a unilateral gift that is not dependent on human giving or counter-gift.

representative of the people who were described in John 2:23-25, who believed in Jesus because of the signs He had done at the Feast, but whose belief was shallow and uninformed.<sup>91</sup> Whatever the reason this leader of the Jews comes to Jesus, he quickly finds himself completely confused by the “Rabbi” and His teaching, showing that a shallow form of belief based only on Jesus’ signs is not the mark of being a child of God.<sup>92</sup> Something more is required, something that does not fit within Nicodemus’ preconceived theological or philosophical categories: a unilateral gift of life through birth from above.

Because of its position in the narrative, this passage is more complex than John 1:12-13, with several important themes interwoven throughout the discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus, including the kingdom of God, being born from above, and the role of the Spirit in the new (from above) birth.<sup>93</sup> While John 1:12-13 presented being born of God with the result of becoming authorized children of God as the primary gift,

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<sup>91</sup>So Brown, *John 1-12*, 129; Köstenberger, *John*, 117; Ridderbos, *John*, 123.

<sup>92</sup>Marianne Meye Thompson, "Signs and Faith in the Fourth Gospel," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 1 (1991): 107-8, is on the right track when she writes, “Jesus’ signs lead to faith when one discerns in them the character of God as life-giving and responds to Jesus as mediating life” (emphasis added). She should conclude from this that faith is essentially *receiving*, but instead goes on to define faith as “essentially gratitude, gratitude to God for grace, mercy, healing, wholeness; gratitude for life itself.” She arrives at the aporia of the gift when she defines life as a gift and faith as gratitude, but she does not seem to recognize the problem.

<sup>93</sup>Interpreters have taken various positions regarding the translation of ἄνωθεν. Some argue it should be translated temporally as “again,” primarily based on Nicodemus’ reply to Jesus in v. 4, where Nicodemus clearly understands Jesus to mean a second birth (As Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:367, notes, this was the interpretation of the Latin, Coptic, and most Syriac translations. Among the church fathers, Augustine, Jerome, and Tertullian all interpreted it this way.). Others argue that it is used spatially and should be translated “from above,” citing its other occurrences in the Fourth Gospel (John 3:7, 31; 19:11, 23), as well as Nicodemus’ inability to understand Jesus’ meaning coupled with Jesus’ need to correct his misunderstanding (Ridderbos, *John*, 125-26). A mediating position suggests that both meanings are appropriate in the context, and Jesus is employing double entendre. When the options are evaluated, it seems that the third position is inescapable, although Jesus might not give the word a double meaning intentionally but intrinsically. That is to say, if a person already has been born physically, to be born from above must be a second birth, even if that is not the primary meaning Jesus has in mind. Therefore, a double-meaning is required, but the emphasis is on the heavenly origin of the new birth. So Barrett, *St. John*, 205-6. Brown, *John 1-12*, 130 calls this “part of the technique of misunderstanding.”

John 3:1-10 presents the kingdom of God as the primary gift. While Nicodemus does not mention the kingdom, Jesus immediately raises the subject in His first statement to Nicodemus in verse 3. To the surprise of many, the kingdom of God is not mentioned again in John outside of John 3:3, 5, but John's meaning is not ambiguous. The Evangelist clearly connects the kingdom of God with eternal life.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, the primary gift about which Jesus teaches Nicodemus is nothing less than the gift of eternal life, and the primary question revolves around how this gift is given.

After Nicodemus flattering greeting (v. 2), Jesus gets to the heart of the matter in verse 3, stating solemnly, “Truly, truly I say to you, unless a person is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” To “see” (ἰδεῖν) the kingdom of God is equated with being able “to enter” (εἰσελθεῖν) the kingdom in verse 5, and it is doubtful that any sharp distinction should be drawn between these two ways of describing how a person receives the gift of eternal life. To see and to enter the kingdom are both expressions related to *experiencing* the life of the kingdom.<sup>95</sup> This experience of eternal life in the kingdom of God can only be had through the birth “from above.” This requirement flusters Nicodemus, but why? As Jesus will note in verse 10, Nicodemus should have understood what He was talking about because he was a teacher of Israel who was learned in the Scriptures. Nicodemus explains his frustration in verse 4 with a question of human ability: “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter his mother's womb a second time and be born, can he?” Nicodemus appears to come to Jesus with an understanding of the kingdom that fits within human economy, an exchange of

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<sup>94</sup>Jesus transitions to discussing eternal life in vv. 14-15, abandoning kingdom terminology. This transition does not signal a subject change from kingdom to eternal life; Jesus simply resumes using His normal terminology for the kingdom in John's Gospel – eternal life – as He elaborates and clarifies what He said to Nicodemus. Whether John has “interpreted” Jesus' original words or directly quotes Jesus' original words is beyond the scope of this discussion, as well as irrelevant to its point. For further discussion on the relationship between the kingdom of God and eternal life in Johannine writings, see Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 285-87.

<sup>95</sup>Carson, *John*, 191, notes the expression in v. 5 is more emphatic than the expression in v. 3.

one thing for the “gift” of the kingdom. His first inclination is to look to himself and what he can do to be born again. He realizes that Jesus has presented to him an aporia. To be born again, as Nicodemus understands Jesus’ saying, is impossible because a person *cannot* climb into his mother’s womb and be born a second time. The implication is that a person cannot give to God to arouse God’s generosity, for such giving undoes the gift and puts God under obligation to humanity. Generosity is perverted into compulsion.

If Jesus wanted to alleviate Nicodemus’ tension over the reality that the kingdom is a gift, He failed miserably. In fact, Jesus only tightens the screws on Nicodemus to emphasize the gift nature of the kingdom of life by showing him that the reality of the gift is the only thing that makes *the* impossible possible. Once again, Jesus is exceedingly solemn, employing the double “Amen” formula before His saying. Jesus reinterprets what it means to be born from above by describing the new birth as being born “from water and Spirit.”<sup>96</sup> Nicodemus was correct, from a certain perspective. He could not bargain, trade, or exchange with God to initiate or procure the new birth. There was *nothing* he could do to obtain it. The new birth is the work of the Holy Spirit, not the work of man. Echoing John 1:13, Jesus reminds Nicodemus that all the will of man can bring forth is flesh.<sup>97</sup> The Spirit alone can give someone spiritual life. Moreover, the Spirit gives this life according to His will. Verse 8 likens the gift of the new birth by the Spirit to the mysterious movement of the wind.<sup>98</sup> To seek to harness the Spirit’s power

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<sup>96</sup>The precise nuance of this phrase is disputed, and space does not permit engaging in the debate here. I interpret this phrase as a unity, describing the purifying work of the Spirit in the new birth. The most difficult aspect of the phrase is the reference to “water,” but since water is dropped from the subsequent discussion, its significance for the argument above is minimal. For a helpful discussion of this phrase and alternative interpretations, see Robert V. McCabe, “The Meaning of ‘Born of Water and the Spirit’ in John 3:5,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 4 (1999): 90-107.

<sup>97</sup>Carson, *John*, 197-98, notes the possible allusion to Ezekiel 37 in v. 8. Ezekiel 37 forms an important backdrop not only for this text but for John 5-6 as well, as will be discussed in chap. 4 below.

<sup>98</sup>Barrett, *St. John*, 211, explains this metaphor, “The Spirit, like the wind, is entirely beyond both the control and the comprehension of man: It breathes into this world from another.” See also Morris, *John*, 195.

and obtain the new birth through human giving is like trying to harness the wind; it is impossible. The Spirit gives this birth freely, unilaterally, and, most importantly, *mysteriously*. It is almost as if Jesus is admitting that the gift of life through the new/heavenly birth is an aporia to the human mind and, from the human perspective, so mysterious it seems like *the impossible*.<sup>99</sup> It defies all human categories of giving and receiving. The Spirit operates in a realm so mysterious, so invisible, that His gift ultimately cannot be understood; it only can be received. Because of the Spirit's invisibility, even those who receive the gift neither see where He came from or where He is going. They only know they have been given new, kingdom life through a birth that comes as a mysterious, unilateral gift from God.

Nicodemus' final words in the passage are words of incredulity: "How are these things *possible*?" (v. 9, emphasis mine), which is nothing less than to assert with the politeness of a question, "These things are *impossible!*"<sup>100</sup> Nicodemus thus joins the postmodern choir that decries the gift as (the) impossible. Jesus flatly rejects Nicodemus' deconstructive logic with a scathing rebuke, calling into question his credentials as a teacher of Israel (v. 10), and by so doing, He affirms that life is a unilateral gift given by God's Spirit through the new birth.

While John 1:12-13 and 3:1-10 vary in their emphases, they speak univocally about the nature of the gift of life: it comes through a birth wrought by God. This birth is not the result of human effort, will, achievement, gift, or counter-gift. It is not part of an exchange wherein God and humanity become partners who give gifts to one another. It is

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<sup>99</sup>Ridderbos, *John*, 129, insightfully remarks, "In all this the divine possibilities are set over against the impossibilities of humankind ('flesh'), but not just negatively but precisely to cause people to look away from their own (im)possibilities and toward God for their salvation." To put it another way, the divine mystery of the work of the Spirit is set against the aporia of the gift as its only solution.

<sup>100</sup>Barrett, *St. John*, 211, translates this phrase, "How can these things happen?" Echoes of the phenomenologist's objection that the gift cannot present itself without deconstructing itself are present in this translation. How can gift happen? How can a present present itself?

a unilateral gift depending solely on God's will, power, and Spirit. Perhaps the most significant point related to the gift that Jesus makes in these passages is this: Simply because the gift of life is incomprehensible to people does not mean it is nullified or impossible. Instead, it means human categories are inadequate and must be discarded for divine categories if the gift is to be known. God does not fit His gift of life into human categories of giving; He obliterates human categories of giving with a gift incomprehensible to a world whose gifts turn out to be counterfeit money. The problem is not the gift but the mind of the one who refuses to bend itself to accept the things of God as determinative rather than the things of man.

**Giving life for life: John 10:7-21.** The gift of life in John 1:12-13 is given a new perspective by Jesus in the analogy of the Good Shepherd in John 10:7-21, where Jesus teaches that the gift of life He gives comes not only through being born of God, but through His giving His own life in death. Moving from the gift of life through birth to the gift of life through death moves from something that should be relatable to something utterly foreign. Life and birth typically go together, but life and death stand opposed to one another. The idea that life could come through death makes about as much sense as the concept of the gift itself in human experience. Nevertheless, John insists that the gift of life must come through giving life (death), and apart from giving life (through death) there can be no gift of life.

The teaching that life comes through death in John 10:7-21 creates greater confusion in Jesus' hearers than the teaching that life comes through new birth. Nicodemus was exasperated, but the reader does not get the impression that he felt animosity toward Jesus.<sup>101</sup> However, when Jesus teaches that the gift of life can come

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<sup>101</sup>Nicodemus' later appearances in the Fourth Gospel (John 7:50-51; 19:38-40) confirm that his encounter with Jesus did not leave him embittered or angry but sympathetic with Jesus.

only through death, His death specifically, His hearers not only are confused, but some of them are incredulous and insist Jesus is demon-possessed and insane (vv. 19-21). The only event that restrains some of Jesus' hearers from concluding He is an insane demoniac is the healing of the man born blind from the previous chapter. Nevertheless, Jesus' hearers cannot understand what He is saying as He speaks of giving life to His people through His voluntary death on their behalf. The gift of life through death is a unilateral gift given by the Good Shepherd. Three figures are brought forward in this saying to highlight the gift character of the abundant life Jesus gives: the robber/thief, the hireling, and the Good Shepherd.<sup>102</sup> The robber/thief and the hireling serve as foils to the Good Shepherd; they are, in their unique ways, anti-shepherds, and their relationship to the gift and to economy is critical to understanding the significance of Jesus' sayings.

The robber/thief is introduced in the first pastoral saying of Jesus in John 10:1-6. He is initially characterized by his shady mode of entrance into the sheep's dwelling.<sup>103</sup> The robber/thief, however, is not developed in this first saying, serving only as a contrast for the true shepherd. In John 10:7-11, the thief/robber returns, his intentions now being unfolded more clearly. Jesus likens Himself to the door of the sheep (vv. 7, 9). While there is some dispute about the precise nuance of this metaphor,<sup>104</sup> the end result of the possible interpretations is the same. Jesus provides what is necessary for the sheep to

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<sup>102</sup>Other figures that might be included are the Father and the wolf. For the present discussion, these two figures will not be included. The Father's relationship to the Good Shepherd belongs to the discussion on the gift within the Trinity in chap. 4. The wolf serves as a necessary literary device to show how the hireling is an anti-shepherd and is not a focal point of the saying.

<sup>103</sup>See Keener, *John*, 803-5, for a discussion of the cultural context of thieves and robbers.

<sup>104</sup>For example, Carson, *John*, 384, notes the possibility that each instance of the "door" metaphor carries a slightly different meaning. The first instance represents the safety Jesus provides the sheep as He bans all thieves and robbers who come before Him (taken in a special sense) from entering the sheepfold. The second instance speaks of the freedom and nourishment Jesus provides to the sheep as He leads them in and out to find pasture. Whether the Evangelist meant to be so exact in His application of this metaphor is debatable but ultimately irrelevant since everyone ends up seeing the same end result no matter which route they take to arrive there. For a detailed discussion of the ways *θύρα* was used metaphorically around the time of John's writing, see J. Jeremias, "θύρα," in *TDNT* 3:173-80.

have abundant life, including safety, shelter, and nourishment. The thief, on the other hand, comes for a nefarious purpose. He comes to steal, slaughter, and destroy.<sup>105</sup> The thief, then, is the anti-shepherd and as such is also the anti-giver. He functions outside the realm of economy, to be sure, but he represents the unilateral taker. He gives no gifts; he gives nothing. Neither does he receive. He takes. He takes by stealing, disrupting economy with the anti-gift.

Jesus stands in antithesis to the anti-shepherd, the anti-giver, the unilateral taker who disturbs economy by theft, murder, and annihilation. The Good Shepherd also disturbs economy, disrupting it with the gift. The Good Shepherd acts outside economy, outside the give-and-take. He comes not to steal, but to give. The Good Shepherd gives the sheep what is His own as they “go in and out and find pasture” (10:9 NASB). He comes not to kill, but to make alive. His gift of life is not given begrudgingly or with a miserly attitude. It is not given with calculation. It is excessive (v. 10).<sup>106</sup> Eternal life is pure gift *because* it contains no calculation, no thought of recompense, no settling of accounts. The Good Shepherd comes not to destroy, but to save (v. 9). In every way, Jesus sets the Good Shepherd in contrast with the robber/thief to emphasize the reality of His gift, the goodness of His gift, the freeness of His gift, and the excessiveness of His gift. The Good Shepherd’s relationship with the sheep is not one of economy, but it is not one that disrupts economy through exploitation and destruction. It is one that transcends economy through unilateral gift.

In verses 11-15, the robber/thief recedes from the scene while the hireling is

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<sup>105</sup>Köstenberger, *John*, 304, notes the emphatic nature of this threefold repetition “to underscore the devastating effect of these usurpers on God’s people.”

<sup>106</sup>The word in Greek is *περισσός*. Most English translations use some form of “abundant” to render it in this context. While the English term “abundant” is technically an acceptable translation, the theological paradigms that see the “abundant” life in terms of a victorious life or some other form of life available to but not experienced by all Christians weigh the term down with too much baggage. The idea of *excessive* is more fitting without prejudice, as *περισσός* indicates something that is “going beyond what is necessary” (BDAG, 805).

brought to the fore. If the robber/thief defies economy out of self-interest, the hireling guards his interests through operating only *within* a circle of exchange.<sup>107</sup> Economy defines his relationships. His actions are constrained and calculated. His service is employment, his recompense a wage. Anything that threatens his economic relationships is (a)voided, and he flees from going above and beyond economy. Jesus describes the hireling as one who flees from danger out of self-interest (v. 13).<sup>108</sup> The hireling is a model of calculated, self-centered, economic exchange.

The Good Shepherd stands in opposition to the hireling. He “lays down His life on behalf of the sheep” (v. 11). While some have argued that this means nothing more than that the Good Shepherd risks his life for the sheep,<sup>109</sup> a more likely interpretation is that the Good Shepherd literally dies on behalf of the sheep.<sup>110</sup> It is true that in first-century Israel a shepherd’s death would likely have been of little, if any, benefit to his sheep. However, this paragraph is filled with foreshadowing of Jesus’ actual death, not merely the potential that He would be willing to die for His sheep. John 10:18 contains the clearest statement to this effect, where Jesus insists that “no one takes it [My life] from Me.” If the Good Shepherd simply is willing to risk His life, this contrast is nonsensical. Jesus fully anticipates His death and resurrection in this paragraph, and He willingly gives (up) His life on behalf of His sheep.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>Michaels, *John*, 588-89, puts it exactly right, saying, “He [Jesus] is not even attaching any particular blame to ‘the hireling,’ who is simply acting out his role as one who has no *investment* in the sheep” (emphasis added). It is precisely the note of *investment* that calls to mind economy. If there is no return on investment, the hireling is disinterested. Furthermore, if there is the chance of a negative return on his investment (or lack thereof), he flees from it.

<sup>108</sup>Köstenberger, *John*, 305.

<sup>109</sup>Bultmann, *John*, 370-71 n. 5; Michaels, *John*, 588.

<sup>110</sup>Köstenberger, *John*, 305.

<sup>111</sup>C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (1953; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 360, writes, “This provides the evangelist with the clearest and most explicit statement he has yet permitted himself upon the Passion of Christ as a voluntary and vicarious self-

In the giving of His life for the life of His sheep, the Good Shepherd takes and receives nothing from the sheep. Rather, out of His love and personal concern for the sheep, He gives them life by sacrificing Himself. Someone might object that economy intrudes at this very point because the Shepherd's concern for the sheep is motivated by self-interest as well. He is the "owner" (v. 12 NASB, Gk. τὰ πρόβατα ἴδια) of the sheep, so He has a personal, vested self-interest in guarding His economic well-being. Two points make this an impossible interpretation of Jesus' words. First, that the Good Shepherd owns the sheep does not necessarily demand an economic relationship between them. The concept of ownership is found in other places in the NT without any economic implications. First Corinthians 7:2 uses the term ἴδιος to describe the marriage relationship, commanding, "On account of sexual immoralities, each man must have his own wife and each woman must have her own husband [τὸν ἴδιον ἄνδρα]." Two verses later, the apostle uses this construction again, this time in reference to one's own body, saying, "The wife does not have authority over her own body [τοῦ ἰδίου σώματος], but the husband has authority over it; and likewise even the husband does not have authority over his own body [τοῦ ἰδίου σώματος], but the wife has authority over it." A person's "ownership" of his body does not imply an economic relationship but an organic relationship, much like the husband and wife relationship, which is modeled after the relationship of Jesus and His people (cf. Eph 5:21-33).<sup>112</sup> Therefore, the Shepherd's ownership of the sheep need not be pictured in economic terms but as an organic

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sacrifice." The term ὑπὲρ also indicates this statement does not mean merely potential death but actual death. In John's literature, this term always means "on behalf of" and has the idea of substitution (John 1:30; 6:51; 10:15; 11:4, 50-52; 13:37-38; 15:13; 17:19; 18:14). Jesus does not *risk* His life in His sheep's place; He *gives* His life in their place. So also Barrett, *St. John*, 375.

<sup>112</sup>BDAG, 466-67, defines this as "own" with "a striking connection to an exclusive relationship." The element of economy, while a possible meaning of this term, is not demanded by it. Here, it is best to see this in terms of relationship rather than economy. Brown, *John 1-12*, 387, reminds the reader that the sheep belong to Jesus by means of the gift of the Father, not by means of economy (cf. John 6:37, 44, 65).

relationship, based not on what the sheep might give Him, but based on the simple fact that He loves them as His own even though they cannot give to Him but feed on what is His, and that excessively.

Second, the actions of the Shepherd reveal that He is not acting out of self-interest, preserving the sheep in a circle of exchange; instead, He is giving them life as a unilateral gift. The Shepherd will die on behalf of the Sheep. The hireling flees because if he dies, his economic interests die with him. What wage will be paid to one who is dead? The Good Shepherd is not interested in such questions. He dies for the sheep, not only giving them life through His death but also making it impossible for them to give Him a return gift. The only way He can be the Giver of life is to give His life for the sheep. The death of the Giver rules out a counter-gift. To make the point emphatic, the Good Shepherd emphasizes that He does not receive life from the sheep. The only possible gift one might give the dead is life. The Good Shepherd, though, will give life to Himself after His death (vv. 17-18). His sheep give Him nothing because they cannot give to Him. They are the sheep; He is the Shepherd. They are in need of life; He is the Giver of life who is in need of nothing, who is *a se*, and who overcomes death apart from anything the sheep might or might not do.

The Shepherd stands opposite of one who operates within the circle of exchange, represented by the hireling, as well as those who operate outside of it as thieves and robbers. Thieves and robbers disturb economy with the anti-gift. Indeed, the anti-gift is the only experience the natural person has with other people as a strictly aneconomic interaction. It is not surprising, then, that people naturally are suspicious of the “gift,” since every time they experience someone disturb the economic system, they are defrauded. The hireling is trusted because he maintains the status quo. He expects no gift, and he gives no gift. He is predictable because everything is calculated. The Good Shepherd, by contrast, appears insane, perhaps even demon possessed (vv. 19-21),

because He threatens the economic system with the gift. He overthrows the status quo and exposes its self-interested and calculated nature. The economic system is marked by the ideal of self-protection. Hirelings are not concerned if the other loses what is his so long as they keep what is theirs. The Good Shepherd, however, is not marked by self-protection. Unlike the thief, whose actions are hostile both to economy and to others, the Good Shepherd's actions are hostile only to economy, but wholly generous toward others. He gives His life so the sheep can receive life, even excessive life that goes beyond any calculation. He gives them life unilaterally by giving His life through death on their behalf.

**Giving life through resurrection: John 11:1-46.** Jesus' teaching that the gift of life comes through (heavenly) birth and (His giving life through His own) death bewildered and angered His hearers, but Jesus was not finished teaching about the nature of His gift of life as a unilateral gift. In an overwhelming display of power, Jesus taught and demonstrated that the gift of life comes through resurrection from the dead in the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-46).<sup>113</sup> The raising of Lazarus from the dead is a critical passage in John's Gospel for many reasons,<sup>114</sup> not least of which is what it says about how God through Jesus gives life to humanity. The word δίδωμι occurs only once in this section (v. 22), where Martha says that God will give Jesus whatever He asks, implying even someone back from the dead.<sup>115</sup> While this instance is of interest, the precise nature of the giving Martha has in mind is outside the scope of this discussion. Although no other explicit reference to giving is found in this pericope, the raising of Lazarus is still

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<sup>113</sup>The historicity of this account has been questioned. I interpret the raising of Lazarus as a historical event. For a brief discussion of this problem, see Morris, *John*, 473-76.

<sup>114</sup>Morris says that John has put this account "as the climax of Jesus' ministry" and that he "wants us to understand that Jesus does give life" (ibid., 476). Köstenberger, *John*, 321, writes, "The significance of the raising of Lazarus in John's narrative as a whole cannot be exaggerated."

<sup>115</sup>No other words related to δίδωμι occur in this section, either in noun or verb form.

critical in understanding the nature of God's giving to humanity. It declares that God has granted Jesus the power and authority to raise the dead, or, to put it another way, to give life.<sup>116</sup> John has narrated several accounts where Jesus has asserted that He is the giver of life (cf. John 3:1-17; 4:1-42; 5:19-29, especially vv. 21, 25; 6:26-68; 8:12-30, 48-59; 10:7-30), and each of these accounts builds to the raising of Lazarus, which is the culmination of those narratives and the turning point in John's Gospel, when the rulers of the Jews devise a plan to put the Giver of life to death. Therefore, what this event shows about how Jesus gives life is critical to explaining John's understanding of the gift and the giving of it.

Jesus (and, with v. 22 in view, the Father) gives life unilaterally to Lazarus through resurrection from the dead. The narrative is straightforward. Lazarus has been dead four days (v. 39). The people watching Jesus at the tomb are wondering why this healer was unable to prevent Lazarus' death (v. 37). John, however, has told the reader that Jesus let Lazarus die so that He could perform this sign (vv. 4, 6, 11-15).<sup>117</sup> After praying to the Father, Jesus cried loudly, "Lazarus, come forth" (v. 43). Jesus' words prove effective as Lazarus comes forth, still bound in his grave clothes (v. 44). Through this miracle, Jesus gives evidence for His claim that He is the giver of life.

The raising of Lazarus, serving as proof of Jesus' claims, highlights John's teaching that God's gift of life is unilaterally given to those who are dead.<sup>118</sup> The gift of

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<sup>116</sup>Gordon J. Keddie, *A Study Commentary on John* (Auburn, MA: Evangelical Press, 2001), 1:417, writes, "The chapter's core teaching is that life comes through Jesus."

<sup>117</sup>Brown, *John 1-12*, 431, describes Jesus' response to the news of Lazarus' illness by writing, "Out of love Jesus did not go to help the sick Lazarus, for he would be of more help to Lazarus when Lazarus was dead."

<sup>118</sup>Dodd, *Interpretation*, 364-66, while not delving into the philosophical implications of gift terminology, nevertheless concurs, writing, "Whether the gift of eternal life is conceived as a present and continuing possession . . . or as a recovery of life after death of the body . . . the thing that matters is that life is the gift of Christ – and Christ's gift to men, we know, is Himself" (364). He adds, "The gift of life is here presented expressly as victory over death" (366). For more on God's gift being Himself, see chap. 3 below.

life through resurrection raises again the question about giving to the dead. In what meaningful sense can a gift be given to a dead person? As noted previously, some would argue that for a gift to be given, the recipient must be alive.<sup>119</sup> If this is a necessary condition of giving, at least of *divine* giving, then the Evangelist (and Jesus) is wrong for calling Jesus' salvation of sinners a giving of, or gift of, life, unless what is meant by the gift of life is only that those who already have life receive more of it. However, this cannot be John's intention because Lazarus was not merely facing the prospect of death and needing more life to avoid it; he was dead, devoid of life. Jesus gave Lazarus life, and Lazarus received it while he was dead.

Someone might object by saying that this does not prove the gift was unilateral because Lazarus could have given a return gift to Jesus after being raised. The narrative leaves no room for such a suggestion.<sup>120</sup> Astonishingly, John does not tell us anything about Lazarus' response to being raised from the dead. Did he give thanks? Did he worship? Was he grateful? John is silent, but why? It cannot be because such details are uninteresting since he does relate the response of those who witnessed the miracle.<sup>121</sup> The most plausible explanation is that John sees the giving of life to Lazarus as a unilateral gift. The point is not gift exchange, but unilateral gift flowing one direction, from Jesus to Lazarus. The repeated emphasis in the next three verses (vv. 45-47) is on what Jesus had

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<sup>119</sup>Saarinen, *God and the Gift*, 11. Saarinen's extended discussion about giving in John's Gospel unfortunately does not comment on the raising of Lazarus, probably because Saarinen's discussion revolves around John's use of *δίδωμι* and fails to take into account John's illustrations of giving that do not use its specific vocabulary. This omission also applies to the above discussion of John 10:7-21.

<sup>120</sup>The commentaries' combined silence about the response of Lazarus speaks volumes. Virtually all commentators transition away from Lazarus to the response of the crowd and the Jews in vv. 45ff.

<sup>121</sup>One might argue that it is because such details are unimportant to the narrative. However, this seems unlikely since the point of the narrative, as argued above, is to prove decisively that Jesus is the giver of life, setting up His passion and resurrection. If John's point is that Jesus gives the gift of life that overcomes death, and John understood this giving of life as a mutual exchange of gifts between Jesus and His disciples, omitting the exchange aspect is a glaring oversight.

done (ὃ ἐποίησεν Ἰησοῦς). Just as John has repeatedly shown throughout his Gospel, he shows again in the raising of Lazarus that Jesus is the giver and humanity, represented by Lazarus, remains always in the position of receiver.

**Summary.** The Prologue of John's Gospel presents life as a unilateral gift of God using the analogy of being born of God and becoming children of God. The idea of birth is unmistakably connected with the idea of giving and receiving life as a gift. Three other passages in John support the contention that John begins his Gospel by describing life as a unilateral gift of God. Being born of God is further explained as being born of the Spirit in John 3:1-10. This new birth is impossible to obtain apart from God giving it freely and unilaterally. Moreover, the life God gives comes through the Son giving His life for His sheep. God is a unilateral giver as He gives life *by giving life*. He gives freely and completely. Finally, the gift of life God gives to His children is most clearly illustrated through the resurrection of Lazarus at the word of the Word made flesh. John begins by showing that life is God's gift, and throughout his narrative he returns to and builds upon the theme that God is a unilateral giver of life.

### **John 1:14-18 – The Gift of Grace**

The final paragraph of John's Prologue introduces several key themes that recur throughout the Fourth Gospel, including glory, grace, truth, legal testimony, the Word as Son of the Father, and the Son as the revelation of God. The theme that is most relevant to the concept of the gift in the Prologue is the concept of grace. The Evangelist uses the language of the gift when describing the grace of the Word-made-flesh, saying, "For out of His fullness we all *received*, even grace in place of grace" (v. 16). How should the concept of grace as gift be understood in the context of John's Prologue?

John's discussion of grace (χάρις) is filled with difficulties. He surprisingly only mentions χάρις four times in the Gospel, and those instances are all concentrated in

1:14-17. The reason why John introduces χάρις in his prologue and then never explicitly returns to it in the rest of his Gospel is unstated. Complicating matters, John does not define χάρις. He simply assumes his readers will understand the meaning of the term within the context in which he uses it. While his original readers perhaps understood his meaning, it is by no means certain among scholars today. The meaning of χάρις, its character as gift, and the role of the recipients all must be considered to understand the significance of the gift of grace in John 1:14-18.

### **The Meaning of χάρις**

Any adequate interpretation of the meaning of χάρις in John 1:14-18 must wrestle not only with its possible OT background but with the Johannine context of giving and receiving in its christological sphere. The term χάρις appears in a section of John's Gospel with a heavy emphasis not only on the incarnation but on the relationship of the incarnation to God's giving and humanity's receiving. This tone is struck in verses 11-13, where those who received Jesus are set in contrast with those who did not. To those who did receive Him, He gave the gift of authority, authorizing them to become God's children. Furthermore, the fullness of Jesus' grace and truth cannot be contained but overflows in giving so that "we all" have received from His fullness. The language of the gift recurs again in verse 17, where the Law "was given" through Moses. The concept of χάρις in John's Gospel is thoroughly steeped in the context of God's giving and humanity's receiving, and this theme must inform any valid interpretation of this text.

At precisely this point, however, many interpretations of χάρις in this Gospel fall woefully short. For example, in her seminal article on this issue, Edwards misses the mark badly when she articulates the problem of interpreting χάρις in John's Gospel as one of relating it to a preposition. "The nub of the problem," she writes, "is the meaning of the preposition [ἀντί], since none of its regular senses leaps out as the obvious one for

this context.”<sup>122</sup> While the meaning of the preposition cannot be overlooked, Edwards has assumed too much by glossing over the meaning of χάρις as “something freely given by God to those who do not merit it.”<sup>123</sup> Such a general definition allows for considerable latitude, and Edwards leaves none of it unused. She concludes that the Evangelist is discussing the replacement of the Mosaic Law with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, with the word χάρις in verse 16 referring to the Gospel in its first occurrence and to the Law in its second. Her interpretation stands or falls based on three criteria. It must “(a) be in accord with an attested meaning for ἅντι; (b) adopt a plausible interpretation for χάρις; and (c) be in keeping with the thought of the rest of the Prologue.”<sup>124</sup> Edwards has made a subtle yet important move in establishing her criteria; she requires an “attested” meaning for ἅντι but only a “plausible” meaning for χάρις. Upon closer examination, it becomes clear why Edwards is more lenient concerning how χάρις can be interpreted. To take it as a reference to the Law is unattested in the LXX and in the NT.<sup>125</sup> Such information notwithstanding, for Edwards, χάρις is open to an expansive semantic range so long as its meaning is considered *theologically* plausible in John’s Prologue. Edwards’ concentration on the pronoun ἅντι has biased her so that she minimizes the larger themes of the Prologue. She also fails to account for the way in which χάρις is typically used in language involving giving and receiving.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>122</sup>Ruth B. Edwards, “Charin Anti Charitos (John 1:16): Grace and the Law in the Johannine Prologue,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32 (1988): 3.

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*, 4. This interpretation takes grace as divine *favor* rather than divine *gift*, a subtle but important distinction. Grace is not simply His merciful disposition toward sinners but His gift to sinners. His gift of what will be discussed below.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>125</sup>BDAG, 1079-81, does not even list the possibility that this could be a reference to the Law in any of the literature cited. So also LSJM, 1977; H.-H. Esser, “Grace, Spiritual Gifts,” in *NIDNTT* 2:115-23.

<sup>126</sup>Several others have taken Edwards’ line of interpretation, focusing excessively on the pronoun, including Brown, *John 1-12*, 15-17; Carson, *John*, 131-34; and Köstenberger, *John*, 44-48.

Moloney, following Edwards, maintains that the Evangelist intends to say ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια that came through Jesus Christ has come in place of the Law, but he tries to alleviate some of the difficulties created by Edwards' imprecise handling of χάρις. Moloney argues that a Pauline understanding of grace has “unduly influenced” many interpretations of John 1:14-18.<sup>127</sup> He suggests that instead of interpreting it as “God’s unsolicited love for an undeserving, sinful humanity,” it should be given “its normal meaning of a kindness, a manifestation of good will, a gift, an unexpected favor,” citing LSJM.<sup>128</sup> Moloney thus achieves a consistency that was lacking in Edwards; χάρις means ‘gift’ in each instance. But this interpretation fails for at least three reasons. First, conceptually it is difficult, if not impossible, to understand what it means to be “full of a gift,” even if grammatically Moloney is correct that the phrase χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας is a hendiadys that means “a gift that is truth.”<sup>129</sup> Second, grammatically it is unlikely that this is a hendiadys. The term πλήρης followed by two genitives joined with a καί occurs six other times in the NT, but never as a hendiadys.<sup>130</sup> The LXX has this same grammatical structure or something similar six times as well, but never as a hendiadys.<sup>131</sup> Moloney gives no compelling evidence why John 1:14 and 17 should be treated differently than these other passages; in fact, he fails to mention them.<sup>132</sup> Finally, in verse

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Carson is the most elaborate commentator, expanding his discussion to include the relationship of John with Exod 33-34.

<sup>127</sup>Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 45. This begs the question of a monolithic definition of grace in the Pauline epistles, which seems unlikely. See H. Conzelmann, “χάρις,” in *TDNT* 9:393-96.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>130</sup>The other occurrences are Acts 6:3, 5, 8; 9:36; 11:24; 13:10.

<sup>131</sup>This structure or something similar occurs in the LXX in Num 22:18; 24:13; Judg 16:27; 2 Sam 23:7; 7:15; Ezek 7:23.

<sup>132</sup>Moloney, *John*, 39, briefly references the phrase חַרְטוּם וְאֱמֶת from Exod 34:6, but not to support his claim that John is employing hendiadys. The Exod 34:6 allusion could just as easily be used to

17, John explicitly puts the term χάρις in juxtaposition with Law. Reverting to the hendiadys argument only exacerbates the problem, contrasting the gift of truth with the Law. Moloney senses the danger at this point, so he clarifies by writing, “Both are gifts of God. One cannot ‘replace’ the other. One prolongs and perfects the never-ending graciousness of God. The gift of the Law is perfected in the gift of the incarnation.”<sup>133</sup> Nevertheless, just a paragraph earlier, Moloney asserted, “My earlier rendering of *charis* as ‘a gift’ enables a different translation that allows *anti* to retain its accepted meaning: ‘a gift *in place of* a gift.’<sup>134</sup> Moloney’s sudden retreat demolishes his argument by razing its foundation.

The mistake of Edwards, Moloney, and others with a similar interpretation is their failure to grapple with the significance in the NT of giving and receiving χάρις along with John’s emphasis on the status of Jesus as a unique, preeminent, unilateral Giver to humanity. When these pieces are added to the puzzle, a different and, it would seem, more compelling understanding of the meaning of χάρις in John 1:14-17 comes into focus.

The term χάρις typically means “kindness,” “goodwill”, or “favor,”<sup>135</sup> but in contexts that involve giving and receiving, it often has a different nuance than simply kindness or favor, connoting power or strength.<sup>136</sup> For example, Hebrews 4:16 says,

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argue the opposite, as suggested by Carson, *John*, 129-30. In their chapter on John, Nigel Turner and James Hope Moulton, *Style, A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1976), 64-79, note that this passage is not quoted from the LXX and say nothing about hendiadys as a feature of Johannine style. Anthony Hanson, "John I. 14-18 and Exodus XXXIV," *New Testament Studies* 23 (1976): 93-95, correctly argues that, although many interpreters claim this is a hendiadys, the lexical and syntactical information cannot support the claim.

<sup>133</sup>Moloney, *John*, 46.

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*, emphasis his.

<sup>135</sup>LSJM, 1977.

<sup>136</sup>For the Hellenistic and Jewish background of the understanding of grace as power, see John Nolland, "Grace as Power," *Novum Testamentum* 28 (1986): 26-31.

“Therefore, let us come near with boldness to the throne of grace, so that we might receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” The chiasm involves the verbs λαμβάνω and εὐρίσκω, which are interchangeable in meaning in this context, both denoting divine assistance God provides to people.<sup>137</sup> Significantly, what is given is not an “unexpected favor” as Moloney defines χάρις, nor is it the Gospel as opposed to the Law as Edwards defines it; rather, it is divine power to enable someone to overcome temptation in a time of trial or distress.<sup>138</sup> Hebrews pictures Christ as the One seated on a throne of χάρις, dispensing it freely and repetitively to meet pressing needs and enable His people to do His will in any circumstance.<sup>139</sup> Such a picture does not seem far afield from John’s Gospel, where believers receive from Christ’s fullness in the context of χάρις.

Understanding χάρις as power from God to do God’s will is not isolated to Hebrews. It is a common way Paul uses this term as well. In 2 Corinthians 8:1-2, the gift of God’s χάρις is the power that motivated and enabled a poor church to give an abundant financial gift to support other Christians.<sup>140</sup> In contrast to Hebrews, here the

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<sup>137</sup>Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 270-71.

<sup>138</sup>Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 186, writes, “Grace may point to inner strengthening to endure testing.” This strength comes from Jesus, the Great High Priest, and it is “generously given ‘for timely assistance.’” Grace, then, is an inner-power to overcome trials and trouble that is not immediately infused in the believer the moment of conversion but is given by Jesus repeatedly when and as it is needed. So also William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47A (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 116.

<sup>139</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 117 concurs, calling grace in this context “divine aid” and noting its “constant availability” for all the needs of God’s people.

<sup>140</sup>As Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 559-60, explains, the word χάρις is the key term in 2 Corinthians 8-9, occurring ten times with six different nuances. In 2 Cor 8:1, Harris defines it as “God’s gift of enablement to his people” in reference to their financial giving to support other churches.

verb δεδομένην places the emphasis on the divine Giver rather than the believer's position as recipient. The perfect tense indicates a gift that was not only given in the past but that continues to be given in the present, much like a continuous flow of divine generosity, creating in believers the good works that please God.<sup>141</sup> Like Hebrews, the continuous flow of divine grace comes from Christ, but what makes the gift character of grace so emphatic in 2 Corinthians is the way Paul ends his discourse on generous giving: "Thanks be to God for His indescribably good gift!" referring to the Lord Jesus. All generosity, further, *all* good that believers do, is *given* to them in a continuous flow of gifts from the gift who is the Giver, Jesus. Grace, therefore, encompasses not only divine power but also the doing of the good itself. God gives both the power and the accomplishment of the good as His gift through the gift of His Son.

In Romans 12:6, receiving grace means receiving a special ability, or gift (χάρισμα), to be used in the church for definite tasks.<sup>142</sup> Paul even understands his own ability to command the church to use their gifts as a result of being given grace himself (Rom 12:3; cf. 1 Cor 3:10; Gal 2:9; Eph 3:2, 7-8). Hebrews, Romans, and 2 Corinthians are not isolated cases. In the vast majority of NT instances, whenever χάρις is received from God and/or Christ, it implies power or ability to do the will of God, power that includes the actual accomplishment of that will, so that it is all gift from start to finish.<sup>143</sup>

The one apparent exception to this pattern is Romans 5:15-21. In this passage,

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<sup>141</sup>Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 391

<sup>142</sup>C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary (London: T & T Clark, 1975-1979), 2:619, calls the gifts given by God's grace "endowments which God bestows on believers to be used in His service and in the service of men." Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 470, notes that the gifts are given by Christ in Eph 4:7 and by the Spirit in 1 Cor 12:7-11. The Trinitarian nature of divine giving therefore comes into play in the giving of grace. For more on Trinitarian giving and its impact on John's theology of gift, see chap. 4 below.

