

CHAPTER I

THE PROLOGUE MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST

John 1:1-18

THE Prologue of the Gospel of John is profoundly and gloriously theological, and while the suggestion may come to mind that it would be better to quickly move on to the more simple narrative chapters, especially when presenting this truth to an unbeliever or even an immature Christian, yet this temptation is to be resisted at all costs. If it be agreed that John 1:19-12:50 is designed to present Jesus Christ as the personal object of saving faith, then it needs to be appreciated that John 1:1-18 intentionally qualifies, in elevated terms, the full dimensions of this same saving person. In other words, before we reach such evangelistic overtures as John 3:16 in which the universal offer of Jesus Christ is plainly described, we need to be clear about who this Jesus Christ is in exact terms, and such a vital explanation is given in John 1:1-18.

A. THE ETERNAL WORD AND HIS RELATIONSHIP TO GOD, 1:1-2

The incorporation of the teaching of Genesis 1-3 into the commencement of John's Gospel is probably more substantial than a casual reading might reveal. To begin with, John's orderly description of "beginning," vs. 1-2, "God," vs. 1-2, "came into being," v. 3, "life," v. 4, "light," vs. 4-5, 7-9, "darkness," v. 5, "man," vs. 6, 9, very much parallels similar terminology in Genesis 1:1-31. Also consider that the Prologue includes the revelation of God on earth, vs. 14, 18, sin, v. 10, and grace, vs. 16-17. So Genesis likewise describes God as present on earth, 3:8-9, sin, 3:1-7, and grace, 3:15. The acknowledgment of this pervasive Hebrew setting is significant insofar as an understanding of the particulars of the Prologue is concerned.

However, the parallel here with regard to Genesis must also be understood as climactic since John adds dimensions that transcend time and transport us into eternity. Thus Westcott rightly explains that "Moses dwells on that which starts from the point, and traces the record of divine action *from* the beginning (I John 1:1; 2:13), while St. John lifts our thoughts *beyond* the beginning and dwells on that which 'was' when time, and with time finite being, began its course (cf. Prov. 8:23)."¹

1. The eternal preexistence of Jesus Christ with God, v. 1a.

"In the beginning, the Word was existing, Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, En archē ēn ho logos. Isaac Watts has penned this truth as follows:

Ere the blue heavens were stretched abroad,
From everlasting was the Word:
With God he was; the Word was God,
And must divinely be adored.

¹ B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 2.

a. The beginning.

What beginning? The beginning of creation according to Genesis 1:1 when God was gloriously existing along with His Son (the Word), 17:5, from eternity past. The second person of the Trinity did not merely exist, but he began the beginning.

b. The Logos.

Who then is “the Word”? Clearly vs. 14 identifies it as Jesus Christ who John beheld and “touched,” I John 1:1. Then where does this terminology come from?. The word “logos” has many meanings, and more liberal exegetes have associated it with Greek Platonic and Stoic philosophy, particularly prevalent in Alexandria; such understanding of the “logos” comprehended the supreme creative principle, reason, the impersonal soul of the universe.² However, John is far more influenced by the Old Testament, as already indicated, where his “logos” is not detached from the world, but part of it, and for this reason the “Word” here draws upon several passages. Also consider that Jesus of Nazareth is also elsewhere designated as “the word” (Luke 1:2).

In Ps. 33:6, “By the Word of the LORD the heavens were made.” In Prov. 8:22-30, especially v. 23, wisdom is personified and also, like Christ, has existence before creation. So in I Corinthians 1:24, Paul describes Christ as “the wisdom of God.” In Heb. 1:1-3a, God “in these last days has spoken to us in His Son.” Hence “Logos” here means the “self-expression of God” which came by active word, but now flesh. “Jesus” is Christ’s earthly name (Matt. 1:21), while “the Word” is his eternal name.

c. The preexistence.

The imperfect tense here of the verb “to be,” εἶμι, ēimi, in contrast with the aorist of γίνομαι, ginomai, in vs. 3, 6, stresses continuous action in the past. Christ (the Word) existed eternally before and at creation, hence he was not created. This eternal preexistence was not incarnation but eternal sonship manifest as “the only begotten from the Father,” v. 14, or unique Son of God, the “first born” (Col. 1:15), the chief or first in rank.

2. The intimate position of Jesus Christ with God, v. 1b.

“And the Word was [being] intimately before God,” καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, kai ho logos ēn pros ton logon. Literally Christ (the Word) was, again imperfect tense, “facing God,” or as v. 18 describes, “in the bosom of the Father,” which he reveals in 17:5 as an exquisitely glorious and transcendently blissful relationship. Here economic relations within the Trinity take on emotional and not merely rational dimensions.

² For a thorough refutation of this concept of a secular source, refer to Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, pp.74-5, 115-26, also Carl Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, II, pp. 11-12.

3. The essential nature of Jesus Christ as that of God, v. 1c.

“And the Word was [being] God.” καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος, kai theos ēn ho logos. Again the imperfect tense indicates eternal existence. However, the preceding high relationship is qualified so that Christ being “face-to-face” with the Father is but indicative of the fact of his essential Deity. Hence, “the Word was God,” and not “divine,” and certainly not “a god” according to Jehovah’s Witnesses.

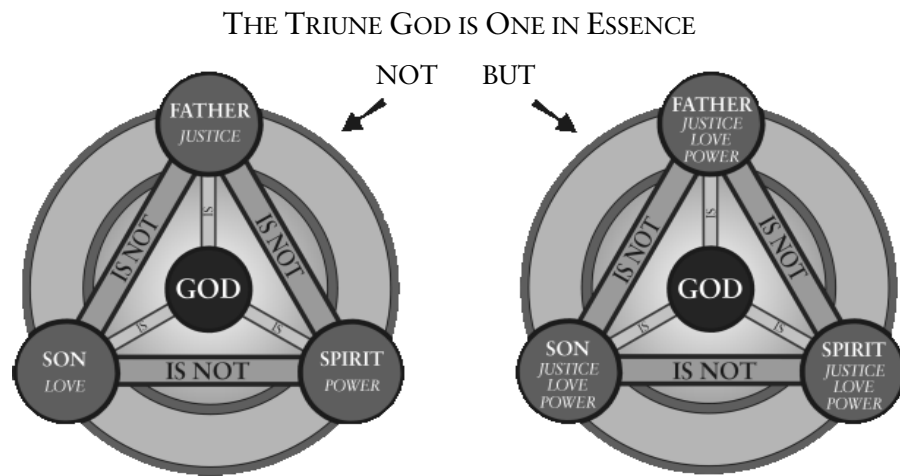
A. The deity of Christ defended.

