

**Text: various**

In our series on Orthodoxy, I've kept the messages short so we can focus on one point at a time.

Last week we opened describing an attack by unbelievers where they try to show that the Lord and the apostles were somehow at odds with one another, contradicting one another, and teaching different things.

There are four main ways they claim this division:

1. A division between Jesus and Paul
2. A division between John and the Synoptics
3. A division between Paul and Paul (*i.e.* Paul in Acts and Paul in the Epistles)
4. A division between young Paul and old Paul so that he contradicted himself

We stand against all these alleged disagreements. The Lord and the apostles speak with a unified voice.

Last week we discussed the alleged difference between Jesus and Paul. This week we will take on the supposed differences between John and the Synoptics.

### *Three Gospels and One More*

For our starting Scripture, we will have two passages:

Read Luke 1.1-4

Read John 20.30-31

**Proposition:** The differences between John and the Synoptics are complementary, not contradictory.

**Complementary:** "serving to fill out or complete"<sup>1</sup>

**Contradictory:** "a proposition so related to another that if either of the two is true the other is false and if either is false the other must be true"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick C. Mish, ed., *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Mish.

## I. Difference due to date and purpose

### A. The clearly different approaches between the various gospels

#### 1. Synoptics (“seeing together”) – Mt, Mk, Lk

- a. They tend to focus on the narrative and the teaching within the narrative
- b. They often use almost identical wording to tell the same story/sermon
- c. They have slight differences of emphasis

#### 2. John

“it is true that John’s Gospel exhibits a larger degree of profound theological reflection on Jesus’ life and ministry”<sup>3</sup>

- a. John is more theological
- b. John is more contemplative
- c. John focuses on the meaning of Christ more than the narrative
- d. John uses unique language and vocabulary

### B. The reason for the differences

#### 1. The synoptics came early

- a. Matthew (AD 49)
- b. Luke (AD 58)
- c. Mark (AD 63)

Note: I disagree with most commentaries on this point. They will start with Mark in the 60s, but Mt & Lk come soon after, before AD 70. I must note that Augustine said Matthew came first, so I have one significant person in my camp!

#### d. John (AD 80-90)

The later gospel would naturally be more reflective, after two generations of church history.

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<sup>3</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger and Michael J. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy*, Kindle Edition (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2010), 85.

## 2. The purpose of writing (only Lk and Jn really address this)

- a. Luke wrote to instruct a disciple
- b. John wrote to convince unbelievers

The difference in purpose constitutes a different focus and produces a different result (but they aren't in opposition to one another).

## 3. The earlier Gospels repeat the Oral Tradition of the Apostles

- a. Crucifixion AD 30 (or 32)
- b. First gospel (by my early date) is AD 49, by most commentators around AD 63
- c. That makes roughly 20 to 30 some years before *any* significant written record
- d. If you work through the sermons in Acts, you will see a remarkable similarity in the message taught
- e. In an oral culture (most or many illiterate), the group would develop a standard “pitch” — a memorized set of stories about Jesus
- f. The synoptics all worked from this oral tradition for their own discipleship purposes
  - 1) Matthew: especially to disciple Jewish believers (church mostly Jewish when he wrote)
  - 2) Luke: disciple Greek believers
  - 3) Mark: disciple Latin believers
  - 4) John has no new group to present an oral tradition: he wants to convince an unbelieving world who Jesus is

The point here is that these Gospels complement, rather than contradict one another.

- They fit one story together into a whole.

## II. The points of significant agreement

- A. The Spirit anointing Jesus at the Baptism (Mt 3.16; Lk 3.22; Mk 1.10; Jn 1.32)
- B. Feeding of 5,000 (Mt 14.13-21; Lk 9.10-17; Mk 6.32-44; Jn 6.1-15)
- C. Walking on the water (Mt 14.22-33; Mk 6.45-52; Jn 6.16-21)

These identical records show the apostles are all telling the same story.

## III. The points of assumed familiarity

### A. Andrew and Peter

- 1. The Synoptics mention Andrew as Simon Peter's brother
  - a. When they were mending their nets by the sea (Mt 4.18)
  - b. In the apostle lists (Mt 10.2; Lk 6.14; Mk 1.16)
  - c. When they go to Simon and Andrew's house and Simon's mother-in-law is sick (Mk 1.29)
- 2. John mentions that Andrew recruited Simon his brother to the discipleship (Jn 1.40-42)

The way John describes it, he assumes you already know the relationship.

### B. John the Baptist's imprisonment

- 1. The story of the imprisonment is found in Mt 14.3-12; Lk 2.18-20; Mk 6.17-29
- 2. John has one comment on the story: Jn 3.24

Jn 3.23-24 John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and *people* were coming and were being baptized—<sup>24</sup> for John had not yet been thrown into prison.

- 3. It's an explanatory note, John assumes you already know the story

### C. The prophet without honour

Jn 4.43-44 ¶ After the two days He went forth from there into Galilee. <sup>44</sup> For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country.

1. John doesn't say where or when Jesus testified to this
2. But we know because the Synoptics told us, in Nazareth, his hometown (Mt 13.57; Lk 4.24; Mk 6.4)

### D. The backstory of Mary and Martha

1. John assumes we already know Mary and Martha when he tells the story of Lazarus (Jn 11.1-2)

Jn 11.1-2 ¶ Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.

2. We only know about these two from the slightly negative story about Martha in Luke (Lk 10.38-42)
3. We also know of the woman wiping Jesus feet by the "anonymous woman accounts" in the Synoptics (Lk 7.37ff.; Mk 14.3-9)

Some think Luke tells a similar account of a different woman

4. John himself tells the story in Jn 12.1-8

The overall point here is that as John speaks of these people, he assumes his readers are already familiar with them, he doesn't need to tell the story again.

### Conclusion:

**Proposition:** The differences between John and the Synoptics are complementary, not contradictory.

We find that these differences (such as they are) are insignificant, differences that don't make a difference.

Rather, they fill out more completely the story the apostles gave us of our wonderful Lord.