

Bible Study May 3, 2023

JOHN 1 (AMPLIFIED VERSION)

The Deity of Jesus Christ

1 In the beginning [before all time] was the Word (Christ), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God Himself.

John wrote to believers everywhere, both Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles). As one of Jesus' 12 disciples, John wrote with credibility and the details of an eyewitness. His book is not a biography (like the book of Luke); it is a thematic presentation of Jesus' life. Many in John's original audience had a Greek background. Greek culture encouraged the worship of many mythological gods, whose supernatural characteristics were as important to Greeks as genealogies were to Jews. John shows that Jesus is not only different from but also superior to these gods of mythology.

2 He was [continually existing] in the beginning [co-eternally] with God. 3 All things were made and came into existence through Him; and without Him not even one thing was made that has come into being.

When God created, he made something from nothing. Because God created you from nothing, you have no basis for pride. Remember that you exist only because God made you, and you have special gifts only because God gave them to you. With God you are something valuable and unique; apart from God you are nothing. If you try to live without him, you will be abandoning the purpose for which you were made.

4 In Him was life [and the power to bestow life], and the life was the Light of men.

Why does Jesus' life bring light to everyone? Because physical death brings eternal darkness and only Jesus' eternal life (his light) planted in us will keep us alive in his new Kingdom for eternity. Jesus is eternally alive because he is God. He came to earth to offer humankind the hope and light of his eternal life. It can't be purchased, only received as a gift. But Jesus gives it only to those who want it—those who want to live the way God's citizens will live in his future eternal Kingdom.

5 The Light shines on in the darkness, and the darkness did not understand it or overpower it or appropriate it or absorb it [and is unreceptive to it].

Do you ever feel as though your life is too complex and your problems too profound for God to understand? Remember, God created the entire universe, and nothing is too difficult for him. God created you, he is alive today, and his love is bigger than any problem you may face.

"The darkness can never extinguish it" means that the darkness of evil never has and never will overcome God's light. Jesus Christ is the creator of life, and his life brings light to humankind (1:9). In his light, we see ourselves as we really are—sinners in need of a Savior. When we follow Jesus, the true Light, we can avoid walking blindly through the spiritual darkness that sin

brings. Jesus lights the path ahead of us, illuminating the truth and clarifying our thoughts so we can see how to live. He removes the darkness of sin from our lives. In what ways have you allowed the light of Jesus Christ to shine into your life? Let him guide you, and you'll never need to stumble in darkness.

The Witness of John the Baptist

⁶ There came a man commissioned and sent from God, whose name was [John. ⁷ This man came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe [in Christ, the Light] through him. ⁸ John was not the Light, but came to testify about the Light.

We, like John the Baptist, are not sources of God's light; we merely reflect that light. Jesus Christ is the true Light; he helps us see our way to God and shows us how to walk along that way. But Jesus has chosen to reflect his light through his followers to an unbelieving world, perhaps because unbelievers are not able to bear the full blazing glory of his light firsthand. The word witness indicates our role as reflectors of Christ's light. We are never to present our own ideas as the light to others, but we are always to point them to the true Light, Jesus.

⁹ There it was—the true Light [the genuine, perfect, steadfast Light] which, coming into the world, enlightens everyone. ¹⁰ He (Christ) was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. ¹¹ He came to that which was His own [that which belonged to Him—His world, His creation, His possession], and those who were His own [people—the Jewish nation] did not receive and welcome Him.

Although Jesus created the world, the people he created didn't recognize him (1:10). Even the people chosen by God to prepare the rest of the world for the Messiah rejected him (1:11), although the entire Old Testament pointed to his coming.

¹² But to as many as did receive and welcome Him, He gave the right [the authority, the privilege] to become children of God, that is, to those who believe in (adhere to, trust in, and rely on) His name— ¹³ who were born, not of blood [natural conception], nor of the will of the flesh [physical impulse], nor of the will of man [that of a natural father], but of God [that is, a divine and supernatural birth—they are born of God—spiritually transformed, renewed, sanctified].

All who welcome Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives are reborn spiritually, receiving new life from God. Through faith in Jesus, this new birth changes us from the inside out—rearranging our attitudes, desires, and motives. Being born makes you physically alive and places you in your parents' family (1:13). Being born of God makes you spiritually alive and puts you in God's family (1:12). Have you asked Jesus to make you a new person? This fresh start in life is available to all who believe in him.

The Word Made Flesh

¹⁴ And the Word (Christ) became flesh, and lived among us; and we [actually] saw His glory, glory as belongs to the [One and] only begotten Son of the Father, [the Son who is

truly unique, the only One of His kind, who is] full of grace and truth (absolutely free of deception).

