

Christology in John's Gospel as a Trigger for Discipleship¹

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Abstract

*This article discusses the relationship between Christology and discipleship. It argues that Christology is the driving force, or trigger, behind becoming a disciple of Jesus and can also be used to revitalize existing disciples. The first part of the article examines the use of the term *mathētēs*, asking the question, “Who is directly or indirectly called a disciple of Jesus?” The second part explores concepts related to discipleship, which provides a basis for the third part of the article, which delves into why someone becomes a disciple of Jesus, i.e., questions of motivation. Since the topic is extensive, this section will only focus on the parts of the Gospel that contain explicit Christological titles and where the response to Jesus is positive. Since, in the Gospel of John, Christology is the means of initiating discipleship, the fourth part analyzes whether the main message of the gospel is centered on Christology or soteriology and how different messages impact discipleship. The article concludes that the Gospel of John emphasizes Christology as the center of its message rather than focusing on man's fallen state and need for salvation. It also states that Christology triggers discipleship and plays a crucial role in motivating believers to commitment, zeal, sanctification, and sacrificial service within the Church today.*

Keywords: *John's Gospel, Christology, discipleship, gospel, soteriology, believe, sin*

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Introduction

Writing about a topic based on the Gospel of John can be quite challenging. This is because John does not follow a linear writing style where he discusses one topic and then moves on to the next. Instead, he uses amplification techniques and often connects and overlaps different concepts to create a network of links and associations. This means that no matter how much you delve into the analysis and treatment of a topic, you may still feel like you have not done it justice and that so much more could have been said.

This article aims to demonstrate the interconnectedness of Christology and discipleship in the Gospel of John. In essence, discovering who Jesus is (Christology) is the foundation for and catalyst of discipleship. To accomplish this, the first section delves into explicit references to discipleship, including who is invited and considered a disciple. The second section explores the various concepts related to discipleship, as John uses a range of terms to describe it. The third section examines how Christology (positive responses to Jesus) encourages and inspires discipleship. Only texts where Christological titles appear and people respond favorably are analyzed. Finally, in the fourth section, John's Christology is examined to determine if the Gospel is primarily focused on Christology or soteriology. It is also pointed out that the greatest sin in John's Gospel is Christological in nature – the disbelief in Jesus' identity.

1. Discourse on Discipleship in John's Gospel

We will start by identifying the specific claims to discipleship. If we trace back to the earliest person directly linked to the term *mathētēs* concerning Jesus' disciples, we find Andrew. Andrew is first mentioned in John 1:35-37 as a disciple of John, along with another unnamed disciple. However, it is not until John 6:8 that the term *mathētēs* is directly associated with Andrew's name. Judas Iscariot is another person to whom the term is directly linked (Jn 12:4), but John immediately warns readers that Judas will betray Jesus. The beloved disciple is mentioned as the third person, referred to as the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (Jn 13:23; 19:26-27; 20:2; 21:7, 20, 23, 24), but the Gospel does not explicitly name him. Simon Peter is introduced as the fourth person, mentioned in chapter 18 as accompanying Jesus at his arrest. It should be noted that others call Peter Jesus' disciple (Jn 18:15-17, 25). There is also a reference to "another disciple" whose identity remains unknown. This pair of disciples, consisting of Peter and "the other disciple," appears again in John 20:2, 3, 4, 8 related to the empty tomb. In John 19:38, it is stated that Joseph of Arimathea was a disciple of Jesus. However, he kept his discipleship a secret due to his fear of the Jews. Another person mentioned in the same chapter is Nicodemus (Jn 19:39). Although the text does not explicitly state that Nicodemus was a

disciple of Jesus, it is worth noting that he appears alongside Joseph of Arimathea during the burial of Jesus' body. Thomas, also known as the Twin, is explicitly mentioned as a disciple of Jesus in 20:26. In 21:2, the largest list of Jesus' disciples is given, which includes Simon Peter, Thomas the Twin, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples.

When examining the use of the term *mathētēs* concerning individuals, only Philip is a new addition due to his mention in John 6:5, 7 where it is linked with the term *mathētēs* in John 6:3. Philip is also mentioned in the context of the paschal meal in John 14:8-9. Peter's name occurs several times: a) in John 6:68, linked to *mathētēs* in John 6:66 and the term "the Twelve" in John 6:67; b) in John 13:6-9, linked to *mathētēs* in John 13:5; c) in John 13:24 linked to *mathētēs* in John 13:22-23; d) in John 18:10-11, linked to *mathētēs* in John 18:1. Peter also appears in chapter 12, but as already mentioned, he is directly called a disciple of Jesus along with some others (Jn 21:2), and the disciple whom Jesus loved. Thomas the Twin, mentioned in John 11:16, is categorized as a Jesus' disciple in connection to *mathētēs* in John 11:12 and to *symmathētēs* in John 11:16. Furthermore, Judas Iscariot is mentioned as a disciple of Jesus in John 12:4 and his status as a disciple is confirmed in John 13:26, 29 in connection with *mathētēs* in John 13:22 and 18:2 in links with *mathētēs* in John 18:1. In John 14:22, a Judas is mentioned, but the author of the gospel clarifies that this is not Judas Iscariot. Although the noun *mathētēs* is not used in close proximity, it is understood that Judas is indeed a disciple, given that the events of chapters 13 to 17 occur during the Passover dinner that Jesus had with his disciples (Jn 13:5, 22, 23).

If we were to list the names of Jesus' disciples in the Gospel of John, they would be:

- Andrew: John 1:40; 6:8; 12:22
- Simon Peter: John 1:40, 42, 44; 6:8, 68; 13:6, 8, 9, 24, 36, 37; 18:10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 25, 26, 27; 20:2, 3, 4, 6; 21:2, 3, 7, 11, 15, 17, 20, 21
- Philip: John 1:43, 44, 45, 46, 48; 6:5, 7; 12:21, 22; 14:8, 9
- Nathanael: John 1:45, 46, 47, 48, 49; 21:2
- Thomas: John 11:16; 14:5; 20:24; 20:26, 27, 28; 21:2
- Judas (not Iscariot): John 14:22
- Judas Iscariot: John 6:71; 12:4; 13:2, 26, 29; 18:2, 3, 5
- Beloved disciple: John 13:23; 19:26-27; 20:2; 21:7, 20, 23, 24
- Sons of Zebedee: John 21:2

In the Gospel of John, the term "disciple" generally refers to those who were Jesus' disciples. This can be seen in various passages such as John 2:2, 11, 17, 22; 3:22; 4:1-2, 8, 27, 31, 33; 6:3, 8, 12, 16, 22, 24, 60, 61, 66; 7:3; 8:31; 9:2; 11:7-8, 12, 54; 12:16; 13:5, 22-23, 35; 15:8; 16:17, 29; 18:1, 2, 19; 20:10, 18, 19, 20, 25, 26, 30; and 21:1, 4, 8, 12. In other instances, John 1:37, 38, and 3:25 mention the disciples of

