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The Absence of ἐπιτιμάω in the Gospel of John

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Since at least the time of the early church fathers, readers of Christian literature have recognized the profound differences between the Gospel of John and the other three canonical gospels. While Matthew, Mark, and Luke seem to be written from a similar perspective (leading to their designation as “synoptic” gospels) and share many key elements, John is distinct in many ways. The events it relates are different, the writing style is unique, and its characterization of Christ contrasts significantly with that of the other gospel texts. The complex relationships between each of these gospels is the subject of a lively debate that started in the second century and is unlikely to be definitively ended anytime soon.

One of the categories in which scholars compare and contrast each of the gospels is the vocabulary used in each account. As is the case with any writer, the ancient authors of these texts favored some terms over others and are stylistically distinct; however, the first three gospels do show a degree of unity in the terms they use. When relating stories shared among the three of them, the gospel authors sometimes use nearly identical phrasing. John’s gospel once again stands distinct in this sense: not only does John use many terms that the synoptics use infrequently, it also employs certain terms that are not present at all in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Sometimes this is merely a matter of using a synonymous term to express the same idea; for example, δέχομαι is used frequently in the gospels (six in Mark, ten in Matthew, sixteen in Luke) and only once in John, while the roughly synonymous term λαμβάνω is used eleven times in John and not once in the synoptics. Such cases abound and can be attributed to the lexical preferences of each author: while the particular term used may differ, the same thought is being conveyed. More interesting, however, are differences in vocabulary which lack parallel terms in other gospels.
as this can often reflect a difference in emphasis on the part of the author. Such is the case with ἐπιτιμάω.

ἐπιτιμάω, a term usually translated as rebuke, occurs six times in Matthew, nine times in Mark, and twelve times in Luke. In contrast, the term is not used once in the Gospel of John, and a parallel term does not take its place; the gospel narrative simply does not describe its characters as rebuking others. The absence of this term from John in particular is noteworthy. The first three evangelists, in the tradition of the Septuagint, use ἐπιτιμάω to identify divinity: just as the Septuagint portrays the divine rebuke as the prerogative of Yahweh, so the synoptic gospels depict Jesus as the only justified rebuker. It would logically follow that John, who is regarded as demonstrating the highest Christology of the four gospels, should use this divine identifier to further exalt Jesus. Why, then, is the term not employed by the authors of John’s gospel?

In this paper, I will argue that while the synoptic gospels follow the Septuagint in using ἐπιτιμάω as a mark of divinity, the Gospel of John eschews using the term in order to present a distinct view of Jesus’ role as a judge. To establish this argument, I will first examine the extrabiblical use of both ἐπιτιμάω and the related ἐπιτιμίον, observing how they are used by the contemporary authors (Philo and Josephus). I will then explore how the terms are used in the Septuagint, particularly the way in which their use illustrates God’s prerogative to judge. In the next section, I will investigate how ἐπιτιμάω is used in the synoptic gospels. Finally, I will examine the strengths and weaknesses of each theory, explaining the absence of ἐπιτιμάω from the Gospel of John. I will assert that the fourth gospel’s unique narrative style and its portrayal of Jesus as a non-judgmental (yet divisive) character are the clearest explanations for the omission of ἐπιτιμάω.

Extrabiblical use of ἐπιτιμάω

While not extremely common terms, ἐπιτιμάω and ἐπιτιμίον are used numerous times in literature from the first century AD. To assess the use of ἐπιτιμάω by other Jewish authors of the time, I will examine their use in the writings of Flavius Josephus and Philo of Alexandria. Flavius Josephus was a Jewish historiographer who wrote during the latter half of the first century CE under the patronage of Rome; his works focus on Jewish history and the Great Revolt in particular. Philo of Alexandria was a Hellenistic Jewish exegete and philosopher, who wrote numerous works allegorizing Jewish scripture during roughly the first half of the first century. While these authors were certainly in very different situations than those of the evangelists, understanding how they used ἐπιτιμάω will provide a context for understanding how it is used in the gospel accounts.

