

The Nature of Yeshua in the General Epistles

Incarnation of Yeshua: God made manifest in human flesh. A.M. Renwick offers the following from *ISBE*:

“The earliest Gnostic known by name is Cerinthus, the antagonist of the apostle John. On the authority of Irenaeus, who quoted Polycarp the disciple of John, there is little doubt that the two met in Ephesus. Cerinthus was a Jew who seemed to have stood between the EBIONITES and Gnostics. From the accounts that have been preserved of Cerinthus and his teaching, it can be gathered that he taught that the world was created not by the Supreme God, but by an inferior power; he also taught a docetic theory of the Incarnation. Caius of Rome, a disciple of Irenaeus, recorded that Cerinthus held there would be a millennium of unrestrained sensuality. Dionysius of Alexandria (*ca.* A.D. 260) confirmed this...There is the testimony of Irenaeus, that the Gospel of John was written to oppose that form of Gnosticism taught by Cerinthus and, before him, by the Nicolaitans. According to Irenaeus, Cerinthus maintained that the world was made not by the sovereign Power but by some inferior being who was ignorant of the supreme God. He taught that Jesus was not born of a virgin but was the son of Joseph and Mary, born after the manner of other people. After His baptism the Spirit in the form of a dove descended on Him, and before His crucifixion the Spirit left Him. Thus, while the man Jesus suffered and rose again, the Christ remained impassible as a spiritual being.”⁶⁸

Today’s discussion and debate over Christology is widely focused around the question of, “Is Yeshua/Jesus God?” There were late First and early Second Century discussions over whether or not Yeshua the Messiah was human. The Apostle John makes it quite clear, “every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come as a human is from God” (1 John 4:2, Common English Bible). Without the humanity of Yeshua, you have no Yeshua who can be executed at Golgotha as an atonement for sins. While it is witnessed that many of us adamantly affirm that Yeshua the Messiah is God, let it not be to the detriment of His humanity.

1 John 4:7-21

“No one has seen God at any time”

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son *to be* the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Yeshua is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.”

⁶⁸ A.M. Renwick, “Gnosticism,” in Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 2:489.

Any basic survey of the Epistle of 1 John will reveal how love for God and neighbor is a significant theme—especially as love demonstrated toward one’s brothers and sisters in the faith is reflective of the love that one has for the Creator. Love demonstrated toward one’s brothers and sisters is to serve as a definite indicator that one is born of God or born again (1 John 4:7); those who do not love consequently do not know God (1 John 4:8). The ultimate love of God toward humanity has been demonstrated via the sacrificial work of His Son, Yeshua (1 John 4:9-10), and it is incumbent upon those who are redeemed in Him to love one another (1 John 4:11).

What is intended by the statement of 1 John 4:12, rendered by the RSV as, “No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us”? The major thrust is to highlight the importance of the love and presence of God abiding within Believers, and the perfecting of their character to be more like His. However, it is hardly surprising that advocates of a low Christology, who think that Yeshua the Messiah is a supernatural yet created being, might take “No one has ever seen God” (NIV) as implying that Yeshua of Nazareth—who very clearly lived a human life on Earth—cannot be God.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Torah does indicate that various persons did “see” God to various degrees (i.e., Genesis 18:2-3; Exodus 33:23; Deuteronomy 34:10), there are translation issues present over *Theon oudeis pōpote tetheatai* (θεὸν οὐδεὶς πώποτε τεθέαται), “God no one ever has beheld” (Brown and Comfort).⁶⁹ The verb *theaomai* (θεάομαι) can indeed involve “**to perceive someth. above and beyond what is merely seen with the eye, see, behold, perceive**” (BDAG).⁷⁰ Given what immediately follows, the “seeing” God in view mainly involves not the debate over whether or not God can manifest Himself in human form, but instead the relationship of God and His love toward others:

“By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:13-19, RSV).

The statement of 1 John 4:12, “No one has seen God at any time” (NASU), is not to be an ontological assertion about the nature of God, but instead mainly be a claim about how most people have not been able to fully perceive or behold all of the significant dynamics of the love of God—which have reached their pinnacle in the arrival of His Son, Yeshua. For the purposes of John’s argument, *where his audience was to be abiding in God and in His love*, he made the critical point that it is insufficient for a brother or sister to say that he or she loves God, and then hates other people. What good is it, for one to claim to love a God who has not been directly seen, who exists in another dimension in Heaven—while hating one’s fellow humans, who can be encountered every day on Planet Earth?

“Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen [*ouch heōraken ou dunatai agapan, οὐχ ἑώρακεν οὐ δύναται ἀγαπᾶν*].⁷¹ The commandment we have from

⁶⁹ Brown and Comfort, 838.

⁷⁰ BDAG, 445.

⁷¹ This clause employs the verb *horaō* (ὁράω), mainly “to see or look” (LS, 565).

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him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also” (1 John 4:20-21, NRSV).

1 John 5:1-5, 18 “Yeshua Born of God”

“Whoever believes that Yeshua is the Messiah is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the *child* born of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Yeshua is the Son of God?...We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.”

Love for God and for God’s people, is an obvious, overarching theme of the Epistle of 1 John. The Apostle John admonishes his audience, “Everyone who believes that Yeshua is the Messiah is born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves the one born of Him” (1 John 5:1, TLV). A slightly more literal rendering of the aorist active participle *ton gennēsanta* (τὸν γεννήσαντα) in 1 John 5:1, often just appearing as “the Father,” is “the one having given birth” (Brown and Comfort).⁷² The Agent responsible for the new birth is God, who has brought about redemption via the sacrifice of His Son, the Messiah Yeshua. A true love of God, resultant of the new birth, will be obedience to God’s commandments, and will also involve victories over the forces of darkness (1 John 5:2-5).

Further on in 1 John ch. 5, it is communicated, “We know that everyone who has been born of God does not sin, but the One who is born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him” (1 John 5:18, HCSB). This is frequently interpreted by readers in how those “born of God” or born again, do not sin, as a result of their spiritual transformation. Yeshua the Messiah is “He who was born of God” in the Incarnation, and because of His sacrifice for sins and consequent resurrection, those who are in Messiah are kept or preserved. Believe it or not, there has been some discussion regarding the nature of the Messiah from 1 John 5:18, something witnessed in *The One God, the Father, One Man Messiah Translation*, which unambiguously reflects a low Christology of Yeshua the Messiah being a created entity:

“We recognize that those who have been born of God do not keep on sinning. The one fathered and brought into existence, the Son of God, protects him and the Devil cannot harm him.”⁷³

1 John 5:18 employs two usages of the verb *gennaō* (γεννάω), “of the father, to beget, engender” (LS),⁷⁴ which most Bibles consistently render with “born” language: “We know that everyone **who has been born** of God does not keep on sinning, but **he who was born** of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him” (ESV). The first usage, the perfect passive participle *ho gegennēmenos* (ὁ γεγεννημένος), regards the one “having been born” (Brown and Comfort)⁷⁵ of God via His salvation, speaking of born again Believers. The second usage, the aorist passive participle *ho gennētheis* (ὁ γεννηθείς), regards “the one having been born” (Brown

⁷² Brown and Comfort, 839.

⁷³ Anthony F. Buzzard, trans., *The One God, the Father, One Man Messiah Translation* (Atlanta: Restoration Fellowship, 2014), 595.

⁷⁴ LS, 162.

⁷⁵ Brown and Comfort, 841.