Part 2

**The Main Actors in the Message of the Evangelist**

*Introduction*

The message in John’s narrative of Jesus’ Ministry presents the view that as a self-evident truth the identities of Jesus and His Father, our God, are intertwined. Nonetheless he also provides episodes in which he shows Jesus is human. If Jesus is human how could he also be a non-human God? In resolving this dilemma John’s strategy appears to be that he makes his readers see who God is through the human life of Jesus. Within this context, he presents Jesus as a perfect representation of God such that in the way He spoke and acted Jesus shows us that God is Love and that Love is the essential characteristic of God’s Nature. Therefore an unbeliever’s common image of God as an unfair tyrant is not the way He is presented in the bible.

How then did this false understanding arise? Was it from interpreting the wars and hostilities described in the older section of the Christian bible, the Old Testament, as God-sanctioned violence? Was it from an age-old animosity towards organized religion? Regardless of its origin, any perception of God as being anything other than a God of love indicates a lack of knowledge of the prevailing biblical view. In another of his Books the Evangelist explains the bible’s position as follows: “… God is love, and anyone who lives in love lives in God, and God lives in that person” (1 John 4:16); “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.” (1 John 4:8)

John, a disciple close to Jesus, leaves no doubt in his Gospel that Jesus’ behavior shows the Character of God to be Love and that for His Creation became paramount to God and forced Him to grant Salvation rather than the logical destruction called for by human rebellion against Him. No human judge would find rebels guilty of insurrection deserving the death penalty and instead invite them home for the best time they have ever had. This is how the Evangelist portrays the Christian God through the Life of Jesus. He also showed us how important that same quality is for those who are His followers. Jesus tells us it is critical for our relationship with one another to exhibit the same love that He has shown for us. An equally important logical consequence of this mutual affection is a community united with a common purpose of reflecting to unbelievers and each other the wonderful qualities our God possesses.

As one reads through the Gospel of John, it becomes clear that Jesus’ representation of God to the world is that He is Non-discriminatory, Inclusive rather than exclusive and accepting instead of rejecting. John shows these qualities in Jesus’ typical behavior to those who were marginalized by the society around Him. In Jesus we experience God’s Desire for us to trust and have faith in Him. Once a person has been exposed to Him, believing in Him becomes the jumping off point into, and the foundation of, a closer relationship in which the believer is enabled to recognize that everything He says and does makes sense. As such the believer can respond to the ups and downs of life with trust in a loving God’s knowledge of “the big picture”. This comfortable assurance is the ultimate condition for continued inner peace, peace among people and mass unity. Several themes emerge from John’s message relating to the roles played by the main actors in this narrative of how God reached out to mankind, His beloved Creation:

**God**

God is the lead Actor and is present in the narrative from beginning to end. According to John’s Gospel, before anything was ever created God recognized the need to provide the world with His Light so we will be able to find our way to Him. He made this Plan a major priority with Himself directing its unfolding all the way through Jesus’ Ministry (1:18, 1:30; 10:30; 11:40; 12:28; 14:11; 18:5-8). Clearly bringing about reconciliation with mankind was of paramount importance to our Creator. Here already we see a God Who loves and wants mankind to be with Him; consequently He cares about what happens to us. Otherwise why would He set such a Plan in action – choosing to pay the debt we owe Him? Indeed this is a God I can trust to watch my back. In the way the Evangelist narrates how Jesus came to be in the picture he provides a very good reason to feel comfortable with and believe in this kind of God.

Given that this God loves and cares about people one needs to find out why it sometimes appears that His behavior is inconsistent with that of a loving God. If one encounters such an inconsistency another very close relationships how would one address it? For example if in a supposedly loving marriage a spouse chooses to aggravate a hurt or seems to act in a cruel manner, the distressed spouse would normally try to analyze the behavior or the situation to “find an answer”, which explains it. If none were evident the next logical step would be to broach the issue with the other. Fully convinced of shared love and with the knowledge that by nature their spouse is a loving person, an unsatisfactory response or one still not understood likely be chalked up to something like: “Since not every behavior will make sense, for the sake of the relationship or my peace of mind I need to let that issue go and move on”.

The point here is that fundamentally it is trust in the other and a commitment to our relationship that guides the situation not the thoughts or feelings about a particular problem within the relationship. In the same way when God’s action or statement seems to contradict my understanding of His Nature of Love I try to reason it through and failing, I “ask” Him through prayer and/or study Scripture to find an answer. Depending on the significance of the bewildering issue I may also seek the wisdom or expertise of a theologically qualified individual, such as a pastor. If I’m still not any more enlightened most likely trust in God would lead me to decide to move on in much the same way as in a marriage to which one is committed. This keeps the relationship intact.

Because the Evangelist presents a God Who loves me dearly I can accept His intentions are good although sometimes I may wonder about His specific Actions. In addition I am aware that my God is all-knowing and all-powerful, which make His view of the big picture superior to my limited understanding of an individual experience.

*God’s Love in Action*

So having initiated the process to win us back because of His Love He stayed personally involved teaching along the way, how to interpret His Words and Actions. John’s record of Jesus’ Ministry shows us that our Salvation was anticipated far back in OT history and how those events were meant to point to His redemptive intentions in Christ (1:23, 5:39, 46; 12:16, 38-41; 13:18; 15:25; 19:24, 36-37; 20:9). And quite early in the Gospel the Evangelist presents Jesus acting like God Himself in the story of Turning Water into Wine at a wedding feast in the village of Cana in the region of Galilee. According to John Jesus continued to portray God in action throughout His Ministry, in part using miracles, which John calls “signs”. The Evangelist however chooses only seven of His many miracles to provide evidence that Jesus is like His Father. Early enough in his narrative the Evangelist makes us aware that God’s Actions through Jesus are done in concert with the Holy Spirit (1:32-34; 20:22). So we learn it is the Trinity Who puts the Salvation Plan into action. Also God’s Presence is noted whenever the Person of Jesus is linked with or recognized as the Messiah or Emissary of God; for then it is understood that God is behind that action or event (1:14:25-26, 42; 7:41; 8:54; 9; 22-23, 32-33; 11:27; 12:12-16; 20:31).

In presenting the close relationship between Jesus and His Father the Evangelist makes us understand that God has to be present in Jesus’ actions and in the events that mark His divinity (5:17; 6:14, 29, 33-34; 8:29). Whenever Jesus escaped or avoided being captured by those hostile to His Message a hidden subtext tells the reader that His Father was there protecting Him (7:30, 44; 8:20). John shows God takes charge also by providing the Script from which Jesus did the Work of salvation (3:34-35; 5:19-20, 30, 36; 7:16; 8:26, 40; 6:65; 10:18; 12:49-50; 14:10, 24; 17:8)

John’s description of God’s Salvation Plan shows that for God this objective is a major priority, with Himself as the Director and the main Actor; and along with Jesus and the Holy Spirit He has remained continually present and available to the believer. According to John this is a reality the believer can expect to experience; namely that God is always present in your life guiding and helping regardless of how your circumstances may appear to you (14:18). Moreover sometimes He will show up when our dire situation seems hopeless as in the case of many whom He healed when they least expected to be (5:7-8). This presentation of the strong desire of the Christian God and His caring for all of us is touching, comforting and reassuring. It has helped me to see through the, sometimes, heinous crimes and misguided actions of so-called Christians to recognize a loving God Who did not intend for these unacceptable and sometimes repugnant or even ruinous behaviors to happen. Now I cannot be sanctimonious about my own behavior, at any age, which unbeknownst to me may have injured others. Holding others to account seems much easier than applying stringent judgment on ourselves. Against God’s standards all human beings are untrustworthy. John wrote:

“*Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.*” (2:23-25)

(In paraphrase: “Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many of the people accepted His divine Authority after they witnessed the miraculous signs He performed there; but Jesus knew better than to put weight on what people profess; for one thing He did not need human commendation being familiar with people’s untrustworthy ways”).

