

John 1.1-2 / COB / 01.05.14

Introduction

[Slide 1: John 1.1] John 1.1 [NET]: Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος: In the beginning was the Word... or “In the beginning the Word existed...”

- † Pastors often say that new believers should start their Bible study with the gospel of John, but I think John’s introduction is challenging. John says, “In the beginning was the Word.” The what? You might picture this big “WORD” floating out there; I actually found graphics like that on the internet. Or you might ask, which word? Was it “pizza”? John’s beginning is hard for us to understand.
 - Today, we are going to learn one of the most important and profound beliefs in our faith, but it also is one of the most difficult to explain or comprehend. So, let’s pray and ask God for some help...

[Slide 2: Word] John 1.1 [NET]: Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος: In the beginning was the Word... or “In the beginning the Word existed...”

- † When you see the capitalized “Word” in your English Bible, it translates the Greek term λόγος. Λόγος could mean a word, a statement, or a message, but when used like this, it referred to something greater.
 - The Jews would have understood this λόγος as the revelation of God. The Greeks would have understood λόγος as the mysterious eternal reason which they believed ran the universe. Similar ideas, really. John used a term both groups could understand, but then he would shock them with how he used it!

[Slide 3: 1.1-2] John 1.1-2 [NET]: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was fully God. The Word was with God in the beginning.

- † We have here one of the most elegant statements in the Bible, for it concisely says astoundingly important truths.
 - This Word, this λόγος, is not God the Father, because he was with God; but he is just as eternal as God the Father, since he was with God in the beginning, a reference to Genesis 1.1, which talks about the beginning, the creation, of the universe.
 - And this Word even is divine like God the Father! The Greek text emphasizes the divinity of the Word.
- † **[Slide 4: fully God]** This would have shocked every reader of John’s day!
 - The Greeks believed in an impersonal ruling power which they thought of as reason, so they would be surprised to see this Word was a personal entity.
 - But the Jews would be far more shocked, because they emphasized the uniqueness of the one God, but John said the Word was fully God, or fully divine, as well as being with God himself at the beginning of time. How could this be?

- † **[Slide 5: God graphic]** Here is where we share the good stuff, but also that which is more difficult to comprehend. Are you ready?
- We believe there is only one God, but we believe that God has revealed himself to be three individuals, who are distinct in personality and function, yet so unified in essence and will that they are considered to be one God. Let me say it again: We believe there is only one God, but we believe that God has revealed himself to be three individuals, who are distinct in personality and function, yet so unified in essence and will that they are considered to be one God.
 - If you think that is hard to comprehend or that it seems nonsensical, I'm with you! But I think it is ok that this is difficult for us to grasp. Sometime soon, Wade will be teaching in Sunday School about the attributes of God, and we will learn that God is infinite and timeless, all knowing and all powerful. If God is these things, then how could we possibly grasp his essence? If I preached a god that we could understand fully, it probably would not be much of a god!
- † **[Prop: idol]** Suppose I fashion an image of an animal, and I declare this is God! How many of you would think I was crazy? All of you, I hope!
- Yet, many people act just as crazy in a slightly different way: we often are guilty of trying to remake God in our own image! Instead of looking in the Bible for how to be like God, we insist that God must be just like us! We impose our values on God instead of looking to the Bible to get God's values for ourselves!
 - Another pastor recently told me of a Sunday school teacher who left his church, when she found out that the church believed sex outside of marriage was a sin; she refused to believe God would think that way! That example might surprise us, but I would bet that many of us are guilty of thinking like this about more subtle issues.
 - God is not like us, so it should not surprise us that we struggle to comprehend his nature.
- † This graphic depicts what the Bible reveals about the triune nature of God. God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not the same as each other, yet each is all of God. Let me say that again: God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not the same as each other, yet each is all of God. We call our belief about God "Trinitarianism." This is what the Bible teaches and what the church has always believed as orthodoxy.
- † **[Slide 6: tri-theism]** Let me further explain by contrasting what we believe with a few other beliefs. What we believe is not the same as tri-theism, which is the belief in three gods. We believe in one God who has revealed himself miraculously as three individuals. Do you see the difference? I have friends who are Hindu, they believe in multiple gods, but I believe in one God revealed as three individuals, three in one, one who is three.
- † **[Slide 7: Arianism]** What we believe also is not the same as Arianism, which is the belief that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are distinct from God the Father, but are created beings, not divine like God. This is what some cults believe today; it is a heresy as old as the church.

- A heresy is a false belief that is so serious, it means you are not even a Christian. There are very few false beliefs that are that serious, but the whole church gathered together and declared this belief to be heresy back in the early fourth century. So don't become a Jehovah's Witness.

