

## **Emphases in the Gospels: Why do We Have Four?**

Let us pray.

*Father, we thank You that You love, that You have lavished a love on us that is so high, deep, wide, and long that we truly cannot fathom it, even though Paul desires for his people in Ephesians to get to know that love. But we recognize the depths and the riches of that love beyond pondering. We live on this side of the cross and the empty tomb, and we can see Your love all the more richly for the gift of Your Son. We pray that Your Son would be honored in this time we have together and that all things would be done unto His glory. Amen.*

I will do something different today. Let us talk about the life of Jesus. [Dr. Chapman calls up two volunteers to attempt to recite the life of Jesus]. First volunteer's outline of Jesus' life: born; went to the temple at age 12, and his parents were frantic; began his ministry in his early 30s; chose his disciples; turned water into wine at a wedding in Cana; taught the beatitudes; went throughout Galilee teaching and performing miracles; was at first liked (for His miracles) but then disliked by His people; was put to death on the cross; rose again from the dead; ascended into heaven; then sent the Holy Spirit. Second volunteer's outline of Jesus' life: born in Bethlehem to ordinary people; went to the temple at age 12; began his ministry; was baptized by John; taught and performed miracles; He instituted communion; His ministry caused a ruckus, which led to His death on the cross—this was a part of God's plan from the beginning, to pay the penalty for our sins and to be our redemption; He did not stay dead but rose on the third day; He returned to visit with His disciples; then He ascended into heaven.

We just had two students give us an outline of the life of Jesus. Now let us pretend these two outlines are Gospels. Two different authors are writing from two different perspectives about who Jesus is. By the way, is there anything in either of these outlines that we would disagree with? Everything looks great to me. I do not see anything in either outline that I find to be odd or unusual. In fact, I think both outlines are very good, especially considering that they were done just now without preparation. I want to approach this from the perspective of the redaction critic for a moment. Let us pretend these are gospels that were written 2000 years ago, and they were written by people who are no longer alive. So we cannot check with the authors of these two "gospels" to find out what they meant. Taking these two "gospels," let us try to tease out what is going on. We are particularly interested in the "theology" of it. Now, the redaction critic would be especially interested in those aspects that are distinct between the two "gospels." We benefit by knowing that the first volunteer's outline came first and the second volunteer's outline came second. That means that the second volunteer was looking at the first outline while she made her outline. Thus we can say (as redaction critics) that anything in the second outline that is different from the first constitutes the distinct theology of the author.

As I look at the second "gospel," I start out by noticing that at the beginning of the first "gospel" we have "born," but here in the second "gospel" we have "born in Bethlehem to ordinary people." Acting as redaction critics, let us begin to develop our theology of the author of the second "gospel"—"writer two." (And we will call the author of the first "gospel" "writer one"). We could say, "The theology of writer two involves Jesus being situated in the ordinary life of His people." That sounds scholarly, does it not? That is the distinct theological contribution of writer two. In fact, if we were to really push this we could say, "Writer two was bothered by the lack of ordinariness in 'gospel one.' Writer two's addition of 'born in Bethlehem to ordinary people' was not simply a distinct theological contribution. This was a correction of 'gospel one.'" We would also want to stop and consider Bethlehem. What is the theology of Bethlehem in "gospel two" as opposed to "gospel one"? We do not have enough material to

determine this, but that seldom stops scholars. Let us see what we can get out of this. Writer two was a little vague on when exactly Jesus began His ministries. It seems there may be something about the 30s that “gospel one” is very interested in. This may be because 30 is the Jewish coming of age. He can now become a full-fledged rabbi. Thus we could say, “Gospel one is extremely interested in the Jewish nature of Jesus, His rabbinic character, and how He can rightly teach.” Writer one also mentions Jesus choosing disciples, so obviously discipleship is of particular interest in “gospel one.” On the other hand, writer two must have intentionally chosen to ignore that aspect of Jesus’ ministry. In “gospel one” we have the highlighting of a particular miracle at the wedding in Cana. So we can try to identify why the wedding at Cana miracle stood out to the author of “gospel one.” On the other hand, “gospel two” is rather vague on the details of Jesus’ ministry, just mentioning that He performed miracles. In “gospel one” we have a specific mention of the beatitudes, while in “gospel two” it only says that He taught. When it comes to the theology of the cross, here we see that “gospel one” just focuses on the mere fact of the death of Jesus, as if there were no great theological import other than just His death. Perhaps that would make the resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Holy Spirit more important for that gospel author. In contrast, in “gospel two” there is a significant theology of the cross. It is not simply that He died after a “ruckus.” There is God’s plan, a penalty paid, and the author uses the term of “redemption.” Here in “gospel two” the resurrection is a bit more vivid because there is mention of Jesus returning to visit the disciples.

