



CHARLES R. SWINDOLL

SWINDOLL'S  
LIVING  
INSIGHTS

NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

For more than sixty years I have loved the Bible. It was that love for the Scriptures, mixed with a clear call into the gospel ministry during my tour of duty in the Marine Corps, that resulted in my going to Dallas Theological Seminary to prepare for a lifetime of ministry. During those four great years I had the privilege of studying under outstanding men of God, who also loved God's Word. They not only held the inerrant Word of God in high esteem, they taught it carefully, preached it passionately, and modeled it consistently. A week never passes without my giving thanks to God for the grand heritage that has been mine to claim! I am forever indebted to those fine theologians and mentors, who cultivated in me a strong commitment to the understanding, exposition, and application of God's truth.

For more than fifty years I have been engaged in doing just that—and *how I love it!* I confess without hesitation that I am addicted to the examination and the proclamation of the Scriptures. Because of this, books have played a major role in my life for as long as I have been in ministry—especially those volumes that explain the truths and enhance my understanding of what God has written. Through these many years I have collected a large personal library, which has proven invaluable as I have sought to remain a faithful student of the Bible. To the end of my days, my major goal in life is to communicate the Word with accuracy, insight, clarity, and practicality. Without informative and reliable books to turn to, I would have “run dry” decades ago.

Among my favorite and most well-worn volumes are those that have enabled me to get a better grasp of the biblical text. Like most expositors, I am forever searching for literary tools that I can use to hone my gifts and sharpen my skills. For me, that means finding resources that make the complicated simple and easy to understand, that offer insightful comments and word pictures that enable me to see the relevance of sacred truth in light of my twenty-first-century world, and that drive those truths home to my heart in ways I do not easily forget. When I come across such books, they wind up in my hands as I devour them and then place them in my library for further reference . . . and, believe me, I often return to them. What a relief it is to have these resources to turn to when I lack fresh insight, or when I need just the right story or illustration, or when I get stuck in the tangled text and cannot find my way out. For the serious expositor, a library is essential. As a mentor of mine once said, “Where else can you have ten thousand professors at your fingertips?”

In recent years I have discovered there are not nearly enough resources like those I just described. It was such a discovery that prompted me to consider becoming a part of the answer instead of lamenting the problem. But the

solution would result in a huge undertaking. A writing project that covers all of the books and letters of the New Testament seemed overwhelming and intimidating. A rush of relief came when I realized that during the past fifty-plus years I've taught and preached through most of the New Testament. In my files were folders filled with notes from those messages that were just lying there, waiting to be brought out of hiding, given a fresh and relevant touch in light of today's needs, and applied to fit into the lives of men and women who long for a fresh word from the Lord. *That did it!* I began to work on plans to turn all of those notes into this commentary on the New Testament.

I must express my gratitude to both Mark Gaither and Mike Svelgel for their tireless and devoted efforts, serving as my hands-on, day-to-day editors. They have done superb work as we have walked our way through the verses and chapters of all twenty-seven New Testament books. It has been a pleasure to see how they have taken my original material and helped me shape it into a style that remains true to the text of the Scriptures, at the same time interestingly and creatively developed, and all the while allowing my voice to come through in a natural and easy-to-read manner.