<sup>143</sup>H. Conzelmann, "χάρις," in *TDNT* 9:396, recognizes that the believer's accomplishment of the will of God is of grace, noting that grace "is the destruction of sin."

grace seems to indicate not the power and accomplishment of the will of God in the life of the believer but the gift of righteousness based on the obedience of Christ that results in justification. For example, the free gift results in justification in verse 16. Justification is the result of “one act of righteousness” (NASB) in verse 18. Receiving grace, therefore, seems to be related only to pardon from sin through justification by the righteousness of Jesus. However, the Apostle Paul gives some clues in this text that receiving grace includes both pardon granted at the moment of justification and power that extends beyond it to the entire life of the Christian, even into eternity.

Romans 5:17 begins to unfold the idea that grace includes not only the gift of justification but also the power that transforms believers into those who do the will of God. Those who “receive” (λαμβάνοντες) the gift of righteousness and the abundance of grace are contrasted with those who were under the reign of death because of Adam’s sin. Significantly, the recipients receive an abundance of grace (τὴν περισσείαν τῆς χάριτος), an expression that is conceptually similar to John 1:16, where “we all have received from Jesus’ fullness καὶ χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος.” The language of receiving is significant in Romans 5:17. While many have stressed the active role of the believer in receiving God’s grace,<sup>144</sup> the language of reception implies not active response but passive receptivity.<sup>145</sup> Grace is not there “for the taking,” so to speak, but grace and the free gift of righteousness are *given*, and believers receive them not because they have

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<sup>144</sup>For example, Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 340, writes, “The reign of life, on the other hand, is experienced through choice and personal decision; it is for those who ‘receive’ the gift,” appealing to Bultmann for support. Concerning this qualification of personal decision, he adds, “For it reminds us lest we have forgotten Rom. 1-4 that righteousness and life are for those who *respond* to God’s grace in Christ and that they are *only* for those who respond” (emphasis his).

<sup>145</sup>John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1959), 1:198, explains, “The word ‘receiving’ enhances the thought expressed in ‘the free gift’; it does not refer to our believing acceptance of the free gift but to our being made the recipients.” He goes on to add this significant statement: “We are regarded as the passive beneficiaries of both the grace and the free gift in their overflowing fullness.”

made a decision but because God *gives* these gifts. The result of God's giving and human receiving is that the recipients of this free gift "will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ." Regardless of whether the reign is a logical future<sup>146</sup> or a temporal future,<sup>147</sup> those who receive grace will exercise kingship through Christ in righteousness, doing the will of God as they reign.

In Romans 5:20, Paul brings the Law back into the discussion, noting how the Law was an aggravator of sin.<sup>148</sup> Sin is not something static or constant in the sense that the amount of sin is always the same. Sin can increase, and the Law's entrance into history through Moses served only to exacerbate it and provoke its increase. However, grace is not static either, for grace can hyper-abound (ὑπερπερισσεύω). Where sin brought condemnation, grace brought righteousness, and the more sin increased, the more grace increased still further, bringing about a fundamental change in status for the Christian, who is no longer in Adam and condemned to death because of the sin of the one man but is now a recipient of grace in Christ and righteous through the one Man's obedience.

Grace as justification is not the end of the story, however, as Romans 5:21 indicates. The hyper-abounding of grace was not an end in itself, but it happened so that grace might reign unto eternal life.<sup>149</sup> The reign of grace that comes through the obedience of Christ is connected once again with righteousness, indicating that this reign

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<sup>146</sup>Ibid., 198.

<sup>147</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38A (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 282.

<sup>148</sup>The presence of the Law in the discussion of giving and receiving grace is another important parallel between John 1:14-18 and Rom 5:15-21, although John's and Paul's purpose in discussing the Law was not the same.

<sup>149</sup>Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:294, notes, "The triumph of grace described in v. 20b was not itself the end of the matter. Its goal was the dispossession of the usurper sin and the replacement of its reign by the reign of grace." V. 21 thus gives the "divine purpose" for the super-abundance of grace.

is in accordance with the will of God and in obedience to Him. In other words, *the reign of grace is a reign of righteousness*. Grace cannot be severed from doing the will of God. Those who receive grace are justified by the gift of God, but the same gift of grace through Christ leads them to performing the will of God. Grace received is thus active and powerful, resulting in a life dedicated to fulfilling the will of God (Rom 6:14).<sup>150</sup> Therefore, receiving grace in the NT is never apart from the context of the power or strength to obey God's will resulting in the actual accomplishment of God's will, so that those who have received grace from Christ are no longer slaves of sin (Rom 6:6).<sup>151</sup>

Returning to John's Prologue, does this interpretation of χάρις as a gift received consisting of divine power to do the will of God fit the Prologue of John's Gospel? In John 1:14, the Evangelist wrote that Jesus was "full of grace and truth." If Jesus' definition of "truth" is the Father's word (John 17:17), and John is using the standard NT definition of χάρις in the context of giving and receiving so that it means "power to do God's will," then John intends for us to understand Jesus' glory as His full reflection of the will of the Father in His actions and His words. Jesus is full of χάρις in that He is full of the power to do the Father's will *in Himself*. Such an interpretation of verse 14 fits well with John's continual refrain that Jesus came to do the will of the Father, climaxing in John 17:4, where Jesus asserts that He has accomplished the work

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<sup>150</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 292, makes this exact point when he writes, "Paul's understanding of grace, as it is set forth in Rom. 6, makes abundantly clear that he could not conceive of a work of grace that did not transform human beings in this life."

<sup>151</sup>Jesse Couenhoven, "Grace as Pardon and Power: Pictures of the Christian Life in Luther, Calvin, and Barth," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 28 (2000): 63-64, helpfully reminds the reader that theologically grace must always be seen as both pardon *and* power. Viewing grace as only power tends toward the error of viewing Christianity "as simply an ethical system," while viewing grace as only pardon denies the active aspect of faith. The Apostle Paul holds both of these aspects of grace in appropriate tension in Rom 5-6 so that the grace that gives the gift of righteousness resulting in justification is the same grace that empowers the believer to live life as a slave of righteousness rather than a slave of sin. This is not to say that both aspects are present in every occurrence of the term, but a New Testament conception of grace must contain both ideas to be complete and true to the text.

the Father gave Him to do. Not only did He do the work of the Father, He gave the disciples the word of the Father (John 17:14). Grace and truth thus come together at the close of Jesus' mission. He has made the Father known by manifesting His glory in grace (doing His will) and truth (speaking His word).

In verse 16, the focus shifts from Jesus' inherent fullness to what "we all" received from that fullness, namely, καὶ χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος. Traditionally, when this has been viewed as something other than the Gospel replacing the Mosaic Law, the preposition ἀντί has been translated "upon."<sup>152</sup> As Edwards insists, this translation is suspect on linguistic grounds.<sup>153</sup> However, rather than seeing ἀντί point to an accumulation of grace,<sup>154</sup> is it possible in John's Gospel that it points to an endless supply of power to do the will of God in every situation, power that with each new temptation, challenge, or trial, is new and replaces power that was needed for previous situations, either because that power has been used or because new strength is needed for each new situation?

The motif of abiding in Christ in John's writings points in this direction. The key metaphor Jesus used to explain the concept of abiding was the vine and the branches in John 15. Just as abiding in the vine provides a branch the necessary strength to remain fruitful and not dry up, so abiding in Jesus provides believers the necessary power to bear fruit and bring glory to the Father (John 15:8). What is needed is not a "one-time" infusion of grace that propels the believer to lifelong fruitfulness, but a continual abiding and receiving of strength from Jesus. Jesus emphasized the importance of abiding in Him

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<sup>152</sup>Ridderbos, *John*, 56.

<sup>153</sup>Edwards, "Charin Anti Charitos," 6.

<sup>154</sup>The preposition ἐπί would be expected for this meaning. Hanson, "John I. 14-18 and Exodus XXXIV," 97, suggests that the preposition should be interpreted as if it were ἐπί, but he does not provide any compelling lexical evidence for this translation. His prior arguments put him in a corner where he has no other choice if he is to maintain his other exegetical work on the passage.

in John 8:31 as well, explaining that abiding in His Word is the mark of a true disciple.<sup>155</sup> Furthermore, the promised work of the Spirit in John 14-16 indicates that the disciples need a continual supply of divine power to do the will of God. For example, in John 14:12-17, Jesus promises the disciples that they will do greater works than He did, adding that He will give them whatever they ask in His name. Their love for Him will manifest itself in obedience to His commandments (v. 15), but where will the strength and obedience originate? It is precisely at this point, in the context of the requirement of obedience, that Jesus promises to send the Spirit to dwell within the disciples. Throughout this discourse, Jesus returns repeatedly to theme of obedience to His words, and He explains that the disciples will receive the Spirit, who will empower them to do these greater works that bear fruit and manifest love through obedience.

John 1:16, therefore, is not speaking of a redemptive-historical replacement of the Law with the Gospel (or a fulfillment or perfecting of the Law by the Gospel); the Evangelist is asserting the same power that enabled Jesus to do the will of the Father has been given to His people in abundance. Not only does this provide a consistent meaning for *χάρις* from verse 14 to verse 16, but it takes into account how *χάρις* is typically used in contexts of giving and receiving, fitting nicely within the thought of the rest of the NT. Moreover, this explanation best accords with Jesus' teaching on abiding in Him and the coming of the Spirit to dwell in the disciples so that they might remember Jesus' words (John 14:26) and do greater works (John 14:12).

When the reader considers verse 17, the thought is simple and straightforward now that *χάρις* has been interpreted consistently and with an attested meaning. The Law is juxtaposed with "grace and truth." Juxtaposition does not imply that the Law is at odds

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<sup>155</sup>Köstenberger, *John*, 261, notes that this implies there were some who were false disciples as well, those who did "hold to the master's teaching." For a discussion of the interpretive problems in this verse, as well as its relation to John 15:1-8, see Carson, *John*, 346-48.

with grace and truth, only that it is different. When John speaks of the Law, he does not disparage it.<sup>156</sup> However, he does point out that the Law serves a condemning function because no one keeps it. In John 5:45, Jesus said that He would not accuse His detractors; Moses would condemn them. Then, in John 7:19, a passage very reminiscent of John 1:17, Jesus asks, “Has not Moses given you the Law? And no one among you does the Law.”<sup>157</sup> Jesus, full of grace, accomplished all the work the Father gave Him to do, unlike the Jews, who hypocritically were clinging to Moses in order to reject Jesus and were unable to do the will of God. The power to do the will of God was Jesus’ gift to those who would come to Him. By abiding in Jesus the disciples would bear much fruit (John 15:8). When John sets the Law side by side with grace and truth, he is contrasting the lesser with the greater. The Law was a gift of revelation to Israel. It revealed the will of God to them, but it was ineffective in enabling them to do it, as Jesus made plain. The gift of God in Christ is far superior to the Law because it not only reveals the will of God in truth (like the Law did) but it also provides the effective power to obey it.

In John’s Gospel, χάρις is not a reference to the Law and/or the Gospel. It is not an undirected concept of favor. Rather, it is the power to do the will of God. As shown above, several factors lead to this conclusion: (1) the NT consistently uses χάρις this way in contexts of giving and receiving; (2) Jesus’ own sayings in John’s Gospel, especially in John 17 where He summarizes the work He accomplished in His incarnation (John 17:4, 14, 17), put the power to accomplish the will of God (grace) next to speaking the Word of God (truth), preserving the parallel in John 1:14 throughout the rest of the

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<sup>156</sup>So Keener, *John*, 1:421-22, who recognizes that the Law is a gift of God because it testifies of Jesus.

<sup>157</sup>Michaels, *John*, 443, suggests that “And no one among you does the Law” should be punctuated as a question. However, Carson, *John*, 314, is more on point when he recognizes that Jesus is about to level charges against His opponents, noting that their disobedience to the Law “guarantees condemnation.”

Gospel; (3) this interpretation flows from a consistent exegesis of John 1:14-17 that both makes good sense of the text and allows for attested meanings of both *ἀντὶ* and *χάρις*; (4) this understanding of *χάρις* complements John's theology of abiding in Christ; and (5) this interpretation does not denigrate the Law but is consistent with how John uses the Law throughout the Gospel. Grace in the Fourth Gospel is power.

### **Grace As Gift**

Having established the meaning of *χάρις* in John's Prologue, it is necessary to explore what it means that it is a gift. The fact that it is a gift is evident from the gift language that is used in John 1:14-18. Grace is something that "we have received" (*ἐλάβομεν*), and it is set in a contrast with the Law, which John says "was given" (*ἐδόθη*) by Moses. Is grace a unilateral gift like John has shown creation, life, and light to be in John 1:1-13, and, if it is, how does it retain its character as unilateral gift when "we receive" it? That is to say, how does receiving the gift not constitute a counter-gift in exchange that nullifies grace as gift?

When a person ordinarily receives a gift from another, if such an event is possible, the giver of the gift has limited resources. This limitation, however great or small, indicates that the giver has needs of his own, needs that he cannot meet from within himself, and needs that he needs others to supply in some capacity. It is this fact that casts the shadow of suspicion on donations whenever they appear (to appear). The question arises in the recipient's mind in terms of want, such as, "What does this person want from me?" or cost, such as, "How much will this gift I have received cost me?" Many times when gifts are given, the potential "cost" to the recipient is not considered because it is insignificant (or at least appears to be insignificant), or the recipient inherently knows that, through the process of "gift exchange," the costs and benefits even

out so that neither party is better or worse off from the giving of gifts.<sup>158</sup> Yet it is exactly this balancing of accounts that is problematic for the gift. A gift given with the knowledge that it will end up as a wash is undone. One impediment to pure and free generosity is therefore need, and need is the inevitable consequence of limited resources.

It is specifically in the context of the gift of grace that the Evangelist mentions Jesus' "fullness" (πληρώματος; v. 16). This fullness is directly related to the gift because it is "out of His fullness" that people receive; that is, His fullness is the source of His gift of grace. To address the typical problem in human giving and receiving of neediness, the idea of fullness in John's Gospel must be understood. It is also necessary to understand how this concept of fullness specifically relates to Jesus as the unilateral Giver of grace through the gift of the incarnation.

**Fullness in the context of John.** John rarely uses words related to the idea of being full or fullness. Words from the root πληρώω are the words most commonly employed by John to convey the concept of being full.<sup>159</sup> Most frequently, John uses the verb πληρώω to describe the fulfillment of Scripture (cf. John 12:38; 13:18; 15:25; 17:12; 19:24, 36) or of Jesus' words (John 18:9, 32). The remaining occurrences of this verb refer to being filled with something intangible, such as a smell filling a house (John 12:3), a time coming to a point of fullness when action is expected (John 7:8), or sorrow filling the heart (John 16:6). None of these instances provides much help unlocking what it means that Jesus was full of grace and truth or that He possesses fullness in some

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<sup>158</sup>For a helpful and thorough explanation of the balancing of accounts through gift exchange in practice, see Cheal, *Gift Economy*.

<sup>159</sup>The words πλήρης in 1:14 and πλήρωμα in 1:16 are not used by John anywhere else in his Gospel. From the πληρώω word group, John uses πλήθος twice (5:3; 21:6), which simply means "a multitude," and πληρώω 15 times (3:29; 7:8; 12:3, 38; 13:18; 15:11, 25; 16:6, 24; 17:12–13; 18:9, 32; 19:24, 36). John also uses the words γεμίζω (2:7 [2x]; 6:13) and μεστός (19:29 [2x]; 21:11) in contexts of fullness, which both are used of physical objects that fill a container. These two words are of no value for the purposes of the question being pursued at present.

absolute sense. However, in the remaining instances where John uses this word (John 3:29; 15:11; 16:24; 17:13), it is always in the context of joy, and it is always related to Jesus.<sup>160</sup>

In John 3:29, John the Baptist declares that his joy has been made full (ἡ χαρὰ ἣ ἐμὴ πεπλήρωται). This statement comes during a time of crisis for John's ministry. Jesus and His disciples had entered Judea and were baptizing those who came to them (John 3:22), and, perhaps like the congregation of a small church might be concerned if a mega-church with a celebrity pastor broke ground across the street to set up a new location, the disciples of John are bothered by this development. They see Jesus' new location as an encroachment on their territory and their leader as well as a threat to their ministry. John, however, takes the opposite view. The growing ministry of Jesus is not a threat to John; it is part of God's purpose. In fact, hearing the voice of Jesus *is what makes John's joy full*. Fullness of joy is not something John possesses in himself.<sup>161</sup> The only way John can experience fullness is if Jesus, the One who does possess fullness, gives it to him.

Fullness of joy is later found thrice repeated during Jesus' final hours with His disciples. Each time Jesus mentions fullness of joy, He connects it with Himself. In John 15:11, Jesus proves to be the dispenser of true joy through the words He has spoken to the disciples. Of even greater significance is that this fullness of joy is identified with the joy of Jesus Himself.<sup>162</sup> Jesus is not the dispenser of joy like a gumball machine might

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<sup>160</sup>For a helpful discussion of these terms, especially within the Johannine writings, see R. Schippers, "Fullness, Abound, Multitude, Fulfill, Make Room," in *NIDNTT* 1:731-39.

<sup>161</sup>Morris, *John*, 213, inexplicably says, "The joy of his friend brings joy to him, too. In the same way, says John, his own joy, not simply that of Jesus, fills him completely." Morris misses the point of the passive verb *πεπλήρωται*, which indicates the fullness comes from God, even when the joy is experienced by someone else (cf. 1 John 1:4). So R. Schippers, "Fullness, Abound, Multitude, Fulfill, Make Room," in *NIDNTT* 1:739.

<sup>162</sup>Ridderbos, *John*, 519.

dispense gumballs to children and at some point become empty. Jesus in Himself possesses fullness of joy. It is only when the disciples have full joy that they will experience Jesus' joy, which is always full and never depletes. Jesus again connects fullness of joy with Himself in John 16:23-24. Jesus gives His disciples a promise concerning what will happen after His resurrection: whatever they ask the Father in Jesus' name, the Father will give to them. This promise is reiterated from their perspective in verse 24, where Jesus no longer says that the Father will give but that the disciples will receive. The purpose of the Father's giving and the disciples' receiving is that the disciples might experience fullness of joy.<sup>163</sup> While Jesus identifies the Father as giver, the giving is only in response to a request in Jesus' name.<sup>164</sup> Furthermore, when Jesus mentions fullness of joy the third time, in John 17:13, He once again identifies His joy with the fullness of joy He wants for His disciples. This time, it is Jesus Himself who requests this gift for the disciples from the Father, standing as their Mediator. The critical point in verse 13 is that the "made full" joy is the joy Jesus possesses in Himself.<sup>165</sup> His joy is and remains constantly full. His fullness of joy is absolute without any source outside of Himself. Jesus does not receive joy from anyone in John's Gospel; He only gives it. The data available from John is scarce but consistent. Whenever John uses a word from the word group πληρόω in relation to Jesus, it is in the context of a gift given out of Jesus' fullness.

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<sup>163</sup>As Carson, *John*, 546, recognizes, this divine giving and human receiving "is the route to the joy Jesus had earlier promised them."

<sup>164</sup>This requirement is not problematic, as gifts from the Father are often said to be gifts from the Son as well. The Son carries out the will of the Father. Though John does not use mediator terminology, the concept of Jesus as mediator of the Father's will, including His gifts, is present throughout the Gospel. For a fuller discussion of this concept, see the section on John 1:1-3 above.

<sup>165</sup>Michaels, *John*, 871, writes, "Jesus wants 'joy,' his own joy, for the disciples, even in their time of 'grief' in the world (see 16:22). Their joy will be 'fulfilled in themselves,' by virtue of their relationship to him, not in the external circumstances they face, which may well be dire and difficult."

**Jesus' fullness as giver.** One objection to the interpretation of fullness as absolute fullness without need or lack is that the disciples had the potential to experience fullness of joy as a gift from Jesus, so it does not necessarily follow that Jesus' fullness is transcendent and absolute since fullness can be received. Is it therefore possible that Jesus' fullness is contingent upon His reception of it via an exchange partner who supplies it to Him? The "fullness" passages above remain silent on this question. Their silence may be used to argue that Jesus' fullness is not the result of reception since any kind of reception is absent. However, the silence also might be a function of an editing process that only serves to preserve what is vital for the disciples to know, namely, that Jesus is the source of their joy regardless of how Jesus came to be that source. However, John's language about Jesus' fullness sets Him apart as possessing an inherent fullness that is not contingent, like fullness received from another, but transcendent, as the fullness of a source.

The fullness of Jesus as source is linked to His creative power. John 1:14 and 17 both present Jesus' relationship to "grace and truth" from different angles that, when taken together, emphasize the relationship of Jesus' fullness to His transcendence as a unique Giver. Verse 14 identifies Jesus as the One who is full of grace and truth, but the Evangelist leaves unresolved where grace and truth originate until verse 17. In verse 17, as discussed above, the verb *γίνομαι* plays a significant role because it points back to the creative work of the Word.<sup>166</sup> Everything has come into existence through the Word (John 1:3), including the world, which was created by the Word (John 1:10). John now

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<sup>166</sup>Morris, *John*, 99 n. 121, says the verb *γίνομαι* "signifies 'became,' 'came into being,'" and "its use here may be meant to associate grace and truth with the work of Christ." Michaels, *John*, 90-91, more forcefully adds, "'Grace and truth,' by contrast, 'came into being' (*egeneto*), just as the world 'came into being' (vv. 3, 10), just as John 'came' as a messenger (v. 6), and just as the Word 'came' in human flesh (v. 14)." Noting the contrast between Moses and Jesus, he adds, "Because of the differing verbs, therefore, the phrases 'through Moses' and 'through Jesus Christ' are not strictly parallel. Jesus is not a new Moses receiving and delivering a new law, but the Word in human flesh, calling 'grace and truth' into being."

adds that “the grace and the truth,” with the articles pointing back to the previous reference to grace and truth in verse 14,<sup>167</sup> came into being through Jesus Christ. Jesus is therefore not like the disciples, who might be filled with joy as a result of Jesus providing it to them. Rather, He is the one who made grace and truth a reality in the created world. He is full of grace and truth not because something outside of Him has filled Him with grace and truth, but because He is the originator of grace and truth. He is the source of grace and truth.

Because Jesus is full of grace and truth as their source, He can give to humanity in a way that is unique in relation to the way the world gives. Jesus does not dispense grace as one who is needy. He does not give as one who lacks something and tries to obtain it through entering into an economy of giving and receiving and giving back, thus perverting both the gift and the giving. Jesus’ fullness implies His aseity. His fullness dispels any notion He might have a need He is seeking to fill since He is already full in Himself. The fullness of Jesus helps explain why He consistently stands in the position of Giver while others, including John the Baptist and Jesus’ own disciples, are the ones who receive from Him. Jesus’ fullness as the Creator sets Him apart so that when He gives the gift of grace to humanity, He is not giving to gain, but giving to give.

### **Receiving the Gift of Grace**

The gift of grace is a unilateral gift given by Jesus to His people, yet the unilateral nature of the gift does not nullify the reality of the recipients’ reception of the gift. Neither does the reception of grace by the people of Jesus constitute a counter-gift. Verse 16 says that those who receive the gift of grace are actual recipients, and their

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<sup>167</sup>*Contra* Morris, *John*, 99 n. 120. Smyth and Messing, *Greek Grammar*, 289, note that abstract substantives typically do not have the article when they represent “virtues,” as is the case in v. 14. The articles in v. 17 are best explained as particular articles that are prompted by the prior reference to Jesus’ glory that was full of grace and truth. See *ibid.*, 287.

receiving of grace does not simultaneously turn them into givers and Jesus into a receiver. In John 1:14-18, the gift of grace may be received from God without necessitating or establishing gift exchange.

John emphasizes the lack of a counter-gift from the recipients of grace by describing the recipients as those in a passive role with no capacity to give in return. Beginning in verse 14, John highlights the active role of the Word in giving and the passive role of the recipients in receiving. The Word takes the initiative to become flesh and dwell among humanity. Of His own initiative, He gives a display of His glory, glory that is the same as the Father's. The Evangelist describes himself and others who saw Jesus in the flesh as those who "beheld" (θεάομαι) His glory.<sup>168</sup> They are characterized as observers, not as givers or as recipients who also bring a counter-gift. In verse 18, John rules out any human capacity to see God, which is to acquire a vision of the glory of God and to obtain a true revelation about God, with any natural tools humans have at their disposal.<sup>169</sup> Nevertheless, Jesus has come and revealed the Father. Human beings are the recipients of divine revelation, and John denies that they have the capacity to give anything in exchange for this revelation. The gift of grace in the Word made flesh comes to humanity from Jesus, and it must be gift, because the reality of God's grace lies beyond the reach of humanity. People are dependent recipients who can only receive God's grace and have nothing inherent within them to give in exchange or in return for it.

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<sup>168</sup>Contra Bultmann, *John*, 66-72, who says that the seeing involved is "neither sensory nor spiritual, but it is the sight of *faith*" (emphasis his). Rightly Ridderbos, *John*, 52, argues that those who beheld Jesus' glory "were the eyewitnesses of that flesh," speaking of Jesus' incarnation. For a discussion of the various verbs used to describe seeing in the Johannine corpus, see Brown, *John 1-12*, 501-3.

<sup>169</sup>Köstenberger, *John*, 49, explains why humanity cannot see God: "The reason for humankind's inability to see God is two-fold: first, God is spirit (John 4:24); second, humankind fell into sin and was expelled from God's presence (Gen. 3; Isa. 59:2)." While it is common to think of humanity's inability to see God as linked to Adam's fall into sin, the former point must be remembered as well. As physical creatures, created by an invisible God, we only can see God if He first gives Himself to us. This self-giving in the Son is precisely what John claims in this verse. No one can see God, who is spirit, but if a person has seen the Son, he has seen the Father (John 14:7), because the Father is in the Son (John 14:10).

Verse 16 emphatically rejects the idea of an exchange between Jesus and humanity while maintaining humanity's status as recipient. The Evangelist contrasts the boundless supply of Jesus, His fullness, with the human need for grace. It is from the fullness of Jesus that "we all received." Surprisingly, John does not directly say what is received from Jesus' fullness. Instead, he puts the gift received in the language of exchange with the phrase *καὶ χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος*.<sup>170</sup> As discussed above, this phrase refers to the Word giving His people grace to do the will of God.<sup>171</sup> When this phrase is interpreted in the context of receiving, it emphasizes the Word's role as unilateral Giver and His people as receivers who receive without giving a counter-gift.

This phrase is used in two places in secular Greek literature preceding or around the time of John's Gospel, and in both places it occurs in the context of undeniable exchange of gifts or favors, with the preposition meaning "in return for."<sup>172</sup> The first example is in Euripedes' *Helena*. Helen and Theoklymenos are having a dispute, and Helen urges Theoklymenos to forgive her for wrongs of the past. Theoklymenos replies, *ἐπὶ τῷ: χάρις γὰρ ἀντὶ χάριτος ἐλθέτω* (On what basis? For a gift should come in return for a gift.)<sup>173</sup> The word *χάρις* is being used in a clearly sarcastic manner, but the point is made. One "gift" certainly ought to be repaid or returned with another. The second example comes from a 2<sup>nd</sup> century work by a "sophist"

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<sup>170</sup>Michaels, *John*, 88-89, notes that *καὶ* is exegetical, linking what is received back to John 1:12. He then makes a profound point that, unfortunately, he does not discuss further: "To receive the Giver is to receive and partake of his gifts."

<sup>171</sup>In the context of John, doing the will of God includes believing in Jesus as the Son of God and abiding in Jesus so that believers bear fruit. The Word therefore gives His people grace to become and live as children of God in a world that hates them.

<sup>172</sup>Ignace de la Potterie, *La Vérité Dans Saint Jean*, *Analecta Biblica* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977), 1:147. A computer search of *TLG* verified the obscurity of this phrase in classical Greek, although several authors used this phrase after John in theological writings, referring to John 1:16. While these are useful, perhaps, for interpreting John's Gospel historically, they are not helpful for understanding the secular meaning of the phrase.

<sup>173</sup>Euripedes, *Helena*, l. 1234 (translation is my own).

under the name Dionysius Sophocles of Antioch.<sup>174</sup> Dionysius is engaged in a dispute with a person named John over some wine. At the end of the epistle, Dionysius gives John a choice, writing, ἢ ληψόμενοι τὴν τιμὴν ἢ χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος ἀπαιτήσοντες (“Either receiving the honor or demanding back a gift in return for a gift”).<sup>175</sup> The choice is clear: John can either “receive” honor or he can demand an exchange of one gift for another, clearly nullifying the reception in Dionysius’ mind. Potterie highlights the significance of this, writing that “la formule χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος était plus ou moins stéréotypée.”<sup>176</sup> This phrase had come to be used for the exchange of gifts and was most likely idiomatic of gift exchange.

It is precisely at this point that John’s statement is puzzling, because rather than having two partners exchanging gifts, there is only one subject giving while the other is receiving, without returning a different gift and entering into the circle of exchange. Potterie recognizes this puzzle, noting, “Néanmoins, ces textes profanes ne sont pas en tous points parallèles à la formule de Jean, puisque χάρις ἐτὶ χάριτος s’y réfère à deux sujets *différents* (il y a donc échange).”<sup>177</sup> Given John’s care in handling complex theological questions, it is unlikely that he used this specific phrase, so steeped in the language of gift exchange, accidentally. Rather, John inserts this phrase specifically here, in his only explicit discussion of grace, to highlight how God’s grace in Christ overturns humanity’s misunderstanding of the path to eternal life. Humanity does not obtain grace through a relationship of giving and receiving with God or through a mutual exchange of one thing for another. God’s gift of salvation from the divine

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<sup>174</sup>So Jennifer Nimmo Smith, *A Christian's Guide to Greek Culture: The Pseudo-Nonnus Commentaries on Sermons 4, 5, 39 and 43 by Gregory of Nazianzus* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), 18 n. 40.

<sup>175</sup>Dionysius, *Epistles*, no. 40 (translation is my own).

<sup>176</sup>Potterie, *La Vérité*, 1:147.

<sup>177</sup>*Ibid.*, 148.

perspective is not give and take; rather, it is give and give, and from the human perspective, receive and receive from God. Moreover, God's gifts cannot be give and take because of the fullness of Christ. There *is* nothing to take. John paradoxically inserts the language of exchange precisely where there can be no exchange because of Jesus' fullness. All human expectations and experiences of the gift are undone by the fullness of Jesus.

### **Summary**

In John 1:14-18, the gift of grace from Christ to humanity is presented as true, unilateral gift. While the Evangelist does not attempt to answer every objection or question raised by those who deconstruct the gift, his discussion points toward an understanding of how the transcendent God might give a gift to humanity. The gift of grace is God through His Word giving humanity power to do His will, which is presented throughout John's Gospel as believing and abiding in Jesus. Such a view of grace fits well not only within the context of John's Prologue and the rest of his Gospel, but also within the NT's definition of grace in contexts of giving and receiving. What enables Christ's gift of grace to remain gift and not enter into a circle of exchange is Jesus' aseity, described by John as His fullness. Because of His fullness, He is always the one giving, while His people always stand as the ones who are receiving His gifts without exchange.

### **Summary**

This chapter argued that the Fourth Gospel presents God as a unilateral giver to humanity. The foundation for the presentation of God as unilateral Giver is established in John 1:1-18, where John introduces the major themes of his Gospel and sets them in the proper context to understand them throughout the narrative. The Prologue puts the Word forward as God the unilateral Giver. In John 1:1-3, the Evangelist explains that the eternal Word of God is in relationship with God as well as union with God. As the Word

of God, He created everything that has come into being. The Word therefore is the fountain of all being, the originator of being for anything that began to be, He Himself being eternal and not subject to time or space.

In John 1:4-11, John focuses on the gifts of life and light to humanity. Both life and light are given by the Word. The Word Himself is the life and the light, depending on nothing when He gives these gifts. Moreover, these gifts are given unilaterally. The light enlightens every person, so that not even the misrecognition of the Giver can thwart the divine gift of light. This principle is illustrated powerfully in the healing of the man born blind, who also misrecognizes the Giver without destroying or denying the gift. Things that have life are given life in a way analogous to the life of a newborn baby. The Giver gives life by giving life, *His* life, through His own death. The birth from God can also be likened to resurrection from the dead, illustrated in Jesus' raising of Lazarus. The gift, then, is given not because the recipients have chosen to receive but because the self-existing Word has chosen to give. The Word's giving determines the gift and defines it as gift.

Finally, when God through the incarnate Word gives the gift of grace, He gives people the power to do His will. The Son's infinite resources dismiss any notion that He is giving to receive since He has no need to receive anything. God's gift is true gift, not exchange disguised as gift. John's Prologue establishes that God is a unilateral Giver.

## CHAPTER 3

### GOD AS EXHAUSTIVE GIVER

Chapter 2 established that God is a unilateral giver by examining the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel and how it defines the gift. The Gospel of John, however, does not describe God as only a unilateral Giver, but also as an exhaustive Giver. Both God's method of giving and what He gives demonstrate He gives exhaustively as the giving God. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the Johannine conception of salvation. Although terms from the σωζω word group occur rarely in John's Gospel,<sup>1</sup> salvation is one of its central themes.<sup>2</sup> Jesus twice asserted that salvation was the reason why He was sent into the world (John 3:17; 12:47). When Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, His words were directed toward the goal of the salvation of His hearers (John

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<sup>1</sup>Words from this root occur only 8 times in John's Gospel: 3:17; 4:22, 42; 5:34; 10:9; 11:12; 12:27, 47. J. Terence Forestell, *The Word of the Cross: Salvation as Revelation in the Fourth Gospel*, Analecta Biblica, vol. 57 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974), 103, hypothesizes that these occurrences have come from the hand of a final redactor rather than the original writer of John's Gospel, but he makes no effort to prove it. It is preferable to understand these instances as coming from the pen of the original writer of the Fourth Gospel and representing an important aspect of his theological message.

<sup>2</sup>Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 3:339, argues that soteriology is the primary theme of the Fourth Gospel, writing that John's "gospel is primarily intended to be a message of salvation." James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 436, argues in a similar direction, stating, "John's theology centers on the glory of God in salvation through judgment." Such statements contradict the commonly held position that Christology is the central theme of John's Gospel. For example, Donald A. Carson, "The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel: John 20:31 Reconsidered," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987): 643-46, suggests the purpose of John's Gospel is to answer the question, "Who is the Messiah?" Michaels, *John*, 39-40, argues that the primary contribution of the Fourth Gospel is its development of the person of the Son, with soteriology a close second. For further discussion, see also John A. T. Robinson, "Destination and Purpose of St John's Gospel," *New Testament Studies* 6 (1960): 117-31 and Marianne Meye Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 6 n. 13, Kindle. The center of John's theology is outside the scope of the current discussion, but it is a theme that needs to be pursued further than has been done heretofore.

5:34). Jesus is declared “the Savior of the world” in John's Gospel (John 4:42).<sup>3</sup> The theme of salvation is thus important not only for John's Gospel but also for understanding how the Fourth Gospel conceives of God's giving and gifts.<sup>4</sup>

The interpretation of what John means by salvation has not been monolithic. Scholars differ widely on the meaning of salvation in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, it is critical to begin by examining how the Evangelist presents salvation as such in his Gospel account. Once a Johannine conception of salvation has been established, the way salvation comes to humanity must be considered. Finally, we will consider the implications of Johannine soteriology for divine giving and gift.

### **Salvation according to John's Gospel**

Before considering the relationship of the gift to salvation, a proper understanding of salvation itself according to the Fourth Gospel must be attained. The eight occurrences of words from the root  $\sigma\omega\zeta\omega$  need to be examined in their context to determine exactly how the Evangelist used them and what he meant by them. In the various studies on Johannine soteriology, this process is rarely, if ever, followed. Discussions tend to skip right over direct salvation terminology and examine concepts

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<sup>3</sup>The only other occurrence of this title in the NT is in 1 John 4:14.

<sup>4</sup>Thompson, "Signs and Faith in the Fourth Gospel," 96, notes, "In the end, sayings which point to Jesus' unique role and function are first and foremost statements about knowing God and *receiving* life and salvation from God, and not 'dogmatic' assertions about Jesus. The Gospel's Christology really stands in the service of its soteriology and not in the service of formulating *doctrine* about the person of Jesus" (emphasis added to "receiving;" emphasis hers on "doctrine"). The important elements of Thompson's statement are that salvation relates to the gift as something received, and the theme of the Fourth Gospel is soteriological in nature, with Christology serving the soteriological goals.

<sup>5</sup>A few select examples illustrate the variety of interpretations. Carson, *John*, 97, conceives of salvation as being set free from sin through the sacrifice of the Son of God. Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John*, 240, defines salvation in John's Gospel as "knowing God, as participation in God's life, and as having fellowship with God through the one in whom God's presence became embodied in this world." Van der Watt, *Salvation in the New Testament*, 128, interprets Johannine soteriology as being made part of the family of God. Forestell, *Salvation as Revelation*, 196-97, closely following Bultmann and expanding on the concept of salvation via revelation, sees revelation as determinative of salvation, which is "a communion of knowledge and love with God, Jesus Christ and the believer." Beasley-Murray, *John*, lxxxv, sees Johannine soteriology as "the deliverance from sin and death for life in the new creation."

such as belief or life under the rubric of salvation.<sup>6</sup> Such a procedure skips an important step in understanding what John means specifically by *salvation*. Only then can one go on to discuss how the concept of salvation within the Fourth Gospel relates to other terms and concepts, such as the gift.

Salvation in John's Gospel is never presented as an absolute concept by itself. Instead, the Evangelist develops his teaching on salvation by way of contrast and comparison.<sup>7</sup> Two primary motifs emerge in the passages that directly address salvation: judgment and life. In each of the eight instances of salvation terminology, one of these concepts is always present to illuminate the Johannine understanding of the salvation brought by the Son.

### **Salvation and Judgment**

The first (John 3:17) and last (John 12:47) time John uses words from the  $\sigma\acute{\omega}\zeta\omega$  word group, he sets the idea of being saved in contrast with being judged. In John 3:17, the purpose of God sending the Son is not for the purpose of the Son judging the world; quite the opposite ( $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda'$ ), the Son was sent that the world might be saved. As Jesus' public ministry in the fourth gospel comes to a close in John 12:47, He reiterates His purpose in coming was not to judge the world but ( $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda'$ ) to save it. Jesus is faithful to the soteriological purpose for which He was sent and obediently came as evidenced by

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<sup>6</sup>Cornelis Bennema, *The Power of Saving Wisdom: An Investigation of Spirit and Wisdom in Relation to the Soteriology of the Fourth Gospel*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*, vol. 148 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 110-42, exemplifies this approach to Johannine soteriological studies, discussing John's usage of words from the root  $\sigma\acute{\omega}\zeta\omega$  in one brief paragraph spanning pp. 115-16, wherein he groups them with words from the root  $\epsilon\pi\gamma\omicron\nu$ , which receive the bulk of his attention. The rest of the section discusses terms related to the concept of salvation, drawing no clear line from the concept of salvation in the Fourth Gospel to the related metaphors and other soteriologically charged terms.

<sup>7</sup>Morris, *John*, 452, notes, "John does not often use the verb 'to save,' and he never explains exactly what he means by it." If Morris means that John does not define salvation in a formula such as  $x=y$ , then he is technically correct. John's approach is more subtle and complex than a simple formula, but a case can be made that John does in fact define salvation, explaining exactly what he means by it, as will be shown.

the fact that He does not even judge those who refuse to keep His words. His mission is the salvation of the world, the opposite of its judgment.

The stark contrast between salvation and judgment provides a helpful starting point in understanding a Johannine theology of salvation because, while salvation terminology is relatively rare in John's Gospel, terminology related to judgment is not.<sup>8</sup> Understanding what John means by judgment is not all that simple, however, as the Johannine terms for judgment are used in ways that sometimes seem to conflict. For example, the statements referenced in the previous paragraph seem to contradict John 5:22-30, where Jesus asserts His place as the appointed judge (v. 22) with duly vested authority to execute judgment (v. 27). Moreover, Jesus asserts that He does in fact judge (v. 30), and later He indicates His purpose in coming was for "judgment" (John 9:39). Therefore, key passages on judgment, especially as it contrasts with salvation, must be evaluated to see what exactly John means by judgment and how judging contrasts with Jesus' saving mission.

