

1. The Word was God

John 1:1-18
The Gospel According to John

Introduction

At the Transfiguration of Jesus in Matthew 17, God the Father spoke to the three disciples who were with Christ, saying, “**This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!**” (Matthew 17:5). Later in the Great Commission, Jesus told His disciples to teach all nations to obey everything He had commanded them (Matthew 28:20). If there was ever a time that the Church needed to listen to the words of Christ, it is today. We need to hear the words of Christ in our sin-darkened world.

When I consider the four Gospels, I enjoy reading the testimony of the Apostle John the most. Not only was he a commercial fisherman like myself, but also he has given us a magnificent view of who Jesus really is. John’s account is very personal and intimate. His Gospel is somewhat different from the other three. John directs our attention, again and again, to the question, “Who is Jesus, really?” I love to teach the book of John because of this particular emphasis. The first three Gospels focus more on the works and teaching of Jesus. John puts the spotlight on the character and the true identity of Jesus, calling us to look closer at *Who Jesus is*.

The apostle John leaves out significant events in the life of Jesus, such as His birth, baptism, the temptation in the wilderness, the agony in Gethsemane, the ascension, demonic confrontations, and parables. Some scholars believe the reason John left out some of the significant events was because the date of his writing was around 90 A.D., several years later than the other gospel writers. John includes several things that the others had not mentioned, such as the occasion when Jesus turned the water into wine, thought to be Jesus’ first miracle (John 2:1-11); the visit of Nicodemus to see Christ and the conversation about the need for a new birth (John 3:1-21).

John also gives us the healing of the official’s son in Capernaum (John 4:46-54), the healing of the invalid at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-9), the healing of the man born blind (John 9:1-7), the raising of Lazarus (John 11:38-44), and the washing of the feet of the disciples (13:1-17). John also includes the teaching on the coming of the Holy Spirit, describing the Comforter and the One called alongside us (John 14-17), as well as the second miracle of fish caught after Christ’s resurrection (John 21:4-6).

John had a purpose to what he wrote in his Gospel. The key intent is to show Jesus as the Son of God. God was coming to earth in the flesh, the promised Messiah. (The word *Christ* is a translation of the Hebrew word for Messiah). The key verse of the book is found at the end of the book:

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:31).

God coming to earth in the person of Jesus will be our focus as we progress through this book and immerse ourselves in the person of Christ. We desire to know Christ and to drink at the well of His gift of eternal life.

Question 1) If you are starting as a group, briefly introduce yourselves and answer the question: What private signals do you use to communicate with someone in your family, for example, facial expressions or physical gestures? How did your parents communicate to you without using words?

God the Communicator

Communication is a necessary thing, but problems in communication can have disastrous or even hilarious results. There is more than one way to communicate an idea, which becomes very apparent when we move from one country to another. When I first came to America from England, I had several communication problems. One of these happened while I was staying at the home of a couple named Gene and Alice. Gene planned on getting up early Saturday morning to cut wood as was his custom in the winter. I planned to help him, so I wrote a note and stuck it on his door. The letter read, “If you need me in the morning, just knock me up!” (I found out later that this means something completely different in America.) They all had a good laugh at my expense the next morning. Sometimes, we have to learn from our mistakes in communicating with others.

In the beginning passage in John, we see that God the Father takes great care in His communication. He is so intent on communicating with us in a way that we will understand that He sent His Only Son to show us the way to His house (John 14:5-6). He took great pain to show us the way to eternal life. To communicate, God did not send an angel. He sent His Son in human form to bring us His message. This communication was very costly for Him, i.e., to watch His Son brutally murdered. We could paraphrase the first few words by saying, “In the beginning was the communication.”

How gracious our God is! The Living Word of God, the Son Himself, longs to communicate with you and me. That thought alone should prod us to spend more time in prayer and to practice closeness of relationship to Him. Right at the beginning of his Gospel, John is very clear about just who Christ is—God’s coming to man, not only to show us the way home but also to be the Way Himself, giving His life so that man may be renewed and born again or born from above (John 3:3). He tells us that those who receive Him are born of God (John 1:12-13). Let’s dive in to understand what John tells us about who Jesus is.