ἐπιτιμάω is used by Josephus fifteen times in his writings: five times as a participle, eight times as a transitive verb, and twice as an infinitive. The related noun ἐπιτιμίον occurs five times in his writings. The term is translated in a variety of ways, depending on the context of the passage. For example, while explaining the allowances Rome made for Jewish Sabbath observance, Josephus uses ἐπιτιμάω in a sense best translated as “fined”: “In this affair that concerned the Romans, no one of them should be hindered from keeping the sabbath day, nor be fined for so doing”—“τοῦ πράγματος Ῥωμαίοις ἀνήκοντος, μηδένα κωλύσθαι παρατηρεῖν τὴν τῶν σαββάτων ἡμέραν μηδὲ πράττεσθαι ἐπιτίμιον” (Josephus, Antiquitates judaicae, 14.264). This sense of the word is also reflected in his use of ἐπιτιμίον: “Let him that is so poor that he cannot pay what mulet is laid upon him, be his servant to whom he was adjudged to pay it”—“ὁ δὲ τὸ ἐπιτίμιον ἀπορὸς διαλύσασθαι δοῦλος ἔστω τοῖς καταδεδικασμένοις” (Jos., Ant., 4.272). In other passages, ἐπιτιμάω is more sensibly translated “condemn”. For example, in his famous “Testimonium Flavianum,” Josephus remarks that “when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him”—“καὶ αὐτὸν ἐνδείξει τῶν πρῶτων ἀνδρῶν παρ᾽ ἡμῖν σταυρῷ ἐπιτετιμηκότος Πιλάτου οὐκ ἐπαύσαντο οἱ τὸ πρῶτον ἀγαπήσαντες” (Jos., Ant., 18.64). “Condemn” is another meaning that ἐπιτιμάω frequently takes

2. Greek text and translations for Josephus, Philo, the Septuagint, and the New Testament are taken from Thesaurus linguae Graecae (Irvine, Calif.: University of California, Irvine).

3. While many scholars believe portions of the “Testimonium Flavianum” to be later Christian interpolations, most agree that the passage existed in some form in Josephus’s original manuscript. Discerning whether this passage is original to Antiquities of the Jews is outside the scope of this paper.
on. After Josephus also quotes Tiberias as saying, “If indeed Eutychus hath falsely accused Agrippa in what he hath said of him, he hath had sufficient punishment by what I have done to him already”—“ἀλλ᾽ εἰ μὲν καταψεύσει, φησίν ὁ Τιβέριος, ἐτὶ δὲ Ἀγρίππου τὰ ἐιρημένα Ἐὔτυχος, ἀρκοῦσαν κομίζεται παρ᾽ αὐτοῦ τιμωρίαν, ἴν ἐπιτείμηκα αὐτός” (Jos., Ant., 18.183).

One of the most frequent uses of ἐπιτιμάω is to mean “rebuke” or “reprove”: the meaning, as we will later see, which it most often has in the New Testament. When mentioning Caesar’s reception of a message from Aretas, Josephus says that “after he had just reproved him (Aretas) for his rashness, in not tarrying till he received the kingdom from him, he accepted of his presents”—“καὶ τοῦτο μόνον ἐπιτιμήσας, ὡς προπετείᾳ χρήσατο τῷ μὴ παρ᾽ αὐτοῦ τὴν βασιλείαν ἀναμείναι λαβεῖν, τὰ δὲ δῶρα προσήκατο” (Jos., Ant., 16.355). When word reached Anileus about the wicked deeds of his brother, “he at length spake to Anileus about these clamors, reproving him for his former actions”—“τηνικαῦτα δή φησιν περὶ αὐτῶν πρὸς Ἀνιλαῖον τοῖς τε πρῶτον γεγονόσιν ἐπιτιμῶν” (Jos., Ant., 18.351). And after relating the banishment of Herod and Herodias, Joseph remarks, “And thus did God punish Herodias for her envy at her brother, and Herod also for giving ear to the vain discourses of a woman”—“Ἡρωδιάδι μὲν δὴ φθόνου τὸν πρὸς τὸν ἄδελφον καὶ Ἡρώδη γυναικεῖων ἀκροασαμένῳ κουφολογιῶν δίκην ταύτῃ ἐπετίμησεν ὁ θεὸς” (Jos., Ant., 18.255).