**John 3:17-19.** The terms for salvation and judgment occur for the first time in the Fourth Gospel in John 3:17-19. These verses are part of a larger unit that begins either

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<sup>8</sup>The terms the fourth gospel uses for the concept of judgment/judging are κρίσις, κρίνω, and κρίμα. These terms occur a total of 31 times in John's Gospel, compared to 33 total occurrences in the Synoptics (19x in Matthew, 1x in Mark, and 13x in Luke). The term κατακρίνω occurs only in John 8:10-11, so it has been omitted. Adding this term increases the Synoptics' total to 42 total instances of judgment terminology (23x in Matthew, 4x in Mark, and 15x in Luke). Regardless, John's Gospel still has the lion's share of discussion about judgment, indicating the importance of the theme in John. Morris, *John*, 205 n. 83, noting the same lexical patterns, agrees, stating, "Such statistics show that the idea of judgment interested [John] more than it did most writers." Bultmann famously has made the theme of judgment (κρίσις) preeminent in his interpretation of John's Gospel (Rudolf K. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament: Complete in One Volume*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951; reprint, 1955), 2:33-69). As Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 468-69, rightly notes, Bultmann recognized an important Johannine theme even if he subjected it to an existential interpretation that "does not square with Johannine passages such as 5:28-29 (not to speak of the book of Revelation; see also 1 John 4:17)." Bultmann's missteps combined with his massive influence demand contemporary interpreters pay close attention to the details of the text to interpret judgment and salvation in a Johannine context rather than a 20<sup>th</sup>-century existentialist one.

with 2:23<sup>9</sup> or 3:1<sup>10</sup> and continues through 3:21.<sup>11</sup> The first part of the chapter (vv. 1-15) narrates the first major dialogue between Jesus and an interlocutor in the Gospel of John. Nicodemus approaches Jesus at night and engages Him in a discussion about Jesus' origin. Jesus turns the topic of discussion to how a person can enter the kingdom of God. As was discussed in chapter 2 above, a person must be born from above by the work of the Holy Spirit to enter the kingdom of God. The implication is that the kingdom of God is a gift. Those who enter the kingdom receive it in a way that can be likened to how a baby receives life at birth, as a unilateral gift. The gift of the kingdom, moreover, is dependent on the work of the Son of Man, who will be "lifted up" (v. 14). Whoever believes in the Son enters the kingdom, which is synonymous in the Fourth Gospel with having eternal life (v. 15).<sup>12</sup>

Beginning in verse 16, the Evangelist reflects on the dialogue he has narrated, emphasizing themes introduced in the prologue such as light, darkness, life, the world, truth, and belief.<sup>13</sup> John's discussion is thus planted in familiar ground, allowing the themes of the prologue to grow and develop more fully for the reader in terms of salvation and judgment. The transition to salvation terminology begins in verse 16 with John picking up where Jesus left off, expanding on what it means to have eternal life. Having eternal life is diametrically opposed to perishing (*ἀπόλλυμι*). John changes his terminology in verse 17 while maintaining the same parallel contrast, speaking in terms

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<sup>9</sup>See Köstenberger, *John*, 113-14; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 43-46.

<sup>10</sup>See Moloney, *John*, 88-90; Morris, *John*, 184.

<sup>11</sup>The precise beginning of this pericope does not impact one's interpretation of the salvation/judgment motif and therefore will not be discussed.

<sup>12</sup>For discussion of the relationship between the kingdom of God and eternal life, see Carson, *John*, 188-90.

<sup>13</sup>Scholars disagree on the specific place where Jesus' words end and the Evangelist's begin, but v. 16 seems to be the most likely place where this transition occurs. For a defense of this position, see *ibid.*, 203-4.

of being “saved” (σῶζω) in opposition to being “judged” (κρίνω). But what does the evangelist mean by these two terms?

The term κρίνω has occasioned disagreement concerning its nuance in this passage. Carson translates the word “condemn,” asserting this is its clear meaning in a context where the opposite is salvation.<sup>14</sup> Godet, however, understands the word to refer to “an act of judgment” rather than to “condemnation” on the grounds that Jesus did not use the more commonly used word for condemnation, κατακρίνω.<sup>15</sup> The act of judgment in view is not an act of condemnation but of evaluation of a person that follows evidence and results in “a judicial sentence deciding as to his innocence or his guilt.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, to judge has a neutral meaning and wholly depends on the evidence presented. Bultmann reduces the term to its most basic meaning, interpreting it to mean nothing more than to divide or distinguish. The coming of Christ is the event whereby the great division, or judgment, of humanity is accomplished.<sup>17</sup> Far from Carson, Bultmann does not see it as condemnation per se, and contrary to Godet, he rejects any idea of a future assize where judgment is pronounced on humanity.

Among the various possibilities, understanding κρίνω to indicate condemnation seems most compatible with the Evangelist’s intention.<sup>18</sup> While Godet is

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 206. A similar contrast between judgment and salvation is found in Melito of Sardis’ *De Pascha*. In the closing section, it says in regard to the Lord, “And was judged for the one condemned” (καὶ κριθεὶς διὰ τὸν κατὰ δίκον; line 770; author’s translation). This judgment has unmistakably legal and condemnatory implications in the context as it refers to the execution of the Messiah on the cross. Speaking of the Messiah’s exaltation, *Pasch.* adds, “The one who has authority to judge [and] to save all things” (ὁ ἔχων ἐξουσίαν πάντα κρίναι <καὶ> σῶζειν; line 810; author’s translation). The contrast is similar to that found in John 3:17, with judgment set in contrast to salvation and, in the context, referring not merely to judgment but to condemnation.

<sup>15</sup>Godet, *John*, par. 4348.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., par. 4350.

<sup>17</sup>Bultmann, *John*, 154-57.

<sup>18</sup>BDAG, 567-68, indicates this term can mean “condemn” or “hand over for judicial punishment” when used of divine judgment, citing John 3:17 as an occasion when “the emphasis is unmistakably laid upon that which follows the Divine Judge’s verdict, upon the condemnation or

correct that John had the term κατακρίνω at hand if he had meant “condemn,” Johannine usage suggests that John’s preference was for the simpler verb without the prefix. The only times the verb κατακρίνω occurs in the Fourth Gospel are in the disputed pericope concerning the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53-8:11, esp. 8:10-11), hardly a passage to support Godet’s point. Building on Carson’s argument noted above, the context of salvation points toward a stronger meaning for κρίνω than Godet or Bultmann allow. Not only is the concept of judgment contrasted with salvation, but, in verse 16, the Evangelist contrasts eternal life with perishing (ἀπόλλυμι);<sup>19</sup> furthermore, the chapter ends contrasting the one who believes and thereby possesses eternal life with those who disobey the Son and consequently remain under the wrath of God (v. 36).<sup>20</sup> Language of ruin and wrath is more suited to condemnation than to investigation or division.<sup>21</sup> So then, κρίνω means “condemn” in this context rather than “evaluate” or merely “separate.”

The concept of condemnation is further defined in verses 18-19. The

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punishment: *condemn, punish*” (emphasis original).

<sup>19</sup>A similar link between κρίνω and ἀπόλλυμι exists in *Gk. Apoc. Ezra* 1:11, where Ezra asks the Lord to “judge” (κρίνον) him rather than sinners to prevent the “destruction” (ἀπόλειαν) of the whole world. The concept of judging is thus linked with the wrath of God coming on sinners so that they perish with the created world.

<sup>20</sup>The concept of judgment as divine condemnation and wrath is also attested in Jewish apocalyptic works. See, for example, *Sib. Or.* 3:287, 689.

<sup>21</sup>The meaning “condemn” is also found in the LXX usage of this term. For example, God promised Abram that He Himself would “judge” (κρινῶ) the Egyptians when Israel was redeemed after 400 years of slavery (Gen 15:14). The meaning in Genesis might be ambiguous because the reader has not come to Exodus yet, but when the plagues came upon Egypt, the judgment of God was more than evaluation; it was divine condemnation. Furthermore, in Ps 109:5-6 LXX (110:5-6 MT/Eng.), Messianic judgment is connected with the day of wrath (ἡμέρα ὀργῆς). The graphic description of the fate of kings, nations, and leaders cannot be taken to mean simply “judge.” Condemnation is in view. Even in Ps 142:2 LXX (143:2 MT/Eng.), the implication is more than judgment. The Psalmist pleads to avoid judgment because he knows judgment means condemnation for his unrighteousness. The difference in nuance is due more to the Hebrew term used (שֹׁפֵט rather than דָּן, which underlies κρίνω in Gen 15:14 and Ps 109:6) than the Greek word used to translate it. The phrase εἰσέληθς εἰς κρίσιν, which uses the noun rather than the verbal form, also affects the nuance to denote “judgment with the implication of condemnation” rather than simply “condemnation.” See W. Schneider, “Judgment, Judge, Deliver, Judgment Seat,” in *NIDNTT* 2:361-67.

Evangelist uses the language of condemnation to focus on the reason why condemnation occurs in the case of some, despite the Son's mission to bring salvation to the world. Unbelievers are not condemned because the Son came to condemn them; they are condemned because they separate themselves from His salvation through unbelief (v. 18). The apostle shows in verse 19 what motivates their unbelief by defining what he means by condemnation. The construction αὕτη δέ ἐστιν ἡ κρίσις ὅτι is typical of Johannine style.<sup>22</sup> The word κρίσις has been variously interpreted as verdict (NIV),<sup>23</sup> judgment or the process of judging (NASB),<sup>24</sup> and condemnation (KJV).<sup>25</sup> In line with the context of verses 17-18, the nuance of condemnation seems most appropriate.<sup>26</sup> The "process" of condemnation, then, occurs when people are exposed to Jesus, the light that has come into the world, and they prefer darkness because of their evil deeds.<sup>27</sup> John thus reasons that people reject the Light, that is, they fail to believe in the Son, because they love darkness and the works of darkness; their love for darkness results in condemnation.

Salvation in this first passage must be understood in opposition to judgment.

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<sup>22</sup>B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John*, Zondervan/Accordance electronic ed., *Westcott Commentary on John, Ephesians, Hebrew, and the Epistles of St. John* (Altamonte Springs, FL: OakTree Software, 2006), par. 1941; A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Accordance electronic ed. (Altamonte Springs, FL: OakTree Software, 2001), par. 5971.

<sup>23</sup>Carson, *John*, 207; Michaels, *John*, 204.

<sup>24</sup>Morris, *John*, 206.

<sup>25</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, trans. William Pringle, Calvin's Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, n.d.; reprint, 1999), 1:126-27.

<sup>26</sup>Even those who take this word to mean "verdict" admit that the verdict is entirely negative in this verse. For example, see Carson, *John*, 207; Michaels, *John*, 204.

<sup>27</sup>Scholars have wrestled with how to understand the logic of v. 19. Most are agreed that the Evangelist is presenting the process of judgment/condemnation. For example, Morris, *John*, 207, writes, "It is not God's sentence with which he is concerned here. He is telling us rather how the process works. People choose the darkness and their condemnation lies in that very fact." Beasley-Murray, *John*, 51, suggests that vv. 19-21 describe the "process" by which people are separated, like the sheep and the goats in Matt 25:31-33, with those who love darkness falling under condemnation. So also Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of John*, Accordance electronic ed., UBS Translator's Handbook (New York: United Bible Societies, 1980), par. 25490. The verse could be interpreted appropriately by translating it, "The condemnation occurs in this way: The light has come into the world, and men preferred darkness rather than light because their works were evil."

Judgment in this context is not merely evaluation, nor is it the great division of humanity. Judgment is the condemnation that falls because of unbelief, which results when people prefer darkness rather than the Light of the world. Condemnation, therefore, is nothing less than being separated from Christ by unbelief. God did not send Jesus to effect this separation, but to bring salvation. God has sent the Son to save the world, which, by implication, must mean to draw the world near to Christ, to give the world the light and free the world from darkness.

**John 12:47-48.** The final paragraph covering Jesus' public ministry in the Fourth Gospel is a bit of an enigma. The last time John discussed Jesus' public teaching was in verse 36, which ended with Jesus hiding Himself from the Jews. The setting of John 12:44-50 is thus impossible to determine. The Evangelist perhaps has left the occasion vague intentionally because the final public speech of Jesus stands as a summary of all John has recorded from Jesus' ministry in the first twelve chapters.<sup>28</sup> Jesus discusses several major themes from the Gospel in this discourse, including believing in Him, the sending of the Son by the Father, Light, darkness, eternal life, the world, the Word, salvation, and judgment.<sup>29</sup> The last two terms are the focus of the present inquiry, as this is the final occurrence of explicit salvation terminology. Once again, it is set in contrast to the concept of judgment.

The word κρίνω occurs four times in verses 47-48, and, unlike in John 3:17-19 where many commentators understood it to mean judge in the sense of evaluate, in this context a majority of commentators understand it in the purely negative sense of condemn.<sup>30</sup> Jesus plainly states that the purpose of His coming was not to condemn the

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<sup>28</sup>Morris, *John*, 539; Michaels, *John*, 708.

<sup>29</sup>Köstenberger, *John*, 389, compares this paragraph to the opening of John's Gospel, stating, "It provides closure to the first half of the Gospel."

<sup>30</sup>Barrett, *St. John*, 434; Carson, *John*, 452; Köstenberger, *John*, 393-94; Morris, *John*, 540; Ridderbos, *John*, 448-49. Newman and Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of John*, par. 27981.

world but to save the world. Therefore, He does not condemn anyone, even those who reject His words. Jesus' opponents should not misunderstand Him at this point, though. Condemnation does occur even if Jesus Himself is not the one who condemns. The condemnation that threatens Jesus' opponents has four basic characteristics. First, the word of Jesus is personified as the judge that condemns those who reject it (v. 48). Jesus' teaching thus is not only the standard by which men are judged but the very thing that condemns those who reject it. Second, it is the rejection of Jesus' words that brings about condemnation. Those warned about condemnation are those who have heard Jesus' words but do not keep them (v. 47), and those who refuse to receive His words (v. 48). Third, the condemnation takes place on the last day (v. 48). This temporal sequence marks a significant departure from what the Evangelist explained in John 3:17-19, where the one who does not believe in the Son already stands under the condemnation of God.<sup>31</sup> Finally, Jesus connects a rejection of His words with a rejection of His person.<sup>32</sup> Condemnation is marked by separation from Christ Himself, a separation that appears to be wholly the responsibility of the condemned sinner. In summary, condemnation in this passage means not to have the Savior because He has been rejected, but instead to have a condemning judge in the teaching of the Savior and to be condemned on the last day by His word.

The same contrast noted in John 3:17 is found in 12:47; Jesus did not come to condemn the world but to save it. If salvation is the opposite of condemnation, what does this passage teach us by way of implication about salvation? First, if condemnation is

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<sup>31</sup>Bultmann, *John*, 346 n. 3, rejects the futurist eschatology as an editorial gloss because of the difference with John 3:17-18. So also Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2:420-21. George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Donald A. Hagner, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 342, helpfully corrects their mistake, writing, "Life is to be experienced in two stages: life in the present in the spiritual realm and life in the future in the resurrection of the body." He goes on to note the importance of bodily resurrection as seen in the emphasis on Jesus' physical resurrection after His death on the cross.

<sup>32</sup>The same idea occurs in Luke 10:16, where hearing ( $\acute{\alpha}\kappa\omicron\upsilon\omega$ ) is contrasted with rejecting ( $\acute{\alpha}\theta\epsilon\tau\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ ) and is personal in nature. In the context of Luke, not only does the rejecter reject Jesus but the Father as well.

carried out by the words of Jesus, then the words of Jesus would also appear to be effective for salvation when they are heard, kept, and received. The same words that condemn those who reject them save those who receive them. Moreover, if Jesus' words bring condemnation on the last day, then it stands to reason that they also bring salvation on the last day for those who have received them (cf. John 6:39-40, 44, 54; 11:54).<sup>33</sup> A future eschatological salvation is not a denial of John 3:17-18 and the present salvation experienced by those who believe, nor is it mutually exclusive with it. If condemnation can be both present and future, salvation as the preferred alternative also would appear to have both present and future dimensions. Finally, salvation is marked by receiving Jesus Himself. If, as noted above, this paragraph brings the first half of the Gospel to a conclusion and comes full circle back to the Prologue, verse 48 implies the teaching of John 1:12 by way of contrast: those who receive Jesus receive salvation. If a person has Jesus, He need not fear having Jesus' words condemn him on the last day. Salvation awaits those who receive the Son.

**John 5:19-47.** The final passage where salvation terminology is set within the context of judgment is John 5:19-47. The Evangelist records a monologue by Jesus that follows the healing of a man on the Sabbath (John 5:1-18). The Jews responded to Jesus' miraculous work of healing with condemnation because they judged Him to be in violation of laws pertaining to working on the Sabbath. Jesus, rather than refuting their accusation that He was working on the Sabbath, called God His Father, infuriating the Jews all the more so that they were seeking to execute Him. Within this context of legal accusations against Jesus, He sets forth a defense not only of His actions on the Sabbath but of His declaration that God is His Father (v. 17). The section is composed of two

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<sup>33</sup>Michaels, *John*, 718, concurs, "Judgment in the present . . . does not preclude a final judgment at the end of the age (see 5:29), even as 'eternal life' in the present does not preclude a literal resurrection at the end."

distinct elements. First, Jesus sets forth His relationship with the Father and why He is in the right to make such a claim (vv. 19-30). Second, Jesus calls upon witnesses to substantiate His claims (vv. 31-47), including John the Baptist. Jesus rejects the idea that He needs human testimony to validate His testimony, but He calls upon it nonetheless so that His hearers might be saved (v. 34).<sup>34</sup> The entire monologue thus has a legal subtext, so it is not surprising that legal language of judgment should be so prevalent,<sup>35</sup> especially as Jesus lays out His evidence before calling His witnesses to testify on His behalf.

Jesus' teaching about judgment comes in verses 19-30 as He lays out His relationship with the Father.<sup>36</sup> As seen above, the connotation of judgment in this passage is entirely negative. However, this similarity does not mean that it is a mere repetition of the other two contrasts between salvation and judgment. Jesus goes into some detail about the nature of judgment in this paragraph, adding depth to the concept and outlining a fuller understanding of what it means to fall under κρίσις and, by way of contrast, what it means to be saved. Jesus describes judgment in details that help fill out the Johannine picture of both judgment and salvation.

Jesus begins His defense of His Sabbath work by linking His work with the Father's work (vv. 19-23). In so doing, Jesus claims that the Father has gifted the task of judging to the Son for the honor of the Son (vv. 22-23). The gift the Father has given the Son of exercising judgment is described in emphatic terms.<sup>37</sup> The Father judges no one (οὐδένα). Then, with a strong adversative (ἀλλὰ), Jesus declares that all judgment (τὴν

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<sup>34</sup>Andrew H. Trotter, "Justification in the Gospel of John," in *Right with God: Justification in the Bible and the World*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 133-34, initially indicates Christology is the focus of this passage rather than soteriology, but then he recognizes that "Christology serves soteriology" in this passage, so that the goal of this section is soteriological. Jesus' aim in teaching about Himself is soteriologically motivated.

<sup>35</sup>Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 73, notes the prominence of legal terminology throughout this section.

<sup>36</sup>Michaels, *John*, 306.

<sup>37</sup>As Morris, *John*, 279 n. 69, notes, "There is an air of finality about the perfect δέδωκεν."

κρίσιν πᾶσαν) has been given to the Son.<sup>38</sup> The divine prerogative to judge does not belong to the Jews who accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath; instead, Jesus is the rightful Judge to whom the Father has entrusted all judgment so that the Father need not exercise judgment on anyone. The Jews, therefore, in condemning Jesus, in actuality condemn God as He has come to them in the gift of His Son. When the Jewish leaders condemn the gift, they cannot escape the fact that they are condemning the Giver Himself, thereby securing their own condemnation.

The Son not only has the authority to execute judgment on humanity, but He also has the power to give life to humanity (v. 21). Jesus uses the term ζῳοποιέω to describe the power the Father has given Him to give life to whomever He desires. This term is important for two reasons. First, it recalls the prior discussion between the Jews and the man Jesus had healed and then between Jesus and the Jews as the legal stage was set for Jesus' reply. The man described Jesus as "the one who made [ὁ ποιήσας] me/him healthy" (vv. 11, 15). The Jews in turn sought to persecute Jesus because of the things He was doing (ἐποίει) on the Sabbath (v. 16). Their desire to persecute Jesus was exacerbated into a desire to kill Him because He was making (ποιῶν) Himself equal with God (v. 18). As Jesus begins His legal defense in verse 19, He seizes on this term and repeats it four times, twice in reference to what the Father does, and twice in reference to what the Son does as He imitates the Father. The Father is complicit in the Son's work because it is the Father who loves the Son and shows Him what He is doing (v. 20) so

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<sup>38</sup>The tension between this statement and Jesus' claims that His mission is a mission of salvation rather than condemnation in John 3:17 and 12:47 is well known and easily resolved. Although the Son has the divine right from His Father to condemn sinners, His purpose in coming was not condemnation. Jesus makes much this same point in John 5:34. Even in His discussion of the judgment that falls on those who refuse to believe in Him, His goal is the hearers' salvation, not their condemnation. The reality of condemnation on those who do what is evil cannot be denied, and in no way does it conflict with the salvific purpose of Jesus' incarnation. As Köstenberger, *John*, 187-88 n. 62, explains, "Also, 3:17 has as its subject the purpose of the Son's coming into the world, whereas 5:22 addresses the issue of the distinctiveness of the Father's and Son's respective roles." See also Beasley-Murray, *John*, 76.

that the Son can do likewise.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the work of the Son has only begun. Greater works are in store than mere healings. The greater “doing” or “making” of the Son is the power He will exercise to make alive (ζωοποιεῖ). The Father has given Jesus the authority to raise the dead and give life. Therefore, when Jesus says that He gives life to whom He wills, He is asserting that He has the legal right to do everything God does, and His work of making the lame whole is consistent with His authority to do the work of God. Furthermore, since Jesus gives life to whomever *He* wills, He does the work of God *as* God.<sup>40</sup> The gift of life has come in the person of the Son, who not only is the life but the sovereign Giver of life.<sup>41</sup>

Second, this term is important because it is used in the NT as a technical term for salvation, especially as salvation relates to the resurrection of the dead.<sup>42</sup> For example, in 1 Corinthians 15, the watershed passage on resurrection, Paul used this term three times to refer to some aspect of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:22, 36, 45). Jesus’ use of this soteriological word heightens the contrast between verses 21-22, showing that the concepts of judgment and salvation are opposed. In verse 24, Jesus describes the person who has eternal life and who does not come into condemnation as one who has “passed out of death into life.” When Jesus describes the resurrection to take place in the coming hour, the resurrection of life is a resurrection unto salvation, while the resurrection of judgment is paradoxically a resurrection unto death (v. 29). Judgment, then, pertains to the experience of death that results from categorically rejecting the Giver and His gift,

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<sup>39</sup>Michaels, *John*, 310.

<sup>40</sup>Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2:106, emphasizes this point, noting that the Son accomplishes His work “with the same sovereign power as the Father himself.”

<sup>41</sup>Morris, *John*, 279, poignantly explains, “People may not command the miracle. The Son gives life where he chooses, not where people choose.” The gift and the Giver are thus inseparably present in the Sovereign Son whom the Father has given.

<sup>42</sup>L. Schottroff, “ζωοποιεῖω,” in *EDNT* 2:110, notes that this word “is used in the NT in an exclusively soteriological sense” and “is understood primarily as the raising of the dead.” See also R. Bultmann, “ζωοποιεῖω,” in *TDNT* 2:874-75.

while salvation pertains to the giving of life in the presence of the Giver Himself.

Jesus makes plain what the basic issue is in His discussion of life and judgment in verse 34. Jesus is not giving His legal defense because *He* is in legal trouble and facing death; to the contrary, Jesus is laying out His defense before the Jews because they are actually the ones facing condemnation. The condemnation they face, however, is not from the authority of a human court; their condemnation is handed down at the divine tribunal on the basis of the righteous judgment of God administered by the Son. Jesus' words of condemnation on those who reject Him and His works are in harmony with the will of God because He seeks to do nothing other than God's will. His judgment, which issues in their condemnation and results in their being raised to destruction, is just and legally binding (v. 30). However, His desire is not for their destruction, so He lays out His defense not to save Himself, but so that His hearers might be saved. In the context, therefore, to be saved is to be rescued from divine condemnation that comes as a result of practicing wickedness (v. 29). It is to have eternal life as one escapes condemnation and passes into the realm of life (v. 24). Judgment is condemnation and death; salvation is nothing less than resurrection life given by Jesus Himself.

**Summary.** Surveying the passages where explicit soteriological terminology is contrasted with terminology involving judgment sheds helpful light on a Johannine doctrine of salvation. In John 3:17-19, salvation is opposed to condemnation in the same way that eternal life is opposed to perishing (v. 16). Condemnation is a present reality for those who do not believe in the Son of God; likewise, those who believe are assured that they are not under condemnation in the present. John 12:47-48 makes much the same point but with an emphasis on future salvation and condemnation. Those who are condemned already because of unbelief will be condemned on the last day. Conversely, those who hear and believe Jesus' words will be saved on the last day. The specific nature of this salvation and condemnation is most clearly spelled out in John 5:19-47,

especially verses 19-34, where both present and future elements are brought together in Jesus' teaching. The present condemnation of the unbeliever is manifest in living in the realm of death, and the future for those who stay in death, persisting in their evil works, is a resurrection of condemnation. Those who hear and believe in the Son, however, no longer are subject to death and condemnation because they have crossed over to the realm of life. They have heard the voice of the Son in the present and been made alive through His divine power. Their present life will culminate in a resurrection of life, which Jesus sums up as salvation in verse 34. For John, judgment has the negative connotation of condemnation that carries with it a sentence of death. Salvation is to be rescued from this legal penalty by believing in the Son, resulting in the possession of eternal life, both now and in the future.

### **Salvation and Life**

The Evangelist's use of salvation terminology in contexts other than judgment argues that, for John, salvation is exclusively related to having life as a result of being delivered from death. The remaining occurrences of words from the  $\sigma\omega\zeta\omega$  root are split between contexts that refer to physical life (John 11:12; 12:27) and to eternal life (John 4:22, 42; 10:9). In both cases, rescue from death is in view, with the result of the person in peril of death being rescued and possessing life.

**Salvation and physical life.** Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, the Fourth Gospel never uses salvation terminology in reference to Jesus healing people from various maladies.<sup>43</sup> The only account when salvation terminology is used in the context of a healing is in the case of the raising of Lazarus, which transcends the typical healing

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<sup>43</sup>Such usage of salvation terminology in the context of healing of various diseases, life-threatening or not, is fairly common in the Synoptic Gospels. For example, see Matt 9:21-22 par.; 14:36 par.; Mark 10:52; Luke 8:36; 17:19. Blindness and other maladies are all problems from which people are "saved" by Jesus.

narrative as Lazarus is no longer ill but dead. Jesus intentionally does not go to see Lazarus until after Lazarus has died (John 11:6-7), thus heightening the tension in the narrative as well as the significance of the miracle of salvation. The disciples, as usual, do not understand what is happening. Jesus tells them that Lazarus has fallen asleep but that He will go and wake him from sleep (v. 11). From the disciples' perspective, Lazarus' ability to rest signals that he will recover from his illness naturally without need for Jesus' intervention (v. 12). The disciples, afraid to travel to Judea because of the hostility of the Jewish leaders toward Jesus and their fear of death at the leaders' hands (v. 16), try to dissuade Jesus from making the perilous journey by noting that, quite apart from Him, Lazarus "will be saved" (σωθήσεται). Commentators are divided on the significance of the disciples' word choice. Some understand the disciples to mean nothing more than physical recovery from illness.<sup>44</sup> Others indicate that John employs double-entendre here to give the narrative a fuller significance.<sup>45</sup> From the perspective of the disciples, Lazarus will recover from his illness (though they are mistaken, not understanding that Lazarus is already dead). From the perspective of the narrator, however, this term indicates that the disciples' soteriology is deficient. Keener notes that the narrator employs the common language for the disciples' misunderstanding of an important fact in verse 13.<sup>46</sup> Lazarus will indeed be saved, but not through a natural, biological process apart from Jesus. Lazarus is not literally sleeping; he is dead, and his only hope for salvation is for Jesus to come and give him life. Therefore, while the disciples undoubtedly mean nothing more than physical recovery from disease, their mistake is not that Lazarus will be saved but *how* he will be saved and *what* that salvation entails. Through the disciples' misunderstanding, the reader learns that salvation is equivalent to life that can come to a

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<sup>44</sup>Köstenberger, *John*, 331 n. 40; Carson, *John*, 410.

<sup>45</sup>Barrett, *St. John*, 393; Moloney, *John*, 337; Morris, *John*, 482 n. 25.

<sup>46</sup>Keener, *John*, 2:841 n. 61.

person only through the person of the Son giving it. The gift is illustrated here through the raising of Lazarus from the dead to restored physical life.<sup>47</sup>

The other instance where salvation terminology is used in relation to physical life is in John 12:27. In John 12:20-26, some Gentiles seek out Jesus, signaling to Jesus that the time of His death has arrived (vv. 23-24). As Jesus contemplates the reality and nearness of the hour of His death, He becomes deeply distressed in verse 27. The punctuation of this verse is disputed, but the issue is irrelevant for the purposes of the present discussion.<sup>48</sup> The meaning of the prayer, “Father, save Me from this hour” (Πάτερ, σῶσόν με ἐκ τῆς ὥρας ταύτης) pertains to being rescued from physical death. The moment of crisis revolves around whether Jesus will fulfill the purpose for which He came into the world, or whether He will ask the Father to intervene on His behalf and keep Him from dying. Salvation terminology is thus employed once again in the context of being rescued from death.

Both John 11:12 and 12:27 use salvation terminology in a manner consistent with how it was used in contexts where it contrasted with judgment. In both cases it refers not merely to healing a disease or rescuing from peril but to rescuing from death and giving life. What’s more, the life that comes through salvation can only come in relation to Jesus. In the case of Lazarus, Jesus must be the one to give Lazarus life. Lazarus cannot be saved without Jesus’ intervention. In the case of Jesus facing the crisis of the cross, He must fulfill the purpose for which He came. It is only through giving (up)

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<sup>47</sup>See chap. 2 above for further discussion of the Lazarus narrative.

<sup>48</sup>The problem revolves around how many questions Jesus asks in this verse. It is agreed that the phrase τί εἶπω is a question, but what about the prayer Jesus utters immediately following, Πάτερ, σῶσόν με ἐκ τῆς ὥρας ταύτης? Some have argued that this is a sincere prayer that Jesus offers to the Father but then immediately retracts as He considers the purpose of His coming (Beasley-Murray, *John*, 212; Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12-21*, New American Commentary, vol. 25B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 55; Carson, *John*, 440). Others argue that this prayer is a hypothetical prayer posed as a question that Jesus puts forward as a foil to His actual prayer in v. 28a (Barrett, *St. John*, 425; Köstenberger, *John*, 381; Morris, *John*, 528-29; Michaels, *John*, 693-94; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2:387). On the whole, the latter seems to be the stronger position, but the meaning of the prayer is unaffected by its rhetorical function (so Brown, *John 1-12*, 475).

His life rather than saving it that the fruit of eternal life can come to those who believe in Him.

**Salvation and eternal life.** The final three references to salvation in John's Gospel are all linked directly to the concept of eternal life (John 4:22, 42; 10:9). Jesus' statement in John 10:9 has already been examined as it relates to the gift of life in chapter 2, but a few more comments are in order to highlight the connection between salvation and eternal life. Jesus uses a familiar pastoral metaphor in this passage to shape His hearers' understanding of salvation. Salvation is described as going in, going out, and finding pasture. These images not only depict what is necessary to provide life for sheep but also echo OT imagery of God's salvation of His people (cf. Deut 28:6; Isa 49:9-10; Ezek 34:12-15).<sup>49</sup> The salvation Jesus provides His sheep is more than just physical protection; it is the fulfillment of the OT promises to God's people of life in peace, security, and freedom from death.<sup>50</sup> Verse 10 emphasizes the nature of salvation as life by contrasting Jesus and the reason He came with the reason a thief comes to a sheepfold. Jesus came that His sheep might not be destroyed (ἀπολέσῃ) but have life. These two verses form an inversion of John 3:16-17.<sup>51</sup> In John 3:16-17, the Evangelist begins by contrasting perishing (ἀπόληται) with having life. He then uses soteriological terminology in verse 17 to describe the mission of the Son. Jesus, however, begins with soteriological language in John 10:9, and then transitions to a description of His mission in terms of His sheep having life as opposed to perishing. The links with the OT imagery of salvation as well as John 3:16-17 make clear that salvation in this context is nothing

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<sup>49</sup>For a thorough treatment of the Old Testament background to this passage, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Jesus the Good Shepherd Who Will Also Bring Other Sheep (John 10:16): The Old Testament Background of a Familiar Metaphor," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 12 (2002): 67-96.

<sup>50</sup>Keener, *John*, 1:811 notes that the term points beyond mere physical safety to "the sort of salvation Jesus provides those who follow him, the eschatological salvation God promised his own flock (Ezek 34:22; Zech 9:16)."

<sup>51</sup>Michaels, *John*, 586-87, notes the parallels with John 3:16-17 as well.

less than deliverance from destruction unto having the eternal life God had promised His people in ages past.

The last two instances of explicit soteriological language (John 4:22, 42) occur in the context of Jesus' visit to Samaria.<sup>52</sup> The conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman revolves around the image of water.<sup>53</sup> Jesus indicates that He is able to give water that bubbles up to eternal life (John 4:14). This water that leads to eternal life is earlier described as the "gift of God" and "living water" (John 4:10). As the discussion progresses, two important points about salvation are made. Jesus explains to the woman that "salvation" is from the Jews (John 4:22), and the Samaritans, upon hearing Jesus' word, declare that Jesus is the Savior of the world (John 4:42). What do Jesus and the Samaritans mean by salvation and savior?

Jesus' understanding of the term "salvation" is not made explicit in the context.<sup>54</sup> Various suggestions have been offered as to what the Evangelist meant by this term. Ridderbos ties salvation to divine revelation, implying that salvation in this context does not mean salvation per se but rather describes the message of salvation necessary to worship God aright.<sup>55</sup> However, the Evangelist has not used soteriological language to

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<sup>52</sup>Unlike the other six occurrences, which consist of the verb σῶζω, these two instances consist of the nouns σωτηρία (v. 22) and σωτήρ (v. 42).

<sup>53</sup>Johannine scholarship has long debated the significance of water symbolism in the Gospel of John. The meaning of this particular use of water as symbol will be discussed in chap. 4 below. For general discussions of water as a Johannine symbol, see Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 162-65; Larry Paul Jones, *The Symbol of Water in the Gospel of John* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); Wai-Yee Ng, *Water Symbolism in John: An Eschatological Interpretation*, ed. Hemchand Gossai, *Studies in Biblical Literature*, vol. 15 (New York: Peter Lang, 2001); R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 92-95.

<sup>54</sup>Some, like Bultmann, *John*, 189-90 n. 6, have suggested that John 4:22 does not fit with the anti-Semitic polemic of John's Gospel and therefore must be a gloss. Such conjecture subjects the Gospel to the tyranny of the dominant rather than listening to what the Evangelist wants to say to his readers. A better approach is to let the text stand as it is and seek to understand it as it has come down to the church through the centuries.

<sup>55</sup>Ridderbos, *John*, 162. While Ridderbos does not cite Calvin, his interpretation is along the same lines. Calvin, *John*, 159-60, suggests that salvation refers to the "covenant of eternal salvation" God

describe the message about salvation in any of its other occurrences. Moreover, what is at issue here is not the message about salvation per se, but the gift of “living water” that results in eternal life (vv. 10, 14).<sup>56</sup> Longenecker takes a different approach, understanding salvation as a title for the Messiah based on Qumran variants of Isaiah and occurrences of the term in other Jewish literature.<sup>57</sup> This interpretation alleviates Jesus of having any “nationalistic pride and soteriological prejudice.”<sup>58</sup> Barrett, however, is correct in noting that this interpretation is “improbable.”<sup>59</sup> He suggests that Jesus means “at the time appointed by God, salvation might proceed from Israel to the world, and Israel’s own unique privilege be thereby dissolved.”<sup>60</sup> Salvation, according to Barrett, must be defined from its usage in other contexts in John.<sup>61</sup> Jesus’ point, then, is not to define salvation as such but to indicate its universal significance even as it comes through a Jewish Messiah.<sup>62</sup> While Barrett is correct in arguing that the meaning of the term “salvation” must be ascertained from the wider context of the Fourth Gospel,<sup>63</sup> he also

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made with Israel, further describing it as “that saving manifestation which had been made to them [the Jews] concerning the heavenly doctrine.”

<sup>56</sup>Brown, *John 1-12*, 178-80, identifies “living water” with “Jesus’ revelation or teaching” and “the Spirit communicated by Jesus,” downplaying any distinction between Jesus’ teaching and the Spirit, arguing that “the evangelist intended no sharp cleavage between them.” While Jesus’ teaching and the Spirit are closely joined in John’s Gospel (cf. John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13), identifying them as interchangeable is erroneous. The Spirit was not given until after Jesus’ resurrection (cf. John 7:37-39; 20:22), but Jesus gave His disciples His teaching during His earthly ministry (cf. John 17:8, 14).

<sup>57</sup>Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:435-36, also identifies the term “salvation” as a title of the Messiah.

<sup>58</sup>Richard N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (Vancouver: Regent College, 2001), 100-103.

<sup>59</sup>Barrett, *St. John*, 237. See also Keener, *John*, 1:611.

<sup>60</sup>Barrett, *St. John*, 237.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid. Barrett suggests John 3:17 as a paradigmatic verse on the Johannine conception of salvation and locates most of his comments on Johannine soteriology in his commentary on that verse.

<sup>62</sup>Morris, *John*, 238-39, notes the significance of the article modifying salvation, which signifies that Jesus has in mind the “messianic salvation” that demands a Jewish Messiah.

<sup>63</sup>Barrett, *St. John*, 217, defines salvation as the world “saved from being itself,” with salvation essentially functioning as a synonym for “eternal life.” It would have been helpful if Barrett would have

ignores the important near context of Jesus' discussion with the Samaritan woman and what specifically Jesus is offering her as an aid to interpreting the meaning of the term in this context. As noted above, Jesus enigmatically presents to her the gift of eternal life using the metaphor of water. Later, when Jesus' disciples return from buying food, Jesus once again defines His mission in terms of eternal life (v. 36). In the context of this pericope, salvation must be defined in terms of the gift of eternal life given by Jesus.<sup>64</sup>

With this interpretation firmly in hand, the climax of the narrative in verse 42 becomes clear. The Samaritans give Jesus the title "the Savior of the world," the only place in the Fourth Gospel where the word σωτήρ occurs.<sup>65</sup> The usage of this title for Jesus has sparked some discussion, especially as it relates to the imperial cult, titles for God in the LXX, or pagan descriptions of their deities.<sup>66</sup> As intriguing as these possibilities are, Michaels seems more on point when he highlights the echoes σωτήρ has to Jesus' earlier comments to the Samaritan woman (v. 22) as well as John's declaration that Jesus came not to condemn but to save the world (John 3:17).<sup>67</sup> These statements relate to Jesus' mission to give eternal life to everyone who believes. While the Samaritans' confession undoubtedly would have had a familiar ring to it culturally because of how often the phrase was employed in diverse contexts, the progression of John 3-4 suggests that the title "the Savior of the world" identifies Jesus as the One who delivers from death and grants eternal life to everyone who believes, whether Jew,

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explained in more detail from what the world is saved when it is saved from being the world. Specifically, what is it about the world as the world that necessitates salvation?

<sup>64</sup>Köstenberger, *John*, 156, defines salvation in v. 22 as "God's redemption," which is close to the mark, but a bit unhelpful since redemption is not particularly Johannine language to describe salvation.

<sup>65</sup>For the same title, see 1 John 4:14.

<sup>66</sup>See Keener, *John*, 1:627-28; Köstenberger, *John*, 164-65 for an entrance into this discussion.

<sup>67</sup>Michaels, *John*, 269, insightfully remarks, "The accent on 'eternal life' in Jesus' earlier pronouncements (3:14-16) suggests that the Samaritans are looking to Jesus for more than temporary help or deliverance. They are embracing nothing less than the hope of 'eternal life.'"

Samaritan, or Gentile.<sup>68</sup> Jesus is the divine Giver of the gift of life.

