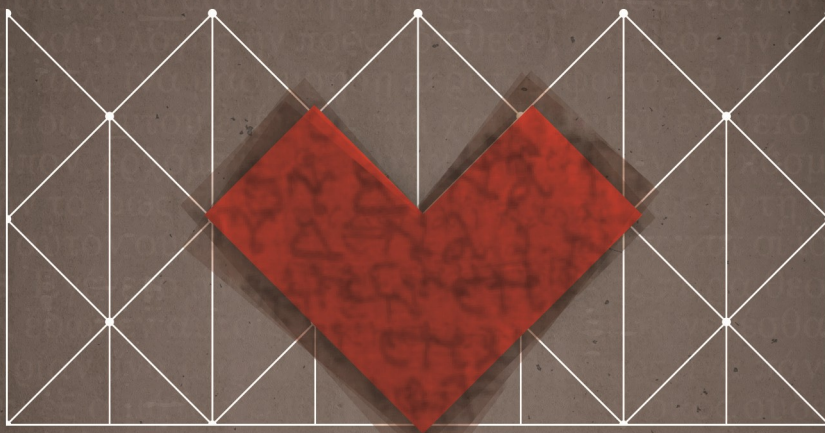


THE GOSPEL OF JOHN



BELIEVE

Studies in the book of John

PART ONE: Weeks 1-6

Group Applications

Personal Study



We would like to thank our pastors and elders for their leadership,
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Preface

A biracial woman with a sexual past. An old religious man seeking the truth. A government official with a dying son. These are the men and women who populate the Gospel of John. They are not abstractions, metaphors, or symbols. They are flesh and blood, walking the stale dirt of first century Jerusalem. The Gospel of John sits at the crossroads between heaven and earth. Between water and wine. Between death and resurrection. It is both a book of incredible wonder and grounded truth, told through the eyes of the most beloved disciple. Through miracles and arrests, healings and resurrections, crosses and graves, John weaves a piercing narrative that unveils the most extraordinary event in human history — God himself has put on flesh. In the most unlikely of ways, God, the Great Author, has written himself into his own story, born of a virgin, born under the Roman empire, born into the most humble of beginnings.

He was the light rejected by men, the only begotten of the Father, abandoned by his family, a prophet with no honor, a man of great sorrow, and the very word of God. As John walks with Jesus, through the eyes of Scripture, we walk with him as fellow travelers, sojourners, and exiles. We, like the woman at the well, like old Nicodemus, like Peter, are witnesses to his glory.

A preacher once said, “There are no wasted words in Scripture, just hurried readers of Scripture.” We so often are like travelers coming in from the cold who stand by the fire for a few seconds, then walk away before the ice on our cheeks can melt. This booklet is an invitation to sit by the fire of the Word, to let it warm your heart, degree by degree, as you behold the glory of God. And perhaps, as you sit by the fire, you may find yourself drawn to this man Jesus. Perhaps you may find your affections stirred for him, your desires aligned with his. Perhaps you may find yourself believing. This is why we have John’s Gospel. This is why the Spirit has given us ears to hear and eyes to see, so that as we receive the words of God we may believe, and in believing, receive the gift of eternal life itself.

Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

John 20:29



Bryan Zhang
General Editor

Week 1 The Gospel According to John

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

John 20:30-31

Date and Author

The Gospel of John was written between 80 and 90 A.D., roughly 50 years after Jesus’ earthly ministry. Although the book did not name an author, early church tradition overwhelmingly supported the Apostle John as the author. The early church father Irenaeus (130-200 A.D.), a disciple of Polycarp (70-160 A.D.) who was a direct disciple of John, testified that John wrote the gospel while at Ephesus in Asia minor towards the end of his life.

It seemed fitting that the Apostle John did not credit himself with authorship. In fact, John did not even refer to himself with his own name in his gospel account, choosing rather to speak of himself as the disciple “whom Jesus loved.” For John, to be loved by the Savior was the only fame and glory he desired.

Along with his older brother James, John was one of the original disciples and half of the “Sons of Thunder”, a nickname given by Jesus himself (Mark 3:17). Throughout Jesus’ ministry, John witnessed first-hand the incredible acts of the Lord, such as the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2) and the Last Supper (Luke 22:14-23). After Jesus’ ascension, John took a prominent role in the church (Gal 2:9) and ministered with Peter until he went to Ephesus, where he wrote the Gospel of John. John outlived all the Apostles and spent his last days as an exile on the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9) where he composed the final book of the Bible, Revelation (Rev 1:1).

Purpose

The Gospel of John is unique in that it explicitly states its own purpose—that readers would believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and have eternal life. In this purpose statement are three major themes.

The Signs of Jesus

John structured his gospel around seven unique signs of Jesus. Each sign not only signified God's kingdom bursting forth into the present age, but also carried with it a specific teaching and meaning. John used signs as brackets to organize his material after a certain pattern. Generally, John would record the signs as part of a narrative, and then record Jesus' words, explaining their meaning and significance. The signs are, in a sense, bookmarks or brackets for John's Gospel to guide the reader through the narrative.

