

John's Grand Opening

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Introduction

The Prologue of John's gospel sets the tone for the rest of the gospel in themes, style, and purpose. It is the key to the rest of the gospel and is full of deep meaning and mystery. The themes it touches on are as follows: Christ's eternal divinity, his role in creation, his incarnation, his relationship with the Father, his being the light of the world, the contrast between light and darkness, Christ's life-giving life, becoming children of God, and Christ's superiority to John the Baptist. The stylistic features will be pointed out in the exegesis. The purpose for which John wrote it is expressly stated in John 20:30-31: "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." Out of the abundance of signs and sayings of Jesus, John has selected those he thinks are the most significant for believing in his name. All the events and discourses included in his gospel are intended towards this purpose, which in the Prologue is implied in verse 12: "Yet to all who received him, those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

The apostle John begins his gospel in a majestic way, going right back before time and history. No other gospel writer goes as deep as John does. Matthew goes back to Abraham with his genealogy, Luke goes back to Adam, and Mark jumps right in with the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry. But although John looks back to eternity before the creation, he is also writing as an eyewitness who had first-hand knowledge of the events of Jesus' ministry. "The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (1:14). John provides many details that indicate the close observance by an eyewitness,¹ but he is selective in what he puts down in writing, because there is just too much to tell (21:25). His main thesis is that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God.

In this paper it is assumed that the "disciple whom Jesus loved," i.e. John, one of the Twelve, is the author of the Gospel of John, as well as the Epistles of John. My own reason for this assumption is that the gospel and the epistles display a similarity of style, vocabulary, and content. By the time of writing his gospel, John has had time to reflect and grow in his understanding of Jesus and what he had witnessed. In fact, he was transformed from a "Son of Thunder" (Mark 3:17) to the "Apostle of Love." John more than any other gospel writer adds many editorial comments on the events he records, from the simple explanatory,² to the more

¹ For example, the fact that it was the right ear that Peter cut off and that the servant's name was Malchus (18:10), and the exact number of fish in 2:11. He also provides time indicators, as in 4:6b; 4:43; 12:1 and others.

² For example, to translate names, as in 1:37 (and 20:16); 1:42; 19:13 and 19:17, to explain geographical references as in 6:1 and 11:8, chronology as in 3:24 and 11:30 and cultural elucidations in 4:9 and 19:40b. It is noticeable that many explanatory comments relate to Judas's role and character: 6:71; 12:6; 13:2; 13:29 and 18:5b. Other clarifying comment are: 4:8; 4:44; 9:22-3; 12:43; 18:14; 18:40b; 19:38 and 21:20b.

theologically significant,³ to ensure that his readers gain a proper understanding of the events that he records. The Prologue is designed to set the stage for this deep understanding of the events that John includes in his gospel.

Exegesis

The opening words remind the reader immediately of the opening of the Old Testament: “In the beginning...” Just as Genesis has a Prologue to the Covenant, so does John have a Prologue to the New Covenant. Some of the words and phrases used are even the same or similar in Genesis and John: “And God said...the Word...light...darkness...all things...made” John uses these words and images to remind his readers of the Genesis passage, which tell the story of God preparing a home for humankind. John tells the story of creation in more general terms. He does not mention the planets, animals, fish, birds and plants. The phrase “all things” encompasses everything.

There is a neat chiasm, with the central truth of the passage being: “The Word was God.”

In the beginning was the Word - (a)
and the Word was with God - (b)
and the Word was God - (c)
He was with God - (b)
In the beginning - (a)

Like the writer to the Hebrews, John saw Christ as God’s ultimate revelation: “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...” (Hebrews 1:1-2). John presents Christ as the Word of God. Not just a word, but **the** Word. “*The Word* points to the truth that it is of the very nature of God to reveal Himself.”⁴ The Word communicates God to us. Further in the Prologue and in the gospel we see that the Word is the Son of God. Scholars have debated John’s use of the word λόγος, which has so many connotations in Greek philosophy, but John does not seem to employ the word as anything other than a title of Christ, just as he was “The Light.”