For those who have no knowledge of Greek, a simple rebuttal of the Jehovah’s Witness runs as follows. The claim is made that the Greek here has no definite article or “the,” so that “a god” is more literally correct. However there is no indefinite article or “a” in Greek! Nevertheless, enquire if a passage of Scripture that clearly addresses Jesus as “the God” were revealed, then would not Jesus’ deity be established? Refer to John 20:28 where Thomas confesses Jesus to be, literally, “the Lord of me and the God of me,” ὁ κύριος μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου, ho kurios mou kai ho theos mou, with the use of the definite article. F. F. Bruce has written: “Those people who emphasize that the true rendering of the last clause of John 1:1 is ‘the word was a god,’ prove nothing thereby save their ignorance of Greek grammar.”³

Those who know even some basic Greek will understand that the verb “to be” here takes a predicate nominative, so that the article with “Word” establishes the subject of the sentence. Thus John wants to declare that “the Word was God,” and not that “God was the Word.”

B. The deity of Christ defined.

Jesus Christ has the same “essence” or “nature” as God, though being a distinct person, separate from the Father and the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ has the same attributes as God, yet he is distinct from God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, even as the following classic diagram illustrates this trinity.



³ F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, p. 60; also D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, pp. 117, 137.

In summary, John has revealed that:

- (1) Jesus Christ has preexisted eternally, gloriously, even before the creation of all things.
- (2) Jesus Christ was in an intimate face-to-face relationship with the Father before the creation of all things.
- (3) Jesus Christ is God with His essential nature and attributes (Col. 2:9).

4. Repetition and refinement of Jesus Christ with God, v. 2.

“This [Word] was existing in the beginning before [in intimate union with] God.” In typical Johannine fashion, the main thought of v. 1 is repeated and refined. Jesus Christ did not come to be with God, as if at a point of origination; rather Jesus Christ is being with God in the beginning. There was never a time when Jesus Christ did not exist with the Father.

5. Applications.

According to J. C. Ryle, the truth of vs. 1-2, “honestly and impartially interpreted, is an unanswerable argument against three classes of heretics. It confutes the Arians, who regarded Christ as a Being inferior to God.—It confutes the Sabellians, who deny any distinction of Persons in the Trinity, and say that God sometimes manifested Himself as the Father, sometimes as the Son, and sometimes as the Spirit, and that the Father and the Spirit suffered on the cross!—Above all it confutes the Socinians and Unitarians who say that Jesus Christ was not God but man, a most holy and perfect man, but only a man.”⁴

Jesus Christ here transcends the perverse contemporary representations of his person that are either born of revision of the biblical record or ignorance. The revisionist model, molded according to scholasticism, Hollywood, psychology, humanism, or sentimentality, is usually rooted, not in strict adherence to divine revelation, but rather dominant and polluted subjectivism. As a consequence, the creator and coming judge of this universe is scrutinized at the bar of sinful mankind, in much the same way that the Jews, on being advised by Pilate, “Behold your King!” responded, “We have no king but Caesar” (19:14-15). The ignorance model, molded chiefly according to vague notions concerning a Jewish carpenter who taught some helpful ethical principles that assist evolving mankind, is unaware of the biblical claims, especially in the Gospel of John, that Jesus Christ is who he is revealed to be in Scripture, namely the incarnation of Jehovah (1:14; 14:9).

Either misunderstanding of who this Jesus really is often results in the incredulous enquiry from an unbeliever: “You don’t mean to say that you believe that this Jesus Christ is the only way that anyone can be reconciled to God, do you?” The answer of the Apostle John would be, in the light of the Prologue revelation, that once you understand who this person is, you will come to the inevitable conclusion of 14:6, that comes from the very lips of Jesus: “No one comes to the Father but through Me.” In

⁴ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on John*, I, pp. 9-10.

the light of 1:1, 3, 10, this Jesus Christ is incomparable insofar as other transient religious figures are concerned. The first question any searching individual must ask with regard to this Nazarene is this: “Who is He?” The Prologue answer is plain; once a person grasps the full dimensions of this Jewish Messiah, this divine Son of God, he will come to the conclusions of Peter (Acts 4:12) and Paul (I Tim. 2:5) that this person is the unique Savior of the world, 4:42. Charles Wesley invites us exclusively to worship him as such:

Let earth and heaven combine,
Angels and men agree,
To praise in songs divine
The incarnate Deity,
Our God contracted to a span,
Incomprehensibly made man.

B. THE ETERNAL WORD AND HIS RELATIONSHIP TO CREATION, 1:3-5

Following the Genesis 1 order concerning the priority of creation, so Jesus Christ is revealed as the actual creative agent within the economic relations of the triune God.

1. Jesus Christ is the uncreated creator of all things, v. 3.

“All things came into being through him, and apart from him not one thing came into being which has come into being.”⁵ Keeping in mind that Jesus Christ is the supreme concern of John, there is emphatic emphasis here that he is the uncreated Creator. The Old Testament declares that Jehovah is creator of all things (Gen. 1:1; Isa. 40:28), while Colossians 1:15-17 reveals not only the same creative agency, that is “by Him, . . . through Him and for Him,” but also sovereign maintenance whereby “in Him all things hold together [adhere].” Hence, this sovereign, creative initiative of Christ in the universe, but especially this world (cf. Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31), ought to lead us to more readily accept his saving interest in this world as well, cf. vs. 9-10. This is a point that needs to be remembered when we consider the intent of John in studying the meaning of κόσμος, kosmos, in such passages as 1:29; 3:16-17; 4:42; 12:47, etc.

Ryle soundly points out that this fullness of creation excluded sin. “It came in afterwards, at the fall, ‘By one man sin *entered* into the world’ (Rom. 5:12). That it could not have entered without Divine permission, and that its entrance has been overruled to the display of Divine mercy in redemption, are undeniable truths. But we have no right to say that sin was among the ‘all things,’ which were ‘made by Christ.’”⁶

⁵ This is the basic translation of the NASB and NIV, cautiously preferred by Bruce, Carson, Morris. There is an alternative translation possible here where vs. 3-4 read: “. . . and apart from him not one thing came into being. What was begotten in him was being alive, . . .”, this being the preferred translation of the early Church Fathers, and punctuation of the UBS Greek Text.

⁶ Ryle, *John*, I, p. 11.

2. Jesus Christ is the source of life and light, vs. 4-5.

a. He is the Light of men, v. 4.

“In him the life was existing, and the life which was existing was the light of [the men [the class of mankind, the human race].” To begin with, 5:26 declares: “For just as the Father is having life in Himself, even so He has given to the Son also to be having life in Himself.” Thus the whole race of Adam was distinctively instilled with the life of God the Father, mediated through God the Son, which in turn became inevitable light and has continued as such.