## Summary

When all of the passages where explicit soteriological language occurs are examined, the following conclusions can be made. (1) Salvation is the opposite of condemnation. Condemnation language always describes the result of sin and disobedience to God and/or Jesus when such language is used in opposition to salvation. It is not merely the sin of unbelief that brings condemnation, although unbelief ultimately is the sin that cuts a person off from salvation since salvation comes through believing in the Son; rather, it is all the evil things (John 5:29) and the wicked works men do (John 3:19) that bring the wrath of God upon them. The condemnation humanity incurs because of its wicked deeds results in a sentence of death. (2) Salvation, then, is deliverance from condemnation and its consequence of death. Salvation removes the judgment sin demands as Jesus takes away sin (John 1:29),<sup>69</sup> and salvation reverses the sentence of death by giving the gift of life. For the Evangelist, salvation is nothing less than to be transferred out of death and into life by the Son. (3) Finally, salvation, like condemnation, has both a present and a future aspect. Those who have been transferred out of death into life possess eternal life in the present and do not come into condemnation. However, the present possession of eternal life is not the final experience for the believer. An hour is coming when those who have been given the gift of eternal life will be raised from the dead to experience the resurrection of life (John 5:29; 12:47; cf. 6:39–40, 44, 54; 11:24). According to John, to be saved is to be rescued from condemnation and death, and this

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<sup>68</sup>K. H. Shelkle, “σωτήρ,” in *EDNT* 3:325-27, is correct when he notes that the Samaritans are probably not engaging in a polemical debate against the imperial cult in this context, however later readers might have understood the term.

<sup>69</sup>*Contra* Forestell, *Salvation as Revelation*, 101, who rejects any idea of a vicarious atonement in the Fourth Gospel, arguing instead that the cross is the path to God rather than a sacrifice for sins. For a helpful response to Forestell, see Carson, *John*, 148-53.

rescue results in the possession of eternal life both now and in the future.<sup>70</sup>

### Salvation and the Giving of the Son

If salvation is rescue and deliverance from death unto life, how do people come to experience this deliverance and consequent life? Furthermore, what is Jesus' role in the giving of this gift? The issue in this context is not the mechanism, such as believing the Gospel, doing some good works, saying a prayer, or some other such means of obtaining eternal life that might be suggested by some or performed by a human subject. Rather, the issue is this: Does John conceive of people obtaining eternal life as a gift from God or by virtue of some kind of economic exchange into which they enter with God? John's Gospel indicates that salvation is indeed a gift from God, not an economic exchange. However, the Fourth Gospel does not describe entering into this experience in terms of some *thing* people receive.<sup>71</sup> Perhaps this is why the concept of salvation is almost always framed in terms of the act of deliverance rather than as a thing or object that might be received as an independent gift.<sup>72</sup> The Gospel of John focuses not on receiving some *thing*, but on receiving a person, namely, the Word, the Son of God, the Christ, Jesus. Salvation itself is not received or obtained directly, but it is possessed when someone receives the person of the Son of God. John highlights the gift of the Son as the only path to salvation through strategically weaving through the Gospel the idea of

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<sup>70</sup>The debate between present and future eschatology in the Fourth Gospel is outside the scope of the present work. For a helpful discussion of this problem, see John T. Carroll, "Present and Future in Fourth Gospel 'Eschatology'," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 19 (1989): 63-69.

<sup>71</sup>Nowhere in the Fourth Gospel does the Evangelist say that anyone "receives" (λαμβάνω, δέχομαι) life, eternal life, salvation, or any other *thing* that might be connected to salvation.

<sup>72</sup>As seen above, the only place in John's Gospel where salvation is presented as a noun is in John 4:22 (σωτηρία; cf. also John 4:42 where Jesus is designated as σωτήρ). Otherwise, salvation is presented in terms of an active deliverance from condemnation with the verb σώζω rather than a noun. The same pattern holds true when the concept of salvation includes the more common Johannine concept of life. Life (or eternal life) is rarely "given" (only 6:33; 10:28; 17:2) and, as seen in the above note, never "received." The Evangelist prefers to use the verb ἔχω when speaking of (eternal) life (John 3:16, 16, 36; 5:24, 26 (2x), 39, 40; 6:40, 47, 53, 54; 10:10; 20:31). The significance of these data will be discussed below.

receiving the Son and by emphasizing that the Son is both the gift and the Giver that the Father has given to humanity.

### **Receiving the Son**

Throughout John's Gospel, words connected with the idea of "receiving" are used about 50 times. The idea is therefore a prominent theme in the Gospel of John.<sup>73</sup> The Evangelist speaks of various individuals receiving (or not receiving) many different things throughout the Gospel, including wages (John 4:36), testimony (human [John 5:34] and divine [John 3:11, 32-33]), food (John 6:7, 11), drink (John 19:30), and circumcision (John 7:23). Some of these instances are theologically significant, especially the instances where the testimony of Jesus and John the Baptist are not received by Jesus' hearers (John 3:11, 32; 5:34). However, above and beyond any *thing*, the most common object (grammatically speaking) of λαμβάνω is Jesus Himself.<sup>74</sup> The way various individuals and groups throughout the Gospel of John respond to Jesus by way of either receiving Him or refusing to receive Him highlight John's understanding of the incarnation as the Father's gift of giving through the Son.

The significance of receiving the Word-made-flesh is revealed immediately in the Prologue of John's Gospel. Before the Evangelist speaks of believing, he speaks of receiving (παρέλαβον) the Word (John 1:11) and emphatically declares that only those who receive the Word are born of God (John 1:12-13). Believing in the Word does not stand as an independent theme but is linked with and subordinate to receiving the Word.

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<sup>73</sup>The breakdown of usage is as follows: λαμβάνω – 46x; παραλαμβάνω – 3x; δέχομαι – 1x. For a helpful discussion of these terms in the Johannine corpus, see B. Siede, "Take, Receive," in *NIDNTT* 3:744-51.

<sup>74</sup>Of the 43 instances where the verbs λαμβάνω/παραλαμβάνω mean "receive" (as opposed to "take"), the object of the verb is Jesus Himself 11 times. No other object is grammatically connected to these verbs more than 3 times, making the emphasis on receiving Jesus highly significant. The verb δέχομαι has been omitted as it is only used once by John in a context that means "welcome" as opposed to "receive" (John 4:45). It is most likely that John specifically chose to use δέχομαι at John 4:45 to avoid giving the reader the impression that the Galileans "received" Jesus in a saving/believing sense.

The theme of receiving the Son lies dormant for a few chapters, but it is introduced again in John 5:43-47 and 6:21. Jesus presents His legal defense for His claim to be the Son of God in John 5:19-47, and He concludes by condemning His hearers for their unbelief. However, their unbelief is not viewed in isolation, as if it were merely failing to believe legal testimony. Their unbelief is a manifestation of something deeper. They do not receive Jesus although He has come in His Father's name (v. 43). The problem is not simply unconvincing testimony but a rejection of the Father's gift. Jesus' hearers are happy to receive what other men claim to give while rejecting the gift of God. Their unwillingness to receive the Son makes it impossible for them to believe in Him. The Son is a gift that they have rejected.

The disciples, by contrast, do receive Jesus, although in what might be termed baby steps. The crowds received the food Jesus miraculously gave to them in John 6:1-14, but rather than receiving Jesus as a gift, they attempt to seize (ἀρπάζειν) Him for their own purposes.<sup>75</sup> Jesus thus hid Himself while His disciples crossed the sea to Capernaum. When Jesus came to them, walking on the water, they willingly received (λαβείν) Him into the boat. While this instance might be shrugged off as theologically insignificant, there are compelling reasons to think the Evangelist's wording is intentional and soteriologically motivated.<sup>76</sup> First, as has been argued above, Jesus' hearers are unwilling to receive Him. After they see His miraculous sign of multiplying the loaves,

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<sup>75</sup>The violent nature of ἀρπάζω is significant (see Brown, *John 1-12*, 235) as the people attempt to overturn Jesus' position as Giver. Rather than *receiving* Him as the King given to them from the Father, they want to *make* Him their king, putting themselves in the position of giver, ostensibly so that they might exercise sovereignty over Him. In their selfish desire to give kingship, they prove to be takers rather than givers, and violent takers at that. Jesus will not be manipulated in this way, and He eludes their grasp because He is and must remain the given Giver, whom men must receive. See also Ridderbos, *John*, 216.

<sup>76</sup>The vast majority of commentators simply ignore the language of "receiving" that John uses in this verse, spending most of their time discussing the precise nuance of the imperfect ἤθελον. Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2:27, dismisses its soteriological significance, suggesting, "The wording is not the characteristic Johannine phrase for the acceptance of Jesus in faith." However, Moloney, *John*, 204, points out the parallel to John 1:12 and notes that it is used "to indicate the authentic reception of Jesus." Cf. Keener, *John*, 1:674, who also notes the contrast with Jesus' enemies' response in John 5:43.

they still are unwilling to receive Him, instead demanding to *seize* Him. The irony is rich. When the crowds find Jesus on the next day, they continue to reject Him, and Jesus' words only serve to heighten their rejection of Him and His teaching so that, when the chapter concludes, many even of those who had been His disciples have abandoned Him (v. 66). The twelve, however, who had received Him into the boat, recognize that He has the words of eternal life (Judas excepted) and manifest their reception of Jesus by confessing faith in Him (v. 69). Therefore, it seems reasonable to understand the disciples' willingness to receive Jesus into the boat as a symbolic act of their reception of His person and teaching. Second, John 6:21 is the first instance of anyone "receiving" Jesus since John 1:12's general statement that some did receive Him. It follows hard on the heels of Jesus' own people rejecting Him (John 5:43), completing the contrast foreshadowed in the Prologue. The key issue that determines belief or unbelief is receiving the Son as gift. Rejecting His testimony or seeking to seize Him for selfish purposes preclude belief. Those who receive Him as a gift are those who believe in His name. The emphasis on receiving the Son underscores that the gift of God according to John is nothing less than Jesus, the Son of God.

The language of receiving the Son finds its greatest frequency in the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, where it is used five times from John 18:31-19:40. The first instance (John 18:31) ominously foreshadows the irony that marks the way this concept is woven throughout the narrative.<sup>77</sup> The Jewish leaders have brought Jesus to Pilate to be tried and sentenced to crucifixion. That is, they desire to *take* rather than to *receive*. When Jesus confronts them like light penetrating darkness, the people must respond to the light of

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<sup>77</sup>Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 179, also notes the irony of this section. In relation to the gift, he insightfully remarks, "The glory of the one from heaven eludes all who are from 'this world' even when they have 'beheld' that glory. Only those who are given (6:37), drawn (6:44), or called (6:70; 10:3) can comprehend the glory." The Jews and Pilate ironically find themselves on the same side, part of "this world." As such, they have not been given to Jesus, nor can they receive the Giver or His gift although both stand plainly in view, united in the person of the Son.

life. They bring Jesus to trial because they prefer to take Jesus' life rather than receive it.<sup>78</sup> Pilate wants nothing to do with their controversy with Jesus. Pilate, like so many other Johannine figures, speaks better than he knows, as he tells the Jews, "Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law" (NASB).<sup>79</sup> In the context of John, and in view of the significance of the concept of receiving, it seems better to interpret this ironically, as a Gentile leader unwittingly commands the Jews to do what they are unwilling to do and therefore refuse to do: they will not receive Jesus themselves. The Jewish leaders emphatically reject Pilate's suggestion that they take/receive (λάβετε) Jesus, turning Jesus back to Pilate for execution.<sup>80</sup> Under duress, Pilate ἔλαβεν Jesus, but rather than believing in Jesus, he punished Him (John 19:1), indicating Pilate was operating in the sphere of taking, not receiving. The details of the punishment phase of Jesus' execution are related, when Pilate a second time urges the Jewish leaders to "take [λάβετε] Him yourselves and crucify Him" (v. 6). Jesus proves to be the rejected Son of God at every turn. Pilate wants nothing to do with Jesus and continues to throw Him back to the Jewish leaders. The Jewish leaders twice hear from the mouth of a Gentile ruler that they ought to receive the Messiah themselves, but they are unwilling. Pilate concedes to their demands for crucifixion, and Jesus is delivered over to them, and they received (Παρέλαβον) Jesus (v. 16 [v. 17 Eng.]). The text, however, is a bit unclear at this point

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<sup>78</sup>The irony is rich here as well because they cannot take His life; He alone can give it (cf. John 10:18). Their futile attempt to undo the gift by killing the Giver demonstrates the gift's indestructibility in the face of economy and economic disruption through illicit taking.

<sup>79</sup>Andrew T. Lincoln, "Trials, Plots and the Narrative of the Fourth Gospel," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 1994): 9, notes the irony of Pilate's statement, which results in the condemnation of the Jews from their own Scriptures. The trial theme is also prominent in John 5:19-47, where Jesus tells the Jews that Moses will condemn them because they refuse to believe what He wrote (vv. 39-40, 45-47). Pilate, therefore, unwittingly echoes the earlier words of Jesus, when He called the Jews to evaluate His works and words in light of the Law of Moses so that they might receive Him as the Messiah and Son of God.

<sup>80</sup>Donald A. Carson, "Understanding Misunderstandings in the Fourth Gospel," *Tyndale Bulletin* 33 (1982): 65-66, notes that irony and misunderstanding in the Fourth Gospel "depend on words and expressions with double or ambiguous meanings." See also Barrett, *St. John*, 208.

as to who received Jesus. Was it the Jews, finally, after the two admonitions by Pilate? At first glance, it seems so. However, John clarifies his meaning in John 19:23, noting that it was the soldiers who crucified Jesus, so that the mysterious “they” turns out to be Gentile executioners. Moreover, the Evangelist explains that the soldiers were not interested in Jesus as much as they were in receiving His garments (vv. 23-25).<sup>81</sup> The gift of the Son of God is thus hung on a cross, having been rejected by His own people. The Gentiles who did not know Him eagerly receive not Him but His garments, desiring a gift apart from the Giver and thereby losing both.

The disciples, however, turn out to be the ones who in the end receive Jesus. Before Jesus expired on the cross, He committed His mother to the beloved disciple’s care. The beloved disciple received Jesus’ mother, indicating not just his reception of Jesus’ mother, but also his reception of the crucified Son of God Himself as he submitted to Jesus’ command immediately. After Jesus died, two secret disciples, unable to remain in the shadows of night’s darkness any longer, asked for Jesus’ body. Pilate granted their request, and they *received* the body of Jesus to prepare it for burial (John 19:40). Once again, the Evangelist uses terminology that makes literary sense quite apart from any theological intentionality.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that these two disciples received Jesus’ body as a sign of their allegiance to Him cannot be overlooked.<sup>83</sup> God gave His Son as a gift to be received. True disciples receive Him as a gift, receiving not only the gift but also the Giver; all others reject Him and refuse the gift (and the Giver). Some reject the

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<sup>81</sup>For further development of the significance of this part of the narrative, see Michaels, *John*, 953.

<sup>82</sup>Most commentators pass over ἔλαβον in this text without comment, focusing their attention on the nature of the linen wrappings and the spices and how they might relate to the Turin Shroud.

<sup>83</sup>Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 3:297, comments, “John places no value on spectators or witnesses; Jesus’ burial as later also his tomb are to reveal Jesus’ glory, which is mirrored in the action of those two men [Joseph and Nicodemus]. They are not identified as councillors, perhaps intentionally not, because in this way they better represent the future believers.” The receiving of Jesus by true disciples with the result that Jesus is honored as king through resurrection is thus foreshadowed here, *contra* Bultmann, *John*, 680, who says, “The narrative does not contain any premonition of the following Easter story.”

gift/Giver outright, refusing to receive Him in any capacity. Others take (under the pretense of receiving) the gift/Giver with nothing other than the intention to destroy Him and profit economically or politically from His destruction; such taking is to reject the gift/Giver in perhaps a more artful way, for to receive a gift with no other intention but to annihilate it is not to receive a gift at all. When the gift is rejected, the Giver is rejected as well. To seek to destroy the gift is to seek to assassinate the Giver.

### **God's Gift of the Son**

Not only does John describe the Son as a gift by using receiving terminology in relation to the Son, but he also shows that He is the gift by which salvation is obtained by emphasizing that the Son is the primary gift of the Father to humanity. Throughout the Gospel of John, the primary Giver is the Father.<sup>84</sup> When the Father gives, He most frequently gives to the Son.<sup>85</sup> However, when the Father gives to people other than His Son, He either gives them His Son or gives a gift that is connected to the giving of the Son.<sup>86</sup>

The first instance where Father is described as giving His Son as a gift is in John 3:16. This verse is paradigmatic for understanding the gift of the Son throughout the Gospel. The gift language is explicit. "For God so loved the world, that He *gave*

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<sup>84</sup>The Father is subject of the verb δίδωμι 38 out of 75 times (about 50.7 percent of all occurrences). The Son also gives 23 times (about 30.7 percent of the instances of giving in John's Gospel), while everyone else only gives 14 times (about 18.6 percent of the time). In the last category, nearly everything given by humanity proves to be a false gift. For example, the soldiers "give" Jesus blows to the face (John 18:22; 19:3). Judas appears to be a giver but in the end turns out to be a betrayer (John 13:29; 14:27). It could almost be said that only God gives genuine gifts in the Gospel of John.

<sup>85</sup>The Father gives to the Son 26 of the 38 times John speaks of the Father giving. If John 3:34 means that the Father gives the Spirit to the Son, as some commentators understand it, the Father gives to the Son 27 times throughout the Gospel of John. The giving/receiving relationship between the Father and the Son is important and will be explored in chap. 4.

<sup>86</sup>The only two possible exceptions are John 1:17, where a divine passive is used of the giving of the Law through Moses, and John 19:11, where Jesus tells Pilate his authority was given to him from above, indicating God's providential raising up of earthly rulers. Both of these passages are connected to the giving of the Son tangentially, but the point need not be pressed.

(ἔδωκεν) His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life.”<sup>87</sup> The reason why God gave the gift of the Son is so that sinners might be saved, that is, that they might be rescued from death as a consequence of sin and have eternal life through the gift of His Son. John reiterates the point in verse 17, switching from gift language to mission language. God not only *gives* the Son, but He *sends* Him as well. Throughout the remainder of John’s Gospel, the primary way Jesus will speak of His life and mission is in terms of being sent by the Father. Each time Jesus (or the Evangelist) speaks of being sent, however, this initial passage defines and determines the nature of the sending.<sup>88</sup> The sending is a gift. The Son is a gift. The reality of His incarnation, suffering, and resurrection from the dead is a gift for humanity.<sup>89</sup> It is a gift that results in rescue from condemnation/perishing and possession of salvation/eternal life. The gift of salvation hinges on the gift of the Son.

The next passage where the Father gives to someone other than the Son is in the “Bread of Life discourse” in John 6:22-71. The particular place in this discourse that is relevant to the discussion of the Father’s gift begins in verse 31. Jesus has been

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<sup>87</sup>Emphasis added. The question regarding the translation of οὕτως is not relevant here, as it makes little difference to the point at hand whether John means to emphasize the way God demonstrated His love or the extent of God’s love seen in the gift.

<sup>88</sup>Ridderbos, *John*, 138, picks up the relationship between giving and sending in John’s Gospel, although he unduly limits the giving of the Son to His sacrificial death on the cross.

<sup>89</sup>Some debate has occurred regarding the precise nuance of the term δίδωμι in John 3:16. Is the word describing the incarnation of the Son (Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:399) or the crucifixion of the Son (Köstenberger, *John*, 129)? Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), 70, claims that ἔδωκεν is used for παρέδωκεν in this verse, but he fails to consider the Johannine theme of the gift when coming to this conclusion. Severing the incarnation and the crucifixion in this verse is a misstep. As Morris, *John*, 203, notes, “In typical Johannine fashion ‘gave’ is used in two senses. God gave the Son by sending him into the world, but God also gave the Son on the cross.” The incarnation of the Son cannot be separated from His crucifixion; moreover, the crucifixion of the Son must always be considered in connection with His resurrection as well. To consider the incarnation of the Word in abstract terms removed from His suffering, death, and resurrection is to miss the entire substance of the incarnation. It is, in fact, hardly conceivable that one could discuss the incarnation in any meaningful way without the shadow of the cross and the light of the empty tomb always hovering over and around the discussion. At the same time, without the incarnation, there would have been no cross and therefore no resurrection.

exhorting the crowds to believe in Him and to seek something greater than a single, fleeting meal. They are unwilling to be distracted from their desire for physical nourishment, so they demand a sign, noting the sign Moses gave them when he led the Israelites out of Egypt by citing Psalm 78:24. The crowd's misunderstanding of the gift is profound. Initially, it is not clear who the crowd understands the subject of ἔδωκεν to be, whether it is God or Moses. In the context of Psalm 78, the subject is clearly God, who "commanded the clouds above and opened the doors of heaven" (Ps 78:23 NASB). God is the giver of bread from heaven. Jesus, however, perceives that the crowd misunderstands not only the Psalm and its context but also the true nature of the gift. He, therefore, must correct the crowd at two points in verse 32. Not only do they misrecognize the giver, thinking the giver is Moses rather than God, but they cannot even fathom the gift itself. Jesus explains that Moses is not the giver; rather, Jesus' Father is the Giver. What does He give? Not bread that gives temporary life to a small group of people and then leaves them wanting more, but the true bread from heaven that gives life to the world (vv. 32-33). Jesus is the true bread from heaven (v. 35), and He gives life that lasts forever.

At this point in the dialogue, Jesus makes an important shift in His discussion of the gift of God. Up until this point, the Father has been the Giver. In verses 33-34, however, Jesus claims to be not only the gift from the Father but also the Giver incarnate. He has come down from heaven so that *He* might give life to the world. The Son is the one who satisfies hunger and thirst (v. 35). He is the One who gives resurrection life (vv. 39-40) through the Spirit (v. 63). If the crowd wants to encounter God and His gifts, they must encounter God in the gift of the Son. The crowd's error traveled in two directions. First, they were looking for a gift from God that was something other than the Son of God. They were content with the types and shadows of manna when the fulfillment of the type was standing before their eyes. Second, the people were disinterested in the Giver.

They could not recognize the Giver either from Scripture or in His presence as He spoke with them. The gift of God, however, is the Son, and anyone who wants to receive from the Father must receive the Son because the Son is the one who gives to humanity as God.

In John 6:65, the first instance of the Father giving something other than the Son occurs. Jesus says, “No one is able to come to me unless it is given (ἢ δεδομένον) to him by the Father.” The interpretive challenges in this verse are enormous, and it will be handled more in chapter 4 below. For the moment, what is significant is the gift the Father gives to people in this verse. The gift the Father gives to people is that they come to the Son.<sup>90</sup> The coming to Jesus is the gift.<sup>91</sup> The Father’s gift, therefore, is the Son, but the gift is contemplated from another perspective. The entrance of the Son into the created world might be considered the gift of the Son from the Father’s perspective, bracketing out the recipient. The gift of coming to the Son, however, is the gift of the Son from the recipient’s perspective, not quite bracketing out the Giver, but rather shifting the focus to the recipient of the gift. The key point for this discussion is that the gift remains the Son. The shift in perspective serves to highlight the centrality of the Son as the Father’s gift. Salvation hinges not on the Father giving salvation directly, but in the Father giving the Son, who gives Himself for the life of the world. The Father gives the Son when He draws people to the Son so that they come to Him, believing in His name.

The last few instances of the Father giving to someone other than the Son cluster in the Upper Room Discourse (John 14-16). Two gifts are promised to the

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<sup>90</sup>Michaels, *John*, 412, perceptively recalls John 3:27 and the absolute principle that a person can receive only what God gives, tying up all the previous metaphors in John 6 by the theme of the gift of God.

<sup>91</sup>*Contra* Carson, *John*, 302, the gift is not the *ability* to come to Jesus and believe in Him but the actual coming to Jesus and believing in Him. This distinction is significant, for if the Father gave the ability to come and not the actual coming, then the Son would no longer be the gift or the Giver; furthermore, the gift itself would be undone, for then the donee would exercise the ability in such a way as to become a taker rather than a receiver. The Son would be *offered*, but not *given*. He would be *taken*, but not *received*.

disciples in this discourse. The first is the gift of the Paraclete (John 14:16); the Father will give the disciples the Paraclete. Significantly, this gift is not something the disciples ask for; instead, Jesus Himself asks the Father to give this gift to the disciples, once again highlighting the centrality of the gift of the Son. But the gift of the Son extends further so that once again the Son not only is gift but also Giver. The Spirit comes from the Father, but Jesus twice states that He Himself will send the Spirit (John 15:26; 16:7). The Father's gift of the Spirit comes through the giving of the Son in every way. Moreover, the Holy Spirit comes in Jesus' name and enables the disciples to remember and understand Jesus' teaching (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit, then, is utterly Son-centered in His coming as a gift. He comes to bring the Son to the disciples in the absence of the Son. In one sense it could rightfully be said that the Son comes in the Spirit, and the gift of the Spirit is another manifestation of the gift of the Son.<sup>92</sup> This assertion does not to confuse the persons of the Trinity, as if the Spirit were the Son.<sup>93</sup> The Spirit's role, however, is not to give Himself to the disciples so much as it is to give the Son to the disciples after Jesus' glorification. When the Father gives the Spirit, He gives the Son.<sup>94</sup>

The second gift in the Upper Room Discourse is the broad gift of anything (John 15:16; 16:23). Such an open-ended, blank check is qualified, however, with the phrase "in My name" (ἐν τῷ ὀνοματί μου), speaking of Jesus. The Father will give to the disciples anything they ask in *Jesus'* name. The gift of the Son is thus determinative for the disciples' relationship with the Father. If the disciples do not ask in

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<sup>92</sup>I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 507, felicitously remarks, "The implication appears to be that it is through the agency of the Paraclete that Jesus makes himself present."

<sup>93</sup>Bultmann, *John*, 617-18, insists that the arrival of the Paraclete is the "Parousia" of Jesus, and that John has combined these two strands of teaching. Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 3:76-77, is more judicious when he writes, "It is unlikely that he [John] wanted to identify the Spirit with Christ; even according to 20:22, 'Holy Spirit' is a gift given by the risen Christ."

<sup>94</sup>The movement from gift language to mission language between John 14:16 and John 14:26 parallels the same terminological shift in relation to the giving of the Son in John 3:16-17, tightening even further the link between the gift of the Son in the incarnation and the gift of the Son through the Spirit.

the name of the Son, they should expect to receive nothing from the Father. The Son thus stands as *the* gift above all others. Anything the disciples might receive from the Father is entirely dependent on having the Son. Jesus also adds that it is not only the Father who will answer the disciples' prayers, but the Son Himself will do whatever they ask in His name (John 14:13-14). Therefore, the Father gives in and through the giving of the Son. The Son is present as both gift and giver, and apart from the Son there is no gift, no giving.

### **Summary**

When the Evangelist conceives of the Father giving to people, His scope is restricted and narrow to the gift of the Son. The Son is the gift that God has given to save men from perishing and condemnation. The Son is the gift of true bread from heaven. The Son is given to the disciples even in His absence through the gift of the Spirit. Finally, the gift of the Son is determinative of a person's relationship to the Father. The Father gives the Son, and it is through the channel of the gift of the Son that any and all of His other gifts flow, especially the gift of salvation, because when the Father gives the Son, He gives the Son as both gift and Giver. The Son comes as the One who is one with the Father. The Son comes doing the Father's works (John 14:10-11). Salvation cannot be conceived in Johannine terms as a gift independent of the Son, for the Son is the one the Father has given to give salvation. The giving of the Son is the giving of salvation.

### **The Son As Exhaustive Gift**

Since the gift of salvation is obtained by receiving the Son, salvation is elevated out of the sphere of a gift (economic?) exchange and proves to be an exhaustive gift. It is unlike any gift that might be given or received in a horizontal manner, from one human person to another. It is a gift that leaves no room for counter-gift because it is the gift that gives everything, so that all of creation is given in the gift of salvation through

the gift of the Son. The transcendental nature of the gift is seen primarily in the Son's authority over all creation and His use of that authority to give what belongs to Him to His people.

### **The Son's Authority over Creation**

In chapter 2, it was noted how the Prologue of John's Gospel designates the Word in His pre-incarnate existence as the Creator of everything that was created (John 1:3, 10). The Word, however, did not remain in this pre-incarnate existence in the presence of God. He became flesh and entered into the world of creation and, in some unfathomable way, the Creator became part of the creation as a man of flesh and blood (John 1:14). The incarnation of the Word thus raised the question of the relationship between Jesus of Nazareth and the created world. In His pre-incarnate existence, the Word as uncreated Creator exercised all rights and authority over His creation. Once the Word entered into the created world as a human being, partaking of creation itself as a human person who had a definable beginning, did He surrender His rights as Creator, perhaps ceding them to God the Father, now subject to the same creaturely limitations within creation to which all other created people are subject? The answer the Evangelist gives is a determined and repeated no. By means of the gift, the Son even in His incarnation and henceforward to eternity, remains the authority over the created world, possessing all of it and able to dispose of it as He sees fit.

The transcendental authority and possession of all creation by the Son is made explicit in two primary passages in John's Gospel, which are virtually repetitions of one another. In John 3:35, the Evangelist declares, "The Father loves the Son and *everything* [πάντα] He has given into His hand" (emphasis added). The term πάντα is moved forward in the sentence for emphasis to show that nothing is excepted. The Father has

given to the Son exhaustively, so that all that has been created belongs to Him.<sup>95</sup> John 13:3 reiterates the point with only slight variations: “Knowing that *everything* [πάντα] the Father gave to Him, that is, into His hands . . .” (emphasis added). This passage is particularly significant because it sets the stage for Jesus washing His disciples’ feet as He prepares for the cross. The depths of humility and love are emphasized by the fact that the One who washed their feet is the One to whom everything belongs. He is truly the Lord and Master of all. Once again, the idea is that Jesus received all of creation as a gift from the Father. When the Word entered the created order, His possession of all creation was not nullified; it was ratified by the Father’s gift.

In both passages, the Evangelist notes that everything the Father gave He gave into the hand(s) of Jesus (ἐν τῇ χειρὶ εἰς τὰς χεῖρας). The imagery here is that of authority. The idea is similar to when Jesus gave His disciples the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18 and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.” The clear implication is that the Father is the One who gave Jesus this transcendent authority that rules over every realm. A similar statement is also found in Matthew 11:27/Luke 10:22, where Jesus indicates that the Father has delivered all things over to Him. The “all things” in the context of Matthew and Luke include not only ownership and authority over creation but also the right and authority to determine salvation itself. The Son therefore has ultimate authority over humanity and the destiny of humanity. Nothing lies outside the purview of His authority, even in His incarnate state as Jesus of Nazareth. He possesses all things, and He has the authority to direct all things as He wills.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>Morris, *John*, 219 n. 133, briefly discusses everything the Fourth Gospel says has been given to the Son.

<sup>96</sup>Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus makes clear that, although He has the authority to do whatever He wills, He always submits His will to the will of the Father, doing what the Father wills. Therefore, to say that Jesus has authority to do whatever He will does not indicate that He wills to do something other than what the Father wills. It is simply to assert that the Father has given everything to

## The Exhaustive Gift of the Son

Since the Son possesses all of creation and has authority to do whatever He wills with His creation, it must be asked how the Son's preeminence affects His giving of salvation to His people and, moreover, what the implications are for the Father's gift of the Son to humanity. While the Son is not described as giving as frequently as the Father, His giving to people is still a prominent theme in John.<sup>97</sup> The Son's gifts are scattered throughout the Gospel, and include such things as authority (John 1:12), the bread of life (John 6:27, 33-34, 51-52), eternal life (John 10:28), an example to follow (John 13:15), and peace (John 14:27). The greatest concentration of the Son's giving takes place in John 17, especially as it concerns the gift of salvation He gives to His people. For this reason, we will limit our discussion to this particular chapter as it brings to a climax and clarifies the giving language that leads up to it.

John 17 is well known, even if somewhat controversially, as the "High Priestly Prayer" of Jesus.<sup>98</sup> It is His final act on behalf of His disciples, the climax of His earthly ministry, before He goes to the cross. The prayer itself includes a summary of Jesus' work and ministry, His requests on behalf of His disciples, and His declaration of success in fulfilling the Father's mission. This chapter gives the reader the clearest and most intimate gaze at the relationship between the Father and the Son. More clearly than any other passage in John, it sets forth the meaning of the gift of salvation Jesus is about to secure through His death and resurrection for those who believe in Him. When the reader finishes this chapter, the results are almost unbelievable as Jesus pulls back the curtain on the full meaning of the gift of salvation. Salvation is the gift of everything, including God Himself.

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Jesus with all the authority that goes with it.

<sup>97</sup>See n. 84 above for a statistical breakdown of the frequency of giving language as it is applied to various subjects in John's Gospel.

<sup>98</sup>Carson, *John*, 552-53, has a balanced discussion of the various proposed titles for John 17, ultimately adopting the title "The Prayer of Jesus."

The prayer begins with Jesus acknowledging the hour of His glorification has come (v. 1). Jesus immediately transitions to the theme noted above, that He is owner and ruler of everything in creation, here spoken of in terms of “all flesh” (πάσης σαρκός). This foundation is critical to understanding the gift Jesus is about to elaborate, for Jesus’ gift is only possible if He has transcendent ownership and authority over all of creation. The foundational nature of the statement is seen in Jesus’ limited gift to a select group of people, namely, those whom the Father has given Him (v. 2). These two statements side by side appear to be in tension. The Father has given Jesus authority over all flesh, but the Father has only given Him a subset of the people that compose “all flesh.”<sup>99</sup> The tension is resolved by understanding that Jesus’ authority extends not only to the prerogative to save but also to judge (cf. John 5:21-22), and that He exercises this authority in accordance with the Father’s will. The Father has willed to give some to the Son, while others will experience the authority of Jesus in the judgment. Therefore, while all flesh is under the power of Jesus and ultimately belongs to Jesus by virtue of the Creator/creature relationship, only some people are His in a salvific sense.

Jesus continues His prayer by explaining that He is the One who gives eternal life. The Father Himself does not give eternal life; He gives the Son. However, He gives the Son as the One who will give eternal life to those the Father has given Him (v. 2). Lest eternal life be misunderstood as some *thing* that might be grasped, domesticated, exchanged, objectified, or exhausted, Jesus goes on to define eternal life, illuminating all the prior occurrences of the term. Eternal life is not some *thing* in particular because eternal life is to know God the Father and to know His Son, Jesus the Messiah. One could grasp eternal life as a finite object as easily as one might grasp the infinite divine being. It is (the) impossible. Eternal life transcends any particular thing in creation. Eternal life

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<sup>99</sup>While it is theoretically possible that “all flesh” and those the Father has given Jesus are identical sets, in the context of John, especially John 17, it is clear that not every person belongs to Jesus in the second sense of this verse. See especially John 17:9, 12, 14, 20.

goes beyond creation. Eternal life takes a person into the very life of God, a life that is outside of and above creation, a life that originates creation, a life that sustains creation, a life that never can be exhausted because it is without limits, without beginning, and without end. The life of God is nothing less than transcendent life that defies any finite circumscription. This life, this eternal life of being caught up in the love of the Father and the Son, is what the Son gives to those whom the Father has given to Him.

Jesus returns to this theme in verses 7-10, speaking this time in terms of the words of the Father rather than speaking directly of eternal life. The pattern is similar, with the gift to the people who belong to Jesus sandwiched between statements of Jesus' transcendent, divine ownership of all things and authority over everything. The disciples understand that everything Jesus has comes from the Father (v. 7); moreover, Jesus adds that everything that is His belongs to the Father, and everything that is the Father's belongs to Jesus (v. 10). Furthermore, everything that belongs to the Father has served to glorify the Son. Jesus thus makes explicit that He is in charge of everything, everything belongs to Him, and everything exists to glorify Him.

In this context, Jesus explains that He has given His disciples another gift: the words the Father gave Him (v. 8). It is most likely that Jesus is using a figure of speech to speak once again of eternal life. The words of the Father and Jesus are equated with eternal life in the Fourth Gospel (cf. John 4:50; 5:24; 6:63, 68). In John 12:49-50, Jesus ends His public ministry by appealing to the commandment of the Father that motivates Jesus to say what He has said. The commandment of the Father, which is equated with the words that Jesus has spoken, is eternal life. Therefore, when Jesus indicates that He has given the disciples the words the Father gave Him, He indicates once more that He has given them the gift of eternal life mediated by communicating to them the commandment of the Father.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup>Jesus continues this theme through v. 14, where He states that He has given the disciples the

Jesus concludes His prayer by stating that He has given His disciples the glory the Father has given Him (John 17:22-24).<sup>101</sup> This final gift is explained in this passage in a two-fold manner. First, it is the gift that brings humanity into union with God Himself (v. 22). A fractured world at war with God and itself can never be united of itself. It must be united by and in God through Jesus Christ. This unity is the purpose of the gift of glory, as the people of Jesus become one in a manner corollary to the union of the Father and the Son.<sup>102</sup> This union, however, is not merely human and horizontal. It takes place because the Son dwells in His people, in unity with them, and the Father dwells in the Son, in unity with Him. To receive the glory of Jesus, then, is, *inter alia*, to become united with the Father and the Son in an inexplicable union. If eternal life is to know the Father and the Son, the union of believers with the Father and the Son indicates this is no superficial knowledge or knowledge at a distance; it is the intimacy that has been shared from eternity between the Father and the Son.

Second, the gift of glory involves seeing the glory of the Son in His presence (v. 24). Seeing the glory of the Son recalls the Prologue of John's Gospel, where John and the disciples saw the glory of Christ, full of grace and truth (John 1:14). The glory of the Word made flesh was nothing less than the glory of the Father's only Son, the very glory that explains the person of the Father (John 1:18; cf. John 14:7, 9-10). Furthermore, just as the Prologue contains echoes of Exodus 33-34, so here Moses' profound and impossible request that he might see God's glory lies in the background (cf. Exod 33:18). The gift of glory is thus the fulfillment of the deepest longings of all the saints throughout

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Word of the Father. This Word is what gives eternal life and cannot be separated from the person of the Son, who is the Word made flesh. The Father gives the Word to and through Jesus, and Jesus manifests the Word to those the Father gave Him, resulting in eternal life to those whom He gives the Word/Himself.

<sup>101</sup>Commentators are divided as to what exactly this glory is. The nature of the glory itself will be considered in chap. 4 below when intra-Trinitarian giving is discussed. For now, it is sufficient to note what the gift of glory means for the disciples.

<sup>102</sup>Thus ἵνα is used to communicate purpose. So Michaels, *John*, 877-78.

history. To have eternal life is to have face-to-face communion with God in the presence of His glory. It is to see Him as He is (cf. 1 John 3:2), not in dread of His judgment or hidden away in the cleft of a rock seeing only the passing glow of the *shekinah*, but in His presence as loved by the Father, even as the Father loves the Son (v. 23).

This final gift Jesus gives to His disciples is ultimately indescribable in terms of human language, and it defies all possible expectations. The gift of salvation/eternal life thus is not the gift of a *thing* but of a person, the Son of God, the Giver Himself. He is a transcendent gift that is beyond *every* thing and includes *everything*. Jesus is the gift that gives inexhaustibly because He is the Giver who gives as God incarnate. Salvation therefore is the gift of intimate union with God through Jesus, receiving and beholding His glory in His presence, while alive with the very life of God. A person cannot come up with a counter-gift. There is no possible exchange. God's gift of salvation is exhaustive because salvation is the gift of Himself in His Son. The gift is the Giver.

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed God as exhaustive Giver to humanity. The discussion focused particularly on the gift of salvation. To understand how salvation is an exhaustive gift, the basic meaning of salvation in Johannine terms had to be established. This was done by comparing and contrasting passages that discuss both salvation and condemnation, as condemnation is a concept that is fleshed out more fully in John's Gospel. Salvation terminology was also considered in passages where it was equated with life. Salvation according to John is the deliverance of people from condemnation unto eternal life, which deliverance is experienced immediately in this life upon believing in the Son and will be experienced in fullness at the resurrection.

The gift of salvation, however, is not something that God the Father is described as giving in the Gospel of John. God the Father's gift to humanity is not salvation per se, but rather the Father gives His Son. This gift the Father gives includes

not only the incarnation of the Word but also the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus as well. That the Son is the gift the Father has given, rather than salvation directly, is seen in the fact that people in John's Gospel receive the Son as opposed to salvation, and the emphasis falls on God's giving of His Son. Salvation is thus not a stand-alone gift, a static gift, or a gift that can be reduced to some *thing* in particular that might exist in isolation from Jesus or detached from His person. Salvation is only given in the Son. The Father gives the Son, and when the Son is received, the person who receives the Son obtains salvation because she has been given the Giver. The emphasis on the Father's gift of the Son turns away any idea that His gift of salvation is immanent, finite, objective, or counterfeit. If someone seeks salvation, that person ought rather to seek the Son, whom God has given to save the world.