What did you think of that? Does that make sense to you? I was making many assumptions. There is much we do not know about these “gospels.” Let us also admit that this procedure as we have done it is a little unfair to the redaction critic. Let us just postulate for a second that “gospel one” is Mark and “gospel two” is Matthew. We do not just have a few bullet points in Mark and Matthew. We have a full 16 chapters in Mark and 28 chapters in Matthew. There is much more material to work with in Matthew and Mark, and so it is a little easier to actually engage in comparison and contrast. Still, this sort of procedure seems a little unfair to the authors. I was kind of pitting these two “gospels” against one another. However, I do not think it would be fair to say that the redaction critic thinks the early church would have been fighting against one another. Rather, the redaction critic might say that the Gospel authors were reading one another and there were points where they disagreed with one another. Thus the redaction critic does not think there were fights or even divisions in the church over these things, but he or she does postulate areas of disagreement because things are changed from one to another Gospel.

In this procedure, I was focusing on dissimilarities as opposed to similarities. Also, where they are different, I am assuming that the author is not interested in the things he does not mention or emphasize. For example, “gospel one” does not say “ordinary people” like “gospel two” does, so I assumed that “gospel one” is not interested in ordinary people. I did start to make assumptions that, just because something was not included, it was not part of the author’s theological concepts. We do not have enough material to know what they do not believe. We only have enough material to know what they do believe.

Also—this is very significant, I want you to hear this well—did you notice that the “gospels” basically agree? By highlighting the dissimilarities, which are fairly slight, I have ignored the fact that 90% of the content of these “gospels” is in agreement, and therefore the theological agendas of the two authors are probably very close to the same. Can I suggest a possibility of what the second volunteer may have been thinking? She may have been thinking, “I need to repeat most of what the first volunteer said because it was well stated.” But she also may have been thinking, “My job as the second volunteer, since the first volunteer had already done his outline of the gospel, was to add a little extra detail that I know to be true, simply to add some things that were accidentally missed in the first “gospel.” Am I right about that? Yes, she just needed to add something so it would not be exactly the same. Could there not be more mundane motives for adding or leaving out certain things in a longer Gospel that was copying

from an earlier Gospel? I do not mean to say that the authors had no interest in theological perspective. But if you already had the 16 chapters of Mark—under the theory of Markan priority—why just repeat those 16 chapters? You will add something. And it is also likely that you will not subtract much. That might help explain things.

I am trying to get into the mind of the redaction critic and critique it at the same time. When we ended the last lesson, we were focusing more on form criticism, but I also said a few things about redaction criticism. Redaction criticism assumes form and source criticism in many ways. Thus the way the redaction critic is thinking is there is Jesus, and there are certain traditions that come out from Him, maybe even groups of tradition. Trying to understand this procedure, let us group the traditions. We will group one tradition as A and one as X. X goes through community Y, which changes it slightly. Then X also makes it into community B, which is slightly different than community Y. At the end of this process we have C and Z, the final forms of the text. Also, we are assuming there is additional material that did not come from Jesus but just came from the community. Let us call that D from community Y and Q from community B. The form and tradition critic's goal was to go back and trace this process, trying to figure out what material came from Jesus and what came from the communities along the way. The redaction critic is not as interested in that. The redaction critic is interested in C and Z (the final form of the text) and what the distinct theological contribution of C and Z is. What they have to work with is the source criticism assumptions. Thus they would say that Mark came first, it was changed in one community and then in another, and the results are Matthew and Luke—but those authors, Matthew and Luke, have other agendas as well. The redaction critic is trying to discern what the distinct nature of Matthew's community versus Luke's community is. That is redaction criticism, effectively. In some ways I have engaged in this here.