Clearly John is describing life and light from Christ the creator that confronts all men to the present, notwithstanding the thorough corruption and blindness of the human soul. So Arthur Pink comments: “[I]t is ‘men,’ as men, not only believers, which are here referred to. . . . It speaks of the relation which Christ sustains to men, all men – He is their ‘light.’ This is confirmed by what we read in v. 9, ‘That was the true light, which *lighteth every man* that cometh into the world.’ In what sense, then is Christ as ‘the life’ the ‘light of men?’ We answer, In that which renders men accountable creatures. Every rational man is morally enlightened.”⁷ Calvin identifies this light as “understanding, . . . reason.”⁸ Yet in parallel with 3:19, it more likely indicates, not an internal revelation to conscience or the intellect of τὸ φῶς, to phōs, “the light,” but that divine shining upon mankind, as with v. 9, which encounters darkness and conflict according to v. 5.⁹ Christ as the “light” here transports us from his “living” being to his earthly ministry: “I am come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness,” 12:46. Here is also indicated the condition of the world stage upon which he presents Himself; it is dark since the lights are off! So v. 5 expounds upon this incarnate debut, gospel inauguration!

b. He is the Light in conflict with darkness, v. 5.

“And the light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome [extinguish, conquer] it.” Why? Because, “greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (I John 4:4). This world and its directors would hiss this Performer from its stage, v. 10, save for the invasion of God’s divine Spotlight, the Holy Spirit, convicting of “sin and righteousness and judgment” (16:8), which ministry cannot be vanquished, for “He will guide you into all the truth” (16:13).

The “light” here is Jesus Christ, radiant in holy splendor, in whose face is “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” (II Cor. 4:6), manifest in alien, pitch-

⁷ Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, pp. 24-5.

⁸ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, p. 000. Similarly Bruce, Westcott.

⁹ Morris comments: “[T]here is no indication in the context that intelligence is in mind. . . . It is more likely that we should think of Old Testament passages which refer to God as the source of light and life. Thus we read, ‘For with thee is the fountain of life: In thy light shall we see light’ (Ps. 36:9). . . . [H]e is writing about the Word, so that his meaning will be that the Word, Himself the life, is also ‘the light of men.’ He is preparing the way for the thought which he will develop throughout his Gospel, that Jesus is *the* life-bringer and light-bearer.” *John*, pp. 83-4. Similarly C. K. Barrett adds: “[T]he life was the light of men, which gave them true knowledge and by shining *in their midst* [emphasis added] submitted them to judgment.” *The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 132.

black territory, himself being utterly devoid of darkness (I John 1:5). Hence this is moral light, righteous radiance, saving brilliance, cloaked in flesh, which by its very presence on earth inevitably exposes darkness (8:12; Isa. 60:1-3). When we are awakened in a dark room by the light suddenly being turned on, everything seems exposed in minute detail, and our human reaction is usually, “Turn off that light; it disturbs me!” Accustomed to darkness, we prefer the darkness.

The “darkness” here, is the world as a *moral swamp* in which man delights to swim (3:19), a *moral stench* which man delights to breath, *moral refuse* which man delights to consume, *moral decadence* which man delights to project as entertainment. This “darkness” is the world arena that welcomes those who do its bidding, like Judas, the agent and associate of darkness (13:30), whereas the coming of the Light of the world introduces conflict. Thus, “everyone who does evil [practices foulness/darkness] hates the light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed [sifted and tested]” (3:20).¹⁰

So “Light” and “darkness,” major categories in John, are portrayed as in a contest, the result being that “the darkness did not overcome [vanquish, extinguish] it [the Light]”, even as at the temptation of Christ (Matt. 4:1-11), especially when “the devil left him,” v. 11.¹¹ Further consider the darkness that assailed Christ on the cross (Matt. 27:45) which could not triumph over the light of his resurrection on Sunday morning (Mark 16:2) Westcott explains that, “[t]he relation of darkness to light is one of essential antagonism.”¹² The word “comprehend” NASB (or “overpower” in the margin), καταλαμβάνω, katalambanō, is better translated “overcome” even as in 12:35: “Walk while you have the light, so that darkness will not overtake [overcome/overwhelm] you” (cf. Acts 26:18; Eph. 5:8; Col. 1:13).

Thus J. C. Ryle rightly confesses, concerning these opening verses: “I cannot close these notes on the opening verses of St. John’s Gospel without expressing my deep sense of the utter inability of any human commentator to enter fully into the vast and sublime truths which the passage contains. . . . I feel as if I had only faintly touched the surface of this passage. There is something here which nothing but the light of eternity will ever fully reveal.”¹³ So Josiah Conder has written:

Throughout the universe of bliss,
The center Thou, and Sun;
The eternal theme of praise is this,
To Heaven’s beloved One:
Worthy, O Lamb of God, art Thou
That every knee to Thee should bow.

¹⁰ Bruce comments that: “Light and darkness are to be understood ethically rather than metaphysically: ‘light’ is a synonym of goodness and truth, while ‘darkness’ is a synonym of evil and falsehood.” *Romans*, p. 34.

¹¹ While the present tense of “shines” declares the ongoing display of Christ’s glory upon a world of darkness, the aorist tense of “overcome” may envisage Christ’s victorious encounter with Satan in the wilderness, even as v. 14 contemplates the transfiguration.

¹² Westcott, *John*, p. 5.

¹³ Ryle, *John*, I, p. 13.

C. THE ETERNAL WORD AND HIS RELATIONSHIP TO *JOHN THE BAPTIST*, 1:6-8

From the broad sweep of “the light shining in darkness” on the stage of planet earth, we move to the particular events that preceded the entrance of the Word, namely the announcer whose principal task is to introduce this Celebrity Performer. God required that “a man sent from God” should proclaim the arrival of “the Light,” vs. 7-8, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” v. 29, “He [who] existed before me,” v. 30, “the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit,” v. 33, “the Son of God,” v. 34.

John is the great transitional figure between the Old and New Testaments, even as the closing verses of the Old Testament significantly indicate (Mal. 3:1-3; 4:5-6; cf. Luke 1:15-17). It is well to remember that not only was he born six months before his cousin, Jesus of Nazareth, but it is highly likely they spent periods of time together in their youth, especially at feast times in Jerusalem, even as did their mothers, Elizabeth and Mary.

1. John’s prophetic commissioning, v. 6.

“[Unlike the Word], a man was begotten [aorist], having been sent from God, his name being John [Jehovah is gracious].” All of the Synoptic Gospels record this ministry of the forerunner, the “messenger” of the Lord (Mal. 3:1). By definition he was a “prophet,” set apart from his mother’s womb who “leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41); thus he was “filled with [the] Holy Spirit while yet in his Mother’s womb” (Luke 1:15).

