

The Word was God

John 1:1-18

Introduction

What is the focus of the book of John and why is it such a key to understanding the person of Christ? At the Transfiguration of Jesus in Matthew 17, God the Father reveals His presence, announcing; “This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him! (Matthew 17:5). The Father commanded the three disciples to listen and obey Christ’s words. Later on we see in the Great Commission, He told all 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 the words of Christ to shed His light in our sin darkened world. John directs our attention, again and again to the question; “who is Jesus, really?” Personally, I love to teach the book of John because of this particular emphasis. The book of John is very different to the synoptic (synoptic means “see-together”) gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. The first three gospels focus more on the works and teaching of Jesus, whereas John focuses more on who Jesus is. It is possible that John had already read what the other gospel writers had written about Jesus, since most commentators believe that John’s gospel dates from around 90 A.D. John leaves out significant events in the life of Jesus such as His birth, baptism, His temptation in the wilderness, the agony in Gethsemane, the Ascension, demonic confrontations, and parables. John also includes several things that the others had not mentioned, such as the occasion when Jesus turned the water into wine, which was thought to be Jesus’ first miracle, (John 2:1-11); 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 second miracle of fish being caught (John 21:4-6). John’s emphasis presents a view of Jesus as coming from heaven, demonstrating that He is God. John’s gospel is written with a purpose, the key intent is to show Jesus as 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). This will be the emphasis as we progress through this book and immerse ourselves in the person of Christ and what He is saying to us today.

Warm-up question on communication: What private signals do you use to communicate with someone in your family? Is it a look; a cough; a tilt of the head; a pinch; a kick? How do you or someone you love communicate a message without words?

Alternate warm-up: Have you ever said something stupid or embarrassing and wished you could take back your words? Share what was said with each other.

Communication is a wonderful and 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 you move from one country to another. When I first came to America from England, I had a number of 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 in the morning to cut wood, as was his usual custom in the winter. I thought that I would give him a hand the next morning, so I wrote a note and stuck it on his door which read: “If you need me in the morning, just knock me up!” They all had a good laugh at my expense the next morning. I also found that saying “I’m easy!” all the time, in answer to a question was not always communicating that you simply didn’t care, and would be happy to go along with the majority decision, but something else altogether. Sometimes you have to learn from your mistakes in communicating with others.

In the following passage 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 totally understand Him, that He sends His only Son to show us the way to His house. He literally took great

pain to show us the way to eternal life. To communicate to the human race, God did not send an angel. God came Himself, in human form to bring us His message. This communication was very costly for Him, in fact it cost Him everything. We could paraphrase the first few words by saying, “In the beginning was the communication.” How condescending our God is! The Living Word of God, the Son Himself, longs to have communication with you and me. Take a moment to think about that and take it in! That thought alone should prod me to spend more time in communion with Him. Right at the beginning of his gospel, John is very clear about just who Christ is—God coming to man, not only to show us the way home but to be the Way Himself, by 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 (verses 12-13). Let’s read the passage and then delve into it to understand it better:

The Word Became Flesh

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. ⁶ There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. ⁹ The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize Him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. ¹⁴ The 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. ¹⁵ John 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.’” ¹⁶ From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.

I find it interesting that 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 really 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. Luke brings out 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.” The Book of Revelation tells us exactly who is meant by the name the Word of God for in chapter 19, verses 11-13, we are told that the coming Jesus is the Word of God. There are some who do not like the thought that Jesus is God manifest in the flesh. Many of the cults among us today accept Jesus as a good person, a wise teacher or a prophet, but not as God. One such group calls themselves “Jehovah’s Witnesses”. I prefer not to call them that, I call them J.W’s because, after all, in my opinion, they are not witnesses for our God, for they do not accept the divinity of Christ. To the text we have just been examining, they add one little word, the letter a, making the text, “the word was a God.” What a difference one little word can make in the communication of such an important statement! Concerning their translation of this passage, Doctor Julius Mantey says, “of all the scholars in the world, so far as we know, none have translated this verse as Jehovah’s Witnesses have done.” Dr. William Barclay says this of the Jehovah Witness translation:

“The deliberate distortion of truth by this sect is seen in their New Testament translation. John 1:1 is translated: ‘... the Word was a god,’ a translation which is **grammatically impossible**. It is abundantly clear that a sect which can translate the New Testament like that is intellectually dishonest.”