The Son Who Came Down

In addition to the signs, John also portrayed Christ as the eternal Son of God who put on flesh in order to accomplish the Father's plan of salvation. By referring to Jesus as "the Christ," John was not informing the world about Jesus' last name, but rather attributing to him the title of the "anointed one." In the Old Testament, the "anointed one" referred to God's special king who would usher in his righteous kingdom and bring eternal life. In the most unlikely of ways, God's king has come to his people in the flesh not merely as a righteous man, but as the only begotten Son of God, God himself, Jesus Christ.

The Son Who Went Up

Towards the end of John's Gospel, Jesus spoke of his mysterious return to the Father, often hinting that one day he would not be with the disciples. However, Jesus' return to the Father was all part of the plan to open up a way for sinners to be saved and given eternal life and a secure future in God's kingdom. Furthermore, Jesus' return to the Father was necessary in order for the Holy Spirit to be poured out on God's people to empower them to be witnesses for Jesus to the nations.

[illegible]

Treasure

1. Read through the entire Gospel of John, preferably in one or two sittings.
2. Look up an outline for the Gospel of John, or write one yourself (think big picture rather than details).

Grow

1. Pick a verse in the Gospel of John that stuck out to you in your reading.
2. Meditate on that verse for 10-15 minutes by reading through it slowly and reflecting on its meaning and application. Here are a few ways to meditate:
 - Slowly think through each word of the verse.
 - Ask questions of the verse: Who is speaking? What is he or she trying to say? What truth is being revealed?
 - How would you write the verse in your own words?
 - Turn the verse into a prayer.
3. Record any observations or applications you gained from your meditation:

4. What are three things you hope God does in your life through your study in John?

Go

1. Write down some non-believers you know in your life and ask God to empower you to be a witness to them through your time in John. If there are no non-believers in your life, ask God to provide opportunities to meet some.

Discussion Questions

1. What are you most looking forward to in our study of the Gospel of John?

2. What are some facts about the apostle John? Who was he, where was he from? How did he relate to Jesus?

3. What was John's purpose for writing his gospel account? How might that purpose relate to us?

4. Why do you think God gave multiple Gospels about his Son?

5. What are some questions you hope to have answered through your study of John?

6. What is one area of your walk with God you hope to grow in through this study of John? How can your group pray for you?

Additional Reading

From John Calvin's Commentary on John, Preface¹

The meaning of the Greek word translated "Gospel" is well known. In Scripture it means, above all, the glad and delightful message of the grace shown to us in Christ. It teaches us to despise the world and its riches and pleasures, which do not last, and wholeheartedly to desire this invaluable blessing, and to embrace it when it is offered to us. We see unbelievers take extreme delight in the empty enjoyments of the world, while they have little if any taste for spiritual blessings. Such conduct is natural to us all. To correct this fault, God calls "Gospel" the message about Christ which he orders to be proclaimed. So he reminds us that nowhere else can true and solid happiness be obtained, and that in him we have all that is needed for a perfect, happy life.

Some people think the word Gospel covers all God's gracious promises, even the ones scattered in the Law and the Prophets. Certainly, whenever God declares that he will be reconciled to men and women, he shows Christ at the same time. It is Christ's special role to shed the light of joy wherever he shines. I admit, then, that the patriarchs had the same Gospel of free salvation that we have. But since the Holy Spirit declares in the Scriptures that the Gospel was first proclaimed when Christ came, let us keep to this way of speaking too; and let us keep to this definition of "Gospel": it is a solemn announcement of the grace revealed in Christ. Thus the Gospel is called "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1: 16) because in it God displays his righteousness. It is also said that we are "Christ's ambassadors," imploring people to "be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5: 20). As Christ is the pledge of God's mercy, and of his fatherly love to us, so he is especially the subject of the Gospel.

That is why the stories of Christ's appearing in the flesh, dying, and at length being taken up into heaven have become known particularly as Gospels. Although the word means the whole of the New Covenant, it has come to mean that part of it which declares that Christ appeared to us in the flesh, and died, and rose from the dead. Merely telling this story would not be enough for salvation — indeed, it would not help at all; so the evangelists also explain why he was born, died and rose again, and what benefit we derive from those events.

The other three Gospels give a fuller narrative of the life and death of Christ, but John dwells at greater length on the teaching about the role of Christ and the power of his death and

¹Calvin, John. Preface. *John*. Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 1993. N. pg. Print.

resurrection. The others certainly say that Christ came to bring salvation to the world, to atone for the sins of the world by the sacrifice of his death, and, in short, to do everything that was required from the Mediator. John, likewise, devotes a portion of his work to historical details. But the teaching which points out to us the power and benefit of the coming of Christ is far more clearly shown by him than by the rest. They all had the same purpose: to point out Christ. The first three Gospels show his body, so to speak, but John shows his soul. For this reason I usually say that this Gospel is a key to understanding the rest; for whoever understands the power of Christ strikingly pictured here will then profit by reading what the others tell about the Redeemer who appeared.