Philo of Alexandria’s writings contain twenty-nine references to ἐπιτιμάω. Some of his uses of the term differ from how Josephus uses it. In a few places, Philo uses ἐπιτιμάω to mean “esteem”; he mentions times in which “actions that ought to be done are held in no honour, and such as ought not be done are esteemed”—“τότε τὰ μὲν πρακτέα ἄτιμα, τὰ δὲ μὴ πρακτέα ἐπίτιμα” (De cherubim, 93.3). Overall, however, Philo overwhelmingly uses ἐπιτιμάω to mean “reprove,” rebuke, or reproach; his usage closely parallels that of the evangelists. When relating the story of Jacob and his favored son Joseph, Philo mentions, “For this reason his father rebukes this intractable youth”—“καὶ ἐπετίμησεν αὐτῷ ὁ πατὴρ” (De Somniis, 2.135.1). At one point he incredulously questions “on what principle can you be angry with or reproach a man who sees a vision in his sleep?”—“ἐπεὶ τίνα ἔξει λόγον τὸ ὅριζεσθαι καὶ ἐπιτιμάν τῷ τὴν καθ’ ὑπνόν φαντασίαν ἰδόντι” (De Somniis, 2.237.2). After referring to Abraham’s campaign against the kidnappers of Lot, Philo says “And he, reproving them, began a song of victory as has here been shown”—“ὁ δὲ τούτοις ἐπιτιμῶν τὸν ἐπινίκιον ὤμον ἔξαρχων ἑδείχθη” (De ebrietate, 111.1).

These example of how ἐπιτιμάω was used in the first century will provide an important backdrop for the use of the term in the New Testament. However,
the absence of ἐπιτιμάω

before examining how the gospels use this term, it’s critical to understand how another influential body of texts has used ἐπιτιμάω: the Septuagint.

ἐπιτιμάω in the Septuagint

The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, started sometime in the third century BC and continued for many years. It was the primary Greek translation used by Diaspora Jews (as well as Greek-speaking Jews in the Holy Land) from the time of its creation until the second century AD. It comes as no surprise then that New Testament writers, composing their books in Greek, often use the Septuagint when referencing the Hebrew Bible in their writings. It follows that these authors were familiar with the language of the Septuagint and were likely influenced by how it used terms—for example, ἐπιτιμάω.

ἐπιτιμάω is used in very particular ways in the Septuagint. It is used extensively to show God’s mighty power to judge and punish both the earth and its inhabitants. In 2 Samuel 22:6 the author describes the passage of the children of Israel through the Red Sea: “Then the channels of the sea appeared, the foundations of the world were laid bare by the rebuke of the Lord”—“καὶ ἀπεκάλυφθη θεμέλια τῆς οἰκουμένης ἐν τῇ ἐπιτιμήσει κυρίου.” Job described God’s awesome power by saying, “the pillars of heaven tremble and are amazed at his rebuke”—“στῦλοι οὐρανοῦ ἐπετάσθησαν καὶ ἐξέστησαν ἀπὸ τῆς ἐπιτιμήσεως αὐτοῦ” (Job 26:11). The psalmist exulted in the Lord’s destruction of wicked Egypt: “Burnt with fire and dug up it was; at the rebuke of your face they will perish”—“ἐμπεπυρισμένη πυρὶ καὶ ἀνεσκαμμένη ἀπὸ ἐπιτιμήσεως τοῦ προσώπου σου ἀπολοῦνται” (Ps 80:16). Psalms of Solomon 2:23 records the fear that “they (the wicked) will make an utter end, unless thou, O Lord, rebuke them in thy wrath”—“καὶ συντελεσθήσονται, ἐὰν μὴ σὺ, κύριε, ἐπιτιμήσῃς αὐτοῖς ἐν ὀργῇ σου.”

