

SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY STUDY BY SETH WILSON

THE WORD...DWELT AMONG US (JOHN 1:1-18)

The Old Testament begins: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1). Then it tells how man was made in the image of God to rule God’s creation, how men fell into sin and separation from God, how God chose the family of Abraham to be His instrument through which to reveal Himself and to prepare a great salvation for all the families of men.

John, the fisherman of Galilee, was one of the descendants of Abraham. He had learned from the Old Testament about God and His promises to Israel. When John the Baptist came prophesying in the Jordan Valley and baptizing people in preparation for the promised kingdom of God, the fisherman John and his brother James left their fishing business for a while to go hear the prophet. There they saw Jesus. They heard the prophet point Him out as the “Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

They began that day to follow Jesus, and for more than three years they lived with Him and were among His closest friends. They saw His miraculous signs. They heard His teachings that revealed who He was - the Son of God who was before Abraham (John 8:58), who had glory with God before the world was (17:5), who came into the world that men might have life (10:10), the light of the world (8:12), the resurrection and the life (11:25), the only way of life eternal for every man (6:53; 14:6). What a wonderful person to know and serve! They also saw Jesus rejected and crucified; then they saw Him repeatedly after He arose in triumph from the dead.

By all these experiences their faith and understanding were increased. But human understanding, even with such experiences, was not enough. They, with all the apostles, were given the power of God’s Holy Spirit to bring to memory all that Jesus had taught them and to guide them into all truth. Thus John gained such clear and sure knowledge, even of things beyond human experience, that he was able to tell us about Jesus, that “In the beginning was the Word...and the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory...)” (John 1:1, 14).

The first eighteen verses of the first chapter of the Gospel according to John are an introduction to John’s account of the events in Jesus’ earthly life and ministry. This prologue or introduction sets forth the theme for the whole book, and attracts the mind of the reader to the exceptional importance and solemnity of the book’s contents.

All Christians would do well to memorize and meditate upon this precious gem of divine revelation. It is simple in its form and wording, but very profound in meaning. We know almost too easily what it means to say in a general way, so that we do not realize the force and significance of these tremendous truths. In very simple language it declares:

1. The eternal existence of Jesus Christ - “In the beginning was the Word” (v. 1).
2. His deity - “the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (vv. 1, 2).
3. His relation to the world as Creator - “All things were made through Him” (v. 3).
4. His relation to the needs of man - “In Him was life; and the life was the light of men” (v. 4).
5. His forerunner, John the Baptizer - “a man sent from God...that he might bear witness of the light” (vv. 6-8, 15).
6. His tragic rejection by men “He came unto His own, and they that were His own received Him not”(v.11).
7. His redemption and regeneration of those who did believe on Him - “To them gave He that right to become children of God...who were born...of God” (vv.12, 13).
8. His incarnation and sojourn with men - “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (v. 14).
9. His revelation of the glory, grace, and truth of God, and His revelation of God Himself (vv. 14, 16-18).

These are supremely significant truths of Christianity. Other religions, at their very best, are capable only of showing man’s seeking after God. Christianity is the result of God’s seeking after men! Other

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religions show man's need of God. Christianity offers God's help for man. If religion were, as some conceive it, only a collection of the best wisdom of men for ordering our personal lives and social relationships, it would probably be, even then, of some value for our short life on this earth. But Christianity is far more and better than that. Christianity is not merely the experience of our fathers preserved for us; it is the wisdom and power of God present with us - God with us and in us for our perfection and preservation here and hereafter, now and forever! Our religion is not a philosophy to be experimentally confirmed or disproved, revised or refined; but it is a matter of facts faithfully witnessed, things done and forever unchangeable, divine truths unerringly revealed.

This Scripture records the coming into the world of the greatest thing that has ever been in the world: life, light, glory, grace, and truth, all embodied in the person of Jesus Christ. Here is told briefly but plainly (1) Who came, (2) Why He came, (3) How He was received, and (4) What He accomplished.

The Word and God John is writing of the life and nature of Jesus Christ. In telling who it was that came, John uses a title for Him that is used only in John's writings - "The Word." The Word was in the beginning. The Word was with God. The Word was God; that is, the Word was deity, and had the nature of God. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory. See I John 1:1, Revelation 19:13.