John is believed to have written chiefly in order to emphasize that Christ was God, as against the wicked blasphemies of Ebion and Cerinthus. This is what Eusebius and Jerome say, as did most of their contemporaries. But whatever his motive for writing at the time, there can be no doubt whatever that God intended something far greater for his church. He therefore dictated to the four evangelists what they should write, in such a way that while each had his own part, the whole might be collected into one. It is now our duty to blend the four together so that we may learn from all of them as if by one teacher. As for John being placed fourth, it was done because of when he wrote; but it would be better to read the Gospels in a different order: when we wish to read in Matthew and the others that Christ was given to us by the Father, we should first learn from John the purpose for which he appeared.

Resources Go to fouroakschurch.com/believe for links to the following resources:

"Bible Introductions: John." *Grace to You*. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 Mar. 2017. <<https://www.gty.org/library/bible-introductions/MSB43>>.

Read/Mark/Learn: John: A Small Group Bible Study (St. Helens Bishopsgate, 1999). <<http://www.st-helens.org.uk>>.

Week Two

John 1:1-5

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Revelation 19:11-16

Divine Expression

A word is the true expression of him who utters it. We have various ways of communicating with one another, but the chief of all these ways is by speech. By our words we make our wills known to others. By our words we make our thoughts and feelings known. We issue our prohibitions or commands and give effect to our intentions. Our words, then, give expression to our will. By a person's words you can perfectly know him.

In the Old Testament "the word of the Lord" was simply the revelation of God through angels, dreams, and prophets. In the time of Christ "the word of the Lord" had become the current designation by which Jewish teachers denoted the manifested Jehovah. And early believers developed what was called the "Logos Christology," or the understanding of Christ as the Word, who is introduced here in the first five verses of John's Gospel.

John's use of the Greek word *logos* denotes the expression of thought. Not the mere word in the grammatical sense, but a unit of language that functions as a principal carrier of meaning. It embodies a conception or idea, also reasoning. When we look at John 1:1-5, we see how John develops the concept of *logos* as it relates to Christ. The *logos* or "Word" was in the beginning with God. John is taking us back to Genesis 1:1. *In the beginning* God created the heavens and the earth, and He created all things by His word. "God said...and it came to be. God said...and it was so." So the Word was in the beginning, before time, preexistent, and therefore was not created.

But John does not stop there. In verse 2, John assigns the pronoun "he" to the Word. He now declares the Word as a distinct person, not just a mere impersonal force. Jesus is coexistent with God the Father and in intimate, perfect communion with him. And yet, mysteriously, Jesus the Word who is with God also *is* God. The Word was the powerful, authoritative agent through which God created all things. More than that, Jesus Christ the Word was the source and light of life. Light (*phos*) is an illuminating agent or source: it makes things visible. It is also used to denote truth and knowledge. Here John connects life and light. As you follow the text down to verse 14, the Word is finally identified by John as the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Jesus is God-in-the-flesh, the divine expression of God coming into relation with created things and revealing Himself. The infinite becomes finite: the eternal one enters time; the invisible one becomes visible.

[illegible]

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. Pick out one key verse that explains the heart of the passage. Ask yourself what verse, if removed, would make the passage hard to understand.
2. Meditate on that verse for 10-15 minutes by reading through it slowly and reflecting on its meaning and application. Here are a few ways to meditate:
 - Slowly think through each word of the verse.
 - Ask questions of the verse: Who is speaking? What is he or she trying to say? What truth is being revealed?
 - How would you write the verses in your own words?
 - Turn the verse into a prayer.
3. Record any observations or applications you gained from your meditation:

4. Why was this name, “the Word,” given to the Son of God?

5. Why is the truth that Jesus is God in human flesh essential for the Christian faith?

Go

1. How would you use the terms “Word” “Life” and “Light-Darkness” in proclaiming the Gospel to someone?

2. Why is it especially important in today’s culture to go back to “the beginning,” as John did, in introducing Jesus Christ to an unbeliever?

Discussion Questions

1. This passage is all about Jesus. Share one reason why Jesus is important to you.

2. In verses 1-2, Jesus is called the “Word.” Why is this significant? Why do you think John does not just say “Jesus is God?”

3. What are some ways non-believers would respond to these verses? How might you respond?

4. How would you explain the concept of ‘life’ according to the Bible? How does Jesus bring life and how does it relate to light?

5. How do these verses change the way you think and feel about Jesus? In what way might you trust in Jesus more?

Additional Reading

From *God Rest Ye Merry: Why Christmas is the Foundation for Everything* by Douglas Wilson¹

We ought always to reflect on the profound reality of the Incarnation. Over the course of time, we have added a bunch of cultural traditions to the celebration of the Christmas season, which is absolutely fine, but at the same time we want to take care not to obscure anything central. So, enjoy the fudge, and the sleigh bells jingling, and bringing the woods into your living room... but enjoy it all for the right reason.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word was made 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.