“The Word became human.” By doing this, Jesus became (1) the perfect teacher—in his life we see how God thinks and therefore how we should think (Philippians 2:5-11); (2) the perfect example—as a model of what we are to become, he shows us how to live and gives us the power to live that way (1 Peter 2:21); (3) the perfect sacrifice—Jesus came as a sacrifice for all sins, and his death satisfied God’s requirements for the removal of sin (Colossians 1:15-23).

Jesus became a human when he was conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary’s womb. He was not part human and part God; he was completely human and completely divine (Colossians 2:9). Before Jesus came, people could know God only partially. After Jesus came, people could know God more fully because he became visible and tangible in Jesus. The two most common errors people make about Jesus are (1) to minimize his humanity by disregarding how he identifies with us in our human bodies and (2) to minimize his deity by rejecting what he has single-handedly done for us in his death and resurrection. But Jesus is both God and man.

In the statement “we have seen his glory,” John would have had in mind the whole Old Testament witness to God’s glory, which added weight to his further revelation about Jesus. But he may also have been reflecting on how that witness had revealed itself when he, Peter, and James had seen Jesus in shining splendor at the Transfiguration (see Matthew 17:1-13). The concept of glory does not impress people today, but to John’s readers it stood for God himself. Jesus was a real expression of God’s overwhelming presence and power.

“The Father’s one and only Son” emphasizes the uniqueness of Jesus. All believers are called “children of God,” but Jesus is one of a kind and enjoys a perfect relationship with God the Father.

¹⁵ John testified [repeatedly] about Him and has cried out [testifying officially for the record, with validity and relevance], “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has a higher rank than I and has priority over me, for He existed before me.’” ¹⁶ For out of His fullness [the superabundance of His grace and truth] we have all received grace upon grace [spiritual blessing upon spiritual blessing, favor upon favor, and gift heaped upon gift]. ¹⁷ For the Law was given through Moses, but grace [the unearned, undeserved favor of God] and truth came through Jesus Christ.

God’s law in the Old Testament revealed his nature and showed people how to live his way. God’s unfailing love and faithfulness also reveal his nature to us. Moses emphasized God’s law and justice, while Jesus Christ came to highlight God’s mercy, love, faithfulness, and forgiveness. Moses could only be the giver of the law, while Christ came to fulfill the law (Matthew 5:17). Previously, the law revealed God’s nature and his will; now Jesus Christ reveals the nature and will of God. Rather than coming through impersonal stone tablets, God’s revelation now comes through a dynamic, living person. As we get to know Jesus better in John’s Gospel, our understanding of God will greatly increase.

¹⁸ No one has seen God [His essence, His divine nature] at any time; the [One and] only begotten God [that is, the unique Son] who is in the intimate presence of the Father, He has explained Him [and interpreted and revealed the awesome wonder of the Father].

What Jesus taught and what he did are tied inseparably to his identity. John shows Jesus as fully human and fully God. Although Jesus took upon himself full humanity and lived as a man, he never ceased to be the eternal God who has always existed, the creator and sustainer of all things, and the source of eternal life. This is the truth about Jesus and the foundation of all truth. If we cannot or do not believe this basic truth, we will not have enough faith to trust our eternal destiny to him. That is why John wrote this Gospel—to build faith and confidence in Jesus Christ so that we may believe that he truly was and is the Son of God (20:30-31).

What does John mean by “the Word”? The Word was a concept used by theologians and philosophers, both Jews and Greeks, in many different ways. In Hebrew Scripture, the Word was an agent of creation (Psalm 33:6), the source of God’s message to his people through the prophets (Hosea 4:1), and God’s law, his standard of holiness (Psalm 119:11). In Greek philosophy, the Word was the principle of reason that governed the world; in Hebrew thought, the Word was another expression for God. John’s description shows clearly that he is speaking of Jesus (see especially John 1:14)—a human being he knew and loved, but at the same time the creator of the universe, the ultimate revelation of God, the living picture of God’s holiness, the one who “holds all creation together” (Colossians 1:17). To Jewish readers, to say this man Jesus was God was blasphemous. To Greek readers, the idea that “the Word became human” (John 1:14) was unthinkable. To John, this new understanding of the Word expressed the Good News of Jesus Christ.

God communicated through various people in the Old Testament, usually prophets who were told to give specific messages (Hebrews 1:1-2). But no one ever saw God. They saw his glory but not his form. Jesus is both God and the Father’s unique Son. In him God revealed his nature and essence in a way that could be seen and touched. In Jesus, God became a man who lived on earth.

The Testimony of John

19 This is the testimony of John [the Baptist] when the Jews sent priests and Levites to him from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?”

The priests and Temple assistants (also called Levites) were respected religious leaders in Jerusalem. Priests served in the Temple, and Temple assistants helped them. The Pharisees (1:24) were a group that both John the Baptist and Jesus often denounced. Many of them outwardly obeyed God’s laws in order to look pious, while inwardly their hearts were filled with pride and greed. The Pharisees believed that their oral traditions were just as important as God’s inspired Word.