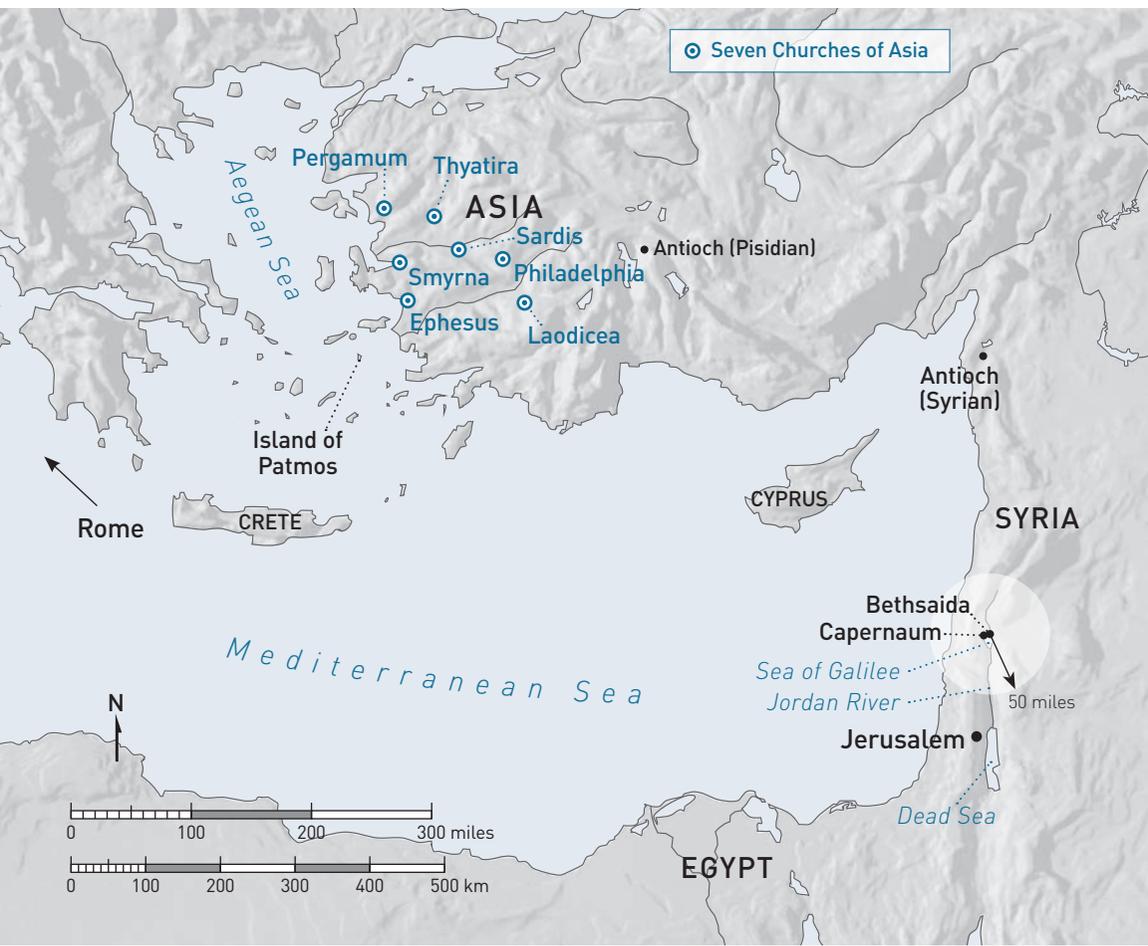
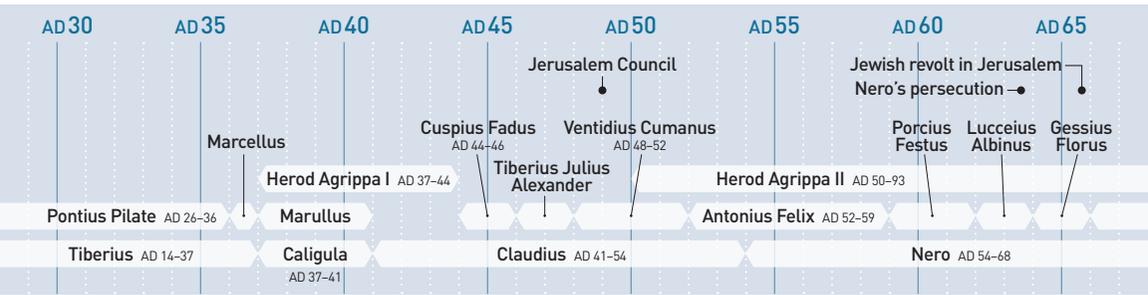
I need to add sincere words of appreciation to the congregations I have served in various parts of these United States for more than five decades. It has been my good fortune to be the recipient of their love, support, encouragement, patience, and frequent words of affirmation as I have fulfilled my calling to stand and deliver God's message year after year. The sheep from all those flocks have endeared themselves to this shepherd in more ways than I can put into words . . . and none more than those I currently serve with delight at Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas.

Finally, I must thank my wife, Cynthia, for her understanding of my addiction to studying, to preaching, and to writing. Never has she discouraged me from staying at it. Never has she failed to urge me in the pursuit of doing my very best. On the contrary, her affectionate support personally, and her own commitment to excellence in leading *Insight for Living* for more than three and a half decades, have combined to keep me faithful to my calling "in season and out of season." Without her devotion to me and apart from our mutual partnership throughout our lifetime of ministry together, *Swindoll's Living Insights* would never have been undertaken.

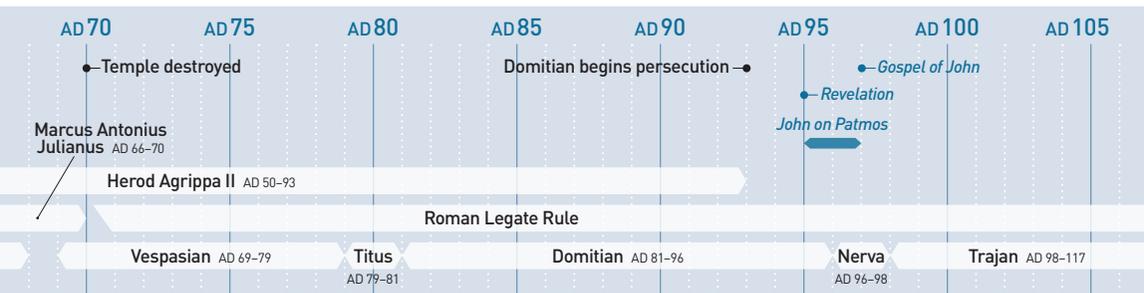
I am grateful that it has now found its way into your hands and, ultimately, onto the shelves of your library. My continued hope and prayer is that you will find these volumes helpful in your own study and personal application of the Bible. May they help you come to realize, as I have over these many years, that God's Word is as timeless as it is true.