John 1:1,14

John's gospel begins with the words *in the beginning*, deliberately echoing the first words of Genesis (Gen. 1:1). Just as God created the heavens and the earth, so in the arrival of Jesus, He was recreating the heavens and the earth (v. 1). In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was *with* God, and the Word *was* God. What does this mean? The *witness* is defined by the word *Word*. The Word was *with* God the Father in the way our words are *with* us. They are not the same. And yet, at the same time, our words reveal us and are to be identified with us. We are what we speak. Out of the abundance of the heart, a man speaks, and we are this way because God is the same way. Out of the abundance of His heart, He speaks. Now, this perfect Word, this Word that came from the Father without any degradation of meaning, this Word which was also to be identified with the Father, what did He do? He became *flesh*, John says, and dwelt among us (v. 14). Did this bring about degradation of meaning? No, John says— we *beheld* his glory (v. 14). What glory? The glory of the only begotten of the Father. What glory? A glory that was *full* of grace and truth....

...Now, consider the nature of the miracle we celebrate at Christmas. Without losing *anything* "in the translation," God brought *this* conversation into *this* world, starting in the womb of a young Jewish woman. The Word (the Word we have been speaking of) became *flesh*, and all carnal philosophy and wisdom fall backwards, like the men who came to arrest the Lord.

...we need to take careful note of the fact that Jesus was not telling us to do something that He was unwilling to do Himself. We should see this as the very model of His particular kind of servant leadership. Jesus told us to become like little children. And what did He do in the Incarnation? *He*

¹Wilson, Douglas (2012-11-16). *God Rest Ye Merry: Why Christmas is the Foundation for Everything* (Kindle Locations 453-526) Kindle Edition.

became a little child. The one, in short, who told us that we needed to be humbled, converted, and made like little children, was the same one who humbled Himself and took the form of a baby in the womb of a young maiden. Jesus told us to become like little children, but He did so as the one who had—in an utterly unique way—become a little child.

He, the eternal Word, the one who spoke the galaxies into existence, was willing to become a little baby boy who could do nothing with words except jabber, and in that jabbering, make glad his mother and earthly father. He, the source of all life and all nourishment for that life, was willing to be breastfed. He, the same one who had separated the night from the day, and had shaped the sun to rule the day, and the moon to rule the night, was willing to have his diapers changed for a year or so. It is not disrespectful to speak this way; for Christians, it is disrespectful *not* to. We believe in the Incarnation, in the Word made flesh. This is our glory; this is our salvation.

Jesus told us that in order to enter His kingdom, we would have to stoop. This is not surprising, because He was the one who stooped in a mystifying way in the creation of that kingdom. He *stooped*—the ultimate Word became a single cell, and then a cluster of cells, and then visibly a baby, although still less than a pound, and then a child who kicked his mother from inside, delighting her immeasurably. He became a little child, and then, years later, He told us to copy Him in this demeanor—to become little children....

...The atonement did not start when the first nail went in and then stop when the Lord breathed His last breath. The entire life of Christ was involved in our salvation, from His conception on. Indeed, the prophet Isaiah said that we were healed by His stripes, which were inflicted *before* the cross (Is. 53:5), and that by His *knowledge* He will justify many (Is. 53: 11). The Lord's time on the cross cannot be detached from the rest of His sinless life, and it is theological folly to try.

Resources Go to fouroakschurch.com/believe for links to the following resources:

Strong, James. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Bible Hub, n.d. Web. 15 Mar. 2017. <<http://biblehub.com/strong.htm>>.

Merrill C. Tenney. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: John/Acts* Vol. 9 General Editor Frank E. Gaebelin, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981).

Hastings, James. *The Great Texts of the Bible*. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 Mar. 2017. <<http://biblehub.com/commentaries/hastings/>> (Google book version is at <https://archive.org/details/greattextsbible00hastgoog>)

"Jesus: The Divine Word." *Grace to You*. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 Mar. 2017. <<https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/43-2/jesus-the-divine-word>>.

Week Three

John 1:6-13

"The people who walked in darkness

have seen a great light;

those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,

on them has light shined.

You have multiplied the nation;

you have increased its joy;

they rejoice before you

as with joy at the harvest,

as they are glad when they divide the spoil."

Isaiah 9:2-3

True Belief

What does it mean for someone to be "light"? In the Bible, the concept of light implies true knowledge, moral purity, and the presence of God. John uses the imagery of light in order to distinguish Him from any form of darkness or impurity while also exposing humanity's need for salvation. In this passage, John calls Jesus the true light, the Messiah, who is the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan.

