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John 1:1 - 1:9



Gospel of John - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg explores John 1:1-9, delving into the concept of the Word and its connection to Jesus. He explains that the term "logos" had a rich history, including references to divine reason and wisdom in ancient philosophy. Gregg emphasizes that Jesus is the manifestation of God's mind and will, communicated to humanity through prophets and ultimately as the Son of God. He also highlights the importance of truth and the light that Jesus brings, and notes that people from all cultures are searching for understanding and enlightenment.

Transcript

Well, let's look at John chapter 1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the light that all through him might believe. He was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light. That was the true light, which gives light to every man who comes into the world.

He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

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. John bore witness of Him, and cried out, saying, This was He of whom I said, He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me. And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.

For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

And these verses then are considered to be a prologue to John's Gospel. The story begins to be told actually in some actual historical detail in the next verse. We're not tonight actually going to even look at the historical portion, but at what we could call in the prologue more like a theological interpretation of the life of Christ.

Because in the first 18 verses he doesn't really give any historical details, except of course the fact of the incarnation. He says the Word was made flesh, that is of course a historical event, but no detail of the life of Jesus is given. Rather, the theological significance of the life of Jesus is summarized in these 18 verses.

And then the specific events of His life begin to be told. And so there's some deep theology here. And we could say that this prologue treats the life of Christ as no other passage in the Gospels does.

Because the other Gospels, if we would say, well these are literary treatments of the life of Christ, what we would mean by that term, the life of Christ, would be the events of His mortal stay on earth. The things He did, historical events in His life. If I asked you to tell me about your life story, you would start with your youth and work through, you'd tell events of your life.

But really, the life of Christ is something that existed before there were any historical events about Him. In Him was life. In who? In the Word.

And when was He around? In the beginning. The life of Christ had no beginning. It is not simply the compilation of events of an earthly sojourn.

The life of Christ is the life of God, which has always existed and happened to tabernacle for a season on earth in the body of a human being named Jesus of Nazareth. That's what John is telling us. And so we have here a theological interpretation of the life of Christ.

Sure, John wants to tell us the details, the facts, at least some of them, about the events of His life that he, John, had the privilege of witnessing with his own eyes. But he wants us first to realize that the events of this man's life have a background that goes back to eternity. As it says in Micah chapter 5 and verse 2, it says, But you, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, though you be little among the villages of Judah, yet from you shall He come forth, who is to be the ruler, whose goings forth have been of old, even from everlasting.

It says of Jesus, who would be born in Bethlehem, that His actual origins are not in Bethlehem. His actual springing forth has come from eternity, says Micah chapter 5 and verse 2. And so John tells us about that. And he does so by using the expression the

logos, transliterated L-O-G-O-S.

The O in each case is the Greek letter omicron. And no one really knows if it's like a long O or a short O. So it's very popular to say logos. That could be a correct pronunciation, but a lot of Greek scholars think it's logos.

I tend to say logos, so it doesn't really matter. Just in case you've heard it pronounced otherwise. No one knows the real pronunciation because no one speaks ancient Greek anymore.

Even people in Greece don't speak Koine Greek, which the New Testament is written in. It's a dead language. So I'm going to use the word logos.

And this is the term that is here translated with our English expression, the word. Behind the English expression, the word, is the Greek term logos. And while John could have used some other expression for Jesus, since the Bible certainly has many of them.

He could have said in the beginning was the Son of God. In the beginning was the Lamb of God. After all, he uses that term later in the same chapter.

In the beginning was the second person of the Godhead. He could have used all kinds of expressions, but he chose for a purpose this term, the word. And John is the only writer in the New Testament who uses that expression for Jesus.

But he does so in two other of his works. He does so in 1 John 1. The opening words of which say, that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon at our hands have handled of the word, the logos of life. For the life was manifested and we have seen it and bear witness and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested unto us.

Now this is how John begins his first epistle. He talks about the word, the logos of life. Here in John chapter 1 he says, in him, that is in the word, was life.

And that life was the light of men, he says. So this idea that the word is a word of life. If you receive the word, you receive life.

Later in 1 John chapter 5, referring to Jesus as the Son, he says, this life that God has given us is in the Son. He that has the Son has life. He that has not the Son of God has not life.

Obviously he is not talking about biological life because people do have that kind of life. Even animals have that kind of life. And so that a person who does not have the Son has a certain kind of life, but not the kind that John is talking about.

The kind that is in Christ, the kind that is the life of Christ, which existed before he had an earthly shell to manifest himself in. That life of Christ is given to us. And that is what

John is going to say both in his gospel and in his epistle.

So we see that John uses the term *logos* here and also at the beginning of his first epistle. He also uses it in Revelation chapter 19. And the place where it appears there is in a vision, which I believe begins around verse 11, where he sees the heaven open and one on a white horse coming.

And there is a vivid description of how there is a sword coming out of his mouth and he is striking the nations with this sword that comes out of his mouth. And it says, and his name is called the Word of God. So although nobody except John uses this expression in the Bible for Jesus, John uses it frequently.

I would like to suggest that John picked up this concept of Jesus being the Word from the experience of having seen that vision in Revelation chapter 19. After all, it was a vision and a revelation from God to John. And when he says of that rider on the white horse, his name is called the Word of God, I think that that probably was the first time John ever had that concept enter his head.

Jesus, he is the Word of God. And when he would then later write the gospel of John and the epistles of John, which I am assuming to be the case, that he wrote them later, then he adopted that which he gained insight into from having that vision in Revelation. Oh, he is the Word of God, so I get it.