2. John’s positive job description, v. 7.

He is appointed to the office of a “witness” μαρτυρία, marturia, so that he might “witness” μαρτυρέω, martureō, about Jesus Christ as the “Light [of the world]” with the ultimate purpose in mind that “all might believe through him.”¹⁴ Thus, “the purpose of John the Baptist’s witness, though of course not its result, was so *that through him all men might believe.*”¹⁵

3. John’s negative job description, v. 8.

In view of early confusion (Luke 3:15) there must be no misunderstanding concerning the roles of “the friend of the bridegroom” and “the bridegroom” (3:28-30), between “a prophet” (Matt. 14:5) and “the Prophet” (1:21; 7:40; cf. Deut. 18:15, 18). John was a “voice crying in the wilderness” (Matt. 3:3), but not the “Word” or “Logos;” John was “the lamp that was burning and was shining,” 5:35, a λύχνος, luchnos, dependent on a supply of oil, but not the φῶς, phōs.

¹⁴ Arthue Pink suggests that the “all” here is the same as in 6:45. *John*, p. 27.

¹⁵ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 121, cf. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 133. The universalistic challenge here is met by John Gill as follows. The intention here is for no “more than the Jews, to whom alone he bore witness of Christ; the faith which he [John] taught, and required by his testimony, was not to believe that Christ died for them, who as yet was not dead, but an assent unto him as the Messiah.” *The Cause of God and Truth*, pp. 31-2. A major problem with this explanation would be John’s proclamation of Jesus as more than the Christ of Israel, but rather “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” v. 29. Such a vista by John surely encompasses more than the Jews (cf. Luke 3:6).

D. THE ETERNAL WORD AND HIS RELATIONSHIP TO MAN, vs. 9-13.

An even greater distinction between John and Jesus Christ concerns the mere “voice” of John and the saving purpose of Christ toward mankind as “the Lamb of God,” v. 29, which specifically was to bestow, according to free grace through faith alone, “sonship” on the sinful race of Adam, both Jew and Gentile, vs. 11-13.

1. His illumination of every man, v. 9.

“He was being the true Light who, coming into the world, enlightens every man.” This is preferable to the KJV, “That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” John is well aware of many “lights” that have sparked forth upon human history; they blazed for a short period and then were extinguished. But with the Word, at the beginning he was existing as the Light. Hence he is emphatic that Jesus Christ is the “the Light, the true [one].” Further, as the preferred translation suggests, Jesus Christ did not come to provide internal illumination for all men, but rather He shone on all men, even as 8:12; 9:5; 12:35, 46 indicate; internal illumination comes only to those who savingly believe in this Jesus Christ.

John Wesley claims the KJV translation for support of his free-will doctrine as follows: “Natural free-will, in the present state of mankind, I do not understand: I only assert, that there is a measure of free-will supernaturally restored to every man, together with that supernatural light which ‘enlightens every man that cometh into the world.’”¹⁶ However, the internal revelation of the righteousness of the law to all men, to which the conscience “bears witness” (Rom. 2:14-15), should not be confused with that particular infusion of the life of God which grants agreement with that righteousness (I Pet. 1:3).

2. His rejection by the world he created, v. 10.

“He was in the world, and the world came into existence[to birth] through him, and the world did not know [rightfully acknowledge] him.” Human conflicts pale before this universal encounter, this most shocking snub as is reflected in Psalm 2:1-3. Here κόσμος, kosmos, means darkened humankind as a whole that incorporates Christ’s designated residence (inheritance) and people, Israel. In other words, while resident as the incarnate Son of God in the midst of mankind that he had brought into existence, and therefore while worthy of the highest adoration, yet that same world repudiated his claims; it did not desire to submit to his rightful reign, it did not wish to know him in saving intimacy (3:19)!¹⁷ Here is the measure of the darkness that Christ

¹⁶ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, X, pp. 229-30. Wesley also believed that the atonement of Jesus Christ was the basis upon which this capacity of free-will was given to all men. He identifies this light as “what is vulgarly called natural conscience, pointing out at least the general lines of good and evil,” *Notes on the New Testament*, I, John 1:9, pages not numbered.

¹⁷ Westcott comments: “It is impossible to refer these words simply to the historical Presence of the Word in Jesus as witnessed to by the Baptist. The whole scope and connexion of the passage requires a wider sense. The Word acts by His Presence as well as by His special Advent.” *John*, p. 8. Similarly Ryle adds: “That the expression applies to Christ before His incarnation, and not after, is said by Lampe to be the unanimous opinion of Origen, Chrysostom, Augustine, Cyril, Theodoret, Beda, Theophylact, and Euthymius. *John*, I, p. 21. However more recent commentators focus on the incarnation, even as is suggested here by Christ’s rejection in vs. 10b-11.

encountered, the extent of human arrogance concerning the creature in relation to the Creator (Rom. 1:25).

3. His rejection by the nation of Israel, v. 11.

“He came to his own embassy [residence, inheritance] and his own ambassadors did not welcome [receive] him.” That Christ came to τὰ ἴδια, ta idia, his “own things/possessions,” indicates his territory and all that it contains, the land of Israel (II Chron. 7:20; Isa. 14:24-25; Jer. 16:18; Mal. 3:1).¹⁸ The same expression is found in 19:27, “the disciple whom He [Jesus] loved . . . took her [Mary] into his own *household*.” That Christ came to οἱ ἴδιοι, hoi idioi, his “own people,” indicates his own people resident in his territory (Ex. 19:5; Ps. 135:4). In relation to the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen (Matt. 21:33-41), Plummer puts it this way: τὰ ἴδια, ta idia, is the vineyard; οἱ ἴδιοι, hoi idioi are the husbandmen, the Chosen people, the Jews.”¹⁹ However, the supreme discourtesy was that Israel “did not receive [welcome] him,” or literally, “receive him to their side” with warmth of affection and worshipful acknowledgment.”

How does John further describe this rejection? (cf. 3:19; 5:18; 6:66; 7:25, 32; 8:48, 52, 59; 9:24, 29; 10:20, 31-33, 39; 11:47-48, 53, 57; 12:10-11; 19:6-7, 14-15). However several parables in the Synoptic Gospels graphically portray Israel’s insulting regard for its Maker and Messiah. They “grumbled at the landowner [Christ]” (Matt. 20:11). They declared, “This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance” (Matt. 21:38). They “were unwilling to come. . . . [T]hey paid no attention” to the wedding of the king’s son (Matt. 22:3-5). “They all alike began to make excuses” having been invited by Christ to the great supper (Luke 14:18-20). They confessed, “We do not want this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14).