Philo’s and the Jewish-Alexandrian doctrine of a *Logos* near the time of Christ has nothing to do with the Logos of John. Philo’s *logos* is in no sense a person but the impersonal reason or ‘idea’ of God, a sort of link between the transcendent God and the world, like a mental model which an artist forms in his thought and then proceeds to work out in some kind of material. This *logos*, formed in God’s mind, is wholly subordinate to him, and though it is personified at times when speaking of it, it is never a person as is the Son of God and could not possibly become flesh and be born a man.⁵

³ For example, regarding the temple of his body (2:21-2) and the after-the-event comments of 7:39 and 11:51-2. Also significant are John’s references to Jesus’ sense of time in 2:4; 8:20; 12:31 and 13:1. When referring to the disciples’ own lack of understanding, John seems to pre-empt his readers’ possible misunderstanding in 18:12-30; 10:6; 11:3; 12:16 and 20:9. Jesus’ foreknowledge is cited by John in 6:64; 12:33; 13:3; 18:32 and 21:19.

⁴ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 74.

⁵ R.C.H. Lensky, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 29.

John wrote to encourage belief in Christ and to edify the church; he did not write for philosophers (as such). The fact that he portrays the λόγος as having become flesh (v. 14) precludes any identification with the Greek philosophical term and its meaning. In Greek philosophy, the flesh could not possibly be identified with divinity. John gives the word λόγος a different content, one that is more closely related to the Hebrew sense of “the Word of God.” “The impersonal God of Philo cannot pass to the finite creation without contamination of his divine essence...John’s God, on the other hand, is personal, and a loving personality. ... He is in direct relation with the world which He desires to save, and the Logos is He Himself, manifest in the flesh.”⁶ It was important for John to emphasize that the Word had become flesh. If John had wanted his readers to think in terms of Greek philosophy, it would have been impossible for him to insist that the Word became flesh, and to describe Jesus as having human needs and emotions as he does in his gospel (4:7, 11:33, 35). It is possible, however, that he used the word to gain an entrance with people of a philosophical inclination to challenge them to rethink their concept of the λόγος.

John attests to Christ’s eternal existence and eternal divinity by saying that the Word was in the beginning, and that he was with God and was God. There was not just something divine about the Word, no, “**the Word was God.**” Christ’s pre-existence will be confirmed later when John records Jesus’ prayer: “And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began (17:5), and “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world” (17:24). He also said “Before Abraham was born, I am” (8:58). Peter proclaimed him to be “the author of life” (Acts 3:15). Paul also testified of Christ’s pre-existence: “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17).

By saying that the Word was **with God**, John implies a plurality within the Godhead. The Word is distinct from the Father, even though he is fully God. As Paul wrote: “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him” (Col. 1:19). The intimate relationship between the Father and the Son is referred to again in verse 18, and many times in the rest of the gospel. It is so close, that to deny the Son is to deny the Father (1John 2:22, 2 John 9). What is important here is that God and the Word have a very close, intimate relationship dating back from eternity – if eternity can be said to be dated. In any case from before time began.

Just as Genesis **describes**, or reveals, the creation of the world, so John **assumes** it, but tells us by use of a parallelism that the Word was the Creator. John first states that the Word’s creative action positively and absolutely: “Through him all things were made” and then negatively “without him nothing was made that has been made” (v. 3). The “all things” are contrasted with the “not one thing.” The combination of a positive and a negative clause to make a point is characteristic of John’s style.⁷ John is keen to emphasize that Christ is the Creator, not a creature. Paul wrote in a similar vein: “For by him [Christ] all things were created: things in heaven and

⁶ M.R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprinted 1985, originally published in 1887), 1:32.

⁷ See also 1:10, 11 and 20; 3:18 and 36; 4:22; 5:22-3; 7:34; 8:14, 19 and 23; 9:41; 12:8; 14:23a+24a; 15:16; 16:13b; 20:23 and 29. For similar contrasts in the epistles see 1 John 1:5; 2:4-5; 2:9-11; 2:23; 4:2; 4:6; 5:10; 5:12 and 2 John 9 and 3 John 11. There are also many contrasts in concepts without the use of a negative and a positive statement.

on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him” (Col. 1:16). The writer to the Hebrews also links the Son to the work of creation: “In the past God ... has spoken to us by his Son, ... through whom he made the universe” (Heb. 1:1-2). Of course, for those familiar with the Psalms, this thought was not totally new. The Psalmist sang: “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry hosts by the breath of his mouth” (Ps. 33:6). And again: “For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm” (Ps. 33:9). God’s self-revelation is first of all through creation, later through redemption. Creation by itself tells us there is a God (Rom. 1:20); if we are perceptive we may even see the glory of God in the creation (Ps. 19:1-2). To know God personally, however, we need to know Christ, who alone can show us the very heart of God, his redemptive love and life-giving grace (as John states it in 1:18 and 1 John 4:9).

