

GRACE AND TRUTH THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

John 1:14-18 - "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. [15] (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.' ") [16] And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. [17] For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. [18] No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."

At first glance there doesn't appear to be anything new in the first verse of our text. It seems the apostle John is merely repeating himself. But **verse 14** is important and **does** make a fresh contribution to John's argument. Take note that **verse 14** is the very first time that John specifically states that "**the Word**" and **Jesus Christ** are to be taken as the same.

Up to this point a careless reader could assume the Word, while identified as divine, might be some creative force or supreme life principle that was somehow active and life-giving in this present world - **John 1:1** - "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**"

Now John makes the Incarnation specific in a unique way. For example, In the seventh book of his famous *Confessions*, Augustine tells how, not long before his conversion to Christ, he was introduced by a friend to a Latin translation of some writings of Plato and was stunned to find much in them that resembled the famous prologue of John's gospel - "**I read there that God the Word 'was born not of flesh and blood, nor of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God. 'But that 'the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us' - that I did not read there.**"

This is John's unique, shocking, shattering statement in **verse 14**. We hear laid bare the unique cornerstone of New Testament Christianity. The **Word** came here in the **flesh** of Jesus of Nazareth.

John chooses the most blunt, almost crude, term - "**flesh**" - "**....the Word became flesh....**" (14). And he does so because then, as now, our imaginations can't picture God that tightly bound to the likes of us. **Docetism** - the heresy that the divine is too pure to ever be contaminated by this material, visible world - didn't vanish in the New Testament world. John argued against those who may have accepted Jesus of Nazareth as God but would never accept that He was also fully human. God **appeared** in Jesus of Nazareth to be moving **close** to mankind but this was only a limited spiritual visit - almost angel-like in Old Testament fashion. A holy God could never take on actual human flesh.

But He did. That's John's bold pronouncement. "**The Word became flesh....**" And even John couldn't have imagined all that this unbelievable **enfleshing** would entail. I'm sure John's jaw would have dropped to hear the apostle Paul's description of what this **taking on of flesh** would eventually mean - **2 Corinthians 5:21** - "**For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**"

This is profound doctrine, but it's not cold truth. This is doctrine for your heart today. This is doctrine for **worship**. As we'll unfold

this idea I hope you'll see where John is taking us with these verses. God came into human flesh - He became as human as you are right now. He's *been* you minus your sin. And that means, even though perfectly holy, human sin isn't a surprise to this holy God. Because He's *been* you He's not *repulsed* by you. He longs for your holiness, true enough. But He desires to make you holy by *bearing your sin* - by *drawing out your love* - not just by some cold command. As we'll see in a minute, that's the glorious difference between the grace from God through Christ and the law through Moses.

1) **IF WE WILL SEE GOD'S GLORY IN ITS FULLEST FORM WE MUST SEE IT IN THE FLESH OF JESUS CHRIST**

John 1:14 - "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

As commentaries ceaselessly point out, the word "*dwelt*" - "...and *dwelt* among us..." - is literally translated "*tabernacled*" or "*pitched tent*" among us. And our mind is instantly taken back to the dwelling place of God in Israel's wilderness wanderings. That tent was called, as you all know, the *Tabernacle*. And the word John uses in our text is merely the verb form of that same noun.

And John's way of pointing us toward that interpretation is the deliberate repetition of that word "*glory*" - "...we have seen his *glory, glory* as of the only Son from the Father...." And we're instantly reminded of the way God's glory uniquely filled that tabernacle in the wilderness. John means to recall those mighty occasions of God's glory - His presence - as it filled that place:

Exodus 40:32-38 - "When they went into the tent of meeting, and when they approached the altar, they washed, as the Lord commanded Moses. [33] And he erected the court around the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the screen of the gate of the court. So Moses finished the work. [34] Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. [35] And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. [36] Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out."

[37] "But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. [38] For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys."