The grass withers, the flower fades,  
But the word of our God stands forever. (Isa. 40:8)

*Chuck Swindoll*  
Frisco, Texas



**John's World.** Before he met Jesus, John probably thought he would spend his life tending the family fishing business in Bethsaida and travel no farther than 50 miles (80 km) from home. But the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 probably forced him to relocate to Syrian Antioch, where a large Gentile church continued to thrive. Then late in the apostle's life, Domitian exiled him to Patmos, where he penned Revelation. Tradition strongly suggests he spent the remainder of his life near Ephesus, ministering to the churches in Asia.



# JOHN

## INTRODUCTION

John had lived long enough to see it all, from the beginning all the way through to the end. As a brash, blustering young man, the idea of tramping around the wilderness of Judea after John the Baptizer appealed to him a great deal—so much so that the young fisherman left a thriving fishing enterprise in the hands of his brother, James, and abandoned his privileged status for the Baptizer’s diet of locusts and wild honey . . . and for the chance to help prepare Israel for the coming of the Messiah. He helped the forerunner of the Messiah baptize thousands of repentant Jews, and supported the strange, Elijah-like figure as he called down judgment upon the corrupt leaders of the Jewish people.

Then, finally, the day came when John saw the long-awaited Anointed One. He looked nothing like what John had imagined, but the declaration of his wilderness mentor, John the Baptizer, was unequivocal: This was the One. He and another of the Baptizer’s disciples decided to get a closer look, to follow Him home, to hear what He had to say about Himself and Israel. Before the dawn of the next day, he knew: They had found the Messiah.

The few years John spent with Jesus flew by in the beat of a lash, yet remained vividly clear in his mind for more than seventy years. During that short time with Jesus, he saw the man he thought would be a conquering super-David, the Savior of Israel, stripped, beaten mercilessly, and hung on a cross like a petty thug. He saw the sky darken as the Light of the world faded into death. Then he saw his hope resurrected to assume a more glorious form than he ever could have imagined, and he stood in awe as the presence of God filled the squabbling, self-promoting disciples and transformed them into the body of Christ—the bones and muscle, hands and feet of Christ.

# THE GOSPEL OF JOHN AT A GLANCE

SECTION	PROLOGUE	PRESENTATION OF THE WORD	AUTHENTICATION OF THE WORD
PASSAGE	1:1-18	1:19-4:54	5:1-12:50
THEMES	<p>God in human flesh</p> <hr/> <p>The evil-dominated world</p>	Encounters with the Son of God	<p>“His own”</p> <hr/> <p>“The world”</p> 
KEY TERMS	<p>Grace</p> <p>Receive</p> <p>The “Word”</p> <p>Flesh</p> <p>Life</p>	<p>Truth</p> <p>Baptize</p> <p>Testimony</p> <p>Believe</p> <p>Sign</p>	<p>Truly</p> <p>Glory</p> <p>Work(s)</p> <p>Judge</p>
EMPHASIS	<p><b>PUBLIC SIGNS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water to wine (ch. 2)</li> <li>• Heals royal official’s son (ch. 4)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heals invalid (ch. 5)</li> <li>• Feeds multitude (ch. 6)</li> <li>• Walks on water (ch. 6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heals blind man (ch. 9)</li> <li>• Raises dead (ch. 11)</li> </ul>
AUDIENCE	“THE WORLD”		
TIME	Prologue	Approximately 3 years	

CONFIRMATION OF THE WORD	VINDICATION OF THE WORD	
13:1–17:26	18:1–20:31	21:1-25
Love among believers Obedience Understanding Holy Spirit <hr/> Persecution of the world Hatred Darkness Tribulation	The Son glorified  Triumph over evil  The ascension of Christ  The commissioning of the disciples	
Glorify Comprehend Abide Hate Advocate	Follow Completed Manifest	
<b>PRIVATE TALKS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heaven (ch. 14)</li> <li>• Fruit (ch. 15)</li> <li>• Promises (ch. 16)</li> <li>• Prayer (ch. 17)</li> <li>• Appearances (ch. 20)</li> <li>• Commissioning (ch. 21)</li> </ul>		
BELIEVERS		
Approximately 3 weeks		Epilogue

Then, as the blood of his martyred brothers and sisters yielded new believers, John nurtured them. As Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Apollos, Luke, Timothy, Titus, and a host of other missionaries zealously expanded the church westward, John anchored its foundation. As critics bashed, John defended. As imposters subverted, John exposed them. As false prophets misled, John refuted their heretical message. He condensed his teaching into three letters (1–3 John), which originally circulated within the churches of Asia Minor around AD 65.

Having outlived all his martyred peers, John was exiled by Emperor Domitian to the nearly barren isle of Patmos. There he saw the future of the world all the way to its destruction and re-creation, and then preserved everything he heard and witnessed in “The Revelation,” which he sent as a letter to the churches of Asia Minor that were under his care. After Domitian’s death in AD 96, John rested in the care of the church in Ephesus, which in turn enjoyed his gentle, grandfather-like shepherding.