The other aspect of redaction criticism, and I think a very apt critique of it, is that what they are really interested in is the theology of C and Z (the final form of the text). That means what they are interested in is the material that is distinctly C as opposed to B, or distinctly Z as opposed to Y. Therefore, there is a focus on what are known as the redactional seams. What is most interesting to the redaction critic, because it will most give you the theology of Z, is not the source material they used (they were just copying that, in the critic's mind). Rather, it is what they used to connect the material together. For instance, the teaching material in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew is all grouped together, whereas parallel material is taught by Jesus during his long trip to Jerusalem in Luke. Thus the same material appears in two different contexts. Now, the redaction critic is not interested in the material that is the same. He or she is interested in the distinct contexts. If Matthew links one saying of Jesus with another saying of Jesus, even with only three or four words, the redaction critic is most interested in those three or four words of Matthew. This is because they believe that is what will tell us about Matthew's theology.

How would you critique redaction criticism? Well, redaction critics focus on these small details rather than the big picture. They are not necessarily making allowances for simple stylistic differences that could account for different word choices between the Gospels. Could the difference not be stylistic rather than hugely theological?

I would add a couple of other critiques. First, redaction critics are indebted to the source and form critics. Their ideas are built on many of the same presuppositions. Thus our critiques of source and form critics could also be applied to redaction critics. Second, their over-emphasis of small details is very important. When you do this, you end up with less and less material that is distinctly Matthew. This is because even the sayings that are distinct to Matthew are not original to Matthew since they came from a source before Matthew. The only thing that you are really interested in is the linking material, the

redactional seams. This means that of the 28 chapters in Matthew, the number of verses that are distinctly Matthew could probably at most make one or perhaps two chapters. Thus you have gone from 28 chapters that give you the theology of Matthew (if you want to speak of it in those terms) to two chapters. This means you have much less to work with, which means you tend to make too much of the details. That is what I was doing in our example when I made too much of the term “ordinary people.” This was just an extra detail the author of “gospel two” chose to add. But if I am not considering the similarities between the gospels, but only what is distinct, then “ordinary people” suddenly takes on this huge import. I will construct an entire theology of ordinary people from that one detail.

Let me state some of the potential benefits of redaction criticism. Quite apart from all the tradition diagrams and such, I think it is the case that Matthew makes a distinct theological contribution, as do Mark and Luke. This is not to say that they are in conflict, but rather they are giving us different perspectives on the same material, as we saw with the diamond analogy. Everyone looks at the diamond from a different vantage point, and so they all have different perspectives. We do have techniques we can use to figure out what those distinct contributions are. That can be beneficial, as long as we do not misuse and abuse these techniques. For an example, we could go back and correct our analysis of “gospel one” and “gospel two.” We could say we are not just interested in the “seams.” We are interested in everything that was included. Thus the theology of “gospel two” is not just ordinary people and other distinctives. It is everything in her outline. We can then compare the emphases from “gospel two” to “gospel one.” I think there is something potentially positive about this, if you are cautious about it and do it in the right spirit of respect for the author, and especially for the Divine Author. I am not saying that we should throw out the good with the bad of redaction criticism, but I am saying we should understand that some of the assumptions here are certainly extreme and possibly wholly erroneous at times.

Two of the most famous, early books in redaction criticism are *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, by Gunther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, and Heinz Joachim Held; and *The Theology of St. Luke*, by Hans Conzelmann. If you read through either of these books, you will notice many of the things we talked about in this lesson. You can even hear it in the title of the second book: *The Theology of St. Luke*. We can assume he is asking what the distinct theology of Luke is. Now, you know I have some sympathies with that. But if you hear someone asking what the theology of Luke is, you should ask, how are they determining what the theology of Luke is?