It appears that the translators of the Septuagint viewed the use of ἐπιτιμάω as the sole prerogative of God, as mortals are consistently shown to be unjustified in rebuking others. In Genesis 36:10, Jacob rebukes his son Joseph for his visionary dream (“καὶ ἐπετίμησεν αὐτῷ ὁ πατὴρ”), but the eventual fulfillment of Joseph’s vision shows the rebuke to be unjustified. Boaz explicitly instructs his servants to not rebuke Ruth (“καὶ οὐκ ἐπιτιμήσετε αὐτῇ”), even

4. Increasing association of the Septuagint with Christians, as well as general rejection of all things Hellenistic after the Bar Kokhba revolt, led to the Jewish rejection of the Septuagint.

5. It should be noted that not all Hebrew Bible citations in the New Testament agree with the Septuagint; it appears the authors sometimes modified the citation or made their own translation. This topic will be discussed later in this paper.
though she would be taking from his crops more than would normally be acceptable (Ruth 2:16). The prophet Zachariah, instead of rebuking the devil himself, denounces Satan by calling upon the Lord to justly rebuke him: “The Lord rebuke you, O Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you!”—“ἐπιτιμήσαι κύριος ἐν σοι, διάβολε, καὶ ἐπιτιμήσαι κύριος ἐν σοι ὁ ἐκλεξάμενος τὴν Ἱερουσαλήμ” (Zech 3:2). Interestingly, one of the two uses of ἐπιτιμάω in the New Testament outside of the gospels is Jude 1:9, which quotes the angel Michael shouting the same phrase at the devil because he “did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’” (”οὐκ ἐτόλμησεν κρίσιν ἐπενεγκεῖν βλασφημίας ἀλλὰ εἶπεν, Ἐπιτιμήσαι σοι κύριος”). When taken together, these examples exemplify the Septuagint tradition of reserving ἐπιτιμάω for divine use, and showing as unjustified those mortals who misuse it.

ἐπιτιμάω in the Synoptic Gospels

The New Testament contains twenty-nine instances of ἐπιτιμάω being used. Of these twenty-nine, twenty-seven of them are found in the synoptic gospels. As stated previously, the term occurs six times in Matthew, nine times in Mark, and twelve times in Luke. Twelve of these references are used in describing incidents common to all three synoptic gospels: these instances include Jesus rebuking the storm on the Sea of Galilee (Matt 18:26; Mark 4:39; Luke 8:24), Jesus exorcising a devil from a child (Matt 17:18; Mark 9:45; Luke 9:42), the disciples rebuking those bringing children to Jesus (Matt 19:13; Mark 10:13; Luke 18:15), and the multitude rebuking the blind man/men calling for Jesus (Matt 20:31; Mark 10:48; Luke 18:39). Six are used in pericopes mirrored in two gospels: Jesus rebuking a demonic (Mark 1:25; Luke 4:35), Jesus commanding his disciples not to reveal his Messianic identity (Mark 8:30; Luke 9:21), and Peter rebuking Jesus (Matt 16:22; Mark 8:32). The remaining nine are independent occurrences (Matt 12:16; Mark 3:12; 8:33; Luke 4:39; 4:41; 9:55; 17:3; 19:39; 23:40).

ἐπιτιμάω is used in two distinct senses in the New Testament. The less common usage of the term is “order” or (as it’s rendered in the King James version) “charge.” ἐπιτιμάω is used this way five times. In four of these passages, the term is used when Jesus is commanding his disciples or the recipients of his miracles to not “make him known” or reveal his divine nature. A

6. The two exceptions are Jude 1:9 (which has already been cited) and 2 Tim 4:2, where Paul instructs Timothy to give brotherly council to the Christians he leads: “κήρυξον τὸν λόγον, ἐπιστήσθι εὐκαιρός ἀκαίρως, ἐλεγξὲ, παρακάλεσον, ἐπιτίμησον, ἐν πάσῃ μακροθυμίᾳ καὶ δίδαξί.”
representative example is Luke 9:21: just after Peter has declared Jesus to be “The Messiah of God,” Jesus “sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone”—“ὁ δὲ ἐπιτιμήσας αὐτοῖς παρήγγειλεν μηδενὶ λέγειν τοῦτο.” The one time ἐπιτιμάω is used in this sense by someone other than Jesus is Mark 10:48, where blind Bartimaeus is shouting out to Jesus and “many sternly ordered him to be quiet”—“καὶ ἐπετίμων αὐτῷ πολλοὶ ἵνα σιωπήσῃ.”

