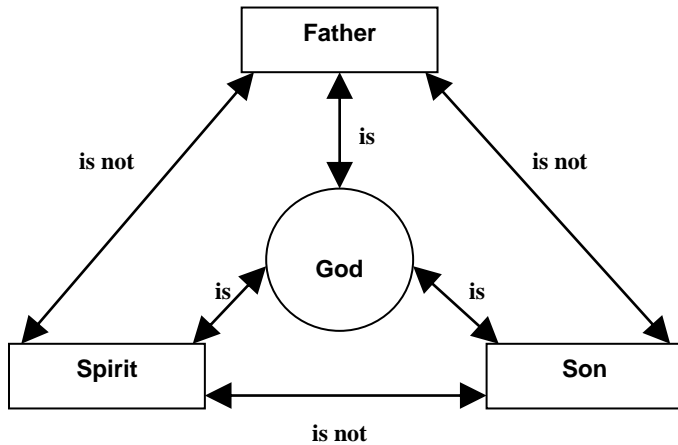


Reflections on John 1.1-18

by Will Groben

Day 1 / Learn: Pray and then read John 1.1-18. The “Word” is the Greek term “logos” [λόγος; pronounced LAH-gahs], which normally meant word, statement, or message. In Greek philosophical thought, the logos was the eternal wisdom or reason running the universe. In Hebrew theology, the logos was God’s revelation. For both, the logos was the starting point of all things. So the apostle John, when he wrote this introduction, was using a term that everyone could understand. But then he would surprise them in *how* he used it! The first surprise came in v.1 [verse 1]: This *Word* not only was eternal and with God, he was divine or God himself! This was shocking because to the Greeks the logos was impersonal and to the Jews one of the most important teachings was that there was only one God, so how could the logos be divine? This is the apostle John’s first hint at the *triune* nature of the one and only God.



This picture depicts what God has revealed about himself: there is only one God, but within the “Godhead” there are three unique entities: the Father, the Son [called “the Word,” see verses 14 & 18] and the Holy Spirit; each in unity with, and of the same essence as, the others; yet each unique in personality and function. Each is all God, yet God is all three. V.1 says that the Word is fully God in essence, but is not the same as God the Father, because he was with God the Father [Θεός, pronounced theh-AHS, meaning God] in the beginning.

Our belief in a triune God is called *Trinitarianism*. It is not the same as *Tritheism*, the belief in three Gods, for we believe in only one God. It is not the same as *Modalism*, the belief

that God merely shows himself in three ways, for we believe the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct individuals, though of the same essence and in the same Godhead. It is not the same as *Arianism*, the belief that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are distinct but not divine, for we believe Jesus and the Holy Spirit are God just like the Father is God. The triune God is a mystery! The magnificence of God transcends our human ability to comprehend.

Reflect: The triunity of God is a big truth to absorb, so spend some time contemplating it. Don’t be upset if this confuses you at first. Write down your questions and any truths you want to remember. It is ok if you want to think about this for a few days before going on.

Memorize: Select one or two verses from this passage to memorize this week. Copy those verses down and carry them with you today. Whenever you think of it, pull them out and work on memorizing them.

Day 2 / Memorize: Be sure to work sometime today on the memory verse you chose yesterday!

Learn: Pray and then read John 1.1-18. The second surprise in this introduction is in v.14. This Word that is divine became flesh, became human! In v.17, John clarifies whom he is describing: Jesus. That God the Son came to earth as the human Jesus shocked Greeks and Jews, who found it hard to comprehend that God willingly would become flesh. We say that Jesus has a “dual nature”: he is fully divine and he is fully human, but these natures do not mix or conflict within him. This is important for reasons that will become more clear later, but if Jesus were not both God and man then he could not do what was necessary to offer salvation to us.

Some translations of vv.14 & 18 [vv. means “verses”] use the term “only begotten,” which has led to confusion. The Greek word here [μονογενής, pronounced mah-nah-geh-NACE] means “one and only.” Though sometimes used to refer to a one and only child, it does not include a “begotten” aspect. One of the author John’s points here is that Jesus was *not* created, that he is an *eternal* part of the Godhead. God the Son existed before Jesus the baby was born, even before creation [vv.1-2]! In fact, God the Father made the universe through God the Son’s work [v.3]. In contrast to the Word being eternal, John the Baptist “came into being” [v.6; though simplified to “There was” or “There came” in English].

Reflect: Why do you think Jesus came to us in flesh, as a human being, and dwelt here among us? [There are some hints in this passage.] For you personally, what is the value in knowing that Jesus was fully human as well as fully God? When the apostle John says Jesus “dwelt among us, and we saw his glory,” he is declaring something about himself too: He was a witness to what Jesus said and did, his book is an eye-witness account. Why is that valuable?