In verses 4 and 5 John introduces one of his many contrasts between light and darkness: “In him was life, and that life was the light of man. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood (or overcome) it” (See also 1 John 1:5-6; 2:8-11). This thought is repeated later: “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself” (John 5:27). He is saying that in Jesus there is **life**. Christ not only gives life: he also maintains life providentially. It is through Christ that God the Father upholds the creation: “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word” (Heb. 1:3). If we want to have life, we have to have the Son. In typical Johannine fashion, he uses a positive statement, followed by its negative opposite: “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12). In John, life equals salvation. In fact, ζῶη [*zoe*] is a favourite word of John, occurring 34 times in the gospel and 15 times in his epistles. Then he states that the life of Christ was the light of humankind.

“The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it” (v. 5). If we render the verb κατέλβεν [*katelaben*] as **understood**, it emphasizes the contrast between light and darkness. In the Psalms, light is linked to understanding, as in “The entrance of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple” (Ps. 119:130). In English, we often say that someone has “seen the light” when he or she has understood something. The phrase can also be translated as “the darkness has not **overcome** it.” In that case, it emphasizes the fact that darkness has no power in itself: it is absence of light. A source of light, such as a lamp or even a single candle, can overpower darkness, but there is no such thing as a source of darkness that can dispel the light. No one has invented a darkness lamp, with which to darken the light. So the Light of humankind can overcome the darkness, but darkness cannot overcome the Light. Both meanings are likely and in keeping with John’s themes. It is a feature of John’s style that he sometimes uses words that have a dual meaning, and that both can apply in the context.⁸ In the Son of God, light and life combine to save the human race from darkness and death. As the Psalmist said: “For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light” (Ps. 36:9).

⁸ For example, in John 3:3 ἀνωθεν can mean “again” or “from above.” Both meanings apply.

In verse 6 John introduces John the Baptist as “a man who was sent from God.” He spoke, therefore, with God’s authority. He came (Ἐγένετο aorist tense) on the scene, in contrast with the Word, who was from the beginning (ἦν imperfect tense). Of course, Jesus was also “sent by the Father” (John’s gospel refers to Jesus being sent by the Father 39 times). And later the disciples are also sent. But John the Baptist and the disciples can only bear witness to Jesus Christ, because they met him in his incarnation. They could not bear witness to the Father. “It is Christ alone who speaks and acts out of the fullness of His knowledge of the Father.”⁹ It is John the Baptist’s God-given mission that makes him special. He was to be a voice of one calling in the desert “Make straight the way for the Lord” (1:23 quoting Isaiah 40:3). In fact, John exhibited a deep understanding of Jesus, not only as the Lamb of God (1:29), but also as the pre-existing Son of God (1:30), as well as being pre-eminent and greater than himself (1:27, 34).

The Baptist came as a witness to the light: he was not himself the light. Some believers in Ephesus (traditionally thought to be the place where John wrote his gospel¹⁰) were well acquainted with John the Baptist, as he had baptized some of them. In fact, Paul had to correct them on their understanding of the role of John, as they had progressed no further than the baptism of repentance (Acts 19). It is possible that they had not even met Jesus before returning to their hometown. So the gospel writer is keen to make it clear (v. 8) that “**he himself** [ἐκεῖνος emphatic] was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.” Similarly, the Baptist denies being the Christ, Elijah, or the Prophet (1:20-21). “In putting the witness in his place he surely recalls that he himself [the gospel writer] could have only the function of a witness, so that all he wrote about the Baptist was automatically written about himself as well.”¹¹

John the Baptist came as “a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe” (v. 7). Note that they are to believe through him, not in him. Many believed in Jesus through John’s witness of Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (1:29). John the gospel writer was likely among those mentioned in 1:37 who heard the Baptist say “Look, the Lamb of God!” In the same way, many believed in Jesus, and still come to believe in Jesus, through John’s testimony in his gospel (20:31). John later reported Jesus saying, “I have testimony weightier than that of John” (5:36). John is fond of the words for **witness, testimony** and **testify**, both as a verb (33 times) and a noun (14 times) throughout his gospel, and again in 1 John 1:2, reiterating the truths of the Prologue: “The life appeared, we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.”