The Gospel of John was written so that people might believe and have life in Jesus (John 20:31). Since John's purpose was to testify about Jesus and bring people to faith, it makes sense that he would begin his account by clarifying first, who Jesus is, and second, the difference between rejecting and truly believing. In Jesus' day, Jewish people acknowledged and maintained a belief

in God, yet they rejected Jesus Christ. John explained that the reason they rejected Christ was because they did not actually *know* him. What did the word **know** imply? Often the Bible uses the word “know” and “believe” in relational terms. For John, belief went far beyond mere intellectual assent; it involved putting one’s complete trust in Jesus.

This biblical view of knowing and believing in Jesus is a far cry from how our culture often uses the term. We often hear people say, “Oh, I believe in God” and yet have no notion of having life in Him (John 20:31)! So despite the popular claim of belief in God, many who utter these words are not willingly putting their life and full trust in the Triune God. True belief is lived out in one’s posture towards God in all of life: mental, emotional, relational, and spiritual.

“Children of God” is another biblical phrase that is often misunderstood. It is commonplace to refer to any human being as a *child of God*. It seems to be a very spiritual and accepting way to think of people, right? But God has already ascribed unique worth to every human being by creating us in His image (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7). No other part of creation bears His image. Yet we must be careful to not conflate the image of God with being a child of God. There needs to be a clear distinction; every human being is an *image-bearer* of God, while not everyone is a *child of God*. Being a child of God is not automatic; it requires saving faith through trusting Jesus and believing in His name. God adopts us as His children because we have trusted and believed in Jesus the Christ. John is thus highlighting the significant difference between those who reject Jesus and those who receive/believe in Him.

[illegible]

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. Pick out one key verse that explains the heart of the passage. Ask yourself what verse, if removed, would make the passage hard to understand.
2. Meditate on that verse for 10-15 minutes by reading through it slowly and reflecting on its meaning and application. Here are a few ways to meditate:
 - Slowly think through each word of the verse.
 - Ask questions of the verse: Who is speaking? What is he or she trying to say? What truth is being revealed?
 - How would you write the verse in your own words?
 - Turn the verses into a prayer.
3. Record any observations or applications you gained from your meditation:

4. Belief in Jesus' name means believing all that is true about Him. What do I know to be true about Jesus from this passage? What does it teach us about Jesus' deity (His being God)?

5. How does the text describe the rejection of the "true light" in verse 10-11?

Go

1. How would you respond to someone who believes that everyone is a child of God?

Discussion Questions

1. John the Baptist came to bear witness about the light. Share about how you came to faith in Christ and who was your “John the Baptist.”

2. Jesus refers to himself as “light” a few places in John. In what ways has the light changed your life?

3. In what ways is it evident today that the world does not know the one who made it? Why does the world not know or receive Him?

4. What does it mean to receive Christ? How does this relate to believing?

5. Why does God describe those who receive Jesus as his children? Why is this significant?

6. What is a particular way that you want to live in the light today?

Additional Reading

From *True Spirituality* by Francis Schaeffer¹

Now we have spoken of faith, so let us pause here. Living in the second half of the twentieth century, we must keep on saying what faith is, in the biblical sense. Christian faith is never faith in faith. Christian faith is never without content. Christian faith is never a jump in the dark. Christian faith is always believing what God has said. And Christian faith rests upon Christ's finished work on the cross.

The reality of living by faith as though we were already dead, of living by faith in open communion with God, and then stepping back into the external world as though we are already raised from the dead, this is not once for all, it is a matter of moment-by-moment faith and living moment-by-moment. This morning's faith will never do for this noon. The faith of this noon will never do for suppertime. The faith of suppertime will never do for the time of going to bed. The faith of midnight will never do for the next morning. Thank God for the reality for which we were created, a moment-by-moment communication with God Himself. We should indeed be thankful because the moment-by-moment quality brings the whole thing to the size which we are, as God has made us.

This being the case, it is obvious that there is no mechanical solution to true spirituality or the true Christian life. Anything that has the mark of the mechanical upon it is a mistake. It is not possible to say, "Read so many of the chapters of the Bible every day, and you'll have this much sanctification." It is not possible to say, "Pray so long every day, and you have a certain amount of sanctification." It is not possible to add the two together and to say, "You will have this piece of sanctification." This is a purely mechanical solution, and it denies the whole Christian position. For the fact is that the Christian life, true spirituality, can never have a mechanical solution. The real solution is being cast up into the moment-by-moment communion, personal communion, with God himself, and letting Christ's truth flow through me through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

¹Francis Schaeffer, *True Spirituality* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2001), p 78.

Resources

Go to fouroakschurch.com/believe for links to the following resources:

Andreas J. Kostenberger, L.Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles. *The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2009).

Merrill C. Tenney. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: John/Acts* Vol. 9 General Editor Frank E. Gaebelin, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981).

Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen. *The Drama of Scripture*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2004).

R.V.G. Tasker, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Gospel According to St. John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1980).