The reality that the Father gave the Son serves to heighten the magnitude of the gift of salvation, removing any notion that salvation can be obtained by giving God anything in return. The reason for this is the Son's position within creation not only as Creator but also as the One with authority over all creation. Nothing exists in all creation that is not His both by creative right in His pre-incarnate state and by divine gift in His incarnate state. God's gift of the Son is therefore an exhaustive gift, for when the Son is received, all that belongs to Him is given to His people because they have received God the Giver in the Son. This is expressed most clearly in John 17, where Jesus gives eternal life, which is ultimately defined as receiving the glory of God so that a person is taken up into the very life of God, seeing God's glory in God's presence, united with God and beloved by Him. Those who would seek salvation as if it were something within human grasp will never grasp it, for salvation is a transcendent gift that stands above and beyond creation and that ultimately brings creation into the life of God to share in His glory. God's gift of salvation is the exhaustive but inexhaustible gift of Himself and everything that is His, including His one and only Son.

## CHAPTER 4

### GOD AS CIRCULAR GIVER

As discussed above, God is both a unilateral and exhaustive Giver, indicating that He stands as an absolute Giver, One who gives without any return gift. In a sense, we have followed Marion's procedure of bracketing the recipient so that God's gifts might be understood clearly. However, at some point the recipient must be re-introduced to make any sense of giving a gift. One cannot *give a gift* to a stone as stone. In this chapter, we will endeavor to understand how John presents the recipients of God's gifts, keeping the above two chapters in view while contemplating God as a circular Giver.<sup>1</sup>

The way forward has been alluded to previously when discussing the gifts of God, especially the gifts given by the Father. As has been shown, the Father's primary gift to humanity is His Son, but instances where the Father gives to humanity account for less than one-third of the instances in which the Father gives in the Gospel of John. The primary recipient of the Father's gifts is the Son. The Father's proclivity to give to His Son presents a twist in understanding divine giving, for the Son has a unique relationship with the Father. He is the only One who has seen the Father. He is one with the Father. He existed with the Father in the beginning. He shares in the glory of the Father from

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<sup>1</sup>The word *circular* has been selected with much care. It indicates that God's gifts travel in a circular direction without implying any specific causality for the circular movement of divine giving. Other possibilities were *reciprocal* and *exchanging*. Neither of these options was precisely accurate. The word *reciprocal* was liable to imply that God gives in response to something outside Himself, while the word *exchanging* could suggest that God gives to establish a return gift to Himself. Both of these options are problematic. Circularity, however, is open to neither charge. God's gifts can flow in a circle without a necessary reciprocation or exchange established. Circularity can exist in the context of an act of pure *giving*, while concepts such as reciprocity and exchange always threaten the aneconomic nature of pure giving and, by extension, the gift.

before the foundation of the world.<sup>2</sup> He glorifies the Father, and the Father glorifies Him. When the relationship of the Father and the Son is examined, it becomes evident that their relationship is in some sense defined by circular giving. How, then, does John understand this relationship of circular giving between the Father and the Son? What does it mean in Johannine terms to describe God as a circular Giver? This is precisely the critical issue in understanding divine gift and giving. Rather than starting with a model of human giving and applying it to divine giving, especially when divine giving is limited to gifts from God to man (or, perhaps, expanded to include reciprocation in some form from man to God), is it possible to construct a model of giving built solely around the giving and receiving done by divine persons? In other words, what are the implications of Trinitarian giving for understanding the gift?<sup>3</sup>

Once the recipient of God's gifts is re-introduced in the person of the Son as He receives from and gives to the Father, the implications for understanding human response to God's gifts must be considered. Up to this point, the human recipients have been bracketed out by treating them primarily as objects that are acted upon rather than as responders to divine giving. While helpful to establish a theoretical model, such a model leaves much to be desired if left incomplete. Jesus is unrelenting in His commands that people believe in Him, come to Him, follow Him, eat His flesh and drink His blood, and

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<sup>2</sup>As discussed in chap. 2, temporal concepts like *before* are problematic when discussing God's eternal existence without time. Jesus speaks of the Father's love for Him "before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). There are at least two possibilities to explain Jesus' statement. He could be indicating that God created time before He founded the world. He also could be using language that condescends to normal human categories to express the inexpressible. Whenever God speaks of Himself to humanity, He must condescend to speak to us in terms that we can understand. The incarnation is the highest example of God's condescension to reveal Himself to us in a way that accurately communicates who He is while preserving His infinite perfections.

<sup>3</sup>Strictly speaking, it is anachronistic to speak of "Trinitarian" giving within John's Gospel. However, a better term than *Trinitarian* is not at hand to avoid a long circumlocution each time the giving among divine persons is mentioned. The term *Trinitarian* will thus be retained, with the understanding that John's Trinitarianism is an incipient Trinitarianism rather than an historical Trinitarianism as the church later expressed it.

hear His words. All of these commands presuppose some sort of desired response by the hearer. If God's gifts *demand* a response, can they legitimately be called gifts, without mutilating the term beyond recognition? The solution to the problem lies in the model established in God's Trinitarian circular giving. Not only is humanity called to respond to God's gifts, humanity is called to become part of the circle of divine giving in an unbreakable union with God and one another. However, the way giving "works" within a Trinitarian framework makes the impossible possible: man participates in divine giving.

Understanding God as (the) circular Giver requires a proper understanding of God as giver and receiver within a Trinitarian context. Intra-Trinitarian giving lays the foundation for understanding how humanity can respond to God's gifts without nullifying their character as gifts. Within this context, it becomes clear how John expects people to remain in the circle of divine giving. People are not to think of divine giving as participation in a unique, unrepeatable, singular event. Rather, people participate as those who abide in the circle of divine giving with God, experiencing an infinite flow of gifts.

### **The Circle of Divine Giving: The Father and the Son**

Throughout the discussion so far, I have considered the concept of the gift using only vertical models, seeking to understand God's gift to humanity, especially the gift of salvation in the gift of the Son. The Gospel of John, however, presses one beyond a vertical model in the context of salvation to a horizontal model of gift giving. The natural tendency with a horizontal model is to consider giving between two human persons, perhaps to derive a system of ethics based on the gift.<sup>4</sup> However, John presses us to look up before we look out so that we might observe a horizontal model of giving

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<sup>4</sup>As discussed in chap. 1, to derive such a system is the burden of Volf, *Free of Charge*. See also Stephen H. Webb, *The Gifting God: A Trinitarian Ethics of Excess* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). Both Volf and Webb fail to spend enough time considering horizontal giving among the Father, Son, and Spirit before moving on to an ethic based on the gift.

between divine persons.<sup>5</sup> The giving and receiving, receiving and giving that take place between the Father and the Son make up a significant and foundational soteriological theme in the Gospel of John. Before God's relationship of giving between Himself and humanity can be understood, God's relationship of giving between the Father and the Son must be understood in its proper Johannine context.<sup>6</sup> Four passages deal with this question in detail, showing how the Father and the Son have a relationship wherein true gifts are given and received, received and given, without nullifying the reality of the gifts as gifts.<sup>7</sup>

### **John 5:19-36**

The first cluster of verses where the giving relationship between the Father and Son is discussed is John 5:19-36, specifically verses 22, 26-27, 36.<sup>8</sup> The gifts in this passage all pertain to the work of the Son in bringing salvation to those who believe and condemning those who practice wickedness. The "gifts" that are described in this passage confound the typical way of thinking about gifts for two reasons. First, they are gifts that create obligation. This seems problematic because obligation would appear to destroy the gratuitous nature of the gift. Second, these gifts seem to be linear rather than circular. The purpose of these gifts does not seem to be to engage in circular giving between the Father and the Son but to equip the Son to give gifts to those who believe in Him. Rather than

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<sup>5</sup>Here is not the place to discuss the legitimacy of the term "person" when it comes to understanding God as Trinity. For the purposes of this discussion, the term "person" is sufficient, accurate, and helpful, so it will be retained. For a more thorough defense of the legitimacy of calling the Father, Son, and Spirit "persons," see Michael Scott Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 273-307.

<sup>6</sup>Space does not permit discussing divine giving between the Holy Spirit and the other persons of the Trinity, although such a study would be useful. The role of the Spirit in human participation in divine giving will be considered later in this chapter.

<sup>7</sup>I am indebted to Bayer, "The Ethics of Gift," 449, for the phrase "giving and receiving, receiving and giving."

<sup>8</sup>The context of this section was discussed in chap. 3 in the analysis of salvation and judgment terminology, so it will not be rehearsed again.

traveling from the Father to the Son, followed by a gift from the Son to the Father in the typical way a circle of giving might be conceived, the gifts travel from the Father to the Son, and then from the Son to His people. To help make sense of these apparent problems with the gift, the passage needs to be examined a bit more closely.

The first gift the Father gives the Son in this passage is the gift of “all judgment” (v. 22), which is later explained as the “authority to do judgment” (v. 27).<sup>9</sup> As was shown in chapter 3 above, the idea of judgment in this context is a legal decision ending in the condemnation of the one being judged. Judgment carries the death sentence as punishment for sin. The Father has given the Son the legal authority to execute judgment on those who do not believe in Him. At first blush, this gift appears to be more responsibility and obligation than what one might typically conceive as a gift. It is conceivable that calling the authority to execute judgment a gift is stretching the language beyond what the Evangelist intends. After all, is it not possible that all he means to indicate is that the power of judgment belongs to the Son, perhaps meaning something closer to the English word “delegate” than give?<sup>10</sup> If this is the case, this verse has very little to say regarding the nature of divine giving between the Father and the Son.

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<sup>9</sup>Ridderbos, *John*, 200, notes, “The pronouncement of vs. 22 that the Father ‘has given all judgment to the Son’ is explained” in v. 27. So also Michaels, *John*, 319; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2:112. Jesus’ explanation that the Father has given Him all judgment because He is the Son of Man has occasioned significant discussion. Some, such as Margaret Pamment, “The Son of Man in the Fourth Gospel,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 36 (1985): 56-66, take the title *Son of Man* to indicate Jesus’ humanity so that it points to Jesus as the ideal human. C. Colpe, “ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου,” in *TDNT* 8:400-77 (esp. 464-70), understands the title to indicate Jesus’ equality with the Father as well as to combat Docetic ideas by emphasizing Jesus’ genuine humanity. In the end, Colpe emphasizes the title’s connotation of Jesus’ humanity as opposed to the apocalyptic imagery of the Son of Man or the essential unity with the Father. Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2:107, after reviewing the background of this title, is more on point, writing, “In this verse, then, Jesus claims this sovereign right, which belongs properly to God alone, fully for himself and in such a way that it is the Father who judges through him.” He notes that judgment was reserved for God alone in Jewish writings, including apocryphal works. Jesus’ claim, therefore, was revolutionary because He claimed to act *as God*, doing what only God does.

<sup>10</sup>Keener, *John*, 1:651, translates the word “delegate.” This meaning corresponds to definition 7 in BDAG, 242-43: “to appoint to special responsibility.” Interestingly, John 5:22, 27 are not cited in BDAG’s entry on δίδωμι, although it mentions appointing judges in this context. John 5:26 is cited under definition 13: “to grant by formal action.” This definition is closely related to definition 7. The difference is that the idea of responsibility or obligation is omitted in definition 13.

However, it seems unlikely that the Evangelist is using the term δίδωμι in a sense unrelated to the idea of the gift.

When the context of the prerogative of exercising judgment is considered, the concept of the gift is more appropriate than placing obligation to judge on the Son or a simple, legal appointment. The emphasis throughout the passage is on the relationship of the Father and the Son, and the relationship is not defined in terms of legality but in terms of love.<sup>11</sup> The Son's love for the Father is alluded to in verse 19 as the Son always seeks to do the will of the Father by doing whatever the Father does.<sup>12</sup> Jesus does not merely allude to the Father's love for Him, however. He states it plainly in verse 20. "For the Father loves [φιλεῖ] the Son."<sup>13</sup> The Father's manner of relating to the Son is grounded in His love for the Son, and the Son's imitation of the Father is grounded in the Father's

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<sup>11</sup>This verse is full of thorny problems. One problem is the background of Jesus' saying. Some, such as C. H. Dodd, *More New Testament Studies* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 30-40, and more recently Michaels, *John*, 307-8, suggest there is a "hidden parable" behind Jesus' analogy of a son watching his father at work. Others have rejected the parabolic nature of the saying because Jesus frequently claims that He sees the Father and does the Father's will (cf. John 1:18; 6:46; 8:26, 38, 40). So Beasley-Murray, *John*, 75; Köstenberger, *John*, 186; Ridderbos, *John*, 191-92. The latter are more persuasive. Another and more significant problem is what Jesus' claim indicates about His relationship with the Father. Frequently, commentators will emphasize the subordination of the Son to the Father as the principle Jesus establishes in this verse. For example, Köstenberger, *John*, 186, writes, "In response, Jesus avers that he, while equal to God, is functionally subordinate to him as a son is to his father." But is Jesus' main point that He is denying full equality with the Father, as Keener, *John*, 1:647, so brazenly puts it when he writes, "In 5:19-30, Jesus responds to the view that he 'makes himself' equal with God, arguing that he is *not* making himself equal with God" (emphasis his)? Ridderbos, *John*, 192, correctly interprets Jesus' meaning when he explains, "Jesus does not reject equality with God, however, but the idea that he *made* himself equal with God" (emphasis his). Jesus' answer does not qualify His equality with the Father. Jesus claims to be equal with the Father because He is the Son by nature, and the evidence of His equality with the Father as the Son is that He does the very work of the Father. Therefore, Jesus is not denying His equality with the Father, but asserting and proving it by His works.

<sup>12</sup>Köstenberger, *John*, 187, comments, "The Father's love for the Son expresses itself in his free self-disclosure, and the Son's love for the Father does so in his obedient submission to the Father's will, including death on the cross."

<sup>13</sup>The use of φιλέω instead of ἀγαπάω has resulted in some discussion of the nuances of each verb in John's Gospel. Michaels, *John*, 309 n. 17, notes the parallel passage in John 3:35, which uses ἀγαπάω to speak of the Father's love for the Son. He suggests that John 3:35 emphasizes the Father's "election" of the Son, while John 5:19 indicates the Father and the Son's "friendship." Köstenberger, *John*, 187, interprets the two terms synonymously in John's Gospel. For more on this question, see C. Brown, W. Günther, and H.-G. Link, "Love," in *NIDNTT* 2:538-51.

love as well.<sup>14</sup> The significance of this point cannot be overstated. Everything that follows verse 20 in Jesus' discourse is built on the foundation of the Father's love for Him, and the Father's love originates all that is to follow. Whatever Jesus does, whatever He has, whatever He says, and whatever He wills proceeds from the Father's deep affection for Him. The shade of love thus colors the entire argument, arguing strongly that the idea of giving in this context is giving based upon love. In other contexts in John where a gift is given out of love, it is plain that the idea of giving is not a technical legal term or a term of simple appointment; the word *give* in the context of love indicates a *gift* (cf. John 3:16).

Secondly, not only does the context of the Father's love for Jesus argue that giving judgment to the Son is a gift, but the reason the Son has received this gift of authority over humanity evidences its nature as gift. "For even the Father does not judge anyone, but the judgment, all of it, He has given to the Son, *in order that everyone might honor the Son just as they honor the Father*" (John 5:22-23a, emphasis added). The gift of exercising judgment is not given to delegate a task the Father prefers to avoid or to divide the workload among the divine persons. The purpose of the Father making the Son the judge of humanity is to give the Son honor from every person.<sup>15</sup> The gift of executing judgment, then, proves not to be the ultimate gift at all. It is a gift that gives another gift.<sup>16</sup> Out of sheer love, the Father gives the Son the same honor He possesses.<sup>17</sup> The

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<sup>14</sup>The γὰρ at the beginning of v. 20 is explanatory, giving the reason the Son imitates the Father. So Carson, *John*, 251.

<sup>15</sup>Morris, *John*, 279, writes, "The whole stress of this present passage is on the unity of the Father and the Son. What is done to one is done also to the other. The inherent dignity of the Son and his intimate relationship to the Father makes the dishonoring of him a very serious matter indeed."

<sup>16</sup>Michaels, *John*, 312, concurs, "Here Jesus accents 'judgment' in particular as that which the Father has given, but judgment is not so much an end in itself as a means of bringing 'honor' to the Son."

<sup>17</sup>John does not use words from the root τιμή often (John 4:44; 5:23; 8:49; 12:3, 26). Most commentators assume the word's meaning is self-evident, but a few attempt to give a definition. Keener, *John*, 1:650, understands the concept of honor to be equivalent to worship. Borchert, *John 1-11*, 239, interprets it as respect or recognition. So also S. Aalen, "Glory, Honour," in *NIDNTT* 2:44-51. The idea of

Father's gift to the Son is the recognition by every created person that Jesus is the Son of His love and equal with Him. Jesus exercises judgment as a manifestation of His relationship with the Father so that He might receive in the end, not authority to judge, but honor.

The same concept prevails when Jesus mentions the other two gifts the Father has given Him, namely, to have life in Himself (v. 26) and to do certain works (v. 36). The Father's gift to Jesus to have life in Himself is coupled with His prerogative to execute judgment.<sup>18</sup> These two gifts will converge at the coming hour, when the dead will be raised either to a resurrection of life or a resurrection of condemnation as they hear the Son's voice (vv. 29-30). The reason, therefore, that the Father gives Jesus the gift of life-in-Himself is so that He might be the source of life for those who believe in Him. The Son gives life to whomever He wishes (v. 21), just as He also condemns all who do not honor Him (and, by extension, His Father; v. 22). Those who believe in Him have eternal life and will not come under condemnation (v. 24). The voice of the Son of God creates life in those who hear it (v. 25). Jesus is able to impart life as only God can *because* God has given Him this gift.<sup>19</sup> In the context of the Father's love leading to the gift of

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recognition or respect based on position seems fitting in the Fourth Gospel with the exception of John 12:26, where the Father honors those who serve the Son, where the meaning is closer to *reward*. See BDAG, 1005; G. Fitzer, "τιμή, τιμάω," in *TDNT* 8:169-86.

<sup>18</sup>Michaels, *John*, 317-18, explains the connection between giving life and judging: "The expression 'to do judgment' corresponds to 'bring to life' (v. 21), and the two together comprise that which the Son 'does' in imitation of the Father (v. 19)." The power to give life and condemn the wicked were both reserved for God alone, so Jesus identifies Himself as One who does the works of God by claiming sovereign power to accomplish these divine tasks.

<sup>19</sup>Once again, the Evangelist uses an explanatory γὰρ to give the reader insight into how it is possible that a human being would have such immense authority and power. It is only possible because of the gift of the Father to the Son. Carson, *John*, 254-55, helpfully comments, "This goes far beyond making Jesus a mere ambassador who acts in the name of the monarch who sent him, an envoy plenipotentiary whose authority is the equivalent of his master's. That analogue breaks down precisely here, for the honour given to an envoy is never that given to the head of state." *Contra* Köstenberger, *John*, 188, who writes, "To this day, the failure to honor an ambassador is a failure to honor the government that he or she represents." The issue is not simply *representation*. The Father is *in* the Son, so those who dishonor the Son do not merely dishonor the Father indirectly by dishonoring His agent; they directly dishonor the Father who is in the Son and revealed through the Son's words and works.

authority to judge for the purpose of honoring the Son, it stands to reason that the gift of life-in-Himself also is given for the same ends: that all might honor the Son. Sure enough, some refused to come to the Son that they might have life (cf. v. 40), but Jesus was not seeking glory from men in any case (v. 41). The Father had given Him these gifts to honor Him, and He received His honor from the Father and sought it nowhere else. That honor came to Jesus either through becoming the source of life for those who received Him or through condemning those who practiced evil deeds.

When the gift of works is considered (v. 36), the same strange ground is retread that was covered in the gift of executing judgment. To be given a task, although the verb is δίδωμι, is almost certainly not considered to be a gift in the usual sense of the term.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, we must read verse 36 in light of the discussion as a whole, where Jesus bases all that the Father has given Him on the love the Father has for Him.<sup>21</sup> The Father does not give the Son works to do because He wants to burden His Son; the Father gives the Son works to do to bless Him with honor, that He might be exalted above every person by every person. The works the Father gave Him to do vindicated His claim that the Father loved Him and intended to honor Him. The works, therefore, function as gifts that give. God gave the Son works to do with the aim of manifesting the Son's oneness with the Father for the purpose of bringing honor to the Son, so that the world might know He is the Son of God.

Having this understanding, we can now go back to re-examine the apparent problems with the gifts given by the Father to the Son in this discourse. The first problem was that these gifts seemed more like obligations than gifts, and a gift that is nothing but

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<sup>20</sup>Brown, *John 1-12*, 224, suggests translating the phrase τὰ γὰρ ἔργα ἃ δέδωκέν μοι ὁ πατήρ ἵνα τελειώσω αὐτά, “works the Father has enabled me to complete,” mistakenly removing the notion of the gift from the translation.

<sup>21</sup>Barrett, *St. John*, 266, writes, “The works are the gift of the Father to Jesus,” appealing to v. 20 for support, grounding the gift of works in the Father's love.

an obligation is in reality nothing more than debt, an onerous burden shifted from the donor to the donee. However, in the case of the Father's gift to the Son, the Evangelist avoids this aporia by putting the gift within the horizon of love. The gift cannot be understood as gift unless the divine love of the Father for the Son surrounds and penetrates it. Moreover, the gifts in question, while implying some obligations, are not terminal gifts. They serve as a means for the Father to give a greater gift to the Son beyond anything in the human world of gift giving: to be honored by the Father as His beloved Son who shares in His divine prerogatives, expressed in terms of doing the works of God as the source of life and the one with authority to execute judgment. The Evangelist turns the regular notion of gift on its head so that the obligation, far from being antithetical to the gift, becomes integral to the gift achieving its goal of *giving*. Unless the Son manifests His divine nature by doing what only God does, He cannot receive honor as the beloved Son because the Father appointed the Son's works as the necessary means of displaying His union with the Father, which is what brings Jesus honor. The obligations, then, lose their significance as obligations and prove to be blessings, even gifts, because through these gifts the divine nature of the Son is manifest. The presents are only present in the presenting of the presents before men. Such a reversal by the Evangelist deconstructs the deconstructionists because the present *must* present itself if it is to be present as present.

The second objection, namely, that the giving is not really of a circular fashion but linear from the Father to the Son to believers, falls away as well upon closer examination. John 5 does not explore this in detail, only dealing with half of the circle of divine giving explicitly. However, what is clear is that believers are not the final goal of giving gifts in this passage. Believers receive life, but the gift at the end of the line in this passage is the honor given to the Son, bending the line back toward a circle. Thus, this passage breaks apart both the linear conceptualization of giving as well as the idea of

giving as exchange, leading to a picture of giving that might be conceptualized as *circulinear* giving.<sup>22</sup> While all the pieces of divine giving are not yet on the table, the picture that is emerging is far from the kind of “giving” familiar among human societies.<sup>23</sup>

### **John 6:37-40**

When the reader comes to John 6, a more familiar picture of giving emerges. Giving is a major theme throughout John 6:22-71. Most of the instances of giving are gifts given to humanity by God/the Son (cf. John 6:27, 31-34, 51-52, 65). However, nestled within Jesus’ teaching on the gift of the true bread from heaven is a short discussion on divine giving between the Father and the Son (John 6:37-40). Lest the reader think that divine giving is too foreign to understand in any capacity, Jesus here paints a picture of divine giving that is at home within human categories. Divine giving should be the pattern for human giving, so that what happens in the human realm from one person to another should be derived from and based on God’s intra-Trinitarian giving.<sup>24</sup> When Jesus describes His receiving and giving with the Father, and the Father’s

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<sup>22</sup>The term *circulinear* seeks to express the linear nature of God’s giving while simultaneously maintaining its circularity. To speak of divine giving is in one sense as paradoxical as to speak of God’s Trinitarian nature. It defies ordinary human language conventions because it does not fit comfortably into anything experienced horizontally between a human giver and recipient. For these reasons, I have coined the term *circulinear* to describe God’s giving as it manifests itself among the persons of the Trinity and breaks into the world through the incarnation of the Son.

<sup>23</sup>Derrida, *Given Time*, 7, makes this fundamental assertion regarding the conditions of the gift: “If the figure of the circle is essential to economics, the gift must remain *aneconomic*. Not that it remains foreign to the circle, but it must *keep* a relation of foreignness to the circle, a relation without relation of familiar foreignness. It is perhaps in this sense that the gift is the impossible” (emphasis his). The concept of circularity allows the gift to keep a relation of foreignness to the circle, even a “relation without relation of familiar foreignness.” This way of describing giving might sound similar to Milbank, “Can a Gift Be Given,” 150, when he describes linearity as “temporal” that eventually folds “back into the eternal circle of the triune life.” The implication of Milbank’s assertion is that linearity is only temporary, a fundamental assumption with which the present author disagrees. Circularity describes the way divine giving works as it is, in itself, not because time has been introduced through creation. The Father has always been the fountainhead of all gifts, but His gifts have never been given for the purpose of *establishing* an exchange, that is, to gain something for Himself, as if there were anything He might gain.

<sup>24</sup>The idea that ideal human behavior is derivative of God’s nature and ways is common

giving and receiving with Him, all the elements of gift giving as they appear in human giving are present, albeit transposed by transcendence.

The first important piece of information Jesus relates is that giving a gift is a legitimate act as well as a legitimate category for interaction. Jesus indicates that the gift is not impossible, at least not when the Father gives to the Son. In verse 37, Jesus said, “All that the Father gives to Me will come, and the one who comes to Me I will most certainly not drive away.” Verse 39 echoes the same principle, repeating that the Father has given a gift to the Son, this time using the perfect tense to describe the act of giving.<sup>25</sup> This passage is an important starting place because of how the gift has been called into question in recent philosophical discussions. Jesus unabashedly asserts that a gift has been given in this text; therefore, this text allows us to examine the nature of the gift in the context of the Father giving to the Son.<sup>26</sup>

The elements of the giving of the gift are elements that are present in human giving as well as divine giving. Jesus indicates that there is a donor, namely, the Father. In addition, the Father gives a specific gift. The gift is initially described using the neuter singular term  $\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu$ , which is then used to describe the gift again in verse 39. The gift,

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throughout the Bible. It is found in such a foundational command as, “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev 19:2 NASB). God’s ways also set the standard for actions that pertain to giving, including the concept of forgiveness: “Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you” (Col 3:13 NASB). Jesus specifically applies this pattern to giving in Matt 10:8, saying, “Freely you received, freely give” (NASB).

<sup>25</sup>Morris, *John*, 325 n. 6, interprets the different nuances of the present and perfect by noting, “The present tense is used here where the Son awaits. In v. 39 the perfect  $\delta\acute{\epsilon}\delta\omicron\kappa\epsilon\nu$  expresses the gift as completed in the will of the Father.” Morris’ use of the term *awaits* is misguided, but the point he makes is helpful. The present tense is Jesus’ perspective on those who come to Him prior to their coming, while the perfect indicates Jesus’ work on behalf of those who have already come to Him.

<sup>26</sup>Many commentators take special note of the gift language in this passage. For example, Borchert, *John 1-11*, 265, writes, “The coming of disciples to Jesus is here described as a gift of the Father.” Carson, *John*, 290, explains v. 37 by saying, “All that (a singular neuter is used to refer to the elect collectively) the Father gives to Jesus, as his gift to his Son, will surely come to him; and whoever in fact comes (by virtue of being given by the Father to the Son), Jesus undertakes to keep in, to preserve.” Michaels, *John*, 377, discussing those who come to Jesus, notes, “God decides who they are, for they are God the Father’s gift to Jesus, and by coming to him they prove that they belong to God (or, as he put it earlier, that their works are ‘wrought in God,’ 3:21).”

however, should not be understood in this setting as “everything,” as though Jesus were referring to everything in creation; instead, it should be interpreted as every person who believes in Jesus viewed collectively.<sup>27</sup> In Jesus’ discussion of this gift from the Father, He explains that  $\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu$  consists of “the one who comes to Me” (v. 37), the people He will raise from the dead on the last day (v. 39), and “everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him” (v. 40).<sup>28</sup> The Father, as the donor, gives a specific gift, namely, everyone who believes in the Son, viewed collectively as a single entity, best described perhaps as a people.<sup>29</sup> The Father, furthermore, gives this gift to a specific donee: His Son. Jesus clearly indicates that He is the recipient of the gift. The Father gives “to Me,” which is repeated in verses 37 and 39. In this (qualified) sense, divine giving is no different than the type of giving regularly experienced in the world between one human person and another. It consists of a donor, a donation, and a donee.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>The significance of the neuter has been debated, especially as it relates to the doctrinal controversy over predestination and free will. Witherington, *John's Wisdom*, 158, after admitting that John 6:37 “seems to be a statement involving some kind of election,” qualifies election with the neuter by adding, “It is in order to point out, however, the text says, ‘all of *it*’ not ‘all of *them*’ (NRSV: ‘everything’), which suggests the verse is referring to an elect group, not elect individuals” (emphasis his). It is difficult, if not impossible, to understand what kind of group is elected if that group does not consist of individuals. The outcome of this kind of reasoning becomes clear when Witherington concludes, “God’s role in the relationship is incomparably greater than the human one, but the fact remains that God does not and will not save a person without the positive human response, called faith, to the divine leading and drawing.” But how is God’s role “incomparably greater” than the role of the human being when the decision of the human being is *decisive* in salvation? Moreover, what happens to the gift, not only the gift of faith, but the gift the Father gives to His Son? Beasley-Murray, *John*, 92, correctly understands the nature of the gift of the Father to the Son in conjunction with human response, writing, “But there are those whom the Father ‘gives’ to Jesus; they are ‘given,’ since ‘faith is God’s work.’” To put it another way, God’s gift to the Son is determinative, not undetermined apart from people giving to God, which effectively would undo the gift itself.

<sup>28</sup>Michaels, *John*, 376-77, writes concerning the alternation between neuter and masculine, “‘All’ is neuter and singular (literally, ‘everything’), referring to all believers corporately, while the participle (‘the person who comes’) is masculine singular, focusing on any individuals who might ‘come to Jesus’ in the sense of believing in him or giving him their allegiance.” The Father’s gift therefore consists of a collective group composed of individuals.

<sup>29</sup>For a comparable expression to describe the chosen and called people viewed collectively as the possession of God, see 1 Pet 2:9-10.

<sup>30</sup>This knowledge of donor, donation, and donee is precisely what destroys the gift according to Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death & Literature in Secret*, trans. David Wills, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The

Because gift giving is often complex, and some authors such as Marion have tried to use the complexity to justify the gift, we need to press a little deeper into Jesus' words.<sup>31</sup> In the human realm, many times the donor of the gift is anonymous. People often prefer to give donations anonymously, especially when it is a significant donation to a recipient not well-known or not part of an intimate circle, such as a family group. An anonymous donor can be philosophically advantageous to the gift because the anonymity nullifies any attempt at a return gift from the donee. The gift is enabled, or at least helped, to be pure gift rather than contract and/or exchange. It is also possible for a gift to be given to an anonymous donee. Blood donations, for example, often function this way, where blood is donated to a blood bank, and the person who donates the blood does not know whom the recipient will be. The same kinds of donations happen regularly for other charities, such as food banks, clothing stores for the poor and indigent, cancer research centers, and more. Donors give to donees, but they have no way of identifying to whom they have given, trusting a middleman to mediate the gift to an appropriate donee. Such anonymous donations are said to help the gift be a gift because the donor cannot exercise superiority over the donee because she does not know the identity of the donee.

Anonymity, therefore, is sometimes argued to be what makes the gift possible, or what

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University of Chicago Press, 2008), 113. He writes, "The moment the gift, however generous it be, is touched by the slightest hint of calculation, the moment it takes account of knowledge [*connaissance*] or recognition [*reconnaissance*], it allows itself to be caught in transacting: it exchanges, in short it gives counterfeit money, since it gives in exchange for payment." Derrida, however, makes a critical error when he supposes that the opposite of counterfeit money is true *money*, betraying that *his* categories are strictly economic. For someone with whom every gift is transaction and exchange, true money becomes counterfeit money when given because it remains "mercenary and mercantile." Then, the only option for gift and giving is what Derrida describes when he writes, "One must give without knowing [that is, without a donor], without knowledge or recognition [that is, without a donee], without *thanks*: without anything, or at least without any object [that is, without donation]" (emphasis his; see also Derrida, *Given Time*, 11). These conditions of the gift, which are also the gift's undoing, are rejected by Jesus when He describes His relationship with the Father. The answer to Derrida's counterfeit money is not true *money* but true *gift*.

<sup>31</sup>For an example of how Marion handles the gift, especially his discussion of anonymity, see chap. 1 of this dissertation as well as Marion, "Sketch of a Phenomenological Concept of Gift," 122-43 and Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 71-118.

enables it to retain its character as gift.

In John 6:37-40, however, Jesus indicates that the giving between the Father and the Son is not anonymous. In fact, in this particular context, anonymity would destroy the gift by disabling it from fulfilling its intention of giving. Jesus identifies the Giver as His Father. The Father, moreover, knows that He has given a gift to the Son. Both the Father and the Son know what the gift is as well. Nothing is anonymous; nothing is secret. The gift, the giver, and the recipient have been disclosed fully to one another. Jesus goes on to argue that such knowledge is vital to the gift itself. The Father has given a people to the Son, and His will in giving this gift is that the Son receive the gift (or, not drive it away, v. 37), keep the gift (or, not lose any of it, v. 39), and give to the gift (or, raise it on the last day, vv. 39-40). Moreover, the purpose of the Son's coming is to do the Father's will as it pertains to the gift (v. 38), which is to keep the gift secure and raise the people God has given Him on the last day (v. 39). To accomplish this will, the Son must have known the will of the Giver in giving the gift, and He must have known what the gift was.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the Father must have known that the donee is the Son because the Son says that the Father sent Him to accomplish a certain objective as it pertains to the gift He received from the Father. From the Johannine perspective, divine giving is not undone or reduced to economic exchange when the donor, the donation, and the donee are known by both parties involved in the giving and receiving of the gift. What is even more surprising is that the donor rightfully can be said to give something with intentionality not only to give but also to have His gift used in a certain way and not used in another way. In human giving, such requirements are sometimes described as "strings" that are attached to a gift, and such strings typically corrupt the gift

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<sup>32</sup>This knowledge further undercuts Witherington, *John's Wisdom*, 158 and his argument that Jesus refers to an elect group abstracted from individuals. If someone should raise the objection that the individuals in the group are known because they are foreseen in God's omniscience, the response of Murray, *Romans*, 1:316, is fitting: "The faith which God foresees is the faith he himself creates."

into an economic exchange, even if it misleadingly and inaccurately retains the name *gift*. From Jesus' perspective, however, these strings are not problematic. To the contrary, Jesus comes to fulfill the Father's intention in giving the gift.<sup>33</sup>

Jesus going where the Father sends Him and doing the Father's will in regards to the gift gives rise to the final aspect of the divine giving described in John 6:37-40: further giving. For the first time in John's Gospel, divine giving appears to be circular. The Son gives to the Father. Jesus does not explicitly state it in these terms, so caution must be exercised in describing Jesus' response as a "gift" in the same sense that the Father's gift is described. Nevertheless, Jesus is sent by the Father (v. 38), and He comes down from heaven to earth to do the Father's will. The Father's will is that the Son do or not do certain things with the gift. The Son thus renders obedience to the Father when He *gives* eternal life to those who believe in Him according to the will of the Father. He receives the Father's gift and gives honor to the Father by obeying the Father's desires. Significantly, Jesus' gift is given directly to the people whom the Father has given Him. In that sense, it is not strictly a counter-gift, but a forward gift. Nevertheless, within this forward gift of life to the people given to Him, He gives obedience to the Father. Once again, we see the circularity of God's giving. It is linear from the Father, to the Son, to the ones given by the Father, but when the Son gives to His people, His giving circles toward the Father as well, even if the Father is not the immediate recipient of His giving. Divine giving happens within mutual relationship.

John 6:37-40 serves both to aid our understanding of divine giving and to challenge our understanding of the gift as it is typically conceived. The basic components

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<sup>33</sup>Michaels, *John*, 377-78, comments, "In promising never to 'drive out' those who come, Jesus is simply obeying the Father by accepting the Father's gift. He confirms a principle first laid down by John, that 'A person cannot receive anything unless it is given him from heaven' (3:27). The corollary is that a person *must* receive that which *is* given from heaven, and this Jesus promises, emphatically and without qualification, to do" (emphasis his). What Michaels does not explain is *why* what is given from heaven *must* be received. For more on this question, see below on human response to God's giving.

of gift giving are present. The Father is the donor. The Father gives a known gift by giving a people. The Son is the donee as He knowingly receives the Father's gift with full confidence that the Father's giving will be effective in drawing the given people to Him so that He might give them eternal life. Thus, another gift is also implied in the Son's response to the Father's gift and His mutual relationship with the Father that stands in contrast to the broken relationship between God and fallen humanity. Jesus' gift is circular, as life is given to His people (linear) and obedience is given to His Father (circular). Jesus does not use any of the conventions philosophers have used to preserve the gift in the face of deconstruction. In fact, He tends to assault the arguments attacking the gift directly, not only naming all the parties of the gift, but showing that the Father gave the gift with intention and desire for the Son to do something specific with the gift. For Jesus, such divine intentionality is not aporetic but essential to the gift reaching its intended goal and finding its completed meaning.

### **John 10:27-30**

This pericope takes place during the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22).<sup>34</sup> At the Feast, the Jews demanded that Jesus give them a candid answer to their question about whether or not He is the Messiah (v. 24). Jesus' response continues the analogy of the shepherd and the sheep, which He began at the start of John 10. Jesus explains to the Jews that their problem in understanding His teaching is not that His teaching is unclear but that they do not believe His words (v. 25). Their unbelief, moreover, is because they are not His sheep (v. 26). Jesus' sheep follow Him as they hear His voice (v. 27). Furthermore, He has given eternal life to them so that they will never perish (v. 28a). In a surprising twist, Jesus returns to their question about His Messiahship and brings His

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<sup>34</sup>On the Feast of Dedication, see Daniel K. Falk, "Festivals and Holy Days," in *DEJ* 644; James C. VanderKam, "Dedication, Feast of," in *AYBD* 2:123-25. For how the Feast of Dedication relates to the context of John 10:22-42, see Keener, *John*, 1:821-23.

response to a climax by asserting that He and the Father are one (v. 30). The path Jesus takes to prove this claim concerns the giving and receiving relationship between Jesus and His Father in verses 28b-29, especially in the joint work they share in protecting Jesus' sheep.

One of the most difficult aspects of this section is the “nest of variants” in verse 29.<sup>35</sup> While five readings are attested,<sup>36</sup> the textual problem boils down to two words, each with two possible readings.<sup>37</sup> The first term in question is the relative ὁ/ὃς. The NA<sup>28</sup>/UBS<sup>4</sup> have chosen the neuter form, while the TR follows the Byzantine tradition with the masculine form. Secondly, should the comparative be masculine (μείζων) or neuter (μειζόν)?<sup>38</sup> The decision is not an easy one.<sup>39</sup> Scholars and commentators are split over the correct reading.<sup>40</sup> Michaels favors the reading that takes both words as neuters, primarily because he does not see how scribes could have changed these terms from masculines to neuters, but it makes sense why they would be changed from neuters to masculines.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, he argues that to read the masculine relative

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<sup>35</sup>Carson, *John*, 393.

<sup>36</sup>Barrett, *St. John*, 381 puts the five readings in a useful table, including the major witnesses for each reading.

<sup>37</sup>The various accusatives that follow the verb δέδωκεν in certain witnesses are later additions and are to be rejected.

<sup>38</sup>To further complicate matters, the word order is in question as well. The NA<sup>28</sup>/UBS<sup>4</sup> read πάντων μείζόν, while the TR has μείζων πάντων. The word order, however, is not a very significant issue for the translation of the sentence.

<sup>39</sup>Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (Fourth Revised Edition)*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1994), 14, 197-98 designates the UBS committee's textual decision with the letter “D,” indicating the extreme difficulty they had in arriving at their decision.

<sup>40</sup>For two representative discussions of this problem and its consequences for interpreting this text, see Stephen M. Reynolds, “The Supreme Importance of the Doctrine of Election and the Eternal Security of the Elect as Taught in the Gospel of John,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 28 (1965): 38-41 and the more concisely titled J. Neville Birdsall, “John X.29,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 11 (1960): 342-44. The major commentators all deal with this question as well.