John the Baptist, while in John 9:28 the Pharisees refer to themselves as “disciples of Moses.” The Pharisees also suspect the man blind from birth of being a disciple of Jesus in John 9:27-28. It is important to note that the term “Twelve” (Jn 6:67, 70, 71; 20:24) refers to a special category of Jesus’ disciples, as seen in the use of *mathētēs* in John 6:66 and 20:25.²

2. Terms Belonging in the Discipleship Domain

2.1. To Follow

Some other terms do not necessarily denote a “disciple,” but their semantic scope can contain such a meaning. Of course, in such cases, the immediate context will reveal the word’s meaning. The first such term is the verb *akoloutheō*, meaning “to follow.” It occurs 19 times in John’s Gospel, but only once does it refer to following someone as a disciple (Jn 11:31). At the start of the Gospel, John 1:35-37 mentions two of John the Baptist’s disciples who decide to follow Jesus in verses 1:37, 38, 40. One of the disciples is named Andrew, and is the brother of Simon Peter, while the other disciple remains anonymous. It is important to observe that these two disciples are not initially referred to as Jesus’ followers. However, their decision to stop following John the Baptist and instead follow Jesus classifies them as disciples, but no longer as John’s disciples but as Jesus’ disciples. In John 1:43, Jesus calls Philip to follow him, which is the first time he calls someone directly. We see this verb next in John 6:2, where we learn that a significant group of people followed Jesus. However, as we read the rest of the chapter, we discover that their motives for following him were not entirely pure. The crowd followed Jesus because they witnessed his miracles on the sick. However, this is not necessarily negative, as in John 10:38 Jesus acknowledges that faith based on works, such as miracles (see Jn 9 and 10), is acceptable to him, though not ideal.³ However, the context of chapter

- 2 Discussing discipleship in the Gospel of John presents a challenge as John does not provide a clear definition of discipleship or what it means to be a disciple. Instead, he describes it in various ways. Additionally, there are instances, such as with the Samaritans in John 4, where it appears that they became disciples of Jesus, but John doesn’t explicitly confirm this. As a result, their fate after Jesus departed remains unclear. Theologians also have differing opinions on whether Nicodemus ultimately became a disciple of Jesus or not.
- 3 Commenting on John 10:38, Colin G. Kruse (2003, 241) highlights the following: “The miracles of Jesus were the works of God, and Jesus invited his opponents to believe in him on account of the miracles, even if they could not believe what he said. This he said was so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father. Though belief based on miracles is not ideal (4:48), many did believe because of his miracles (7:31). Sadly, there were many who saw the miracles and still refused to believe (12:37). Nevertheless, the evangelist records Jesus’ miracles to engender belief in his readers (20:31).”

6 shows that the large crowd following Jesus misunderstood him, believing him to be only a “prophet” and seeking to make him their “king.”

The next group of texts describes the meaning of following Jesus, i.e., being his disciple. John 8:12 tells us that the one who follows Jesus will not “walk” in darkness. Based on John 10:4, 5, and 27, we find out that following the Shepherd involves listening to his voice. John 12:26 informs us that the prerequisite for serving is to follow Christ wherever he goes. Additionally, John 12:25 describes that serving/following implies hating one’s own life in this world.

The final set of texts refers specifically to Simon Peter and to a lesser extent, the “disciple whom Jesus loved.” In John 13:36-37, Jesus tells Peter that he is not yet ready to follow him, but will be in the future. The context clearly shows that Peter believes this means he is not ready to die for Jesus. Later in John 21:19-22, Jesus brings up the topic of death again and predicts that Peter will die a martyr’s death, like Christ, and encourages him to follow him. In John 18:15, Peter and another disciple follow the arrested Jesus to the High Priest’s courtyard, but this may not necessarily be related to discipleship. In John 20:6, Peter is shown following “another disciple” to Jesus’ empty tomb, and in John 21:20, Peter notices the disciple whom Jesus loved following them and asks about his future. Instead of answering, Jesus invites Peter to follow him.

2.2. *To Abide*

The verb *menō*, meaning “to abide,” is another term that carries the idea of discipleship. In John 1:38, when Andrew and another disciple follow Jesus, he asks them, “What are you seeking?” They answer with a counterquestion, “Rabbi... where are you staying/abiding?” Although they seem to be asking for his place of residence to spend time with him, according to Laurentio (2019, 3), this is another way of asking, “Who are you?” Similarly, in John 4:40, the Samaritans who believed in Jesus wanted him to “stay/abide with them.” Since it is clear that their faith was the fruit or result of woman’s testimony and Jesus’s teaching, this refers to discipleship and not just hospitality. In John 6:56, Jesus makes the connection between abiding in him and eating his body and drinking his blood, while in John 8:31, the condition for discipleship is abiding in his word/teaching. In John 12:46, Jesus stresses that whoever believes in him may not remain in darkness. The most significant discussion of abiding can be found in chapter 15, where Jesus speaks about “abiding in him” (15:4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 16). To abide in Christ means that his *word* abides in us (15:7), which is connected to abiding in his *love* (15:9). This love is defined as keeping or obeying his commandments.

2.3. To Come

The verb *erchomai*, “to come,” is also sometimes associated with discipleship. In John 1:39, Jesus calls his first two disciples, saying, “Come and you will see.” It is obvious that the invitation “Come” signifies a call to discipleship. Shortly afterward, Philip, who was invited by Jesus to “follow” him, met Nathanael and shared about Jesus with him. Philip invited Nathanael to meet Jesus himself, simply saying, “Come and see” (Jn 1:46), echoing the same words Jesus used in John 1:39.

When we encounter the term *erchomai* in the context of discipleship again, it is when Nicodemus approaches Jesus. In John 3:2, Nicodemus approached Jesus to discuss his ministry. He did not come specifically to be or become a disciple of Jesus. However, in the context of John’s Gospel, it is reasonable to see this arrival of Nicodemus in the context of discipleship, because of his later involvement in the burial of Jesus together with Joseph of Arimathea (Ch. 19). As we have said before, Joseph of Arimathea is described as a secret disciple, and it is possible that Nicodemus also falls into this category. Therefore, if we understand discipleship as a process, this “coming” of Nicodemus in chapter 3 can be seen as discipleship. Additionally, Jesus uses the verb *erchomai* twice in his conversation with Nicodemus, referring to those who do not “come” to the light and those who do (Jn 3:20-21). The fact that he came to Jesus at night seems to testify that Jesus indirectly pointed out to Nicodemus that he was still “in darkness.”