The more common use of ἐπιτιμάω is, of course, “rebuke,” and the other twenty-two occurrences of the term in the gospels all share this meaning. Interestingly, the gospels seem to show the same sensitivities about using ἐπιτιμάω as does the Septuagint; it is primarily used by the divine Christ as a mark of his authority, and those mortals who use it are always shown to be in the wrong. With ἐπιτιμάω, Jesus rebukes the elements, devils, sicknesses, and unwise disciples; his use of the term clearly reveals his divine stature. Those without his authority who use it are shown to be mortal and flawed. For example, both Matthew and Mark record that, after Jesus uttered his first passion prediction, “Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him”—“καὶ παρρησίᾳ τὸν λόγον ἐλάλει. καὶ προσλαβόμενος ὁ Πέτρος αὐτὸν ἥρξατο ἐπιτιμᾶν αὐτῷ” (Mark 8:32). He is quickly proven rash, however, as Jesus “rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan!””—“ἐπετίμησεν Πέτρῳ καὶ λέγει· ὕπαγε ὀπίσω μου, σατανᾶ” (Mark 8:33). When they saw that the multitude brought little children for Jesus to pray over, “the disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them”—“οἱ δὲ μαθηταὶ ἐπετίμησαν αὐτοῖς” (Matt 19:13); Jesus, of course, then tells his disciples that they are in the wrong and to let the children come to him. And when the Pharisees indignantly command Jesus to rebuke his disciples for lauding him as king (“διδάσκαλε, ἐπιτίμησον τοῖς μαθηταῖς σου”), Jesus tells them that, were the disciples silenced, the stones would take up the cry (Luke 19:39–40). Only in two cases are mortals allowed to reprove without rebuke: in Luke 17:3, where Jesus commands his disciples to rebuke—then forgive—those who offend them (“ἐὰν ἁμάρτῃ ὁ ἀδελφός σου, ἐπιτίμησον αὐτῷ, καὶ ἐὰν μετανοήσῃ, ἀφεῖς αὐτῷ”), and Luke 23:40, where one thief being crucified rebukes another for impiously “hurling abuse” at Jesus (“ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ ἄλλος ἐπιτιμῶν αὐτῷ”). Aside from these exceptions, however, ἐπιτιμάω clearly sets Jesus apart in the narrative: like the divine Yahweh in the Septuagint, the divine Jesus justly wields the divine rebuke.

7. Translation is the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.
The Lack of ἐπιτιμάω in John

The fact that ἐπιτιμάω is a mark of divinity makes its absence in the Gospel of John even more puzzling. John has been consistently characterized as having the “highest” Christology among the four gospels. Christians as early as Clement have recognized its unique theological focus: Eusebius records Clement as saying that “last of all, John, perceiving that the external facts had been made plain in the Gospel, being urged by his friends and inspired by the spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel” (Hist. Eccl. 6.14.7). Or, as Johannine scholar Raymond Brown has put it: “Modern commentators have recognized that by speaking of Christology as the center or heartbeat of John’s thought, to the point where Christology is spoken of as the gospel message.”

The Jesus portrayed in the Gospel of John is consistently and thoroughly portrayed as divine. While the Jesus of Mark appears to reach divine status at his baptism and the Jesus of Matthew and Luke is divinely conceived, the first chapter of John makes clear that Jesus was the divine Word even before being born (John 1:1–15). The Johannine Jesus knows everything (John 2:24–25) and often amazes or confounds those with whom he speaks. In contrast to the other gospels, where Jesus often tells his followers not to reveal his messianic nature, in John Jesus frequently and openly proclaims his role as Christ. His numerous ἐγώ εἰμι statements throughout the gospel link him linguistically to Yahweh: in John 8 the assertion is so overt that his Jewish audience picks up stones to kill him for blasphemy. Jesus frequently mentions that the sacrifice of his life is voluntary and demonstrates that he is in control even during the passion: the party that arrests him is so awed by him that they fall to the earth (John 18:5), he calmly disparages the power of a frightened Pilate (19:18), and unlike his counterpart portrayals in other gospels, he is fully capable of carrying his own cross to Golgotha (19:17).