<sup>41</sup>Michaels, *John*, 601 n. 22.

pronoun with the masculine comparative “places all the emphasis on the Giver without mentioning the gift at all,” which seems to miss the entire point of what Jesus is saying.<sup>42</sup> Jesus’ point, according to Michaels, is “that because the Father is who he is, his gift (‘that which he has given me’) is ‘greater than all things.’”<sup>43</sup> The gift thus must be the people whom the Father has given the Son, and they are greater than all things because the Father has given them to the Son.

Michaels, however, seems to have missed the point of the gift language in this passage. The emphasis is not on the greatness of the gift, great as it might be. The point Jesus is making to His hearers is the greatness *of the Son of God*. He makes this point not by highlighting the greatness of the gift but the greatness of the Giver. The reading that makes the most sense in context is ὁ πατήρ μου ὃς δέδωκέν μοι πάντων μείζον ἐστίν.<sup>44</sup> Not only does the context support this reading,<sup>45</sup> but it has text critical weight behind it as well.<sup>46</sup> It is one of the more difficult readings because it does not smooth out the difference in gender between the relative ὃς and the adjective μείζον, as one might expect a scribe to do.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, it explains the other variant readings, as some scribes attempted to make the gender agree, especially by changing ὃς to ὃ, in line with the construction in John 6:37, 39.<sup>48</sup> This reading indicates that the Father is greater than

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 601.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 602.

<sup>44</sup>Barrett, *St. John*, 381-82 also prefers this reading as the most likely reading.

<sup>45</sup>So Carson, *John*, 393 n. 184.

<sup>46</sup>*Contra* Ridderbos, *John*, 370-71.

<sup>47</sup>The difference is grammatically unusual but not unprecedented, as Barrett, *St. John*, 381 notes.

<sup>48</sup>Birdsall, "John X.29," 344, comes to the same conclusion regarding how to account for the various genders in the tradition, but he neglects the probability that a scribe would conform this text to other Johannine passages. He concludes that the original text must have been ὁ πατήρ μου ὃ δέδωκέν μοι πάντων μείζον ἐστίν, despite the near impossibility of translating the meaning of this text. Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2:308, opts for the same reading as Birdsall even though he admits, “With regard

anything else.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, Jesus underscores the Father's greatness by conspicuously omitting the gift and describing the Father as the absolute and ultimate Giver.<sup>50</sup> Jesus' original audience, much like a contemporary audience reading the Gospel of John, would have inferred the gift from the context, so the gift does not need to be stated explicitly. Furthermore, it serves Jesus' purpose to omit it. The Father is the Giver *par excellence* as He enters into a giving relationship with the Son. Not only this, the Father is the Shepherd *par excellence*, as no one can rip (anything) out of the Father's hand. Again, Jesus omits the accusative, and He does so for the same reason: anything that belongs to the Father could be placed in the accusative position and the statement would be true. The context indicates that the primary object the Father protects is the sheep He has given to the Son, but the omission indicates that the Father is the ultimate protector so that nothing can be wrested from His grasp. Such infinite, invincible strength reassures Jesus' sheep of their safety in the fold of the Good Shepherd. Jesus thus magnifies the greatness of the Father as provider and protector.

While Michaels is correct that "the notion that God the Father is 'greater than all things' is something that should go without saying,"<sup>51</sup> what cannot go without saying is that the Son is greater than all things, especially in Jesus' situation where the Jews were seeking to execute Him for blasphemy. Had Jesus' discourse simply ended with verse 29, Jesus' statement would have seemed to have been nothing more than an

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to contents, the thought, 'what the Father has given me is greater than everything (or: all)' does not fit in, since, in this context, by ὃ δέδωκέν μοι only the sheep could be meant (cf. 6:39; 17:2)."

<sup>49</sup>John Whittaker, "A Hellenistic Context for John 10, 29," *Vigiliae Christianae* 24 (1970): 241-60, concurs, although he reads μειζῶν instead of μειζόν, which is of little consequence for the interpretation of the passage.

<sup>50</sup>Jesus does something similar in John 14:27, where He omits the accusative after contrasting His giving with that of the world. The absoluteness of the giving language in John 14:27 serves to highlight the stark contrast between the manner in which Jesus gives and the manner in which the world gives. By speaking of giving in an absolute sense, Jesus shows His transcendence over the world of men. So Saarinen, *God and the Gift*, 39.

<sup>51</sup>Michaels, *John*, 601.

exercise in stating the obvious. The climax in verse 30, however, drives home the point so powerfully that the Jews grab stones to commence an impromptu execution in verse 31. The Jews would have agreed with Jesus that God is greater than all, but what was intolerable to them was that Jesus should link Himself with God as He did in verse 30. By stating that He and the Father are one, Jesus equates Himself with God (v. 33).<sup>52</sup> Such a statement underscores both the unity of and the distinction between the Father and the Son. The Father and the Son are distinct persons so that the Father can give to the Son and the Son can receive from the Father. There is difference between the Father and the Son in the sense that they “are” (as opposed to “is”) and the word “and” can rightly divide them as two subjects.<sup>53</sup> In this sense, a familiar giving and receiving relationship prevails. However, alongside the distinction of the Father and the Son stands their unity. They are united in their greatness as Givers and Protectors. Just as the Father is an ultimate giver, so is the Son; just as the Father is an invincible protector, so is the Son.<sup>54</sup> The unity of the Father and the Son also is displayed in their joint work to protect what belongs to the Son through the Father’s giving.

At this point, a problem for the gift is raised. Jesus indicates that the sheep are in His hand, and their presence in His hand guarantees their safety from wolves and other threats to their excessive life (John 10:10).<sup>55</sup> The sheep are in the hand of the Son because

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<sup>52</sup>Brown, *John 1-12*, 408; Carson, *John*, 396; Michaels, *John*, 604; Ridderbos, *John*, 372.

<sup>53</sup>For an elaboration of these grammatical arguments for diversity between the Father and the Son in the seminal exegesis of the church fathers, see Mark DeCogliano, "The Interpretation of John 10:30 in the Third Century: Antimonarchian Polemics and the Rise of Grammatical Reading Techniques," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 6 (2012): 117-38.

<sup>54</sup>Most commentators recognize that Jesus is describing functional unity here. If He meant to imply metaphysical unity (which seems to be implied in this context by the functional unity; *contra* Joseph C. Dillow, "Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship: Another Look at John 15:1-6," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (1990): 46-47), it is in the background rather than directly stated. What most commentators fail to emphasize, however, is the nature of the functional unity as it pertains to the gift and the ability of the Father and the Son to give in a uniquely divine fashion.

<sup>55</sup>For the translation of περισσὸν as *excessive*, see chap. 2.

the Father has given them to the Son out of His love for Him. However, the sheep are also in the Father's hand in verse 29, because the Father's protective power is meant to reassure the sheep that they are safe when they follow Jesus. How, then, can the Father be described in any meaningful way as *giving* the sheep to the Son if He *retains* the sheep in His own hand? These two statements seem to contradict each other, for it seems evident that a person cannot *give* what He also *keeps* in His own possession, since *giving* and *keeping* are opposed to one another. The difficulty is greater still, because it is not merely that the Father *keeps* the sheep as if He retains them, but that He *guards and protects* the sheep from any other person coming to *take* (ἀρπάζω) them out of His hand.<sup>56</sup> Such imagery strains human categories of giving beyond their limits because it is inconceivable that a person should at the same time *give* a gift to someone that he vigorously works to *guard* from anyone taking it from him. Perhaps it might be said that such a person *intends to give* at some future date, but while it remains in his custody and is so heavily guarded that no one can take it from him, the reality of the gift evaporates into impossibility.

It is precisely at this point that divine giving transcends human giving because of the unity that exists alongside and within the distinction between the divine persons. John 14:10 elaborates on this mystery. Jesus said to His disciples, "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me?" The distinction is emphasized in that there are two persons who are in one another. The Father is not in Himself, so to speak, nor is the Son said to be in Himself, but they exist *in one another*.<sup>57</sup> Yet this is exactly the

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<sup>56</sup>The concept of guarding and protecting the sheep is derived from the metaphor of the Good Shepherd in John 10:1-18, especially v. 12, where the word ἀρπάζω is also used. The hireling does not protect the sheep; he abandons them, with the result that a wolf comes and drags them away (ἀρπάζω). Thus, the meaning of ἀρπάζω in this context is to steal or drag away by force. No one is able to drag believers away from the Father and the Son with any amount of force because they are guarded by divine power. See C. Brown, "Snatch, Take Away, Rapture," in *NIDNTT* 3:601-5.

<sup>57</sup>Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 3:69, calls this a "reciprocal formula of immanence" that describes "the complete unity between Jesus and the Father." He then admits, "Every analogy, after all, breaks down

mystery. How can they be in one another in this way? How can two distinct persons be in such an inseparable unity that they exist within each other *while maintaining their proper distinction as persons?*<sup>58</sup> Jesus spells out the implications in the second half of the verse: “The words which I speak to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father abiding in Me does His works.” While the Son is speaking, the Father is working, because the Father remains in the Son (and the Son in the Father, although this is not primarily the emphasis Jesus intends here).<sup>59</sup>

If we transfer this analogy back to John 10:27-30 and the guarding of the sheep, the metaphor of the sheep being protected by the hand of the shepherd becomes clearer.<sup>60</sup> The sheep are in Jesus’ hand, and no one can take them from His hand (v. 28). Since the Father abides in the Son, and since the Son and the Father are one in their work to protect the sheep (v. 30), the Father’s hand and the Son’s hand are a unity. The Father’s abiding presence in the Son implies that when the Son guards the sheep in His hand, the Father also guards the sheep in His hand because the Father is always in the Son. The Son never acts in isolation from the Father or apart from the Father because the Father is always abiding in the Son. Whatever the Son guards the Father guards. The Father guards the gift He gave to the Son not by keeping it, but by abiding in the Son as in union with Him all the while maintaining His distinction as the Father. That is why the

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here.” The concept of the unity of and distinction between the Father and the Son defies human categories of thought and comprehension.

<sup>58</sup>Beasley-Murray, *John*, 253-54, recognizes the impossibility of adequately describing this relationship of distinction and unity, writing, “The reality is greater than human language can express, but that to which it points is sufficiently clear: in the depths of the being of God there exists a *koinonia*, a ‘fellowship,’ between the Father and the Son that is beyond all compare, a unity whereby the speech and actions of the Son are that of the Father in him, and the Father’s speech and action come to finality in him.”

<sup>59</sup>Jesus’ statement has led to some confusion regarding His words and the Father’s works. Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 3:69-70, rightly rejects a view that Jesus’ *words* are the Father’s *works*. Jesus speaks the Father’s words and does the Father’s works. As Köstenberger, *John*, 432, explains, “The Fourth Evangelist consistently portrays Jesus’ words as words of the Father, and his works as works of the Father.”

<sup>60</sup>The relationship of John 10:30 and 14:10 is made explicit in John 10:38, as Jesus explains His unity with the Father in terms of mutual indwelling. See Carson, *John*, 494.

unity Jesus asserts He has with the Father is so scandalous in the eyes of the unbelieving Jews. Jesus' claim of unity asserts that whatever He does, the Father does because He is One with the Father who is abiding in Him.<sup>61</sup>

The key to understanding the divine gift from the Father to the Son in this context lies not in understanding something about the gift but about the Giver. The Giver abides in the Recipient without being or becoming the Recipient. The unity of and distinction between the Father and the Son open up new horizons for the gift inconceivable when the possibility of the gift is considered merely at a human level. In fact, both the distinction and the unity are necessary conditions of the gift: distinction, because without distinction nothing could be given *to* another, which is to say, nothing could be given at all; unity, because without unity the gift is undone by economy.

## John 17

In chapter three above, Jesus' prayer in John 17 was discussed from the perspective of the Son giving to His people as the exhaustive, divine giver. As significant as Jesus' gift to His people is in John 17, it pales in comparison to the Father's gifts to Him.<sup>62</sup> Among the many possible themes suggested for this prayer,<sup>63</sup> the theme of the

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<sup>61</sup>T. Evan Pollard, "The Exegesis of John 10:30 in the Early Trinitarian Controversies," *New Testament Studies* 3 (1957): 334-49, gives an excellent summary of how the distinction between and the unity of the Father and the Son were developed in the first three centuries of church history, noting on page 348, "The evangelist himself was content to leave the problem in the paradox of *distinction-within-unity*, a paradox which is stated most explicitly in 'I and the Father are one'" (emphasis his). The paradox of the gift mirrors the "paradox" of this "distinction-within-unity" as well as the paradoxical idea of God giving in a circular fashion.

<sup>62</sup>The Father is the subject of *δίδωμι* 13 times in John 17 (vv. 2, 4, 6-9, 11-12, 22, 24), while the Son is subject only 4 times (vv. 2, 8, 14, 22). In 3 of the 4 times the Son gives to His people, His giving is explicitly derivative of a gift the Father has given to Him (vv. 2, 8, 22), and in v. 14 the gift is implicitly derivative of the Father's gift.

<sup>63</sup>Carson, *John*, 551, suggests several "principal themes" for this prayer, including "Jesus' obedience to His Father, the glorification of His Father through His death/exaltation, the revelation of God in Christ Jesus, the choosing of the disciples out of the world, their mission to the world, their unity modeled on the unity of the Father and the Son, and their final destiny in the presence of the Father and the Son." Carson is non-committal on which of these themes is the main theme of the prayer. See also Barrett, *St. John*, 499-501; Köstenberger, *John*, 482-84; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 3:202.

relationship between the Father and the Son must be given consideration, for in this prayer it is striking how often Jesus invokes His relationship with the Father as the basis of His requests.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, Jesus' relationship with the Father is described in such detail because it sets the pattern Jesus' disciples are to follow in carrying out God's purpose in the world after Jesus' ascension.<sup>65</sup> John 17 thus provides the greatest insight into the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Fourth Gospel, and their relationship is discussed overwhelmingly in terms of the gift, providing space to explore divine giving between the Father and the Son.<sup>66</sup>

**John 17:1-5.** The first paragraph of Jesus' prayer begins with the concept of glorification.<sup>67</sup> Jesus requests that the Father glorify Him so that He in turn might glorify the Father. The specific idea Jesus has in mind when He asks for glorification is disputed. The problem revolves around two axes. First, what does it mean to be glorified? Carson suggests two possibilities. The verb  $\delta\omicron\zeta\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$  might mean either (a) to praise or honor or (b) "to clothe in splendour."<sup>68</sup> Carson correctly argues that the context of verse 5 tips the scales in favor of the latter option, so that Jesus is asking the Father to restore Him to the splendor He shared prior to creation.

Second, when does this glorification take place? Based on the term "hour," Michaels interprets this as an allusion "both to Jesus' own impending death and to the

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<sup>64</sup>Borchert, *John 12-21*, 188, notes, "It is this wonderful sense of Jesus' personal relationship to God that John captured in this magisterial prayer of John 17."

<sup>65</sup>Carson, *John*, 551.

<sup>66</sup>Morris, *John*, 636 n. 6 concurs: "The repeated use of  $\delta\acute{\iota}\delta\omega\mu\iota$  in this chapter should not be overlooked." See also Borchert, *John 12-21*, 188.

<sup>67</sup>Many different outlines of the present chapter have been proposed. For a summary of the options, see Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 3:168-69; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John: Introduction, Translation and Notes*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 29A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1970), 748-51.

<sup>68</sup>Carson, *John*, 554. See also BDAG, 258.

consequent scattering of the disciples.”<sup>69</sup> Carson is more expansive, suggesting that the hour of glorification is the combination of Jesus’ “death/exaltation,” for which “glorification” is shorthand.<sup>70</sup> The way John uses *δοξάζω*, especially in contexts of the glorification of the Son yet future, helps clarify the timing and meaning of Jesus’ glorification.<sup>71</sup> The first instance of this term tied the giving of the Spirit to the time of Jesus’ glorification (John 7:39). The next time John uses *δοξάζω* in a time-specific way is in John 12:16, where he explains that the disciples did not understand Jesus’ teaching or the Scriptures until Jesus was glorified. A few verses later (John 12:23), the arrival of some Greeks seeking Jesus signaled to Jesus that the hour of His glorification had come, which the Father Himself confirmed with a voice from heaven (John 12:28). John 13:31 continues the theme of the imminence of the hour of Jesus’ glorification. Throughout Jesus’ discourse in John 14-16, He only mentions His glorification once (John 16:14) in reference to Himself, and He again ties it to the coming of the Spirit. The language of glorification as it is used in relation to the Son and His “hour” leads to a dual emphasis. John 12:23-24 bears this out most clearly.<sup>72</sup> The Son of Man is to be glorified in the imminent hour, and that glorification is likened to a grain of wheat that dies in the heart of the earth. Death leads to fruitfulness, which implies life. Death, therefore, is not in itself, in isolation, the glorification of the Son of Man; His glorification occurs when through death He returns to life and bears fruit.<sup>73</sup> In this way, the relationship between the

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<sup>69</sup>Michaels, *John*, 859.

<sup>70</sup>Carson, *John*, 553. Carson later explains that the “exaltation” refers to Jesus’ ascension. See Carson, *John*, 554. Borchert, *John 12-21*, 191 is even more expansive, defining Jesus’ glorification as “His life, death, and resurrection.” If the entire incarnation is Jesus’ glorification, Jesus’ anticipation of the hour of His glorification throughout His ministry makes no sense.

<sup>71</sup>This term is used 16 times in the Fourth Gospel (John 7:39; 8:54; 11:4; 12:16, 23, 28; 13:31-32; 14:13; 15:8; 16:14; 17:1, 4-5, 10; 21:19). For further discussion, see S. Aalen, “Glory, Honour,” in *NIDNTT* 2:44-48, and G. Kittel, “δόξα, δοξάζω, σὺνδοξάζω,” in *TDNT* 2:233-54.

<sup>72</sup>Kittel, *TDNT* 2:249.

<sup>73</sup>Köstenberger, *John*, 378, notes the agricultural background of this saying and its theological

Son's glorification and the giving/receiving of the Spirit makes sense. The Spirit is not given (and received) until after Jesus' resurrection (John 20:19-23). The disciples also do not understand Jesus' teaching or the Scriptures until He has risen from the dead (cf. Luke 24:21, 25). John 2:22 makes emphatic that it was after Jesus' *resurrection* that the disciples "believed in the Scripture and in the word which Jesus had spoken."<sup>74</sup> So then, the crucifixion signals the "hour" of the glorification has come because the cross is the path to the resurrection. Jesus, then, prays that the Father would restore Him to His pre-incarnate splendor by means of raising Him from the dead in glory.<sup>75</sup> In this way, as Carson writes, "The cross and Jesus' ascension/exaltation are thus inseparable."<sup>76</sup> Glorification comes by means of the crucified one's resurrection.

When Jesus asks the Father to glorify Him, He is asking the Father to give Him glory, and when He says that He will glorify the Father, He implies that He will give glory to the Father. Because giving terminology is so prevalent in this chapter, one might object that if Jesus had the idea of giving or the gift in mind when he spoke these words, He would have been explicit about it. However, two responses overcome this objection and make it certain that Jesus does have in mind the idea of the gift of glory.

First, the expression "to give glory" is rare in John's Gospel, occurring outside this chapter only at John 9:24, where the Jewish leaders enjoin the formerly blind man

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implications, writing, "In the rabbinic literature, the kernel of wheat is repeatedly used as a symbol of the eschatological resurrection of the dead." He somehow misses the significance of this point when he posits, "Jesus now plainly states that the glorification of the Son of Man will take place in his death" without mentioning the role the resurrection plays in Jesus' glorification. Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2:382, is exactly right when he says, "By 'glorification' here he envisages the fulness of saving power which will be given him (13:32; 17:1-2) to 'draw all men to himself' (12:32). It is true that in the Johannine view Jesus' death itself can also be glorification . . . but Jesus' final aim in his glorification is the giving of life to all believers." He concludes, "This is the meaning of his death, as the image of the grain of wheat in the next verse makes explicit."

<sup>74</sup>Ridderbos, *John*, 424-25.

<sup>75</sup>Carson, *John*, 554, writes, "The petition asks the Father to reverse the self-emptying entailed in his incarnation and to restore him to the splendour that he shared with the Father before the world began."

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*

whom Jesus healed to “give glory to God.”<sup>77</sup> It is likely that they are not thinking in terms of the gift but in terms of an idiom used to compel a person to tell the truth in confessing wrongdoing.<sup>78</sup> The expression “to give glory” is found twice in John 17, however, at the conclusion of Jesus’ prayer. In John 17:22, Jesus refers to the glory the Father *has given* (perfect tense) Him that He has given in turn to the disciples. It is unclear whether this glory is the same glory for which Jesus prayed in verse 1 or whether it is something else until the reader comes to verse 24. Jesus’ desire is that His people be where He is to see the glory the Father *has given* (perfect tense) Him. Jesus’ prayer points to His glorification after His death through the resurrection because Jesus is now going to the Father. His prayer is that His disciples would be in His presence to see the glory He had before the foundation of the world, the same glory for which He prayed in verse 1. The repetition of the perfect tense conjugation of δίδωμι does not militate against understanding this glory as something Jesus will have in the future at His resurrection as the crucified one. As Morris points out, the perfect tense of δίδωμι in this chapter is common and emphasizes “the permanence of the gift.”<sup>79</sup> That the Father’s gift of glory is spoken of in this way fits well with Jesus’ triumphant declaration, “I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). The Father’s will concerning the Son’s exaltation was certain and could not be thwarted. Jesus’ prayer ends with a note of certainty and inevitability. The Father will fulfill Jesus’ desires. His prayer to be given glory will be answered. The glorification He requests at the beginning of the prayer is described in terms of the gift at the end.

Second, the parallelism between verses 1 and 2 indicates that Jesus had the gift

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<sup>77</sup>The converse expression “to receive glory” is found in John 5:41, 44, where Jesus excoriates the Jews for their desire to receive glory from men rather than from God. In contrast to the Jewish leaders, Jesus flatly rejects the idea that He receives glory from human beings.

<sup>78</sup>So Keener, *John*, 1:790.

<sup>79</sup>Morris, *John*, 636 n. 6.

in mind when praying for glorification.<sup>80</sup> Verse 2 begins with the term *καθώς*, which some have interpreted as a marker of causality in this context.<sup>81</sup> In this case, Jesus asks the Father to glorify Him *because* He has given Jesus authority over all flesh. It is possible this is Jesus' meaning, but it is unlikely for two reasons. First, this meaning is common when this adverb begins a sentence, but here it is the structural center of a long predicate. This adverb can be a marker of causality when it does not begin a sentence (cf. Eph 4:32), but such instances are less common and more clearly connected causally. Therefore, it is syntactically improbable that *καθώς* is being used as a marker of causality. Second, the extended predicate of which *καθώς* is the structural center shows remarkable parallelism. In the first clause, Jesus makes a request with a certain purpose in mind (δόξασόν σου τὸν υἱόν, ἵνα ὁ υἱὸς δοξάσῃ σέ; v. 1).<sup>82</sup> The word *καθώς* is between this clause and the following clause in verse 2, where Jesus describes a past act of the Father (ἔδωκας αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν πάσης σαρκός) followed by a second purpose clause (ἵνα πᾶν ὃ δέδωκας αὐτῷ δώσῃ αὐτοῖς ζωὴν αἰώνιον). A more natural reading of these two clauses would understand *καθώς* as comparative.<sup>83</sup> Jesus compares His request for glorification (through being raised as the crucified one) and its attendant purpose (that He might glorify the Father) to what the Father has done for Him in the past (that is, given Him authority over all flesh) and the consequent purpose of that past action (to give eternal life to all the Father gave Him). By means of the comparison, Jesus states the ground for His petition.<sup>84</sup> Jesus' present request to be glorified is thus

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<sup>80</sup>Carson, *John*, 554, has a helpful chart showing the parallelism in these two verses.

<sup>81</sup>For example, BDAG, 493-94 lists John 17:2 under definition 3: "Of cause, *since, in so far as.*"

<sup>82</sup>Morris, *John*, 636 n. 5, notes, "Jesus prays for his own glorification not as an end in itself, but as a means to the greater glory of the Father." See also *ibid.*, 81 n. 61.

<sup>83</sup>This corresponds to the first definition in BDAG, 493, "Of comparison, *just as.*"

<sup>84</sup>Carson, *John*, 554, calls this way of establishing the ground for Jesus' request as "establishing an analogical pattern."

consistent with the Father's past action of giving Him authority and purpose of giving life to those He gave to the Son; therefore, the Father ought to give Jesus His request.

The comparison of what the Father has done in the past with what Jesus requests now that the hour has come indicates that the meaning of glorification is *giving* glory. The past action of the Father, which is the pattern upon which the request is based, is an action defined by giving. The Father's gift is emphatic as the Father is designated as the donor twice in verse 2 (ἔδωκας αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν and ὁ δέδωκας αὐτῷ). The Father has given Jesus authority over all flesh, and He has given Jesus a people.<sup>85</sup> The purpose of the gift was that the Son might give His people eternal life.<sup>86</sup> The meaning of glorification thus is seen through this comparison. The Father gives glory to the Son when He raises the crucified Son from the dead so that the Son might give glory to the Father by giving eternal life to the gift the Father has given to Him. The concept of circular giving reappears. The Father gives a people to the Son. The Father also gives His Son glory. The Son gives glory to the Father by giving life to the people the Father gave Him.

John 17 begins with the gift, showing the Father and the Son in a circle of giving, mutually giving to and receiving from one another. The Father gives to the Son and the Son gives to the Father. The Father gives in order that He might initiate a line of giving, but the line of giving also results in a gift relationship between the Father and the Son marked by circular giving and receiving. What makes this gift giving unique is that the gift to the Father is intentional *and* indirect. The Son intends to give glory to the Father by giving eternal life to the people the Father gave Him. The Father gives glory/authority/people to the Son, and the Son gives glory to the Father by giving not to

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<sup>85</sup>As in John 6:37-40, the people in John 17:2 are considered objectively as a single entity rather than personally or individually, as the neuter ὁ indicates. Ibid., 555, notes that the individuality of those who receive eternal life is preserved by the plural αὐτοῖς.

<sup>86</sup>Michaels, *John*, 860.

the Father, but by giving eternal life to His people. The circle of giving between the Father and the Son is thus complex in the way the gifts are given and received, and even in whom the direct and indirect recipients are in each case.<sup>87</sup>

After defining eternal life in verse 3, Jesus returns to the themes of gifts and glory in verses 4-5, clarifying the nature of the gift of glory further. Jesus continues His prayer with a slightly different emphasis than verse 1, noting in verse 4 that He has already glorified the Father on earth by finishing the work the Father had *given* Him to do.<sup>88</sup> Embedded in this statement is the circular nature of the gift. The Father *gave* the Son work to do as a gift,<sup>89</sup> and the Son, by receiving this gift, which receiving is completed when the Son accomplishes the work, gives glory to the Father.<sup>90</sup> In this way, the Son's receiving from the Father is simultaneously the Son's gift to the Father.

Jesus presents His request in verse 5, which repeats the request of verse 1 with two variations. First, Jesus no longer speaks to the Father in the third person. Instead of referring to Himself as "Your Son," He uses the first person "Me" to designate Himself. This subtle shift personalizes the request to a greater degree, as Jesus understands His

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<sup>87</sup>Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 284, notes how Richard of St. Victor defined Trinitarian giving, "In his *On the Trinity*, Richard argues that the Father gives without receiving, the Son both gives and receives, but the Spirit is only a recipient of love." While Horton focuses on the problems this creates for pneumatology, it also fails to account for the Son giving glory to the Father. The Johannine understanding of the Father is perhaps better explained by saying that the Father gives without receiving *directly*. The Father receives glory from the Son only as His gifts are given linearly to others.

<sup>88</sup>This corresponds to the arrival of the hour in v. 1. The fact that the Son accomplished the earthly task given to Him by the Father signals the arrival of the hour of glorification.

<sup>89</sup>For an explanation of how a task can be a gift, see the discussion above on John 5.

<sup>90</sup>The specific "work" Jesus has in mind is disputed. Borchert, *John 12-21*, 192; Carson, *John*, 556-57; Köstenberger, *John*, 489; Morris, *John*, 639, understand Jesus to refer to the entirety of the incarnation with a proleptic reference to His work on the cross (cf. John 19:30). Barrett, *St. John*, 504, takes a mediating position, viewing the entire incarnation as the "work" but also saying that vv. 6-8 explain the work. Michaels, *John*, 861-62; Ridderbos, *John*, 549, understand the work of Jesus as what is defined in vv. 6-8, giving eternal life to the disciples. A combination of the views seems to make the most sense, with the emphasis on Jesus' work of giving the disciples life by manifesting the Father to them. The gift of life, however, must be qualified by understanding that Jesus must die and rise to finish His saving work for His people. The immediate context, however, seems to focus most intently on Jesus' relationship to His disciples.

Sonship and is confident of His relationship with the Father as the Son so that He need not emphasize it again.<sup>91</sup> The second variation is Jesus' declaration that before the world was, He possessed the glory for which He prays. Jesus is not requesting a new glory. He is not requesting something that does not belong to Him already or something that is not rightfully His. Jesus' request for glory is simply an admission that He and the Father retain "reciprocal ownership" of the divine glory.<sup>92</sup> The glory the Father and Son give to one another is a glory they shared before the world was created. The gift the Father gave His Son was to manifest their eternal glory *on earth* (ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς), to bring the glory of God into space and time by doing the work of God in history.<sup>93</sup> Now that His task is complete, the gift received and given, the Son seeks the continuation of the circle of giving, asking the Father to give Him, through the resurrection from the dead and His return to the presence of the Father, that same eternal glory He possessed before descending onto the earth.

**John 17:6-12.** Gift language permeates verses 6-12 as eight occurrences of δίδωμι appear in this paragraph. The paragraph begins much like the previous paragraph, with Jesus recognizing that the Father has given Him a certain group of people out of the world. What is different this time is the explicit reference to the transfer of the gift. Jesus says, "They were Yours, and You gave them to Me." This statement could be taken at least two ways.<sup>94</sup> Jesus could be saying that the Father alone possessed this group of

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<sup>91</sup>The term υἱός is not used again in John 17 to refer to Jesus. It occurs once more in v. 12 in reference to Judas, the "son of perdition."

<sup>92</sup>The phrase "reciprocal ownership" comes from Carson, *John*, 561.

<sup>93</sup>Keener, *John*, 2:1055, concurs, writing that Jesus' task of glorifying God on earth was to provide "an earthly analogy in his incarnate life to explain the character of God in humanly comprehensible form."

<sup>94</sup>Borchert, *John 12-21*, 193, wrongly asserts, "The issue is not the previous status of the disciples but their role in God's mission strategy through the coming of the incarnate Jesus." There is no need to bifurcate the previous status of the disciples from their mission. To the contrary, the status of the disciples by means of the gift is the *foundation* of their mission in the world.

people, but now He has given them to Jesus so that the Father no longer possesses them. They belong to the Son alone. He also could be saying that the Father retains ownership of the men but now shares ownership of them with Jesus. Jesus thus has full authority and sovereignty over the people who belong to the Father. However, He does not have this authority alone but shares it with the Father.

Jesus resolves this conundrum in the verses that follow.<sup>95</sup> The men whom the Father gave to Jesus recognize the Father's gift to the Son (v. 7).<sup>96</sup> Moreover, the Son has given the Father's words, which were given to Him, to the disciples, and the disciples received them.<sup>97</sup> Up to this point, Jesus is repeating the same concepts He has already stated regarding the gift. However, in verse 9, the discussion takes an unexpected turn and clarifies the confusion of verse 6. Jesus' prayer is not for the world but for those the Father has given to Him. The reason Jesus prays for the disciples in particular, over against a general prayer for the world of humanity, is because the disciples belong to the Father in the present. Not only do they belong to the Father, but *everything* that belongs to the Son belongs to the Father.<sup>98</sup> At this point in Jesus' prayer, it perhaps looks like what the Father gave with one hand He takes away with the other. It is precisely at this

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<sup>95</sup>This question is not addressed by the Johannine literature, which typically is not focused on the implications of the text on *the gift*. Carson, *John*, 558, for example, merely says, "Thus in a profound sense they belonged to God antecedently to Jesus' ministry," and then continues by discussing the significance of the revelation of God's name to the disciples. He does not discuss in what sense the disciples have been given to Jesus and if there are any implications on their relationship to the Father as a result of Him giving them to the Son.

<sup>96</sup>Barrett, *St. John*, 506, notes the awkward and "tautologous" syntax of v. 7. Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 3:177, explains the tautology, "The prayer above all creates an aura which draws attention to the Father as the one who possesses, gives and grants everything. It does this by the use of the very significant word 'give.'"

<sup>97</sup>Once again, humanity stands in the position of recipient. For more on this, see the discussion of God's unilateral giving in chap. 2.

<sup>98</sup>Michaels, *John*, 866, draws a distinction between the Father giving the disciples and giving away the disciples, indicating the Father has done the former but not the latter. The distinction is perhaps too fine. Keener, *John*, 2:1056, describes the giving in terms of *entrusting* to the Son. This language, however, is too weak. The Son is not a steward in John's Gospel. The Son is the owner of the sheep (John 10:7-18).

moment when Jesus makes an astonishing claim about Himself and His relationship to the Father. Not only does everything that belongs to the Son belong to the Father, but everything that belongs to the Father also belongs to the Son. Furthermore, the Son is glorified in everything that belongs to the Father. Among other things, this indicates that the Father and the Son share the same glory, and their glory radiates in everything that belongs to them. When Jesus says that the Father gave Him the disciples (v. 6), He means that He and the Father both have ownership of the disciples.<sup>99</sup> The disciples belong to the Father and the Son.<sup>100</sup>

Jesus' words raise a question that of necessity must arise in giving between divine persons, namely, how can divine persons give anything to each other since divine persons mutually possess everything? Is their giving merely a façade, their gifts mere pretense? It appears that the condition earlier suggested for giving to be possible, that the giver have no needs, makes the gift impossible because someone who has no needs must have infinite resources. Someone with infinite resources cannot receive because there is nothing to receive. Jesus does not resolve the problem at this point. He merely asserts the way the relationship is between the Father, the Son, and the disciples. It is a relationship defined by giving. The Father and the Son give one another glory as the Son gives the Father's gifts to His disciples.

The final gift from the Father in this section of the prayer is the gift of the name (vv. 11-12). The name the Father has given the Son is not specified,<sup>101</sup> but the

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<sup>99</sup>Brown, *John 13-21*, 758, notes how v. 9 reverses v. 6, showing the unity between the Father and the Son. Keener, *John*, 1057, also rightly notes the theme of unity in these verses.

<sup>100</sup>The concept of "ownership" need not be taken in economic terms. See chap. 2 above for an explanation of God's ownership of His people as aneconomic.

<sup>101</sup>The lack of detail has led to several conjectures regarding the name in question. Some have tried to specify with great detail, suggesting the name is "I am" (so Brown, *John 13-21*, 755-56). Most have tried to find a general implication of the name rather than a specific title. In view of the OT's descriptions of God's name as a power that protects His people (cf. Pss 20:1; 54:1; Prov 18:10), some have interpreted the name to indicate God's protecting power (so Borchert, *John 12-21*, 197; Köstenberger, *John*, 493).

function of the name is to protect the disciples from enemies to ensure fulfillment of their mission. While Jesus was with the disciples, He kept them in the divine name so that they were all protected except Judas, who had to fall away to fulfill prophecy. Now that Jesus is leaving the disciples, He asks the Father to keep the disciples in the name. The name will function not only as a hedge of protection around the disciples but as the power that binds them together in unity.<sup>102</sup> Being in Jesus' name grants supernatural unity, the kind of unity experienced by the Father and the Son, which here refers not to their unity of essence but their functional unity.<sup>103</sup> The pattern prevalent throughout the language of divine giving holds here as well, as the Father gives the Son a name, and the gift the Father gives the Son He gives to the people the Father gave Him.

When this section is considered, it raises more questions than it answers. It also retreads well-worn paths. Nevertheless, there are a few key points highlighted. First, the Father and the Son have reciprocal ownership of everything. What belongs to one belongs to the other, and vice versa. Second, this reciprocal ownership does not nullify their ability to give to one another and receive from one another. While Jesus does not explain how it is possible to give in this context, He asserts that giving is precisely what occurs. Finally, the divine giving occurs in a context of perfect unity between divine persons. When these gifts are extended by the giving of the Son to the people the Father

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Others interpret it to mean the character of the Father as Jesus has revealed it (so Beasley-Murray, *John*, 299; Carson, *John*, 562; Morris, *John*, 644; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 3:175). Still others combine both views, interpreting the name as both power and revelation (so Brown, *John 13-21*, 759; Keener, *John*, 2:1057). It seems impossible to be specific about the identification of the name, but in view of v. 6, the locative understanding, that Jesus asks the Father to keep believers in the truth He has revealed about the Father, seems most likely. This interpretation is corroborated by the fact that it is difficult to understand how the name is a gift to Jesus from the Father if it is divine power for protection. For detailed argument, see Carson, *John*, 562.

<sup>102</sup>That the name provides protection for the disciples does not contradict the interpretation above. The name protects not because it is divine power, but because it is divine truth as revealed by Jesus. As the disciples remain in the truth revealed by the Son, they remain protected and unified.

<sup>103</sup>*Contra* Köstenberger, *John*, 493 n. 48. Suggestions on the nuance of this functional unity have ranged from love (Barrett, *St. John*, 508) to fellowship (Ridderbos, *John*, 553) to mission unto fruitfulness (Carson, *John*, 568).

gave Him, they are given for the purpose of bringing humanity into this divine unity.

**John 17:22, 24.** In the final section of Jesus' prayer, His remarks about giving are concentrated in verses 22 and 24. The theme of the divine giving has returned to where it began in verse 1, with giving divine glory. In verse 22, Jesus gives another linear description of the gift. The Father has given Him glory, and He has in turn given glory to those who believe in Him. The theme of unity from verses 6-12 is added to the theme of giving glory. When Jesus gives the glory of the Father to believers, it is for the purpose of creating unity among them.<sup>104</sup> Not only does the gift demand unity between the giver and the recipient to maintain its status as gift (as discussed above), but when a divine gift is given to the people of God, it creates the unity it demands.

Jesus concludes His discussion of divine giving in verse 24 by joining together the gift of glory with the gift of His people. Jesus emphasizes that the Father gave Him the people who believe in Him. They are the Father's gift to the Son. Jesus desires that the gifts of God become united, so that the gift of believers might see the gift of glory in the presence of the Son. Jesus' desire in this passage is for the benefit and good of His people. He wants them with Him so that they might see the glory the Father has given Him. Jesus' desire for believers is motivated by the Father's love.<sup>105</sup> He wants the world to recognize that the Father loves the people He has given to His Son (v. 23), and He explains His desire as flowing from the Father's love for Him before the foundation of the world (v. 24). The two pillars that support the gift in these final verses are love and unity. The desire to give the gift must be prompted by love for the recipient within a relationship of unity rather than rivalry.<sup>106</sup> Such love and unity exist and have existed

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<sup>104</sup>Morris, *John*, 651 n. 68.

<sup>105</sup>Michaels, *John*, 878.

<sup>106</sup>Derrida, *Given Time*, 10-11, addresses the question of unity in regard to the gift and identifies unity as a barrier to giving. He explains, "It supposes a subject and a verb, a constituted subject,

between the Father and the Son before creation came into existence. The Father and Son give to and receive from one another based on their mutual love and unity of purpose. Moreover, the Son gives to bring believers into the love of the Father (and, by extension, the Son) and the unity they share. The gifts the Son gives to His people create the necessary conditions for the gift to appear as gift without undoing itself.

**Summary.** From John 17, we see how reciprocal giving functions at the divine level so that the Father and the Son give gifts to one another. Because the Father and the Son share the divine nature, they necessarily have reciprocal ownership of all things. Their unity means that what belongs to one belongs to the other. Furthermore, neither the Father nor the Son has any need, lack, or want of anything. Their reciprocal ownership of all things within their unity intimates absolute sufficiency within themselves. However, this does not mean that they do not have desires. As persons, they have will and desire, and Jesus expresses as much in verse 24. These realities within the Father and the Son's relationship rule out giving based on need of the giver.