Day 3 / Memorize: Be sure to work on your memory verse sometime today!

Learn: You will not waste time if you read John 1.1-18 again! In v.17, the apostle John refers to Jesus Christ. “Christ” is not Jesus’ last name, it is a title. It comes from a Greek word which translates the Hebrew word for “Messiah.” Jesus was the Messiah about whom there were many prophecies in the Old Testament. He is the one who would come to usher in a new covenant [or contract] between God and mankind, which would include the forgiveness of sins, among other blessings [if you are interested, see Jeremiah 31.34; Ezekiel 36.25-27; Isaiah 53]. God the Father sent John the Baptist as a prophetic witness to this Messiah [vv.6-7]. The purpose of this was so that all might believe in Christ [v.7]. Christ is the source of life [v.4], who not only gave life to all creation, but also enlightens people to see God clearly in faith and thus obtain salvation [vv.4, 7, 12]. This was one reason he came into the world [vv.9, 17-18]. Jesus also revealed or explained God the Father [v.18; see John 6.46; 14.9-11]. Misunderstandings existed even in Israel about God, his law, and his will. Jesus revealed God in a new way, through his humanness, through what he taught and how he lived.

Reflect: If you believe in this Christ, in who he is and in what he accomplished so as to offer you forgiveness for your sins and reconciliation with God [which the author John will explain further], then you are saved [vv.12-13]! What *do you* believe about Christ? We have learned Christ is fully God and fully man, is the savior from God promised in the Old Testament, was the agent of creation and the bringer of life, and has always existed. Can you believe in these supernatural facts, to which John the Baptist and the author John both testified? What questions do you still have [write them down]?

Day 4 / Memorize: Be sure to work on your memory verse sometime today!

Learn: The salvation of all people was the *purpose* for God sending John the Baptist as a witness to Christ [v.7], but not the *result*. There is a darkness which is the antithesis of the light [v.5], a darkness which is the forces of evil. The darkness cannot overcome the light [v.5; some translations have “comprehend” here, but “overcome” is the Greek sense]; but there still is evil at work, and so most people, even among the Jews, rejected Christ while he was here [v.10-11]. We could translate v.11, “He came to what was his own [creation], but his own people [Israel] did not receive him” [NET].

Reflect: If you are still unsure about Christ, what exactly do you doubt or question? If you are a believer in Christ, what sort of doubts do you think keep people from faith in Christ? Do you have questions even though you believe?

Want more? Note that the apostle John began his book with the phrase, “In the beginning,” an allusion to Genesis 1.1. To see the brilliance of John’s portrayal [the brilliance of God’s inspiration!], read Genesis 1 and Psalm 33.6, which show how powerful is God’s *word*, that he could speak the universe into existence. How does this relate to John 1.1-18? What does this suggest to you about Jesus? Look at Hebrews 1.1-2; Colossians 1.15-17.

Day 5 / Memorize: Be sure to work on your memory verse sometime today!

Learn: There were many prophecies about the Messiah [Christ]. For example, compare Isaiah 9.1-2 with Matthew 4.12-16. Isaiah 53 prophesied Israel’s rejection of the Messiah and also his saving work on the cross. Compare Isaiah 1.1-3 and John 1.10-11. Just as they had rejected the rule of the Father, now the people refused to recognize the rule of the Son, the promised Messiah who represented God on Earth. The worst form of rebellion is lack of faith.

Reflect: Even if you are a believer who has believed in Jesus as your savior, do you rebel in smaller ways, by rejecting his right to rule in your life? Consider the things you think and say, how you act with your family, friends, and coworkers, how you approach ministry, job or school, social times, hobbies; consider your honesty and trustworthiness, the example you set for others. Are you following Jesus in all these things? If yes, then send him praises for how he has grown you! If no, then take time to confess, and then commit to improving in those areas, find an accountability partner, and begin praying and studying scripture about those issues.

Want more? One way to look at the structure of this prologue is to see similarity in verses 1 and 18, and see them as forming bookends that frame the rest, focusing on Jesus as the revelation of God. Or it might be a Jewish form called chiasm. Suppose you want to say three main things, with one of the three being most important. In chiasm, you would write statement A, statement B, and statement C, but then you would write another form of statement B and another of statement A: the pattern A-B-C-A’-B’. The center statement is the focal point for the reader. Some theologians see a chiastic structure to John’s prologue in verses 1.1-18, centering on v.12’s emphasis on becoming a child of God. That would suggest the theme of John’s book was salvation through Jesus. Do you see any such form here?