Let me read you some selections from this second book. This is from the chapter, “The Significance of John the Baptist According to St. Luke.” It is not the significance of John the Baptist that is in view, it is the significance of John the Baptist *according to* Luke. You can hear the redaction type terminology that is used. Quoting from the book, “In the pre-Lukan tradition, John is understood from the standpoint of the dawn of the new eschatological age. He is more than a prophet, he is a forerunner, he is Elijah. Here Mark and Matthew use traditions which Luke himself has preserved for us. So it is all the more striking that Luke’s own pronouncements point in another direction. It is true that he does not set out his view coherently [in other words, we will have to tease out much of this], but he indicates it whenever he speaks of John by what he omits and by what he adds. In the tradition, John the Baptist stands on the dividing line between the old and the new epic.” This is the methodology right here! What is the tradition? It is the pre-Lukan tradition, presumably Mark that Luke is editing.

Let me quote Conzelmann again, skipping ahead to the next chapter: “Luke uses the existing material but transforms it in a characteristic way. Nowhere in his writings is a figure from the past brought into direct connection with the future eschatological events. On the contrary, existing interpretations are rejected [that is, Luke is rejecting the tradition, namely Mark]. Instead of being directly linked with

eschatological events, the figure is given a definite place in a continuous story of salvation, the end of which is not yet in sight. John no longer marks the arrival of a new eon but the division between two epics in the one continuous story.” Now, what he will conclude from doing that in a couple different places is that Luke’s eschatology is wholly different than Mark and Matthew. Mark and Matthew have two epics: pre-Jesus and Jesus. Luke has a continuous eschatology that comes from and out of the Old Testament in a much smoother way. That is his conclusion. Do you hear how the redaction critic is thinking? With redaction criticism, Jesus virtually disappears. At no point are they trying to come back to who Jesus is. They are no longer even interested in who Jesus is. They are wholly interested in Matthew and Mark.

If you asked for my opinion of redaction criticism in a couple of sentences, I would say that the idea of finding distinct theological emphases in the different authors of the Gospels is not necessarily bad. But redaction critics go beyond calling them “emphases.” They call them distinct “theologies,” as if the theology of Luke can be pitted against Matthew and Mark. Thus there is a presupposition and terminological distinction I would make. A more specific critique I would make is that by just focusing on the redactional seams we lose the sense of what the Gospels have in common. Even when you focus on the redactional seams you usually assume source theories. You also assume a particular theological motive for every little addition or omission from what you think the source was. These differences could be simply stylistic. We need to view them as part of a much bigger picture. The method is inherently interested more in the differences than in the unity between the Gospels. It is true that witnesses to an important event are focused on producing an account of what happened, not on being distinct from each other. But we have to be a little more sophisticated in thinking through how they came to actually writing their Gospels. Remember from the prologue of Luke how he indicates that he knows of many people who came before and wrote these things down. He also knows of the eyewitnesses and the traditions they passed down. It is not as if Luke wrote his Gospel while viewing the events he writes about. Rather, he knew the eyewitnesses, he knew the written accounts, and after careful investigation he was able to put it together. It is more as if he interviewed the eyewitnesses. Matthew and Mark were likely eyewitnesses of some of the events of the Gospels, but I would still hold to the possibility that Mark came first. Then Matthew could have used Mark as a basis for recollecting what went on, and he may have brought other sources in as well. We need to be a little more careful in our analogy, but the point is very well made that at the scene of an important event, everyone’s eyes are on the event, and they are seeking to describe the event. They are not focused on being distinct from one another.

Because of some questions from students, I want to make it clear that redaction criticism is not strictly postmodern. It came at the juncture from modernism to postmodernism. Now, those of you who have studied postmodernism will realize that there are many connections with modernity in postmodernism. Thus the transition between the two is a lot less absolute than we often recognize. One method that is a little more postmodern is narrative criticism. All of the critiques we have mentioned of redaction criticism are not uniquely ours. These critiques have occurred to many people before us, including many capable scholars. This is especially true of the critique that the redaction critics focus so much on the distinctions that they lose the big picture.

