

JOHN

I. In the beginning

A. **John 1:14-18** . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. [15] John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'" [16] For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. [17] For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. [18] No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

B. Prayer

II. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us

A. **John 1:15** . . . John testified about [Jesus] and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'"

1. We know from **Luke 1**, that John was born about six months before Jesus was born. We know from **John 1:6-8**, that as the forerunner or preparer of the way for Jesus, John the Baptist began his ministry before Jesus began his. Therefore, when John tells us that John the Baptist said that Jesus came onto the scene after him, he was stating an important truth in order to present an even more important truth.
2. And this more important truth John is presenting is a two part truth he has already stated, which is –
 - a. **First**, John the Baptist was not the Christ.
 - b. **Second**, Jesus Christ is God in human flesh – which is the explanation as to how Jesus could have been born after John the Baptist was born and yet be in existence before John was born.
3. And though both truths play an important role in establishing who Jesus is, I want to take a few minutes and talk about two things directly related to the fact that John the Baptist is not the Messiah.
 - a. **First**, in this chapter, John states six times, and in a variety of ways, that John the Baptist is not the Messiah (**John 1:8, 15, 19-23, 30, 34, 36**).
 - (1) This raises the question, Why? Why do we need to have this truth stated six times? And the answer is, I don't know.

- (2) However, one of the possible reasons is that John the Baptist was a notable figure with many followers. And it is possible that at the time John wrote his gospel, there were still some of John the Baptist's followers who were loyal to him and had yet to believe in Jesus and become loyal followers of Jesus.
- (3) And so, it is possible John is trying to convince his readers that John the Baptist was not the Christ.
- b. The **second** thing I want to point out is this – we know from **Matthew 3, Luke 3** and **John 1:19-28**, that many people were going out to hear John the Baptist. And of those who went to hear John, many repented and were baptized. Because of John's popularity and the effect on people of his ministry, the Jewish religious leaders were wondering who John was – that is, if he was the Messiah, or Elijah returned, or the Prophet promised by Moses in **Deuteronomy 18:15-18**. To get the answer, they sent some men to question John.
 - (1) In response, John the Baptist said, "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the LORD,' as Isaiah the prophet said" (**John 1:23**).
 - (2) Now the reason I believe this is important is because, when the response from John we just read is taken together with his response in **vs 15** – where he says, "[Jesus] was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a **higher rank** than I, for He **existed before** me,'" it gives us a picture of a well-known person in ministry who maintained a humble, honest perspective of his calling, his role, and his position, even though God had given him a special task to do, and even though he drew crowds of people and saw many respond to his message.
 - (3) In other words, John the Baptist was a humble servant, who was submissive to his master, and who genuinely desired that the work he was given to do should bring praise and glory to God, and not to himself.
4. Now you may be wondering why I am pointing this out when it seems it has little to do with the focus of this chapter. Here is my reason.
 - a. Given the growing number of pastors who treat the church as if it were their business and themselves as the owner, and given the belief that a big church is better than a godly church, and given that Christians are willing to travel far and wide to hear a popular speaker but will not seek out the unknown yet godly

person in their midst, and given that some promote serving God because that is the way to become a world changer, or in other words, it is a way to become someone important who is doing something important, and given that some promote service to God on the basis that God has a specific and unique task just for you to do so that you become unique to all other believers, I believe it is good for us to see someone with John's stature – *who is doing a God-given task of significant importance, and who is gaining fame from fulfilling that task* – exhibiting the godly qualities of humility, honesty, submission, and the commitment to treat God, and not himself, as the important, praiseworthy One.

- b. It is my opinion that many in the church have turned service to God into a means of feeding pride, and gratifying fleshly desires for self-importance and self-worth, and opening doors to satisfying our desire for influence and power over others.
 - c. Therefore, I am encouraging us to be like John the Baptist, and like Jesus Christ, and like those servants of God listed in **Hebrews 11** – all of whom were active in God's service for God's sake and the good of those served – as verified by their humility, integrity, honesty about their role and position, and submission to God, even at the cost of their lives.
5. Paul speaks of this quality of service in **Romans 12:3,10-11**, where he says, “[3] Do not think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, but think so as to have sound judgment [concerning the amount of faith God has allotted you for the role and position God has given you] . . . [10] Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; **give preference** to one another in honor; [11] not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, **serving the Lord**.
- a. Jesus showed His own commitment to this humble, honest, and submissive form of service when He said, “I [do] not speak on My own initiative (*even though He was God*), but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak” (**John 12:49**).
 - b. And as you know, Paul exhorts us to put on the same attitude that Jesus Christ had, that is, to let go of our need for respect and the power that comes from our position, and to take on the attitude of a humble servant, so that we willingly serve God and others, even if it costs us our lives (**Philippians 2:5-8**).

6. But how do we get to this quality of character exhibited by John the Baptist? The only way I know is to follow Paul's directive in **2 Timothy 2:21-22** . . . If anyone **cleanses himself** from these things (*that is, the things that contaminate our character, such as pride, seeking the praise of men, longing to be important, and wanting power over others*), he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. [22] Now **flee** from youthful lusts (*the excessive desires of youth*) and **pursue** righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.
7. Therefore, may we be like John the Baptist rather than use God and Christian service to gain earthly praise, honor, influence, and even power – for such rewards are only temporary, while the cost of pursuing them is eternal.