In John 4:40, we encounter the Samaritans who approach Jesus after hearing the testimony of a woman. This act of arrival can be categorized as discipleship for two reasons. Firstly, these individuals request Jesus to “abide” (*menō*), which in certain contexts refers to discipleship.⁴ Secondly, we witness that some of them gain faith (Jn 4:41) in Jesus as the Savior of the world (Jn 4:42) upon arriving. Conversely, in John 5:40, Jesus informs the Jews during a Jewish holiday that they are knowledgeable about the Scriptures but refuse to “come” to him to obtain life. Jesus points out that the Jews claim to believe and follow the teachings of Moses, but since Moses wrote about him, they should come to him. Clearly, “coming” has the meaning of discipleship, among other things. Similarly, in John 7:73, during the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus invites all those who are thirsty to “come” to him.⁵

4 As was already pointed out, John often enhances and expands one term by connecting it and overlapping it with other terms, creating a network of links and associations between various concepts. Therefore, it is reasonable to claim that “discipleship,” among other things, is described as “residence,” but the meaning of “residence” extends beyond the concept of discipleship.

5 It is sometimes difficult to find the boundary between discipleship and soteriology in John, because the belief that brings eternal life is directed at recognizing and accepting Jesus’ identity. Different people “come” to Jesus and “follow” him. Regarding some, we are told they “believed” in him. However, there are also those who believe but still need to believe (disciples in Ch. 1 believed in Jesus but were still in the process of believing (e.g., Jn 2:11, 22), and some who believed were capable of stoning Jesus (in Jn 8:31 the Jews who believed in Jesus wanted to kill him in the end (Jn 8:59)).

Chapter 6 of the book mentions the verb *erchomai* six times. The first instance of this occurs in John 6:5, where a crowd approaches Jesus after witnessing his miracles. Although this act of coming to, or following, Christ seems commendable, the same crowd displays a great misunderstanding of Jesus' person and ministry after he performs the miracle of multiplying the bread. They recognize him as a prophet and want to enthrone him as king (Jn 6:14-15). In John 6:24, after Jesus leaves them, the same crowd comes to him again, calling him "teacher" (Jn 6:25). However, Jesus sees through them (Jn 6:26-27) and understands that they follow him for the wrong reasons and with a deep misunderstanding. In John 6:35, 37, Jesus uses *erchomai* again to address the same people and tell them about himself as the "bread of life." He also explains that those who come to him "will not go hungry" and that only those whom the Father gives him can come to him. He repeats this thought in John 6:44, 65, where we find two instances of *erchomai* again. Based on this, what can we deduce? In those passages, *erchomai* certainly appears in the context of discipleship, given that Jesus is "teaching" the listening crowd (Jn 6:59). However, we also learn that the group contained many of his "disciples" (Jn 6:60) and that many of them left him (Jn 6:66). If discipleship is a process, we see that some who follow Jesus stop halfway.

In John 8:2, we find Jesus sitting at the Temple as people "come" to him, and he teaches them. The text does not reveal in what sense they come to him or whether they are his disciples. However, things get more complex because while Jesus teaches the multitudes, the Pharisees and scribes enter the scene with the woman caught in adultery, shifting the focus toward them. In the discussion from 8:3 to 8:20, Jesus teaches at the Temple, with the Pharisees at the center of that conversation. From 8:21, the Pharisees are no longer mentioned, and John refers to the "Jews," leading to many people believing in Jesus (Jn 8:30). It is not clear whether the Pharisees are counted among those Jews or whether it refers to the people from 8:1. From John 8:31 onward, Jesus now talks to those who "believe in him," but from the rest of chapter 8 we find out that those "believers" actually want to kill/stone Jesus (Jn 8:59), the reason being that Jesus told them who their true father was. The events of chapter 8 take place at the Temple, making it possible that this group of "believers" who want to stone Jesus are associated with those mentioned in John 8:1.

In John 10:41, the Gospel plot points us back to the beginning and John the Baptist's role as a witness. The verse mentions that some "come" to Jesus because of John's testimony. Based on the fact that these people came and "believed" in what John the Baptist said about Jesus (about his identity), it is evident that this "coming" may be related to discipleship.

2.4. *To Believe*

The term *pisteuō*, meaning “to believe,” holds great significance in John’s Gospel. This is already evident in the Prologue, where John introduces certain themes and topics that he will expand on throughout the Gospel. The verb *pisteuō* occurs two times. Here we see that John the Baptist bears witness about the light so that people can believe (Jn 1:7). Those who believe become children of God by “receiving” Christ (Jn 1:12). The Prologue does not mention discipleship, but faith is a shared trait among those who follow Jesus. Nathanael, for example, believes in John 1:49-50 that Jesus is the Son of God and the king of Israel. The miracle of turning water into wine in chapter 2 leads to disciples believing in Jesus (Jn 2:11). Only after Jesus’ resurrection did his disciples believe what he said in John 2:19: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn 2:22). In chapter 4, the Samaritans begin to believe in Jesus because of the woman’s testimony (Jn 4:39) and his word (Jn 4:41). The connection between faith and discipleship is perhaps most evident in John 8:31-32: “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Jesus says that those who abide in his word are truly his disciples, and they will know the truth and be set free. Finally, in chapter 10, Jesus refers to himself as the good Shepherd and says that those who believe are his sheep. They listen to his voice, he knows them, and they follow him (*akolouthēō*). In John 10:38, we learn that this talk of faith includes the knowledge that “the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (Jn 10:38).

Speaking of believing, we should point out that John’s Gospel gives us a multi-faceted picture of the concept of belief:

1. Some believe in Jesus because they have seen a sign (Jn 2:11).
2. Some believe because they have seen miracles, but Jesus himself does not believe them (Jn 2:23-24).
3. Some believe because of his teaching/word without seeing any miracles (Jn 4:41).
4. Some follow Jesus not because of miracles, but because of food. However, faith based on miracles alone is better than no faith (Jn 6:26).
5. Some look for signs and wonders to believe (Jn 6:30; 4:48).
6. Some believe in Jesus, but end up wanting to kill him (Jn 8:31, 59).
7. There are some who neither believe his words nor his deeds. That means that the miracles and the Word will not necessarily bring people to faith in Christ (Jn 10:25).
8. In 10:37-38 we see that Jesus accepts faith that is based on believing the miracles. People want to stone him for pretending to be God although he is only a man (Jn 10:33), but Jesus appeals to his words (what he told them) and his deeds (Jn 10:37). It seems that Jesus allows people not to believe if he is not doing his father’s works.