Make sure you see John's point. This **14th verse** becomes an important part of John's comparison of Jesus with Moses. That comparison will reach its most blunt articulation in **verse 17**, but already John is leading us into it. His point in **verse 14** isn't that God now has another place - an additional place - to make His dwelling place. No. His point is Jesus' human flesh is the *fulfillment* of all that temporary tent in the wilderness was only pointing to. That tabernacle in the wilderness was never intended as a permanent meeting place for God and man. What that earthly tabernacle was *in part* Jesus is in *completion*.

So the “...**Word was made flesh**” in Jesus Christ in a different manner from any other dwelling places of God. The temple itself was a passing, imperfect house for our God. Its centrality came to an end with the atoning work done in the **physical flesh** of Jesus Christ on the cross.

And the proof - the **visible** proof - of that was the tearing of the veil into the holy of holies when Jesus' body - his **flesh** - was crucified - **Matthew 27:50-51** - “**And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. [51] And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.**”

There's still more. We know that the flesh of Jesus Christ is still the **abiding** revelation of Father God because the work of the Incarnation - the actually **enfleshing** of God in Christ - has never been undone. This is the apostle Paul's great point in **1 Timothy 2:5** - “**For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus....**”

Note carefully. Our present Redeemer and our present Mediator isn't some **spiritual** Christ Jesus. No. His body - that **Word made flesh** - still matters and still exists. This is the **permanent** meeting place between God and mankind. **All** mankind. Forever.

And here's the application for us. John is saying if anyone is going to **find** God now they will have to come to Jesus Christ. Jesus' flesh is where the glory of God dwells in completeness. Like that earthly tabernacle was the place where Israel encountered God, Jesus is the place God dwells to meet this fallen world.

And that means John's message in our text is tailored for a world like ours. Our world isn't full of God rejectors. There are some, but not that many in percentage of population. Our world is full of people committed to finding God through other sacrifices, other prophets, other visions, and other religions. **That's** John's concern in our text. The **Word** from our Creator God - that light and life that He wants to bestow - is only given through the flesh of His Son, Jesus Christ.

That is why, from this point on, John will never again use the term the “**Word**” (or Logos) to describe Jesus. It's as though he wants to emphasize the actual, physical person of Jesus - the man that was “**seen**” by all the apostles - to designate Christ. He will, from this text on, constantly be called by His very common earthly name, “**Jesus,**” or, to show His unique relationship to Father God, He is called “**the Son.**” John doesn't want anyone following Jesus with a faith built around a vision or dream. Touch the nail torn hands. That's where you meet your Creator God.

2) **THE WONDERFUL BALANCE OF GRACE AND TRUTH**

John 1:14 - “**And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.**”

When John speaks of having **“seen his glory,”** to what is he referring? Is it that Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes, calmed the sea with the word of His command, or made the blind to see?

Truly these were all glorious works, but I think the inclusion of **“grace and truth”** right on the heels of **“seen his glory”** take our minds in a different direction. The glory of which John speaks is the glory of seeing the lengths to which God the Son - the One who has created all things (3) - would go to bestow grace on sinful rebels.

Remember, John writes this gospel **after the fact** of the earthly life and death of Jesus. This is what makes him cry out, **“O, we saw such grace! We say God dwelling in the body of Christ for the purpose of mercy and atonement and forgiveness. That was the true glory that our eyes saw!”** Again, the Apostle John writes his gospel from the perspective of having already seen Christ crucified and risen.

Then John adds the virtue of **“truth”** - **“...full of grace and truth”** - he doesn't mean primarily truth as opposed to falsehoods. He's not merely reminding us that Jesus didn't lie. The Greek word deals with **reliability** and **trustworthiness**. In other words, John knows how unworthy people find it hard to imagine getting grace for wickedness. Nothing in this world **trains** us to expect grace for sin. John bolsters our confidence by linking up the grace and mercy of redemption with the faithfulness of God's promise.