The Synoptic Gospels, written as early as the AD 50s by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, had been staples of church teaching for decades. They told the story of Jesus from different perspectives, yet they chose to include many of the same events, largely taken from Jesus’ ministry in Galilee. Decades later, when the elder John was in Ephesus, the church was no longer a budding movement, but an established community and system of thought. The challenges were different than when Christianity was in its infancy. The danger came less in the form of physical attacks or religious opposition, and more through philosophical corruption and theological compromise. Furthermore, the biography of Jesus lacked a much-needed cosmic dimension.

So, in the final years of John’s life, after he had witnessed the most significant period of history the world has ever known and with the nearness of death giving memories an urgency to be shared, John wrote of his Master.

### **“THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE”**

The Gospel of John is a masterpiece of storytelling. It is at once charming in its simplicity and challenging in its depth, a rare work of literature that fun-loving children and deep-thinking philosophers can share equally. John’s God-breathed account of Christ’s earthly ministry uses such elementary Greek, it reads like a child’s primer and is often one of the first books novice learners of Koiné learn to translate. Yet philosophers and theologians spend lifetimes trying to fully comprehend the profound truths John presents.

John's Gospel presents God as Father more tenderly than any other book in the Bible. It boldly and unambiguously establishes the dual nature of Jesus Christ—fully God and fully human, perfectly united in one person. And it reveals the mystery of the Holy Spirit unlike any other Gospel. Moreover, John's narrative provides a broad range of practical lessons to guide the believer through life. Several passages come to our rescue when leading someone to faith in Jesus Christ, while others bring comfort and consolation when we are burying a cherished loved one. From the Gospel of John, we learn about our increasing estrangement from the world and our deepening intimacy with the Almighty, and we begin to appreciate the priority the Lord places on unity in the family of God.

Despite its intricacy and complexity, the Fourth Gospel is usually the first book of the Bible to be read by students and new believers. Martin Luther marveled over the dual nature of John's writing, admitting, "Never in my life have I read a book written in simpler words than this, and yet the words are inexpressible!"<sup>1</sup>

John's approach is deliberate. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he carefully crafted each sentence to unveil the fascinating mysteries of heaven in simple language, and he painstakingly chose which facts to relate and which to leave out. In his own words, "There are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). Rather than pen a document that quadrupled the size of the Old Testament, he chose the "less is more" approach. Instead of overwhelming us with volumes of information, he strategically chose which stories to relate in order to accomplish his primary purpose: "So that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (20:31).

## WHY FOUR GOSPELS?

Why do we have four biographies of Jesus when one could have done the job just as well? Why not fourteen? In reality, we do not have four Gospels; we have one Gospel from four different vantage points. We have one biography from four writers, each providing his own unique perspective.

If we were to document the life of Jesus using only pictures, we could choose one of several possible methods. For example, we could use a motion picture camera to record every movement in detail, and—if the reel is long enough—replay His life from birth to death to resurrection and beyond. The running time of the film would exceed thirty-three

years of non-stop viewing! Another method would be to capture key moments in still photographs—perhaps from several angles at once—and tell the story of His life in a photo essay. The benefits would be obvious. The story could be told briefly, yet adequately, allowing time to reflect on the details of the most important moments. In the case of the Gospels, we have four albums of Christ’s life, put together by individuals who highlighted different, yet crucial, themes. Before John penned his account, these three were in circulation:

**Matthew** was a Jewish disciple of Jesus Christ who once earned his living as a tax collector, an official of the Roman government. Moved by the Spirit of God, he wrote a biography of Jesus from a Hebrew point of view, emphasizing the regal rights of Jesus as Messiah and legitimate King of Israel. Matthew traces Christ’s genealogy from Abraham, through King David. It’s a Jewish book written by a Jew to his fellow children of the covenant. Matthew’s primary theme: *The Messiah has come.*

**Mark** was not one of the Twelve, but the son of a follower named Mary (Acts 12:12) and a close associate of Barnabas, Paul, and Peter. He presents Christ’s ministry from a practical, action-oriented point of view in a narrative frequently punctuated by the phrase, “and immediately . . .” This style would have appealed to the can-do Romans of the first century, who respected deep thinkers but looked to men of action for leadership. Mark’s Gospel shows Jesus to be the no-nonsense God-man who came from heaven to complete a task. “[He] did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Mark’s primary theme: *The Son of God came to seek, serve, and save.*

**Luke** was a physician, probably born and reared in Macedonia. He was a Gentile, not a Jew. He wrote to neither the spiritually privileged Jew nor the politically privileged Roman, but to common Greeks, most of whom had no power, no wealth, and no hope. Luke’s Gospel highlights the humanity of Jesus, favoring the title “Son of Man” and providing details about His humble birth, His ordinary boyhood, His compassion for the poor and sick, and the global scope of His ministry. Luke’s genealogy traces Jesus’ lineage all the way back to Adam, the father of all humanity. Luke’s primary theme: *The Son of Man came to redeem all of humanity.*

John certainly knew of the other Gospels and probably taught from them for many years before deciding under the guidance of the Holy Spirit that the biography of Jesus was still incomplete. The Christian world knew Jesus as the King of the Jews, Jesus as the servant, and Jesus as the Son of Man, but there remained a need to proclaim Jesus as the Son of God. John wrote his Gospel so that we would know that the Son of Man is God in human flesh—completely human, yet no less God than when, “in the beginning,” He spoke the universe into existence.

