

PART 1

The Word

Scripture Reading:

John 1:1-5

Key Verse:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

Events:

1. John introduces us to the Son of God incarnate, the Word of God
2. John the Baptist testifies that Jesus is the Lamb of God
3. Jesus calls His first disciples

What does this passage teach us?

The Gospel of John, which begins with these verses, is in many respects very unlike the other three Gospels. It contains many things which they omit. It omits many things which they contain. Good reason might easily be shown for this unlikeness. But it is enough to remember that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote under the direct inspiration of God. In the general plan of their respective Gospels, and in the particular details—in everything that they record, and in everything that they do not record—they were all four equally and entirely guided by the Holy Spirit.

About the matters which John was specially inspired to relate in his Gospel, one general remark will suffice. *The things which are unique to his Gospel are among the most precious possessions of the Church of Christ.* No one of the four Gospel-writers has given us such full statements about the divinity of Christ—about justification by faith—about the offices of Christ—about the work of the Holy Spirit—and about the privileges of believers, as we read in the pages of John. On none of these

great subjects, undoubtedly, have Matthew, Mark, and Luke been silent. But in John's Gospel, they stand out prominently on the surface.

The five verses now before us contain a statement of matchless sublimity concerning the divine nature of our Lord Jesus Christ. He it is, beyond all question, whom John means, when he speaks of "the Word." No doubt there are heights and depths in that statement which are far beyond man's understanding. And yet there are plain lessons in it, which every Christian would do well to treasure up in his mind.

We learn, firstly, that our Lord Jesus Christ is *eternal*. John tells us that "in the *beginning* was the Word. He did not begin to exist when the heavens and the earth were made. Much less did He begin to exist when the Gospel was brought into the world. He had glory with the Father "before the world was" (John 17:5). He was existing when matter was first created, and before time began. He was "before all things" (Colossians 1:17). He was from all eternity.

We learn, secondly, that our Lord Jesus Christ is *a Person distinct from God the Father, and yet one with Him*. John tells us that "the Word was *with* God." The Father and the Word, though two persons, are joined by an ineffable union. Where God the Father was from all eternity, there also was the Word, even God the Son—their glory equal, their majesty co-eternal, and yet their Godhead one. This is a great mystery! Happy is he who can receive it as a little child, without attempting to explain it.

We learn, thirdly, that the Lord Jesus Christ is *very God*. John tells us that "the Word was God." He is not merely a created angel, or a being inferior to God the Father, and invested by Him with power to redeem sinners. He is nothing less than perfect God—equal to the Father as touching His Godhead—God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds.

We learn, fourthly, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the *Creator of all things*. John tells us that "by Him were all things made, and without Him was not any thing made that was made." So far from being a creature of God, as some heretics have falsely asserted, He is the Being who made the worlds and all that they contain. "He commanded and they were created" (Psalm 148:5).

We learn, lastly, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the source of all spiritual life and light. John tells us, that "in Him was life, and the life was the light of men." He is the eternal fountain, from which alone the sons of men have ever derived life. Whatever spiritual life and light Adam and Eve possessed before the fall, was from

Christ. Whatever deliverance from sin and spiritual death any child of Adam has ever enjoyed since the fall, whatever light of conscience or understanding any one has obtained, all has flowed from Christ. The vast majority of mankind in every age have refused to know Him, have forgotten the fall, and their own need of a Savior. The light has been constantly shining “in darkness.” The most have “not comprehended the light.” But if any men and women out of the countless millions of mankind have ever had spiritual life and light, they have owed all to Christ.

Such is a brief summary of the leading lessons which these wonderful verses appear to contain. There is much in them, without controversy, which is above our reason but there is nothing contrary to it. There is much that we cannot explain, and must be content humbly to believe. Let us however never forget that there are plain practical consequences flowing from the passage, which we can never grasp too firmly, or know too well.