The Greek word used in these expressions is *logos*, which means much more than merely a word as a unit of speech. It often means a saying or extended utterance, the faculty of speech, instruction, a matter under discussion, a reason, an act of reasoning, or power of reason. The Greek language has another term for a mere word as a thing spoken or a unit of language; it is *rhema*, which is the "word" used in Hebrews 11:3 and at least 66 other times in the New Testament.

The words of a man are a most important expression of his character. The Christ is the supreme expression of God's character. He was much more than mere actions of God; He was and is a person, but in His whole personality and life He is the perfect expression of what God is and does. As John says in 1:18, He "declared Him." That is, He expressed plainly to human senses the nature and the will of God, whom no man had seen or known adequately. Jesus was such an adequate manifestation of God that He was able to say, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9), and "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). He well deserves the title "Word".

God is a person. That is, He is a Spirit Being, having will and power of choice, capable of personal relations with others such as feeling love or obligation, being pleased or displeased, showing goodness or judgment, and the like. Since God is a person, a perfect revelation of God must be made in the life and character of a person. The only one who can be the kind of character and live the kind of life that will manifest the supreme being adequately must himself be equal with God in the possession of divine attributes.

John makes plain the fact of the personal, eternal existence of the Word from the beginning with God and like God, and acting in the creation of all things. But our understanding of such a grand truth, so beyond human reason and experience is helped by other statements in divine revelation. Genesis says God created the world; but it also uses a plural word for God and quotes God as saying, "Let us make man in our image" (Genesis 1:26). John in verse three declared that not even one thing was made without the Word. Christ's pre-existence in the form of God and on equality with God is expressed in Philippians 2:5-8. See also John 8:58; 17:5, 24; Revelation 1:8. He was not a created being, but is eternal and uncaused, like God. His work as Creator is affirmed in Colossians 1:16, 17 and in Hebrews 1:1-4. His deity and glory with God before coming to earth are stated or implied in John 17:5, 24; 6:62; Isaiah 9:6; and Micah 5:2. The following works of divine power and scope are attributed to Him:

1. Creation of all things,
2. The work of upholding and holding together the universe,
3. Raising the dead,

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4. Eternal judgment of all men,
5. Forgiveness of sins,
6. Regeneration or renewal of those who were dead in sin,
7. Bestowal of the gift of eternal life,
8. Transformation of the bodies of the redeemed.

The deity of Christ is not a matter of cold, stale, abstract theology that has no practical importance to us. Rather, it is a truth of the greatest importance for us, for it is a matter of knowing whom we have believe and being fully persuaded that whatever He has promised He will do.

Life And Light In Him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). All life originated with Him, and He is the power that sustains life in the universe. As John proceeds with His account, it becomes plain that he is thinking of the spiritual and eternal life that is offered to men in Christ, and only in Christ. Life manifests itself in many forms, but in man it becomes intellectual and moral light, reason and conscience. All the light of men came from Christ the Creator even before He came into the world as Jesus.

The light of moral truth and God’s revelation of Himself has been shining into the darkness of human sin and folly through the ages. Before Jesus came, a measure of divine light had been given to man in his moral nature, in the original knowledge of God, in the progressive revelation in the Old Testament. When the light was manifested the darkness did not understand it or did not overcome it (John 1:5). The Greek verb can be translated either way. Either of these meanings expresses what is true, and each may fit the context. Men in the darkness of sin did not receive and appropriate the light as they should have; nor on the other hand, did the darkness overpower the light.

All the real light that any man receives comes from Christ. Through His life and His gospel Christ furnishes light for all men, although some may not receive it, and many love the darkness rather than the light (John 3:19; 12:35, 36, 46). Christ was the true light coming into the world. He is the “light which enlightens every man.” When Jesus came in the flesh, the world knew not that He was the Creator and Lord of all. Some came to know Him, but most did not. The original language helps us understand verse eleven. John says, “He came unto His own things and His own people received him not.” The first “own” is neuter, suggesting things, and the second “own” is masculine, suggesting people. The Jews, who had been chosen and prepared to know God and to serve Him, were peculiarly His own people. There is pathos in this simple statement.

“But as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name” (John 1:12). Not all rejected the Lord; a few were believing and appreciative. Though most Jews rejected, many Gentiles have received Him. The original word means “authority” rather than “power”. God does not give the believers ability or force to become sons of His by their own efforts; but He gives the authorization or right to come into Christ by His grace.

