

The Gospel of John

Believe and Live!

Lesson 1

John 1:1–18

The Eternal Word

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” Like a finely-crafted elaborate picture frame, verses 1 and 18 of chapter one encase the splendid prologue of John’s Gospel. The importance of what he is writing about is inescapable; the doctrine at stake is strikingly clear—Jesus Christ is God! John wastes no time in making this point, leaving no room for debate.

John starts his gospel at Creation—placing Jesus there *in the beginning*. He ends with his stated purpose in writing (20:31): *“That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”* Within the first eighteen verses of his opening chapter, John introduces the fact that in coming to earth, Jesus Christ revealed to mankind what God the Father is like and that He has life—eternal life—to give to every man, woman, and child coming into the world who will believe.

If you think you have a pretty good idea of who God is and what He is like, take a good look at Him in the face of Jesus Christ this year. You may find that your picture is not quite accurate. For starters, God is much more loving than you have perceived, more glorious than you can envision, more fearful than your ego allows, and infinitely more forgiving than your finite mind can conceive. And yet, He desires more than anything for you to know Him intimately and walk with Him closely through this adventure of life! Pause for a moment of prayer, asking Him to do exactly what He desires for you.

At a glance ~ **Read John 1:1–51.**

At the onset of his letter, John reveals who Jesus Christ is, introducing Him to the reader in all of His deity and humanity. As you are reading through the entire chapter for the first time, jot down the different names and titles for Christ that John uses. (See how many you can find—there are approximately twenty-two, depending on your Bible translation.)

John first introduces us to Jesus by referring to Him as **the Word**. To the Jews, “the **Word**” represented the revelation of God’s character in the Old Testament. In the Hebrew, “the **Word**” is used to describe the act of creation: “*By the word of the Lord the heavens were made*” (Psalm 33:6). The Greek term means **logos**; both convey the aspect of beginnings—meaning, in simple terms, *the world began through the Word*.

Talk about seeing things from the “big picture”! John’s bio of the Lord Jesus describes Him as the very essence and source of everything we know and understand as the beginning: “*In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word was God.*”

1. In your own words, summarize what John says about the Word in vv. 1–2.
 - a. What does this tell you about the relationship between God the Father and God the Son? What insight does John give you in John 17:24?

Verse 2 emphasizes the truth of verse 1: that the Father and Son are one and nothing can separate them. John emphasizes the fact that the words and actions of Jesus are the words and actions of God!

In perspective ~ Read the Creation account in Genesis 1:1–2:7.

John links the message of his gospel with the message of Creation in Genesis 1. What similarity do you see between John 1:1 and Genesis 1:1?

2. What do you learn about Jesus’ involvement in Creation from verse 3?
 - a. Colossians 1:16?
 - b. Hebrews 1:1–2?

The importance of our understanding the doctrine of Creation, and the role of Jesus Christ in it, is vital to the foundation of our Christian faith. The case for the Gospel message rests upon the truth that Jesus was there in the beginning: “. . . and without Him nothing was made that has been made.” This historical Jesus who came into the world in the flesh was first the eternal Word that existed before anything else!

3. In verse 4, John introduces two key words about the *nature* and *function* of Jesus; what are they? (We will learn much more about them in the days ahead.)

The Greek word for life is *zoe*, used no less than thirty-six times in the Gospel of John and always to describe eternal life.

4. What critical truth about life did Jesus reveal to John and the other disciples in the intimacy of the Upper Room? John 14:6

“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (v. 4). Jesus lived in eternity past with the Father before creating the world—something out of nothing—and entering into time as we know it, bringing a message of hope for all mankind.

5. John uses the words of *light* and *darkness* in verse 5 to represent good and evil. What was the result of light entering darkness?

The darkness could not comprehend—grasp or understand—or *overcome* the light. The power of Christ’s light overcomes all darkness in the world!

Selah ~ (Pause and ponder.)

Jesus is the source of all life: *physical, spiritual and eternal*. He created something out of nothing when He created *you!* Think carefully about the following questions. This is an opportunity for you to realize *who you are* and *where you are* in God’s grand design.

