

THE PROLOGUE

John 1:1-18

The purpose for which the Gospel according to John was written was stated clearly in John 20:31, namely, "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." Thus we see that the purpose of this Gospel is twofold: to lead to personal belief in the historical "Jesus" as "the Christ" or Messiah (for the Jews) and as the "Son of God" (for the Gentiles), and to lead, by believing, to the possession of life through Him.

In the Prologue, or the first eighteen verses of this Gospel, John recorded the essence of all that he intended to set forth. These remarkable verses contain some rich and important truths about Christ, the Son of God, the Messiah of the Jews and the Saviour of sinners, which are not revealed elsewhere.

I. The Revelation of the Word. 1:1-5a.

"The Word" is one of the titles or names of the Lord Jesus Christ. Revelation 19:13 says: "And his name is called the Word of God." Therefore, it is not surprising that this Gospel opens with the statement "In the beginning was the Word." A word serves two distinct purposes: it gives expression to the inner thought and soul, and it reveals this thought to others. Word here refers to Christ, Who expresses the mind of God, and reveals His thoughts to men. Christ is the expression of the being, the mind, the will, and the power of God.

1. The eternity of the Word.

"In the beginning was the Word." There was never a time when the Word or Christ did not exist. Christ was before time and the world began. When the beginning was we do not know, but Christ was before that, for He existed from all eternity. He is co-eternal with God the Father.

2. The equality of the Word.

"And the Word was with God." This statement reveals the separate and distinct personality of Christ, even though an inseparable union existed between Him and the Father. There has always been the most intimate relationship between God the Father and Christ the Son. Christ was face to face with God the Father. They saw eye to eye on everything, as though they looked at one another on an even line. They took great delight in their close communion.

3. The deity of the Word.

"And the Word was God." This is a very clear declaration of the deity of Christ. This sweeping declaration of His essential deity is confirmed throughout the New Testament. Any lower estimate of Him is certainly inadequate. It would be difficult to imagine a more profound statement as to the Person of Christ than the one, "And the Word was God." He was of the very same essence, character, quality, and being as God the Father. In Christ we see and understand what God is like.

To those who believe the teachings of the Bible it is apparent that God is the creator of all things. Since Christ is the creator of all things, then He is God. Of all things that exist in the material universe there is nothing that came into existence apart from Him. This truth that "all things were made by him" is reiterated with characteristic Pauline clarity in Colossians 1:16-17: "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist."

4. The source of life.

Christ is the source of all life and every living being is dependent upon Him for the very sustenance of life. John wrote: "In him was life." The life which we now possess came to us from Christ when we were regenerated. He is the only source of spiritual life. Those who are not in Christ are existing, but they are not really living. The unsaved are still without real life.

5. The light of men.

Christ is the source of all light, as well as all life. In the incarnation Christ was the light blazing in the darkness. Through all the intervening centuries He has kept on shining in the midst of the darkness, ignorance, and hostility of the sinful people of the world, and happily the darkness has never been able to overcome or extinguish the light.

II. The Rejection of the Word. 1:5b-11.

John the Baptist is here introduced as the forerunner of Christ, who came to prepare the way for and to bear witness to the One Who was and is the true Life and Light. As to the origin of John the Baptist we are told that he was sent from God.

To the Hebrews the denial of offspring was "sorrows crown of sorrow." Not only was it a keen disappointment, but it was also a reproach and an evidence of the divine displeasure. Naturally, it meant the extinction of a family in the national records.

Zacharias the priest and Elizabeth his wife were old and had ceased to have hope of becoming parents. They were righteous, obedient to God, irreproachable in conduct, consistent before men, and engaged in a good and great work. Their home was one in which God was revered and worshipped, the members of the family were separated from worldliness, and rendered faithful service to God.

To whom was the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist made? It was made to a godly, reverent, worshipping, and praying father. It was made to him while he was worshipping and having fellowship with God Whom he loved and delighted to serve. The announcement of Gabriel not only surprised Zacharias, but it also caused him to fear and to doubt.

In due time this God-planned and God-given child was born. His parents received him with joyful thanksgiving, and they dedicated him to God. In his home John the Baptist was taught reverence for God, faith in God, humility before God and obedience to Him. His godly parents taught him the great truths about God. The Holy Spirit taught him what his mission in life would be.

John the Baptist came for the specific purpose of bearing witness to Christ. When Christ came, the people were so blinded by sin and so stepped in iniquity that they had to be told that the Light was at hand. As a witness John the Baptist testified as to what he knew to be the truth. He told what he saw and heard. His message was, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." In great numbers the people went to hear him, responded to his invitation, confessed their sins, repented of them, and then John the Baptist baptized them in the Jordan River. He denied that he was the Christ. He announced that Christ was coming, and declared that he was not worthy to untie His shoes. When Christ came and asked him to baptize Him, it did not puff him up, but he said, "I need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" He rejoiced in the privilege of pointing men to Christ. When somebody reported that Christ was preaching and that everybody was going to hear Him, it did not make John the Baptist the least bit jealous. He simply said, "He must increase, but I must decrease." That was his spirit, and it proved his greatness. In the life of every

Christian there ought to be less of self and more of Christ. John the Baptist earned and received the approval of Christ. He declared that of all who had been born there had not been a greater than John the Baptist.