And by the way, when John used the term *Logos*, it was not in a vacuum philosophically, culturally or whatever. There had been much discussion as to why Jesus is called by John the *Logos*. Well, one reason could be of course that in that vision in Revelation, he saw that his name was called the Word.

But still, Revelation also called him the Lamb. Why does John pick the *Logos* as his preferred designation for Christ here? Any commentator will point out to you that the word *Logos*, in addition to being an ordinary Greek word for word, has a broader lexical meaning. The range of meaning of the word *Logos* can include the idea of an utterance, a message, of speech, of reason, of logic.

Logic, our English word, comes from the word *Logos*. And so it is kind of a broad range of meaning in this expression *Logos*. But it had a philosophical history at the time that John used it.

John was in Ephesus in his later years of life, as the Church Fathers tell us. And all scholars agree that he wrote, that is all those who believe that John wrote this book, believe that he wrote it from Ephesus in his old age. And it was not a Jewish culture.

And it was, of course, Greco-Roman in culture. Now in the Greco-Roman culture, this word *Logos* had come to be a very commonly used word by many of the philosophers, the first of whom who used it as a philosophical term was actually five centuries before

Christ. Heraclitus was sometimes thought to be the founder of Western philosophy.

He is the first known Greek writer to have tried to synthesize knowledge into a system, sort of a complete system of thought. And some would call him the father of Western philosophy. But it was Heraclitus that used the term Logos of the thought or the reason that is behind everything, that runs through all reality.

Now it's kind of an abstraction that you might think New Agers would appreciate more than Western Christians would, and that may be true. And I'm not saying John used it the way that Heraclitus did, but the point is that when John wrote to this Gentile audience of Christians, presumably Christians, although he does say at the end of his book he wrote it so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, so it's possible he was writing it evangelistically to non-Christians in the Greek world, Greco-Roman. They already had a set of ideas associated with this word Logos because their philosophers had been talking about it for a long time.

After Heraclitus, the Stoics had developed the idea. Further, they considered it to be the reason that pervades all of reality, that orders all of reality. The reason that there is order and that there is consistency in things is because of this principle of the Logos that I don't think they associated with any god or anything like that, but it's just sort of a non-personal force or intelligence or wisdom that pervaded everything.

But it began to take on a form that Christians might feel more comfortable with in the writings of a man named Philo. Philo was not a Christian. He was actually a Jew.

Philo lived in Alexandria, Egypt, contemporary of Christ and the apostles, though he never knew them and they probably never read him. But he became a very influential Jewish philosopher who took the Hebrew scriptures and tried to give them relevance to Greek philosophical thought. In Philo's writings, he used the term Logos 1,300 times in various ways, but primarily he spoke of the Logos as the divine reason.

He considered that humans are rational because God's divine reason, the Logos, is in us too. That God's rationality, God's reasonableness is his Logos and it's through that that he made everything. Philo actually said, through the Logos, all things were made.

It's very clear that John's words echo somewhat those of Philo. Although John may have never read Philo, he might have, but if he had read him or not, the ideas of Philo were influential in the Jewish philosophical community. Jews were throughout the whole world.

So it's very possible that John encountered them and knew that the people were talking about the Logos that way. John does say some of the same things about the Logos that Philo does. On the other hand, that doesn't mean that John is using the term the same way they did.

He may be finding it, he may be using the term a little bit like Paul exploited the

unknown God in Athens. Remember, in Athens, they had a shrine, they had many shrines to many gods, and one of them said to the unknown God. And Paul, when he preached to the Athenians, decided to springboard from that cultural reality in Athens, that they had a shrine to a God that they acknowledged that they did not know.

And he could say, I'm here to declare to you and let you know about the God that you are worshipping ignorantly. Now, whether Paul really believed they were worshipping Yahweh with that shrine, we don't know. But he did say, you claim not to know who this God is, and I happen to know one that you don't know.

So, I'm here to tell you about the unknown God. That is, he took something in their philosophical or religious culture, and saw a way to connect that to the message he wanted to give. It's possible that John, knowing very well how the Greeks thought of the Logos, realized that to the Christian mind, Jesus fills all those roles.

Jesus, before his birth on earth, was the divine reason, the divine wisdom. He was the one through whom all things were made, and so forth. That doesn't mean that John was equating the Logos with all those concepts, but rather saying, Christians have their own understanding of who that Logos would be.

If you want to describe the Logos in those terms, we know who he is. And one thing John does, is he personifies the Logos, which others did not do. He refers to the Logos as he, right from the very beginning.

Verse 2, he, who? The Logos. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, not it.

So, while the Greeks may have had some philosophical background for this Logos, at the very most, we could say John exploited that, and drew parallels to what they already appreciated as the means through which the universe was created. He said, you know, in our theology, Jesus fits into that slot. What you're looking for, and calling it the Logos, well, we know who he is, and we don't even mind calling him the Logos.

We don't even mind calling him the Word. There's a sense in which that might be a very appropriate way to speak of him. Because in the Hebrew scriptures, which were totally independent of Greek philosophy, the Word played a very important role also in creation.

Because in Genesis, it says, God said, let there be light, and there was light. God said, let there be a firmament, and there was. And let dry land appear, and it did.

In other words, God spoke, and through his speaking, things got done. Theologians refer to that as his creative fiat. It has nothing to do with the kind of car God drives.

A fiat is a command. And so, by God making the command, let it be, his authoritative fiat created everything. And that was him speaking.

We call that words when people speak. And it gets even verbally closer to John's idea when you get to Psalm 33. In Psalm 33, 6, it says, By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and the host of them by the breath of his mouth.

And three verses later, in Psalm 33, 9, it says, For he spoke, and it happened. He commanded, and it stood fast. So, really, Psalm 33 is just reminding us of what we already knew from Genesis, but wording it differently.