By way of application, while being astonished at Israel’s shameless repudiation of its Owner, many so-called Christian churches are no less brazen in their exclusion of their Owner (Rev. 2:4; 3:20).

4. His revelation to the nations, vs. 12-13.

Again we are reminded, not only by John 10:16; 11:52-2, but also from the parables just identified, how a more encompassing invitation is given to the Gentiles. Christ seeks those unemployed for almost the whole day, eleven hours (Matt. 20:6-7). Christ will “rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons” (Matt. 21:41). The invitation to the wedding of the king’s son is extended to “the main highways, and as many as you find there” (Matt. 22:9). Again, to the great supper are invited “the poor and crippled and blind and lame” (Luke 14:21). And concerning those who spurn Christ’s reign, he declares, “bring them here and slay them in my presence” (Luke 19:27).

¹⁸ This territorial identification is supported by Alford, Ryle, and Westcott.

¹⁹ Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 69.

- a. The solicited response of welcome faith, v. 12.

“But as many as [whoever] received [welcomed] Him, to them He gave authority to become children of God, that is [see NIV, not “even” as with the KJV, NKJV, NASB] to those who are believing in His name” Here “faith” is defined as “reception” meaning a “ready grasp” of Christ, Col. 2:6, though not in any mere transactional, cool cognitive sense as some evangelistic methods suggest. When the man with the withered hand was invited by Christ, “Stretch out your hand,” doubtless his response was not merely in a cool cognitive sense, but rather trembling, reaching out to grasp whatever Christ might provide (Matt. 12:10-13). The coolness of Israel’s reception indicates the warmth that Christ solicits.

Here then is “the human side of salvation,” as Pink puts it,²⁰ which is followed in v. 13 by the overarching “divine side of salvation.” But the human side is not to be demeaned; the broad invitation or call to receive, to believe, to eat the Bread of Life (6:35), to drink the Water of Life (7:37-8), to grasp hold of Christ is obviously a universal offer “to the highways and highways” (Luke 14:23), a “call” from καλέω, kaleō, which is an “invitation”²¹ to “the wedding feast,” specifically to “as many as you find . . . both evil and good” (Matt. 22:9-10). The response of faith in John is not a soft option, since he uses the verb πιστεύω, pistuō, near one hundred times, though never the noun, πίστις, pistis (Heb. 11:6). If a person is overwhelmed with a sense of personal sin and is serious about becoming a Christian, what would your response be? Would you invite him to believe in the Lord Jesus, or would you struggle in your mind about Calvinistic doctrine and skirt all around worried that you might encourage some reprobate to believe? Read Spurgeon and Bunyan and learn of their unfettered offer of Christ, even as John here recommends.

However, to savingly believe is to be bestowed, invested at conversion, with the “authority” or “right,” not “power” KJV, ἐξουσία, exousia, to gracious elevation as “children” of God (I John 3:1-2), τέκνον, teknon, never υἱός, huios, in the Johannine writings. This familial distinction of John is unlike Paul who identifies Christian “sonship” with legal adoption (Gal. 4:4-7). Qualification for this promotion from darkness to light, from children of the devil (8:44), to children of God (11:52), is through faith that is further defined as “believing [continuously] in His [Jesus Christ’s] name.” The Hebrew understanding of a name meant essential character, even as with the Tetragrammaton, and not token identification. Here the person and work of Christ are intended, especially his divine, messianic, redemptive attributes (1:1, 3; 5:18; 13:13; 14:9; 20:28). Hence saving faith has considerable content with regard to its specific saving Object; but it is more than substantial understanding; it is submissive embrace of that saving Person.

²⁰ Pink, *Romans*, p. 29.

²¹ Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 400.

b. The sovereign response of a begetting God, v. 13.

This verse was the text of John Bunyan's last sermon preached in London twelve days before he died of a fever on August 31, 1688. The connection with the preceding "human side of salvation" in v. 12 is of vital importance since misplaced emphasis leads to either Arminianism or hyper Calvinism. We deny there is a divine side alongside a human side, but rather a divine side that is over and above the human side, even as heaven reigns over earth.

In summary, John is declaring that those who *authentically* welcome Christ and believe in his name and receive divine family status will have come to this spiritual begetting or new birth through God alone. Here regeneration does not follow faith,²² but rather is coterminous with and logically precedes it. Such a comprehension does not depreciate the vital role of faith, as John so thoroughly indicates (8:24); but it does establish the sovereignty of God over faith. Here in vs. 12-13 is a paradox that must, in spite of necessary human participation, acknowledge God to be the sole spiritual Progenitor.

In human begetting there is necessary human activity, yet the Word of God frequently acknowledges that in the final analysis "children are a gift of the LORD" (Ps. 127:3); further God determines the open and closed womb (Gen. 30:22; I Sam. 1:5). So the aorist passive here of γεννάω, gennaō, while excluding human activity, describes divine saving activity that operates upon man at the time of his conversion.

(1) The negative sources of the new birth.

Here faith, as is commonly understood in the religious world, is further qualified. Additional modern negative sources include baptismal regeneration, charismatic phenomena, liberal humanism, new age subjectivism, etc.

(a) Human lineage is excluded.

Christians were not born of "bloods," that is Jewish lineage, family relationships, national and racial association, denominational heritage, etc.

(b) Human effort is excluded.

Christians were not born of "[the] will of [the] flesh," that is carnal initiative, faith that trusts in human performance, religion that is man-centered, self-exalting.

²² We reject Barrett's comment that, "[t]his birth is conditional upon receiving Christ and believing on his name," *John*, p. 137, especially since the general emphasis of 3:1-18, 36 is one of regeneration having logical precedence over faith.

- (c) Human autonomy is excluded.

Christians were not born of “[the] will of man,” that is independent human choice, autonomous decision that is beyond divine influence, or so-called “free will.” Bunyan comments: “I am not a free-willer, I do abhor it.”²³

- (2) The positive source of the new birth.

Christians were “born of God,” which means that ultimately He determines the composition of His family and sovereignly grants a nature like unto His own (II Pet. 1:3-4). Stephen Charnock devotes 140 pages to v. 13 here which he titles “The Efficient of Regeneration,” being acknowledgement that “God alone is the prime efficient cause of regeneration. . . . What toad, naturally full of poison, ever made himself sweet and wholesome? . . . We are naturally weeds; if ever we be flowers in God’s garden, the transformation must be God’s act alone.”²⁴ What then of those who are not born of God? Charnock exhorts, “Seek it only at the hands of God. [Nevertheless, employ] the use of means, not abating anything of thine own industry. Seek while God offers it; hold your mouth under the fountain while it runs. . . . God promised David and Gideon victory, but not with their hands in their pockets, but their arms and armies about them. Moses must fight with the arms of Israel, but pray to the God of battles and victory”²⁵(cf. Tit. 3:4-7; Jas. 1:18).