The Identity of Jesus as the Creator

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made (John 1:1-3).

Question 2) At the start of his Gospel, John writes that Jesus was there in the beginning, but what does he mean by the “beginning,” i.e., at the beginning of what?

John doesn't start with Jesus' birth or His life with his mother; He starts with Christ's pre-existence. John's thought is to grab us from the beginning of his Gospel with the fact of Who Jesus is. It almost seems that John, moved by the Spirit, wants to write something different than Matthew, who starts his Gospel by proving that Jesus was and is the Son of David, the son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1-18). Luke begins his Gospel with the fact that Jesus was a son of Adam (Luke 3:23-38). John gets straight to the point, affirming the divinity of Jesus with a statement similar to Genesis 1:1, "**In the beginning God....**"

John writes, "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning**" (John 1:1-2). Jesus was not only from the beginning, but also He was "in the beginning." He was and is eternal in that He was before all creation and had no beginning and will have no end (Hebrews 7:3). This thought tells us that Jesus was not "in" God, He was and is *with God* (v. 2), meaning that He has a separate personality. The one God has three distinct personalities. He was not *a* God, as some believe; the Word, Jesus, is God. Jesus didn't come to reveal God; He came as God revealed.

In verse one, we see that the *Word* is a title of the Lord Jesus. The Greek word is *Logos*, which means the expression of a thought. Through words, ideas are articulated. Thoughts are brought into the realm of the five senses through words. *Logos* is Deity expressing or communicating Himself. The Scriptures tell us plainly that the One referred to by the title *the Word of God*, is, in fact, Jesus. The passage below tells us of the time when Christ will come in power at the end of the age. Take special note of His name:

¹¹Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹²His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which **he is called is The Word of God** (Revelation 19:11-13).

Why would He be called "the Word?" In another place, Christ is called the *Alpha* and *Omega* (Revelation 22:13), the beginning and the end of the alphabet in the Greek language. God's chosen form of language is the person of His Son. The Scriptures are clear that Jesus is God and fully self-existent with the Father and the Spirit. Christ was the agent of the creation of all things: "**Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made**" (John 1:3). Writing to the Colossian church under the inspiration of the Spirit, Paul says something similar, and yet takes the thought further:

¹⁶For by Him **all things were created**: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; **all things were created by Him and for Him**. ¹⁷He is before all things, and in Him **all things hold together** (Colossians 1:16-17).

Not only did He create all things but also every quark, atom, and molecule of the whole created universe is held together by Christ's power. R. Kent Hughes writes about this:

There are about 100 billion stars in the average galaxy, and there are at least one hundred million galaxies in known space. Einstein believed that we have scanned with our largest telescopes only one billionth of theoretical space, and he made this observation over six decades ago. This means that there is probably something like 10,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 stars in space (ten octillion). How many is that? 1,000 thousands = a million; 1,000 millions = a billion; 1,000 billions = a trillion; 1,000 trillions = a quadrillion; 1,000 quadrillions = a quintillion; 1,000 quintillions = a sextillion; 1,000 sextillions = a septillion; 1,000 septillions = an octillion. So ten octillion is a ten with twenty-seven zeros behind it. And Jesus created them all! Not only is He the Creator of the macrocosm of the universe but also of the microcosm in the inner universe of the atom. The text in Colossians explains that He holds the atom and its inner and outer universe together (“in Him all things hold together”).¹

The eternal Creator spoke the worlds into being through the Word of God—the Lord Jesus. Eight times in the Book of Genesis, chapter one, we read the words, “And God said.” Each day of creation, God spoke, and the creation was brought into being, such is the power of the Lord Jesus. This thought that He was at the beginning of the creation and that through Him all things were made shows up in two other places apart from the above two references. Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, “*God...created all things through Jesus Christ*” (Ephesians 3:9). Then again, in the book of Hebrews, the writer states that God, “*has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds*” (Hebrews 1:2).

He Came to Light up Our Darkness with His Life

⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it (John 1:4-5).