The lesson here is that God knows not to depend on human faith or their witness (5:34); neither should we. In our case completely trusting someone because of their position in the Church may prove to be a big mistake. In many situations however, becoming a victim may be unavoidable. Nonetheless God teaches us to be forgiving of others (Luke 11:4) as we expect Him to be to us, which He is (8:1-11); great, since we are not and never will be perfect. And so I continue to believe in this God Who loves all of us, regardless. Be aware though, there is an exception to the things for which He grants forgiveness. Jesus says:

“*Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation*” (Mark 3:28-29).

(In paraphrase: “Take seriously what I’m about say: All other sins people commit are forgivable; but uttering threats or cursing God’s Spirit, His very Breath in you, is absolutely unforgivable”).

**Jesus**

Right from the start of his Gospel account John introduced us to the ancient and close relationship between Jesus and God where he describes Jesus as the Living Utterance of God Who has always been with God and shares the same divine Nature with God (1:1-2). A modern figure of speech may describe Jesus as a “spitting image” or perfect likeness of God. Such was the basis of their closeness that God confidently gave Jesus full authority to act on His behalf (1:12-13) in this world; and their intimacy is such that to reject the Son arouses the Anger of the Father whereas giving Him allegiance brings the Father’s Acclaim (3:35-36; 10:17-18, 29-30, 36; 13:31-32; 14:6-7, 10-11, 21, 31; 15:9-10, 23; 16:15, 27).

God gave Him the tools and resources to function successfully in this Role (1:14, 18, 32; 17:7). In the carefully chosen seven miracles, which John presents and calls Signs of Jesus in the role of a divine Actor, we are made to recognize that only God or Someone like God can do them. A child who shows such likeness would fill any parent with pride, especially a Jewish father’s son in Jesus’ time. This kind of son could represent the family honorably, showing their best qualities (2:1-11; 4:46-54; 5:1-18; 6:5-14; 6:16-21; 9:1-7; 10:32; 11: 1-45; 12:44-45, 47-48; 17:4, 25-26; 18:8). This is a child who has stayed particularly close to his father, respects and loves his parents and therefore learned well the family values and message to be presented to the outside world (6:27, 29; 8:28-29, 38). In that regard Jesus functioned flawlessly.

In the spiritual cosmic realm however, these characteristics are completely opposite to the behavior and fate of Lucifer, an estranged member of the family, once the Morning Star (Isaiah 14:12-15). Jesus always shows that obedience to His Father is of prime concern and a guiding principle in His Ministry. The Love and closeness between God and Him and His obedience to His Father are displayed not only in His sticking with the Instructions from God but also extends to patterning His Behavior after His Father’s (4:34; 5:20-23). Satan in contrast, hated God and contrived a plan to usurp God’s position, was disobedient, a liar (untrustworthy) and arch Tempter of the human race, away from God’s Salvation.

*Jesus’ Unique Role*

In the present-day Western world children are for the most part treated equally in the family. Therefore even today those living outside the Middle East may not truly appreciate significance of a son let alone a first-born in that part of the world. The important position in the family of a first-born son has roots that go far into the history of the ancient Middle East. And even more special is a son who is a one and only child. In the Old Testament stories that reflect life in Israel in those days, the firstborn son was the one who normally received double of the inheritance given to the children. He also inherited his father’s role as head of the family, when he passed. Such a status required a character that would preserve the family’s good name.

This is the role the Jewish readers of John’s Gospel would recognize in the Person of Jesus. This background information allowed me to understand more fully the great value of Jesus to God. Moreover He is God’s One and Only Son! Because this privileged role was socially endorsed for all first-born sons, it was their special characteristics that would distinguish one son from the other. In the case of Jesus it was His absolute Love for and Obedience to His Father that humans cannot have for their fathers. Even today these qualities are the most sought-after by parents and Jesus exemplified them admirably. Now who would not want a child like that? I believe it is a dream of most parents to have a child who is always unquestionably obedient and shows a deep love for them.

The Evangelist shows us that with these attributes Jesus was incomparable as a Son. As such it is astounding to me that God offered this gem of a Son to be killed because that was the only way He could bring mankind back into His Family, following our going astray at the Fall. Jesus said (3:15): “… even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life”. “Lifted up” means: “raised up on the cross”. I grasp more fully that the reason the Evangelist records this Message is likely to assure us that Jesus’ crucifixion was further evidence of God’s Constant Loving Nature on which we can rely to receive forgiveness. In other words this astonishing sacrificial gesture is not a fluke or whim.

According to John Jesus on the cross is a reminder that God did it once when a raised image with potential to heal needed only trust in God to save the Israelites travelling in the desert from dying, after being bitten by poisonous snakes. As God allowed the believing Israelites at the time of Moses to heal from the deadly consequences of their rebellion and live, in the same way Jesus on the cross serves to symbolize and actualize God’s allowing all of mankind who believe in Him to heal from Satan’s fatal sin-bite and live for ever. This time God’s need for reconciliation with us is much more desperate, warranting His extraordinary action of using His Son’s life to bargain for our allegiance.

*Valued Son*

The Evangelist says God seeks to establish cordial relations with mankind because (with my emphasis): “… God ***so*** loved the world...” He is conveying, in human language, God’s deep emotional desire to have us back. God’s Action may be summed up in the caption: “Please Come Home, Everyone”. God sacrificed this Special Son because He loves us and cannot stand our being estranged from His Family! Who can refuse this Call? This love includes the whole world – of every country, ethno-linguistic group and every kind of belief, orientation and disposition. This teaching by John of what Jesus’ death represents makes me appreciate and want the Christian God more than ever. If you do not feel that way, give yourself time and you will. God does not change!

This Emissary-Son, Jesus related lovingly and respectfully with both His earthly mother and Heavenly Father. A special Mother-Son moment occurred between Jesus and Mary when she asked Him to save the day, which resulted in the miracle at the wedding feast in Cana. He was in the Caring Son role when He formally united the Evangelist, His best friend with His mother to ensure her wellbeing. While the tone and tenor of His prayer (Chapter 17) seems to convey a celebratory mood, in a few verses (for example: 2, 10, 12) a subtext of “Thank You, Father” seems indicated. Equally so: “for which I thank You”, seems implied in some other verses (23, 24b and 26). Perhaps too much is being read into the text, though knowing the obedient and loving attitude of Jesus towards His Father the idea of a grateful prayer does not seem inconsistent.

*How and Why to Be a Jesus Follower*

I realize from reading this Gospel that the whole point of the Book is that John wants to present Jesus in a way that readers of his time and generations following will have the evidence to conclude that without doubt, Jesus is God’s Son, as well as His Accredited Representative on earth. In today’s world we are familiar with this designation in an official business or diplomatic context and in John’s time a trusted son would be seen in exactly the same light. The Evangelist however did not have to contend with whether or not Jesus really existed, as a writer today might need to. Other people had written about Him and beside that, John was one of His disciples. How would he not know the real Jesus?