B. **John 1:16** . . . For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.

1. **For of His fullness we have all received** – The “fullness” that John is talking about is the mysterious mixture of Christ's deity and humanity. And the “we have all received” is speaking of coming to know and experience the person of God through knowing Jesus Christ, who reveals God to us in ways we can understand.
 - a. In His letter to the Colossians Paul, gives us a detailed description of the **fullness** of deity that is in Christ Jesus. **Colossians 1:15-19** . . . [Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. [16] For by [Jesus Christ] all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through [Jesus Christ] and for [Jesus Christ]. [17] [Jesus Christ] is before all things, and in [Jesus Christ] all things hold together. [18] [Jesus Christ] is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. [19] For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the **fullness** [of God] to dwell in [Jesus Christ].
 - b. Therefore, as we personally get to know, listen to, and submit to Jesus Christ, we see and experience God in the most personal ways possible.
2. However, we not only see the fullness of God in Christ, we experience the abundance of God's grace through the work of Jesus Christ on

our behalf. And so John continues vs 16 with these words, **and grace upon grace**.

- a. In the OT Temple, we have the Holy of Holies, which is another way of saying that **that** “Holy” place is the most holy place of all. And in the OT we have Solomon’s Song of Songs, which is another way of saying that Solomon’s song is the song of all songs.
 - b. So here in **verse 16**, we have **grace upon grace**, which is another way of saying that the grace we receive through Jesus Christ is God’s most gracious grace. That is, nothing exceeds it.
 - c. Therefore, just as there is no earthy place holier than the Holy of Holies, and just as Solomon wrote no earthly song greater than the Song of Songs, so there is no amount of grace that exceeds the grace we receive from God through Jesus Christ.
3. Now, let me summarize **vs 16**, because John is telling us two exceedingly important truths –
- a. **First**, as we come to know, trust in, submit to, and follow Jesus Christ, we see and personally experience God in ways we can understand.
 - b. **Second**, through coming to know, trust in, submit to, and follow Jesus Christ, we receive God’s most gracious grace.

C. **John 1:17** . . . For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.

1. The first thing I want to point out is that this is the first time John uses the name, Jesus Christ, in his gospel. Before this, John refers to Jesus as the Word, the Creator, and the Light.
2. However, that is not the important truth being stated here. In this verse, John is comparing Moses with Jesus Christ, and the Law with grace and truth.
 - a. Now whatever you may think of the OT Law, I want to make it clear that John is not making a comparison between what is bad and what is good. He is not saying that the Law is bad while grace and truth are good. Neither is he inferring that Moses is bad and Jesus Christ is good.
 - b. What John is doing is comparing the method God used in OT times with the method He is using in NT times –
 - (1) to reveal who He is and what He is like,
 - (2) to provide forgiveness for sin, justification, and the restoration of relationship between a forgiven sinner and Himself,
 - (3) and to instruct us on how to live a God pleasing life.

3. The reason I am pointing this out is because there are some Christians who hold a negative view of the Law. They treat the Law as if what God intended for good turned out to be bad – and they support this view by pointing out the things the Law cannot do and how it keeps law-keepers from coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ.
 - a. Now it is true that the Law cannot save us, for it is not and never was intended to be a living being who would shed its blood on our behalf for the forgiveness of sin. It is also true that the Law cannot empower us to live a godly life.
 - b. But what the Law was supposed to do, it did.
 - (1) Like a good parent to underage children, the Law taught us that God is the authority and we are the subservient children.
 - (2) It taught us that the wisest thing we can do is to fear God so that we obey God even when we don't want to obey Him, **and** so that we learn what God intends to teach us in order to grow up to become what He wants us to be.
 - (3) The Law taught us the correlation between obedience and blessing, and between disobedience and the unwanted consequences of disobedience.
 - (4) And the Law taught us that the sin of one brings destructive consequences upon the whole family or community, just as the righteousness of one brings blessing on the whole group.
 - c. Therefore, we are not to see the Law as evil or as something that God intended for good but turned out bad. The Law did what God intended it to do. It was a good parent that led the world during its childhood years, that is, during its years of spiritual infancy, and brought it to the place where it could enter spiritual adulthood with the ability to think like and live like responsible, mature adults. (**Galatians 3:23-26**)
4. Now, back to the message of **vs 17**, which is best understood when viewed from this perspective that God has dealt with human history as if it has two parts – childhood and adulthood – with the childhood years being the years under the Law, and adulthood years being the years under Christ.
 - a. **The Law came to us through Moses**, and as I have already said, the focus of the Law is to train us in the ways of submission, obedience, the fear of God, the rewards of obedience, the consequences of disobedience, personal responsibility for our behavior, and the value of the community, as well as teaching us God-approved forms of worship.

- b. **Grace and truth were realized in Jesus Christ.** The point here concerning God's grace is that God shows us extreme grace in comparison to our sin. And the point here concerning God's truth is that, as adults, we are now free to choose how we will apply the truth to our thoughts, desires, feelings, aspirations, needs, words, and deeds.
- c. In other words, now that we are adults who have been trained by the Law and prepared to act like responsible adults, we can be told about and knowingly experience the extent of God's grace and truth without treating God as if He were lenient, or treating His grace as if it makes it safe for us to sin, or treating His truth as if we have the right to make it say what we want it to say.

III. Conclusion

- A. Unlike the other three gospels, John begins his gospel by explaining who Jesus is, and his primary purpose is to show us that Jesus is God. To this end, John begins with, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God**" (**John 1:1**).
- B. In **verse 9**, John begins explaining that Jesus reveals what God is like in ways we can understand. In **verse 14**, John affirms that we can see what God is like by looking at and walking with Jesus.
- C. And finally, John concludes this presentation of who Jesus is with these words: "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father (*Jesus Christ*), He has explained Him" (**John 1:18**).