
Grace and Truth Came

John 1:1-18

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The gospel of John was written by the Apostle John late in his life. It is one of the last books in the New Testament to be written. It is written to the church who has the Pauline writings circulating. John's elegant and lovely writing highlights the Lord Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament in a way the other gospels do not. While they tend to focus on prophecies, John looks back to types. The book is filled with Jesus' "I am" statements that point back to many of the Old Covenant types and pictures.

It was written with the overt purpose to bring people to a true saving, eternal life receiving belief. He tells us this in John 20:30-31. (ESV)

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

So, that is my purpose as well: that in hearing the words of God you come to believe in the Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is good for you who don't believe:

This book puts the issues on the table.

This book may put faith in your heart.

This is good for you who profess to believe:

To greater and stronger faith in your heart;

To warn about all the kinds of belief that don't save.

This last purpose is an important part of the book. There are many ways of believing in Jesus that will not save you. So, you need this book to know and to believe in Christ in a saving way.

The Reality of the Word

(v. 1-5)

Who is this person, Jesus? If this book is about believing in Him, then we need to know who He is.

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John is telling us that Jesus is God; He is Divine. Each statement here is meant to declare that to be true. They also are connecting Jesus to the Old Testament.

He is the God

(v. 1-2)

I have chosen to say it this way very carefully. He is not a god. He is not part of God. He is Divine. He is Deity. As we will see, He is one of the persons of the one and only true God.

HE IS THE WORD. He is quite simply, God's communication, God's speaking. He is God's revelation. This is not something esoteric. It is a deep mystery. But all over the Bible, we are told that Jesus is the revelation of God. To see, hear, understand, know Jesus is to know God.

HE IS ETERNAL. He existed before the beginning and when the beginning began. Therefore, He had no beginning. He has always been. From His own perspective, He always is – improper grammar but proper theology. So if He has no beginning can He have no end? No.

HE IS A PERSON. So cool the way John says this. He was with God. The sense here is that He was and is, towards God. We would say, He is face-to-face with God. It also implies that He was intimate and near to God. This is the face-to-face of loving closeness and communion. He was and is God's companion.

HE IS GOD. He is divine. He was and is deity. He is not a part of God, a component of God. He is God of very God.

He has always been God and with God. Why? Because at the beginning, He was with God. How do we know this?

He is the Creator

(v. 3)

Jesus is the Creator of the universe, the world, the cosmos. There are two assertions here and an implication.

First is an all-inclusive *positive* - all that is not God came into existence through Him.

Second an excluding *negative* - nothing exists that He did not create. This is as definitive as you can make it. All that is was made by Him and nothing that was made was made by any other.

The clear *implication* and core *assertion* is them that He Himself is not created nor of creation!

So John has linked us to Genesis 1-2 and to all the Old Testament texts that speak of the role of wisdom and word in the creation of the universe. In the be-

ginning, God created the world. He spoke it into existence. In the beginning, when the world was created, Jesus existed and He brought the world into existence as the Word spoken by God.

He is the Light **(v. 4-5)**

Lovely language and even more stunning reality. Jesus is the life and the light of all creation. These two words reach back into the Old Testament and in a mystery divine gather up those pulsing truths and locate them in Jesus Christ.

In Jesus is life. That life is the light of/for humanity. This is not talking about physical life; it is talking about spiritual life. His life animates spiritual deadness and His light illuminates spiritual darkness.

Now the first ominous note: spiritual darkness is more than merely the absence of light. It is a personal failure to understand the light and an active resistance to the light. John will unfold this through the book. The light of world came into the dead and dark world and the dead and dark world fought the Light. It eventually snuffed out the life thus thinking to extinguish the light. Ah, but it could not. For the light came back to life...

The Response to the Word **(v.6-13)**

What then is the response to this life that lights?

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Central, main point of this section - (show the chiasmic structure)

- A The Reality of His Deity
- B The Response in the World
- A' The Revelation through His Humanity

John's elegant writing then preserves the centrality of Christ while emphasizing the importance of believing in Jesus.