“The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world” (v. 9) is about Christ’s incarnation. The true light shows up the human race for what it is, and in this sense it is judgmental. While he ministered on earth, Jesus exposed the wicked inclinations of the human heart. He knew what was in people’s heart (see 2:25; 6:64; 13:11; 16:19 and 21:17). When Jesus returns, he will again be that kind of light: “wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what

⁹ James M. Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 40.

¹⁰ D.A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 158.

¹¹ Karl Barth, *Witness to the Word* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 55.

is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts" (1 Cor. 4:5). There is also a positive aspect to Christ being the Light of the world. The light leads, illuminates, guides, heals and transforms. Jesus' whole life on earth exemplified both aspects of him being the Light. Verse 9 is echoed later in the gospel, as in 8:12 where Jesus says: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (see also 3:19; 9:5 and 12:46). The light is also connected to Christ's glory: "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Note that Jesus is the **true** (genuine, original) light, not just some "spark of divinity" that the Stoics believed everyone was born with. **Truth** and **true** are also key words of John, both in his gospel (22 nouns and 13 adjectives) and in the epistles (18 nouns and 2 adjectives).

The question needs to be asked what the light was that was given by the true light. Calvin said it meant that which distinguishes men from animals, i.e. reason and intelligence. Hence it is "only referring to the common light of nature, a far lowlier thing than faith."¹² If the "every man" is to be taken absolutely, then that would be correct. This light is derived from the true light, the uncreated light of the Creator and given to every person in the form of an awareness of right and wrong in his or her conscience. If "the light of faith" is meant, then the "all" is restrictive, i.e. "whosoever is enlightened at all, is enlightened by this Light."¹³ That would then form an analogy with the restrictive "all" of verse 7, "so that all men might believe." All men might believe, but not all men do. It seems to me that the latter interpretation is a distinct possibility, especially when we look again at verse 4: "In him was life, and that life was the light of all men." It is only **in** Christ, as a believer, that a person can have true life. Faith is then the light that is obtained in Christ.

In verse 10 John introduces a note of pathos and irony: "He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him." The Word who had spoken creation into being (v. 3) was not recognized for who he was. Verse 11 states the same thing in a more personal way. It progresses from the created world at large to his own home: "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him." A deep sadness and regret lie in these words. The Son of God came to his own, but his own disowned him. They did not recognize him. So Jesus was rejected on two levels. He was rejected by the creation, the home he made for humankind, and by the chosen people of God, his very own possession. The Parable of the Tenants (Mark 12:1-9) illustrates this rejection. It is almost unbelievable that this should happen to the Lord of Life!

Rejection is contrasted with reception. Because Christ **is** the Lord of life, John follows with the "Yet" of verse 12, proclaiming the very good news of salvation for those who do receive him: "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." To receive him is to believe in his name. In John, salvation is described in

¹² John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1959), tr. T.H.L. Parker, 15.

¹³ J.A. Bengel, quoted in f.n. 83 on p. 61 of Barth, *Witness*.

terms of becoming “children of God,” τέκνα θεου, John’s preferred expression for believers.¹⁴ He reserves υἱός (Son) for Christ. Paul, on the other hand, is more likely to use υἱοί (sons), to indicate adoption and being heirs of God in Christ. Christ, who is uniquely the Son of God, gives believers the **right** to become children of God, not a mere possibility or ability. But this right is to be received as a gift of God’s grace (see Ephesians 2:8-9).

The verb “become” indicates a change of status. By our sinful, unbelieving nature we are children of the devil (John 8:38-44). When we believe in Christ we have the right to be children of God.¹⁵ Belief is, of course more than an intellectual assent to the facts of Jesus’ existence. It involves putting one’s trust in him, relying on him, and resting in his love.

John explains what it means to become children of God. First, he states it negatively three times: “children born not of natural descent [literally: of bloods], nor of human decision or a husband’s will,” and then positively: “but born of God.” In other words, being of Abraham’s blood is no guarantee of salvation, nor is gentile blood an obstacle to becoming a child of God. “Bloods” in the plural may refer to maternal and paternal blood. Secondly, God is sovereign in the decision as to who will be born of God, as Jesus later makes clear in his discussion with Nicodemus: “The Spirit gives birth to spirit” (John 3:6) and “The wind [or: spirit] blows wherever it pleases” (3:8). They are not born of the will of the flesh, i.e. by hormonal impulses. Children of God are not begotten through sexual intercourse between a husband and a wife. They are “born of God.”