Beyond that, he was in Jesus’ inner circle; and beyond that closeness he described himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved”. One, apparent evidence for that is seen in his close physical and clearly intimate position with Jesus as they reclined for supper. Another likely evidence is that John was probably one of the youngest of the disciples and Jesus took him under His wings in a more special Big Brotherly way than He did the others. As such, John’s Gospel gives us an account of the Ministry of Jesus from the point of view of a close friend, mentee and committed follower. In this regard, unless we charge the author with some kind of fraudulent intent, naïve or erroneous thinking, of which there is no evidence in the Gospel, we must accept the Gospel of John as an authentic and reliable presentation of the Real Jesus.

Also John did not seem to have a task of explaining how God could have a Son, as in the Greek and Roman culture around the Evangelist the belief in gods procreating was common. As well the idea of the Trinity is well established in the Bible; so that too did not require explanation. As such his only task was to show that this man, Jesus, was that Son. John did not downplay the reality that during Jesus’ Ministry His opponents strongly objected to this claim especially, and prominently, some among the religious leadership. Nonetheless ironically even with the high degree of power and sway these Pharisees had over the people and despite the historical legitimacy of their own ministry these leaders could not stop the increasingly large numbers of people following Jesus. On this point, the other Gospel writers and St Paul all agree with St John that the Jewish rejection of Jesus was because of His claim to divinity (10:33). This agreement then appears to support the importance of John’s purpose in proving that indeed Jesus is the Son of God.

*Jesus Is Historically Real but not Ordinary*

Therefore Jesus was a real Person Whom the people acknowledged as doing wonderful acts of kindness from God; only that some could not accept He was the Son of God. In this Book John the Evangelist gives us ample, convincing evidence that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah) and the Son of God (3:34; 4:25-26, 42, 53; 5:17; 8:16-19, 8:38; 19:7-11; 20:16-17). Indeed Christianity is based on whether or not a person believes this (1:12). To be a Christian you only need to believe that Jesus as presented in the Bible is God’s Son; if you do not you cannot become or claim to be a Christian. This is the only basis of Christianity, the only entry point. Being Christian does not depend on age, gender, race, gender orientation, religion, or power position. John explains this open, unqualified, non-judgmental acceptance by God in terms many are familiar with, namely (with my capitalization):

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (3:16)

(“For God so loved the world, that he gave up his only one-of-a-kind Son as a sacrifice with the purpose that WITHOUT EXCEPTION, EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM will not suffer total destruction but instead enjoy Eternal Life”)

John reinforced this faith platform with an assertion in the next verse of what God does not intend Jesus to do in our lives, namely:

“For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” (3:17)

According to John, Jesus confirms that His Mission is not about condemnation of the believer (3:18) when He states:

“… For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.” (9:39)

This sounds like He is saying His coming on earth provides the rules or basis whereby God will judge between those whose knowledge of Him is misguided or wrong but want His guidance to be able to follow the correct path as against those who believe they already have a proper knowledge of God but don’t recognize they are in darkness or are seeing Him wrong (due to their chosen blindness). As such He was not sent here to judge but to lead people back to God and those who do not choose to go blindly through life rejecting Him should have no concern about judgment (12:47-50). In that regard Jesus said:

“… I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” (8:12)

According to John, Jesus’ divinity is equal to God’s (1:1; 10:30) and Jesus has been with God as a Co-Creator since before the Creation as (1:2-3; 17:5); He is the Source of Eternal Life from God (5:24, 39-40; 6:27, 40, 46-51, 54-58, 68; 8:12; 10:28; 11:25-26; 12:49-50; 17:2) and the original Source of the true knowledge of God in a world needing clarity about Who God is (1:4-5). He represented God’s Glory on earth (5:21-23; 6:27; 8:18; 10:37-38; 11:4, 40; 12:27-28; 13:31-32; 17:1, 4-5) and as a result of being in this role He brought additional Grace (God’s benevolence, kindness or blessing), which He has in full measure (1:14, 16).

Not only do we see Jesus performing miracles, John also showed that He had mysterious powers. For example Jesus provided information an ordinary person would not have; by Himself alone He was able to overturn tables and drive out a courtyard full of merchants (1:47-48; 2:14-17; 4:16-19; 11:11; 13:21, 38; 16:32). Of course according to John Jesus is superior in every way because He is from a “higher” place, Heaven (3:31, 34; 4:12-13). Despite His miraculous powers Jesus sometimes adopts practical measures to deal with certain situations (4:1-3, 11:54; 12:36; 18:8, 22-23)

*How to Behave as A Christian*

John the Evangelist also portrays Jesus as needing His followers to show certain qualities. Explicitly He emphasizes the requirement to love one another, especially because this will be evidence of being His disciple. This lesson is presented as central to their evangelistic mission especially in view of Jesus’ Example, from Whom love went regardless of whether it was returned or not. So the model for loving one another shows that Christians ought to give or show love as a characteristic of their calling and should not base it on its being mutual (1:11; 13:1, 34-35; 15:9, 12-14, 17; 17:26). He did not want them to be fearful, instead He told them to keep a calm and peaceful disposition. To help them live with peace of mind, as they faced a different and threatening future without His physical presence He gave them some of His own Peace, which served as assurance of a coming Encourager.

He also provided details of what they will watch for, experience and reason out to help them cope (14:1-4, 12-14, 16-18, 27, 31; 15:11, 18-25; 16:1-7, 20-24, 30-33; 17:13; 20:19-23, 26-29). No doubt He wants them and us to have concrete evidence of a peace of mind we can count on and utilize in troubled times. His Peace, the perfect form of peace of mind can stem any kind of distress or fear. Jesus needs His disciples to be obedient to Him as evidence of their love for Him (8:31-32; 12:47-48; 14:15, 21, 23-24; 15:10, 27). Throughout His Ministry He modelled how to stay grounded in obedience to God. In the same way He expects His followers to be obedient to His Teaching, which comes from the same God. He used a dramatic method of feet washing to teach and charge His disciples to be humble as also a basic requirement of discipleship (13:12-17).

In the telling of Jesus’ encounter with a woman accused of committing the unquestionably punishable crime of adultery John presents a powerful implicit teaching on forgiveness, in a poignant drama, no doubt, as an example of how Jesus expects His disciples to behave. Without a word of calling to account or of condemnation, Jesus teaches His disciples including us that it is important and effective to use forgiveness for wrongs towards us, Christians (5:45-47; 8:10-11, 15). Look how Peter turned out as against how he might have, being riddled with shame, guilt and self-condemnation, if Jesus had been resentful and/or punitive towards him. Jesus (by this actions) and John (in including these passages as evidence that Jesus is the Son of God) both want us to never forget that God is truly forgiving, with no strings attached; and so we too should be.

*Jesus as a Divine-Human Is Present throughout the Bible*

From John’s presentation it is clear that their Leader was a consistently kind, loving, humble and obedient Person, Who expected His followers to be the same. As well John portrays Jesus with extraordinary powers and qualities of seeing into the future and of having knowledge of the past that stretched far beyond that of normal human ability, for example about Abraham. Further, the Evangelist provides other evidence that convinces the reader of the supernatural origin of these powers. For example, in the case of the mysterious Voice speaking about or to Jesus that readers are compelled to conclude is from God (1:32-34, 12:28-29).

On the other hand we see Jesus, reacting in expected human ways, for example by His restricting His movements so as to avoid the religious leaders. In this framework of presenting Jesus as divine-human John, nonetheless supplies abundant evidence that Jesus is God’s fully accredited Ambassador-Son.