There are those today that deny that Jesus is God, saying that God is One, and one only. They deny the tri-unity of God. John, the apostle, is very clear in his opening statement that the Word was God and that He was with God in the beginning.

How would you respond to someone searching for the truth who believes that Jesus is not God?

There are people today who will try and disprove the divinity of Christ by saying that Christ never claimed to be God. It is true that He didn't walk around saying, "Listen to me, I am God." The things He said about Himself and the things that He did are evidence that Jesus viewed Himself as God. When one takes a look at a number of scriptures, it is evident that the scriptures are very clear in their portrayal of Christ as God in the flesh. Let's look at a few of these examples:

At the burning bush, when God spoke to Moses, telling him that He was sending him to the Israelites in Egypt to deliver them out of bondage, Moses asked God who he shall say was sending him. God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14). In John, chapter 8, John describes a scene where Jesus was responding to the Pharisee's criticisms. They thought they had caught Him out when He told them that He had seen Abraham. He said:

⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."⁵⁷ "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!"⁵⁸ "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "**before Abraham was born, I am!**"⁵⁹ At this, **they picked up stones to stone him**, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds (John 8:56-59).

He didn't say, "Before Abraham was born, I was", or "before Abraham was, I already existed." No, instead He deliberately used the same name translated into Greek, EGO AMI, the name by which God had revealed Himself to the Israelites, the Great I AM. Notice how they responded to this statement. They took up stones to stone Him for blasphemy, because He was claiming to be God. This is an important truth for us to understand because of the statement of Christ just a few verses earlier in John 8:24, where Jesus said: "I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am (the one I claim to be), you will indeed die in your sins" (John 8:24). Notice that in most translations, the words "the one I claim to be" is in parenthesis. Why did the editors put those words in parenthesis? Because it is not in the original text! It puts a different emphasis on the passage entirely, doesn't it? **Jesus** is clearly saying that redemption comes only as we get a true picture of just who Jesus is—the Divine Son of God, the great I AM. Either way, Jesus' meaning is clear. Eternal life hinges on an understanding of who He is. If He is only

a man, eternal life would depend on the truth He taught. Instead, the greatest truth we must start with is the fact that He is the great "I AM." He is the way, the truth and the life.

What other I AM's can you think of in the gospels?

What about His direct claim in John 10:

²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ **I and the Father are one.**" ³¹ Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, ³² but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" ³³ "We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, **because you, a mere man, claim to be God**" (John 10:27-33).

Notice that when they accused Him of claiming to be God, Jesus did not correct them. If He was only a prophet, and not God, He would have said so! After all, He claimed to be the truth; "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." Someone who claimed to be the embodiment of truth would not allow such a grave misunderstanding to be believed about Him. Later on, when He would finally appear to Thomas, one of the twelve disciples, after His crucifixion in the upper room, He did not correct Thomas when the disciple exclaimed to Jesus; "My Lord and My God!" If Jesus was not indeed God, we would see Jesus rebuking him for such a blasphemous statement. Instead, the passage indicates that Thomas finally understood who Jesus really was, as Jesus invited Thomas to examine His wounds and said:

²⁷... "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." (John:2:27).

How could God be One and yet here, and also in John 1:1, we see two persons, the Word of God (Jesus) with the Father? Do Christians believe in three Gods?