If, therefore, the authors of John are clearly promoting a divine, omnipotent Jesus, why do they not then employ ἐπιτιμάω to accentuate Jesus’ divine authority, as the Septuagint and the synoptics do? Was the omission a conscious decision, or was it a byproduct of other unique aspects of John? The remainder of this paper will examine some of the possible explanations for why ἐπιτιμάω is not used in John. I will address the various influences that may have impacted the composition of John’s gospel, the narrative style employed by John, and finally the realized eschatology of John and its impact on the Johannine view of judgment.

Influences on the Gospel of John

One possible explanation of why John doesn’t use ἐπιτιμάω is because its authors did not have access to the same sources or influences that the composers of the other gospels had. If this argument is supplied in the case of the Septuagint, it fails miserably: the influence of the Septuagint is just as strong in John as it is in the other gospels, if not more so.9 Some of John’s quotations of Septuagint verses are explicit, and some of them are somewhat modified, but even these modified references can be comfortably linked to the Septuagint.10 These frequent Septuagint references show that the writers of the Gospel of John were very familiar with the Greek scriptures and thus would have been familiar with the traditional usage of ἐπιτιμάω.

A more complex issue is the relationship which the fourth gospel has with the first three, and whether this can explain the omission of ἐπιτιμάω. The intricacies of the synoptic debate are beyond the scope of this paper,11 but some aspects of it have implications on the question at hand. If the Gospels of Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source, then is the Gospel of Mark (or the sources from which it was composed) the origin of the New Testament ἐπιτιμάω tradition? And is the absence of ἐπιτιμάω from John attributable to the fact that John neither had access to Mark or the sources underlying it? It is a possibility. Some scholars such as Raymond Brown have contended that the Gospel of John originated independent of the synoptic gospels and the Marcan tradition upon which they are based.12 Many of the stories related in the synoptics which employ ἐπιτιμάω are not present in John. Thus, by not having access to these account or the sources underlying them, the writers of John might not have had access to oral or textual Jesus traditions that used ἐπιτιμάω and thus did not think to employ it.

However, strong parallels between some Johannine material and some pericopes in the synoptics lead even some of these scholars to believe that the Gospel of John was influenced by these texts before it reached its final form; others go a step further and claim John contained elements of these books

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10. Schuchard, Scripture, 146.
If such is the case, then it’s a possibility that ἐπιτιμάω was intentionally excluded, as a few of the passages from other gospels which John parallels contain ἐπιτιμάω references which are absent in John, like the triumphal entry from Luke (John 12:12–19; Luke 19:28–40). Indeed, in many ways the ties between John and Luke seem the most pervasive—and yet Luke contains by far the most instances of ἐπιτιμάω of any gospel (12), and John still has none. Furthermore, even if John was truly written in isolation from the other gospels (a position greatly contended in scholarship), to deny that the author of John could not have incorporated ἐπιτιμάω into the narrative independently is to deny the literary and theological astuteness of its author and redactors. As has been shown by the use of ἐπιτιμάω in outside literature, and particularly by John’s explicit use of the Septuagint, the author of John certainly had access to some form to the ἐπιτιμάω tradition. Thus, neither the use or lack of use of specific sources can sufficiently explain why the Gospel of John omits ἐπιτιμάω.

Johannine Narrative Style

Another possible explanation for the absence of ἐπιτιμάω is that the narrative style in the Gospel of John does not lend itself to using ἐπιτιμάω. Comparing the style of the gospel of John with the synoptics gives some credence to this theory. Mark’s gospel is a gospel of action: it is a quick-paced examination of what Jesus did. C. S. Mann stated that “First and foremost . . . the evangelist [Mark] focuses his attention and ours on the events of the ministry of Jesus; the element of teaching is almost at a minimum.”14 Matthew and Luke’s accounts build on this narrative framework, fleshing it out with more discourses and theological detail, but largely leaving the narrative structure intact. With this underlying focus on what Jesus did, it seems natural for the gospel narrator to describe Jesus’s actions with verbs such as ἐπιτιμάω: the words of the rebuke (particularly in Mark) are perhaps not as emphasized as the fact that Jesus is rebuking.