John emphasizes Jesus’ unique position and relationship with God in the context of His dual character, as what made our Salvation possible. It is not allegiance to God alone or to Jesus as only an exceptional person that makes a Christian. The entire requirement for being a Christian rests on a belief that Jesus the God-man, the Son of God, redeemed us by His death. John’s Gospel shows that the promise of Eternal Life (Forever-Life-with-God) that Jesus makes to believers is the main reason for the Salvation Work that He brought to a glorious conclusion on the cross. Harking back to the way John presents the value of the Old Testament one notices a pattern. For example he does not record any OT reference about the wrongness of adultery in the cases of the woman at the well (4:17-18) and the one caught in the act (8:10-11). Nor did Jesus disqualify Abraham’s faith as faulty by adding “… except for when…” in reference to his relationship with Hagar (8:39-40).

All the Old Testament allusions are about Jesus’ place in God’s Plan of Salvation. Indeed from that perspective we can see the entire OT as a record of God’s loving Intention to save mankind played out in a variety of historical and prophetic situations despite our sinfulness or flaws, asking only that we come back to Him. Dire consequences for individual sinful acts do not appear to be central to the Old Testament Message of Salvation. According to John, Jesus’ Teaching resonates with that same merciful Message. What’s most important to God is that we come back through Jesus to Him, just as we are. Jesus has taken care of our cleansing from and forgiveness for individual sins past, present and future on the cross. Since this is the case, then no lifestyle or human act (except rejection of Him) can disqualify a person from being received into the loving encircling arms of Jesus. It’s the safest and happiest place to be and God badly wants us there.

**Holy Spirit**

“Holy Spirit” rather than “the Holy Spirit” is used to conform to the style of a name. In the Greek the definite article appears with nouns where it does not occur in English. For example in 11:33 and 13:21 the Greek uses “the spirit”, which in English is translated: “spirit” with the definite article omitted. In Acts 2:4 however, the Greek does not have “The Holy Spirit” as follows: “And they were all filled with Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues…” Only in the rest of the verse does the Greek have “the” as follows: “… as the Spirit put in them how to speak out.” The omission of the definite article in the first part of the verse may be intentional.

A study of the Gospel of John reveals facets of Holy Spirit that the other Gospels do not provide and of which only a divine being like the Real Jesus would have such specific detail. Holy Spirit is wonderful, helpful, complex and the bona fide third Person of the Trinity, Whose Person, Work and availability is fully committed to keeping us connected to Jesus and the Father. The following sections briefly outline the teaching, mainly from John the Evangelist’s Gospel, on Holy Spirit.

*The Person of Holy Spirit*

1 John 5:7 reads as follows:

*“For there are three that bear record (testify) in heaven, the Father, the Word (Son), and the Holy Ghost (Holy Spirit): and these three are one (one thing)…”*

St Paul adds to the description of Holy Spirit as a Person (Ephesians 4:30): Holy Spirit can be grieved, although the words “Holy”, “Spirit” and “whom” are all neuter. Jesus also uses both masculine (14:26) and neuter forms (14:16-17) of the pronoun in Greek when He talks about Holy Spirit; and the third person verbs that refer to Holy Spirit could mean any gender. This is one level of His complexity.

From the lips of John the Baptist in John’s Gospel, Holy Spirit is a dove Whose role is to identify Jesus as the promised Messiah (1:32-34). In this Gospel Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth that comes through Jesus Who is the Truth. As we learn later from the Evangelist Holy Spirit is intended to be an earthly counterpart of Jesus when He returns to Heaven. He will be an Emissary in much the same way as Jesus represented God while He was on earth.

Holy Spirit will continue to dwell permanently and timelessly among and within those disciples and as well as with believers the world over – another level of complexity. His relationship will be more intimate with us than when Jesus was God’s earthly Representative. One may conclude this has to be the case because as the Paraclete on earth replacing Jesus He will be our “alongside Encourager”. This function of the Holy Spirit seems to run parallel with that of Jesus Whose disciples had Him alongside them, as their Teaching, Encouraging Rabbi.

The Evangelist presents Holy Spirit as equivalent to Jesus with the same identity characteristics, though not as identical Persons. The key distinction being that Jesus is God’s Son and Holy Spirit is not. Another difference is that Jesus received instructions from God, not from Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit will receive instructions from God (14:26, 15:26) through Jesus. They seem to operate in much the same way, in the sense that Holy Spirit shows the same divine attributes as Jesus. As such He too may be seen as depicting the I AM Statements, but with Jesus as the Mediator. Believers are protected and guided both from above by Jesus as well as from below by Holy Spirit. Our welfare cannot be any better cared for.

“… *I will pray* [to] *the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever*…” (14:16)

In promising to pray for His disciples Jesus identifies Holy Spirit as “Another Paraclete” or as previously stated, “Alongside Encourager”, which may also be rendered: “Coach and Chief Encourager” or “Mentor” like Jesus is, in the role of a Rabbi with his disciples. In this relationship with believers Holy Spirit is completely authoritative as a Source of Truth from God, the same as Jesus Himself, Who will be Holy Spirit’s Immediate Source.

He is also a Source of Life as noted in the following passage:

“*It is the spirit that quickeneth* (gives life); *the flesh profiteth nothing* (is of no help): *the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life*” (6:63)

Jesus seems to be saying Holy Spirit actually provides or supplies Life in the sense that Holy Spirit is the conduit Who has the responsibility to make it possible, for God’s gift of Life to enter us. Holy Spirit is One of the Trinity Who originally created all life and everything else on earth and in Heaven. In that regard Jesus may be contrasting the pre-eminent place of Holy Spirit in the Salvation Story with the non-contributory role of the body it inhabits. This interpretation lines up with the understanding that Holy Spirit is able to communicate with us through our spiritual or inner person in the performance of His Role. As such the Nature of Holy Spirit as the means or channel for believers to receive Eternal Life is an important lesson to learn.

Further, in His explanation to the people that He is the Bread of Life, the spiritual Source of Eternal Life, Jesus says: “… *the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world*.” (6:33) Mistaking that Bread to be ordinary life-sustaining bread that is their staple food the people request: “… *Lord, evermore give us this bread*” (6:34). (… Sir, keep supplying us with this bread all the time.) Jesus wants potential believers to understand that the new relationship with God is spiritually based, despite their very recent experience of being physically fed. He tries to point out that the true life-sustaining “Bread” (Power) in this relationship is Jesus Himself and that in that sense biological life (the flesh or body) has no role. In other words it is Jesus Who provides us with all the Food or Bread that the Father supplies, being the primary Means for us to be fed eternally, with Holy Spirit participating, Who, in due course will be His Emissary.

The people however did not grasp that doing what God expects and ensuring that they will always have bead or food, are two sides of the same coin; and that at a spiritual level to keep on living and to be fed forever are both linked with believing in Jesus Who is the Bread and Food of Eternal Life. Misinterpreting that Message they also failed to understand that believing in Jesus is a Spirit-guided act that can never need physical involvement; and therefore access to Eternal Life can happen only by connecting with Jesus at a spiritual level, since our physical qualities are useless for that purpose. So we learn it is essential that we leave our spiritual “port” open so to speak, (as did their ancestors who needed to believe by looking at the snake) through which till today, Holy Spirit, being of a similar spiritual nature can heal from unavoidable death. So we see in John’s presentation that God had anticipated saving mankind from Satan’s poison way back in history using the same Channel, Holy Spirit.