The Gospel of John provides no genealogy, illustrating the fact that Deity has no beginning. The Gospel of John offers no childhood details and retells no parables,<sup>2</sup> perhaps to emphasize Jesus’ transcendent nature as God. The Gospel of John bypasses Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness, His transfiguration on the mountain, His commissioning the disciples after His resurrection, and His ascension from earth.

Instead, John writes from a philosophical and theological perspective, placing great emphasis on the miracles of Jesus, which he calls “signs.” For John, the miracles were indicators of a supernatural happening, proof that what many considered to be theoretical truths were in fact tangibly real. The Word had become flesh to give all of humanity every reason to believe and to leave us with no excuse for doubt. John’s primary theme: *The man we know as Jesus is none other than God on earth.*

- Matthew says, “This is the Messiah, the King; worship Him.”
- Mark says, “This is the Servant who served humanity; follow Him.”
- Luke says, “This is the only Man among men without sin; emulate Him.”
- John says, “This is God in human flesh; believe in Him.”

## THE CRISIS OF FAITH

John declares, in effect, “I’m not writing merely to inform. I’m not writing merely to entertain. I’m writing to stir the heart of the reader to *believe*.” The Greek word *pisteuō* [4100], translated “believe,” appears 98 times in the Gospel of John—multiple times per chapter. But what does it mean to believe? Does it mean to believe in the historical personage of Christ, to accept the fact that a man named Jesus lived at some point in time? Does it mean to admire Him, or to emulate Him, or to take up His revolutionary cause? Does it mean to entertain warm feelings, or to venerate Him as more than human, or to devote time and energy in order to please Him?

No. Those kinds of belief are good—some are even necessary. But the kind of belief John calls all his readers to embrace encompasses much more. First, the term *pisteuō* means “to acknowledge the truth as truth.” When I say that I believe the book of John, I mean to say that I accept its content as truth. To believe in Christ is, first, to accept what He says as truth. Second, and more important, *pisteuō* means “to trust, to rely upon, to derive confidence in” something or someone. When I say *I believe in Jesus Christ*, I declare that I trust Him, I rely upon Him, I have placed my complete confidence in Him; everything I know about this life and whatever occurs after death is dependent upon His claims about Himself and how I respond to His offer of grace.

Here is how I respond: I believe in Jesus Christ.

Recently, churches all across the United States have experienced remarkable growth and the “megachurch” phenomenon has encircled the globe. It’s exciting to see. However, the burgeoning numbers packing these sanctuaries include multitudes caught up in a movement, who listen week to week but have never given themselves over to the message of Jesus Christ and placed their absolute trust in Him. Many listen and learn and nod in agreement, but they do not *believe*. They have not submitted their hearts and wills to the truth of Jesus Christ—His identity as God and His offer of eternal life through faith alone.

Another important aspect of John’s call to belief is that we are invited to believe in Jesus Christ, the person. Not merely His message, not merely His teaching, not merely His example, not merely His challenge to live a certain way. We are called first and foremost to believe in *Him*. This was the intellectual and moral crisis presented to people of all kinds in John’s narrative, many of whom responded with *pistis* [4102]—belief, complete trust. Here are just six examples of people who responded positively to Jesus’ message:

### **John the Baptizer**

“I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’ I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.” (John 1:33-34)

### **Nathanael**

Nathanael said to [Philip], “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in

whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael said to Him, “How do You know me?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Nathanael answered Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.” (John 1:46-49)

### Peter

As a result of this [difficult teaching] many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. So Jesus said to the twelve, “You do not want to go away also, do you?” Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.” (John 6:66-69)

### Martha

Martha said to [Jesus], “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” She said to Him, “Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, *even* He who comes into the world.” (John 11:24-27)

### Thomas

Then [Jesus] said to Thomas, “Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.” Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed *are* they who did not see, and *yet* believed.” (John 20:27-29)

### John (the author of this Gospel)

Many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:30-31)

## SIGNS AND DISCOURSES

John’s narrative is remarkable in several respects, not the least of which is its structure. The first verse of chapter 13 marks a dramatic shift in the story of Christ’s earthly ministry so that the final eight chapters read

very differently from the first twelve. Chapters 1 through 12 describe an extensive, very public ministry and message, whereas chapters 13 through 21 bring us behind closed doors to witness the private ministry of Jesus. Chapters 1 through 12 carry us through a period of more than three years, whereas chapters 13 through 20 span four days (followed by the epilogue, chapter 21, which took place within forty days of Christ’s resurrection.) The first section highlights the miracles of Jesus, while the second section records His discourses with the Twelve.

JOHN 1-12	JOHN 13-21
3+ Years	3+ Days
Public Proclamation	Private Instruction
Spectacular Miracles	Intimate Discourses

Chapter 1 opens with the forerunner proclaiming the arrival of the Messiah and the baptism of Jesus, which is accompanied by the booming voice of the Father. In chapter 2, Jesus turns water into wine. In chapter 4, He heals an official’s son. In chapter 5, He heals a paralyzed man. In chapter 6, He feeds more than 5,000 men and their families and walks across the surface of the Sea of Galilee. In chapter 9, He gives sight to a man who has suffered blindness from birth. His miracles reach a crescendo in chapter 11 with His raising a man from the dead. John calls these “signs” because they prove that Jesus, while completely human, is also more than human. He is the Son of Man who is also the Son of God.