Because in Genesis, it says, God said. But in Psalm 33, it says, By the word of the Lord the heavens were made. Well, that's pretty much what John says here.

In the beginning was the word, and all things were made by him, by the word. So, John is no doubt synthesizing what he knew to be true from the Hebrew Old Testament, and connecting it insofar as it could be connected with Greek concepts of the word, and saying, you know, all of these concepts work well to describe who Jesus was in eternity. He was the mind of God, expressed.

He was the means by which God created all things. God spoke, and so his word was Christ. Now, I don't know if John would have made this connection if he had not had the revelation on the island of Patmos, and said, oh, he's the word of God.

And no doubt John, contemplative fellow that he was, probably gave that a lot of thought, and the Holy Spirit working with his, you know, revealing things to him, probably he came up with these ideas that the word, the role of the word in creation, is agreeable with the Old Testament scriptures, and also agreeable with Greek thought, although the Greeks don't personify the word. They don't identify the word as God. But Philo had come close to doing so by calling the word divine reason, not just reason, not just the pervasive reason of the universe, but the divine, God's reason.

So already before John, a Jewish philosopher in Alexandria was beginning to use the term logos in a very similar way to what John picked up and used, and that is that what was Jesus before he came to earth? Now, our theology, at least ever since the fourth century, has been more comfortable saying things like he was the son of God, the eternal son, begotten, not made, in eternity past. These are the words of the Nicene Creed, which was made in 325 A.D. That creed was written because there was a desire on the part of the church to synthesize into a simple statement some very mysterious things, which were being interpreted variously prior to that time by different Christians in different places. Before Nicaea, there were Christians who were what we would now call Trinitarian.

They believed in a trinity, very much like we do. But there were also Christians who had other views of things, and so the Nicene council gathered in order to try to find some agreement and to speak with one voice about the nature, especially of the son, prior to the incarnation and his relationship with God. They wanted to preserve the full deity of

Christ, rather than making him something lesser or created.

That position had been done by the Arians. A man named Arius was teaching that Jesus was created by God, that he was a God of sorts, but he was a creature of God, made by God, not really God himself. You may recognize that doctrine in that of the Jehovah's Witnesses today, and they make no bones about it, they agree, they are Arians.

Arians were considered after the council of Nicaea to be heretics. The Jehovah's Witnesses though would say that the Arians got a bad rap. They were really right, and the Nicene council was wrong.

So we still have the Arians with us today going to the kingdom hall, and they believe Jesus is not God. But obviously this passage here is going to give them trouble, and it did until they made their own translation of the Bible, and then they fixed it for themselves. They just changed the translation.

Just make the Bible say something it doesn't say, and then you can solve that naughty problem. Yet, even those who had believed that Jesus was God prior to Nicaea had never formulated into the systematic statement that came out of Nicaea that God exists in three persons. The three are one in substance and three in person, and Jesus is the second person, he is the eternal son of God.

And this expression is for the most part fine with me. The only problem I have is that the Bible nowhere says it. And it's always a little scary to me when we're affirming things that are mysterious and transcendent and invisible, and we don't have any scripture to say that it's so.

I don't know how we're going to get that information if the Bible doesn't tell us. If God doesn't say it, how are we going to figure it out? Now of course that Jesus is the son of God is stated in scripture, but in what sense is he the son of God? John did not say in the beginning was the son. He said in the beginning was the word.

And without meaning to imply anything specific about this observation, it's a simple fact that there's no place in the Bible speaking of Christ before his incarnation that refers to him as the son of God. Jesus begins to be spoken of as the son of God at his incarnation when he is born of Mary and God only as his father. John could have called him the son before that if that's how he thought of him.

The relationship of the father and the second person of the tree was not something that John was thinking of as father-son. Though throughout the Gospel of John there's a tremendous emphasis on the father-son relationship of Jesus and God. I mean certainly we have more of that emphasis in John than in any other book of the Bible.

Almost all the dialogue in the Gospel of John is Jesus talking about his father and his own sonship and how he and the father are that way, father and son. However, of course, all

of those are descriptions of Jesus in his earthly life. John here is talking about Jesus before his earthly life and he doesn't use the term son, he uses the term word, which is an observation.

I don't know, I'm not claiming to understand these mysteries, I'm just pointing out something that may not be pointed out to you by anyone else because no one ever pointed it out to me. I had to search it out myself, as with so many things. If you want to know something you sometimes have to study on your own because a lot of times you're not going to find it in the books, I don't know why.

It's there in the Bible that way, but it's not often observed. So, John at least is not overtly teaching anything about a father-son relationship between the first and second persons of the Trinity prior to the Incarnation. That relationship is the most frequently mentioned relationship after the Incarnation, but is never once mentioned prior to.

So, what is it about Jesus that John is trying to get across about his pre-incarnate relationship with the father? Certainly he starts out with a statement that's an enigma, a paradox. He says, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Now, if there's anyone who has never found that problematic, I want to shake your hand.

You're a better man than I am, or woman, because I don't know how anyone could read a statement like that and never have found it problematic. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. Well, was He God, or was He with God? Can you have it both ways? Apparently you can.

How so? Well, John never tells us exactly how so. In fact, no place in the Bible does. And it's the lack of information about that that pesters the minds of inquisitive theologians so that they can't rest until they sit down and they answer it for themselves, out of their own imaginations.

And so you can get systematic theologies that will explain all of that for you, but none of it's in the Bible. They just want to know, and they're not happy to have any mysteries that are unsolved. They're not content to let God know, and let God let us know if He wants us to know.