Children of God are earthly creatures who are born from above, but Jesus is the eternal Son of God who was born below, and took our flesh, our humanity. Some have seen a reference to the virgin birth in the negatives of verse 13. Jesus was not born of natural descent, nor of the will of the flesh, nor through Joseph’s assistance, but by the Spirit of God. Against this, it has to be said that Jesus certainly had Mary’s blood in his veins. The wonder is that ordinary people, who are born of a human father and mother, can become children of God and participate in the divine nature!

John makes a great contrast as he proclaims the mystery of the incarnation: “The **Word** became **flesh** and lived for a while among us” (v. 14). From the transcendence of verses 1 and 2, John moves to the immanence of Jesus’ life on earth. In this sentence, John refutes whatever gnostic and docetic tendencies there may already have existed among his readers. “For the docetists it would be unthinkable that God would ‘taint’ himself with flesh.”¹⁶ The God who made a real, physical universe, one that was **good**, also came to earth as a real, physical person, who was **sinless**. The Word, who had first created ‘flesh’ and all other physical entities, became flesh himself. He did not cease to be the Word, but came down to our level and became a human being. He shared in our humanity (Hebrews 2:14). He did not become a personality for the first

¹⁴ See also John 11:52; 1 John 3:1, 2, 10 and 5:2, 19. John also uses “children” as a synonym for “those for whom I am pastorally responsible” in 1 John 2:12; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21 and 3 John 4. These would also be believers.

¹⁵ Paul describes this change in various ways; from wicked to washed (1 Cor. 6:9-11), from dead to alive (Eph. 2:1-5 and Col. 2:13), and from alienated to reconciled (Col. 1:21-22). Peter writes, in more communal terms, of changing from being not a people of God to being the people of God (1 Peter 2:10), and states the purpose as: “so that ... you may participate in the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

¹⁶ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John, New International Commentary in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 123.

time when he became flesh: he was already a personality from before time. But it was in his flesh that he revealed himself as the Son of God. The Word, who was before time and history, entered time and history at a particular moment. Calvin comments as follows on “flesh”:

This word expresses his meaning more forcefully than if He had said He was made man. He wanted to show to what a low and abject state the Son of God descended from the height of His heavenly glory for our sake. When Scripture speaks of man derogatorily it calls him ‘flesh.’ How great is the distance between the spiritual glory of the Word of God and the stinking filth of our flesh! Yet the Son of God stooped so low as to take to Himself that flesh addicted to so many wretchednesses.¹⁷

John makes belief in the Word having become flesh a litmus test for being a true believer instead of a false prophet: “Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God” (1 John 4:2-3).

The word translated “lived” is actually “tabernacled,” which reminds the reader of Old Testament times, when “the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” (Exodus 40:34). When God was angry with his people, “he abandoned the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent he had set up among men” (Psalm 78:60). John proclaims the good news that God, in his Son Jesus, had again tabernacled among us. Thus it is logical for John to continue with: “We have seen his glory,” reminding his readers that just as the glory filled the tabernacle, so glory abounded when Jesus was among them. His glory was seen throughout his life, but particularly at the Transfiguration.¹⁸ His glory was also seen in his miracles (2:11 and 11:40), his perfect life and character, and – paradoxically – in his passion and death on the cross. The verb used for “have seen” means more than just “looked at.” It means “perceived,” “observed,” “noticed.” It involves an understanding of the significance of what has been seen. Many people looked at Jesus, but it takes a believing heart to perceive his glory.

Karl Barth wished to relate John’s use of the word for tabernacle/tent to Paul’s use of it in 2 Corinthians 5:1-4.¹⁹ However, there is no evidence that John would have thought of the body as a tent that is to be destroyed. In any case, Jesus’ body was transformed at the resurrection, not destroyed. It is also hard to reconcile the negative connotations that Paul gives to the word in that context with the glory that John associates with it.