Another important critique of redaction criticism is that you cannot teach or preach well from the Scripture when you approach Scripture with this mindset. Let me give you a sample sermon from a text that I will approach as a redaction critic. “The sermon for today is on Mark 1:9-13. ‘And it came about in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth...’ As we look at Mark, we see that there are some distinct features of this Gospel as compared to Matthew and Luke. We realize that when he uses the phrase ‘And it came about in those days...’ as opposed to ‘But it came about...’ as we find in Matthew and Luke, we need to meditate on why he said ‘And.’ So the first point in my sermon is about ‘And.’” This simply

does not work. There is a sense in which approaching the text with this mindset hinders you from being able to preach and teach the Scripture well. That reality alone has caused people to say, “I need something I can take into the pulpit.” The other issue with all this is that people have realized that the fight about the historical Jesus will go on forever. Part of the reason for that are the presuppositions of people going into the historical Jesus debate, which we talked about before. They will constantly be at odds about what happened in the tradition. But what we really want to know is what it is that Matthew is trying to tell us.

Thus a new approach is to ignore all of the community influences that form criticism looks for. In ignoring all of this, we will not even be able to say much about the relationship between C and Z, the different final forms of the text, because the relationship between C and Z somehow goes back to a hypothetical community X. We are not simply interested in the redactional seams; we are interested in the whole Gospel. So let us just read each Gospel entirely on its own. We will not compare and contrast with the others. This is known as narrative criticism. The idea is that you have a narrator who tells you a story. The narrator creates the whole world in which he wants you to interact in a narrative fashion. Thus you can put aside everything, as if you knew nothing other than what the narrator tells you. Just read Matthew 1:1-28:20 and try to draw connections between different parts of Matthew. It is important to notice that in that context we speak of a narrator who tells a story. We are not vouchsafing the authenticity of the story. That is not our goal. Our goal is to approach this as we would any other work of literature—such as *Moby Dick*, or Shakespeare’s play *Julius Caesar*. We want to understand the work of literature as a work of literature, apart from historical reference. We will just read it from beginning to end. That is, effectively, narrative criticism.

One example of this method is a book called *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel*. Did you hear the phrase “reading Luke”? The goal is simply to read Luke, like a simple narrative. This title also uses the term “literary...commentary.” We are interested in Luke as a literary figure. What does he write? Thus narrative criticism focuses on reading the Gospels as any other work of literature. The length of this book, *Reading Luke*, betrays that the amount of detail of interest in the Gospel narratives is perhaps greater than with other great works of literature. That is narrative criticism.

Let me read you a selection from this book: “Luke 9:52-56 and 10:1-24 not only present the theology of world mission, they also offer guidelines to govern missionary behavior. On the one hand, both the Luke 9 passage and the Luke 10 passage contain a note of rejection following the theme of universality. Two different responses to this rejection are mentioned.” Do you hear the word “rejection”? That is a technical term in literary studies for “crisis.” There is a crisis happening here. Note that in this literary context James and John are simply characters in the text. They are not historical people; they are simply literary figures. James in the text, John in the text, Jesus in the text—they are simply different literary figures. Continuing the quote: “One: in the Samaritan episode James and John ask Jesus about the possibility of calling down fire from heaven on those who rejected him, reminiscent of an Elijah episode in 2 Kings 1:10. Jesus rejects any retaliation against His rejecters. Here is one guideline for dealing with rejection. It is in line with early Christian instruction about a disciple’s response to offending non-Christians. Two: in the section of the commission of the 70 (or 72), the response to rejection is very much that of 9:5.” He goes back to compare different passages in Luke with each other. He compares and contrasts the literary motifs found in this one Gospel. That is how you go about doing narrative criticism.