I cannot tell you how Jesus was God and with God at the same time, but both are affirmed, and therefore both are true. A caller on the radio not long ago was asking me about this, and I was trying to... I was saying sort of the same thing as, I don't know, I don't understand how these statements are both true, they are, but I can kind of imagine ways in which they might be. But see, I'm no better than the theologians if I put forward something that comes from my imagination.

That's what they do too. But it doesn't hurt to put out some imaginary scenarios for

consideration. You don't have to follow them.

They don't have any authority. But I can think of my own words, by way of analogy, and my own thoughts. My words are my thoughts and my opinions and so forth in expression.

My will is being expressed verbally in my words. Now, in a sense, my words are me. They're not someone else.

They come from my brain. They are my opinions. What is it that makes me me, except the distinctive opinions and thoughts and so forth that I have, different than anyone else has? That's what makes me a separate person.

My thoughts and my expressed thoughts are me. But once you've spoken them, once they've proceeded forth from me, they have an ongoing existence of their own. And if you don't know that's true, try to take them back sometime.

Try to get them all back. Once you've said something and you have regrets about it, try to make people not have heard it. Try to stop the rumors.

Once you've spoken it, it exists on its own. But it's you. It has its own existence in one sense.

But it's never anything other than you. It's not anyone else. And this may not be a helpful illustration at all.

I find illustrations sometimes helpful to me, but they may not help anybody else. But the Bible says that Jesus proceeded from the Father, as words proceed from the mouth of God. Jesus is God's mind and will and personhood expressed.

But He is that expression in the flesh. What this is saying is that expression has existed even before He was made flesh. There's a certain chronological structure to this prologue, I believe.

It starts out with creation. Eventually it gets to the point of the incarnation. But between the creation, which was 6,000 years ago or so, and the incarnation, which was only 2,000 years ago, there's 4,000 years of what was going on with the Word in those days.

Well, the Word was the light that was enlightening everyone who comes into the world. The Word was in the world, but people didn't recognize it. He even came to His own people, and they didn't recognize it.

How did the Word come to God's people, the Jews? Through the prophets. God expressed His mind. God expressed His opinion.

God expressed His will. God communicated. He always has communicated.

This is one reason why I think it's so strange that there's certain people whose theology say, well, you know, the gift of prophecy and God speaking to people, that was good up until the apostolic times, because we didn't have the New Testament. Now we have the New Testament. God doesn't do that anymore.

I think, well, how does He control Himself? He's done nothing but communicate through His entire history, if we could speak of His history. I mean, at least that part of His existence that has corresponded with human history. He's created through speaking, and then He spoke to everybody that He was close to, Adam.

He even spoke to Cain. He spoke to Noah and Enoch and those people, and then to the prophets. The Word was in the world.

The world wasn't listening for the most part. The world didn't recognize Him. Even when He came to His own, through the prophets.

They killed the prophets. They didn't recognize Him. But eventually the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

And the word dwelt there, in verse 14, is the word tabernacled. And that is perhaps one of the most helpful ways for me to understand the relationship of Jesus to the Father. John says, okay, the Word was God, and the Word tabernacled with us, and we beheld His glory.

Now that wording is a deliberate echo of the Old Testament tabernacle and the glory, the Shekinah glory, that was seen there. God in a glorious pillar of fire at night and pillar of cloud in the daytime, that was His Shekinah glory, dwelt in the tabernacle. God had Moses build the tabernacle just so He could.

God said, I want to dwell with the people of Israel. Build me this house and I will dwell among you. And so the tabernacle became the place, the house of God on earth.

The place where God manifested Himself and dwelt among men. Now God didn't only live there. He lived everywhere in the universe.

But He manifested Himself there. It may be helpful to point out that there are different ways in which the Bible speaks about God's presence. For example, in one of the Psalms it says, Whither shall I go to escape from your presence? If I ascend into heaven, you are there.

If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and fly to the outermost parts of the sea, even there. You are there.

Your hand will guide me there. I can't escape you. There's no place to hide from you.

You're everywhere. That's the doctrine of the universal presence of God. He fills all

things, the Bible says.

He is everywhere. You can't go anywhere to get away from where He is. But there's another aspect which we could best call the manifest presence of God.

God is everywhere, but He's not manifested everywhere. He is manifested at certain times and places, especially in the Old Testament. Sometimes He would manifest in what we call a Theophany, appearing actually as a human form, or a non-human visible form, like a fire in a bush, or a pillar of cloud.

These are called Theophanies. The Greek term Theophany means appearance of God. In a Theophany, God's manifest presence was seen.

When Moses built the tabernacle and dedicated it, the glory of the Lord filled the place so tangibly, so palpably, it says the priests could not even enter there. They couldn't stand to minister because the glory of the Lord filled the place so much. There was the manifest presence of God.

God wasn't only there, He was everywhere too, but that's where He was manifesting Himself, in the tabernacle. People anywhere in the world could have cried out to God, and He would have been there within earshot. But, if you really wanted to appear before God formally, and really enter into His presence, you came to the place that He had chosen to put His name there.

The place that He had chosen to inhabit among men. The place where He manifested His glory. That was in the tabernacle.

Now that reality was in the Jewish mind and in John's mind. And he said of the Word, the Word tabernacled among us, and we beheld His glory. The manifest presence of God was seen in Christ, perhaps not only analogous to the way the cloud was seen in the tabernacle, but maybe even the way that a theophany was a manifestation of the presence of God.

When He wrestled with Jacob, or when He appeared to Abraham, or when He was in the fiery furnace with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Or appeared to Joshua as the captain of the Lord of hosts. These are all believed to be instances of God appearing in one place.

But when God appeared in that one place at that one time, that didn't mean He stopped being everywhere else. He was everywhere else. But He was manifest here.