9. Some believe because others witnessed to them about Christ (Jn 4:39; 10:41).
10. Some believe in Christ but are not willing to say that publicly, fearing for their reputations (Jn 12:42).
11. In John 19:38 we see that Joseph is a secret disciple of Jesus, because of the fear of the Jews.
12. Some believed it because of the empty tomb (Jn 20:8).
13. Some do not believe without seeing (Jn 20:25), and yet some others will believe without seeing (Jn 20:29).

If the concept of belief in John is primarily aimed at recognizing and accepting the identity of Jesus, it is clear from the above examples that belief in Jesus has different meanings for different groups of people, and their faith (knowledge of who Jesus is) is of a different quality. Additionally, simply believing in Jesus does not necessarily make one a disciple. For example, some follow Jesus without truly understanding who he is (as in point 4), and some seem to be believers in Jesus, but their faith does not indicate that they are Jesus' disciples (e.g., points 2 and 6).

2.5. To Walk

The verb *peripateō*, “to walk,” is yet another term that sometimes carries the meaning of walking in the sense of discipleship. The first such mention occurs in John 6:66, but in a negative context because it is said that many of Jesus' disciples no longer “walked with him.” In John 8:12, the combination of *akoloutheō* (“to follow”) and *peripateō* (“to walk”) suggests that walking in this context means following Jesus. In John 11:9-10 and 12:35, there is a recurring theme of light and darkness. In John 11, Jesus says that those who follow the light walk in the day, while those who do not have the light in them walk in the night. In John 12:35, he warns his followers: “Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going.” Jesus sees himself as the light, and those who follow him walk in the light. Finally, in John 21:18, Jesus prophetically announces Peter's death and uses the verb *peripateō* alongside *zōnnyμι* (“to gird”). Peter used to walk wherever he pleased, but there will come a time when he will be guided by others to walk where he doesn't want to. Even though it may not seem related to discipleship, Jesus' instruction to Peter to “follow” him (*akoloutheō*) in John 21:19 implies the idea of walking in the context of discipleship.

2.6. To Hear

The verb *akouō*, “to hear,” or “to listen,” also sometimes has the meaning of discipleship, describing those who follow Jesus as disciples. The first two mentions of

the verb *akouō* occur together with the verb *akoloutheō*, “to follow” (Jn 1:37, 40), meaning that those who heard Jesus or heard about Jesus, started to follow him. In John 4:42, Samaritans hear for themselves what Jesus is saying and “believe” and “know” (*oida*) that he is the Savior of the world. Similarly, in John 5:24 *akouō* is paired together with *pisteuō*, “to believe,” and such persons have eternal life. In John 6:45, *akouō* is surrounded by phrases denoting discipleship: “It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught (verb *didaktos*) by God.’ Everyone who has heard (*akouō*) and learned (*manthanō*) from the Father comes to me.”

In John 8, Jesus presents himself as the one who “heard” from the Father (vv. 26, 38, 40). This is in contrast to those that surround him, because they could not bear to hear his word and, therefore, could not understand it (Jn 8:43). The conclusion comes in John 8:47 when hearing becomes the *measure* or the *test* showing who belonged to God, and who did not: “Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.” In Ch. 10, when Jesus talks about himself being the Shepherd and disciples being his sheep, one of their characteristics is that they “hear” his voice (10:3, 8, 16, 27). Similarly, in John 18:37, speaking to Pilate, Jesus says that those who belong to the truth “hear” his voice.

3. Christology as the Trigger (Motivation) For Discipleship

Having briefly considered terms that explicitly and implicitly fall under the category of discipleship, we will now explore why someone becomes a disciple of Jesus, or what motivates a person to become Jesus’ disciple. So, the crucial question is, “Why?” The answer offered in this article is: “Christology.” If we accept W. Hall Harris’ (1994, 162) statement that “Johannine theology is, in essence, Christology. The person of Jesus Christ is at the heart of everything the Apostle John wrote,” it is clear that Christology permeates John’s Gospel. In the Synoptic Gospels, there may be uncertainty among Christ’s followers about his identity. However, in John’s Gospel Prologue, the reader is immediately presented with a clear and powerful Christology that leaves no ambiguity about the Jesus that John is writing about.

In this vein, Howard Marshall (2014, 492–494) explains that while the other gospels introduce Jesus as the Messiah – a human chosen by God to establish His kingdom on earth, who will announce the future arrival of that kingdom, and who calls for repentance, faith, and discipleship – they also acknowledge that Jesus is more than just a man, he is the Son of God. The process of becoming a disciple of Jesus is described as becoming like little children. In contrast, John introduces Jesus as a divine being from another dimension who shares his heavenly status and nature with humanity. Despite the difference in perspective, John also addresses the Jews’ acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah and the subject of dis-

discipleship. Ultimately, the ingredients are the same, but the story is “put together” in a different way.

The next section will consider occurrences of explicit Christological titles as well as places where the response to Jesus was positive, resulting in discipleship or something akin to it.

3.1. *First Disciples of Jesus – Chapter 1*

While we are focusing on the Christology of John 1:35 to 51, it is important to remember that this section is preceded by John the Baptist's testimony (Jn 1:19-34) since the first disciples of Jesus come from John's disciples (Jn 1:35). John states that he is not the Messiah, Elijah, or the (expected) prophet (Jn 1:20-21, 25), but the voice of one crying in the wilderness (Jn 1:23). On the other hand, when John speaks of Jesus, he identifies him as the “Lamb of God” (Jn 1:29), the one on whom the Holy Spirit descends, allowing him to baptize others with the Holy Spirit (Jn 1:33), and the “Son of God” (Jn 1:34).

All of this serves as an introduction to the passage in John 1:35-51, when “the next day,” John is standing together with two of his disciples and repeats that Jesus was “the Lamb of God,” causing the two disciples to “follow” (Gr. *akoloutheō*) Jesus. Regardless of whether we consider their reaction to be discipleship in making or true discipleship, their reactions reveal deep Christology (see table below), which then drives them to follow Jesus and call others to do the same.⁶ The first disciple mentioned by name is Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, who first told his brother about Jesus and described him as the “Messiah” (Gr. *Messias*), the “Anointed One”⁷ (Gr. *Christos*) and “brought” (*agō*, cf. Jn 10:16) him to Jesus.