Would we know, for one thing, *the exceeding sinfulness of sin*? Let us often read these first five verses of John’s Gospel. Let us mark what kind of Being the Redeemer of mankind must needs be, in order to provide eternal redemption for sinners. If no one less than the Eternal God, the Creator and Preserver of all things, could take away the sin of the world, sin must be a far more abominable thing in the sight of God than most men suppose. The right measure of sin’s sinfulness is the dignity of Him who came into the world to save sinners. If Christ is so great, then sin must indeed be sinful!

Would we know, for another thing, *the strength of a true Christian’s foundation for hope*? Let us often read these first five verses of John’s Gospel. Let us mark that the Savior in whom the believer is bid to trust is nothing less than the Eternal God. He able to save to the uttermost all that come to the Father by Him. He that was “with God,” and “was God,” is also “Emmanuel, God with us.” Let us thank God that our help is laid on One that is mighty (Psalm 89:19). *In ourselves we are great sinners. But in Jesus Christ we have a great Savior.* He is a strong foundation-stone, able to bear the weight of a world’s sin. He that believes on Him shall not be confounded (1 Peter 2:6).

Questions:

1. What is the theme of chapter 1?
2. What do these verses teach us about who Jesus is?

3. How does Jesus' greatness reveal the sinfulness of sin?

Family Discussion Questions:

1. Do we, as a family, make light of sin, or do we take sin seriously as an offense against a Holy God? Discuss recent examples.
2. Are we in awe of the glory of our Savior Jesus? How do we demonstrate this awe, affection, and love for our Lord?

PART 2

The Word

Scripture Reading:

John 1:6-13

Key Verse:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

Events:

1. John introduces us to the Son of God incarnate, the Word of God
2. John the Baptist testifies that Jesus is the Lamb of God
3. Jesus calls His first disciples

What does this passage teach us?

John, after beginning his gospel with a statement of our Lord's nature as God, proceeds to speak of His forerunner, John the Baptist. The contrast between the language used about the Savior, and that used about His forerunner, ought not to be overlooked. Of Christ we are told that He was the eternal God—the Creator of all things—the source of life and light. Of John the Baptist we are told simply, that “there was a *man* sent from God, whose name was John.”

We see, firstly, in these verses, *the true nature of a Christian minister's office*. We have it in the description of John the Baptist—”He came for a witness, to bear witness of the light, that all men through him might believe.”

Christian ministers are not priests, nor mediators between God and man. They are witnesses. They are intended to bear testimony to God's truth, and specially to the great truth that Christ is the only Savior and light of the world. This was Peter's ministry on the day of Pentecost. “With many other words did he *testify*”

(Acts 2:40). This was the whole tenor of Paul's ministry. "He *testified* both to the Jews and Greeks repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). Unless a Christian minister bears a full testimony to Christ, he is not faithful to his office. So long as he does testify of Christ, he has done his part, and will receive his reward, although his hearers may not believe his testimony. Until a minister's hearers believe on that Christ of whom they are told, they receive no benefit from the ministry. They may be pleased and interested; but they are not profited until they believe. The great end of a minister's testimony is "that through him, men may believe."

We see, secondly, in these verses, *one principal position which our Lord Jesus Christ occupies towards mankind*. We have it in the words, "He was the true light which lights every man that comes into the world."

Christ is to the souls of men what the sun is to the world. He is the center and source of all spiritual light, warmth, life, health, growth, and beauty. Like the sun, He shines for the common benefit of all mankind—for high and for low, for rich and for poor, for Jew and for Greek. Like the sun, He is *free to all*. All may look at Him, and drink health out of His light. If millions of mankind were mad enough to dwell in caves underground, or to bandage their eyes, their darkness would be their own fault, and not the fault of the sun. So, likewise, if millions of men and women love spiritual "darkness rather than light," the blame must be laid on their blind hearts, and not on Christ. "Their foolish hearts are darkened" (John 3:19; Romans 1:21). But whether men will see or not, Christ is the true sun, and the light of the world. There is no light for sinners except in the Lord Jesus.

We see, thirdly, in these verses, *the desperate wickedness of man's natural heart*. We have it in the words, Christ "was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."