ESV Study Bible

Week Four

John 1:14-18

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. **2 Corinthians 3:18**

Beholding His Glory

We have in this passage the greatest truth of the Christian faith—that God the Son stooped to our estate, took on human nature, and displayed the glory of the Father. Herman Bavinck said, “the incarnation is the central fact of the entire history of the world.”¹ The very Word of God that spoke existence into being has now entered into the world. He who held all things together became dependent and emptied himself by adding the weakness of human flesh to his infinite divine nature. While the mystery of this can stump our minds, the power of its truth ought to enliven our souls. In this passage we see that Christ himself is the Word or “speech” of God to us. In fact, as Hebrews 1:2 says, God now speaks to us exclusively through his son. He is the complete and entire revelation of God to man. In Christ the full glory of God, the truth, is revealed to mankind. But what is this Glory? What does Christ reveal to us? It is the glory of God’s own nature and will and his very “grace and truth.”

Knowing the infinite distance between God and man, Christ bridged the chasm in the Incarnation and took upon himself our guilt. He has shown us the immeasurable grace of God by drawing feeble, dying sinners to himself, knowing that they could and would not come apart from him. But how does he draw us? How does he compel us to cast ourselves on his mercy? We are told the disciples “beheld” glory, and “received” from his fullness. We are told to “look to Christ, and be saved” (Isaiah 45), and to gaze upon his grace and glory and in so doing become transformed by his power. Reader, let me ask you a question: do you gaze upon Christ? Do you behold his glory? Do you think about and meditate on the grace shown to you in the incarnation? What is it that

¹Bavinck, Herman *Reformed Dogmatics, Vol.3* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006, pg. 274.

²Owen, John, *Meditations on The Glory of Christ*. Christian Focus Publications, 2004. Reprinted 2008 by Christian Focus Publications, Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland, U.K.

³Sinclair Ferguson, *The Incarnate Word*, Audio Sermon. <https://media05.sermonaudio.com/sermons033/17131514113.mp3>

keeps you? As the theologian John Owen said, "No man shall ever behold the glory of Christ by sight hereafter, who does not in some measure behold it by faith here in this world."² Consider the greater revelation of grace in Christ. He reveals not law but grace, not terror and judgment but free goodness and riches, at the expense of another. Sinclair Ferguson said in a sermon, "You have not seen the glory of Christ until you have seen him as full of grace and truth."³ The life of faith is a life of beholding the works of another, the righteousness of another, and the eternal glory of the one for us, the Lord Jesus Christ. If you find rest in this, hope will arise in your soul and you will be satisfied as you behold his glory, and as you behold him, you will be transformed into his image.

Week 4 Sermon Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. Pick out one key verse that explains the heart of the passage. Ask yourself what verse, if removed, would make the passage hard to understand.
2. Meditate on that verse for 10-15 minutes by reading through it slowly and reflecting on its meaning and application. Here are a few ways to meditate:
 - Slowly think through each word of the verse.
 - Ask questions of the verse: Who is speaking? What is he or she trying to say? What truth is being revealed?
 - How would you write the verse in your own words?
 - Turn the verse into a prayer.
3. Record any observations or applications you gained from your meditation:

4. In what ways does Christ become the perfect mediator for us in the incarnation?

5. How does one live a life of “beholding Christ”?

Go

1. How could this passage encourage you to “proclaim the excellencies of Christ” to the dying world around you?

2. How could your engagement with unbelievers call them less to doing and more to beholding?

Group Discussion Questions

1. This passage is all about grace. Share how you have experienced grace recently.

2. What does God communicate to us through the Incarnation ("the Word became flesh")? In other words, how significant is it that Jesus became a person?

3. Jesus is full of grace and truth. How do these two concepts work together? How are they displayed in Jesus?

4. How do we receive from Jesus' fullness grace upon grace?

5. What does John mean when he says we have never seen God and only the Son can make him known to us? (Jn 1:18)

6. In what ways do you need Jesus' grace today?

Additional Reading

From *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* by J.C. Ryle⁴

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. Nowhere, perhaps, shall we find a more wise and judicious statement than in the second article of the Church of England. "The Son, who is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin of her substance--so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and the manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, truly God and truly man." This is a most valuable declaration. This is "sound speech, which cannot be condemned." 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 life-time, was never for a moment unlike our own, though by union with the Godhead, greatly dignified. Though perfect

⁴Ryle, J. C. *Ryle's Expository Thoughts On the Gospels, Vol.3*. 2nd reprint edition. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956.

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.

Week Five

John 1:19-28

A voice cries:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;

make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up,

and every mountain and hill be made low;

the uneven ground shall become level,

and the rough places a plain.

And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,

and all flesh shall see it together,

for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Isaiah 40:3-5

A Voice in the Wilderness

Thousands of years before the birth of Christ, the prophet Isaiah foretold of a day when God would return to Israel, save his people from oppression, and restore their kingdom to glory. It was this hope, the hope that the Lord would return and set things right, that fueled the Messianic expectations of Jesus' day. It's no wonder that when John the Baptist began his ministry all of Israel paid attention. John's message was simple—the Lord is returning to his people and everyone needs to get in line.