Chapter 13 begins a relatively quiet period in the narrative, a calm before the great storm. Just before Jesus’ arrest, trials, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, He pulled His men aside for a final time of preparation. This was a review of His most important lessons before the great test, after which they would be sent out to minister without their Master’s physical presence.

Chapter 13 describes servant-hearted love. Chapter 14 explains the promise of heaven, the unity of the Trinity, and the promise of the Spirit. Chapter 15 encourages the believer in a hostile world and emphasizes the need to abide in Christ. Chapter 16 warns of the certainty of challenges and persecution, and assures of the care of the Holy Spirit, the power of prayer, and the promise of victory. Chapter 17 relates Jesus’ prayer for Himself, His disciples, and all future believers—a prayer that casts His vision for the church. Chapters 18 and 19 describe His Passion,

then chapter 20 takes us behind closed doors for several private resurrection appearances to His closest followers. Chapter 21 allows us to witness the Lord's quiet fellowship with His disciples and His gentle restoration of Peter after his failure.

John did not structure his Gospel account haphazardly. The narrative unfolds much like the Christian life itself. Our initial, intriguing introduction to the Savior leads quickly to a call to believe and to follow. Understanding will come in time. This is not an intellectual decision but a moral one. Then, as we witness His power, hear His teaching, and experience life in His presence, our understanding deepens and our confidence grows. Gradually we become mature disciples, though never beyond the need for grace after failure.

In other words, John's account of Jesus' life and ministry on earth is no mere biography. The Gospel of John is an invitation to believe in the Son of God, to become His disciples, to deepen our understanding of His identity and mission, to grow in maturity, and to join Him in tending His sheep.

Now . . . let us behold "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29)!

## KEY TERMS IN JOHN 1:1-18

**charis (χάρις) [5485]** “grace,” “joy,” “divine kindness,”  
“unmerited blessing”

The secular Greek definition is simply “rejoicing,” and is associated with the feeling of joy. In the Old Testament, this feeling is most frequently associated with God’s work of salvation, delight in His law, or His abundant provision at harvest. John draws heavily upon the joy of harvest time and wedding celebrations, both of which picture great blessing received as a gift. See *John 1:14, 16, 17*.

**lambanō (λαμβάνω) [2983]** “to receive,” “to accept,” “to  
hold to oneself”

In the literal sense, the term means to accept what has been offered. When used of a person, “to receive” is to welcome personal connection, as when a man or woman receives a partner for marriage, or when a host receives a houseguest. See *John 1:12, 16; 5:43; 13:20*.

**logos (λόγος) [3056]** “word,” “message,” “issue,” “reasoning”

The most basic meaning of the term is “word,” which can be a single term or an entire message, such as, “We received *word* of the army’s victory.” Greek philosophers adopted the term to describe the apparent logic that causes the universe to obey natural laws, such as gravity, mathematics, and morality. To them, the universe would fall into utter chaos were it not for this impersonal divine mind, which they named “the Word.” John’s Gospel claims that the divine mind is, indeed, personal and that He became flesh in the person of Jesus. See *John 1:1, 14; 12:48; 17:17*.

**sarx (σάρξ) [4561]** “flesh,” “substance of the body,” “earthly,  
tangible matter”

This word has three spheres of use: literal, technical, and philosophical. In the literal sense, “flesh” is merely muscle and sinew, as distinct from bone, blood, etc. It also acquired a technical nuance, closely related to the literal, to denote the material aspect of humanity. Greek philosophy and religion—especially the Gnosticism of John’s day—eventually came to see everything tangible, including “flesh,” as inherently evil.<sup>1</sup> John uses “flesh” to speak of humanity in the tangible realm for the express purpose of undermining the influence of Greek religion on Christian doctrine. See *John 1:13, 14; 3:6; 17:2*.

**zoē (ζωή) [2222]** “life”

At its most basic, the term refers to the physical vitality of a living being.<sup>2</sup> For Greek-speaking Jews, *zoē* is closely related to *hayim* [H2416], the Hebrew term for life, which they regarded as the supreme good of creation and a divine gift to be cherished, albeit shortened and corrupted by sin.<sup>3</sup> The Jewish notion of *zoē* carried with it the opportunity to enjoy *shalom* [H7965], “peace.” See *John 1:4; 3:16; 11:25; 14:6*.

