



The Gospel of John

“The Word Became Flesh”

John 1:6–13

September 22, 2013

Introduction

When we consider the life, miracles, and claims of Jesus Christ, these were things that arrested the attention of people and caused them to react. During His ministry there were several different responses to Christ.

Some were superficially drawn to Him. These were the ones who thought of Him as simply a good person or a prophet. But their commitment was fickle. They were the members of the crowd who one week would shout “Hosanna!” (Matt 21:9); and the next week “Crucify Him!” (John 19:5). Some were strongly attracted to Jesus and His ministry, but were unwilling to publicly acknowledge Him. Some others, like the Pharisees, were openly hostile to Him, falsely accusing Him of many things. Still others considered Jesus to be a madman, thinking Jesus to be demon possessed and insane. But in all of these responses, the common theme linking them together is unbelief. This is the sin that ultimately condemns all who reject Jesus Christ. John 3:18 states that “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

But in contrast to the unbelief of the lost, those whom the Father gave to Jesus (John 6:37) respond by fully believing His claims and accepting His teachings. These are the ones who will receive all the blessings of salvation: eternal life, forgiveness of sins, adoption as children of God, and a new life in Christ. John had firmly established the deity of Christ in the first five verses of his gospel. Now he turns to the only two possible responses to that reality: belief or unbelief. But before addressing the possibilities, John first identifies the one who testified to these things.

The Testimony of John the Baptist (vv. 6–8)

In verse five we noted that the Light (everything pertaining to truth, holiness, and the Lord) shines in the darkness (the world of falsehood,

sin, and evil). But the Light of the Word is not seen by mankind in a vacuum. It is only seen when one testifies or bears witness to the Light. As God the Father prepared to send His Son to the earth, He also prepared a forerunner — one who would testify of the Messiah to follow. The forerunner’s name was John the Baptist (cf. Matt 3:1; et. al.) We know this to be a different John than the author of this gospel because the writer never identifies himself by name.

The purpose of John’s witness was “that all through him might believe.” Of course, this was not the actual result since some refused to believe. We see an example of this in 1:35ff. John was an excellent witness and he gained the respect of the people. When it says that he was “sent from God” (v. 6), this confirms his role as a herald. The Old Testament concludes with the book of Malachi which includes a prophecy of an Elijah-like prophet who would come (Mal 3:1). Additionally, the events surrounding John’s conception and birth were miraculous, given his parents’ old age. He was also the first true prophet to appear in Israel in 400 years. John’s bold, confrontive style of preaching created quite a sensation. He preached a message of repentance, calling on people to turn away from their sins. But another part of his mission was to herald the arrival of the Messiah. He would proclaim:

“I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (Luke 3:16)

Many of the Jewish religious leaders were perplexed by John’s presence and message. But sadly, despite John’s insistence that the Messiah was greater than him, some remained fiercely loyal to him and failed to embrace the Messiah that he proclaimed. Paul even encountered some of these years later in the city of Ephesus (Acts 19:1–5). Despite John’s self-stated position as a mere herald, some of these John the Baptist loyalists persisted into the second century and were still around when John wrote his gospel. Therefore, he stressed John the Baptist’s inferiority to Christ.

John’s mission was not to exalt himself, but to be a witness about the Messiah, and to testify to the Light. He is the first of eight witnesses that appear in John’s gospel. The others are the Father (5:37), Jesus’ words (8:18) and works (5:35; 10:25), the Old Testament Scriptures (5:39), some of those who met Him (4:29), the disciples (15:27; 19:35;

21:24), and the Holy Spirit (15:26). The terms “witness” (*marturia* μαρτυρία) and “bear witness/testify” (*martureō* μαρτυρέω) are words related to fact, not opinion. People believe in Christ through the testimony of witnesses like John. They are the *agents* of belief, but Christ is the *object* of belief. Salvation then, is obtained through faith in God and what He has said (Rom 4:1–16). To counter any notion that John the Baptist should be exalted, the apostle wrote that he was not the Light, but came to bear witness to the Light. At this point we may be tempted to see a contradiction with Jesus’ statement in 5:35 where He says that John the Baptist “was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light.” But there are two different Greek terms that translate to the English word “light.” The term used in John 1 is *phōs* (φῶς), which refers to the essence of light. In 5:35, the term translated as “light” is *luchnos* (λύχνος), referring to a portable lamp. As such, Jesus *is* the Light; John merely reflected it.

Unbelievers: John’s Testimony is Rejected (vv. 9–11)

In verse 9, there are two possible ways to deal with the phrase “coming into the world.” It can refer either to the “true Light:”

“The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.” (John 1:9, NIV — also NASB, ESV, NET, HCSB)

or it refer to “every man:”

“That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.” (John 1:9, NKJV — also KJV)

This idea of giving “light to every man who comes into the world” is used as a proof text for the Arminian doctrine of prevenient grace, which says that God gives grace which enables depraved men to believe. But it does not guarantee such since it may be rejected. Prevenient grace is thus sufficient for salvation, but not efficacious (irresistible).