Some persons have used John 1:13 to refer to the virgin birth of Jesus. Jesus was born of the virgin Mary but this verse does not affirm that fact. John here states that believers become children of God, not by natural descent or ordinary birth and not by the efforts of their own will, but by being born anew from God. This is a birth of water and the Spirit (John 3:5; Titus 3:5; Romans 6:4-11). It is accomplished through believing and obeying Christ. Thus we appropriate His life and light.

Unique And Incomparable God came to us in human flesh and for a brief time lived among men, showing in His life and works the goodness and truth of God. In Him men saw the glory of God, unique and incomparable. John plainly identifies the eternal Word in His earthly sojourn as Jesus Christ. In many versions, we read in John 1:14 of “the only begotten Son”. The Word translated “only begotten” is *monogenes*. It does not necessarily refer to begetting, but may mean “the only one of his kind”. Thus it is used in Hebrews 11:17 to describe Isaac, who was not literally the only begotten son of Abraham. Ishmael was begotten by Abraham before Isaac, and six brothers were begotten by Abraham after Isaac. But Isaac was indeed Abraham’s unique son of miraculous birth and divine choice.

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Applied to Jesus, the word *monogenes* seems not intended to emphasize the fact that He was the begotten Son among others who were adopted, though that is true. But the word refers to His unique relationship with the Father in all eternity, *before He was begotten in the flesh* as well as after. No one else had such a relationship; He was the one and only. He not only was with God; He also *was* God. So John 1:18 tells us that no man has known God face to face, but one who is of the nature of God has come from the heart of God to us. In some of the oldest and best Greek manuscripts we find in John 1:18 the reading *monogenes* God instead of *monogenes* Son. This represents a difference of only one letter in the way manuscripts were copied. This would express not the sonship but the deity of the one who has come in the flesh to expound the invisible Father (Col. 1:15; 2:9).

Jesus is not important simply because His teachings are superior and effective; but His teachings are supremely important because He is in reality *God with us*, speaking the eternal truth of God! Because He is God with us, His death is more than an example of self-sacrificing meekness; it is rather the accomplishment of a divine plan of redemption with power to save the lost and purge the sinful.

We need also to realize that the God revealed by Jesus is the only God there is. There is no God but the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we must have no other gods beside Him. If we make any philosophy about God that considers Him to be different from the character and purposes and teachings of Jesus, we make an idol as surely as if we carved one out of wood.

Therefore, also, if we would pay any respect to God or serve Him, we must do it through Christ and according to God's will as revealed in Christ. We cannot know God or serve Him while rejecting or disregarding Jesus Christ. Beware of all those occasions on which men claim to honor God or to teach His will while they bypass Jesus and include in their ceremonies men who deny Christ. "He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father that sent Him" (John 5:23).

Christ Among Us And In Us Try to imagine what significance it would have if the apostle Paul were to come to preach among us for three months! What if he were with us to correct our concepts of Christian teaching, to direct our emphasis in Christian work, and to demonstrate what real faith and holy zeal are like? But how much more wonderful than even that would be is the fact that the very Son of God came and lived among men for thirty-three years as a perfect demonstration of God's love, wisdom, purposes, and holiness! He showed us, throughout an entire lifetime, the way of righteousness, the glory of service, the power of love, the life of prayer, and the victory of complete trust in God.

His earthly life was perfect in godliness, but it was truly human at the same time. For our sakes He came to be really one of us, to be tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin. For having suffered being tempted, He is able to help those who are now being tempted. He lived a very real and complete human life, as a helpless babe, as a growing boy, as a working youth, as a man of sorrows, serving and saving humanity. His humanity is not to be denied any more than His deity is (see I John 4:2; II John 7). He became one of us that He might represent us as our priest before God. He even suffered our death, that through it He might free us from the sentence of the second death and the fear of the first one.

His coming to dwell among us is especially significant when we let Him come and dwell within us. For the Word of God not only dwelt *among men* nineteen hundred years ago; He will *dwell in our hearts* today through faith. This is the real purpose of the incarnation and the teaching of the Gospel - to bring Christ into the lives of all men, to be their life and righteousness and their hope of eternal glory (see Col. 1:27; Gal. 4:19). When we really accept Him as Lord, and His death as the death our sins deserve, we are baptized into His death and are counted as "crucified with Christ". Henceforth, the life of faith in Him is not our own life, but Christ living in us (Gal. 2:20 compare Rom. 6:1-11). This is the divine purpose and the abiding glory of the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us.