E. THE ETERNAL WORD AND HIS RELATIONSHIP TO GRACE, 1:14-18

The fourfold use of “grace,” χάρις, charis, in this section distinguishes a significant emphasis, especially since the word is not elsewhere used in this Gospel! Further, “mercy,” ❖ ἔλεος, eleos, is not used at all in this Gospel. However, implicit grace and mercy are described throughout John’s Gospel, especially by means of the terminology of “love” ἀγάπη/ἀγαπάω, agapē/agapaō, used 46 times, which freely, with sovereign, saving determination, confronts an ugly, dark world that is mortally wounded by means of the venom of sin, 3:14-16. It is also significant that δόξα, doxa, another major word in this Gospel, makes its first appearance in this section.

1. The Eternal Word is manifest in human flesh, vs. 14-15.

There is recapitulation here with further expansion concerning the eternal preexistence of Jesus Christ and the fact that “He came” as “the true Light” into “the [opposing] darkness” of “the world [that] was made through Him.” However, the essential point now concerns “how” this Word came. We may reasonably assume that John believes this eternal Son of God, existing before Abraham (8:57-8), previously visited this planet, though not by means of incarnation. This clothing of God in human flesh is at the heart of one of the most succinct yet profound declarations in all of the Bible.

²³ John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan*, II, p. 756.

²⁴ Stephen Charnock, *Works*, III, pp. 249, 305.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 304-5.

a. The Tabernacle of God with glory, v. 14.

To avoid doctrinal speculation that is detached from soul reality, we need to be constantly asking the question as to “why” these momentous events occurred, “why” – “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us”? Remember that Satan believes in the incarnation!

There is a historical factor that needs to be considered here, namely the prevailing influence of Platonic/Gnostic thought which declared that matter was intrinsically inferior and evil. Further there developed the heresy of Docetism, from *δοκέω*, *dokeō*, meaning “I think, seem,” so that Jesus Christ only “seemed” to be manifest in human flesh. The father of this error was Cerinthus, who Polycarp relates was in the bath-house at Ephesus. John the Apostle was also there and on learning that Cerinthus was present, ran out fearing that the building would fall on the heretic in judgment! It is for this reason that John elsewhere is emphatic about Jesus Christ “having come in the flesh” (20:27; I John 1:1; 4:2-3; II John 7). Hence Carson describes John’s “unambiguous, almost shocking” truth here that was radically different from much of the contemporary religious world.²⁶ Bruce points out that in Augustine’s *Confessions*, just prior to his conversion, this verse caused him to see a radical difference between the teaching of Neoplatonists and the Apostle John. Further, Bruce describes this verse as the most foundational in the formulation of the Nicene Creed of 325 AD which, in opposing Arianism, declared that Jesus Christ was, “true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, . . . who for us men and for our salvation came down and was made flesh, and became man.”²⁷ History then demonstrates the crucial importance of understanding who Jesus Christ is, before we seek to understand why he came as absolute deity and true humanity.

(1) Divine incarnation.

“And the Word became [was begotten as] flesh [human nature].” Here the infinite is one with the finite, the eternal with the temporal, the spiritual with the material, the divine with the human. The Word became not simply “a man,” but “man” (Rom. 5:19). Paul’s exposition of this truth in Philippians 2:5-11 describes that deity took on humanity, Jesus Christ, “existed in the form of God, . . . and being in the likeness of man emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant.” The Son of God did not lose anything; he took to himself humanity which he had not previously embraced. As a result, as Pink points out, “First, it was now possible [not inevitable by nature] for Him *to die*. Second, He can now be touched with the feeling of our infirmities [Heb. 4:15]. Third, He has left us an *example*, that we should follow *His* steps [I Pet. 2:21-23].”²⁸ Thus “the [eternally preexisting] Word,” having come forth from Mary’s womb, is to be named “Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14); “which translated means, GOD WITH US” (Matt. 1:23).

Here is where modern hymnology utterly fails because of its doctrinal superficiality. Consider Charles Wesley, Martin Luther,

²⁶ Carson, *John*, p. 126.

²⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, pp. 39-40; Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, p. 35.

²⁸ Pink, *John*, p. 33.

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
 Hail the incarnate Deity!
 Pleased as man with man to dwell,
 Jesus, our Immanuel. (CW)

Ah, Lord, who hast created all.
 How hast Thou made Thee weak and small,
 That Thou must choose Thy infant bed
 Where ass and ox but lately fed? (ML)

Glory be to God on high,
 And peace on earth descend:
 God comes down, He bows the sky,
 And shows Himself our Friend:
 God the invisible appears:
 God, the blest, the great I AM,
 Sojourns in this veil of tears,
 And Jesus is His name.

See the eternal Son of God
 A mortal Son of Man;
 Dwelling in an earthly clod,
 Whom heaven cannot contain.
 Stand amazed, ye heavens, at this:
 See the Lord of earth and skies;
 Humbled to the dust He is,
 And in a manger lies. (CW)

He laid His glory by,
 He wrapped Him in our clay;
 Unmarked by human eye
 The latent Godhead lay;
 Infant of days He here became,
 And bore the mild Immanuel's name.

He deigns in flesh to appear,
 Widest extremes to join;
 To bring our vileness near,
 And make us all divine:
 And we the life of God shall know,
 For God is manifest below. (CW)

Surely this last stanza leads us to the purpose of John 1:14, even as countless other biblical passages do (Mark 2:17; Luke 19:10; Gal. 4:4; I Tim. 1:14)

(2) Carnal habitation.

“And [the Word] encamped [tented, tabernacled] amongst us.” Here the incarnation, a more abstract concept, is specified in human terms. The aorist of σκηνώω, skēnoō, means to commence human residence, flesh or humanity being the form of accommodation. There is strong allusion to the Old Testament in which God dwelt for a season in a tent, shrouded in “ram’s skins and porpoise skins” (Ex. 26:14), “where I may dwell among them [Israel]” (Ex. 25:8), where He was to be sought at “the tent of meeting” (Ex.

33:7). But in Christ, “something greater than the temple [of Herod] is here” (Matt. 12:6). The Old Testament tent of God was also a place where His glory was manifest, yet veiled in cloud (Ex. 40:34-38).

Here is a clear indication of God’s intended progressive revelation, from Sinai to Jerusalem, from theophany to incarnation, from Moses to Christ, from revelation from God to God as revelation, from “the earthly sanctuary,” to the “more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands” (Heb. 9:1, 11), from “the blood of goats and bulls” to “the blood of Christ” (Heb. 9:13-14), from the tent of human fabrication to the tent of divine begetting; so also in v. 15, from John the Baptist to Christ, v. 17, from law to grace.