The next pair of disciples on the scene are Philip and Nathanael. Unlike in the case of the first two who turned from following John to following Jesus, here we see Jesus personally invite Philip to follow him. The text does not tell us why Philip began to follow Jesus, but in his invitation to Nathanael, we discover his deep Christology. He calls Nathanael to follow Jesus by telling him: “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote!” (Jn 1:45a). Additionally, Philip points out Jesus' earthly origin by mentioning that this is Jesus the son of Joseph from Nazareth (Jn 1:45b). We are not told how Philip came to know this about Jesus, except for the detail that Philip was from the same city (Bethsaida) as Peter and Andrew (Jn 1:44). It is obvious that he got to know this through the personal testimonies of Peter and Andrew. So, Philip approaches

6 For more on the true depth of disciples' Christology in Ch. 1, see the short review on the topic in 3.6. In any case, unlike the Synoptics, the first disciples of Jesus in John are well aware of his identity from the very beginning.

7 “The term Messiah is translated by John for the benefit of his non-Jewish readers” (Guthrie 1994, 1028).

Nathanael, and although Nathanael is initially skeptical,⁸ Philip invites him to use the same words (Jn 1:46) that Jesus used for his first disciples (Jn 1:39).

In the part that follows (Jn 1:47-51), the emphasis is on the words Jesus says to Nathanael. These words reveal information about both Nathanael and Jesus, since in John 1:51, Jesus refers to himself as the “Son of Man” for the first time. Nathanael’s response to Jesus’ words is deeply Christological. In John 1:49, he declares Jesus to be the “Son of God” and the “King of Israel.” Although chapter 1 does not indicate whether Nathanael became a follower of Jesus, we learn that Nathanael is listed among the disciples in John 21:2 at the end of the Gospel.

“Lamb of God”	Jn 1:35
“Messiah,” “the Anointed One”	Jn 1:41
“him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote”	Jn 1:45
“the Son of God,” “the King of Israel”	Jn 1:49
“the Son of God”	Jn 1:51

Since John begins his Gospel with high Christology, showing us that Jesus is both man and God from the start, and since the first disciples recognize Jesus’ identity (at least on the terminology level), one must ask how deep their understanding of him was. Although this merits a discussion of its own, for this article, it is enough to highlight the following paragraph:

John 1:35–51 depicts the beginning of Jesus’ active ministry as well as the beginning of the disciples’ journey with Jesus. This section of the narrative tells the story of the disciples’ first encounter with Jesus and their following of him. The passage is therefore significant for an understanding of Johannine discipleship. As our narrative reading will show, it not only depicts the significant aspects of discipleship (following, remaining or abiding, testifying, believing, etc.), but it also helps to clarify the Christological character of Johannine discipleship. The presence of many Christological titles, which John introduces as a motivating force for the disciples to come to Jesus and follow him, demonstrates the profound relationship between Christology and discipleship in the Fourth Gospel (Hera 2013, 3).

8 “The reason Nathanael has trouble with Jesus’ coming from Nazareth is probably because the Messiah was not expected to be associated with Nazareth. Nathanael’s question is usually understood as a negative one, though some of the church fathers took the tone as positive—that something good could come from Nazareth (Westcott 1908:1:55). It is probably neither entirely negative nor positive but simply a genuine question, expressing his doubts. He has reason to question whether Jesus is the one promised, but he is open to the possibility that Jesus is, as his subsequent action and confession show. Both Nathanael and Jesus’ opponents begin by questioning Jesus’ identity on the basis of his origin, but unlike the opponents, Nathanael ends by confessing Jesus and being promised greater revelation. The reason for the difference must lie in the fact that Nathanael is a true Israelite, in whom is nothing false (1:47)” (Whitacre 1999, 73).

3.2. Nicodemus – Chapter 3

We have pointed out that Nicodemus did not visit Jesus as a disciple, but John shows us here that he had a keen interest in his person. His statement: “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs (*sēmeion*) that you do unless God is with him” (Jn 3:2), reveals that Jesus’ signs made him curious about his identity and his relationship to God. While the conversation in chapter 3 initially centered on the topic of new birth, John 3:9 focused on the person of Jesus. Jesus revealed himself as the Son of Man (Jn 3:13, 14), the only Son (Jn 3:16), and the only Son of God (Jn 3:18). This Christology provides an answer to Nicodemus’ initial question about him “doing these signs” (Jn 3:2). The flow of the argument reads:

- A. Who are you? (Jn 3:1, 2)
- B. You must be born again (Jn 3:3-10)
- C. New birth is associated with Jesus, who is the Son (Jn 3:11-18)
- B. The one who comes to Jesus, comes to the light and carries out works (*ergon*) in God (Jn 3:19-21)
- A. B points to and answers A.

In other words, Jesus answers Nicodemus by linking the new birth, salvation, and crossing from darkness into light to himself. As Edward W. Watson (2021, 30) notes, “Although Nicodemus at this point does not yet embrace Jesus... it also reveals a desire to come to the light and find out more about who Jesus is and what message he brings.”

Since Nicodemus appears twice more in John’s Gospel (7:50 and 19:39), one must ask if Nicodemus ultimately became one of Jesus’ disciples. According to David Beck (1997, 63), “The primary question concerning the characterization of Nicodemus in the Fourth Gospel is how the reader should evaluate him. Does he remain a negative example of the unbelieving Jews, or does his understanding of and commitment to Jesus develop to the point of his portrayal in chapter 19 as a valid model of discipleship? Readers are divided on this issue.” Regardless of our position on this, we must note that what triggered Nicodemus’ approach to Jesus was Christology.

3.3. Samaritans – Chapter 4

The next chapter of John introduces a new character, a Samaritan woman who discovers Jesus’ identity through a prolonged conversation with him. Bauckham (2007, EPUB Location 108/388) observes that misunderstandings of Jesus’ listeners in John often allow Jesus to clarify the picture he uses or expand on its meaning. Consequently, some of Jesus’ listeners understand him, and some do not. In

the case of the Samaritan woman, Jesus uses the picture of water to teach her about his identity. Throughout their conversation, the woman's understanding of who Jesus is grows. Initially, she recognizes him as a *Jew* (Jn 4:8). But after a confusing discussion about water, she asks if he is greater than Jacob, who gave them the well (Jn 4:12), clearly anticipating a negative answer. Jesus then reveals his knowledge about the woman's past husbands, causing her to see him as a *prophet* (Jn 4:19). Later when discussing worship, the woman says that the Messiah is coming. Jesus answers by saying that he is the Messiah, using the phrase "I am," which in this context means "I am the Messiah." Bauckham (2007, EPUB Location 226/388) points out, "...the Jesus who tells the Samaritan woman that 'I am he' (Jn 4:26) has already implicitly claimed to be more than a human Messiah by offering the living water from which eternal life springs (4:14)." Jesus' messiahship is the main content of the woman's testimony to the people of her town, and she now uses the phrase "Come and see" (1:39, 46), which serves as an invitation to discover Jesus' identity (Jn 4:28-30). In John 4:42, we find the last step in the discovery of Jesus' identity, where some of her fellow villagers believe because of her testimony, while many more believe because of Jesus' words. Ultimately, the Samaritans recognize Jesus as the Savior of the world, a unique title found only once in John's Gospel.