Several reasons suggest that “coming into the world” should be modified by “the true Light,” as in the NIV. First, the phrase “coming into the world” would be superfluous as a modifier for “every man.” What other kind of men are there? Second, in verse 10 the Light is in the world; thus it makes sense for verse 9 to speak of its entering the world. Third, throughout this gospel, the idea of “coming into the

world” or being sent into the world is repeatedly applied to Christ, not men (cf. John 3:19; 12:46).

But what does John mean by saying that the Light that comes into the world “gives light to every man?” First, the verb “gives light” may mean “to illuminate” (inwardly), i.e. “to give knowledge.” However, this cannot mean that all men have some universal knowledge of salvation since verse 10 says “the world did not recognize Him.” More likely, the verb “gives light” carries the primary meaning of “to shed light upon,” i.e. “to make visible” or “to bring to light.” John is speaking of the light of revelation that comes through the Son and reveals truth.

John the Baptist had to point out that the true Light graphically illustrates the world’s blindness, because only blind people cannot see light. Unbelievers are spiritually blind because “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor 4:4; cf. Isa 61:1–2; Luke 4:17–18). The unbelieving world’s blindness is inexcusable, because Jesus is the true Light. Through His coming into the world, He has shed light upon all of mankind. The tragic reality, however, is that sinners reject the “Light of the world.”

“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.”
(John 3:19–20)

People refuse to come to Jesus Christ because they love their sin and don’t want it exposed. Many are willfully blind to the truth of their condition.

The term “world” (v. 9) is another common term we will encounter in John’s gospel. The Greek word is *kosmos* (κόσμος) and can refer to the physical world, humanity in general, or most frequently, the evil system dominated by Satan. It is this third sense of *kosmos* that John had in mind when he said that the world did not know Christ. But despite its rejection of Him, the unbelieving world will one day be forced to acknowledge Jesus as Lord (Phil 2:9–11) and judge (John 5:22, 27).

As shocking and tragic as the world’s rejection of Christ is, there is an

even greater tragedy in Israel's rejection of Him. The English word "own" appears twice in verse 11, but with different genders in Greek. The first instance is neuter and refers to one's belongings or possessions. In this case, Jesus' own possession is the physical world, which was created by Him (v. 10). The second "own" is masculine in Greek and refers to Jesus' people — the Jews. Like many of their ancestors, most of the Jews in Jesus' day stiffened their necks and rejected Him, despite the clear testimony of the Old Testament Scriptures (John 5:39). Instead of repenting of their sins and accepting Him as their Messiah, they cried, "Crucify Him!...His blood shall be on us and on our children!" (Matt 27:23, 25).

This theme of rejection will be repeated throughout John's gospel.

Believers: John's Testimony is Believed (vv. 12–13)

But not all will reject the gospel. The word "but" in verse 12 is a small fulcrum that marks a dramatic shift. The world's hatred of God and rejection of Christ in no way overrules or frustrates God's plan. Those whom God chose for salvation before the foundation of the world will embrace Christ in faith (Eph 1:4; 2 Tim 1:9). John will go on to write in 6:37, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out."

It has been said that verse 11 would be an appropriate title for chapters 1–12 of this gospel: "But His own did not receive Him." Then verse 12, "Yet to all who received Him," aptly applies to chapters 13–21. In truth, national Israel for the most part rejected the Word when He came into the world. There were, however, a few who received Him — which is explained as those who believed in His name.

To believe in someone's name means to believe in the person, including what he stands for and represents. To believe in Jesus Christ is to place your trust and faith in Him and all that He represents. However, the word "believe" does not always denote saving faith (cf. John 2:23; 8:30–31; James 2:19). The context must decide what is meant in each case.

The children of God metaphor in verse 12 naturally leads to another way of describing those who receive the Word in verse 13. They are children born "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of

man, but of God.” These terms all describe procreation, the opposite of spiritual birth.

Though people cannot be saved until they receive and believe in Jesus Christ, salvation is nonetheless a sovereign work of God on the dead and blind sinner. John simply states that no one would come to believe in Jesus unless He gave them the right to become children of God. They are saved entirely “by grace...through faith; and that not of [themselves], it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph 2:8–9).

Conclusion

When we are confronted with the Word, we are faced with two options: belief or unbelief. There is not a third! The choice is clear: will you receive the light of Christ by believing in His name and becoming a child of God? Or will you remain in darkness by rejecting the truth? Believe in Christ today — He is the only way of salvation!

~AWB