By saying “We have seen...” John puts himself among the eyewitnesses of these events (also in 1 John 1:1-2). He explains what kind of glory it is: “the glory of the one and only Son/Begotten, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” It denotes a unique relationship between the Son and the Father. The amplification of “full of grace and truth” further explains the character or nature of the Son. The Son of God showed his grace by forgiving people their sins, his gracious treatment of people, and in his self-revelation as “The Way, the Truth, and the Life” (14:6). People who worship creatures rather than the Creator are said by Paul to have “exchanged the truth of God for a lie” (Romans 1:25). While on earth, Jesus accepted worship from people

¹⁷ Calvin, *ibid*, 19-20. Calvin’s negative view of the human body has been described and analysed in: Alida Leni Sewell, *Calvin, the Body, and Sexuality* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2011).

¹⁸ See Luke 9:28-36 and also 2 Peter 1:17-19.

¹⁹ Barth, *ibid*, 93.

whenever they caught something of his divine glory.²⁰ Less surprising, of course, is the disciples' worship after the resurrection (Matthew 28:9, 17). They did not commit idolatry by worshipping the creature, but worshipped the Creator.

Just as verse 14 can be seen as a summary of verses 1-5, so verse 15 is a summary of verses 6-8. Whereas the Baptist is spoken of in the third person in verses 6-8, here we are given a direct quotation, with another self-quotation within the quotation: "John testifies concerning him." Note the present tense; his witness continues. John again allows John the Baptist to record his testimony that he was not the Christ, but that Jesus was before him. Jesus was born approximately six months after John, and yet, Jesus takes precedence, as the Baptist says: "He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me." In other words: my successor is my predecessor. Jesus was with God in the beginning. Both the Baptist and the apostle John want people to be very clear on this point.

Next, John describes the results of Jesus being "full of grace and truth." He writes: "From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another" (verse 16). Literally: "From his fullness we all received, and grace instead of grace." Paul also refers to the divine fullness: "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ..." (Colossians 2:9). Vincent comments: "Hence John's meaning here is that Christians receive from the divine completeness whatever each requires for the perfection of his character and for the accomplishment of his work."²¹ Perhaps Vincent is thinking of the development in the Christian of the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22).

"For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (verse 17). The law was also a blessing and a gift from God, given through Moses. It was to guide the behaviour of the people of God. Grace, the unmerited favour of God, and truth, were further and more wonderful blessings, given directly by God in Christ Jesus. The law was limited in what it could do. It was the teacher [παιδαγωγός] to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). In Jesus Christ we have the fullness of grace and truth. John wants to impress on his readers that Jesus is greater than Moses. The law bears witness to Christ, but the same people who did not believe Moses, also rejected Christ (John 5:45-47). Note that John here names the Word for the first time in his gospel as **Jesus Christ**.

"No one has ever seen God, but God the Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (verse 18, also in 1 John 4:12). In the Greek, "God" is placed first, indicating a strong emphasis. Jesus proclaims this same thought: "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal himself" (Matthew 11:27). In John's gospel, we read: "No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father" (6:46). Paul, writing about God the Father said: "who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see" (1 Timothy 6:16). Moses himself, who was very close to God, was only allowed to see his "back" (Exodus

²⁰ In Matthew 2:11; 14:33 and John 9:38 προσεκύνησθαι translated as "worshipped." In Matthew 8:2; 9:18 and 15:25, the same verb is translated as "knelt."

²¹ *Word Studies*, 57.

33:20-23). Any visions people had of God were only partial. It is in Jesus Christ that God has chosen to reveal himself. The one who was eternally “at the Father’s side” or “in the bosom of the Father,” enjoyed such intimacy and unity with him, that he was the only one who could fully reveal him. That is why he could say to Philip: “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” In the same passage, Jesus explains this intimate relationship between the Father and the Son (John 14:8-14). It is a relationship of pure love.

The Prologue comes to an end with: “*he* has made him known.” The word *εκεῖνος* is strongly emphatic. The verb “has made him known” can also be translated as: declared, explained, interpreted, revealed, or manifested. Only Christ, the eternal Son of God, can fully reveal God. Not only this, but the revelation of God the Father by his Son is a redemptive revelation: “But you know that he appeared so that he might take away sins” (1 John 3:5) and “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (1 John 3:8).

In his Prologue, John has given us the central meaning and purpose of the coming of Christ as the Son of God who was from all eternity and who revealed God the Father to us. He testifies that we are in darkness if we live without Christ, and also to the blessings that are ours in Christ.

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