The final component that surfaces in this chapter is the *love* that exists between the Father and the Son. Love explains how it is possible for divine persons who possess all things to have desires. In the realm of finite humanity, desires are typically driven by need, lack, or want. People desire things they do not possess. They desire what is not theirs or what they are unable to bring about by their own power, for if it were theirs or

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which can also be collective—for example, a group, a community, a nation, a clan, a tribe—in any case, a subject identical to itself and conscious of its identity, indeed seeking through the gesture of the gift to constitute its own *unity*” (emphasis added). The subject thus seeks to create unity by means of the giving a gift to another. But how? By giving to *itself* recognition of its identity by the recipient. The gift is given, or intended to be given, so that the donor might get “its own identity recognized so that the identity comes back to it, so that it can reappropriate its identity: as its property.” The community, clan, or tribe becomes unified when its unity is recognized by the recipient of the gift. What Derrida has not taken into account is the opposite of this intention in giving the gift when the Giver does not need to constitute His own unity because His unity is essential to His nature. To the contrary, the giver establishes not His own unity, but the unity of the recipient, and therefore the identity of the recipient. The divine gift does not come back to the Giver so that He can reappropriate His identity as His property, but it goes forth to the recipient to give the recipient a new identity, a new unity, belonging to the Giver as the gift.

they could bring it about by their own power, they would no longer desire it but actualize it. The Father and Son, however, desire not based on need or want, but based on love. Their desires do not derive from need but from their moral nature. Their desires have nothing to do with what they need for fulfillment, joy, satisfaction, sustenance, or happiness, for they need nothing outside of themselves for any of these things. Their desires stem from their holy love for one another and their people. They desire because they love, not because they need. Moreover, the love of the Father and the Son is not based on any kind of self-centered desire, in the way humanity conceives of self-centeredness as selfishness or seeking to satisfy oneself over the other. This is because the Father and the Son do not need to seek satisfaction or gratification outside of themselves. They have existed eternally in a relationship of perfect love that exists apart from any need of anything. The Father and the Son love one another simply because they love one another, for they *are* love. Love flows from their nature as God. The Father and the Son thus have desires that are driven by a holy love that is not self-seeking but self-giving. Holy love accompanied by divine aseity creates unity rather than rivalry in giving, the desire for the good of the other, even at the expense of oneself. In this way, God gives and receives within the persons of the Father and the Son.

## **Conclusions**

In this section, we have sketched how divine giving works as reciprocal exchange between the Father and the Son by examining John 5:19-36; 6:37-40; 10:29; 17:1-24. Four facets of divine giving and receiving have emerged. (1) The emphasis in John's Gospel falls on the Father's gifts to the Son, not vice versa. The Father is thus the fountainhead of all gifts, but His giving is typically restricted to Jesus. (2) The Father gives to His Son to (a) empower the Son for His saving mission, in order to (b) honor the Son. The ultimate gift that the Father gives to the Son is honor and glory. (3) Giving is primarily described as linear rather than circular. The Father gives to the Son, and the

Son gives to humanity, usually restricted to the disciples or those who will believe through their words. While giving as a circular exchange is often emphasized in discussions of the gift, the Gospel of John emphasizes the linearity of divine giving. (4) Linear giving must be qualified. The linear model is not strictly linear but bends back in a circle because as the Father gives to the Son and the Son gives to His people, the Father is glorified. When the Son glorifies the Father, He gives glory to the Father. Therefore, God can be described as a circular giver within the relationship of the Father and the Son. The Father gives to and receives from the Son, and the Son receives the Father's gifts, thereby giving glory to the Father as He gives the Father's gifts to His people.

### **Entering the Circle: The Spirit and Human Response**

Throughout our study of John's Gospel to this point, whenever God and humanity have been in a gift relationship, it has been one-sided. God is the Giver; people are the recipients. God has given unilaterally and exhaustively. However, when giving between the Father and the Son enters the picture, a different image emerges. God gives circularly between the Father and the Son. Two related issues arise when these two facets of divine giving are brought together. First, where is the Holy Spirit in all of this giving and receiving? The Father and the Son have a giving and receiving relationship as divine persons, but the Spirit as a divine person must not be left out of the circle. Second, what can be made of the requirement that people respond to God's gifts throughout the Gospel of John?<sup>107</sup> Even a superficial reading of John's Gospel cannot help but notice that the readers are called to respond to the message. The requisite response affirms the

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<sup>107</sup>Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 615, writes, "Critics insist that the Reformation teaching so emphasizes salvation as the unilateral act of God in grace that there is no real place for human responsiveness and activity." For a response that engages John Milbank's critique of Reformation theology, especially the theology of John Calvin, see J. Todd Billings, "John Milbank's Theology of the 'Gift' and Calvin's Theology of Grace: A Critical Comparison," *Modern Theology* 21 (2005): 87-105. For a more general response to this criticism using the theology of Calvin, see J. Todd Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

truthfulness of God and His Son. It gives God our trust that what He says is true, and in this sense it honors God because it acknowledges His rights over His creatures and His trustworthiness in what He says.<sup>108</sup> God requires that humanity give Him their trust (which John repeatedly refers to using the verb πιστεύω) to have His gift of eternal life. God seems to impose a condition upon the gift of salvation. It is only given to those who believe in His Son.<sup>109</sup>

Imposing a condition on the gift would create a significant problem. If God requires humanity to enter into a gift-giving exchange with Him or face His wrath for eternity, is salvation any longer a gift? Is it not merely a market transaction, wherein God's contractual obligation is to "give" sinners life, and the obligation of sinners is to "give" God their trust? As long as sinners keep their end of the contract, God will "give" them his gifts. It is not difficult to see how God's gift of salvation could seem like counterfeit money. If one person said to another, "I will give you a gift, but only if you give me one first," it would be proper to suspect that the first person was not actually "giving" anything. Such transactions are not gifts but trades, trading one thing for another under a defined or understood contractual agreement. But this is precisely not what a gift is meant to be. A gift must be given freely, not under obligation and without consideration of reciprocity.

The Fourth Evangelist is not unaware of this problem. He addresses it directly, and in doing so the role of the Spirit enters into the divine circle of giving. The human

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<sup>108</sup>For discussion of faith as giving something to God, see chap. 2.

<sup>109</sup>The apparent conditionality of the gift of salvation has led many to believe that faith is *not* a gift given by God. For example, Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 335 n. 53, writes of faith, "If faith is not meritorious, but is instead the *reception* of the gift of salvation, then it is not a gift per se" (emphasis his). Derrida rightly deconstructs this kind of muddled thinking, for faith *is* a gift no matter how it is regarded. The question is not whether faith is a gift, but *who is the giver of faith?* Reception of the gift *is* counter-gift and undoes the gift if *reception itself* is not also a gift. Examples of those who miss this vital point are not limited to Wallace. See also Roy L. Aldrich, "The Gift of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 122 (1965): 248-53; Carmen J. Bryant, "Salvific Faith: Gift from God or Action of Man? A Linguistic Approach" (Th.M. thesis, Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1992); López, "Is Faith a Gift," 259-76.

response to which Jesus calls people is itself *given* by God. God imposes the demand but meets the demand Himself. He gives what He demands through an act of creation. John 5:24-26 and 6:22-63 unfold the role of the Spirit in genuine human response, explaining not only how the Spirit enters the divine circle of giving, but how humanity enters it as well.

### **John 5:24-25**

Previously this passage was considered when trying to understand better John's usage of salvation terminology and the giving relationship between the Father and the Son. The context should be familiar by now. However, as much as this passage has been discussed, not only in the present work but in commentaries and articles as well, verse 25 is often overlooked. It is perhaps the verse commentators spend the least amount of time considering in this section. This neglect is strange since verse 25 is critical to understanding the entire way salvation occurs. Verses 24-25 form a pair, with verse 25 explaining the assertion in verse 24.

John 5:24 begins solemnly. The solemnity indicates the importance and validity of Jesus' teaching. Jesus tells His hearers how they can have eternal life. They must hear His word. This seems to be a qualification everyone listening would have met, as well as the reader of John's Gospel who "hears" Jesus' word while reading these discourses.<sup>110</sup> But not only must a person hear the word of Jesus, a person must believe the one who sent Jesus, referring to the Father. Jesus does not require His hearers to believe Him at this point, but to believe in His Sender. The implication of this progression, from hearing the words of Jesus to believing in the One who sent Him, indicates that the "hearerbeliever" perceives that Jesus' words are the words of the Father

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<sup>110</sup>All the major commentators agree that the "hearing" involved is the hearing of faith, not physical and sensory hearing Jesus' words. This is undoubtedly correct and is at the heart of the discussion in vv. 24-25.

and not from Himself.<sup>111</sup> Since Jesus' qualifications are in dispute (v. 18), He appeals to the Father to witness to the truthfulness of His word. Jesus' word has come from the Father, and to hear Jesus' word with faith is to believe the Father who sent Him is the One who has given Him the words He speaks. The one who believes God avoids condemnation because he has left the realm of death and crossed over into "the life" (τὴν ζωὴν).<sup>112</sup> The one who does not hear Jesus' word as the word of the Father remains in death and stands condemned. The response of a person to Jesus, then, is essential. A person *must* respond in faith to have eternal life and escape condemnation.

The dilemma in verse 24 is the reality that the person being called to hear and believe is dead. All of Jesus' hearers begin in death or they would not need to pass out of death into life. Jesus emphasizes their dead condition in verse 25 by referring to them as οἱ νεκροὶ.<sup>113</sup> Jesus does not mean that these dead ones are physically dead; they are spiritually dead.<sup>114</sup> Physically, they can hear Jesus' words and interact with Him, as their interactions in this text prove. Spiritually, however, because they are dead, they can neither hear Him nor believe His word of themselves.<sup>115</sup> Like a corpse at a funeral unable to hear the words of the eulogist, humanity in its natural condition cannot hear the voice of Jesus.<sup>116</sup> Something must happen from outside the dead person to enable the dead

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<sup>111</sup>Beasley-Murray, *John*, 76.

<sup>112</sup>The article points back to the 'eternal life' (ζωὴν αἰώνιον) Jesus mentioned earlier in this verse. See Smyth and Messing, *Greek Grammar*, 287.

<sup>113</sup>While this phrase can refer to dead bodies, here the meaning is spiritual death, not physical death. So Beasley-Murray, *John*, 76-77; Michaels, *John*, 316-17; Morris, *John*, 281. *Contra* Borchert, *John 1-11*, 240.

<sup>114</sup>That this verse refers to the spiritually dead who are regenerated and not to the physically dead being raised on the last day is evident from the addition of the phrase καὶ νῦν ἐστὶν τὸ ἔρχεται ὄρα, which is absent in v. 28, where Jesus explicitly refers to the bodily resurrection on the last day. Cf. Morris, *John*, 281-82.

<sup>115</sup>For a helpful description of spiritual death and all that it entails, see Reymond, *Systematic Theology*, 446-57.

<sup>116</sup>As Michaels, *John*, 317, aptly commented, "Common sense tells us that the dead can hear

person to hear, believe, and live.

This is precisely what occurs in verse 25. Some of the dead hear the voice of the Son of God.<sup>117</sup> When they hear His voice, they live. Jesus says nothing about believing Him or the Father in this verse. The dead transition from hearing to living by the Word of Jesus. Many commentators correctly see an allusion to Ezekiel 37 in this verse, which explains why the sequence of events is slightly altered between verses 24 and 25.<sup>118</sup> In Ezekiel 37, the “son of man” (v. 3) is commanded to “prophecy over these bones and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD’” (NASB).<sup>119</sup> The Lord then promises to bring these dead bones to life by putting breath (רוּחַ) in them so that they might know that He is Jehovah. Ezekiel follows the divine command, and as he speaks to them, commanding them to hear God’s word, the bones come together to form dead bodies. Ezekiel then calls for the breath to come and fill them and make them alive, which happens according to the divine command.<sup>120</sup> Jesus, using this shared imagery with His hearers, shows that He is the true Son of Man (John 5:27) who speaks the word of the Lord over the dead.<sup>121</sup> When they hear His word, they come to life. The implicit

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nothing.”

<sup>117</sup>The “voice” of Jesus is an important sub-theme in this Gospel, and as the narrative progresses it becomes clear that only the sheep can hear the Shepherd’s voice. In John 10:26-27, Jesus said, “But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” All of humanity begins life as “the dead,” since even those who believe pass out of death. Only Jesus’ sheep can hear His voice. The others do not believe, indicating that they have not heard His voice and remain dead. See O. Betz, “φωνή,” in *TDNT* 9:278-301; Calvin, *John*, 1:206; Köstenberger, *John*, 189.

<sup>118</sup>So Carson, *John*, 256; Köstenberger, *John*, 189; Michaels, *John*, 316.

<sup>119</sup>Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 374, describes the situation in Ezek 37, writing, “The narrative leaves no hint regarding whose bones these might be, but the picture is one of death in all its horror, intensity, and finality.”

<sup>120</sup>For a discussion of Ezek 37:1-10 and the significance of the imagery involved, see *ibid.*, 373-79.

<sup>121</sup>Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 29 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 185, links the Ezekiel passage to the creative word in Gen 1, writing, “It [the Spirit/breath of the Lord] was this pervading power that gave continued life to a finite world (Ps 104:29-30; Job 34:14-15).”

assumption is that those who hear are also those who believe, for those who remain dead do not hear and cannot believe. The response that Jesus demands is the response that is generated within the dead by the word of Jesus when the dead hear it. Their hearing, however, is not something that takes place on their own volition. They are like dry, scattered bones, who can only be brought to life by the power of God. The hearing and believing occur because Jesus speaks to them, calling them out of death into life. They hear Him because they are His sheep, the ones the Father has given Him. Their response of faith is *created* within them by God, or, in the language of the gift, *given* to them while they are yet dead and unable to respond in themselves.

### **John 6:22-65**

John 5:24-25 sets the stage for the narrative in John 6.<sup>122</sup> The vision of Ezekiel 37 contained two elements that gave life to the dry bones: the word of the son of man and the breath of Jehovah. In John 5:25, the effectiveness of the word in giving the gift of life to the dead so that they might respond to Jesus' call is evident. The role of the breath of Jehovah, which was introduced most clearly in John 3:1-8,<sup>123</sup> is absent from the explanation of how the dead are made alive and believe in Jesus in John 5:24-25. That aspect of Ezekiel's vision and the divine gift of response are filled out in John 6.

The passage begins the day following Jesus' miraculous feeding of the 5,000. The crowd is clamoring after Jesus but unable to discover His whereabouts. They eventually realize that Jesus and His disciples have gone across the sea into Capernaum, so they make the journey to Capernaum to find Him and request more miracle bread.

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One may compare too the powerful creative word in Genesis 1.”

<sup>122</sup>Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2:5-9, misses the connection entirely, trying to stitch the Gospel narrative together based on place references and thereby utterly disrupting the flow of theological development the Evangelist is shaping.

<sup>123</sup>Carson, *John*, 191-96, notes that Ezek 36-37 form the background of John 3:1-8. For a more thorough treatment of the background of the work of the Spirit in John's Gospel, see Linda Belleville, "Born of Water and Spirit: John 3:5," *Trinity Journal* 1 (1980): 125-41.

Jesus responds to their quest with a riddle. Knowing their interest in Him falls woefully short of the spiritual ideal, Jesus challenges their motives with a riddle concerning the gift in verses 26-27. The mutually exclusive concepts of the gift and the wage are brought together, as Jesus says to the crowd, “Do not *work* for the perishing food but for the abiding-unto-eternal-life food, which the Son of Man *will give* to you” (emphasis added). The people are presented with a paradox, although they completely miss the difficulty of the statement.<sup>124</sup> As Carson notes, “They [the crowd] display no doubt about their intrinsic ability to meet any challenge God may set them; they evince no sensitivity to the fact that eternal life is first and foremost a gift within the purview of the Son of Man.”<sup>125</sup> They confidently ask what they are required to do to do the works (τὰ ἔργα) of God (v. 28). Jesus replies in an enigmatic way that is open to interpretation, saying, “This is the work (τὸ ἔργον) of God, that you believe in the one whom He has sent” (v. 29).<sup>126</sup> The phrase τὸ ἔργον τοῦ θεοῦ can be taken to mean either the work God *requires*<sup>127</sup> or the work God *performs*.<sup>128</sup> Despite the fact that most commentators agree this is an objective genitive,<sup>129</sup> there is good reason for taking it subjectively. The only other place John uses

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<sup>124</sup>Calvin, *John*, 1:242, recognizes and demonstrates the difficulty of v. 27, writing, “There is undoubtedly some appearance of contradiction in these words; but we may easily [!] reconcile these two statements, that the spiritual food of the soul is the free gift of Christ, and that we must strive with all the affections of our heart to become partakers of so great a blessing.” Unfortunately, Calvin does not untie the knot for his readers.

<sup>125</sup>Carson, *John*, 285.

<sup>126</sup>John 6 is riddled with “misunderstandings” on the part of the crowd, such as their inability to comprehend the gift of God. See Carson, “Understanding Misunderstandings in the Fourth Gospel,” 59-91.

<sup>127</sup>An objective genitive.

<sup>128</sup>A subjective genitive.

<sup>129</sup>Köstenberger, *John*, 207-8, recognizes that Jewish literature uses this phrase to describe the work God performs, but he still opts for taking it as an objective genitive. Morris, *John*, 319, quotes G. H. C. MacGregor approvingly, “There is a sense in which ‘to believe’ is to perform a work,” thus transforming faith into its antithesis (cf. Rom 11:6). López, “Is Faith a Gift,” 267, misses the irony of the question and Jesus’ response. He assumes his conclusion, writing, “‘To believe in the one he has sent’ is in apposition to the ‘work of God.’ It is man, not God, who believes, and therefore the context makes clear that τοῦ θεοῦ

this phrase is in John 9:3, where it clearly is a subjective genitive, speaking of the works God performs (in this case, through Jesus His agent).<sup>130</sup> Romans 14:20 is the only other place this phrase occurs in the NT, and Paul clearly has in mind the subjective meaning, describing the work God has done. Moreover, in the LXX this phrase is used four times (Pss 63:10; 65:5; 77:7; Tob 12:6) as a subjective genitive, describing the mighty deeds performed by God, but never as an objective genitive to describe work(s) God requires. In view of the ensuing manna discussion, it is likely that Jesus is recalling OT terminology to point the crowd to the work God does in *giving* them the gift of life, and that it is not the result of them working the works God requires or, worse, usurping God's role as giver of life and performing work that belongs to God alone. Only God can do the work of God.<sup>131</sup> Jesus thus takes the crowd's misguided statement and corrects it in a way that they should have recognized because of their OT heritage, but because they cannot comprehend God's gift, either in its substance as the gift of eternal life through the death of His Son or in its character *as gift*, they cannot understand Jesus' statement. Jesus' hearers do not think they need a gift; to the contrary, they stand ready to enter into an economic contract with God wherein they perform what He requires and He remunerates them with the bread they seek.

For the rest of the discussion between Jesus and the crowd, Jesus obliterates the people's misconception about the way God works and relates to humanity, resolving

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['of God'] is not a subjective genitive ('work *by* God'), but an objective genitive ('work *for* God') (emphasis his). Such a claim is nothing short of stunning. In what sense could faith be a human *work* in the context of the John's Gospel, let alone the rest of NT? Moreover, how could it be a work *for God*? What does God stand to gain from it? Nothing. While it is the human being who believes, it is God who does the creative work to bring faith into existence in a person. For other commentators who miss the significance of this verse, see also Carson, *John*, 285; Michaels, *John*, 367.

<sup>130</sup>Cf. also John 3:21, where the phrase αὐτοῦ τὰ ἔργα ὅτι ἐν θεῷ ἐστὶν εἰργασμένα is used to speak of the work God performs.

<sup>131</sup>Thompson, "Signs and Faith in the Fourth Gospel," 97, speaking of Jesus' signs as the works of God, writes, "God grants life through these works, and it is the character and work of God – and of God alone – to give life." It is precisely this key point that the crowd missed in their discussion with Jesus.

the paradox of how work and gift are related in His statement. He focuses especially on the human need to receive the gift at the most fundamental level, that of coming to Jesus. Jesus' watershed statement occurs in verse 35, when He declares, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst."<sup>132</sup>

The concepts of coming and believing, central to Jesus' teaching in this section, seem like actions that are simple enough, especially if believing is the only "work" God requires (as the people still conceived of doing the work of God themselves rather than receiving God's work as a gift). However, the same people who declared they were ready and able to do whatever work God required did not believe in Jesus although they had seen Him and His signs (v. 36). The people's unbelief presents profound tension in the narrative, not merely between them and Jesus, but for the reader as well. After all, these are the same people who ate the miraculous meal, who searched everywhere for Jesus, and who were willing to travel across the sea to find Him. They appear ready to do whatever He commands them to do, and all He calls them to do is believe in Him to receive the gift that the Son of Man is willing to give them. The scenario seems ripe for Jesus to add thousands of followers to His core group of disciples. Yet the crowd will not believe in Him. They refuse to receive the gift of life from the Son of Man. To put it in terms of John 5:24-25, they cannot hear His voice although He speaks to them directly. But why can't they respond? Why do they find it impossible to work faith, to do the seemingly simplest of tasks – come to Jesus?

Jesus answers these questions by explaining that both the gift of life and meeting the divinely established requirement to receive the gift of life are gifts of God. To be more precise, the gift of life is *gift* from start to finish.<sup>133</sup> God must create the

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<sup>132</sup>So Köstenberger, *John*, 206. See also Morris, *John*, 323-24. For a discussion of bread symbolism in John's Gospel, see Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 165.

<sup>133</sup>Michaels, *John*, 385, succinctly writes of those who come to Jesus, "They are God's gift to Jesus, and Jesus is God's gift to them."

response in the hearer for the hearer to have life. For the hearer to come to Jesus, the Father must draw Him to Jesus (v. 44). Jesus does not say that no one *will* come to Him unless the Father draws him, but no one *can* (δύναται) come to Him unless the Father draws him.<sup>134</sup> The sinner has no inherent capacity in himself to receive the gift of life from Jesus because the sinner cannot receive the gift *as* gift. He looks for reciprocity and exchange, not gift. On his own, the sinner cannot participate in a relationship of giving with the God who created him, *not even as a recipient*. God must draw the sinner into the gift relationship if the sinner is to participate at all.<sup>135</sup>

The drawing work of the Father is explained in verses 45-46 as the work of teaching, initiated by the Father. Jesus cites Isaiah 54:13 to show the crowd that the messianic community would learn from God Himself.<sup>136</sup> However, the school of the Father is not an institution where the students are able to initiate enrollment, for no one has seen the Father. The Father is absolutely inaccessible to everyone except the Son, who alone is able to relate to the Father independently. The implication is clear. For anyone to come to Jesus through the teaching of God, God must reveal Himself to that person. What is more, when God chooses to reveal Himself, everyone to whom He reveals Himself comes to the Son, for “everyone who has heard from the Father and learned comes to Me.”<sup>137</sup> As Calvin noted, “If all come *whom the Father hath taught*, He

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<sup>134</sup>Morris, *John*, 329, notes the impossibility of coming to Jesus apart from divine gift: “They [people] think that they come or that they *can* come to Jesus entirely of their own volition. Jesus assures us that this is an utter impossibility. No one, no one at all, can come unless the Father draws him” (emphasis his).

<sup>135</sup>Köstenberger, *John*, 213, writes, “John proceeds to underscore the human inability to gain salvation apart from divine enablement . . . . Ultimately, therefore, salvation depends not on human believing, but on the ‘drawing’ action of the Father (presumably by the Holy Spirit) by which God moves a person to faith in Christ.”

<sup>136</sup>For discussion of Isa 54:13, see John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 427-28.

<sup>137</sup>Michaels, *John*, 387 n. 20, notes that the phrase “heard from and learned” is “almost redundant, merely making explicit what is already implicit in having ‘heard.’”

gives them not only the choice of believing, but faith itself.”<sup>138</sup> To come to Jesus is entirely a gift from God, not only in its result of obtaining eternal life, but in the very act of coming/believing itself.

Jesus continues His discourse on the bread of life by explaining that eternal life is given to those who eat His flesh and drink His blood, which is too much for the crowd and leads to the climax of His teaching on salvation in this chapter: the role of the Spirit. When the crowd recoils at His teaching, Jesus does not attempt to domesticate it or simplify it; instead, He rebukes the crowd for being unable to handle even rudimentary truth. If they cannot comprehend His death for the life of the world, how will they ever understand His resurrection and ascension to the Father? Understanding the glory of the Son of Man demands understanding the path to that glory, which goes through the cross. The reason that Jesus neither simplifies nor softens His teaching is because it is through this very teaching that life is given by the Spirit. Jesus plainly tells the crowd, “The Spirit is the one who gives life” (v. 63). Nothing should have been more obvious to His hearers than this basic theological truth. From the creation account to the promise of salvation already discussed in Ezekiel 37, from Isaiah’s promise of salvation to Jeremiah’s prophecy of the new covenant, the Spirit is God’s life-giving agent. Because life is wholly dependent upon the Spirit’s gift, Jesus knew who would believe in Him before any of them actually came to Him in faith (v. 64). The essential work of God in giving life through His Spirit was so crucial to Jesus’ teaching on the gift of salvation that He repeatedly told<sup>139</sup> His hearers that “no one is able to come to Me except it is given to him

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<sup>138</sup>Calvin, *John*, 1:259, emphasis his.

<sup>139</sup>The imperfect ἔλεγε indicates the ongoing nature of Jesus’ teaching this truth. Morris, *John*, 342 n. 158, concurs: “If the imperfect tense (ἔλεγε) is significant the meaning will be that this is the kind of that Jesus said repeatedly.” For a different interpretation of the imperfect here, see Michaels, *John*, 412.

from the Father.”<sup>140</sup> The earlier metaphors of being drawn and taught by the Father/God are now replaced by language of the gift. Coming to the Father is not possible for a person apart from the gift of the Father, who gives the coming to Jesus in faith. The gift of coming is effected by the Spirit, God’s life-giving agent.

While the emphasis in these texts lies with the gift of God that brings the sinner to Jesus, teaches the sinner the truth, and gives the sinner life, these texts must not be strained to eliminate the element of human response. John 6:65 makes plain that the person to whom the Father gives the gift of coming to Jesus *actually comes to Jesus*. It is not the Father who comes to Jesus in the place of the sinner, but the sinner himself who comes to Jesus. As Westcott observed, “It must be noticed likewise how here the divine and human elements are placed in close juxtaposition, *given, come*” (emphasis his).<sup>141</sup> The Father gives the coming (by the Spirit) and the sinner enters into the circle of divine gift giving and receiving, which becomes evident by the sinner’s coming to Christ. The element of human response to God’s gift is not nullified by the gift; to the contrary, it is created by the gift.<sup>142</sup> The response is the gift of God to the lifeless sinner who cannot hear, come, or believe unless the Father by the Spirit draws, teaches, and gives the sinner the gift of entering into the divine circle of giving.

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<sup>140</sup>Borchert, *John 1-11*, 275, could not miss the point of v. 65 more badly when he comments, “The point is that Jesus was not surprised at rebellious people, and that should be an important lesson for Christians.” The main point is not Jesus’ lack of surprise but *the reason* for Jesus’ expectation that not everyone would believe in Him, which traces back to the nature of salvation as a gift from the Father through the Son by the Spirit.

<sup>141</sup>Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John*, par. 2805. Westcott, unfortunately, draws the conclusion that these two elements are to be held in tension equally, rather than understanding that it is the gift that moves the will.

<sup>142</sup>Ridderbos, *John*, 233, commenting on God’s giving of faith to those who come to Christ, writes, “This observation keeps coming back in the Gospel (cf. 1:12, 13; 3:3ff.; 5:44); one might call it one of its fundamental thoughts.” If Ridderbos is correct, as the present writer thinks he is, this is strong evidence for the argument of this section, that God gives as a gift the very response He requires to obtain His gift of life.

## Summary

John 5:24-25 and 6:22-65 explain how finite creatures enter into the circle of divine giving with infinite persons. The sinner is dead and without the life of God until the voice of the Son of God awakens him unto life. The sinner does not initiate the hearing of the Son's voice and the believing in the word; God is the one who gives life to the dead through His word. Ezekiel 37 provides the OT context for Jesus' teaching, where the word of the Lord and the breath of Jehovah are both necessary elements in giving life to dry bones.

The role of the Spirit is made explicit in John 6:22-65, for "the Spirit is the One who gives life" (John 6:63). While the Father is described as the One who draws the sinner so that the sinner comes to Jesus and teaches those who belong to Jesus so that they believe in Him, the Spirit is the Father's agent in bringing this about through the words Jesus speaks. People must respond to the call of the Son of God if they are to have eternal life. They must enter into the circle of divine giving. But they can only enter into this circle if it is *given* to them. The finite cannot ascend to the infinite. The infinite must descend to the finite, which is precisely what the Father has done by sending His Son and giving life by His Spirit. Creatures therefore enter the circle of divine giving as the Spirit comes and creates within them the response God requires to obtain salvation.

### **Remaining in the Circle: Abiding in Christ and Giving Glory to God**

By a miraculous condescension of the infinite God and through the power of His Spirit in awakening a dead sinner to life through the Word of Christ, finite creatures are brought into the circle of divine giving. Once the creature has entered the circle, the question remains of how she now relates to the giving God. Having been brought into the circle of divine gifts, is the believer a partner with God in giving to and receiving from

Him?<sup>143</sup> Or does John argue that salvation is a one-time, unique experience so that the believer participates in divine giving in a wonderful yet temporary manner, and once the gift is received, the believer exits the circle (or has the option of exiting the circle)?

Theologians have argued some variation of both of these options. John's explanation of the believer's relationship to God within the circle of divine giving is more complex than either of these choices.

The call to come to Jesus and believe in Him for life is not, as has been argued previously, a call to an economic transaction where Jesus "gives" life in exchange for trust in Him, and then both parties go their separate ways, each having obtained what was desired. To the contrary, the call to come and believe is a call to enter into the divine circle of giving and to *remain* in that circle as one who continuously participates in divine life, even as one who remains a participant in the circle of divine giving.

John unfolds the way in which the finite creature can remain in the circle of divine giving and participate in it by way of the Holy Spirit. Even as the sinner enters into the circle through the power of the Spirit, the creature remains in the circle through the Spirit's work. God continues to give the gift of response to His call so that the work of God is accomplished by the Spirit of God, who creates our continual response to God that results in God receiving glory from us. To see how John develops this pneumatic understanding of remaining in the circle of divine giving, we will trace his teaching on the Spirit, beginning with John 4:7-15 in conjunction with John 7:37-39, through John 14-16, and concluding with John 20:19-23.

### **John 4:7-15 and John 7:37-39**

John 4:7-15 and 7:37-39 are complementary passages, with the latter

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<sup>143</sup>This seems to be the logically necessary conclusion of Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given," 154, as a person engages in a purified gift exchange motivated by *agape*.

explaining the former.<sup>144</sup> Jesus' discussion with the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar is a *locus classicus* for the Johannine conception of the gift of God.<sup>145</sup> The pericope begins with a brief background narrative explaining why Jesus was in Samaria (John 4:1-6). Around noon on a certain day, Jesus encountered a woman who was coming to draw water from a well. Jesus immediately engages the woman in conversation by requesting a drink. The language is loaded, as Jesus commands her to make a gift out of a cup of water (δόξ μοι πειν). Even at this early stage in John's Gospel, Jesus' request is rather strange, but not for the reason the woman thinks. The Samaritan woman is stunned that a Jewish man would ask her for a drink since she is a Samaritan woman (v. 9). Jesus affirms the shocking nature of His request, but the reason the woman should have been surprised has nothing to do with racial or gender tension; Jesus is the One who should be giving, not the woman (v. 10). At this point, the narrative takes a major turn and transitions away from the normal, daily conversation concerning fatigue, thirst, and wells, to something entirely from another realm: living water.

Jesus makes two points about the woman's naiveté to transition to the conversation to this higher plane. The woman does not understand the gift of God or the person to whom she is speaking.<sup>146</sup> She has encountered the One who comes to give "living water" (ὕδωρ ζῶν) from God. The woman seems to misunderstand Jesus' claim, perhaps interpreting the phrase ὕδωρ ζῶν to mean running or flowing water as opposed to still water, with no spiritual implications.<sup>147</sup> She questions how Jesus might procure

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<sup>144</sup>So Barrett, *St. John*, 327; Michaels, *John*, 465; Morris, *John*, 373; Ng, *Water Symbolism*, 140-41.

<sup>145</sup>As Köstenberger, *John*, 149, notes, "The verb δίδωμι (*didōmi*, give) dominates this section, occurring seven times between 4:7 and 4:15." See also Saarinen, *God and the Gift*, 37-39.

<sup>146</sup>Moloney, *John*, 117, rightly notes that the woman's two-fold ignorance frames the structure for the remainder of Jesus' conversation with her, as He explains the gift of God (vv. 11-15) and who He is (vv. 16-30).

<sup>147</sup>Köstenberger, *John*, 150-51; Ng, *Water Symbolism*, 136-41.

this flowing stream of fresh water since He has no instrument with which to draw water from the rather deep well (v. 11). She then tries to move the conversation in another direction, as she seeks to determine who He is by contrasting Him with Jacob (v. 12). Jesus, however, is not ready quite yet to leave the subject of the gift. He returns to discussing the water that He “will give” to an ambiguous recipient (vv. 13-14).<sup>148</sup> The water that Jesus gives quenches thirst in a way that well water cannot because the water Jesus gives produces an internal well of water that springs up to eternal life (v. 14). At this point, the woman still does not fully understand the import of what Jesus is saying. Her mind is fixed on the earthly reality of well water, and, like the crowd in John 6 with bread, she requests that Jesus give her water to minimize her workload of coming out to draw so frequently (v. 15). The woman is now interested in the gift, even if she misunderstands it, so Jesus transitions to discussing whom the woman has met at the well. Discussion of the gift is left behind until John 7:37-39 to focus on the Giver, for the gift cannot be understood without knowing the Giver.

John 7:37-39 takes place on the final day of the Feast of Booths (John 7:2).<sup>149</sup> Jesus issues another call for the crowd to come to Him, paralleling the action of coming with drinking. Jesus does not explain what the object is that those who come to Him must drink (He had called them to drink His blood in John 6:53), but the meaning of the metaphor is clear enough in verse 38, as Jesus simplifies His call to mean believing in Him. At this point in the text, a great division among commentators has occurred regarding the punctuation of the text and the antecedent of the genitive αὐτοῦ. Verses 37-38 could mean either that the rivers of living water flow out of the innermost being of

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<sup>148</sup>The future tense (δῶσω) is significant here, as the complementary passage in John 7 will show.

<sup>149</sup>Whether this great and final feast day was the seventh or eighth day is uncertain. For a discussion of the relevant issues, see Michaels, *John*, 463-64.

the one who believes in Jesus,<sup>150</sup> or these verses could mean that the living water would flow to believers from Jesus.<sup>151</sup>

Each position has merit and choosing between the two options is difficult, but the more important question is the meaning of Jesus' phrase ὕδατος ζῶντος.<sup>152</sup> Jesus did not explain this phrase to the Samaritan woman in John 4, which has left interpreters puzzled over what it means.<sup>153</sup> John, however, solves the riddle for the reader in verse 39, explaining that the living water is a reference to the Spirit, who would be given after Jesus' glorification.<sup>154</sup> Some have questioned whether there is a legitimate link between John 4:10 and 7:37-39.<sup>155</sup> John and Jesus speak of water at other times, sometimes even contrasting it with the Spirit (cf. John 1:33; 3:5).<sup>156</sup> However, a writer is not constrained to use a particular symbol with uniformity throughout his writing. Different contexts clarify the meaning. In both John 4:10 and 7:37-39, the specific phrase ὕδωρ ζῶν is

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<sup>150</sup>In this case, the antecedent of αὐτοῦ would be ὁ πιστεύων. For a defense of this position, see Carson, *John*, 322-28.

<sup>151</sup>The antecedent of αὐτοῦ would be ἐμέ in this interpretation. For a defense of this position, as well as a possible third position which he rejects, see Brown, *John 1-12*, 320-21.

<sup>152</sup>The precise solution to this interpretive problem does not affect the argument presented here, so I will leave it open to the reader's judgment with one caveat: the text must not mean that the believer becomes the *source* of living water. The tenor of John's Gospel militates against the idea that Jesus' disciples are the givers of the Spirit. Neither position demands such a view, but those who hold the former option sometimes point in this direction. For example, see Morris, *John*, 377-78.

<sup>153</sup>For example, E. Pinto, "John: The Gospel of Life," *Bible Today* 23 (1985): 399, interprets the living water in John 4 as "the person of Jesus and the revelation that Jesus brings" without any comment or evidence. Ridderbos, *John*, 157-58, claims that "a specific meaning" is not "central here" to Jesus' discussion of living water. While John does not record if Jesus explained the meaning of the symbol to the Samaritan woman, Jesus later referred to the Spirit in John 4:23-24. It is possible, if not likely, that Jesus later explained what He meant to the woman as well as to her townsfolk, but John leaves the reader in suspense so that he can unfold his doctrine of the Spirit throughout the narrative course of the Gospel.

<sup>154</sup>Beasley-Murray, *John*, 60, aptly remarks, "It is evident that 'living water' has a variety of nuances that must be taken into account; chiefly it appears to denote *the life mediated by the Spirit sent from the (crucified and exalted) Revealer-Redeemer*" (emphasis his).

<sup>155</sup>So Ridderbos, *John*, 157-58; Whitacre, *John*, 102-4.

<sup>156</sup>It is possible that John 1:35 actually likens the Spirit to water because the Messiah baptizes people in/with/by the Spirit, in which case the primary place where Spirit and water are differentiated would be John 3:5.

used, something that does not occur outside these contexts and serves as a crucial link between them. Moreover, in John 4:10-14, Jesus uses future tense verbs when speaking of His gift of living water, indicating it was something that He was not giving at that moment but would give at some point in the future. Such a future orientation toward the gift of living water fits with John's explanatory gloss in John 7:39 that the Spirit was not given at that moment but after Jesus' was glorified.<sup>157</sup> Therefore, it seems not only justifiable but preferable to understand the "living water" to be a reference to the Holy Spirit, both in John 7:37-39 and in John 4:10-14.<sup>158</sup>

Coming back to John 4:7-15, focusing especially on Jesus' explanation of the gift in John 4:10-14, the passage lays the foundation for understanding how Jesus' gift not only brings a person into the circle of divine giving but keeps him within the circle. The water that Jesus gives, that is, the gift of the Holy Spirit, quenches thirst from within by becoming an internal well that springs up to eternal life. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the inner-being of the believer is not a stagnant or temporary gift, but a running stream that is ever sustaining the believer from within. The gift of living water is thus a *continual* gift that is always fresh, always new, and always *given* within the believer by the Son. As Barrett aptly remarked, "Those who accept him and his gifts are thereafter permanently supplied, and their needs are inwardly met."<sup>159</sup> Remaining in the circle of divine giving occurs through the gift of the Holy Spirit, who not only brings the believer into the circle, but through His abiding presence and unceasing work of giving keeps him there.

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<sup>157</sup>Carson, *John*, 329; S. H. Hooke, "The Spirit Was Not Yet," *New Testament Studies* 9 (1963): 372-80; Morris, *John*, 378-79.

<sup>158</sup>Bruce, *Gospel & Epistles*, 105.

<sup>159</sup>Barrett, *St. John*, 234.

## John 14-16

The predominant way the Evangelist portrays the concept of being in the divine circle of giving is by using the term μένω.<sup>160</sup> This verb is used in its physical sense of staying in a geographical location for a period of time (John 1:38-39; 2:12; 4:40; 7:9), but John also goes beyond this meaning to indicate a relationship of continual dependence on God by His people, and God's faithful commitment to give His people what they need.<sup>161</sup> Jesus first uses μένω this way in John 6:56, indicating that coming to Him and believing is more than a one-time event but a continual union with Him, relying on Him for spiritual nourishment. He reminded those who had some level of belief in Him that what marks a true disciple is abiding in His word (John 8:31). As with other Johannine themes, however, Jesus does not go into much detail to explain the significance of these terms when they first surface in the narrative (and the narrator is silent as well). Such explanation takes place later in a more direct and complete discourse that involves both the concept of abiding along with John's most extended discussion of the role of the Holy Spirit. These two subjects are inextricably linked and must be taken together. John relates Jesus' teaching on the Spirit and abiding in the so-called "Upper Room Discourse" in John 14-16.

**Abiding in Jesus: The vine and the branches.** John 15:1-8 is the passage where the significance of abiding is unpacked for the reader using the metaphor of the

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<sup>160</sup>In the Gospel of John and John's first two epistles, this term occurs 67 times. It occurs only 51 times in the rest of the NT combined.

