

From a talk by B. Cobbey Crisler
 BOOK OF JOHN, A Walk with the Beloved Disciple
 (from transcription notes with earlier permission from Janet Crisler)
 remove the term "us and them." I don't believe that we need to recognize as an
 obstacle the centuries which have intervened.

No centuries have intervened unfortunately as far as human nature is concerned. We're almost right where they were. The challenge then to them, as well as to us, is a continual one, namely, what can we do about the problems brought upon us individually and collectively by human nature? What was the master teacher's method? Is it applicable today? Is it just theory? Is it just niceness, something that we love to hear, but impractical to put into practice? All these things I think we find will be answered as we go through the account.

Professor C.H. Dodd, who was one of the top New Testament scholars, had great insights indeed. He suggested that if we can understand John, we will know what early Christianity was.

JOHN 1:1

John 1:1. John starts off unlike any of the preceding gospels. "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" He starts off, as a matter of fact, as only one other book of the Bible begins. Notice Genesis 1:1: "*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*" Do you think the early readers of his gospel would have recognized that? Do you think that was John's intent? That it *should* be recognized?

There is something that is a major clue to studying the Bible. That is, when you get the remotest hint of an Old Testament verse in the New Testament, don't ignore it or put it aside. It's there for a very deep reason. It probably holds the key to the meaning of the New Testament event, or the author would not have included it. By no means make the mistake which Professor Davies, Professor Dodd, Professor Albright and many others of our top New Testament scholars say we often make. That is, when you find a verse in the New Testament which comes from the Old Testament, either an exact quote or a paraphrase, don't just go back to that verse.

Read the context around it. Study the environment, get deeply involved in the thought and intent of the Old Testament passage. You may be more closely at-one with what the author in the New Testament means. In other words, what do you have? You have a blend of the whole Bible that way. You find that Old and New Testaments become inseparable, which is virtually the view, I think, that the authors of the New Testament take. The account of the "Walk to Emmaus" in Luke 24:13-35 shows how much Jesus and the apostles used the Old Testament to show

how much the New Testament fulfills Old Testament prophecies.

It also seems clear to me that Jesus, in his approach to mankind, from his outlook, his acts, his attitudes, his words as well as works, embraced universal humanity. You'll find hints of it passed down from his early students to their students, and so forth. But more than this, Jesus of Nazareth was a Bible student to surpass all Bible students. Therefore, if he knew in his own thought when an event affecting him or others of his period were the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy, or a lesson should be learned from a new/old truth that came out of the reservoir of the Scriptures, then he would so state it.

But sometimes he allowed it to remain hidden. It would force his hearers, as well as his readers in this century, to become Bible students with him if they wanted to understand what he was saying. He embraces universal humanity. He addresses and communicates particularly to Bible students. As far as Jesus' comprehension of the word "Christian" is concerned, it probably would be fair to say that he would insist that Christians become Bible students just to comprehend what the word meant. What does that say to us today? Does that mean we should be reading these books, this collection, this library called the Bible? Specifically, our focus today is on the New Testament and one of the gospels? Should we be reading it as if it were a novel? Is that how Jesus felt his life and mission should be conveyed?

Should we weep real tears because of the suffering and the lack of understanding and the persecution that occurred to him? And then wipe our eyes and go about our business because we've read a very deeply moving story, as we might have turned on a television set? Is that the kind of surface research that Jesus expected of his followers? When he said in John 5:39, "*search the Scriptures,*" I doubt you could ever apply that to television. Who wants to search television? There is obviously an object in view which Jesus knew would not benefit him, but would be enormously rewarding. The yield on that kind of investment would leap out of the page into the lives of those who did it. Therefore, "*the word would be made flesh,*" (John 1:14).

John 1:1 starts his gospel off, "*In the beginning was the Word.*" The Greek is, *en arche hin ho logos*. Does *arche* look familiar to you? It is the root word in "archeology." It's an exciting word. It doesn't just mean when things begin or when they have started in a human way, so much as, translated by some scholars, as "the

first principle” of things.

For instance, when Jerome, in about 400 A.D. translates the Greek Bible into Latin, here’s how he does those opening words. “*In principio*,” which, of course, is our root of our word “principle,” *in principio*. He could have used another Latin expression which is “*ab initio*,” which would have meant at the initial phases of things, but instead he chooses a Latin word which has a dual meaning which could be “principle,” the first principle, the origin, the basis of things.

If we choose that particular Greek meaning for the opening of both Genesis and John, then it gives it an entirely different connotation. If, in principle, God created the heaven and the earth, or in principle, was the word, it starts out like many mathematical or scientific textbooks which start out with the statement of principle. Everything else derives from it.

But then we come to a word which John uses in the first chapter and uses again in successive chapters but never with the same connotation. It stands out in its uniqueness and it is so emphatically important to the author that we have to just dwell on it somewhat and see what it might mean.