These leaders came to see John the Baptist for several reasons: (1) Their duty as guardians of the faith included investigating any new teaching or movement (Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 18:20-22). (2) They wanted to find out if John had the credentials of a true prophet. (3) John had quite a following, and it was growing; they were probably jealous and wanted to see why this man was so popular.

20 And he confessed [truthfully] and did not deny [that he was only a man], but acknowledged, “I am not the Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed)!” 21 They asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” And he said, “I am not.” “Are you the [promised] Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” 22 Then they said to him, “Who are you? Tell us, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” 23 He said, “I am THE VOICE OF ONE SHOUTING IN THE WILDERNESS, ‘MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

In the religious leaders' minds, there were four options regarding John the Baptist's identity: He was either (1) the prophet foretold by Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15), (2) Elijah (Malachi 4:5), (3) the Messiah, or (4) a false prophet. John denied being the first three personages. Instead, he identified himself with the words of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, “the voice of someone shouting, ‘Clear the way through the wilderness for the LORD!’” (Isaiah 40:3). The leaders kept pressing John to say who he was because people were expecting the Messiah to come (Luke 3:15). But John emphasized only why he had come—to prepare the way for the Messiah. The Pharisees missed the point. They wanted to know who John was, but John wanted to prepare them to recognize who Jesus was.

24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25 They asked him, “Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” 26 John answered them, “I baptize [only] in water, but among you there stands One whom you do not recognize and of whom you know nothing.

John was baptizing Jews. The Essenes (a strict, monastic sect of Judaism) practiced baptism for purification, but normally only Gentiles (non-Jews) would be baptized when they converted to Judaism. When the Pharisees questioned John's authority to baptize, they were asking who gave John the right to treat God's chosen people like Gentiles. John said, “I baptize with water”—he was merely helping the people perform a symbolic act of repentance. But soon one would come who would truly forgive sins, something only the Son of God—the Messiah—could do.

27 It is He [the preeminent One] who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie [even as His slave].”

John the Baptist said he was not even worthy to be Jesus' slave, to perform the humble task of unfastening his sandals. But Jesus said that John was the greatest person who had ever lived (Luke 7:28). If such a great person felt inadequate even to be Jesus' slave, how much more should we lay aside our pride to serve him! When we truly understand who Jesus is, our pride and self-importance melt away.

28 These things occurred in Bethany across the Jordan [at the Jordan River crossing], where John was baptizing.

29 The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

Every morning and evening, a lamb was sacrificed in the Temple, symbolizing that the sins of the people were forgiven (Exodus 29:38-42). Isaiah 53:7 prophesied that the Messiah, God's Servant, would be led to the slaughter like a lamb. To pay the penalty for sin, a life had to be

given and blood shed. In the Old Testament, it was the blood of an animal, but with the coming of Jesus, God's Son, God chose to provide the sacrifice himself. The sins of the world were removed when Jesus died as the perfect sacrifice. This is the way our sins are forgiven (1 Corinthians 5:7). The "sin of the world" means everyone's sin, the sin of each individual. Jesus paid the price for your sin by his death. If you confess your sin to him and ask for his forgiveness, you will receive it.

³⁰ This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I and has priority over me, for He existed before me.'

Although John the Baptist was a well-known preacher who attracted large crowds, he was content for Jesus to take the higher place. This is true humility, the basis for greatness in preaching, teaching, or any other work we do for Christ. When you are content to do what God wants you to do and let Jesus Christ be honored for it, God will do great things through you.

³¹ I did not recognize Him [as the Messiah]; but I came baptizing in water so that He would be [publicly] revealed to Israel." ³² John gave [further] evidence [testifying officially for the record, with validity and relevance], saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. ³³ I did not recognize Him [as the Messiah], but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this One is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'

John the Baptist baptized with water as an act of preparation; his baptism was a first step because it represented repentance and symbolized the washing away of sins. Jesus, by contrast, would baptize with the Holy Spirit. He would send the Holy Spirit to all believers, empowering them to live as transformed people and to proclaim the Good News of salvation. This outpouring of the Spirit came after Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven (see 20:22; Acts 2).

³⁴ I myself have [actually] seen [that happen], and my testimony is that this is the Son of God!"

John the Baptist and Jesus were related (see Luke 1:36), but John still needed confirmation of Jesus' identity as the Messiah. At Jesus' baptism, God gave John a sign to show him that Jesus truly had been sent from God (John 1:33). Jesus' baptism is described in Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; and Luke 3:21-22.

John the Baptist's mission was to point people to Jesus, stating clearly that Jesus was their long-awaited Messiah. Today, people are looking for someone to give them security in an insecure world. We must point them to Jesus and show them how he gives certainty, direction, and fullness of life.