I am interested in what you think about that. Do you see benefits, do you see drawbacks? What do you see? One student raised a concern that narrative critics focus on the story without looking at meaning or

content. They do look for meaning and content, but they look for the meaning and content that the author of the story is trying to convey. Now, they will not bring it back to Jesus. They are only interested in Luke. What does Luke try to say in his narrative? Narrative criticism loses the historical connectedness, which means it loses the redeeming power of Jesus. A student said it seems that Jesus becomes just a moral figure teaching about morality. I would go much further than that, to say that in Luke the character Jesus dies on a cross. In Luke the character Jesus is raised again. And in Luke the character Jesus ascends. Luke has a theology there, and his theology involves the death of Jesus—even the atoning ramifications of the death of Jesus—the resurrection of Jesus, the ascension of Jesus, and Jesus' power that comes from these things. All that is in Luke. What you cannot then do, as a narrative critic, is say that all goes back to Jesus. This is because, as a narrative critic you do not make historical pronouncements as to whether or not any of this actually happened. It is all still within the narrative framework.

Another student said that, in this method, the object of the truth of Jesus is suppressed for simply the subjective thing Luke thought. That is exactly right. Part of the motive for that is the frustration that if you want to say anything about Jesus Himself you have to engage in historical Jesus scholarship and all the presuppositions bound up in that debate. So the narrative critic says, "Let us ignore all that; let us not even care about it and simply talk about Jesus as a character in Luke." This seems to be in discontinuity with how we study the rest of history. We want to know something about what actually happened. Here the narrative critics are in a sense giving up. We cannot know that, so let us just study what Luke says. The narrative critic is not concerned with the authenticity of Luke's history. He or she does not pronounce on that. But the narrative critic does look for a different truth. One way of approaching this, from a more liberal perspective, would be to say, "There is truth here. But it is not historical truth as to whether events happened. It is truth that speaks to our souls."

Another question is whether they are interested in historical context, such as when Luke wrote the Gospel, and how it would have resonated in his day. The answer varies. The early practitioner of the narrative approach simply said, "All of that is irrelevant because the narrator provides you with the world as you need to know it. You do not need to know anything outside of the narrative. When you read a book like *Moby Dick*, you do not need to know about what life was really like for Melville (the author)." That is the point they would make. I do not agree with that point, but that is what they would say. You do not need to know about the historical context of Shakespeare's day. You just read the story and he provides you with everything you need to know. I do not agree with that.

I have to say that many of the later narrative critics began to incorporate ways to speak of the society, so they speak of "Lukan context." By doing this you still focus on Luke. You cannot go back to Jesus. But you can talk about "how a Luke would have sounded in the first century to a first-century audience." There have been some narrative critics who have brought that in. I think that is a helpful corrective to the approach. Another question is whether they are at all about the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the Word. This gets at a point I wanted to make. This approach does not assume a particular theological viewpoint, in at least some sense. A very liberal person—these categories are strange; let us say someone who does not believe Jesus' death atones for their sins—can approach and use this method, and he or she could get much out of the Gospel in terms of what Luke says. But for them, they will not draw the broader implication that Luke is correct. For them it is simply that this is what Luke is saying. On the other hand, there are a number of evangelicals who have used this method as well. They want to say, "Luke says Jesus died as an atoning sacrifice, rose again, and ascended—all of that is what Luke is trying to convey, and Luke is right." They might make the conclusion that Luke is right outside of their publication, but they would want to add that.

Let me paint this picture for you. You are a person of evangelical convictions in a secular university trying to get your Ph.D. You want to write about the Gospels. If you use the redaction-critical approach, you will be restrained by the seams, all the source-critical things, and you will end up pitting the Gospels against one another, which you do not want to do. If you want to go back to the historical Jesus, you will have to engage in some of the scholarly presuppositions about the historical Jesus, including the criteria of dissimilarity, etc. You do not feel that is a fair place to go—you will lose if you go back to Jesus in that context. But you really are interested in what Luke and Matthew are saying. So you attempt to simply read them as narratives. You cannot go back to talk about the historical Jesus, because as soon as you do, your doctoral supervisor will nail you. He or she will say, “You cannot talk about Jesus without engaging in a full-blown, historical Jesus analysis of that passage with all the pre-suppositions and problems and a full source-critical approach tracing the traditions back”—you will have to do all of that. So do not talk about who Jesus was. Then you might say, “Okay, I can do that. I can play that game. I will just talk about what Luke is trying to say, and deep down I will know that I believe what Luke says is true. But I will not say that in my dissertation.”