- Has His light of truth invaded *your* darkness? With what result?

- Have you been able to discover and fulfill God’s purpose for your life? How does Ephesians 2:10 help you to understand part of your designed purpose?

Take a closer look ~ John 1:14

(Memorize and meditate on the memory verse each time you open your lesson.)

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

What does this verse reveal to you about Jesus? How does this revelation of truth encourage you today?

The True Light

Outlook ~ Read John 1:6–13 for review.

Before Jesus Christ steps visibly onto the scene, John introduces us to His forerunner, a uniquely different individual with a divinely ordained purpose.

1. According to verses 6–8:
 - a. Who was this forerunner? _____
 - b. What was his purpose? _____
 - c. Who sent him? _____

The Greek word used for “sent” is the root word from which *apostle* is derived. It refers to the sending out of an envoy with a special commission. The preposition “from” in the phrase “from God” is *para*, meaning “from beside,” which implies this messenger was invested with greater authority than had he simply been sent “by God.” One cannot minimize the importance of John’s mission here: “*He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light*” (v. 8).

In perspective ~

John’s gospel reveals John the Baptist’s mission and purpose. Take a look at Luke 1:57–66; and 76–80, noting what stands out to you from his early life.

2. What specific truth was John the Baptist sent from God to herald? vv. 9 and 15

Verses 10–13 are a brief summary of Jesus’ life story: a story of rejection, but also one of restoration for those who turned and received Him.

3. In your own words, finish the explanatory thought begun in the following:
 - v. 10: *He was in the world and the world was made through Him* _____
 - v. 11: *He came to His own* _____
 - v. 12: *But as many as received Him* _____
 - v. 13: *Who were born* _____

Selah ~ (Pause and ponder.)

There is a *right way* and a *wrong way* to go about doing just about everything in this world; and since God's ways are much different from our ways—much higher than our own—we must pay attention to what He tells us in His Word, particularly when it comes to His plan for our salvation.

Jesus' rejection by His own people, the Jews (also referred to as the lost sheep of Israel), meant that salvation is offered to all who will receive Him by believing on His name. The "right to become children of God" (v.12) means that He has granted permission (or the privilege) to become a part of His family. No one can earn this privilege on the basis of their own goodness or merit, but only by believing on the name of Christ. Believing on His name involves the complete transfer of trust from *self* to Savior. Anything less than this does not constitute *saving* faith!

Personal ~

Based on your learning this week, which way have you been attempting to gain God's favor: the wrong way—*your way* or the right way—*His way*? Please explain.

We're talking about *family matters* here; so if this is difficult for you to grasp, it may be because you do not yet belong to God's family. Once you respond to the invitation to receive Christ, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in your life—cleaning out the old nature and replacing it with a new one. Your new nature allows you to understand what the Bible teaches and how to live it out in daily life! If you haven't received Christ as your personal Savior, maybe you'd like to right now. If so, just pray this prayer:

"Lord Jesus, I confess that I'm a sinner and that I need a Savior. Please forgive me and fill me with your Holy Spirit. I thank you for dying for me on the cross and that I am now a child of God. Help me live to please You from this day forward, in Your name, Amen!"

If you prayed to receive Christ as your personal Savior, tell someone about your step of faith. Record today's date in your Bible next to 2 Corinthians 5:17, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*" Congratulations and welcome to the family of God!

Review this week's memory verse.

The Word Becomes Flesh

Outlook ~ Read John 1:14–18 for review.

In verse 14, John returns to one of his favorite themes: the **Word**. In a single sentence, John beautifully summarizes the *incarnation*—which means Christ became the God-man: “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*”

The word “flesh” used here means more than acquiring a physical body, though that is part of it. Christ set aside the *privileges* of deity and became human. It must be noted that Jesus Christ did not acquire a *sin nature* but He did fully assume a human nature—body, soul and spirit, thus completely identifying with humanity. He was completely human yet completely divine among men.