## PROLOGUE (JOHN 1:1-18)

In 1964, Thayer S. Warshaw, an English teacher at Newton High School near Boston, worried that when public schools banned the Bible, students would be deprived of an important part of their culture. To make his point, he devised a quiz on common allusions to Scripture as they appear in secular literature and language. Despite their obvious intelligence and first-rate education, the majority of these college-bound students couldn't complete the following common expressions:

“They shall beat their swords into plowshares.” (63%)

“Many are called, but few are chosen.” (79%)

“The truth shall make you free.” (84%)

“Pride goeth before a fall.” (88%)

“The love of money is the root of all evil.” (93%)

Furthermore, several students at this nationally acclaimed school thought that Sodom and Gomorrah were lovers (rather than cities). Many named the four Gospels as “Matthew, Mark, Luther (rather than Luke), and John.” According to these top-ranked students, Eve was created from an apple (rather than eating an “apple”), Moses baptized Jesus, Jezebel was Ahab's donkey (rather than his wife), and Jesus spoke in “parodies” (rather than parables).<sup>4</sup>

Around this same time, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, I had a close relationship with Campus Crusade for Christ. Some close friends of mine and I would talk to students on the campuses of the University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, and the University of Texas at Austin and in Arlington. As a conversation starter, we used a simple questionnaire, which included the question, “Who, in your opinion, was Jesus of Nazareth?” The most common response was, “The Son of God.” That may surprise you, as it did me. I expected “a great teacher,” or “the founder of Christianity,” or “a martyr who died for his beliefs.” However, when I asked the follow-up question—“How did you come to that conclusion?”—the most common response was, “I don't know.” I find the same to be true among many Christians today. They know the right answer, but they don't know *why* the answer is true.

The apostle John wrote his account of Jesus' life to reveal the identity

of Jesus so that we might respond in belief. He opens his Gospel with a prologue (1:1-18), which declares unambiguously that Jesus is God in human flesh. John then weaves this primary thesis through the rest of the narrative. Jesus claimed deity, His miracles supported His claim, His activities presupposed this truth, and His resurrection finally vindicated everything He said and did.

## God in Human Flesh

### JOHN 1:1-18

NASB

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. <sup>4</sup>In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. <sup>5</sup>The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not <sup>a</sup>comprehend it.

<sup>6</sup>There <sup>a</sup>came a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came <sup>b</sup>as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He was not the Light, but *he came* to testify about the Light.

<sup>9</sup>There was the true Light <sup>a</sup>which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. <sup>11</sup>He came to His <sup>a</sup>own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. <sup>12</sup>But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name, <sup>13</sup>who were

NLT

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning the Word already existed.

The Word was with God, and the Word was God.

<sup>2</sup>He existed in the beginning with God.

<sup>3</sup>God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him.

<sup>4</sup>The Word gave life to everything that was created,\* and his life brought light to everyone.

<sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.\*

<sup>6</sup>God sent a man, John the Baptist,\* <sup>7</sup>to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. <sup>8</sup>John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. <sup>9</sup>The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

<sup>10</sup>He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. <sup>11</sup>He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. <sup>12</sup>But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. <sup>13</sup>They are reborn—not with a physical birth

<sup>a</sup>born, not of <sup>b</sup>blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

<sup>14</sup>And the Word became flesh, and <sup>a</sup>dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of <sup>b</sup>the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. <sup>15</sup>John testified about Him and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me <sup>a</sup>has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’” <sup>16</sup>For of His fullness <sup>a</sup>we have all received, and <sup>b</sup>grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup>For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth <sup>a</sup>were realized through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*.

1:2 <sup>a</sup>Lit *This one* 1:5 <sup>a</sup>Or *overpower* 1:6 <sup>a</sup>Or *came into being* 1:7 <sup>a</sup>Lit *This one* <sup>b</sup>Lit *for testimony* 1:8 <sup>a</sup>Lit *That one* 1:9 <sup>a</sup>Or *which enlightens every person coming into the world* 1:11 <sup>a</sup>Or *own things, possessions, domain* 1:13 <sup>a</sup>Or *begotten* <sup>b</sup>Lit *bloods* 1:14 <sup>a</sup>Or *tabernacled; i.e. lived temporarily* <sup>b</sup>Or *unique, only one of His kind* 1:15 <sup>a</sup>Lit *has become before me* 1:16 <sup>a</sup>Lit *we all received* <sup>b</sup>Lit *grace for grace* 1:17 <sup>a</sup>Lit *came to be*

resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

<sup>14</sup>So the Word became human\* and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness.\* And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father’s one and only Son.

<sup>15</sup>John testified about him when he shouted to the crowds, “This is the one I was talking about when I said, ‘Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.’”

<sup>16</sup>From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another.\* <sup>17</sup>For the law was given through Moses, but God’s unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God,\* is near to the Father’s heart. He has revealed God to us.

1:3-4 Or *and nothing that was created was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything.* 1:5 Or *and the darkness has not understood it.* 1:6 Greek *a man named John.* 1:14a Greek *became flesh.* 1:14b Or *grace and truth; also in 1:17.* 1:16 Or *received the grace of Christ rather than the grace of the law; Greek reads received grace upon grace.* 1:18 Some manuscripts read *But the one and only Son.*

John’s prologue offers four reasons to believe that Jesus Christ, the Word, is God:

- The Word is eternal; He had no beginning and He will have no end (1:1-2).
- The Word is the Creator; all things were made through Him (1:3).
- The Word is the Source of life; nothing remains alive apart from Him (1:4-13).
- The Word, though completely human, fully reveals the Father (1:14-18).