God saw the darkness of our inner being, i.e., our spirit/soul, and came to give us light. Until we come to Christ, our inner nature, our spirit, is darkened and dead because of sin. God had warned Adam in the Garden of Eden that the day he chose to listen to the serpent rather than listen and obey God was the day he and all his progeny would surely die (Genesis 2:17). Every person that comes into the world is DOA (Dead on Arrival). Look with me to Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus:

¹As for you, *you were dead* in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, *the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient*. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. ⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, *made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions*—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word Series. John: That You May Believe*. Published by Crossway, 1999. Page 17.

yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:1-10).

Both verses one and five speak of all being dead before they meet the Lord Jesus and receive His impartation of life. The Greek word, *Zōē*, is the word translated with the English word *life* in the passage in John's Gospel that we are studying (John 1:4). We get the same word later on in John 10, where Jesus says, "I have come that they may have *life*, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). Here is what my Key Word Bible says of this Greek word:

Zōē is a somewhat metaphysical term, which denotes the very life force itself, the vital principle that animates living beings. In the New Testament, it is used most often in connection with eternal life. This life is the very life of God of which believers are made partakers.²

Question 3) How is this impartation of life and light given to a man, woman, or child?

John tells us that Christ is the true light that gives light to every man (John 1:9). J.C. Ryle has a great comment about Christ being the Light of the World:

Christ is to the souls of men what the sun is to the world. He is the center and source of all spiritual light. Like the sun, He shines for the common benefit of all humanity, for high and for low, for rich and for poor, for Jew and Gentile. Like the sun, He is free to all. All may look at Him and drink health out of His light. If millions of mankind were mad enough to dwell in caves underground or to bandage their eyes, their darkness would be their own fault and not the fault of the sun. Likewise, if millions of men and women love spiritual darkness rather than light, the blame must be laid on their blind hearts. However, whether men will see or not, Christ is the true sun and the Light of the World. There is no light for sinners except in the Lord Jesus.³

The True Light That Lights Every Man

⁶There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. ⁸He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. ⁹The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize Him. ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him (John 1:6-11).

God sent John the Baptist to testify about the coming of Christ into the world, yet many of the religious elect did not receive his testimony. John was not the light; he came as a witness to the Light of Christ. Paul the Apostle writes to the Colossian church, saying that all things were "created by him [Jesus] and for him" (Colossians 1:16). John tells us in verse ten that His created ones did not receive Him. Even His countrymen, i.e., the ruling Jewish religious elite, did

² Key Word Study Bible, AMG Publishers, Lexical Aids page 1630.

³ J. C. Ryle, Bible Commentary- The Gospel of John, Online Edition [at this link](#)

not recognize Him or receive Him (John 1:11). Many were blinded by their religious leaders to reject the person of the Messiah, but the Father foresaw this. He sent those Jewish people who had received Him to go beyond their nation to the Gentiles, who have been added to the Body of Christ, the called-out ones (The Church):

¹²Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. ¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:12-14).

The gift and impartation of eternal life are transmitted to people when they believe. God has made the receiving of eternal life so simple that even a child can receive Him. This gift of life doesn't depend on our knowledge of all the facts. It depends upon our heart attitude to lay down our lives in submission to Christ, knowing that, without Him, there is no eternal life (1 John 5:10). If we don't receive Christ as a little child, we shall not enter into life (Mark 10:15).

Receiving Christ and being born anew, i.e., being born of God, does not happen by going to church. John the Apostle said that it doesn't occur by being born into a Christian family; it's "not of natural descent" (v. 13). One person has said that God has no grandchildren. What he meant is that each of us cannot get into the kingdom of heaven because our parents know Christ. Each of us must receive this Life into our being. John then says that it's not by being married into a Christian family, i.e., "a husband's will." Your spouse being a Christian is not enough. Receiving Christ requires each of us to abandon all we have and all we are into His hands. John writes about those who have believed in His name, i.e., they are the same ones given the right to become children of God.

Believing is not just an intellectual acknowledgment of the work of Christ on the cross for our sake; it is placing our faith and trust in Christ and Christ alone. We can use the analogy of Blondin, the great tightrope walker who crossed from one side of Niagara Falls to the other side. After crossing the 1,000-foot tightrope numerous times, he turned to the crowd and asked them if they believed that he could take one of them across. After a roar of approval where most acknowledged that he could do it, he then proceeded to ask them one by one to get on his back and come with him. They wouldn't do it. Believing in Christ is putting our trust in Him. It is not merely an intellectual belief that is required for us to be saved. It is receiving Him into our lives and letting Him carry us from that day onward. Can we receive Christ like a child today?