A good question! Jewish people are taught almost from the cradle that the most important 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 a Jewish person 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. This is an idea that is preposterous and blasphemous to the mind of a devout Jew. Remember how we saw that one little word can be so important? The Hebrew word translated with the English word one in Deuteronomy 6:4, is the word Echad. Echad is a compound-unity noun. What that means is that it is a noun that demonstrates unity, and yet being comprised of several parts. We see the word Echad used to demonstrate a husband and wife becoming **one** 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 Ezra 2:64, we are told that, 64The whole company numbered 42,360, the word whole company is this same word, Echad. When God wanted to communicate one and only one, he used a different Hebrew word, 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. When He wants to communicate the tri-unity of God He uses the word echad. John the apostle tells us that, “He was with God in the beginning (John 1:2). Do we find God referred to in the plural in Genesis, chapter one? Yes! The Spirit is mentioned as hovering over the waters (verse 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 also, it is the Hebrew word Elohim, a plural noun.

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

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

³⁷ “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: ⁹ “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 LORD? 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 revulsion that this man was claiming to be God by using the name of the Great I AM. Then to cap it off, Jesus 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.

What are the implications of Jesus being God? What are the implications if He is not God?

I cannot conceive of such love, the God of the universe dying in my place to take the punishment for my sin upon Himself. 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 in order 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.

John’s next important point in these first few verses is that, “³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:3). I take that to mean that Jesus was the agent of creation, being there with the Father and the Spirit in the beginning. Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Spirit to the Colossian church says something similar:

¹⁶ For 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.** ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in Him **all things hold together** (Colossians 1:16-17).

This thought that He was in the beginning at the creation and that through Him all things were made shows up in two other places, apart from the above two references. Paul writes to the church at Ephesus that “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).

How does it make you feel, when you consider that the One through whom all the worlds were created, has called you into relationship with Himself?

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. This means that there are 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

If that doesn't boggle our minds enough, John then goes on to say that, “in Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it” (John 1:4). He saw the darkness of my soul and came to give us light. Until we come to Christ, our inner nature, our spirit, is darkened and dead, because of our 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 would surely die, and his progeny (Genesis 2:17). Look

with me to Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus:

¹ As for you, **you were dead** in your transgressions and sins, ² in 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.** ³ All 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. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ **made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions**—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, **it is the gift of God**—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For 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).

This darkness pervades all of us before we are baptized into the person of Christ. Before a person comes to Christ, their spirit has not yet received life from the Lord Jesus. They are what the bible calls, “*dead.*” The only way that they can come alive spiritually is to receive an infusion of God's life, His *Zōē*, translated *life* here in John's gospel (John 1:4). We get the same word 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 which 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

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

Christ is the true light that gives light to every man (John 1:9). John writes that He, (Christ) came to His creation, the ones “created by him and for him” (Colossians 1:16), and they did not recognize Him or receive Him (John 1:11). How tragic!

¹² Yet to **all who received him**, to those who believed

¹ R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word Series. Book of John. Published by Crossway. Page 17.

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

in his name, **he gave the right to become children of God**—¹³ children born **not of natural descent**, nor of **human decision** or a **husband's will**, but **born of God**.¹⁴ The 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).

God has made the receiving of eternal life so simple even a child can receive it. In fact, if you don't receive Christ, and with Him the gift of life, as a little child you shall not enter into life (Mark 10:15).

Perhaps some of you have already received this life? How did your life change from that point on? Share your story of receiving Christ with each other.

Receiving Christ and being born anew, or born of God, does not happen by going to church. John the apostle says it doesn't happen by being born into a Christian family, "not of natural descent." It's not by being married into a Christian family, "a husband's will." Receiving Christ entails us abandoning all we have and all we are into His hands. John says to those who believed in His name, are those who are given the right to become children of God. Believing is not just an intellectual ac-

knowledge of the work of Christ on the cross for your sake; it is placing your faith and trust in Christ and Christ alone. We can use the analogy of Blondin, the great tight rope walker who crossed from one side of Niagara Falls to the other side. After crossing the 1000 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 totally. It is not simply believing that Christ has won salvation for you, it is receiving Him into your life and letting Him carry you from that day on. Can you receive Christ like a child today? 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 towards Christ. Thank you for sending your Son into the world to save me from my sin. I want to receive Christ today. Amen.