Let me give you a partial history of the word. What automatically occurs to you as the meaning of *logos*? We take this word, “Word,” and identify it with *logos*. This is likely being written at some point during the 1st century A.D. Way back in the 6th century B.C., Heraclitus at Ephesus was attempting philosophically to explain continuity amid all the flux around him. He resorted to *logos* as the eternal principle of order in the universe, the kind of reliable, unchanging law and order. This is several centuries prior to John’s use of it. (Interestingly enough, people think that the *Gospel of John* may have been written there.)

From that period we can trace the word *logos* through many, many different concepts. Zeno (of Elea, c 490 - c 430 B.C.), a Greek philosopher used it in the connotation of right reason, of reality within the mind, pure thought. Which leads me to what Professor Dodd has said, “It is only in Greek that a term is available which means both thought and word, and that’s *logos*.” Only in Greek have you that term that can convey both thought and word. So, when you’re talking about *logos*, even from the standpoint of word, if we are not giving to it what really is behind it, we’re

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losing something of the message, aren't we?

Why does the additional concentration on thought add to the definition of word? When you go behind the word to the thought, you're dealing with ideas, concepts, and the meaning. It is where all human languages finally give up their fragmentation and meet, and become one, in a Pentecostal day of infinite communication. The "word" is but an instrument which we must meet at the thought or at the meaning. Then, no barriers, especially language barriers, can stand between us and comprehension of one another, of the universe, its laws, and the source of those laws.

Dodd continues,

"In Origen's commentary on the 4th gospel which is being written, again very early in the history of the Christian church. In reading Origen's commentary, there are interpretations in there, in the Greek that he's writing, which absolutely depend upon taking *logos* not only in the sense of word, but it alternates without warning with the other sense of rational principles. So, the continual indication of this word principle is something that is significant."

Do you know where we use *logos* in the English language? Biology, physiology. *Logos* is the one that has been used to define the sciences in the English language. This was the comprehension at least of the lexicographers who developed our own language of the Greek term. Look how it's lasted even in our language. We use it all the time without realizing it, taking it for granted. Is there a scientific connotation, then, that "*In the beginning,*" "*In the first principle of things,*" there is a scientific unvarying, inalienable, order that's ruling. And that it's not only being uttered as an expression or word, but behind it is the immense thought that also must be based on the same principle. Notice in Verse 1 of Chapter 1 that it all related with and to God.

JOHN 1:3

John 1:3 continues with a statement that is quite absolute, "*All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.*" Is there any reservation for qualifications? "*All things were made by him.*" That is enormous commitment to make at the beginning of a book. The theology of this book is therefore committed right squarely on what principle if we're now defining the theological principle on which the Bible is based? Not only oneness of God, but the fact He's one, also means He's all. "*All things were made by Him.*" Everything is

created by Him. That also poses problems, because all we have to do is open our eyes and look around us. And what we see, we'd rather not think was created by God. But as of now, we've just started the book. So, let's see what the style of the author is and his theological commitments. "*All things were made by Him.*"

He doesn't leave it there. The very next sentence adds, "*Without him was not any thing made that was made.*" Why is he saying that? Why wouldn't the first part of the sentence be sufficient? "*All things were made by Him,*" doesn't that take care of the other part? What is the difference? What's the distinction that he is implanting in his readers' thought right at the beginning of the book? "*All things were made by Him.*" What would you call that? That kind of statement is an absolute, but is it also an affirmation. It's a real solid plus. This is a plus of the theological view of John. "*All things were made by Him.*"

What have we got now? Denial. Here is how we're going to deal with the minus element. The minus element is without Him, "*without him was not any thing made that was made.*" Any hint of a minus existing after the all-things-were-made-by-him being declared, is removed, because it is the other side of the same coin.

The plus, the minus, the affirmation, the denial is a mathematical approach. Dealing with the plus, dealing with the minus and ending up with one, not dualism, One, so there's no doubt that the key to the gospel is monotheism. It challenges the reader's thought to see if he's there at that altitude before he continues any further in the gospel. It forces the reader to get to that height in order to remotely communicate with what's in the gospel itself.

JOHN 1:4,5

John 1, Verses 4 and 5, in your own study, the mention of light and darkness should instantly communicate something to Bible students who already know what these opening verses are intended to convey. It is the days of creation. Why "the days of creation"? Let's take away "the days of" and just use the word "creation." What is this first chapter pointing us back to from its opening words? Genesis 1. What's the key symbol in Genesis 1? "*Light.*" In fact, the very next thing it said in Genesis 1:3, "*Let there be light.*" Then John moves into the narrative, but only after he has discussed the important elements of the first chapter of Genesis.

JOHN 1:6

John 1:6, "*There was a man sent from God.*" No one should ever take John's vocabulary lightly. "*Sent from God*" couldn't even be uttered to a Jewish audience unless it could be proved by what? The Old Testament. To the Jews there was only