<sup>161</sup>BDAG, 631, define this term in John as "an inward, personal communion." F. Hauck, "μένω," in *TDNT* 4:576, says the Johannine usage implies that "the relationship of salvation is both enduring and present." K. Munzer, "Remain," in *NIDNTT* 3:226, highlights the dependence of the person upon Christ. "The indwelling Christ, or life through the word of Christ, *demands and forms* a life conforming to his spirit and nature, and wills and brings about sanctification" (emphasis added). The believer is thus wholly dependent upon Christ to remain in the circle of divine giving, but the presence of Christ faithfully and continuously *gives* this gift as He abides in the believer in the person of the Holy Spirit. See also Bultmann, *John*, 535-36.

vine and the branches.<sup>162</sup> The metaphor itself has been the subject of significant discussion, especially as it relates to the meaning of being “in Me [Jesus]” (ἐν ἐμοὶ) and being “taken away” (αἴρει) in verse 2.<sup>163</sup> Regardless of which interpretation one takes on this problem, the main thrust of the passage is the same: believers are called to abide in Jesus. The nature of salvation is such that God expects His people to be joined to Him in vital relationship. The metaphor of the vine and the branches makes this point in a powerful way, but what sort of relationship does Jesus have in mind? He is not a literal vine, and people are not branches, so the analogy can be taken only so far. Viewing this passage through the lens of the gift helps make sense of what kind of relationship Jesus means as well as what it means to be a participant in the divine circle of giving as a finite creature.

Jesus begins by laying out the basic premise: the Father’s aim in joining branches to the vine is fruit (vv. 1-2).<sup>164</sup> The significance of this premise cannot be overstated. The transcendent God who is consistently described as the God who gives is

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<sup>162</sup>Moloney, *John*, 417, is surely correct when he notes, “The outstanding feature of the opening section of 15:1-16:3 is the use of the verb *menein*, ‘abide,’” adding, “The first section of this part of the discourse is not determined by the metaphor of the vine but by the theme of ‘abiding’ across vv. 1-11.” The metaphor of the vine and the branches thus serves the main point of the passage, which is the significance of abiding in Jesus. For various options on the origin and exegesis of John 15, see Fernando F. Segovia, “The Theology and Provenance of John 15:1-17,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101 (1982): 115-28.

<sup>163</sup>For a summary of the possible interpretations, see Gary W. Derickson, “Viticulture and John 15:1-6,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (1996): 35. Derickson interprets the passage to mean that God disciplines unfruitful believers with death. For a defense of other interpretive options, see John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Is Authentic Faith?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 165-72, and Witherington, *John’s Wisdom*, 254-58. J. Carl Laney, “Abiding Is Believing: The Analogy of the Vine in John 15:1-6,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146 (1989): 55-66 and Dillow, “Abiding Is Remaining,” 44-53, have a helpful dialogue over this question. The best position seems to be closest to that of Laney and MacArthur, which interprets the branches that are broken off and burned as false disciples who manifest their true allegiance when they fall away from their profession of faith (cf. 1 John 2:19-20).

<sup>164</sup>The identification of this fruit is uncertain. Is it to be likened to the Pauline fruit of the Spirit in Gal 5:22-23? Or does Jesus have in mind multiplication of disciples through the apostolic mission? With most commentators, it seems preferable to the present writer to leave the nature of the fruit open to both of these options as well as to anything else that the Spirit of God works in the people of God to God’s glory. Whatever holy outcomes are borne from a believer’s abiding relationship with Christ are the kind of “fruit” the Father desires.

now seeking fruitfulness from His people. The Father is so zealous for fruitfulness that He tends every branch to maximize productivity. Some branches are taken up and thrown away (vv. 2, 6), while others are pruned to become more fruitful (v. 2b). Two significant questions arise at this point in the narrative pertaining to the gift. Why does the Father want fruitfulness? And, what distinguishes the branches that bear fruit from those that are cast into the fire? Because God has been repeatedly described as the Giver and His people as the recipients, these questions are significant. It appears that God wants His people to give Him something; moreover, the Father's desire for the gift is so great that terrible consequences are threatened if He does not receive it from His people. Once again, the reader is faced with a dilemma related to the gift. God is described as the Giver, but here He appears to be the ultimate taker, so bent on getting from His people that He pledges to destroy them if they do not produce the fruit He wants from them. To resolve this problem, the gift relationship between God and His people must be understood.

Jesus begins to unpack the Father's mandate for fruitfulness in verse 3 by explaining that the disciples are what they are by virtue of His gift. The disciples are already "clean" (καθαροί). Jesus' play on words indicates that His disciples are not fruitless branches to be thrown away but pruned branches ready to bear more fruit.<sup>165</sup> Their condition as clean branches ready to bear fruit is not their own doing. They have been pruned by means of divine revelation, through the word Jesus has spoken to them. The indication is that the disciples have been rather passive in the process of becoming clean. It has come to them as a divine gift, as the result of the work of God rather than their own effort. The fruitfulness the Father seeks therefore does not and cannot begin with human initiation but only by divine revelation. The finite cannot reach up to the infinite with a gift; only the infinite can condescend to the finite, reveal Himself, and

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<sup>165</sup>Michaels, *John*, 803-4. See also Carson, *John*, 515.

create the conditions necessary for the fruit He desires to grow.

Jesus continues by introducing the concept of abiding for the purpose of fruitfulness in verses 4-5. He commands His disciples to abide in Him.<sup>166</sup> The disciples must therefore respond to Jesus' work of cleansing them by the Word.<sup>167</sup> While they cannot initiate with God, they must respond to His initiation in bringing them into the circle of divine giving. Their response must be continuous, as the nature of abiding demands. Disciples must give their trust and allegiance to Christ at all times.

The difficulty with this command surfaces in verse 5. They are as dependent upon Jesus for fruitfulness as a branch is on the vine. Jesus speaks of their absolute inability to bear fruit apart from His nourishment supplying what they need.<sup>168</sup> Further still, Jesus asserts that His disciples can do *nothing* (οὐδέν) apart from Him. If *nothing* is all encompassing, as it seems Jesus intends it to be and the Evangelist understood it,<sup>169</sup> it would of necessity include the giving of continual trust to Jesus, the abiding faith Jesus requires. The disciples cannot abide in Him on their own, from their own power, or using

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<sup>166</sup>Köstenberger, *John*, 455, highlights the conditional nature of the imperative μέννατε in v. 4. The force is such that Jesus' disciples are obligated to respond to God's gift by continually trusting in the Son for everything they need to bear fruit. The promise is conditioned upon their abiding trust. If they abide (which is commanded), then Jesus will also abide in them in mutual fellowship.

<sup>167</sup>The way a person "abides" in Jesus and His words is cast differently in different parts of the Gospel. The negative introduction to this concept in John 5:38 indicates that the foundational principle of abiding is believing in God, which means believing in His Son. Eating Jesus' flesh and drinking His blood characterizes those who abide in Him, and in the context of John 6, these acts are paralleled with coming to Jesus and believing in Him. Holding fast to the word of Jesus marks out true disciples in John 8:31. Obedience is the requirement for abiding in the immediate context (John 15:10) as well as the last word on the subject in the Gospel. John's first epistle emphasizes the same points in its much more thorough discussion of this concept. In summary, to abide in Jesus is to believe in Him with an enduring trust that leads to obedience to His Word. For a more complete discussion, see Laney, "Abiding Is Believing," 55-66.

<sup>168</sup>The repetition of the opening phrase from v. 1 in v. 5 serves to underscore the significance of Jesus' role as the indispensable vine, upon whom everything depends for His disciples.

<sup>169</sup>Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John*, par. 4494, concurs, "At the same time the words have a wider application. Nothing that really 'is' can be done without the Word, whose activity must not be limited when He has not limited it." Michaels, *John*, 807, sees the disciples' inability to catch any fish until Jesus tells them where to cast their nets as "a dramatic illustration of this pronouncement" (cf. John 21:3).

their own inherent resources. Jesus does not solve this mystery immediately, choosing instead to let the tension remain. Nevertheless, the disciples are called to abide in Jesus, although exactly how they will carry out this command is uncertain.

After reminding His disciples of the terrifying consequences of failing to abide in Him in verse 6, Jesus encouraged His disciples with the blessings that come from remaining in the vine. Those who have this dependent relationship with the vine, who abide in the vine and are nourished by the words of Jesus, are assured that in response they will receive whatever they desire. The qualification of the mutual indwelling of the believer in Jesus and the *words of Jesus* in the believer must not be overlooked. This is not a “blank check” to satisfy any cravings a disciple might feel at any time. The disciples’ requests must be interpreted in the light of the *words of Jesus*, which abide in them. The words of Jesus form a significant sub-theme in John’s Gospel. Jesus speaks the words of God (John 3:34; 8:47; cf. John 5:47). The words of Jesus are the source of life (John 6:63, 68) or condemnation (John 12:47-48), depending on whether one receives them. These words were given to Jesus by the Father, and Jesus in turn gave them to the disciples (John 17:8). The words of Jesus express the will of the Father, and they have been given to the disciples through Jesus. In John 14:10, Jesus connects the words He speaks with the presence of the Father abiding in Him. Since the Father abides in Jesus, what Jesus says does not come from Him but from the Father. Moreover, the words are connected to the works the Father does as He abides in the Son. This context is determinative for understanding the requests of the disciples in John 15:7. Their requests arise from their dependency on Jesus, the vine. They abide in Him, indicating their utter dependence on Jesus giving them resources to keep them alive, much like a vine supplies to the branches. Jesus’ words abide in them, the words the Father gave the Son and the Son gave the disciples. As the disciples depend on the Son, the Son’s words prove effective, eliciting requests from the Father. These requests, then, while coming from the

disciples, are not the disciples' requests in a way that approximates how Jesus' words, though they came out of His mouth, were not His words, but the Father's words. In this sense, the disciples' requests are *given* to them *as* requests, and then the answers are *given* to them as gifts from the Father, who *gives* them their requests as pure gift.

The gift giving relationship is thus perpetuated. Jesus initiates the gift relationship by cleansing His disciples so that they are prepared to be fruitful branches. The disciples then abide in Him and seeking to bear fruit, giving their *given* desires to God through prayer. God then gives the disciples that for which they ask, since their requests arise from the words of Jesus abiding in them and in this way are identified with the desires of the Son, who desires only the will of the Father.<sup>170</sup> Answered prayer then leads to the climax of the lesson of the vine and the branches. When the disciples bear much fruit, the Father receives glory.<sup>171</sup> The passage returns to where it began. The Father seeks fruitfulness. His work takes place among the branches connected to Jesus. Some branches prove fruitless and thus are thrown away and burned; the rest, however, are pruned to become more fruitful. The fruit that ripens to the Father's glory comes through a circle of giving and receiving in which the disciples participate as givers and receivers, but even the disciples giving is *given* to them, so that they are always and ever *dependent* participants in the circle. The nagging question remains as to *how* the disciples abide in Jesus given they can do *nothing* apart from Jesus. To answer that question, the rest of the "Upper Room Discourse" must be considered.

**Abiding in Jesus and the coming Paraclete.** John 14 and 16 serve to comfort

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<sup>170</sup>The verb γενήσεται should be considered a divine passive in function, indicating that it is God who grants the requests of Jesus' disciples as they abide in Him. So Michaels, *John*, 809 n. 38; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 3:102.

<sup>171</sup>For the interpretation of the term δοξάζω as meaning "receive glory" when it is in the passive voice, see the discussion above on John 17:1-2. There it is in the active voice and connotes "give glory."

the disciples in view of Jesus' imminent death, resurrection, and ascension to the Father as well as to give them final instructions for carrying out their mission under these new (and, for the disciples, unexpected) conditions. Jesus spends much of these chapters teaching them about the coming of the Holy Spirit, so that the Spirit becomes the major theme of the farewell teaching.<sup>172</sup> While the Spirit is not mentioned explicitly in John 15:1-8, His presence is the underlying assumption to Jesus' teaching about bearing fruit for God's glory by abiding in Him. John 14 begins with Jesus' and disciples conversing about Jesus' departure and the disciples trying to discern what Jesus means and where He is going. The dialogue becomes a monologue in response to Philip in verse 9. After reminding the disciples of His relationship with the Father, Jesus introduces many of the key themes from John 15:1-10 in verses 12-15, including prayer, glorifying the Father, the disciples accomplishing great works,<sup>173</sup> and love's relationship to obeying Jesus' commands. These significant thematic links set the agenda for Jesus' instructions to the disciples for life following His glorification.

Immediately after laying the foundational elements for life after His departure, Jesus introduces the Holy Spirit as the One who will come in Jesus' place to equip the disciples for their task. Jesus calls the Spirit ἄλλον παράκλητον, a name that has been the subject of much discussion.<sup>174</sup> The Paraclete comes in Jesus' absence, by Jesus' request, and from Jesus' Father. The precise nuance of the meaning of this term is best

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<sup>172</sup>Ridderbos, *John*, 482-83, describes the theme of this discourse as "the *continuing* fellowship of Jesus with his own after he 'goes to the Father'" (emphasis his), noting the close relationship of the Spirit to this theme. In fact, the continuing fellowship Jesus has with His disciples after His return to the Father is made entirely dependent on the coming of the Spirit in this section.

<sup>173</sup>The works are not cast in the form of bearing fruit in this context because the imagery of the vine and branches has not been established yet. The image would have made little sense if introduced here, so the fruit of John 15 is described in terms of works in John 14.

<sup>174</sup>For an introduction to the issues not only with the meaning of the term παράκλητος but with the complications rendering it in English, see G. Braumann, "Advocate, Paraclete, Helper," in *NIDNTT* 1:88-92; F. Porsch, "παράκλητος," in *EDNT* 3:28-29.

discerned by what Jesus describes the Spirit doing to empower the disciples for their mission in His absence. The Spirit comes as a comfort to the disciples, who perhaps might feel as if Jesus has orphaned them (John 14:16-18). He further comes to teach the disciples and to remind them of everything Jesus taught them, guiding them into the truth, relating to them the word of Jesus, and revealing what is to come (John 14:26; 16:13). He testifies to the truth about Jesus (John 15:26) and convicts the world (John 16:8). He ultimately serves to glorify the Son by His work through the disciples (John 16:14).

In the midst of these descriptions of the work of the Spirit, He makes two crucial points for understanding how believers participate in the circle of divine giving. First, Jesus draws a distinction between the disciples and the world in relationship to the gift of the Spirit. In John 14:17, Jesus asserts that the world *cannot receive* (δύναται λαβεῖν) the Spirit because the world does not see or know Him. Jesus again explains that entering and remaining in the circle of divine giving is impossible for the world. The Spirit, as a divine person, is inaccessible to the world. The finite world cannot reach up to the infinite God, *not even to receive from Him*. God must reveal Himself and give the gift of receiving His gifts for the creation to enter into relationship with Him. Participating in the flow of divine giving thus depends wholly on God's gifts. The disciples can receive the Spirit because the Spirit will come to them to abide with and in them. The point of verse 17b is that the disciples know the Spirit because God through Jesus has revealed the Spirit to them by means of *giving* them the Spirit. It is only because of God's work and gift in His Son's death and resurrection that they can receive the Spirit. The Spirit comes to them as gift (cf. John 20:19-23). To underscore this point, Jesus contrasts His giving with the world's giving in John 14:27. Not only can the world not receive from God unless God condescends to give this reception, but the world cannot give as God gives. Worldly giving is unlike divine giving. It is false. It is counterfeit money trying to pass as the real thing. The world cannot give or receive in the true sense of the terms. The world

has no access to the circle of divine giving. The world gives nothing but poison that ends in death, vividly portrayed in the crucifixion of the Giver (John 18:22; 19:3, 30; cf. Ps 69:21).<sup>175</sup>

The implication of the contrast between the disciples and the world is that the disciples are brought into the circle of divine giving as something other than “the world.” They are taken out of the world (John 17:14, 16), not physically, but spiritually, because they participate in the life of God through the Son and the Spirit. Through the divine gifts, the disciples receive from God, trusting in His Son. Not only do they experience His gifts, but, because the Spirit abides in them, they also remain in the divine circle of giving. Through the Spirit’s presence and work, they become participants in the circle of divine giving.

Second, Jesus explains that the participation of the disciples in the circle of divine giving circles back to God’s glory through God’s work and God’s gift. I argued previously that God gave His Son to those who believe for their salvation. After the death and resurrection of the Son, the Father and the Son gave the disciples the Spirit to abide in them (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). The first half of the circle can be described as God giving gifts to His people as the Father gives His Son to His people, and the Father and the Son give them the Spirit following the Son’s glorification. The circle then returns from the Spirit to the Father. The gift of the Spirit is given to give glory to the Son in relationship to the disciples. The Spirit gives glory to Christ as the Spirit receives from Christ and discloses (gives) what He receives to the disciples (John 16:14). As the Spirit gives to the disciples, the Son receives glory. As they hear the Spirit speak, they recognize that the Spirit speaks only what He has received from the Son and passed on to them. Christ, as the divine giver, receives the glory from the work and gift of the Spirit as the Spirit gives to the disciples. As the circle returns to the Son and then to the Father, the

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<sup>175</sup>Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 3:283-84.

linear nature of divine giving is maintained, indicating that the gift is circular. The persons of the Trinity only give to one another by giving to God's people through the revelation of Jesus.

The circle makes its way back to the Father as the Son's work and gift gives the Father glory. The Son gives to the disciples whatever they ask so that the Father receives glory in the Son (John 14:13). The disciples once again serve as channels for divine glory through their prayers, which are given to the disciples as the Spirit abides within them so that they abide in the Son. The Father receives glory from the Son through the prayers of the disciples and the Son's answers to their prayers, specifically in His answer of giving the Holy Spirit. God, therefore, gives to His people, but He doesn't receive glory from His people but from Himself. His giving is the beginning, middle, and end of the gift.

**Summary.** The disciples become participants in divine giving, being elevated out of worldly giving and receiving by the Spirit so that they might participate in the life of God, including God's giving and receiving. However, as the disciples participate in the circle of divine giving, they always do so as dependent participants. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit participate in the circle of divine giving as equals who, because of their deity, can give to and receive from one another by nature. The disciples participate not as equals but as those always dependent upon God's gift for their participation. They cannot even receive from God apart from God condescending to give them the gift of receiving His gifts. Nevertheless, once God has brought His people into the circle of divine giving through the Son's offering of Himself and the Spirit's quickening power, they remain in the circle by virtue of the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the source of God's constant gifts to His people and their continual reception of those gifts as they abide in Christ. What was impossible has become possible because God has made it possible. God does not receive glory from men. But the Spirit gives God glory through men by the

Spirit's work and gift. The presence of the Spirit in a person is the only way any person might give glory to God, yet even this is God's gift to man.

### **John 20:19-23**

The final teaching concerning the gift in John's Gospel takes place as Jesus fulfills His promise to give the disciples the Spirit in John 20:19-23.<sup>176</sup> Jesus links His giving of the Spirit with His earlier promise of the Spirit in John 14 through the greeting, "Peace be with you" (cf. John 14:26-27).<sup>177</sup> Jesus comes with His peace and Spirit to give the disciples the gift they need to abide in Him and fulfill their mission as Jesus sends them into the world. What is most telling in this passage is the picture of the bestowal of the gift. In verse 22, John says, "And after He said this, He breathed and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." The command λάβετε is strange given the sequence of events. How can a person obey the command to receive the Holy Spirit? A similar difficulty is seen here to what was observed in John 15 with the command to abide in Jesus despite the fact that the disciples can do nothing on their own. Is it conceivable that the disciples might have or even could have refused to receive this gift? It seems unlikely.<sup>178</sup>

This final scene is illustrative of all that has been described in this chapter. The

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<sup>176</sup>Whether the Spirit was given at this precise moment or at Pentecost is immaterial to the point of this discussion. For a detailed study on this question, see Russell Dale Quinn, "Expectation and Fulfillment of the Gift of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010).

<sup>177</sup>Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 3:323, notes the repetition of the greeting in v. 21. See also Carson, *John*, 647; Michaels, *John*, 1008; Morris, *John*, 745.

<sup>178</sup>It seems even more unlikely in light of Acts 2 and the events at Pentecost, where the disciples are sitting in a room when the Spirit rushes upon them and empowers them. Their reception of the Spirit in that context was not something to which they consented; it simply happened when God determined it would happen. Carson, *John*, 649-55, argues that the giving of the Spirit here was a parabolic act that foreshadowed the giving in Acts 2 because the reception of the Spirit here did not change the disciples like it did in Acts. If Carson is correct, the idea that the disciples had any control over receiving the gift becomes impossible. They had no control over Jesus' appearing in the room to impart the gift, and they had no control over when the gift would appear.

Lord initiates with the disciples, who are locked inside a room “for fear of the Jews” (John 20:19 NASB). Jesus appears to them and gives them His peace and shows them the scars He received during His crucifixion. Jesus then commissions the disciples to go into the world in like manner as the Father sent Him. The image of bearing fruit is not used here, but the principle is the same. Even as Jesus was sent into the world to give glory to God by bearing much fruit (cf. John 12:24-25), so the disciples are sent to glorify God by bearing much fruit (cf. John 15:8). The commission requires a communion with God that the disciples have been promised but have not yet received, so Jesus commissions them with the Holy Spirit. The giving of the Spirit is the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise that He would abide in them and be with them forever through the Paraclete He would send. The disciples are to respond to Jesus’ gift. That is, they are to remain in the circle of divine giving. They are to receive the Spirit. Their reception, while real, is not something actively done. Jesus gives them the Spirit and they receive the Spirit by a divine work and gift. Entering into the circle of divine giving is thus initiated by Jesus as He comes to them while they are locked away in fear, and remaining in the circle is the result of divine giving as Jesus gives the Holy Spirit so they might abide in Him and do the works that will bring glory to the Father. Through the giving and receiving of the Spirit, the disciples’ ability to remain in the circle of divine giving is realized. God has given them the gift that works within them so that the Father might be glorified.

### **Summary**

This chapter has argued that God, the unilateral and exhaustive Giver, is also a circular Giver. Such a statement is absurd in almost any context, but what makes it possible for God is His triune nature. God acts as a circular Giver among the persons of the Trinity. The Gospel of John explores this relationship from different perspectives as it presents the giving and receiving that take place between the Father and the Son. Divine giving between the Father and the Son is like human giving in some ways (John 6:37-40),

but it is also unlike human giving (John 5:19-29, 36). At a basic level, the concepts are familiar to us, but when giving occurs between the Father and the Son, it breaks apart normal human thinking about giving because of its transcendence. Not only this, but the circle of divine giving takes place in the perfect balance of unity and distinction (John 10:29). This unity and distinction exists in a relationship of love. Love is what motivates the Deity's desire rather than rivalry, need, or selfish craving. The Father and the Son give genuine gifts to one another and receive from one another as two perfect divine persons existing within a relationship of unified love.

The Trinitarian nature of divine giving encompasses the Spirit as well. When the Spirit is considered in the circle of divine giving, the way humanity becomes part of the circle becomes clear. The vision of the valley of dry bones from Ezekiel 37 formed the backdrop of the discussion of John 5 and 6, as the word of the Lord and the Spirit of the Lord work within a person to bring him to life and create within him the response God commands. The dead are made alive by the Word and the Spirit. Life is a gift, and the Spirit is the one who gives life and brings the creature into the circle of divine giving. While the Spirit is the one creating the response, the response of the believer must be taken seriously so that the person *really does respond to God's gifts* and becomes part of the flow of divine giving. The response itself is a gift from God (to the human recipient) and to God (from the divine Giver), in what might be called circular giving. It is God's Trinitarian nature that makes sense of this difficult puzzle.

Finally, the Spirit is the divine person whom the Father and the Son send to be with Jesus' disciples so that they might not only enter the circle of divine giving as dependent participants but also remain in the circle. Through the work and gift of the Spirit, the disciple bears fruit that gives glory to God. The circle of divine giving has come to the Father, who initiates all gifts, in bringing glory to Him. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit give and work, so that the people that belong to God might join with God

in experiencing the wonder of participating in the circle of divine giving.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND CHALLENGES

Throughout this study, the gift has been discussed, described, debated, deconstructed, and exegetically reconstructed. One rather startling omission is that the gift has not been *defined*. The meaning of the gift has been delayed as we have attempted to think the Giver before the gift. Jesus' words in John 14:27 reveal that the hand of the one "giving" either creates or destroys the gift. The gift cannot be thought apart from the Giver, for without a Giver, there is no gift. Now, having sought to establish that God is a unilateral, exhaustive, circular (by means of linearity) Giver, we are in better position to define gift.

What is a gift? What appears to be a simple question is in actuality rather complex. Several factors emerge when this question is considered, but perhaps the most important question of all is the epistemological question: How do we know that such a thing as a gift exists at all, and if it does, then who or what has the prerogative of defining it? Only once the answers to these questions have been determined can the gift (if there is any) be defined. Perhaps the greatest weakness in the many answers to the deconstructionists' challenge of a Christian theology of the gift is the failure to engage this basic epistemological question satisfactorily. Several answers may be and have been given to this foundational question.

A gift might be determined and defined by the cultural practices surrounding any particular people group or culture. That is to say, a gift might be culturally determined. In this case, *the* gift is meaningless. A culturally determined meaning is limited in its applicability to one particular culture. Furthermore, the meaning of *gift* is subject to change as the culture that determines its meaning evolves. In this scenario, the

term *gift* is vacuous, serving only as a label at a point in time to describe certain things (or a certain thing) done by certain people (or a certain person) in a particular cultural context (or contexts).

Another approach toward understanding the concept of the gift is to define it from a legal perspective. In a sense, the legal basis for understanding the gift is not much different from the cultural perspective. The cultural perspective is simply more informal. The legal definition of a gift is important for civilized cultures because of the legal ramifications involved in the transfer of property from one person or entity to another. Typically, a legal definition of the gift is not concerned with such philosophical concerns as the self-congratulatory motives of a particular donor or if gratitude on the part of the donee nullifies the gift. To the contrary, in American culture it is customary to appeal to the pride or desires of potential donors to induce them to “give” to charities or to help various causes. In the eyes of American law, the concern is not whether someone felt better about himself because he donated a car to help the needy, but whether a person had the intent to transfer goods to another entity without remuneration and whether the transfer was duly accepted by the donee. For societies to function justly, perhaps this limited concept of the gift is all that is required. However, it seems to fall short of solving the existential angst the gift causes so many, and it does not begin to address the philosophical concerns raised by the notion of the gift.

Neither of these solutions is satisfactory for determining if the gift exists in itself and, if it does, *who* defines what it is<sup>1</sup> and *what* that definition actually is.<sup>2</sup> All these solutions offer is a label on a pattern of behavior either for sociological or legal purposes. Another option in trying to define the gift is linguistic analysis. In other words, is there a

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<sup>1</sup>The question of authority to determine meaning is what is at issue here.

<sup>2</sup>This concern is distinct from the question of authority. This question is one of the actual definition of the gift as the one with the authority to define it has defined it.

shared meaning of the terminology related to how cultures conceive of giving? This sort of attempt to define the gift is more abstract, but it moves past the limitations of cultural labels to find some kind of transcendent (yet still thoroughly immanent) meaning that spans every culture. Using this kind of analysis someone like Derrida can deconstruct the gift and phase it, for all intents and purposes, out of existence. The process of negating the gift is simple. Simply identify what people *say* and show how what they *do* contradicts it. Show how this spans cultures so that the contradiction inherent in the linguistic versus the phenomenal is exposed. Declare that the gift is worse than dead, because it never existed in the first place, and what is called gift is actually poison. The gift is a figment of human imagination, at best a prop for the human ego and at worst a tool to manipulate, dominate, and oppress others. While this is undoubtedly an oversimplification of Derrida's work, it is a fair representation of his method and the method of others who reject the notion of gift as something aneconomic.

The basic problem with Derrida's philosophical method is it lacks any authority or basis for its claims. Its epistemological starting point is dubious. To show that human beings say one thing but do another in regard to giving gifts is not to reject the possibility of the gift but to prove the hypocritical nature of humanity. The observation that no one to Derrida's knowledge has given a gift successfully within the framework of what that person claims he is doing in giving a gift only proves that Derrida has never empirically experienced someone giving a gift to another. Nevertheless, by Derrida's own standard this reasoning is fraught with insurmountable difficulties. Perhaps someone *has given* a gift to Derrida, and he simply does not know it.<sup>3</sup> Or, could it be that someone has given a gift to Derrida but he denies it, acting in a manner consistent with those whom he criticizes for saying one thing but doing another to hide the truth?

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<sup>3</sup>Such an occurrence would nearly satisfy his requirements for the gift.

At this point is the crux of the debate over the gift. Derrida and others go to great lengths to define the gift without giving a reasonable argument for why their definition of the gift is valid. In other words, why should anyone, including the present writer, assume that Derrida's definition of the gift is accurate, authoritative, and legitimate? On whose authority does Derrida come to his understanding of the meaning of the gift? Since Derrida does not address this question in his writings on the gift, it is impossible to know how he would answer this particular question. The "gift" takes on a similar stature to Kant's categorical imperative, as if it is something everyone knows by reason.<sup>4</sup> Derrida would shudder at the thought. The inconsistency is unavoidable in an immanent universe without authoritative revelation. The gift, like everything else, is reduced to absurdity.

Christian theologians and philosophers cannot play on the deconstructionists' playground. *Their playground doesn't exist.* The problem is not that the gift is the impossible; the problem is that the world in which the gift is the impossible is the impossible. To reason from such a world back to God is to stack the deck against God. That kind of reasoning predetermines what God is like (or not like) based on finite creatures, or it denies the reality of God altogether. It is to reason from the creature to the Creator, but the finite cannot ascend the infinite. The impassable divide from the finite to the infinite is only impassable for the finite creature. God can condescend to His creatures to reveal Himself to them. The Christian contention is that God has done just

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<sup>4</sup>Derrida, *The Gift of Death & Literature in Secret*, 67-68, could not be more Kantian when he writes, "The other as absolute other, namely God, must remain transcendent, hidden, secret, jealous of the love, requests, and commands that he gives and that he asks to be kept secret." A central tenet of the Christian faith, if not the central tenet, is that the transcendent God does not keep Himself secret but *reveals Himself through the incarnation of the Son of God, who was crucified and raised from the dead.* In a way not fully explicable by human beings, the transcendent, infinite, eternal God, enters the immanent universe in His Son, in the flesh and blood of a human being, living (and dying and rising) in space and time. This fundamental confession of Christianity must be the foundation of knowing the gift, as the preceding chapters have sought to demonstrate.

that. God has revealed Himself to humanity in what He has made and through His Word.<sup>5</sup> As image bearers, we reflect who God is, but because we are fallen image bearers, our reflection of God is marred. In the realm of the gift, this plays out as people imitate God in their attempts to “give,” but human giving is always corrupted by sin. Therefore, when deconstructionists assail the gift, the Christian response is that they are assailing the corrupted gift. At this level, there is great agreement and common ground between the Christian and the deconstructionist. The Christian argument, though, must go further and assert that the corrupted gift is not the entire story. Immanent giving is corrupted by sin; therefore, the only way to understand the gift is through divine revelation that speaks to, reproves, and restores the gift through God’s condescension in His Son. Human giving on a horizontal plane cannot be used to define *the* gift. We must begin with God and His Word to understand the gift in itself as gift, not corrupted, but pure.<sup>6</sup> In this context, not only can we make progress in understanding the gift but also in bearing fruit for God’s glory in horizontal giving.

The present work has attempted to answer the challenges put to the gift not in terms of the presuppositions, definitions, and assumptions of the challengers, but in the light of the Word of God by exegeting the Gospel of John. While this methodology will not be convincing to many of those who disagree with the conclusions of this study, a Christian epistemology demands such a procedure when seeking to solve theological questions.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>For a fuller explanation of this problem, especially as it relates to Kantian philosophy, see K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 57-86.

<sup>6</sup>The epistemological problem raised here deserves detailed treatment in the context of the gift. While space does not permit such treatment here, it is fertile soil for further work on a theology of the gift.

<sup>7</sup>For a defense of this claim, see K. Scott Oliphint, *God with Us: Divine Condescension and the Attributes of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

## Conclusions

Having established Christian presuppositions about basic epistemological concerns, it is finally possible to define the gift. After examining dozens of passages in the Gospel of John concerning God and His gifts, especially His gift of salvation, the following definition of gift is given: A gift is given when a person, motivated solely by holy love, freely gives something to another person. Holy love is the love that exists among the divine persons because God *is* love. God does not love because He stands to gain something from loving; He loves because He is love (1 John 4:8). His gifts, therefore, are motivated by His nature as love, not by any desire within God to meet His needs. God is *a se*. He has no needs to meet. He gives to give, not to receive.

This definition can be seen woven throughout the discussion of the body of this work. In chapter 2, several passages in John point to God as a unilateral giver of His gifts. That is, God does not give and receive. God gives and gives. Divine giving to humanity is not a partnership or an exchange. God's holy love that motivates His giving is the foundation of unilateral giving. If God gave so that He might meet some personal need within the deity, He would not give unilaterally. However, the gifts of grace, light, and life all demonstrate that God gives unilaterally and that humanity is in the position of absolute recipient of God's gifts.

God not only gives unilaterally, but, as chapter 3 discussed, God gives exhaustively. To understand this, we focused on the gift of salvation. Salvation is the deliverance of people from condemnation, which results in death, unto eternal life. The Father does not give salvation directly but through His Son. In this sense, the gift of God to humanity is not salvation *per se* but the gift of His Son. When God gives His Son, He is not giving in a way that can be experienced in horizontal giving because God is giving exhaustively. The giving of the Son is the giving of God Himself, which means that it is the gift of everything. It is an exhaustive giving, and an exhaustive giving can bear no return gift for it gives *everything*. God's motivation for giving is His holy love for His

people, which knows no bounds. When God gives salvation, He gives Himself. He gives exhaustively.

Finally, in chapter 4, I examined the passages in John that discuss God's giving as circular (or, circular). The foundation for God's circular giving is Trinitarian. God as three persons has an eternal, holy relationship of giving within Himself. The Father and the Son give to and receive from one another as divine persons with a holy love for one another. Their giving might be described as a divine circle of giving. The Father gives to the Son, and the Son receives the Father's gifts. In receiving the Father's gifts, which results in giving the Father's gifts to His people, the Son gives glory to the Father, which the Father receives. It is not fitting to call this a divine circle of *exchange* because neither the Father nor the Son give to get. They give because they love one another. They give because they love their people. They give to give, which is why it is best viewed as a circle of *giving* rather than *exchange*. Paradoxically, since God's circular giving is only accomplished through linearity, reciprocity is not present. Trinitarian giving is therefore utterly aneconomic.

When the Spirit's participation in the circle of divine giving is considered, it becomes clear how divine giving impacts humanity. God brings people into the circle of divine giving through the gift and the work of the Spirit. While humanity in its natural state rejects the gift and seeks exchange, to do the work of God, only God can do the work of God. Moreover, God does His work through the Spirit and gives His work as a gift to His people. The Spirit is the Father's agent in drawing people to the Son, and the Spirit is the Son's agent in giving life to those the Father has given Him when His word comes to their dead ears. Humanity is given the gift of faith through the work and gift of the Spirit. Furthermore, the believer's participation in the divine circle of giving is maintained and sustained by the gift of the Spirit. Like a branch must remain in a vine to maintain life, so believers must abide in the Son. The problem is that believers have no

inherent ability to do this or anything else apart from Christ's power, which is given to them in the gift of the Spirit. Through the Spirit and His abiding in the disciples, the disciples abide in the Son. As they abide in the Son and His words abide in them, their prayers, which echo the Son's words given to them, are answered. God gives them what they need and is glorified by the fruit they bear through the indwelling Spirit. The circle is complete (and yet, as circle, never-ending) so that the Father gives the Son, and the Father and the Son give the Spirit. The Spirit creates and sustains (gives) life in Jesus' disciples, giving glory to Jesus. As the Son is glorified through the disciples, who prove to be His disciples by bearing fruit, the Father receives glory. Once Jesus' disciples have entered the circle of divine giving, they remain in the circle, participating in the life of God through the work and gift of the Spirit.

All of divine giving is motivated by God's holy love, whether His giving occurs within the Trinity or whether it brings humanity into the circle of divine giving. Even God's gift of the Son is motivated by His love for the world (John 3:16), a holy love that loves because God is love. The final explanation for the divine gifts is the mystery of the love of God, a holy love that, like the gift, humanity has corrupted in its own expressions of love as fallen creatures, but also that, like the gift, God aims to restore and redeem within His people (John 13:34).

### **Challenges**

The focus of this dissertation has been to prove from Scripture, specifically the Gospel of John, that God's gift of salvation in Jesus is a genuine gift rather than counterfeit money. The contrasts could not be more striking. God's gift is genuine in that it is what it appears to be, without dissimulation. God's gift is a gift, freely given for the good of the one to whom God gives. Counterfeit money, on the other hand, is a fiction, purporting to be what it is not. It purports to be *money*, which is inextricably linked to economy. God's gifts are aneconomic and genuine expressions of love. But even with

these foundational elements in place, several challenges remain for the Christian theologian wrestling with the topic of the gift. Three challenges in particular present opportunity for further engagement and fruitful study.

First, a theology of the gift is incomplete without taking into account the humanity of the Son of God from the incarnation to eternity. While the Son was God, lacking nothing of the divine nature even in His humiliation, treating Him as though He were only divine and not human fails to account for how His humanity and His deity came into play in giving and receiving. To understand more fully how divine and human giving interface, the human nature of the Son needs to be discussed. Thus, an incarnational theology of the gift is a necessary next step to the present study.

Another challenge this study presents is developing the ethical implications of a Johannine understanding of the gift. The present work is concerned to deal primarily with giving as it relates to God's relationship with human beings. The question remains, however, what God's giving to humanity means for humanity giving to one another. How can finite, needy, fallen people truly *give*? And how can Jesus' disciples *receive* from others whose giving is corrupted by sin? What are the implications of a theology of the gift for interacting with a fallen world, even a world where most of the people with whom we interact are spiritually dead and do not hear the voice of the Good Shepherd? The principles developed in this study need to be developed further to answer these questions.

Finally, a theological harmonization of the gift with the biblical doctrine of God needs to be completed. God relates to humanity as giver, as this work has labored to show, but that is not the *only* way God relates to His creatures. Even in this dissertation, we have seen how God is Judge, Healer, Creator, and Sovereign Lord over His creation. Moreover, God is the God who enters into covenants with His people and relates to His people covenantally. What is the connection, if any, between God's various covenants and His gifts? One pitfall of the present study is that, in focusing on the gift, some might

construe it to mean that everything God does, says, or requires is based upon the gift. Such a view of God simply is not compatible with the biblical data. Much of the confusion over God's demands as corruptions of God's gift arises because the doctrine of God and the theology of the gift have not been harmonized or seen working in tandem. God's nature as Giver is not opposed to His nature as Judge or as Sovereign Lord of creation. The way these are compatible needs to be explored.

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## ABSTRACT

### COUNTERFEIT MONEY OR GENUINE GIFT? GIFT, GIVING, AND SALVATION IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

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This dissertation studies the concept of gift in the Gospel of John, especially as it relates to God's gift of salvation to humanity. Chapter 1 defines the problem of the gift both for New Testament studies as well as philosophy and sociology. In light of the discussion of the gift historically and in contemporary scholarship, and in view of the biblical text of the Gospel of John, chapter 1 presents the thesis that the Fourth Gospel describes salvation as a gift rather than an economic exchange.

Chapter 2 argues that the Fourth Gospel presents God as a unilateral giver. The foundation for this argument is the Prologue of John's Gospel, which sets forth creation, light, life, and grace as unilateral gifts of God. When the Gospel of John discusses these gifts, it insists that when God gives them, He receives nothing in return from the recipients.

Chapter 3 narrows the focus to God's gift of salvation. It begins by defining salvation in Johannine terms. When John's terminology for salvation is examined, it becomes clear that salvation means nothing less than deliverance from the condemnation that results from sin unto eternal life. Salvation is tied to God's gift of His Son. Indeed, salvation is given in the gift of the Son. The gift of the Son, however, is a transcendent gift wherein God gives to humanity exhaustively.

Chapter 4 discusses the role of the recipients in the giving and receiving when

the giver is God, who gives unilaterally and transcendently. The role of human donees must be viewed within a Johannine concept of Trinitarian giving. The triune nature of divine giving and God's gift of the Spirit to His people present an aneconomic model of giving.

Chapter 5 summarizes the main arguments of the dissertation, focusing on the epistemological presuppositions requisite to understand the gift and offering a definition of gift. It also notes remaining challenges that need to be addressed in future studies on the gift in the context of Christian theology.

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