God the One and Only at the Father's Side

¹⁵John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' " ¹⁶From the fullness of his race we have all received one blessing after another. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known (John 1:15-18).

Question 4) How can God be One, yet here in verse 18 and also in John 1:1, we see two persons, i.e., the Word of God called the One and Only (Jesus) with the Father? Do Christians believe in three Gods?

That's a good question! Jewish people are taught almost from the cradle that the most crucial Scripture in Judaism is: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one (Deuteronomy 6:4). Just as many Christians memorize John 3:16, Jewish people memorize this verse. When one is talking with Jewish people about the Messiah, this is a major stumbling block to them, for they believe that Christians hold to a belief in not one but three Gods. The idea of three gods is preposterous and blasphemous to the mind of a devout Jew as well as a Muslim, but it is also blasphemous for a Bible-believing Christian, too.

The word translated from Hebrew into English in Deuteronomy 6:4 is the word *Echad*. This word is a compound-unity noun. What that means is that it is a noun that demonstrates unity yet consisting of more than one part. For instance, we see the word *Echad* used to illustrate a husband and wife becoming one (*Echad*) flesh (Genesis 2:4).

When the twelve spies were sent into the land of Canaan to spy out the land, they wanted to show the fruitfulness of the land, so they cut down a branch with one cluster of grapes. The word *cluster* is our word *echad*. Also, in the book of Ezra, we are told, "The whole company numbered 42,360" (Ezra 2:64). The phrase rendered as *whole company* is this same word, *Echad*.

When God wanted to communicate one and only one, He used a different Hebrew word, i.e., the word *Yachid*. We find this word used in the testing of Abraham: "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah" (Genesis 22:2). There was just one son that God recognized as the heir to the promises of Abraham, his only (*yachid*) son, Isaac.

John the Apostle tells us that "He was with God in the beginning" (John 1:2). Do we find God referenced in the plural in Genesis, chapter one? Yes! The Spirit is mentioned as hovering over the waters (Genesis 1:2) and then in verse 26: "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule" (Genesis 1:26). The word *God* is in plural form. It is the Hebrew word *Elohim*, a plural noun.

People who say that Jesus never said He was God have missed some key Scriptures, such as when He said that to receive Him was to receive God:

He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me (Matthew 10:40).

Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me (Mark 9:37).

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:9).

Are you convinced yet that Jesus is God manifest in the flesh? How bravely and nobly he stood before the Sanhedrin the night before His crucifixion as they accused him and beat Him. None of the false witnesses could be found to agree. Finally, the Chief Priest, seemingly frustrated that the “kangaroo court” was not going well, asked Christ to His face, “**Are you the Christ, the Son of the blessed One?**”

“I am,” said Jesus. **“And you will *see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One* and coming on the clouds of heaven”** (Mark 14:61-62).

What was the response? The High Priest tore his robes, signifying his extreme shock that this Man was claiming to be God by using the name of the Great *I AM*. Jesus then said that He would be seen sitting with God on His throne and coming in the clouds of heaven, a scene that any Jew clearly understood as a picture of the Messiah coming in great power and glory.

This kind of love is staggering to the human mind, i.e., the God of the universe dying in my place to take the punishment for my sin upon Himself. The great British cricketer and a missionary, C.T. Studd, once said, “If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.” If there was no way other than that Christ should die in my place for my sin, then it proves the sinfulness of sin and how important it is to God for the guilt of my sin to be put away for me to have fellowship with God. We should do everything in our power to put our sins behind us and walk out the rest of our lives seeking to obey Him in all things.

What is your response to the Word of God? Maybe today, you would like to pray a simple prayer, believing and trusting Christ and His finished work on the cross. Here is a simple prayer of trust:

Prayer: Father, I believe with all my heart that Jesus came to give me life. Today, I trust Him and His finished work on the cross for my sake. I have sinned and done things wrong in my life. I turn from my sin toward Christ. Thank You for sending Your Son into the world to save me from my sin. I want to receive Christ today. Amen!

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