That is the scholarly context. There are many fine scholars who have earned their Ph.Ds by doing that. Is there any problem with that? I want to say “Yes!” because these Gospels are about history. Remember the title of this class: *New Testament History and Theology*. Luke is about real history. We want to affirm that. I do have to say that I understand my evangelical colleagues who are trying to speak to the broader academic community. They realize that to try to go back to Jesus will invite so many questions that it is dangerous. And they are still doing something good to talk about Luke and the narrative of Luke. But there is something dangerous about it, because suddenly the Gospel becomes a-historical, loosed from history. That is extremely dangerous because, to put it in Pauline terms, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then our faith is useless. I ultimately do not care what Luke or Matthew thought. If Jesus’ bones are still rotting in the grave, we should just go home. Thus we want to be able to say more than that. There is the danger that the narrative-theological approach does not allow us to do that. There is a tendency in most narrative approaches to not speak very much about even the historical context of Luke. I would want to do more. I would want to engage the narrative more, both on an historical level by rooting it in history, and also on an historical level by saying this is true history. I would want to do both of those things.

Redaction criticism and narrative criticism are the two approaches closest to what I actually want to do in this course. I have done a lot of narrative criticism with you in this course. You just may not have realized it. Early in the course I pointed out that there is worship in Matthew 2 and in Matthew 28, and this shows there is a major theological emphasis on worship in Matthew. What was going on in the back of my mind during that process is this: “This is not emphasized as much in Mark or Luke. Matthew uses the word.” There is a little redaction-critical tinge to what I just said. Also, I drew a narrative connection between Matthew 2 and 28, which was a little bit of narrative criticism. Treating this as a work of literature, you see the connection between these two chapters. Thus I want to say there is fruit, benefit, from both of these approaches. But I also want to say that the magi really showed up and wanted to worship Jesus. When Jesus appeared to the disciples in Galilee, they really fell on their knees and worshiped Him. These things happened historically. That is what really went on. It is just that Matthew chooses to bring that out in order to invite the reader to worship Jesus: will you worship Jesus? That is one of the things Matthew really tries to produce in those chapters.

Let me say that if you pull any Bible commentary off of the shelf that has been written in the last 20 years, its author will have been aware of all of these approaches and may use them to varying degrees. If you pull an older commentary, perhaps from 50 years ago, people then were not even aware of narrative criticism—they mainly had source, form, and redaction criticism. This is the reality of the

commentaries. Even the most popular commentaries think in these terms. That is not necessarily bad. I would invite you to not necessarily reject that literature but to read it from a critical viewpoint. You could say, “When I read this commentary, does their methodology get in the way of Scripture, or does it assist in the understanding of Scripture?” In the same commentary, even within the same commentary, both could happen. Methodology can get in the way, and it can also produce some very helpful results. I would invite you to read the literature but to read it critically. Try to understand what is going on and do not just be overwhelmed by the presuppositions.

With regard to the dating of the Gospels, a late dating of the Gospels is required for many of these approaches, especially for form criticism. A second-century date is common. Sometimes the Gospels are dated as late as the mid-second century, 100 years after Jesus. They are also sometimes given a late first-century date. There are some problems with that. One is that we have a text—it is very fragmented, but it is a text—of the Gospel of John from 135 AD, the beginning of the second century. The text does not come from where John actually wrote. Thus there must have been a wide distribution of John’s Gospel by the early second century. At least the Gospel of John, then, must predate that time. We have grounds to say at least that John’s Gospel came before the second century. Moreover, there is extensive use of the Gospels and the Gospel’s tradition among the early church fathers. There was widespread use of the Gospels by these men in the early second century and even in the late first century. That shows the Gospels (at least their traditions, but I would argue for the Gospels themselves) must predate the post-apostolic writings of the late first century and the early second century. There is much discussion about individual Gospels, whether they are before 70 AD or post 70 AD. Why does 70 AD matter? The fall of Jerusalem. Thus Gospels are often dated based on whether it seems that they anticipated or knew about the destruction of the temple. I do not want to go into the individual issues with Matthew, Mark, Luke, and also John. If you want to investigate this further, Carson and Moo’s *Introduction to the New Testament* is a good resource. In their chapters on Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, they go through much detail about dating the traditions.