The Gospel of John, however, has a very different narrative style. While the deeds of Jesus are certainly important in John’s narrative, the gospel is distinguished from its counterparts by extended discourses given by Jesus. These include his dialogue with Nicodemus (3:1–21), his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well (4:4–42), his discourse on the divine son (5:16–47), his discourse on the bread of life (6:25–71), his discourse at the Feast of Tabernacles (7:14–52), his discourse on the light of the world (8:12–59), and

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14. Mann, Mark, 84–85.
his farewell discourses (14–17). These discourses make up a large portion of John’s account and are pivotal in its focus on the character of Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of God” (20:30–31). (Even the deeds of Jesus in the gospel are less important in terms of what he did and more important in what they reveal about him.) This understanding makes it plausible that ἐπιτιμάω is absent from John for the simple reason that the authors of John are less interested in what Jesus did and more concerned with what he said (and how it revealed his divinity). Edwin Abbott insightfully noted that “the Synoptists frequently represent Jesus as ‘rebuking,’ ‘commanding,’ ‘having compassion,’ ‘being filled with indignation’: John dispenses with these words, mostly thinking it enough to say that Jesus ‘said,’ or ‘spake,’ or ‘did’ this or that, and leaving the words and the deeds of the Messiah to speak for themselves.” This view is bolstered by the fact that the other most discourse-driven gospel, that of Matthew, also contains the least instances of ἐπιτιμάω—and five of those six occurrences are from material which likely originated with Mark. It’s possible that the discourse-focused narrative style precludes the frequent use of ἐπιτιμάω.

It is my opinion that the narrative style of John is likely a contributing factor to the omission of ἐπιτιμάω from the gospel. However, I also feel that this explanation alone is insufficient. Even if Matthew’s discourse-heavy narrative left ἐπιτιμάω in the pericopes it borrowed from Mark, it seems peculiar that John would edit ἐπιτιμάω out of the passages appropriated from the synoptic tradition. Additionally, there are certainly places in John where the speech of a character is preceded by more than just a simple “he said (λέγει)” or “she replied (ἀπεκρίθη).” John 1:20 states that John “confessed (ὡμολόγησεν) ‘I am not the Messiah.’” In 4:31 the disciples “were urging (ἠρώτων) him, saying ‘Rabbi, eat.’” The Samaritan woman who Jesus talked to “testified (μαρτυρούσης) ‘He told me everything I ever did’” (4:39). Even Jesus, whose dialogue in the gospel is almost exclusively introduced just with λέγει or ἀπεκρίθη, is described as “st[anding] and cr[ying] out [ἔκραξεν], saying, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink’” (7:37). Clearly, then, such descriptive comments are not foreign to John, and including ἐπιτιμάω (particularly in descriptions of Jesus’ many antagonists) would not have felt out of place. Another argument must supplement this one to adequately address the absence of ἐπιτιμάω.

17. The only use of ἐπιτιμάω in John independent of Marcan material is Matt 12:6—and even this use has echoes in the other gospels.
The Johannine View of Judgement and Realized Eschatology