He introduces us to three categories of people.

Those who Represent Him **(v. 6-8)**

The first group is those who represent Jesus. Like Moses and all the prophets, John the Baptist was sent by God and from God. He is the last of the Old Testament prophets. He was the final Old Testament preacher of Christ.

He was sent to testify to the light. He was a speaker, a witness, a preacher. He was not the Word, neither the revelation nor the light. He was not sent to be the light. He was sent to represent the light. The purpose of the ministry of John and

the purpose of the Old Testament was to bring people to believe in Jesus. It always had that forward look.

This is important. John not only is a connection to the Old Testament, but he is functioning the way we do in the New Testament. We are witnesses to the light, the Lord Jesus. We are sent into the world to represent Him, to speak of Him, to point to Him. That is our role in world. So John fulfills the Old Testament prophets and launches the New Testament preacher. We are sent by God to speak of Christ what we know of Him as a witness to the world so that they may believe.

Those who Reject Him

(v. 9-11)

⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

The second group is those who reject Jesus. This clarifies what John means when he says Jesus is the light. It is spiritual illumination. In His coming into the world, He is the one and only one who gives light to people. He did not just come into the physical world, he came into the world of men, of people. Over against many who claim to be “the light”, Jesus is the true, the authentic light.¹

Jesus not only came into the world of men, but He came to His own domain, His own realm. He was not coming as an alien to take over what was not His. He was coming into the world He had made to the nation He had established.

But His own people rejected Him.² The Jews refused to accept John’s witness. They rejected Jesus. They did not receive Him, did not welcome Him. His world, His nation, His people were all in deadness and darkness. Therefore they were able to neither see Him with understanding nor receive Him. This grim reality was nothing new. But now, it had become personal.

Those who Receive Him

(v. 12-13)

¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

The third group is the ones who receive Him, that is, they believe in His Name. These are given the right to be God’s children. Remember that this is being written at a time when Christians would know enough to be able to think deeply and rejoice greatly at this. As Kent Hughes wrote, "A dizzy joy at our future as God’s children should pervade all our ways."

John says that receiving and believing are essentially synonymous. Therefore, rejecting and not believing are also the same. Receiving Jesus is done through believing in Him, in all that His Name represents. Believing in Jesus then makes you the child of God. It brings you into the family of God, the people of God.

Those who believe already had something happen to them. Notice carefully the language here: “who believed... who were born.” This birth comes before belief.³ We are going to see this more emphatically in John 3. But notice that this birth is a direct act of God. We are born:

Not by blood – that is, by human birth through a woman possibly also through human family relations;

Not by the will of the flesh – that is, not by the exertion of human decisions or physical power;

Not by the will of man – that is, not by human decision⁴.

But of God – that is, of His family, by His power and through His decisive choosing.

This makes it clear that neither physical birth nor ethnic descent nor human effort can make people God’s children. God’s children are born by God’s supernatural work. Since this is true then Gentiles can now become God’s children. So, “To all ... who believed ... he gave the right” shows us that saving faith does come before our being adopted as sons. Upon our believing, we are publicly acknowledged as true sons and joint heirs with Christ. (ESV Study Bible, adapted).

May I summarize this in two sentences that might be helpful to learn the distinction between being born as a child of God and adopted as a son.:

We are born by God as His children, then we believe and repent.

We believe and repent, then we are adopted or given the standing as sons.

So, where are you?

Are you rejecting Him by unbelief?

Are you receiving Him by believing?

Are you representing Him by witnessing?

The Revelation through the Word

(v. 14-18)

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) ¹⁶ And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.

He came into the world to show us God. He became flesh and lived among us and we (the apostles) *saw* and believed.

What Happened

(v. 14)

The eternal, divine Son, the Word became earth, flesh, human. He took upon Himself what He did not have before. In becoming human, He did not become less than God. He was fully God and fully human.