3.4. *The Large Crowd and Jesus' Disciples – John 6*

Chapter 6 gives us an interesting dynamic between the "large crowd" (Jn 6:2, 5, 22, 24) that followed Jesus, Jesus' disciples who stopped "walking" after him (Jn 6:61-66), and the disciples who continued to do so (Jn 6:67-71). At the beginning of this chapter, John tells us the reason why a large crowd was following Jesus: "Because they saw the signs (*sēmeion*) that he was doing on the sick" (Jn 6:2). Although they were following Jesus, we cannot speak of the crowd as disciples because at this point we do not know what they think about him. John 6:14 gives us a first glimpse: seeing a miracle/sign that Jesus did, the crowd believes that Jesus is the long-awaited "prophet" who is to come into the world. The crowd shows great ignorance concerning who Jesus is, because seeing that he is a prophet, they want to make him king. In the case of the Samaritan woman, we saw a progression from Jesus as "prophet" to Jesus as "messiah," and here it goes from "prophet" to "king," although the meaning of the term "messiah" in this case has the meaning of "king," this interaction between Jesus and the crowd produces a different ending. After the crowd begins "seeking" (*zēteō*) Jesus and then finds him, Jesus tells them that they are seeking him for the wrong reasons: "You are seeking me, not because you saw signs [cf. Jn 6:2], but because you ate your fill of the loaves" (Jn 6:26). From this place onward, the image, or the symbol of food is the basis for the dialogue between Jesus and the crowd.

- Jesus immediately places himself at the center of the conversation, urging them to work for the food the Son of Man will give them (Jn 6:27-29).
- The crowd still does not understand that Jesus is talking about himself because they ask for a sign so that they may see and believe him (Jn 6:31-32).⁹
- The crowd still wants the bread Jesus is talking about (Jn 6:33-34), but then Jesus openly says he is talking about himself (Jn 6:35-40).
- The crowd begins to mumble, saying that Jesus cannot be the bread from heaven because he is Joseph's son and they know his mother (Jn 6:41-42).
- Jesus points out that the proper response to him implies discipleship (Jn 6:45), which is synonymous with believing (Jn 6:47), which is then synonymous with eating him as the living bread (Jn 6:50-51).

This last statement creates a double reaction. On one side, Jews begin to quarrel about Jesus' talk of the body that is to be eaten (Jn 6:52). On the other, many of his disciples stop following Jesus (Jn 6:61-66). The last group in this chapter are Jesus' disciples who continue following Jesus, and the response Simon Peter gives on behalf of the twelve reveals a deep connection between discipleship and Christology: Jesus has the words of eternal life since he is the Holy One of God. Since Jesus is the One, they have no one else to go to.

3.5. *Born Blind – John 9*

A man born blind is another person who progressively discovers who Jesus is. In this story, we find one of the Christological titles, noting that, as in the case of Nicodemus, there is a positive response to Jesus. However, we cannot be certain if this person became a disciple of Jesus. Nicodemus' story highlights the image/symbol of new birth and light and darkness; the case of the Samaritan woman uses the image/symbol of living water; in Chapter 6, the body of Jesus is portrayed as food; and now we have a symbol of blindness and sight. This blind man neither follows Jesus nor, unlike Nicodemus, does he show any interest in him. He is completely passive because Jesus is the one who approaches him first. His journey in discovering Jesus' identity begins with the fact that for him Jesus is merely "a man called Jesus" (Jn 9:11). In a later conversation with Pharisees who did not believe in Jesus' divine origins, the man refers to Jesus as a "prophet" (Jn 9:33), which is a term that has already been used by the Samaritan woman and the crowd who wanted to crown Jesus as their king. When the Pharisees question the man again, accusing Jesus of being a "sinner" (which they had been claiming throughout this chapter – cf. Jn 9:16), the man asserts that Jesus is actually "from God" (Jn 9:33). Finally, after meeting with Jesus, the man reveals that he believes Jesus to be the

9 An interesting parallel with Thomas, "Unless I see... I will never believe" (Jn 20:25).

“Son of Man,” a title which has been used in previous conversations with Nicodemus and the large crowd in Chapter 6.

It is significant that between recognizing Jesus as a “prophet” and saying that he was “from God,” we find a discourse about discipleship because Pharisees see themselves as Moses’ disciples, mockingly describing this man as Jesus’ disciple. Although we cannot know whether the blind man became a disciple of Jesus (but he does show some characteristics of Jesus’ disciples – witnessing), this whole narrative reveals that the key to discipleship is knowing who Jesus is.

3.6. *Thomas – John 20*

Apostle Thomas will be our last example. Thomas is a special case because, unlike previously mentioned people, he is by this time already a disciple of Jesus (cf. Jn 11:16; 14:5). We have no record of how and why Thomas became a disciple, but the conversation between him and Jesus is significant because it centers around Christology again. This time, Christology does not generate discipleship but revitalizes it.

John in his Prologue reveals that Jesus is the divine *logos*. Also, the idea of Jesus’ divinity runs throughout John’s Gospel in various ways (e.g., Ch. 8), and the readers of John’s Gospel will immediately understand that. However, the characters within the Gospel discover this truth gradually. Since John begins his Gospel with high Christology, showing us from the beginning Jesus as a man and God, and since the first disciples recognize Jesus’ identity, one must ask how profound their understanding of Jesus is. According to Schreiner (2008, 241), when Nathanael referred to Jesus as the “Son of God” and “King of Israel,” he did not think that these titles describe Jesus as a divine person. The term “Son of God” in effect meant the “Messiah.” Similarly, when Martha says that Jesus is the “Christ” and the “Son of God” in 11:27, she probably used those terms synonymously without necessarily seeing Jesus as a divine person. Schreiner further says that during Jesus’ trial, Pilate was informed that Jesus had referred to himself as the Son of God, which may have led him to understand the statement as a claim to divinity. Overall, Schreiner suggests that those who used the title “Son of God” for Jesus may not have fully grasped its depth in terms of his divinity, based on John’s theology as a whole.¹⁰

10 Whitacre (1999, 74–75) points out something similar: “The reference to Moses and the prophets (v. 45) suggests the titles Nathanael uses for Jesus are messianic. One popularly held expectation of the Messiah was that he would be a king in the line of David (for example, 2 Sam 7:12–16; Psalms of Solomon 17:21; cf. Rengstorf 1976:335–37; Michel 1978:648–51). The title Son of God could be understood in this way, as when in the Old Testament the king is called God’s son (for example, Ps 2:6–7; cf. Michel 1978:636–37). Thus, in calling Jesus the Son of God and the King of Israel (Jn 1:49) Nathanael is the true Israelite acknowledging his King. This view of Jesus is right, as Jesus acknowledges when he affirms that Nathanael believes (1:50), but it is far short