However, this inhabitation by means of taking on humanity is not merely for the response of astonishment by the angelic hosts (I Pet. 1:12), or hoped for welcome by Adam’s race, but rather as represented in Revelation 21:1-4 which describes the purpose of the descending “new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.” Then in vs. 3-4 we read, “And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying or pain; the first things have passed away.’” This inhabitation is not simply intended as a visitation of God, but rather for the purpose of saving a people from a universal, mortal plague called sin!

(3) Theanthropic glory.

“And we beheld his glory, [being] glory like an only begotten [intimately originating] from [his] father, full of grace and truth.” As Moses and Israel witnessed the glory of God in the wilderness, so “we,” that is John and the early disciples, but particularly Peter, James, and John (Matt. 17:1-8, note also v. 9; II Pet. 1:16-18), “beheld [with deliberate, wondering regard, Luke 23:55; I John 1:1],” *θεάομαι*, *theaomai*, Greek, the glory of this incarnate deity. Here the veil of flesh was briefly pulled aside so that “His face shone like the sun, and his garments became as white as wool” (Matt. 17:2). The word *δόξα/δοξάζω*, *doxa/doxazō*, is a key word in John, being used 42 times, cf. 2:11, whereas the greatest frequency in the Synoptics is Luke with 22 times, and in Paul’s epistles, II Corinthians with 22 times. Also consider the added emphasis that the synonyms “light,” 8:12; 12:46, and “name” of the Father, 17:6, 11, 12, 26. The word comes from the Hebrew *כְּבוֹד*, *kabod*, meaning “weight of splendor and importance, hence visible majesty, brilliance, shining radiance.”

However, John describes the glory of Jesus Christ in terms of his distinctive lineage; this is “glory as of an only son from his father,” which in fact represents “glory as of the only begotten of the Father.”²⁹ But how is Jesus Christ “the only begotten from the Father”? This title defines rank rather than temporal origin, just as Isaac was Abraham’s “only begotten son” (Gen.

²⁹ Carson, *John*, p. 128; Westcott, *John*, p. 12.

22:2; Heb. 11:17) or “unique” son of promise in spite of the fact that Ishmael preceded him.

But further, this glory of the unique, beloved Son of God is distinguished as “full of grace and truth.” Recall that Moses had asked the LORD, “I pray You, show me Your glory!” To this request the LORD responded positively, placed Moses in the cleft of a rock, and covered him with His hand. So, “the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, The LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth’ (Ex. 33:18; 34:6). No wonder that Jesus Christ declared to Philip, “He who has seen me has seen the Father,” 14:9. But this truth has come by revelation, not human discovery; this was the understanding of Peter, James and John at the Transfiguration. Yet when Moses asked, God was pleased to respond positively and graciously!

b. The testimony of John to glory, v. 15.

Since vs. 14 and 16 would read with continuity, why the inclusion of the thought of v. 15, especially in the light of John’s qualified role in vs. 6-8? On the one hand John the Baptist is representative of the Old Testament era that is superceded by Christ; on the other hand the strong Hebrew belief in primogeniture, the privileged status of the firstborn, the elder, must be addressed otherwise a claim for John’s seniority could be made.³⁰ Hence when it is understood that in fact Christ preceded John, his right to privilege as the superior administrator of grace and truth is established.

“John witnessed concerning him and has cried out [sharply, intensely] saying: ‘This was He of whom I said: ‘The one coming after me has come to be before me because he was existing in priority before me.’” While John the Baptist was born six months before Jesus Christ, this Messiah preexisted in the bosom of the Father prior to the birth of the forerunner. Therefore, John’s diminutive role is upheld while Jesus Christ’s transcendent role is magnified, and worth shouting about! There seems to be the inference that John has been proclaiming this point repeatedly and emphatically.

2. The Eternal Word is manifest in great grace, vs. 16-17.

The “fullness of grace and truth” in v. 14 is now explained by the Apostle rather than the Baptist.³¹ It is “the fullness belonging to Christ” that “we all received” which is now described in terms of its historic superiority, that of Christ over Moses.

a. The fullness of the grace of Christ, v. 16.

Thus beyond Peter, James, and John on the mount of the transfiguration, even the apostolic eyewitnesses, a more encompassing body of believers has been endowed with this divine “fullness,” πλήρωμα, plērōma (Col. 1:19; 2:9; Eph. 1:23; 3:19; 4:13). Possibly John is aware of exclusive gnosticism, not only its repudiation of

³⁰ Carson, *John*, pp. 130-1; Morris, *John*, pp. 108-9.

³¹ Ryle, *John*, pp. 42-3.

the flesh, but also the belief that only an elite group were partakers of a “fullness” of Deity. This being so, John here, as in v. 14, is repudiating this heresy by emphasizing the universality of Christ’s fullness, to whoever welcomes him.³² In Christ there is a fullness of glorious divine essence that is mediated through the incarnation to the domain of rebellious mankind. But more it is that aspect of God’s goodness that is graciously poured out upon a corrupt race. The fountain commenced at an insignificant manger in Bethlehem; but now a torrent has overrun the Roman empire and beyond.

Thus the outpouring is described as “grace upon grace,” χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος, charin anti charitos, concerning which there is a variety of interpretations. Surely it is the “fullness of grace and truth” in v. 14 that is the controlling factor here. Thus we receive “grace in place of grace” because the fountain never runs dry (2:6-10; 4:13-44).³³ Dr. John Fawcett, a convert at 16 through George Whitefield, accepted a call to follow Dr. John Gill at Carter Lane, London. Packed to travel, he was so moved at the grief of his people that he decided to stay with the poor northern congregation. So he wrote of this grace that is supplanted by more grace.

A fullness resides in Jesus our Head,
And ever abides to answer our need;
The Father’s good pleasure has laid up in store
A plentiful treasure to give to the poor.
The fountain o’erflows our woes to redress,
Still more He bestows, and grace upon grace:
His gifts in abundance we daily receive;
He has a redundance for all that believe.
Whatever distress awaits us below,
Such plentiful grace will Jesus bestow,
And still shall support us, and silence our fear;
For nothing can hurt us while Jesus is near.

b. The superiority of the grace of Christ, v. 17.