I believe that the absence of ἐπιτιμάω in John is most convincingly explained as a conscious choice by the authors and editors of the Gospel of John in order to promote a specific Christological image of Jesus. The foundations of this argument are the scholarly views of Johannine eschatology, which I will discuss briefly. Scholars have discerned two different strains of eschatology in the Gospel of John: future eschatology and realized eschatology. Future eschatology, or the view that God (and for Christians, Jesus) will intervene in earthly affairs in a spectacular manner, fulfill prophecy, judge the inhabitants of the earth, and bring an end to history. Such a viewpoint was likely driven by Jewish messianic expectations and apocalyptic literature of the time. The Gospel of John takes pains to distance itself from the immediate messianic expectations of the time: for instance, “when Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself” (6:15). However, John does support the notion of a future eschatological event, particularly when he speaks about “the last day.” John 5:28–29 speaks of a time to come “when all who are in their graves (will) come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” In chapter 6 Jesus promises anyone that follows him that “I will raise him up at the last day” (6:40; see also 6:44 and 6:54). To those who reject his message, Jesus warns that “the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day” (12:48). These and other verses make it clear that, while rejecting the false messianic expectations of the time, John affirms the reality of a future eschatological event. This viewpoint matches the synoptic tradition, although more attention is given in the first three gospels to the apocalyptic unfolding of the eschaton (see Matt 24, Mark 13, Luke 21).

Unique among the gospels is John’s additional emphasis on realized eschatology, or the view that the coming of Jesus has already ushered in the eschaton, and Christians can enjoy the blessings of it in the present. Frequently the gospel makes reference to the possibility of having eternal life now: “anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life” (5:24). Later, when comforting the grieving Martha, Jesus tells her that “everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (11:26). And just as the future eschatological view anticipates a divine judgment, many verses in John portray Jesus’ coming

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18. See Brown, Introduction to John, 238–241 for a good overview of this topic.
as a divine judgment in the present: just before his passion Jesus definitively states that “now is the judgment of this world” (12:31).

The presence of these two differing eschatologies in John result in some seemingly contradictory statements by Jesus. Jesus claims in 3:17 that “God did not send the Son into the world to judge (κρίνῃ) the world, but that the world might be saved through him.” Yet then Jesus makes the claim in 9:39 that “I came into this world for judgement.” Jesus claims that God “has given him (the Son) authority to execute judgment” and that “as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just” (5:27, 30), yet he asserts in 8:15 that “I judge no one.” Can these various statements be reconciled? After presenting various contradictory Johannine statements on judgment, Raymond Brown notes that “[t]he idea in John, then, seems to be that during his ministry Jesus is no apocalyptic judge like the one expected at the end of time; yet his presence does cause men to judge themselves.”20 This can be seen as a further refutation of immediate messianic expectations which Jews (and early Christians) might have had: Jesus would not immediately judge the wicked and reward the righteous; rather, that eschatological expectation would be fulfilled at “the last day.” However, this perspective still allows for a judgment in harmony with realized eschatology: Jesus’ coming forces people to accept or reject his word—a preliminary judgment—which will be ratified and finalized at the last day. As John states near the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, “Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed” (3:18).

The interplay of these two eschatological views provides pivotal insight into why the Gospel of John excludes ἐπιτιμάω. Because the gospel authors are trying to portray Jesus’ ultimate judgment as being in the future, it would counter their purpose to portray Jesus as rebuking (and implicitly passing judgment) during his mortal life. Jesus makes it abundantly clear that he has been authorized to wield the divine rebuke (“the Father . . . has given all judgment to the Son,” 5:22), but he explains that he will not use it until the last day. And while the realized eschatology does make it clear in the gospel that Jesus’ presence provokes judgment (and implicitly a measure of rebuke to the wicked), the agent of this judgment is never Jesus himself, but rather his word. In 12:47–48 Jesus asserts that “I do not judge anyone [presently] who hears my words and does not keep them . . . [but] on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge.” Thus, to portray Jesus as rebuking anyone would

run counter to the goal of the gospel to present judgment as being effected by the reader’s acceptance or rejection of Jesus’ word.

**Conclusion**

In sum, ἐπιτιμάω, though it indeed would have conveyed many of the high Christological ideas which the Gospel of John often advocates, was rejected from the gospel text for reasons of narrative style and eschatological consistency. While I am confident in the likelihood of this omission being a conscious decision on the part of the authors of John, I concede that certainty in this debate is impossible without the knowledge of the sources used in the creation of the gospel. As source criticism becomes more refined, and as more early Christian texts come to light, it will be possible to make more accurate observations about the compositional process the authors and redactors of John went through to produce the text we have today.