*The work of the Holy Spirit*

The coming of the Messiah will signal a role of profound significance for Holy Spirit Who will connect the believer with God and Christ through worship.

“… *the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit* [Neuter, by the way]: *and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth*” (4:23-24).

True worship will come and has already started to come from those who worship “in spirit” or will come in a way that is grounded in the essential part of God’s Nature or of Who He is (Spirit); and that aspect of what worship that connects with God entails, is informed by Jesus Who is the Truth. Thus Holy Spirit becomes the Standard-Setter for relating to God, through Jesus Christ, which highlights the importance of the Work of Holy Spirit in our lives. We need to acknowledge and express gratitude to Him every time we consciously worship.

Another aspect of His work is stated in this way:

“*He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you*.” (16:14)

As the Son is in the business of glorifying the Father so the Holy Spirit is committed to Jesus’ glorification. How Jesus has fulfilled that Mission is on divine record, which the Father will make available to the Holy Spirit. As such the disciples can rest assured that nothing will be amiss or changed from what they have already experienced while Jesus has been their Rabbi.

One may see the core of the Spirit’s Job Description however in the following passage:

“*And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged*” (16:8-11).

Here the disciples learn about the central relationship between Jesus’ Ministry and that of Holy Spirit. Based on this comprehensive description of a major component of His Employment Package, Holy Spirit’s Ministry will link up with Jesus’ starting where Jesus leaves off. Sin, the absence of righteousness and inevitable judgment are three ugly tentacles of the satanic creature that infested God’s creation and caused widespread havoc in the entire world, over millennia. The Salvation Work is launched to destroy the power of this Beast. To accomplish this defeat it is the Holy Spirit’s job to enable would-be believers to connect with the Trinity and to provide on-the-spot guidance to all believers.

On the other hand, He has to confront those who refuse the Invitation to join Christ’s Redemption Bandwagon going Home to the Father. He will seal the fate of these enemies of God who choose to remain in sin under Satan’s rule. These unyielding deniers of the Gospel in their state of unrighteousness have no hope of ever living with God and therefore are doomed to a harsh judgment of total estrangement from God. It is baffling that otherwise rational people do choose to experience such an ending. Of course those in this category are equally mystified about the belief Christians hold on to. The reality of Jesus, God and Holy Spirit demonstrated by John in his historically accurate Gospel however, confirms the Christian faith is not based in fiction.

Moreover since the matter of faith is based on personal choice each Christian has to be very content with their choice to believe in God the Father of Jesus Christ and in Holy Spirit. So here’s one line of reasoning for a seeker, a person looking for spiritual security. That person can choose to believe in Jesus and then find out more about it from the inside. One has nothing to lose if one is wrong, that is should no God exist. In fact they would have learned beneficial life-affirming principles, meanwhile. In any case Holy Spirit is the Person guiding any potential believer’s choice-making! I am glad that I am no longer on the side of detractors and unbelievers, as I was many years ago; because if I am wrong being on that side, the horrifying consequences are irreversible. You probably do not need a reminder that it’s never too late. Holy Spirit is there for you too, if you’re not yet Christian. However, the decision must be made in this lifetime or it’s too late.

Jesus outlined another important task for the Holy Spirit as follows:

“… *the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost* (Who Holy Spirit is), *whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you*.” (14:26)

In present-day representation the role of Holy Spirit as Coach and Chief Supporter, also acts as Resident Teacher. The expression: “in my name” gives Him the same credentials with a level of authority and authenticity as Jesus had from God. Therefore we expect that just as God put the Power and Service of Holy Spirit at Jesus’ disposal (3:34) so Holy Spirit is required to put them at ours. Not only does Holy Spirit have the Task of continuing to manage the “fallout” from Jesus’ Salvation Work He also fills in any gaps of knowledge about God that human ambassadors of His Message may need filled.

“*But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even* (that is) *the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth* (originates) *from the Father, he shall testify of me*” (15:26)

Holy Spirit is to acknowledge Jesus and His Ministry publicly and speak the truth about Him. Clearly many stories in the Book of Acts provide examples of Holy Spirit fulfilling this role, starting with His spectacular “formal” entry on to the evangelical stage, on the Day of Pentecost, in chapter two. As the death of Jesus moved farther into the past Holy Spirit was indeed needed to take the place of the physical Jesus, to provide evidence of divine power supporting the fledgling faith at that point. He worked among both would be-believers and those who were spreading the Word and who needed encouragement and assurance that the Lord was truly in charge:

“… *when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you*” (16:13-15)

Spirit “of truth” may mean that He always operates with integrity or that He represents all that there is to know of the Truth about Who God and Christ are. Clearly both qualities are combined in Holy Spirit. According to the Evangelist this has been how Jesus has functioned with respect to His Father all along. After His return to the Father Holy Spirit will take over this job in a modified form that primarily showcases Jesus. The Architect of this enlarged Mission is still God the Father but the information will be routed through Christ to the equally completely trustworthy Third Person of the Trinity. Holy Spirit is nonetheless acting like a Rabbi, Who provides guidance to His new as well as His always developing disciples. However unlike earthly mentors Holy Spirit will tell the future without error. The achievements of Holy Spirit will reflect back honorably on Jesus Whose Instructions will be the basis on which Holy Spirit will be effective among Jesus’ disciples.

For this Evangelical Work (which is to take Jesus’ Ministry to the whole world) all of the Father’s Resources that are put at Jesus’ disposal will also be available to Holy Spirit from Jesus. So although before returning to His Father the disciples have access to Jesus; but not 24-7, when Holy Spirit takes Jesus’ place on earth they will have a Guide Who totally incorporates Jesus’ Powers, which He will pass along to them, practically step-by-step plus His being permanently available without any break in their connection.

*Receiving Holy Spirit.*

John describes Holy Spirit as the Agent of the new birth that comes through faith in Jesus, which simultaneously allows entry into the Kingdom of God. Two passages are interesting in this regard:

“…*as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*.” (1:13-14)

One cannot help but hear a very similar message being explained to Nicodemus (3:5-7):

“… *Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again*.”

When Jesus said: “… *If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water*...” to which the Evangelist added the explanation: “… *(But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified)*” (7:37-39). Jesus appears to be assuring the people that those who accept Him and His Ministry will receive Eternal Life-giving Holy Spirit in them in abundant renewing amount. Apparently Jesus could not let this opportunity pass with the largest crowds of worshippers from far and wide available to receive the Invitation to Salvation. The fact that He was deep inside enemy territory and therefore extremely vulnerable to attack became secondary to the immense potential of winning many souls at this Feast.

The lesson is daunting: Sometimes preaching the Gospel supersedes concern for personal safety regardless of the threat. Indeed countless committed disciples who heeded this example have lost their lives throughout the history of the Church till the present. Does it not behoove us, believers to find the courage to at least announce or even just not deny our allegiance to Jesus whenever a real opportunity presents itself? Whenever we do so we must remember to apply the biblical principle that St Peter states: “… *sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear*” (1 Peter 3:15)

(In paraphrase: … Give the Lord a special place in your hearts and be ready always to give an intelligent response in every situation you are questioned about your faith; but do so non-aggressively and in humility). Holy Spirit will always support, guide and encourage us.