Christ was in the world *invisibly*, long before He was born of the Virgin Mary. He was there from the very beginning, ruling, ordering, and governing the whole creation. By Him all things are held together (Colossians 1:17). He gave to all life and breath, rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons. By Him kings reigned, and nations were increased or diminished. Yet men knew Him not, and honored Him not. They "worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator" (Romans 1:25). Well may the natural heart be called "wicked!"

But Christ came *visibly* into the world, when He was born at Bethlehem, and fared no better. He came to the very people whom He had brought out from Egypt, and purchased for His own. He came to the Jews, whom He had separated from other nations, and to whom He had revealed Himself by the prophets. He came to those very Jews who had read of Him in the Old Testament Scriptures—seen Him under types and figures in their temple services—and professed to be waiting for His coming. And yet, when He came, those very Jews received Him not. They even—rejected Him, despised Him, and slew Him. Well may the natural heart be called “desperately wicked!”

We see, lastly, in these verses, *the vast privileges of all who receive Christ, and believe on Him*. We are told that “as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become you sons of God, even to those who believe on His name.”

Christ will never be without some servants. If the vast majority of the Jews did not receive Him as the Messiah, there were, at any rate, a few who did. To them He gave the privilege of being God’s children. He adopted them as members of His Father’s family. He reckoned them His own brethren and sisters, bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh. He conferred on them a dignity which was ample recompense for the cross which they had to carry for His sake. He made them sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.

Privileges like these, be it remembered, are the possession of all, in every age, who receive Christ by faith, and follow Him as their Savior. They are “children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26). They are born again by a new and heavenly birth, and adopted into the family of the King of kings. Few in number, and despised by the world as they are, they are cared for with infinite love by a Father in heaven, who, for His Son’s sake, is well pleased with them. In time He provides them with everything that is for their good. In eternity He will give them a crown of glory that fades not away. These are great things! But faith in Christ gives men an ample title to them. Good masters care for their servants, and Christ cares for His.

Are we ourselves sons of God? Have we been born again? Have we the marks which always accompany the new birth—sense of sin, faith in Jesus, love of others, righteous living, separation from the world? Let us never be content until we can give a satisfactory answer to these questions.

Do we desire to be sons of God? Then let us “receive Christ” as our Savior, and believe on Him with the heart. To everyone that so receives Him, He will give the privilege of becoming a son of God.

Questions:

1. What is the theme of chapter 1?
2. What is the main job of a Christian minister?
3. How was Christ in the world “invisibly”?
4. What great privilege do we receive when we believe in Jesus Christ?

Family Discussion Questions:

1. How has Jesus Christ brought His light into our family? What are some examples?
2. What are some of the privileges of being God’s children?

PART 3

The Word

Scripture Reading:

John 1:14

Key Verse:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

Events:

1. John introduces us to the Son of God incarnate, the Word of God
2. John the Baptist testifies that Jesus is the Lamb of God
3. Jesus calls His first disciples

What does this passage teach us?

The passage of Scripture now before us is very short, if we measure it by words. But it is very long, if we measure it by the nature of its contents. The substance of it is so immensely important that we shall do well to give it separate and distinct consideration. This single verse contains more than enough matter for a whole exposition.

The main truth which this verse teaches is *the reality of our Lord Jesus Christ's incarnation, or being made man*. John tells us that “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.”

The plain meaning of these words is, that our divine Savior really took human nature upon Him, in order to save sinners. He really became a man like ourselves in all things, sin only excepted. Like ourselves, he was born of a woman, though born in a miraculous manner. Like ourselves, He grew from infancy to boyhood, and from boyhood to man's estate, both in wisdom and in stature (Luke 2:52). Like ourselves, he hungered, thirsted, ate, drank, slept, was wearied, felt pain,

wept, rejoiced, marveled, was moved to anger and compassion. Having become flesh, and taken a body, He prayed, read the Scriptures, suffered being tempted, and submitted His human will to the will of God the Father. And finally, in the same body, He really suffered and shed His blood, really died, was really buried, really rose again, and really ascended up into heaven. And yet all this time He was God as well as man!