However, once we come to the end of the Gospel and the purpose of its writing stated in John 20:31, the expressions “Christ” and the “Son of God” are no longer synonymous because the term Christ refers to Jesus as the Messiah, and the “Son of God” denotes Jesus’ special status – his divinity (Schreiner 2008, 241). Thomas’ proclamation is also significant for the beginning of John’s Gospel because it creates a Christological inclusion:

There is no doubt, according to the Gospel of John, that Jesus is God. The Gospel climaxes with Thomas’s declaration to Jesus: “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28). The disciples grasp who Jesus truly is when he is raised from the dead. The acclamation of Jesus’ deity forms an inclusion with John 1:1, framing the entire Gospel. The same framing device exists in the prologue itself. The best textual reading of John 1:18 proclaims that Jesus is “the only God” (*monogenēs theos*) (Schreiner 2008, 259).

Melvyn R. Hillmer (1996, 93) reaches a similar conclusion when he says that the vocabulary used to describe discipleship – terms that describe the relationship but also the action – is remarkably diverse. However, it can be summed up by Thomas’s proclamation about the risen Christ, “My Lord and my God.” According to him, “This is the affirmation of faith of all who believe in Christ, for Thomas speaks for the entire group of disciples of that day and all followers of Jesus throughout the subsequent history of the church.”

4. John’s Christology as a Guideline for Proclaiming the Gospel and Discipleship

4.1. Gospel Message: Christology or Soteriology?

Through the analysis of John’s Gospel, we have discovered at least two key points:

1. The main purpose of Jesus’ interaction with people is to recognize his identity.¹¹
2. Those who recognize Jesus for who he is (partially or fully) and respond positively become his disciples.

of the deep truth expressed by these titles. Jesus is truly King, but his kingdom is not of this world (Jn 18:36). He is indeed the Son of God, but in a sense far beyond anything expected by Moses and the prophets. Each of Jesus’ titles affirmed in this chapter is true, so the disciples have glimpsed something of Jesus’ identity. But much purging of error and further illumination will be necessary before they truly grasp what they are saying.”

11 Fernando F. Segovia (1985, 91) highlights that John systematically and throughout the Gospel shows the difference between “Jesus’ disciples” and “Jews” in a way that the basic point of contention is “the validity of claims about Jesus’ relation to the Father.”

Marianus Pale Hera (2013, 48) aptly summarizes these two points:

...John does not argue for Jesus' divinity for its own sake. Rather he emphasizes the divine identity of Jesus in relationship to the human response to his coming. The presence of the divine Logos in the world naturally provokes the world's response, rejection, and acceptance. In the prologue the narrator draws the audience into the narrative by appealing to the audience's experience of the Word to prepare them to give their response to the incarnate Word by believing, so that they may have eternal life (20:31). If the Gospel's testimony of the divine identity of Jesus is Christology and the message concerning the acceptance of Jesus in faith is called discipleship, then the movement from Christology to discipleship is apparent and can be traced in the opening passage of John.

The significance of this subject is connected to another important subject – the message of the gospel and the question: What is the primary content of the gospel message – Christology or soteriology? This topic is of utmost importance for Christianity because it directly influences the concept of discipleship and does so in this way: the basic assumption of marketing is that people will buy a product if they think it will improve their quality of life. Therefore, the basis of marketing is *interest*. However, the problem arises if the gospel message starts to look like marketing, which is easily possible if the *center* of the message is man, his spiritual state, and the need for forgiveness/salvation. Speaking specifically about Western Christianity, the fact is that there is more than one message of Christianity. In this vein, Dallas Willard (n.d.) notices:

In the post-WWII period, the strongest association of evangelicalism was with evangelism, and for many citizens of North America, the only thing they knew of evangelicals was that they were evangelistic. And indeed they were. They were intent upon proclaiming a gospel of “salvation” and upon winning converts to Christ... This vision was firmly tied to the version of the Gospel and of salvation that dominated evangelicalism during the period. It was strictly a gospel of forgiveness of sins and assurance of heaven after death upon profession of faith in Jesus Christ – or, minimally, profession of faith in his having suffered the penalty for our sins upon the cross. If you believed in his death as your substitute, you were a Christian, even though you never became a disciple.

Similarly, in his book, *The Great Omission*, Willard (2009, 62) emphasized two related things: “If there is anything we should know by now, it is that a gospel of justification alone does not generate disciples” and “we cannot have a gospel dealing only with sin” (2009, 64). Willard hereby points to one of those gospels that emphasizes man's sin and justification.

However, the situation is far more complex, as the “marketplace” contains various “gospels” that uniquely prioritize man and his needs. Following Bill Hull's tax-

onomy, Dennis Allen and Raymond Brown (2023, 44–47) set forth the following versions of the gospel message:

1. **The “Forgiveness Only”** Gospel sees salvation as the outcome for the believer and considers everything else to be secondary. It is satisfying to the radical individualism of the American Christian and establishes a “do-this-get-that” transactional thinking.
2. **“Left” and “Right” Gospel** “is used to shorthand sociological stances on a range of cultural issues, typically the Left taking the liberalized view of economic, moral, and political topics, whilst the Right hews, typically to the conservative, or historically traditional view.”
3. **Prosperity Gospel** focuses on bartering with God and the “rights” believers have in Christ (health, blessings, wealth, etc.).
4. **Consumer Gospel** focuses on how God and/or the church community can fulfill my needs and maximize my enjoyment.

What do these four gospel versions have in common? They all place man in the center. Yes, people may believe in Christ. Yes, people may start attending church, services, and other church activities. Yes, they may get baptized, change some of their habits, and consider themselves Christians, believers, and Jesus’ worshippers, but at what cost? Well, at the cost of distorting or disabling true discipleship. Because if salvation is seen as a *transaction* between God and us, supported primarily by man’s self-interest, such a starting point in the relationship with God will inevitably affect and define one’s subsequent walk with God.

In his discussion about the gospel, Scot McKnight (Wax 2010) points out that there is a dilemma within Evangelical Christianity concerning integrating Jesus’ emphasis on the Kingdom of God and Paul’s emphasis on the message of justification by faith. Consequently, some view the talk of the Kingdom of God as the center of the gospel message and some think the center is justification by faith. However, there is a problem:

The minute a kingdom hermeneutic comes up, one either abandons the Pauline hermeneutic or one synthesizes or – and I think this is most common – one colonizes Jesus’ kingdom hermeneutic by a justification hermeneutic. That is, we make Jesus talk to Paul. Or, we colonize Paul with Jesus’ kingdom hermeneutic and make Paul talk to Jesus.