This is a broader point that I suggest you take into consideration. How does the book of Acts end? Paul is in prison Rome. There is an expectation, I think, that he will be released because they do not have a good case against him. But he is still in prison, ministering and such, at the end of Acts. Why would Acts end that way? That is an odd way to end. If Paul was freed from prison in Rome, as church tradition indicates fairly universally, then why not mention his release from prison? It does not seem to serve any purpose to leave him under Roman house arrest at the end of the book. Luke would want to mention it if he was released. If he was executed, recording that might also serve a purpose because one of the themes of Acts is people martyred for the Christian religion, as we see in the persecution Paul suffers, the death of Stephen, etc. So Luke may have wanted to talk about that. And certainly his readership would have known of Paul’s execution, if that was the outcome. Therefore it is possible that Acts was written while Paul was still in prison. I think that is very likely. Paul was in prison in Rome in roughly 58 or 60 AD. That would indicate that Acts was written sometime around 60 AD. Acts is a sequel to Luke. That means the Gospel of Luke would have been written before 60 AD. Making a hypothetical possibility, if Luke used Mark—or even if you say Luke used Matthew—then you have a case for at least one of the other two synoptic Gospels also predating 60 AD. Then the Gospels would have been written within 30 years of Jesus’ life. They would have been written in the same generation, from the apostolic authors, and all of that.

That is a very short argument that would need to be fleshed out in more detail and supplemented by the details from each Gospel such as in Carson and Moo. But I would suggest that as a possibility. If that is a possibility, then there was simply not enough time for all these communities to so change the traditions

that they could become manipulated beyond recognition. Therefore I would critique form criticism on that point.

There is an article by R. T. France in Ladd's *Theology of the New Testament*. He indicates some theological themes that are emphasized in the Gospels. I would largely affirm the conclusions of this article. I think he helpfully identifies some of the unique contributions each Gospel makes. I would also say France is careful in his article to acknowledge that these are just distinctives in light of the unity between the Gospels highlighted elsewhere in Ladd's book. In other words, he indicates this is not all you would want to say about Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. This is just what is distinct. In his article he assumes you have read the rest of Ladd's book to understand the unity. I would also note that he does not just say what scholars have done, but he also evaluates them. He does not just imbibe at the fountain of redaction criticism.

I also have some critiques of this article as well. France, in ways he does not fully acknowledge, is dependent on scholarly studies, and as a result he does not produce a balanced theology of Matthew. He is so dependent in some ways on the work of redaction critics that he is, by default—though he does not intend this—only emphasizing the redactional seams that connect the material in the Gospels. He does not sufficiently emphasize the areas of unity that are also part of the distinct theology of Matthew. I would also critique this article because he raises the distinctions between the Gospels to the level of theological points, as if these were theological points to be made. He does this sometimes to the point of almost raising a disagreement between certain of the Gospels. He will say, "The Christology in Matthew is higher than that of Mark and Luke. He has a more overt emphasis on the deity of Christ." I think that is a little too strong. It is going a little overboard. These may be emphases, but to say they are distinctives that can be pitted against one another is a little dangerous. (We have already engaged in that discussion in this lesson).

Finally, nearly every distinctive is demonstrably present in all the Gospels; they are simply emphasized in one Gospel more than the others. Jesus certainly fulfills the Law in Matthew, but that is not to say He does not fulfill the Law in Mark and Luke, they just do not use the word "fulfill." Jesus is, in many ways, like the new Moses in Matthew. But there are Mosaic elements of Jesus' ministry in Mark and Luke. Luke is interested in the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit is not lacking in Matthew and Mark. Luke does show a great deal of interest in the Gentile mission, but so does Mark. Thus, even though these are emphases, we can say maybe that a few elements are heightened in these different Gospels, but we cannot say they are missing in the others. Those are some pros and cons about the R. T. France article.

In our next lesson, we will briefly talk through some issues in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Then we will look at Acts a bit. By the following lesson I hope to be in the Gospel of John.