3) THE SUPERIORITY OF JESUS CHRIST TO ANY OTHER PROPHET OR TEACHER

John 1:15 - **“(John bore witness about him, and cried out, ‘This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’ ”)**

Just one quick thought from this verse. The key words are **“ranks before me.”** John knows his ministry came **before** Jesus in terms of sequence. John was the one who **prepared the way** for Jesus. And John certainly had great prophetic acclaim. Jesus reminded some of his listeners that among all the people born from a woman, none was greater than John the Baptist.

But then Jesus actually made His entrance. His saving work began to unfold. And John - wonderful, humble John - has the good sense to tell the whole listening world that Jesus **outranks** any other voice or leader. He still does. So while there is **idolatrous** worship in this world, to be sure, there are no actual competitors to Jesus Christ, God the Son.

4) THERE IS AN UNENDING DYNAMIC TO THE ADVANCE OF GOD'S GRACE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

John 1:16-17 - “And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. [17] For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

These verses make me ask questions. To which recipients of grace does John refer when he says, **“And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace?”** Who is this **“all?”** We know the Apostle John writes these words about 50 years after Jesus’ ascension. So the **“all”** would include others beyond those who lived and met Christ Jesus physically on earth.

My own conviction is the words, **“we have all received,”** are **church** words. They’re words describing the way people continued to encounter the life-giving power of the Word made flesh, long after the flesh of Jesus was no longer here on earth. **“We have all received”** means as the gospel - the record of the saving work of Jesus Christ - was proclaimed through the preaching of the Apostles and then the preaching of the church at large, God continued to pour out **“grace upon grace.”**

In other words, the grace didn’t stop flowing. The very **same** grace that first lit this sin-darkened world in the visible flesh of God the Son continues to this day to turn darkness into light - **Ephesians 5:8** - **“....for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord....”** We are at no **disadvantage** because we weren’t physically alive when Jesus walked this earth. No. **“From his fullness we have all received....”**

And something else. Notice that phrase, **“From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace”** (16). This is part of John’s contrast between grace and law. He will continue it in **verse 17** - **“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”** John means to show there is a one-time **givenness** to the law. It comes and it’s done. It was given at one specific point in time. If Moses hadn’t given it, someone else easily could have.

But grace **came** specifically **“through Jesus Christ.”** You can learn the law. But you never master grace. It is an **ongoing dynamic** in our discipleship. You and I constantly **need** fresh grace. So we never actually just receive **grace**. We receive **“grace upon grace.”** We receive grace **over and over again**. The law - any law - is different. You can **study** the law. But you have to **receive** grace.

Brighten the rest of this week remembering that the grace isn’t any less real or potent just because we have never **seen** Jesus Christ in the flesh. The same grace flows. John says even to those who first read his words - some of whom were born **after** Jesus ascended into heaven - **“From his fullness we have all received!”**

The grace **keeps flowing**. It hasn’t stopped. It comes to people who mess up. It comes to people who mess up over and over again. Praise our Lord this grace didn’t come the same way that law was given in tablets of stone. Grace keeps flowing. How could John say it better to sinful people? **“Grace upon grace, upon grace, upon grace, upon grace.....”** One reliance upon grace, replaced by **another** fresh reliance upon grace. There. That’s the Christian life.

5) **THE END OF THE PROLOGUE ACTUALLY PLACES US RIGHT BACK AT THE BEGINNING**

John 1:18 - "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."

The very first verse of John's gospel has the Son, who **was** God **with** God in His eternal existence before the world was even created. And this last verse places the ascended Son **back at the "Father's side."**

So before John even begins to unfold the events of the earthly life of Jesus, he tips his hand. The Son's mission is already a completed success. We will get all of the historic earthly details, but the **point** of the Son's coming has already been accomplished. The mission is over. The battle is won. The dawn of that still to come new creation can never be stopped.

And the fact that we can't **see** this God doesn't make His will any less sure. That's why John included that little detail about the **hiddenness** of our God - "**No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."**

Look to the flesh and bones, the actual completed mission of the Son. That's faith's resting place. And that's the Source from which God's marvelous grace still flows.