This union of two natures in Christ's one Person is doubtless one of the greatest mysteries of the Christian religion. It needs to be carefully stated. It is just one of those great truths which are not meant to be curiously pried into, but to be reverently believed. But while we do not pretend to explain the union of two natures in our Lord Jesus Christ's Person, we must not hesitate to fence the subject with well-defined cautions. While we state most carefully what we *do* believe, we must not shrink from declaring boldly what we *do not* believe. We must never forget, that though our Lord was God and man at the same time, *the divine and human natures in Him were never confounded*. One nature did not swallow up the other. The two natures remained perfect and distinct. The divinity of Christ was never for a moment laid aside, although veiled. The manhood of Christ, during His lifetime, was never for a moment unlike our own, though by union with the Godhead, greatly dignified. Though perfect God, Christ has always been perfect man from the first moment of His incarnation. He who is gone into heaven, and is sitting at the Father's right hand to intercede for sinners, is man as well as God. Though perfect man, Christ never ceased to be perfect God. He that suffered for sin on the cross, and was made sin for us, was "God manifest in the flesh." The blood with which the Church was purchased, is called the blood "of God" (Acts 20:28).

Though He became "flesh" in the fullest sense, when He was born of the Virgin Mary, He never at any period ceased to be the Eternal Word. To say that He constantly manifested His divine nature during His earthly ministry, would, of course, be contrary to plain facts. To attempt to explain why His Godhead was sometimes veiled and at other times unveiled, while He was on earth, would be venturing on ground which we had better leave alone. But to say that at any instant of His earthly ministry He was not fully and entirely God, is nothing less than heresy.

The cautions just given may seem at first sight needless, wearisome, and hair-splitting. It is precisely the neglect of such cautions which ruins many souls. This constant undivided union of two perfect natures in Christ's Person is exactly that

which gives infinite value to His mediation, and qualifies Him to be the very Mediator that sinners need. Our Mediator is One who can sympathize with us, because He is very *man*. And yet, at the same time, He is One who can deal with the Father for us on equal terms, because He is very *God*. It is the same union which gives infinite value to His righteousness, when imputed to believers. It is the righteousness of One who was God as well as man. It is the same union which gives infinite value to the atoning blood which He shed for sinners on the cross. It is the blood of One who was God as well as man. It is the same union which gives infinite value to His resurrection. When He rose again, as the Head of the body of believers, He rose not as a mere man, but as God. Let these things sink deeply into our hearts. The second Adam is far greater than the first Adam was. The first Adam was only man, and so he fell. The second Adam was God as well as man, and so He completely conquered.

Let us leave the subject with feelings of deep gratitude and thankfulness. It is full of abounding consolation for all who know Christ by faith, and believe on Him.

Did the Word become flesh? Then He is One who can be touched with the feeling of His people's infirmities, because He has suffered Himself, being tempted. He is almighty because He is God, and yet He can sympathize with us, because He is man.

Did the Word become flesh? Then He can supply us with a perfect pattern and example for our daily life. Had he walked among us as an angel or a spirit, we could never have copied Him. But having dwelt among us as a man, we know that the true standard of holiness is to "walk even as He walked" (1 John 2:6). He is a perfect pattern, because He is God. But He is also a pattern exactly suited to our needs, because He is man.

Finally, did the Word become flesh? Then let us see in our mortal bodies a real, true dignity, and not defile them by sin. Vile and weak as our body may seem, it is a body which the Eternal Son of God was not ashamed to take upon Himself, and to take up to heaven. That simple fact is a pledge that He will raise our bodies at the last day, and glorify them together with His own.

Questions:

1. What is the theme of chapter 1?
2. Why was it necessary that Jesus be both God and man?

3. How is the incarnation a mysterious doctrine?
4. What are some of the differences between the first Adam and the second Adam?
5. How did Jesus demonstrate the dignity of mankind in taking on himself a human body?

Family Discussion Questions:

1. If Jesus is able to sympathize with us because he felt our own weaknesses, how does this encourage us when we pray to God?
2. How can we as a family express gratitude to God for the mystery of the incarnation?
3. If Jesus took on a human body so that our bodies could be set free from sin, do we seek to keep our bodies holy for Him? Are there any ways we need to confess the sinful use of our bodies?