John the Evangelist tells us:

“*And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit* (set aside, forgiven)*, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained*.” (20:22-23)

Jesus gives the disciples’ confidence a boost with the Holy Spirit to keep them collectively focused on being prepared for the task of spreading the Gospel. While their receiving this Gift may be a rehearsal for them to make sense of the Pentecost experience when they will receive individual empowerment, it nonetheless appears to also teach them that both Jesus and God are linked with and can share the power of Holy Spirit with them. Their access to Holy Spirit is guaranteed in any case and at no point will they be left abandoned. Jesus’ action at this point is not an empty gesture. By breathing Holy Spirit on them He establishes a link between events in Heaven and those on earth. Now they have a “window” into Heaven and the capacity to make their earthly actions consistent with events in Heaven. By recording this event John is probably conveying the message that unless Holy Spirit makes the linkage possible, in the absence of Jesus on earth, we cannot communicate with the Trinity.

*Where Holy Spirit Works*

Another aspect of the Nature of Holy Spirit is encountered in the following statement made by John the Baptist concerning what God told him about Jesus:

“… *Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God*” (1:33-34).

(“… *The man upon whom you see the Spirit descend and stay is the One who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. I saw it happen; so I vouch that He* [Jesus] *is the Son of God.*”)

This passage and the previous one add to the complexity of the Nature of Holy Spirit. Is it the same Person Whom Jesus received at John’s baptism that He breathed on His disciples, with Whom He will baptize (according to the Baptist) and Who came down at Pentecost? Can He be broken up into pieces and still remain the same Holy Spirit? An easy, though not necessarily comprehensive means of resolving this apparent dilemma is to remember the Attributes of God and of the Trinity. God is Omni-present, which means He is anywhere across space and time, simultaneously; and while He has the Identity of Thee Persons He is also One Thing or Entity. As such the same is true of Holy Spirit. In the above passage, He serves to indicate the Messiah to John the Baptist whom the Evangelist needs as a respected and therefore valuable witness to Jesus’ Divine Status and His Revelation as God’s Representative.

*The Inner Person in Us Is not the Holy Spirit*

Perhaps arguably there are passages in which the word “spirit” does not represent Holy Spirit. For example:

“*When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit*…” (11:33)

“… *he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me*.” (13:21)

There cannot be any suggestion in both passages that Holy Spirit is the reference. In these texts “spirit” seems to be the place from which we respond emotionally, with empathy and grief respectively, in the quotations. As such “in spirit” may simply mean: “with emotional pain” or “emotionally”.

Consider the passage:

“… he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost (His spirit).” (19:30).

“Spirit” in this passage cannot mean “Holy Spirit”, the Life-sustaining part of Jesus Whom He gave up or released. It probably makes better sense to interpret the reporting of this event as another way of saying: He gave up what made Him human or allowed Himself to “die” – which means He voluntarily went through the human process of leaving this physical world in the same way as He was physically born.

With this meaning, Jesus did not relinquish Holy Spirit and became cut off from the Third Person of the Trinity. It cannot be so! Firstly Jesus is God and nothing sustains God. He is eternally a part of the Trinity. Secondly it cannot be the case that Jesus released Holy Spirit to energize the inauguration of the Church. Even as symbolism the idea of linking Jesus’ death with the chronological emergence of the Early Church is questionable. For one thing Holy Spirit was already present in the world before Jesus took on human nature and He was already working in the world. In the Old Testament, prophets spoke about Holy Spirit at work, having the same characteristics then as later described in the New Testament (Isaiah 63:10, Ephesians 4:30), till today and forever. Another fact is that the Church started as soon as individuals believed in Jesus during His Lifetime with converts already coming from even non-Jewish groups (e.g. the woman at Jacob’s well with the townsfolk, the Centurion and his household).

**The Twelve**

A crowd of people usually followed Jesus around but He chose twelve specific individuals also known as the Twelve, as His permanent group of disciples. A disciple is a ‘learner’ or ‘follower’; that is, people who accepted and followed the teaching and practices of an acknowledged teacher. The Hebrew or Aramaic word for this kind of teacher is “Rabbi”. Andrew and another unnamed disciple of John the Baptist, likely the Evangelist, himself, were the first named in the Gospel as members of Jesus’ special disciple group. When the Baptist identified Jesus as the Lamb of God they chose to follow Him instead. Then Andrew brought Peter his brother along to meet Jesus and join their ranks. Jesus called Philip. Philip described Jesus to Nathaniel who had misgivings about Jesus’ Messianic authenticity but chose to seek Him anyway. Jesus seemed to appreciate Nathaniel’s attitude of candor. These first picks of Jesus’ disciples are all different and the Evangelist gives us clues about the character of two of them. From Jesus’ words, Peter is someone to be relied on, the rock; Nathaniel is honest, a straight talker.

We also recognize that of these five Jesus personally called only Philip. The Evangelist did not name any other disciples till later in the Gospel although earlier (3:1-15) he described a meeting with Nicodemus, a scholar among the religious leaders whose discussion with Jesus indicated he was a sincere listener and seeker of spiritual knowledge. Later (19:38) we learn he was a secret follower of Jesus. Joseph of Arimathea another member of the Sanhedrin was described as “… a disciple of Jesus but secretly, for fear of the Jews” (the religious leaders).

The Woman at Jacob’s Well may also be included among His disciples though she did not appear to have followed Him in person, much like Nicodemus and Joseph. Nonetheless acting in the role of an apostle she took word about Jesus, which physically and spiritually brought people to Christ from Whom they received further teaching (4:4-42). When Jesus healed the Man Born Blind He told him to go wash off the clay mixture He put on the blind man’s eyes to restore his sight in the pool of Siloam. John made it a point of explaining that the name of the pool meant “Sent”, which means the same as Apostle: "one who is sent". In the New Testament an apostle is a messenger sent to spread the gospel of salvation. In this sense the healed who proclaimed Jesus may be counted among those John identified as disciples of Jesus.

We are told the Twelve did not always understand the meaning of Jesus’ statements and actions, which was due to not grasping the essence of the Person of Jesus when the events happened; but they did after His death and Resurrection (2:22, 12:16; 14:7, 9; 16:17-18). As such sometimes they seemed out of sync with their Teacher’s capabilities, as in the story of the Lord’s Feeding of the Five Thousand. Philip’s idea was to buy bread for the people and Andrew came forward with a boy who had five loaves and two fish. Both of them however recognized the impracticality of implementing their respective suggestions.

*The Disciples’ Knowledge of Jesus*

Neither of them along with the rest of the disciples considered the power of their Master in the light of His Teaching about Himself nor especially what the miracles they witnessed Him perform presented of His capabilities. Was it blindness that stopped them from seeing the possibilities? Was it immaturity in their ability to seriously analyze the meaning of the “signs”? Was it a case of being too compartmentalized in reading who or what their Leader’s Actions revealed about Himself due to seeing different situations as having separate meanings? According to the Evangelist, Jesus however had predetermined that the feeding miracle would be a teaching situation for the disciples. All the same

Jesus did not approach their lack of understanding in a critical way. He seemed to see them as just needing more teaching.