His universal presence is one thing. His manifest presence is something else. I sometimes like to make homey illustrations that help me.

I'm almost embarrassed of them because, although they may be helpful, they're a little

bit childish sometimes. But I sometimes think in terms of a fishbowl with some goldfish in it in a home. And the fish can't see outside the bowl.

They look at the walls, but they just see a reflection of themselves. They don't know what's beyond their world. But every once in a while, usually every day, a little bit of edible stuff appears on the surface of their world.

And they go up there and eat it and say, wow. They give it very little thought. Of course, fish have very little contemplative powers and all that good.

But if they were able to think more, they might say, I wonder where this food is coming from. And one might say, well, I really suspect there's a whole big world out there outside this fishbowl. And there's an actual owner who's actually feeding us on a daily basis.

And the other one says, nah, I can't see that. I think it's just natural. I think it just appears.

I think these things just evolve there on the surface. And then one day, the owner decides to get up close and personal. And he sticks his finger in the tank.

And he's holding a little worm and he feeds the fish by hand. And they say, see that? That was an intrusion from some other world. I think that was our owner.

And he'd be right. That was. But that wasn't the whole owner.

That was just the fingers. That was just a little part of the owner intruding into their visible world. Jesus said he was casting out demons by the finger of God.

It's like God was sticking his little finger into our world so he could manifest himself there. And Jesus, who was that finger, so to speak, he said to his disciples, if you've seen me, you've seen the Father. But if you've heard, but the Father's greater than I am.

Well, how so? How can those two things be true? Well, that is his finger. That is him manifesting himself. That's not someone else.

It's him. But it certainly isn't all there is to him. There's more where that came from.

And some of you have heard these illustrations before. But because John chapter 1 is the most difficult, it raises some of those difficult questions about the Godhead and about Jesus' relation with the Father. I take the liberty to share them.

We usually think that the Godhead is a Father and a Son and the Holy Spirit like a committee and one of them came down, the other stayed in heaven. And there certainly is language in the Bible that would encourage that picture. And maybe that's an accurate picture.

That the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit were sitting around in heaven making a plan and the Father said, why don't you go? And Jesus said, okay, I'll do it. And so Jesus leaves heaven and comes down here, the second person in the Trinity. The other two are still in heaven.

Paul didn't seem to see it quite that way. He said in Colossians 2.9, in speaking about Jesus incarnate, he says, in him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Not one third, but all the fullness of who God is dwelt bodily in Jesus.

He was not part of God, he was all of God. And yet, he was an awfully small manifestation of all of God. God is a spirit and we have a hard time picturing spirit because spirit is ethereal.

We think of it more like air or like liquid or something like that. Not like individual solid bodies. When we think of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit being three persons, although we aren't really saying that they're physical, we can hardly not import to our mind images of three guys sitting around in a conference room or something.

Sitting around as three individuals talking to each other like individual people. But if God is spirit, maybe they're not so much well pictured as individual people, as maybe images of liquid would do. After all, that's the kind of imagery the Bible more often uses of spirit.

Spirits likened to living water, oil, liquid stuff. What if we were to, just for the sake of being risqué, get a picture like this. You take three substances.

In our illustration, these represent actual living spirit persons. But take three substances we're familiar with. Lemon, water, and honey.

Lemon juice and water and honey. You put them together and you have one thing. You don't have three things.

You have one thing. Each one is distinct and each adds its own bit to the character of what's made. But there's not three things anymore.

There's one thing. The three, lemon juice is not honey and is not water, but it contributes to the concoction, something that would not be there if it wasn't there. But they're all mixed together.

I always wonder why Jesus in the upper room in John 14, when the disciples said, show us the Father and that will suffice us. He said, have I been so long time with you, Philip, and you don't know me? Don't you know that if you've seen me, you've seen the Father? Then he went on like this. He says, don't you know that I'm in the Father and the Father is in me? I've read that all my life and as a child I thought, that does not compute.

I could say that he's in the Father, but how could the Father then be in him? I was

thinking of the canisters on my mom's kitchen cabinet and you could put them inside of each other, but not really inside of each other. The small ones went inside the bigger ones, but you couldn't put the bigger ones inside the small ones. One thing could be in the other, but the other thing couldn't be in that at the same time.

I was thinking spatial relationships. When I think of something like lemonade, you put the lemon in the water and the sugar together and the lemon is in the water and the water is in the lemon and the sugar is in the water and the water is in the sugar. I mean, it's all mixed together.

Now, and the three ingredients actually make a distinctive thing. And I don't know if that might be a more accurate way to think, because then we could have this picture. If you picture a punch bowl full of lemonade and somebody wants to know what that lemonade tastes like, you can take a ladle and put it into a cup and take that cup to somebody and say, if you've tasted this, you've tasted that whole punch bowl.

If you've seen this, you've seen that. It's exactly the same. It's just a small sampling in a small container.

But the punch bowl is much bigger than this. It's a true sample, but it's a limited sample. Limited in time and space to a smaller container.

And I wonder if God is like that. The Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, they're all, of course, Spirit in each other. It's all very mysterious and I ask more questions than I can give answers about that, because I don't profess to understand it, so don't take my ideas and run with them and say, well, that must be the way it is.

I'm just trying to stir up your pure minds to contemplate these things afresh. But I would say, if we had that kind of an image, then I could say the Word was one of the ingredients in the Godhead and yet was so intermixed with the Godhead and one with it that, I mean, you know, Jesus said He and the Father were separate, but the Bible says He is the Father. Remember Isaiah 9-6? Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor of the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father.