1. Not only did the Word become flesh; how did He condescend to mankind? v.14

John uses the verb form of “to dwell”, which means “to pitch tent or tabernacle.” His use of it in the figurative sense is a reference to the Old Testament tabernacle where God met regularly with His people Israel. There they worshipped, sacrificed and received revelation from God.

- a. To get a better understanding of the Tabernacle, see Exodus 26:1-37 and Leviticus 26:11. What do you discover that stands out to you?

Whenever God met with His people in the tabernacle, His glory rested over the holy place. In sending Jesus Christ, God “tabernacled” among men and His glory was revealed in the face of Jesus Christ.

- b. John is the only writer to use the verb form of “to dwell” in the New Testament. In the book of Revelation, he uses it to speak in the literal sense about the time to come when He—Christ—will again dwell among his people. What does he say in Revelation 7:15 and 21:3?

2. Because Jesus, the Word, became flesh and dwelt among us, how was mankind blessed? v.14b See also 1 John 1:1–4 for clarity.

Jesus was not one of many—He was God’s **only** begotten Son! The Greek word for “only begotten” is *monogenous*, meaning one and only. It refers to the eternal relationship between the Father and Son that is uniquely theirs.

In focus ~ (Key words)

John uses the word **truth** many times throughout his gospel, but he only uses the word **grace** here in vv.14 and 16–17 and then never again. Look up these words using the resources you have on hand (Bible translations, dictionary, concordance) and write a definition.

grace: _____

truth: _____

Jesus is the perfect embodiment of both *grace* and *truth*. How is your life enriched as a result? _____

Jesus' first eyewitness was His own cousin, of whom it says in verse 15: "*John pointed him out to the people. He shouted to the crowds, 'This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Someone is coming who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before I did''*" (NLT). John the Baptist was at the height of his popularity at this point. Some even thought he was the Messiah, so it is important for John's readers to realize that the Baptist endorsed Jesus as the one they had long awaited.

3. What was John the Baptist's appraisal of Christ; in other words, how did Jesus outrank John? v.15

4. Due to the preexistence and preeminence of Christ, what does John state that all believers have received? v.16

The word for "fullness" in the Greek is *pleroma*—conveying the idea of that which is complete in itself. John's use of this word in connection with "grace and truth" in verse 14 is to emphasize that every believer receives from Christ absolutely everything he or she needs for fulfillment in life.

Close up ~

This word "fullness" occurs in only this one instance in John's writings, but the same word is used on five occasions by the Apostle Paul in speaking of Christ and believers. Look up the references and note your findings.

a. Ephesians 1:22–23 _____

b. Ephesians 3:17–19 _____

c. Ephesians 4:13–15 _____

d. Colossians 1:18–20 _____

e. Colossians 2:9–10 _____

Whatever it is you need to complete your character, fulfill your personal desires, and accomplish your service for God is already provided for you in the fullness of Christ!

John goes on to state in verses 17–18: *“For the law was given through Moses; God’s unfailing love [grace] and faithfulness [truth] came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. But his only Son, who is himself God, is near to the Father’s heart; he has told us about him”* (NLT). In the Old Testament, God revealed His nature and will to His people through the law given by Moses—stone tablets containing His written word. Jesus Christ is the incarnate Word of God—whose nature and will is written on the fleshly tablets of every human heart that belongs to Him for the world to see!

Picture it ~

John describes Jesus as being in the bosom of the Father or near the Father’s heart. The imagery conveys to us a child leaning in closely in absolute dependence on the Father. (It is the picture John uses in his gospel to depict his intimacy with Jesus. In biblical times, the one who reclined next to his host at the meal was the one who enjoyed the closest relationship with him.) Share your thoughts about the kind of relationship God wants you to enjoy with His Son.

More like Jesus ~

Are *you* becoming more like Jesus? Absolutely! Every time you open the Word and spend time getting to know Him more intimately, you partake in the life-long process of drawing near—going deeper—bearing fruit—becoming more like Him. As you close your lesson today, determine to put into practice what you’ve learned by noting it below.

▪ Recite your memory verse _____

▪ Reflect on a lesson you received _____

▪ Respond with prayer and praise to God _____

Notes