Jesus' Public Ministry, First Converts

³⁵ Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as He walked along, and said, “Look! The Lamb of God!” ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

One of the two disciples was Andrew (1:40). The other was probably John, the writer of this book. Why did these disciples leave John the Baptist? Because that’s what John wanted them to do—he was pointing the way to Jesus, the one he had prepared them to follow. These were Jesus’ first disciples, along with Simon Peter (1:42), Philip (1:43), and Nathanael (1:45).

³⁸ And Jesus turned and saw them following Him, and asked them, “What do you want?” They answered Him, “Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?”

When the two disciples began to follow Jesus, he asked them, “What do you want?” Following Jesus is not enough; we must follow him for the right reasons. To follow him for our own purposes would be asking him to follow us—to align with us to support and advance our cause, not his. We must examine our motives for following him. Are we seeking his glory or ours?

³⁹ He said to them, “Come, and you will see.” So they went [with Him] and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard what John said and [as a result] followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹ He first looked for and found his own brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah” (which translated means the Christ). ⁴² Andrew brought Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas (which is translated Peter).”

Andrew accepted John the Baptist’s testimony about Jesus and immediately went to tell his brother, Simon, about him. There was no question in Andrew’s mind that Jesus was the Messiah. Not only did he tell his brother, but he was also eager to introduce others to Jesus (see 6:8-9; 12:22). How many people in your life have heard you talk about your relationship with Jesus?

Jesus saw not only who Simon was but who he would become. That is why he gave him a new name—Cephas in Aramaic, Peter in Greek (the name means “rock”). Peter is not presented as rock-solid throughout the Gospels, but we learn in the book of Acts that he became a solid rock in the days of the early church. By giving Simon a new name, Jesus introduced a change in his character.

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go into Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, “Follow Me [as My disciple, accepting Me as your Master and Teacher, and walking the same path of life that I walk].” ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the One Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote about—Jesus from Nazareth, the son of Joseph [according to public record].” ⁴⁶ Nathanael answered him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip replied, “Come and see.”

Nazareth sat near the crossroads of several trade routes and thus had contact with many cultural influences the Jewish people considered sinful. Tradition says there was also a Roman garrison located there, which no doubt would have greatly influenced the town. Some have speculated that the people of Nazareth had an aloof attitude or a poor reputation in morals and

religion, which may have been what was behind Nathanael's harsh comment. Nathanael's hometown was Cana, about four miles from Nazareth, where Jesus would perform his first miracle (2:1-11).

When Nathanael heard that the Messiah was from Nazareth, he was surprised. No prophet had ever mentioned Nazareth in association with the Messiah, and it was a place with a questionable reputation. Philip responded, "Come and see for yourself." Fortunately for Nathanael, he went to meet Jesus and became a disciple. If he had stuck to his preconceived ideas without investigating further, he would have missed the Messiah! Don't let people's stereotypes about Jesus cause them to miss his power and love. Invite them to come and see who Jesus really is.

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Here is an Israelite indeed [a true descendant of Jacob], in whom there is no guile nor deceit nor duplicity!"

48 Nathanael said to Jesus, "How do You know [these things about] me?" Jesus answered, "Before Philip called you, when you were still under the fig tree, I saw you."

49 Nathanael answered, "Rabbi (Teacher), You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel."

Jesus knew about Nathanael before the two ever met. Jesus also knows what each of us is really like. An honest person will feel comfortable with the thought that Jesus knows him or her through and through. A dishonest person will feel uncomfortable. You can't pretend to be something you're not. God knows the real you and wants you to follow him.

50 Jesus replied, "Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe [in Me]? You will see greater things than this." 51 Then He said to him, "I assure you and most solemnly say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man [the bridge between heaven and earth]."

John the Baptist and these new disciples used several names for Jesus: Lamb of God (1:36), Rabbi (1:38), Messiah (1:41), Son of God (1:49), and King of Israel (1:49). As they got to know Jesus, their appreciation for him grew. The more time we spend getting to know Jesus, the more we will understand and appreciate who he is. We may be drawn to him for his teaching, but we will come to know him as the Son of God. Although these disciples made this verbal shift in a few days, they would not truly understand Jesus until three years later (Acts 2). What they so easily professed had to be worked out in experience. We may find that words of faith come easily, but deep appreciation for Jesus comes with living by faith.

This is a reference to Jacob's dream recorded in Genesis 28:12. As the unique God-man, Jesus would be the ladder between heaven and earth. Jesus was not saying that they would see the ladder with their eyes, like some of them would see the Transfiguration; he was saying that they would have spiritual insight into Jesus' true nature and purpose for coming. The disciples understood this prediction better after Jesus' resurrection.