† **[Slide 8: Modalism]** What we believe also is not the same as modalism, which is the belief in one God who manifests himself in three ways.

- This is where people in good churches often get caught in heresy! We say God is like ice, water, and steam, but that is one substance revealed in three forms, which is not what Trinitarianism teaches.
- We don't believe God sometimes appears as a human and sometimes as a spirit, we believe God the Father, the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct individuals who somehow comprise one God. We believe God the Father, the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct individuals who somehow comprise one God.
- Can we say God is like a tree, with leaves, bark, and roots? No, because each part is not all of the tree. We believe the Holy Spirit is all of God, yet distinct from God the Father and the Son, who also are all of God. None of the metaphors about God work without taking you into heresy, so it is best not to use them.
- I used to fall into this heresy myself. I used to think of God the father as the intellectual side of God, Jesus as the physical manifestation, and the Holy Spirit as the spiritual aspect. This fit my view of myself at the time, that I was mind, body, and spirit. I accidentally was a heretic! Or at least I entertained heretical ideas. I have heard elders and pastors make this mistake too.
- Don't fall into it yourself: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are each distinct from each other and each all of the one God.

† If this is all new to you, it probably is hard to comprehend. We have included a devotion in your bulletin, which I encourage you to use this week whether or not these concepts are new to you. The devotion will explain these concepts again and give you an opportunity to reflect on them.

† **[Slide 9: Matthew 28.18-20]** Let's depart from John momentarily, to look at this triune nature of God in other passages.

- Matthew 28.18-20 [NASB]: "And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'"
- When someone comes to saving faith, we baptize that person in water, into the community of the church, to symbolize and memorialize what has happened inside that person. This is one of the two ordinances Jesus gave the church to perform, along with communion. And when we baptize a new believer, we are to do so not just in the name

of God, but in the name of God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One God, but revealed as three individuals.

- † **[Slide 10: Matthew 3.16-17]** Matthew 3.16-17 NET: “After Jesus was baptized, just as he was coming up out of the water, the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming on him. And a voice from heaven [God’s voice] said, ‘This is my one dear Son; in him I take great delight.’”
 - So here we have Jesus, the Son of God, standing in the Jordan River, and the Holy Spirit descending down onto him, while the voice of God the Father speaks from Heaven. You can see that these are three distinct individuals, all interacting, even though they constitute one God.
- † **[Slide 11: 2 Corinthians 13.14]** 2 Corinthians 13.14 NIV: “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”
 - This is Paul’s benediction to the Corinthians, his hope that they would experience the grace of Christ the Son, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Notice that each individual in the Trinity has a unique function in Paul’s hope.
- † **[Slide 12: John 14.16-17]** John 14.16-17 NET: “Then I [Jesus] will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever– the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept, because it does not see him or know him. But you know him, because he resides with you and will be in you.”
 - Jesus, the Son of God, says he will ask God the Father to send the Holy Spirit to empower believers. You see again they are three distinct individuals, though each one is all of God.
- † **[Slide 13: John 10.27-30]** Now let’s see a passage that shows Jesus’ own view of his divinity. John 10.27-30 NASB, Jesus speaking: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.”
 - Immediately, the people picked up stones to stone him. When Jesus asked them why, they said for blasphemy, which shows they clearly understood what Jesus was saying: that he was one with Yahweh, God the Father, that he was divine like God.
- † **[Slide 14: Acts 5.1-4]** Just to be complete, let’s look at a passage that speaks to the Holy Spirit’s divinity. Acts 5.1-4 NET: Now a man named Ananias, together with Sapphira his wife, sold a piece of property. He kept back for himself part of the proceeds with his wife's knowledge; he brought only part of it and placed it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back for yourself part of the proceeds from the sale of the land? Before it was sold, did it not belong to you? And when it was sold, was the money not at your disposal? How have you thought up this deed in your heart? You have not lied to people but to God!"

- Peter refers to the Holy Spirit as God here, showing the divinity of the Holy Spirit, just like God the Father is divine.
- † **[Slide 15: summary]** There is one God, who has revealed himself as three individuals, distinct from each other in personality and function, but so unified in essence and will as to be considered one God: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, each all of the one God yet not the same as each other.
- I intended to teach on John's entire introduction today, vv.1-18, but this is such a profound and important truth, that I wanted to give it the time it needed. So next week, we will finish John's introduction, which includes some other major theological truths.
- † The application for a teaching like this is not to go out and do something, it is to be still and reflect on each aspect of these truths. It is not to try to change yourself, but to allow God to change the way you think, and thus allow God to change who you are, by growing you to be more like him and to know him better.
- So please give the devotion a try, and spend some time thinking through these concepts this week. Give God the opportunity to enlighten and sanctify you!
 - Let's pray...