The Prince of Peace, Jesus, is the Everlasting Father? Well, He is and He isn't. John, by saying the Word tabernacled with us, is trying to give us the impression that it's a lot like when God tabernacled with Israel. They saw His glory.

They saw a sample of God that was made visible and came into their world in tangible ways so they could say, oh, there He is. But He wasn't just there. There was a lot more where that came from.

And when the same God manifests Himself in a human nature, in a human being, Jesus could say, I'm Him, but He's more than me. The Father is greater than I, but the Father is

me too. And so John could say the Word was God, and in a sense, the Word could be distinguished from God as well.

In one sense, He was, and in another sense, He was not. Now you might say, you haven't helped at all. I never promised to.

What I find is we have to either allow the mystery to remain unsolved, or come up with some tentative ways of trying to make comparisons to something we do know about, or else change the Bible like the Jehovah's Witnesses do. The last option is not acceptable. And if one wishes to just remain entirely mysterious about it and not have any analogies, that's fine with me.

That might be the wisest course of all. The only problem is when we can think of no analogies, it makes it hard for us to believe that these words can make sense at all because we can think of nothing analogous to it. That's why my mind plays these games with itself.

They're serious games. But the point is that when Jesus came to earth, the one who came to earth is the one who was none other than that, at least the true sample, the Godhead. My words are part of who I am.

There's more to me than just my words, but they certainly are the true sample of who I am. And that Word of God existed and was active before he came to earth and before he tabernacled among men. In fact, he was in the beginning with God, it says in verse 2. And all things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that was made.

He is not one of the things made, in other words. It says there is nothing that was made that wasn't made through him. Now it's also important to note that this does not say Jesus is the creator.

It says things were created through him. He was the agent of creation. Jesus, I don't think, ever would have said, I am the creator.

I think he would always have said, my father was the creator. But he was the agent his father used for the creation by speaking, by using, by uttering his words, God created everything. And I think that that's consistent not only with this statement, but with every relevant statement in the scripture on the subject.

For example, if you look at Colossians chapter 1, a certain framing of this mysterious idea from another apostle, not John, but Paul in this case. It says of Jesus in Colossians chapter 1, speaking of Jesus in verse 15, he says he is the image of the invisible God. Now that in itself suggests that God, apart from the manifestation of himself in Christ, is invisible, but Christ has become the visible manifestation of him.

He is the image of the invisible God. The firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created.

Now again, the Jehovah's Witness Bible says, by him all other things were created. Because they want him to be a created thing too. So they add the word other, though it doesn't exist in the Greek.

They just add it for convenience. So, for by him all things were created, which eliminates the possibility that he was one of the created things. All that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers, all things were created through him and for him.

Through Christ, through the word. That's how God created things. And so John begins by speaking of the activity of the word as far back as the creation time.

And then he says in verse 4, In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. Now, God from the very beginning was speaking to the creation.

To Adam, to Eve, to Cain, to Abel. We don't have any record of God speaking to Abel, but we are told by Jesus in Luke chapter 10 that Abel was a prophet. Prophets got words from God, so Abel got words from God.

Cain we know heard from God because we have a conversation recorded in Genesis 4. So these early humans, right from the beginning, God's word was coming to them. God was speaking to them. He was communicating with them and giving them light.

The reason Cain could be blamed for bringing the wrong sacrifice is because he had light and he rejected light. He didn't have as much light as we have. He didn't have the whole Bible.

He didn't know about Jesus, but he had some light because God had spoken to him. And the word is light. In Psalm 119, verse 130, it says, The entrance of your word gives light.

And he says, In him was life, and that life was the light of men. So this is a living word. This word was a living being, a spirit, a living spirit, and he gave light.

Right from the very beginning, after creation, he continued to give light. And it says, The light shines in darkness. The darkness did not comprehend it.

I think we are to understand this to mean that although darkness came to challenge the light in the fall, yet it couldn't extinguish the light. The word comprehend, we think of it meaning understand, and this Greek word can mean that, but most commentators agree that the other meaning of this Greek word is better, which means overcome. The darkness could not overcome it.

This is actually before the birth of Christ, I believe. It says, The light shines in the darkness, and darkness did not overcome it or comprehend it. Now verses 6 through 8 are a parenthesis.

They kind of interrupt the subject matter. And he does this twice in the prologue. He interrupts himself twice to say something about John the Baptist, not the author, John the Baptist, who is a different John.

Here in verse 6 through 8, he says, There was a man sent from God whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the light, that through him all might believe. He was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light.

Now the other interruption is the parenthesis in verse 15, which is also about John the Baptist. John bore witness of him, and cried out, saying, This was he of whom I said, He who comes after me is preferred before me, for he was before me. Now there's twice, while talking about the logos and talking about the light and all that, John takes a parenthesis out to say something about John the Baptist.

And in both cases, they are things he is saying to basically diminish what might be someone's maybe too high a view of John the Baptist. He says, Now he wasn't that light, in case you were thinking he was. John wasn't that light.

He was only come to bear witness of the light. That's the first parenthesis. The second parenthesis has the same effect.

He says, John came saying, This other one is greater than I am. He was before me. He's preferred before me.

Both of these statements about John here tend to be, maybe seeming to be wanting to address a readership that could have been giving too much place to John the Baptist. And there could easily have been, in some sectors of the church, those who were enamored with John the Baptist. Perhaps because he was more of an ascetic.

There's always been Christians who have gravitated more toward an ascetic lifestyle, a hermit lifestyle. And that being so, maybe John was more their model man. And maybe he's the better light.

And the author has to maybe correct that by saying, No, there was this guy, John, and he was important, but not as important as someone might think. He was not the light. And even the last statement of John the Baptist in this gospel, later on in chapter 3, is John saying of Jesus, He must increase and I must decrease.

