

SESSION ONE

The Word: *Finding Life-Changing Answers (John 1:1-18)*

"In this prologue declares Christ's eternal divinity, to teach us that He is the eternal God, manifest in the flesh . . . Now the knowledge of this doctrine is of the first importance. For since we should on no account seek life and salvation outside God, how can our faith rest in Christ if the certain of this teaching is not established? In these words, therefore, the Evangelist asserts that we do not forsake the one eternal God when we believe in Christ." ~ John Calvin, John, 1:7

I. Overview

II. The Content

A. The One from Above (v. 1-5)

1:1 In the beginning . . . Unlike the Hebrew Scriptures, John will take his Gospel to a time before Creation (see John 17:5).

. . . was the Word . . . The background for this term stems from Jewish thought. Note the particulars:

- The Word is the source of creation (see Psalm 33:4, 6, 9, 11).
- The Word is equated with Scripture.
- The Word speaks of a divine nature.

. . . with God . . . This particular preposition "with" does not suggest proximity, but rather intimate personal relationship. This intimacy between the Father and the Son is observed throughout John's Gospel (3:2; 8:29).

. . . the Word was God . . . This Greek construction is extremely important. It allows John to express, in the most concise way, that the Word was God and yet distinct from the Father. Consequently, this Johannine phrase cannot be rendered "the Word was a god," nor is it best to translate the phrase as "the Word was God" (speaking of definiteness), but rather, it would be best to render the phrase: "the Word was fully God" (see the NET, NEB).

1:4 . . . in Him was life . . . Based upon John's usage elsewhere, we can safely assume that John is referring to eternal life in this passage. This major theme of the gospel certainly echoes Old Testament thought: "For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light." (Ps 36:9).

1:5 . . . and the light shines in the darkness . . . Light, life, and the Torah were often associated together (see Psalm 119:105, 130; Prov 6:23).

. . . darkness not able to seize the light . . . For John, darkness is not something which seeks to understand or comprehend the light, but these forces seek to conquer it.

B. A Witness to This One (vv. 6-8)

1:6 . . . There came to be a man sent from God . . . While the Logos “was,” this man came into existence.

1:7 . . . that they might believe in him . . . This is the first occurrence of the verb “believe” in John’s Gospel. It describes the primary goal of the narrative (i.e., 20:31; also, see 6:28-29).

C. An Opportunity to Respond to This One (vv. 9-13)

1:11 . . . his own did not receive him . . . Note the irony in these verses. The Logos serves as the creator of the world and all that it contains—including his own people; and despite this fact, these people rejected him!

1:12 -13 . . . right to become children of God born of God. Observe the following concerning this statement:

- Receiving and believing are almost synonymous in the Gospel—both involve a conscious and active choice.
- No human can boast or take control of this descent.
- A child of God is begotten by supernatural divine means.

D. The One Who Dwelt Among Us (vv. 14-18)

1:14 . . . the Word became flesh . . . It has been said that this verse is the most concise statement of the Incarnation in the New Testament. Indeed, the writer of Hebrews states: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us ‘by his Son’” (Heb 1:1-2).

. . . only unique one . . . While the term is often translated “begotten,” a better rendering would be “one of a kind” or “unique” (note how the term is used to describe Isaac in Hebrews 11:17).

1:15 . . . because he was first of me . . . This rather awkward construction speaks not merely to relative priority, but absolute priority. Jesus was not just “former” but “first” in an absolute sense. While John begins his ministry first and will baptize Jesus, the Baptizer’s ministry fails to trump the incarnate position of 1:1.

1:18 . . . God . . . Several times the evangelist highlights that no one has ever seen God (3:13, 31; 5:37; 6:46). In Deuteronomy 4:11-15, Moses only viewed the backside of God. Consequently, Jesus is set apart from all of humanity. Jesus speaks concerning what he has seen and heard (see 3:11, 32; 8:38).

III. Intersect

- A. Note who the Lord is.

- B. Note what the Lord has done for us.
 - 1. He has given us both physical and spiritual life.
 - 2. He has provided us the means and the honor to be called the “Children of God”—children who can know their father.
 - 3. He has granted us direction, purpose, grace, peace, security, and truth in a world that offers confusion, lies, hurt, and hopelessness.
 - 4. He has entered our time and space, and is intimately involved with our world.

- C. Note how the Lord provides surety for our faith.

“When Christ reveals Himself there is satisfaction in the slenderest portion, and without Christ there is emptiness in the greatest fullness.” ~ Puritan Alexander Grosse