Evangelicals are worried that if we colonize Paul with Jesus’ kingdom hermeneutic, we will lose a Pauline soteriology. There are plenty of cases where that very thing happened. But I think many are doing the very same thing by colonizing Jesus with Paul.

What I suggest in my article is that both of these approaches fail (sic) to find the essential continuity between Jesus and Paul. Kingdom doesn’t lead to justification and justification doesn’t lead to kingdom. The unity is found through Christology, not through kingdom or justification.

This is how McKnight (2010) defines the gospel message: “The gospel is first and foremost about Jesus. Or, to put it theologically, it’s about Christology. Behind or underneath both kingdom and justification is the gospel, and the gospel is the *saving story of Jesus that completes Israel’s story*. ‘To gospel’ is to tell a story about Jesus as the Messiah, as the Lord, as the Son of God, as the Savior.” If McKnight is correct, then we should first proclaim Christology in order to make a path toward soteriology (Budiselić 2013, 19).

4.2. *The Key Sin in John’s Gospel: The Sin of Unbelief*

If we go back to John’s Gospel and consider those parts where we directly or indirectly notice a call to discipleship, we will see that the talk of sin (soteriology) is in the background. When Jesus calls to discipleship, the focus is the realization of who he is, and not a confession of one’s *sinfulness* (lust, lying, stealing, etc.) or a call to repentance/conversion. However, when we talk about sin, John’s Gospel brings us “the sin of all sins” that stretches from the Prologue to the very end of the Gospel and is essentially of Christological nature: the sin of not believing in who Jesus is, or, in other words, the sin of refusing to accept who Jesus says he is. Accordingly, the parallelism in the Prologue between those who “received” and “believed” in Jesus (Jn 1:12) and those who “did not receive him” (Jn 1:11), can be seen throughout John’s Gospel. John’s Gospel abounds in examples of those who believed in Jesus and those who did not believe, but here we will focus only on passages we already mentioned in the context of a positive response to Jesus’ person through discipleship:

- The calling of the first disciples (Jn 1:35-42) was preceded by John the Baptist’s statement that Jesus was “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29), but when Philip and Nathanael are called, there is no mention of sin or the need to repent – it is all about Christology. Nathanael is the one who believed in Jesus (Jn 1:50) because Jesus told him that he saw him under a fig tree.
- In the case of Nicodemus, Jesus pointed out the need to be born again. However, as previously noted, all the talk about being born again, salvation, and crossing from the darkness into the light, Jesus connected to himself. What was not in focus was Nicodemus’ sinfulness but the topic of belief/unbelief in Jesus: “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (Jn 3:18).
- In the case of the Samaritan woman, Jesus does comment on her sinfulness, but, as Beck (73) observes, “[t]he question of the woman’s sinfulness has received far greater attention from some readers than the narration of it seems to warrant. Nowhere in this scene is there any textual evidence of

repentance, nor is Jesus portrayed requesting it of her.” At the center of this story, the focus was not on the woman’s sinfulness but on the fact that some Samaritans believed because of her testimony (Jn 4:39), and some because of Jesus’ teaching (Jn 4:41-42).

- The problem of the large crowd Jesus dialogued with in Chapter 6 is also unbelief (Jn 6:36, 64; cf. 6:29, 30, 35, 47).
- Although the story of the man born blind begins with the question: “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”, Jesus seems to ignore that issue. Rather, he sees this as an opportunity to manifest the works of God. The ultimate result of this miracle is the blind man’s belief in Jesus (Jn 9:35-38).
- The last example is Thomas, whose statement “My Lord and my God” (Jn 20:28), and Jesus’ invitation for Thomas to no longer “disbelieve but believe” (Jn 20:27), nicely sum up the story of John’s Gospel Christological call to faith.

Conclusion

The Gospel of John falls into a special category due to its unique structure and message. It also places a great emphasis on Christology, while discussing personal sinfulness and the need for repentance and conversion less frequently than other synoptic Gospels. This does not imply that these topics are not relevant, but they are not as prominent. Instead, the focus is on Jesus as a person and how people react to him. In this article, we have tried to demonstrate the significance of Christology for discipleship.

The importance of this topic is manifested in several ways. Firstly, John’s Gospel clearly shows that the core of the Gospel message is centered around Christology, rather than man, his fallen state, and his need for salvation. Secondly, John’s Gospel also points out that Christology is the trigger for discipleship. Consequently, if believers/Christians lack interest in discipleship in their churches, perhaps it is due to their focus on the gospel message, which is centered on soteriology. In such cases, it is necessary to reconsider the content of the message being announced and emphasize Christology at the gospel’s core. Lastly, if Christians do not show enthusiasm toward the person and work of Jesus Christ, it is unlikely that anything else will permanently motivate them to commitment, zeal, sanctification, and sacrificial service. John’s Gospel invites us to explore the depth and beauty of Jesus’ person and follow the positive examples outlined in John’s Gospel to become Jesus’ disciples.

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Ervin Budiselić

Kristologija u Evanđelju po Ivanu kao okidač za učenje

Sažetak

U ovome članku razmatra se tema učenja u poveznici s kristologijom budući da se ističe kako je kristologija pokretač ili okidač za to da netko postane Isusov učenik te se ponekad koristi i za revitalizaciju učenika. U svrhu dokazivanja ove teze, u prvome dijelu članka istražuje se korištenje pojma *mathētēs*: koga se sve direktno ili indirektno naziva Isusovim učenikom. U drugome dijelu članka istražuju se pojmovi koji spadaju u domenu učenja, a sve to služi kao temelj za treći dio članka u kojemu se istražuje zašto netko postaje Isusov učenik, tj. što je to što neku osobu potakne ili motivira da postane Isusovim učenikom. Zbog širine same teme, u ovome dijelu razmatraju se samo dijelovi evanđelja u kojima se javljaju eksplicitne kristološke titule i gdje je odgovor na Isusovu osobu pozitivan. Budući da u Evanđelju po Ivanu kristologija pokreće učenje, u četvrtom dijelu razmatra se je li primarni sadržaj poruke evanđelja kristologija ili soteriologija te kako različite poruke evanđelja utječu na učenje. U članku se zaključuje kako Ivanovo evanđelje zorno pokazuje da je središte poruke evanđelja kristologija, a ne čovjek, njegovo palo stanje i potreba za spasenjem, kako je kristologija okidač za učenje te kako je kristologija ključna u današnjoj Crkvi za motiviranje vjernika na predanje, revnost, posvećenje i požrtvovno služenje.