The emphasis of this gospel, when it talks about John the Baptist, is he's not the last word. He's not the ultimate. He played an important role in bearing testimony to the light, but don't mistake him for the light.

And John was writing to people in Ephesus, and there could very well have been a John the Baptist cult. You know, when Paul came to Ephesus, in Acts chapter 19, he met 12 disciples. And there was something different about them.

He says, Have you guys received the Holy Spirit since you believed? And they said, We've never even heard there was a Holy Spirit. And Paul said, What? Into what then were you baptized? And they said, John's baptism. John the Baptist's baptism.

Where'd they hear about that? They're over in Turkey. John never went there. But Apollos did.

Apollos, in the previous chapter of Acts, in Acts chapter 18, had gone to Ephesus knowing only the baptism of John. Priscilla and Aquila caught up with him and corrected him, and he got his doctrine right, but not before he'd apparently made some converts. Paul caught some of them and got them straightened out, but maybe there were others that Paul didn't get to, and maybe there was a John the Baptist cult there in Ephesus, because that's where John the writer lived and where his audience presumably was.

It's possible that alongside the church in Ephesus there was this group of people who were just all about John the Baptist. And so while talking about the importance of Jesus as the light to God, John, like the other Gospels, cannot avoid mentioning John the Baptist. He's too important to leave out.

But he mentions him in these parenthetical statements where they are, in their content, putting John in his proper place below Jesus. He's not the light. He only is a witness to the light, an important one, but that's not the same thing as being the light.

And then he quotes him in verse 15, John saying, you know, the one who's coming after me is preferred before me. I'm lower than him. He was before me.

So it's kind of interesting in the structure of this prologue, in the first 18 verses, that John the writer interrupts himself twice to make comments about John the Baptist. I think those comments can be said to be out of chronological sequence. I don't think that by the time we've gotten to John chapter 1, verse 6, where he mentions there was a man named John, that the author has now jumped forward in time all the way to the time of John the Baptist.

I think that he's, as he's talking about these philosophical, deeper theological things, he feels the need to say something about John to make sure that people realize he's not talking about John when he says the word and the light and the life. I'm not talking about John. There was this guy named John, but that's not who I'm talking about here.

So it's kind of interesting. If you read the whole thing without those two sections, if you read the whole flow without verses 6 through 8, which is one parenthesis, and without verse 15, which is the second parenthesis, the whole thing reads very smoothly, and you

can see that these are kind of stuck in unnaturally. So we have this phenomenon of these two parentheses in the prologue, about which we'll say no more now, but we'll continue on in verse 9, because before that parenthesis, in verse 5 he said, the light shines in darkness, and darkness could not comprehend it.

In verse 9, jumping past the parenthesis, that was the true light. Back on subject now. That light that could not be overcome by darkness, that was the true light that gives light to every man who comes into the world.

Again, the entrance of God's word gives light. It says in Psalm 119, verse 130. He started out talking about Jesus as the Logos, the word.

God's communication, God's expression of himself to us in a human form. But even before he was in a human form, God was already expressing himself. Even before there was any human there to hear him express himself, he's expressing himself to the Christian.

Let there be light. Let there be dry land. Let this be.

He's a communicative God. He likes to talk. And his word has always been a part of him.

His word has always been an important function of himself. And that function was coming to men even before he came in a human form. He came in through the prophets.

He came through the law. He came even to everyone who comes into the world, verse 9 says. As a bit of some kind of enlightenment.

He is the light that enlightens every man that comes into the world. Now, it sounds like he is saying that everyone, whoever comes into the world has some light. Some light from God.

And that light they have is this guy he's talking about as the word. Who we know as Jesus because he became incarnate in Jesus. But if this is what he's saying, then he's saying that even those who've never heard the gospel have some light.

God has not left himself without a witness. That's what Paul actually said to the people of Lystra, pagans. Paul was the first monotheist to get to them.

And he was preaching about this God they'd never heard of because they believed in many gods. In fact, they wanted to burn, they wanted to sacrifice a cow to him and to Barnabas because they thought they were Hermes and Zeus. I mean, these people were superstitious in the extreme.

And when Paul is preaching, he says, No, we're here to tell you about the real God. The real God, you don't know about him. But he said, but he has not left himself without a witness.

Even before we got here to tell you about him. You have not been without a witness to his existence because he's given us fruitful seasons and good crops and so forth. He's saying, you have no doubt attributed your fruitful seasons to your fertility gods.

But this was not your fertility gods giving you these crops. This was the true God who I'm here to preach to you about. And he did that to give you a witness of himself, of his existence.

You've just misinterpreted it and given the credit to other gods. But he has been speaking to you through his faithfulness to you, through his feeding you, through his giving you the seasons that keep you alive. That's been God speaking.

That's his word coming to you. He's witnessing to you about himself. See, Paul said that was true of the people of Lystra before he even got there with the gospel.

And so there is a sense in which apparently God's word comes in many forms in order to give some form of light to everyone who comes into the world. When Paul was in Athens, another place that had never heard of the real God before, and we talked about the unknown God. He says, this is the God that I'm here to tell you about.

He said in times past, because of your ignorance, God allowed you to be ignorant and he winked at it. But now he's commanding you to repent because you have more light now. But he did say you already had some reason to know something about him because your own poets have spoken about him.

Your own poets have said we are all his offspring. And if we are his offspring, Paul says, then he can't be made of stone or wood because we're not. So, in other words, you already in your own culture, through your own philosophers, who were benighted souls, no doubt, in many respects, were somewhat enlightened.

They knew there was a God there, that we're all his offspring. Well, that's true, Paul says. That's light.