A closer look at Isaiah 40 shows us that God's promise that he would one day return was a promise of comfort. "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem," Isaiah wrote, "and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins." When God returned to his people, he would not only forgive their sins, but he would actually give

them twice as many blessings over what they actually deserved. When would this day of the Lord happen? When a messenger appears from the wilderness and declares that the day of the Lord has come.

However, the day of the Lord did not come as people expected. The coming of Jesus was God coming in the flesh to save his people, but in a way that nobody expected. Instead of being the conquering king that put everything right, God appeared in the flesh to dwell among his people, not to liberate them from political or military powers, but from bondage to sin and slavery. It was this unexpected development in the plan of God that sent Jesus' enemies into a frenzy. Jesus Christ came not to judge the world, but rather to save it, so he could give eternal life to all who believed in him. John the Baptist's cry was for the world to recognize that the conquering King had first come as a suffering servant in order that God's mercy could extend to the ends of the Earth.

[illegible]

Treasure

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Grow

1. Pick out one key verse that explains the heart of the passage. Ask yourself what verse, if removed, would make the passage hard to understand.
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 - Slowly think through each word of the verse.
 - Ask questions of the verse: Who is speaking? What is he or she trying to say? What truth is being revealed?
 - How would you write the verse in your own words?
 - Turn the verse into a prayer.
3. Record any observations or applications you gained from your meditation:

4. In what ways was the Incarnation necessary?

5. What steps can you take to “behold Christ” in a better and more consistent way?

Go

1. How would you explain God’s glory to a non-believer?

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever prepared the way for someone else? Share your story—the circumstances, how it made you feel, etc.

2. John the Baptist's role was to prepare the way of the Lord. What character qualities do you think John needed to fulfill this role?

3. What was John the Baptist's attitude towards Jesus? Look at verses 15 and 27 in particular.

4. Why do think John the Apostle included Old Testament references in his account?

5. How might you be more like John the Baptist today?

6. How can we participate in gospel ministry and make sure Jesus still takes center stage in that ministry?

Additional Reading

From *The Voice In The Wilderness*, a devotion from Ligonier Ministries¹

*“As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, ‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face ... the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’ John appeared ... proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (vv. 2–4). **Mark 1:1–8***

Interpreting the prophets correctly can be difficult because of the highly symbolic language they often use in proclaiming their oracles. Isaiah 40:1–5, for example, uses wilderness imagery, as well as a metaphorical picture of terrain being flattened, in order to tell the exiled people of Israel and Judah that God was going to bring about a new exodus, a new redemption. The Lord once came and called His people out of Egyptian slavery into the wilderness, and He was going to come again and redeem His people from the sin that led to their exile, arriving from His abode on Mount Sinai in the wilderness. Therefore, the people had to get ready. They had to prepare the way of the Lord, that is, they had to prepare their hearts for His coming.

Even though Isaiah uses metaphorical language to predict this redemption, we need not think that the language is wholly figurative. In fact, it is not. As we read in today’s passage, the prophet’s oracle was fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist. Mark quotes Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1, but he cites only Isaiah as the source of the quotation. The biblical writers, especially when quoting the prophets, often cite passages from two or more prophets but name only one of them, the prophet with the larger book.

The ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy did not occur in 538 BC, when the exiled Judahites began returning to the Promised Land, but nearly six hundred years later, during the first century AD. As we will see in the months ahead, the initial returnees were not faithful to God, so the hard conditions of exile persisted until He finally visited His people in the person of Jesus Christ. Through Isaiah, the Lord called the people to prepare themselves, but they could not do so. A mightier move of the Holy Spirit through John was needed to get the people ready for the Messiah. Indeed, the Spirit must always take the first step “that we may take out of the way those

¹ *The Voice in the Wilderness*. Ligonier Ministries. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 Mar. 2017.

sins which obstruct the kingdom of Christ, and thus may give access to his grace” (John Calvin).

Thanks be to God, He did take the initiative, preparing the way for Christ through John. The Lord is always faithful to His promise to save His elect. Calvin comments, “There are intricate and crooked windings in the world, but through such appalling difficulties the Lord makes a way for himself, and breaks through, by incredible means, to accomplish our salvation.”

As important as he was in God’s plan of salvation, John the Baptist was called not to exalt himself but to point to the Savior. That is our task today. As many have said, we are just “poor beggars telling other beggars where they can find bread.” Thus, we must continually point beyond ourselves to Christ, refusing to puff ourselves up but submitting wholly and eagerly to Him as the only Savior. In ourselves, we are nothing. Christ is everything.