With respect to leadership style Jesus’ teaching style was exemplary. He accepted their deficiency and simply proceeded to give them “hands on” learning. In the context of today’s analytic thinking it is interesting that despite apparently having time to kill we are not told the disciples engaged in any reflective discussion about a miracle that at least some in the crowd clearly saw as Messianic. It seems the author of the Gospel of Mark had a reason to explain the situation: “… t*hey considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened*.” [In paraphrase: “They had not put two and two together regarding the miracle of the loaves because their minds were unresponsive”] (Mark 6:52). One wonders whether later, in the case of the Man Born Blind the disciples would have asked a question (9:2) about an apparent “no brainer” in that cultural belief system (9:34) had Jesus not previously used a teaching approach in response to their imperceptiveness. By their asking this time however, we are treated to a unique aspect of God’s Actions and also learn how urgent or time-limited Jesus perceived His Work to be (9:3-5), as He proceeds to perform a spectacular healing. Such details prompt the believer to realize that it is the real Jesus speaking and acting.

Probably one obstacle to the Twelve’s understanding some of Jesus’ references to His identity is due to the fact that they too were not seeing Him as being the Authentic Representative of God. In that case like the religious leaders they were apparently, at least sometimes, reading from the Wrong Script. Their deficiency however was temporary, in contrast to that of Jesus’ Jewish opponents’ because the Twelve accepted Jesus as their Rabbi with a Message from God and were willing to learn from Him. Also, in becoming His disciples they were bona fide on the same side as Jesus, so their faith in Him or at least their desire to learn was not in question; they just needed to develop spiritual maturity. This growth seemed to have happened to different degrees over varying periods of time resulting in their becoming more focused on being on the same page (1:35-50; 2:11, 17, 22; 4:27; 6:68; 15:16; 16:30; 17:6-8; 20:30-31; 21:24). Be that as it may, some of Jesus’ followers were not able to reach maturity although He continued to gain others (6:66; 7:31; 8:30, 31; 10:42; 12:10-11).

In the story leading to the Raising of Lazarus the disciples’ first concern is their Leader’s safety in Judea where He plans to visit. Jesus however seems to use the occasion to teach them that an evangelist goes where the work calls and personal danger cannot be a deterrent. Jesus had demonstrated this principle at the Festival of Tabernacles. In portraying them as worried about another attempt on Jesus’ life, in the light of the response from Jesus, John calls attention to a human rather a spiritual motivation guiding the disciples. Touching and reasonable as their behavior may be we do recognize, as Jesus appears to point out to them that in that situation they lost sight of the ball: the Call of the Gospel. Their next instance of a shortcoming in this story is that they fail to grasp Jesus’ meaning when He tells them: "*Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.*" (11:11)

One wonders whether His disciples, still very concerned about Jesus’ intention to return to Judea, were trying to persuade Him it was no longer necessary to go since Lazarus would get better when he wakes up on his own. If that was the case they failed to appreciate the significance in the Lord’s words: “*And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent (in order that) ye may believe…*” (11:15) As such we witness a genuine concern and love for their beloved Rabbi, as is expressed in Thomas’ bold declaration: “… *Let us also go, that we may die with him.*” (11:16) Of course as we know, when the opportunity came for them to “die with Him” they deserted Him. Nonetheless they seem to miss the important reasons for some events in Jesus’ Life, including now, why they were going to Lazarus, a dead man (4:31; 18:10, 15; 20:8-9, 18, 20, 27-29; 19:27-27; 21:7). Not just to display divine power, rather to increase faith needed to propagate the Good News of God’s Kingdom is an action we expect of the real Jesus.

The explanation the Evangelist gives for why Judas Iscariot was upset by Mary pouring the expensive oil on Jesus’ feet raises a question of whether all the disciples or just the inner circle knew all along that he was stealing the money or did Jesus alone know, since He was aware of Judas’ character (6:70).

Regardless, the fact that he continued to be a disciple and even further, to have the job of treasurer for the group suggests counter intuitively that honesty was not a defining requirement for membership in the group or to have that job. If Judas had any redeeming virtue the Evangelist was not impressed, judging from the unqualified disclosure of Judas’ dishonesty. So why did Jesus have him around? If we see one of the disciples’ role as being facilitative access points to Jesus as in the case of the Grecian Jews approaching Philip (12:20-22), then the only way to see Judas Iscariot as an access point would be to let Satan in. Probably that’s why he was there, while the others were points of access to Grace. Perhaps the lesson Jesus was teaching His disciples was not only to be inclusive, but also tolerate the flaws of others in their role of carrying on the Work of Jesus when He leaves this world.

*The Disciples Are Introduced to Evangelical Ministry*

For the disciples to be effective in the role of bringing people to Christ they definitely needed special instruction. In the episode of the Washing of the Disciples’ Feet the Evangelist places the group under the spotlight of their Master’s Plan for the psychological state required for the task ahead. They needed to have a servant view of themselves and to refrain from focusing on the esteem that would be a privilege of their future position as leaders of His Church – just as Jesus Himself has not let being accorded Lordship obscure His duty of humility right there among them. The disciples seem to accept this symbolic initiation to the importance of that role except for Peter who needed additional spiritual prompting. Jesus’ response to Peter’s refusal shows how important Jesus sees humility is in their learning about Him. He said: “*Unless I wash you, you have no part with me*.” (13:8). In effect He was telling Peter that unless he received the instruction on humility he had no place in Jesus’ Ministry. The Evangelist also lets us see the disciples demonstrating their need for personal safety with respect to Jesus’ betrayal by Judas Iscariot (e.g. wanting to be exonerated from suspicion and deserting Jesus when He was arrested and Peter’s denial). They showed the same human character flaws among their ranks that everybody else has. It is remarkable that Jesus chose them knowing this (13:10, 21; 15:16, 19; 16:31-32; 18:17, 25-27).

From his presentation of the words and behaviors of the disciples and Jesus’ reactions to them John the Evangelist teaches that they were ordinary men with no special talent or virtue. They needed spiritual learning and growth to reach a full realization of Who Jesus is, which happened only after His Resurrection. According to the Evangelist, Jesus however was patiently willing to give them the lesson they needed to have. They seemed definitely to respect the originality of their Rabbi’s teaching as deduced from their willingness to accept a new teaching from Him why people are born with defects, as against the old, which was well known to be due to punishment for sin. They also genuinely cared about and loved Jesus. Nonetheless among them, in general, were the good (which, Philip was as a door to Christ), the bad (namely, Thomas the doubter and Peter the denier) and the worst of all, the ugly (that is Judas who betrayed Jesus).

In the end clearly, they were well prepared for their evangelical task, down to the required attitude; and their Teacher was unequivocally satisfied with their progress (17:6-8). Of course their learning was not over; for as John tells us the Holy Spirit will be putting the finishing touches. The learning however will not end till they join Him in Heaven. In John’s narration I believe I can see myself in all the characteristics of these fortunate and therefore special men as I reflect on my Christian Walk. For example, I believe I have opened a door with this commentary through which someone might see the Lord or see Him in a clearer and I hope, dearer light. At the other end of the spectrum of my evangelical ministry, I believe I have betrayed my Master here or there through silence or ignorance. This includes times when I have succumbed to intimidation or shown reluctance to share Christ. In those circumstances I deserted my Lord by not standing up for Him through speaking out my faith in Him, for example when I believed others put Him down. So my newfound determination is to be a strategic spokesperson for Him and my strong desire is to keep learning as directed by the Holy Spirit (Who will teach everyone), thereby demonstrating my mission to be Homeward bound.

