

Grace Upon Grace

John 1:14-18

In this text we have come to the last section of John's Prologue to his Gospel (1:1-18). In it, he has used the philosophical concept of the "logos", the "word", which was familiar to both Hebrew and Greek thought. He takes the idea of "logos" and applies it to a person: One who is God; who created everything; who was a light shining into a dark world, and into dark hearts.

And finally – in this section, John describes a new, cosmic event in history – the God who has spoken throughout history speaks in a final, supreme way – "He has spoken to us by His Son (Heb. 1:1-3)."

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

Verse 14

The logos "**became**" – An action at a point of time; infinity entered time/space/history.

"**flesh**" – John uses the most common, direct Greek word to describe humanness.

Note: these simple words have become the center of the deepest theological divisions in church history (and today) over the nature of Christ's incarnation. Cults and heresies commonly either:

- Deny the full divinity of Christ over His humanity, or
- Deny the full humanity of Christ over His divinity.

The following are helpful quotes regarding an orthodox understanding of the incarnation:

"The incarnation means that the Son of God took human nature in its integrity into his person with the result that he is both divine and human, without any impairment of the fullness of either the divine or the human. He is God-man." (John Murray, *Collected Writings*, Vol. 2, p. 136)

"He had not ceased to be God; He was no less God than before; but He had begun to be man. He was not now God *minus* some elements of His deity, but God *plus* all that He had made His own by taking manhood to Himself ... not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh: but by taking of the manhood into God. Our minds cannot get beyond this..." (J I Packer, *Knowing God*, p.50)

These quotes are helpful in making a vital distinction: that what we have described here is not God-indwelted humanity, but incarnate deity – perfect God, perfect man; of one substance with the Father; one Christ, two distinct natures, never ceasing being God.

[Refer to the beginning section of the Nicene Creed]

Vs. 14, Continued:

“dwelt among us” – He ‘moved in,’ literally “pitched a tent.” He fully identified with humanity.

“we have seen his glory” – in the O.T. this was the Hebrew word “kabod,” or ‘weight,’ called ‘glory’.

Note: Jewish hearers would know the terms “tent, tabernacle” and “glory,” associating Jesus as the true, living Tabernacle of God, the place where His glory dwells.

What was that glory like?:

“full of grace” - of all the infinite divine attributes that could have described Christ, the first is grace.

“and truth” – His grace was always in perfect balance with God’s truthfulness: about sin, His Word, ourselves, the issues of life – everything. Jesus calls Himself truth incarnate (14:6).

So: grace is a person; truth is a person; both fully seen in Jesus Christ.

Verse 15

Here John the writer refers to John the Baptizer, in a brief parenthesis. The quote is from 1:30, where the Baptizer (the cousin of Jesus, 6 months older) states that though Jesus came after him chronologically, he was truly “before” him – emphasizing the priority and eternity of Jesus over himself.

Verse 16

“From his fullness we have all received” – referring back to the fullness of the Father in v. 14. The fullness of grace is described as flowing **from the Father, to the Son, and from the Son to us.**

“grace upon grace” – a most beautiful description of the flow of fresh grace that come from Christ – endless, continuous, inexhaustible, because the source is infinite, grace after grace after grace.

Note: the phrase literally reads, “grace instead of grace” – possibly the idea that one grace replaces another; that grace is dynamic – there is a different grace for different situations (ages, life situations, needs). He gives just the kind of grace we need, when we need it.

In verse 17 we see why Christ became man – the reason for the incarnation.

Verse 17

What we see is that the reason God became man is directly connected to **the atonement He would make for sin.** There is no Gospel without Christ becoming man to die for sin. Any so-called ‘gospel’ that talks of the incarnation **without** the atonement is a false gospel (major world religions, cults).

John states this by making a contrast:

“the Law was given through Moses” – and it did its work.

- Puts us face-to-face with Almighty God and His holiness

- Shows us our own sin, and that we are all guilty before the Law
- Shows us the impossibility of earning God's favor, and our absolute need for grace
- It was only a 'schoolmaster', a sign pointing forward to Christ (Gal. 3:23-24). The redemption and atonement of Jesus is the theme of the **entire Bible**, because the Law cannot forgive sin.

"grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" –

- We bring nothing to the table – our acceptance before the Father is by faith in Christ's atonement.
- The Law presents us a 'bill' – "Ready to pay up?" (we can't, being spiritually bankrupt). The grace/truth of Christ says, 'I paid that bill. All of it. You'll never be charged again. I paid with my blood – your sins are covered. I take your sins, and you receive my righteousness.'

The Law demands; grace gives – freely (a gift), extravagantly (grace upon grace).

Verse 18

"No one has ever seen God" – John quotes Jesus (from 6:46). But remember, Jesus brought the very glory of the Father to earth (v 14).

"God the One and only, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." -- "known" is from the Greek word 'to interpret, explain, exegete.' Jesus has exegeted, perfectly explained the Father. The only full, complete knowledge of God is found in Jesus Christ Himself, and His is fully authoritative and true. "He who has seen me has seen the Father (14:8,9)."

The Father has fully and finally spoken to us in His Son.

Also see II Corinthians 8:9; Galatians 4:4; Philippians 2:5-8; Colossians 1:15-17, 19; Hebrews 1:1-3.