Week Six John 1:29-34

*“As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John:
“What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?
What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold,
those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. What then did you go out
to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom
it is written,*

*‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way before you.’*

*Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one
greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of
heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the
kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. For
all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to
accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”*

Matthew 11:7-15

Proclaiming with Confidence

If the recent Academy Awards kerfuffle for Best Picture tells us anything about pronouncements, it's that the legitimacy of a declaration is only as good as the legitimacy of the source. When Faye Dunaway mistakenly proclaimed that *La La Land* had won the award for Best Picture, she did so because in 89 years of Academy Award presentations the name on the card is the winner. The boldness Ms. Dunaway demonstrated in pronouncing the winner was based on her trust in the source. Though it was later discovered that the card given to Ms. Dunaway and Mr. Beatty for Best Picture was actually the one for Best Actress (for Emma Stone in *La La Land*), Ms. Dunaway

assumed that her confidence was appropriately placed. It was quickly discovered that *Moonlight* had actually won, but not before drama and confusion occurred on stage. What we learn from this type of incident is that for our pronouncements to be true, it is critical that the basis of our information is true.

John the Baptist arrives at his meeting with Jesus in John 1:29 fresh off of a showdown with the priests and Levites, who were sent by the Pharisees to figure out what his ministry was all about. And with a flourish, he is going to reveal the answer in this encounter. What John states here is one of the boldest proclamations by man in the gospel, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” This statement is powerful for many reasons, but here are three things that jump out.

First, John was confident in his proclamation because he was called. Verse 33 tells us that John communed with God, “...**but he who sent me** to baptize with water **said to me...**”. John spent time in prayer (Luke 11:1), discerned God’s will, and proclaimed boldly about the nature of Jesus’ mission in light of God’s directive.

Second, John was confident because he had seen. Verse 34 tells us John saw and bore witness that Jesus was the Son of God. This verse refers to when John baptized Jesus and saw the Holy Spirit descend on the Son. John’s experience with the Lord refined his faith and gave him the assurance to acknowledge the purpose of Jesus’ arrival and ministry.

Third, John was confident in his proclamation because he knew his ministry was finite. Verse 30 points out John’s ministry as one that would not be everlasting, “After me comes a man who ranks before me...but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.” John was able to properly contextualize his calling as one that had purpose, but also one that would end so the ministry of the Messiah would begin.

[illegible]

Treasure

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 - How would you write the verse in your own words?
 - Turn the verse into a prayer.

3. In verse 33, John says that he didn't know Jesus, but Scripture teaches that John and Jesus were cousins. What do you think John meant?

4. What was the source of John's confidence in telling people about Jesus?

Go

1. What are some steps you can take to grow in humility this week?

2. In what ways can you "count others as more significant than yourself" (Philippians 2:3) in your workplace or in your home?

Discussion Questions

1. Share your story of baptism with the group.

2. This first chapter of John is full of comparisons. How and why does John the Baptist compare his baptism with Jesus' baptism?

3. What is the significance of John the Baptist calling Jesus the Lamb of God?

4. Jesus came to take away the sin of the world. What is a particular sin from your past that you're grateful Jesus has taken away?

5. What is a sin you'd like to confess and turn from today? How can your group pray for you?

6. John bore witness of Jesus. Who might you bear witness about Jesus to today?

Additional Reading

from *Gospel-Powered Humility* by William P. Farley¹

Humility and Pride Defined

Humility is one of the least understood spiritual fruits. It is not self-hatred or the lack of self-confidence. Humility and low self-image are not the same thing. Indeed, they are polar opposites. Increasing humility brings rest with self, with God, and with life's circumstances. It produces real lasting joy and healthy self-image. Humility is the ability to see spiritual reality, to see things as they are. *It is the capacity to see myself in God's light, in the context of his holiness and my sinfulness.* In other words, it is the ability to see self, and this world, through God's eyes. God empowers the humble person to increasingly see himself as he really is: "wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" (Revelation 3:17). The person growing in humility sees his gifts and faults, his strengths and weaknesses, with increasing clarity. Ironically, as we will see, this humility lays the sure foundation for real contentment and healthy self-image because the humble Christian also increasingly sees and *feels* God's great personal love. The truly humble believer has a low view of himself, but an increasingly high view of God and his fellow man.

Pride is the opposite. It is spiritual blindness. It is a delusional, inflated view of self. It is unreality on steroids. And the scary part is this: The thing to which we are most blind is our pride. A demonic Catch-22, pride causes us to chase our grievous, disabling sin – because its very nature is blindness, and the first thing to which it is blind is its own existence. Pride is a spiritual veil blinding us to the truth about ourselves and God. The proud person has a high view of self but a low view of God and his brother.

"There is no fault which we are more *unconscious* of in ourselves," wrote C.S. Lewis. "If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed."

Here is the great paradox: the proud man thinks he is humble but the humble man thinks he is proud. The humble man sees his arrogance. He sees it clearly, and as a result he aggressively pursues a life of humility, but he doesn't think of himself as humble. The proud man is completely unaware of his pride. Of all men he is most convinced that he is humble.

¹Farley, W.P. (2011). *Gospel-Powered Humility* (pg. 24-25). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company.



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