**The Religious Leaders**

We get a perspective of the basis of the religious leaders’ stance from John’s comment: “… the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (1:17). From this proclamation one gets the impression that Jesus and his religious opponents were likely working from two different Charters: Moses Charter vs. Grace and Truth Charter. The Evangelist was direct about which had superiority, undoubtedly because on this issue sat the legitimacy of the New Message of Jesus as against the already popularly accepted manifesto of the Scribes, Legal Experts and Pharisees. According to John it seems that since both Messages came from God Jesus’ was more powerful because as he said: “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (1:18). (“No one has seen God at any time except His One and Only Son Who is in the closest relationship with Him; He has presented His Father clearly to us”). With these credentials Jesus’ Ministry is exclusively authoritative.

The religious leaders were middlemen between Moses and the people; whereas Jesus was Himself the Lawgiver and Interpreter speaking directly to the people. It is like commentators on an author’s work reading from a previous edition as compared with the author, himself reading from a current edition. According to John this fundamental difference between the religious leaders’ teaching and that of Jesus is based in the latter’s ignorance. So they represented people “walking” (and working) in the dark, who were not able to see Jesus as the Person Moses talked about regarding God’s intervention in human life. It was to their understanding of the now “outdated” (though not-to-be-discarded) Law of Moses that they turned to understand who John the Baptist was. Based on that Law they could not have known that the identity of the Person for whose Way the Baptist was here to “make straight” (Is. 40:3) was the King of kings, the Lord of lords, Himself!

*Their Distorted Perception*

The religious establishment believed that Salvation came only from a strict adherence to the Torah, the Jewish Scriptures. As such for a man who broke Sabbath rules and mixed with “sinners” it was totally absurd to them that Jesus could claim to be an authentic Rabbi let alone to be God’s Messiah (5:9, 16-18; 6:42). They were on the wrong path to Salvation and could not see it. As Jesus told them: “… If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth” (9:41). From their faulty perception and reasoning they apparently saw themselves alone as having the authority to represent the true Voice of God. Therefore they needed to silence Jesus Whose teaching and claims they saw as blasphemous (2:18; 3:10-11; 5:39). Being on that path they were unable to see Jesus as the Way the Truth and the Life or in the light of any of the six other I AM statements.

It is notable that despite their sense of rightness and legitimacy regarding their stance against Jesus they chose to operate with a hidden agenda or deviousness, as for example in the case of the Woman Caught in the Act of Adultery and the Man Born Blind respectively (8:4-6; 9:28-34). In the case of the adulterous woman they came seemingly seeking advice, while their true intent was to corner Him into a no-win position that would infuriate the crowd or at the very least, in their view, diminish His so-called Messianic stature. Instead of admitting to Jesus’ divinity when He provided vision to an adult who was born blind the influential group of the religious leadership mounted an unsuccessful campaign to prove the obvious miracle was a fraud.

*Obsessive fear of Losing Power*

One explanation that would help us understand their behavior is that these religious leaders were people of defective character, which may sum up Jesus’ accusation of them (for example, 8:38, 41, 44; 9:40-41). So then an underhanded style was simply their natural way of operating. Another motive may be fear. Likely they were afraid of any perceived threat or opposition to their status that could cause them to lose their age old privileged position of being the fully respected biblical authority. They seemed sensitive to this possibility in the meeting at which Caiaphas made his famous prediction (11:47-53). A further explanation of their deceitfulness is that it probably shows a basic need to always be right or be on the right side. This perfectionist trait would lead them to refuse to admit their Script was incomplete in any way and instead to see Jesus as a disrupter. The same trait would not allow them to be open in the way they approached their concerns about Jesus because they were afraid of being seen in the wrong. The common characteristic in these explanations is a fear that takes over a person’s way of behaving leading to character flaw.

Reading from the wrong Script they also would not accept that Jesus was a Messiah or that He came from David’s linage. As such Jesus Whom they believed was human claiming to be the divine Representative of God with a Galilean ancestry was bogus on more than one level and as such showed Him to be a total deceiver. Early in his narrative however, the Evangelist had introduced Jesus with impeccable divine identity and soon after a highly credible religious personality, the Baptist, acknowledged Him as: “… *this is the Son of God.*” (1:34) And all through his Gospel the Evangelist provided evidence which culminated in the unmistakable conclusion: “… *that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah), the Son of God,* ” So the reader comes to know whose version of God’s Plan is correct and complete. Moreover, however, John makes it clear that some members of the Sanhedrin did become believers (12:42-43). Nonetheless by his portrayal of the group as a whole he gives us evidence, useful even today, that religious leaders and biblical scholars can be misguided or totally wrong in their interpretation of Scripture.

*Doing the Work of God against God*

From their erroneous belief however, the religious leaders outlawed His preaching and were constantly trying to kill Jesus (7:1, 13, 25, 32, 45; 8:3-6; 9:18-23; 10:31-33, 39; 11:47-53, 57). Probably these religious diehards interpreted Jesus’ Ministry as “prosperity preaching” and therefore rejected It. They likely argued: “If He were the Messiah, surely He would know that qualifying for Eternal Life involved more than a simple acknowledgement of someone’s divinity. This is nothing more than self-serving exploitation of the people.” Indeed however, as presented by the Evangelist: Believing that Jesus is the Son of God is the first step from which understanding the rest of the Story followed. John dedicated his Book to bringing people the good news from God about God’s Good Nature from which flows undeserved Grace to us leading to eternal life with God’s Family. In other words Jesus preached that God is offering us a fantastic life for which we don’t have to do anything other than believe in Him (Undeserved Grace).

This sounded like a phony “Gospel” to the Church leadership of that day. Nonetheless we know that God in the Torah is the same Gracious God as the Person Jesus described in His Good News Announcement in New Testament. He is described in the Torah as: “… *The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty*…” (Exodus 34:6-7). Other Old Testament passages in which this kind of description occurs provide further corroboration (2 Chronicles 30:9, Nehemiah 9:17, 9:31, Psalm. 86:15, 116:5, Joel 2:13, Jonah 4:2). The religious opponents could not accept Jesus’ Message probably also because they interpreted the Law of Moses as teaching that God’s Grace came only through covenant and sacrificial ritual and as such they missed the perspective of His Unmerited Grace. That aspect is well portrayed in the Life of the real Jesus in the Gospel of John.

In the face of their inability during the multiple trials of Jesus to produce evidence to support their trumped up charges, along with inciting the crowd they needed to intimidated Pilate into allowing Jesus’ Crucifixion, which was their main goal (18:31). Right to the end the Jewish leaders were being misguided by the wrong Charter of Salvation when they protested at the sign Pilate authorized to be put on Jesus’ Cross: “JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS” (19:19). Pushed by unhealthy motives these religious leaders seemed to believe that as representatives of God’s Voice to the people it was their calling to fight God’s battle for/with Him, as they read it, against Jesus’ blasphemous and outrageous claims. Ignorant of their error they relentlessly fought against God Himself, convinced that they were taking His side. That tendency is still alive in believers who think they will be more successful or effective in fighting God’s Battles than God Himself can be.

The significance of John’s presentation of the religious leader is that the claim by people of any group that they are endowed with special understanding for accurate application of Scripture can never be true. For one thing, the story of Job teaches us that spiritual events outside of our knowledge may sometimes account for apparently bizarre or incomprehensible events in human life. Moreover we now know that the baffling strong and arrogant behavior of these religious leaders was in fact contributing to God’s Plan (12:39-41). In this regard we also know that God tends to act within the personality or predisposition of the person He is using for His Purpose; so those leaders are still accountable for their actions. Nonetheless it is God Who will pass judgment on confirmed or unwitting charlatans, of whom I may be one from time to time.