Picking up on the Tabernacle language of the Old Testament, John says that He dwelt or “tabernacled”, tented among us. The Tabernacle was the physical dwell-

ing of God in the Old Covenant. So clearly, Jesus' living in a human body was God living among us.

As one writer put it, "The Word, God's very Self-expression, who was both with God and who was God, became flesh: he donned our humanity, [except for] our sin. God chose to make himself known, finally and ultimately, in a real, historical man: 'when "the Word became flesh", God became man"' (D.A. Carson).⁵

What They Saw (v. 14-15)

The apostles who walked with Jesus saw something significant. What they saw has become what they say, what they speak, what they witness to (cf. 1 John 1). So, when the Word became flesh:

They saw His Glory (v. 14)

They saw the glory of God the Father in Jesus Christ. The glory they saw was divine. In other words, they recognized and believed that Jesus was God.

But it was more than just the bright, shining glory that indwelt the Old Testament Tabernacle and the Jewish Temple. It was a glory marked by being full of grace and truth. The glory of the Old was bright and fearsome. It was unapproachable and unknowable. But the glory of Jesus, the Word tenting in flesh, was absolutely brimming over with grace and truth. It was bursting with the covenant love and kindness of God. It was pulsing with living truth. The glory of God became a human who manifested God's sweet grace and truth.

They saw His Greatness (v. 15)

They saw what John had said. They believed what John had said. They saw how much greater Jesus was *than all the Old Testament revelation of God*. This is what this means. There was great stuff in the Old Testament. There was great preaching by John, the Baptist. But Jesus was so much greater.

What We Received (v. 16)

Out of Jesus' overflowing fullness, we have received grace upon grace. Note that John expands his frame of reference. The Apostles saw Jesus in the flesh. Like John they have witnessed what they saw. As a result, *all of us believers* have received grace upon grace.

Now a bit of a problem here: literally this is "grace instead of grace". Ok, so what does that mean?

What it Means (v. 17-18)

Keep reading. "And from his fullness we have all received, grace [instead of] grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

We have all received the grace from Christ's fullness instead of some other grace. What grace is that? It is the grace that gave the Law. Simple isn't it? God gave the Law through Moses as an act of grace to Israel and to mankind. But now, we have grace and truth through Jesus Christ. A greater grace now instead of the lesser grace then.

Then in a stroke of irony – no one has ever seen God, except of course Moses who saw His back parts. But Jesus – ah Jesus who is face-to-face with God sitting at His side, He has revealed Him. What Jesus' showed and what they saw, we have received – Jesus' full of grace and truth, glory.

Reflect and Respond

We have a greater blessing... John 20:24-29

²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." ²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." ³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

May God grant that you will be one of these blessed, believing ones. May you have life in His Name.

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. [Hebrews 1:1-3 [ESV]]

Notes

¹ This sense of being the true or authentic occurs all through the book. John and Jesus will assert that Christ is the true... light, vine bread, one from heaven, son, Messiah, etc.

² D.A. Carson writes, “If the Word of God came to fallen mankind in the general terms earlier described in v. 5, he came in law, prophecy, and wisdom, in deeds of deliverance, judgment, and mercy, and in sheer, brilliant theophany. Now the Word comes in personal self-disclosure ‘to his own home’, but his own people *did not receive him.*”

³ This is what theologians call the order of salvation. John, both here and in 1 John 5:1-5 which reads as follows noting the highlighted phrases:

¹ *Everyone who believes* that Jesus is the Christ *has been born of God*, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. ² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. ³ For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. ⁴ For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Faith does not transmit the new birth – those who are born from above are granted the ability to believe and repent as gifts from God.

⁴ Some say that “man” here ought to “husband” (see the NIV). I am not persuaded. The classic translation and understanding of this phrase is more likely what John meant: not via human decision. We cannot decide to be born (or not).

⁵ Carson, D. A. *The Gospel According to John*. Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: InterVarsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991. P.127