“For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were brought to us through Jesus Christ.” Clearly “law” means the law or codified, covenantal rule of God that Moses received at Mt. Sinai on tables of stone, the Pentateuch. Thus by way of stark contrast, the law was given “through” διὰ, dia, the mediation of a servant, Moses (Heb. 3:5); grace and truth were embodied in Christ for us; they were “begotten,” aorist of γίνομαι, ginomai, cf. v. 6, or conveyed to us through the earthly begetting of the Eternal Word, who is now first identified as Jesus Christ, a Son in the house of God (Heb. 3:6). God is eternally gracious, but the manifestation of this same grace over history has been according to greater revelation in these latter days (Heb. 1:1-3) Hoskyns explains that, “[t]he imperative of God is the gift that kills. The law does not give life. But there has come into the world that which the law could not give (Rom. 8:2). . . . The law

³² Ibid., pp. 39-40; Everett F. Harrison, ed., *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, pp. 233, 237-8.

³³ This is the most commonly understood interpretation being held by Alford, Barrett, Bruce, Hendriksen, Morris, Ryle, Westcott. Contra is Carson who understands that the grace of the law is replaced by the grace of Christ. The argument hinges on the meaning of the preposition ἀντὶ, anti.

was a gift separable from the agent by whom it was given. Grace and truth, however, came not only *by* but *in* Jesus Christ, who is the truth embodied (14:6).”³⁴

Bruce well describes John’s intended contrast as follows: “Here, then, as in Paul’s writings, Christ displaces the law of Moses as the focus of divine revelation and the way to life. This gospel emphasizes in a series of presentations that the new order fulfils, surpasses and replaces the old: the wine of the new creation is better than the water which was used in Jewish religion (2:10), the new temple supercedes the old (2:19), the new birth is the gateway into a sphere of life which cannot be entered by natural birth, even natural birth into membership of the chosen people (3:3, 5), the living water of the Spirit which Jesus imparts is far superior both to the water in Jacob’s well and to the water which was ritually poured out in the temple court at the feast of Tabernacles 4:13f.; 7:37ff.), the bread of heaven is the reality of which the manna in the wilderness was but an adumbration (6:32f). Moses was the mediator of the law; Jesus Christ is not only the mediator but the embodiment of grace and truth.”³⁵

3. The Eternal Word manifests God’s essential nature, v. 18.

The prologue is now climaxed with a definitive statement concerning the Eternal Word now identified as Jesus Christ. Here, in contrast with the universal predicament of the unholy alienation of the human race, its impotence in terms of approaching and beholding God, is the summation of the object of saving faith. Man has lost his way while God has found a way whereby the unholy may be reconciled with the Holy. This God’s Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, declares himself alone to be this “way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (14:6). Surely the prologue here leads us to no other conclusion.

a. God the Father unseen.

“No one at any time has seen God.” Not only the emphatic double exclusion, but also the perfect of ὁράω, horaō, where “seeing” gives “prominence to the discerning mind,”³⁶ adds to this absolute statement. In the past and up to the present, no one has ever beheld God in his unclouded, holy essence, except the Son (6:46). Here the contrast between Moses and Christ is heightened; here even the lawgiver as a mere man is excluded from having seen God, and this in spite of Exodus 33:18-23; 34:6 where, as Bruce puts it, Moses “saw, so to speak, the afterglow of the divine glory.”³⁷ It was the same at the burning bush where he had “hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God,” fearful of the threatening holiness and inevitable death (Ex. 3:6, 20). At Mt. Sinai Moses “heard the sound of words, but . . . saw no form—only a voice” (Deut. 4:12). In the case of Abraham prior to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, this was a visit from the angel of the Lord accompanied with two other angels (Gen. 18-19). Similarly

³⁴ Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, p. 152

³⁵ Bruce, *Romans*, pp. 43-4.

³⁶ Vine, Unger, and White, Jr., *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, p. 556.

³⁷ Bruce, *Romans*, p. 44.

Manoah, the father of Samson, declared “We shall surely die, for we have seen God” (Judg. 13:22), yet this was the angel of the Lord, a Theophany.

b. God the Son in the bosom of the Father in heaven.

“The only begotten God [Son, NKJV]³⁸ who is [present participle] in the bosom of the Father,” as John writes, presents further stark contrast with Moses, for Jesus came from the glory of the Father; he has enjoyed eternal bliss there with absolute, unveiled, unrestricted compatibility. Of course “bosom of the Father” is an anthropomorphism, that is a heavenly representation of John the Apostle “reclining on Jesus’ bosom” (13:23; cf. Luke 16:22-23), reflecting honored intimate union As v. 14 established, Jesus Christ is like Isaac as distinct from Ishmael, the unique ranking and only Son of promise, “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Col. 1:15). However note that John is describing the post-ascension session of the Son with the Father following the earthly exposition that is next described. Hence this restored union is resettlement with the satisfied Father following the accomplishment of redemption.

c. God the Son as the exegesis of the Father on earth.

“He has explained [expounded] that One.” The word ἐξηγέομαι, *exēgeomai*, Greek, means to lead out, so that “exegesis” is the leading out of the meaning of a text. In Acts 15:14, at the Council at Jerusalem, James relates that, “Simeon [Peter] has related [expounded] how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people [Abraham and his seed of promise] for His name.” Hence Jesus Christ is the exegesis, the precise expression of the Father. The aorist describes this Son of God’s coming at a point of time in history in contrast with his continuous blessed residence with the Father.

Many people today glibly express their desire to know God, to draw near to God, even as Philip enquired: “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus seems astonished at such blindness in responding, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (14:8-9). It is significant that the word for “see” here, ὁράω, *horaō*, is the same as in 1:18, “Nobody has seen God at any time,” but now in Jesus Christ they have!

4. Application.

Alfred Plummer concludes: “In this prologue we notice what may be called a *spiral movement*. An idea comes to the front, like the strand of a rope, retires again, and then reappears later on for development and further definition. Meanwhile another idea, like another strand, comes before us and retires to reappear in like manner. Thus the Logos is presented to us in v. 1, is withdrawn, and again presented to us in v. 14. The Creation passes next before us in v. 3, to reappear in v. 10. The ‘the Light’ appears in v. 4, and withdraws, to return in vs. 8-9. Next the rejection of the Logos is introduced

³⁸ The translation “only begotten God” finds overwhelming support from the more recent evangelical commentators, including Carson, Hendriksen, Morris, Robertson, although along with “the only begotten Son” the fundamental doctrine of Jesus Christ’s deity is in no way diminished.

in v. 5, and reproduced in vs. 10-11. Lastly, the testimony of John is mentioned in vs. 6-7, repeated in v. 15, taken up again in v. 19 and developed through the next two sections of the chapter.”³⁹

That Jesus Christ is the most significant and influential person of human history is an indisputable truth which immediately leads us to ask why this is so. In terms of the prologue to the Gospel of John, the answer is abundantly clear. As the God-Man, the Creator, the incarnation of grace and truth, his stature is unique and incomparable; submission to him alone is implicitly incumbent upon all before it is explicitly sought from all.

³⁹ Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. John*, pp. 75-6.