Christ "came unto his own, and his own received him not." This verb "came" denotes a definite act -- the incarnation. "Unto his own," neuter plural, refers to the things which He created and possessed. "And his own received him not." "His own," masculine plural, means His own people, the Jewish people to whom Christ came first. He came to be their Redeemer and Saviour, but they rejected Him. Christ came to His own land, but the Jews refused to receive Him. They rejected Christ because they were not aware of their need of redemption and did not have any real desire for spiritual blessings.

The greatest stupidity in the history of the human race is that moral blindness which led the Jews to reject the Saviour when He came to them. Though He walked in their midst, performed miracles of mercy, revealed the amazing glory of God, and taught them the love of the Father, their only answer was that of rejection and repudiation, culminating in His crucifixion on Calvary.

Those who had been prepared through many generations, who had been taught to be the special reception committee to receive the Lord Jesus and to introduce Him to the world, would not receive Him when He came. This is the saddest story of human conduct and the greatest tragedy of all. They felt the jibe of the truth He spoke, but resented it; they heard the appeal to accept the salvation which He offered, but rejected it; they felt the charm of His personality, but rejected the blessing of it; they felt the urge within their own hearts to yield, but stifled it. They not only rejected Him, but resolved to destroy Him. What a tragedy!

III. The Reception of the Word. John 1:12-18.

While Christ was rejected by the masses of the people, there were individuals who received Him and became the children of God. The expression, "But as many as received him," indicates that a small, but noble and courageous, minority received Christ. As many as did receive Christ were given the right, the privilege, and the ability or power to become the children of God.

To all who place their faith in and receive Christ He imparts the ability or power to become what they are not, namely, the children of God, and thereafter to enjoy all the rights and privileges pertaining to that position. The only way whereby any can become the children of God is by a definite and personal acceptance of Christ as Saviour. To receive Christ is to be saved, to become a child of God, to enjoy the divine favor, and to spend eternity in heaven.

All who are the children of God are such by the communication of His life to them. It is only by supernatural power that people enter God's family. Salvation is not earned, but it is received as a gift. As an empty cup receives from the flowing fountain, so we receive Christ into our empty hearts and lives. Being children of God means having God as our Father, Christ as our Saviour, the Holy Spirit as our Guide and Comforter, the saved as our brethren, and the angels as our friends. As children of God we have the inestimable privilege of direct access into the Father's presence, of feasting on the bounties from His table, of enjoying the protective shelter from the storms that rage about us, of having fellowship with His children, and of the comfort of His glorious companionship.

Even though Christ came and revealed the grace, the love, and the mercy of God, and men have heard the glorious gospel message, still there are many who reject Him as their Saviour, and who will remain lost forever. What a pity!

Verse thirteen is intended to correct three erroneous ideas that were extant in the first century and are still prevalent, namely, that regeneration comes by heredity -- "not by blood," through self-effort -- "nor of the will of the flesh," or through the efforts of organized society -- "nor of the will of man." Regeneration, or the impartation of the divine nature to a human being, takes place upon the acceptance of Christ as personal Saviour.

John tells us that the Word, or Christ, Who always was, Who always was equal with God, and Who always was God, came into human flesh. He became what He had never been before -- He became flesh. God became Jesus of Nazareth. John also says that He "dwelt among us." It suggests a temporary dwelling. Jesus Christ dwelt on earth for only a little more than thirty-three years. Both John and others beheld His glory. Christ Jesus was full of both "grace and truth."

When the word "fulness" is applied to Christ in the New Testament, it always has a special meaning. It refers to His divine completeness. It means that He has all the attributes and powers of God. It declares that He possesses every excellence and contains every resource. There is in Christ a fulness of essential deity and of perfect manhood. He is still full of grace for those who do not deserve anything, and of truth for those who as yet are in ignorance. In Him is a fulness of grace to pardon, to regenerate, to sanctify, to preserve, and to perfect. In Him there is a fulness beyond our ability to imagine. There is in Christ a boundless supply of all that any sinner can need in time or in eternity.

Oh, what a fulness Christ has! Oh, what spiritual destitution we have! This abundance in Christ is exactly suited and intended to meet our need, to supply our deficiency, to relieve our poverty, and to satisfy our hunger and thirst. Have you received of Christ's fulness? Have you availed yourself of His great power? Have you drunk from the never-failing fountains of His grace?

Never doubt the sufficiency of His grace. His grace comes like the waves of the ocean. When one blessing comes there is another close behind it. There is no end to the boundless resources which are available to every believer in Christ. His grace continually fills up and supplies all of our needs. Whatever your needs may be, His resources are equal to them. Stretch out the hand of faith and take all that you need from Christ's fulness. His supply is far greater than your need. However, we cannot expect to receive His fulness if our vessels are already half filled with our own merits. We must be emptied of self before Christ can fill our hearts and minds.

Christ's fulness always carries with it certain obligations. If we draw from His fulness of grace and truth, we are obligated to communicate them or bear witness to others about them.