That's truth. Even through your own pagan philosophers, there's a sense in which God was giving you a little bit of light. Now, what John sounds like he's saying, and I don't want to get too much into it more than he's saying, but I'm just taking it at face value.

It sounds like he's saying everyone who comes into the world has some light. It's a very dim light. Some of us are very fortunate.

We have the whole Bible, and we have the church, and we have Christian history. We have such a platform from which to understand things. We're really advantaged.

But even those who don't have any of that, they have some light. They can know in their conscience. They can know by observing the heavens.

The heavens declare the glory of God. And the firmament shows forth its handiwork. It says in Psalm 19 that day and today utter speech, and night and tonight show forth knowledge of God.

It says there's no language and no people where their voice is not heard, it says in Psalm 19. There's never been a culture anywhere that didn't hear the voice glorifying God from the heavens. That's the Word.

The Word is in the world, but people are not paying attention to it. The world did not know it. God has been speaking, and He is the true light.

What He's saying seems to be a response to whatever light you have is a response to Christ, because that light is Him. He is that true light that enlightens everyone. Which really changes the way we have to think about some of the more noble pagans.

I mean, everyone's a sinner. Everyone is condemned. Everyone deserves to die because the wage of sin is death, but so do we.

The reason we don't expect to be condemned is because of the mercy of God, because we've responded to the light we had. And we've had a lot more light than most. But if our response of faith to the light we have is what God credited for righteousness, and Abraham who had less light than we do, he believed in God, and it was credited to him for righteousness.

He didn't even know the name Jesus. He probably didn't even know about the atoning work of Christ or the resurrection, for crying out loud. Even the disciples didn't know about that until it happened.

The Jews in the Old Testament who believed and were saved didn't know the gospel like we do. They had some light, much less than we do, but they believed what they had, and God credited them for righteousness. What if there's a pagan who's got much less light even than Abraham ever had? They don't know nothing in terms of divine revelation, but the heavens are declaring the glory of God, and they're listening.

They're saying, you know, there is someone up there, and I want to believe in that someone up there. Now that person is greatly disadvantaged if he doesn't know who that God is. If no missionary reaches him to tell him about Jesus, there's a huge disadvantage on his part.

But is it possible God could credit that to him for righteousness? Because that light he's responding to is the word, is Christ, is the same God who made himself manifest in flesh and tabernacle among us in another time in history, in another place on the world? But that's the same light that enlightens everyone, and a response to that light, does God count that perhaps to be a response to Christ? The Christ they don't know by name, just like Abraham didn't know him by name? I'm raising the questions because obviously I

think it's possible the answers could be yes, but I don't want to be too dogmatic because John doesn't come out and say it that way. But I think he allows us to consider that possibility. So when people say, what's God going to do about those people who never heard the gospel? Not sure, but I'm pretty sure they have some light.

And it's probable that if they respond faithfully to what little light they have, to whom he that is faithful in what is little, might be given much. You never know. Cornelius didn't know about Christ, but he knew something about the Jewish God, and he was doing good deeds and so forth, and an angel appeared to him and showed him where to hear the gospel from Peter.

But look at John chapter 3 real quickly, and we'll be done here. In John chapter 3 it says in verse 19, This is the condemnation of the world, that light has come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. Now this is why the world is condemned.

Not because they didn't have any light, but because they did have light. People aren't condemned because the light never came to them. People are condemned because the light did come to them, and they hated it.

At least some of them did. It says in verse 20, For everyone practicing evil hates the light, and does not come to light, lest his deeds be exposed. But look, but he who does the truth comes to the light.

So the light comes to the world and meets with two different responses from different kinds of people. Some people hate the light. They want to snuff out the light.

They want to suppress the truth and unrighteousness like Paul said. And God's wrath is burning against those people who want to suppress the truth. But there's others who are of the truth.

They're honest folks. They're looking for truth. They want the truth.

They come to the light. They're looking for more light, not trying to hide from it. Believe it or not, there are people in other cultures who really want to know the truth.

At least that's my understanding of their behavior. I think it's a fair interpretation of what they do. They're seeking God.

That's why there are other religions. These other religions are not true. And they can't save them.

But there's a reason those exist. Because someone out there who didn't know the truth was trying to find the truth somehow. And came up with something as an alternative.

Not because they wanted to deceive themselves, but because they wanted to know. And

they were guessing, perhaps, poorly. But we shouldn't see the world religions as a sign of the corruption of the world as much, or the evil of the world, as the sign that people are searching for God.

Many people are searching for God in all the wrong places. But there is some light that God has given them. And it's not surprising when you look at all the world religions, although they don't have what saves, they have some of the same light that Christianity does.

I mean, some of the same ethics and so forth are there. Even if the religions are very different from each other in many important respects, there's still some points of overlap where we have to say, you know, they had a little light there. And that light is this light, the true light that lightens every man that comes into the world.

And who is apparently Jesus. So, again, we're getting a theological treatment here of the life of Christ. We're not getting a historical treatment yet.

That comes up after the prologue is over. But there's some deep stuff here. Stuff that is going to, you know, warrant probably a lifetime of contemplation.

And even then, at the end, you'll probably say, I might be getting a little bit of it, I'm not sure, you know. At least that's my experience. I've been contemplating for over 50 years.

And I think I can say, I think I might be getting sort of a, there's a little crack in the door with a little light shining through. I think I might be getting a hint here. But I'm not sure I ever will see, plainly, until I go to see the Lord.

But John, I think, revels in giving the more mystical kind of aspects that the other gospels don't bother to give. The other gospels don't interpret the information as much as John does. We're not finished, we're halfway through the prologue.

So we'll take the other half next time.