Before we examine each of these reasons in detail, read 1:1-18, and take note of John’s deliberate progression from infinity and eternity down to the single individual, Christ, in whom resides all that is infinite and eternal.

## EPHESUS: THE BIRTHPLACE OF “THE WORD”

## JOHN 1:1

Around 500 BC, a Greek nobleman of Ephesus named Heraclitus taught that the universe operates according to a rational structure, a unified ordering principle, which we can discern if we carefully observe its patterns and solve its many riddles. According to this theory, all the laws of physics, mathematics, reason, and even morality can be traced back to this one ordering principle, which he called *logos*, “the Word.”

Other philosophers, such as the Stoics, adopted this seminal idea and added their own doctrines, even going so far as to describe “the Word” as a divine animating (life-giving, life-moving) principle permeating the universe. Philo (20 BC—AD 50), a Jewish philosopher heavily influenced by Plato, taught that the *logos* was God’s creative principle in the realm of pure thought, which cannot have any direct association with anything in the tangible realm of matter.

Ephesus was not only the birthplace of the *logos* idea; it had also become a celebrated repository of texts on Greek philosophy. By the time John lived and taught in Ephesus in the final decades of the first century, clashes with the priests of Artemis were a distant memory. In John’s time, the philosophers of Greece, both ancient and modern, threatened to corrupt Christian doctrine. Some have suggested that John was overly influenced by the Greek *logos* idea, and have accused him of leaning toward Gnosticism. However, Greek philosophers would have strongly objected to the *logos* becoming flesh. John merely affirmed the parts of Greek philosophy that were valid in order to preach the truth of Christ on common ground.

## — 1:1-2 —

**The Word is eternal; He had no beginning and He will have no end.**

In eternity past, before the beginning of anything—space, time, matter—in the indefinite expanse of timeless existence, in a beginning that had no beginning, “the Word” was existing in an eternal, infinite “present.” The verb translated “was” is the imperfect past tense of the Greek verb *eimi* [1510], “to be.” A literal rendering of John’s first sentence is, “In the beginning, the Word was existing.”

Why is this so important? Because John carefully crafted these initial sentences to establish an essential truth. He chose his words carefully and arranged them precisely to leave no room for misunderstanding. Before any conceivable point in the eternal past, the Word was already existing.<sup>5</sup> The Word, therefore, has no beginning. The Word has always existed.

Later in the prologue (1:14), we learn that the Word is Jesus Christ. The Greek term “Word” is *logos* [3056], which had been a profoundly significant concept among philosophers for at least three centuries before Christ. It referred to an uncreated divine mind that gives meaning and order to the universe. John essentially co-opted the concept, saying in effect, “The concept pagan philosophers have theorized about actually exists; He is God, and Jesus Christ is He.”



Mark W. Gaither

**The Library of Celsus.** For centuries, various schools of Greek philosophy operated in Ephesus, attracting learners from around the Roman Empire. Then, in AD 110, the son of Roman consul Celsus Polemeanus began constructing this library in his father’s honor. When completed in AD 135, it housed approximately 12,000 scrolls, which undoubtedly cemented the reputation of Ephesus as a major center of learning.

John continues to describe “the Word” by saying He was *with* God. The Greek preposition *pros* [4314], when used in this particular manner, represents familiarity. “The Word” and God the Father were existing closely together, sharing place, intimacy, and purpose. In fact, the intimacy and familiarity were such that “the Word was God.” The Word and God share the same essence; therefore, all that is true of God is true of the Word.

Psalm 90 came from the pen of Moses and it celebrates the eternal existence of God, who has no beginning—unlike His creation.

LORD, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.  
Before the mountains were born

Or You gave birth to the earth and the world,  
Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.  
(Ps. 90:1-2)

The Hebrew word for “everlasting” is *olam* [H5769], which is probably derived from a similar word meaning “to hide.” If an object is moved farther and farther away from an observer, it eventually vanishes from sight. It is beyond the vanishing point. A good paraphrase would render the idea this way: “From the vanishing point in the past to the vanishing point in the future, You have existed, Lord.” A. W. Tozer captures the thought well in his book *The Knowledge of the Holy*:

The mind looks backward in time until the dim past vanishes, then turns and looks into the future till thought and imagination collapse from exhaustion; and God is at both points, unaffected by either.

Time marks the beginning of created existence, and because God never began to exist it can have no application to Him. “Began” is a time word, and can have no personal meaning for the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity.<sup>6</sup>

This is what John expresses about the Word. Then, to underscore and summarize his point, John adds, “He was in the beginning with God.” In that eternal existence before time, the Word and God were together and they were the same being.

— 1:3 —

**The Word is the Creator; all things were made through Him.**

In 1:1-2, John states that the Word is Deity and then makes his case from the standpoint of time: Only God is eternal; and because the Word is eternal, He is God. In 1:3, the apostle establishes the deity of Christ from another perspective: creation. In the ancient mind—Hebrew and Gentile—everything that exists can be placed into one of two distinct categories:

“CREATED”	“NOT CREATED”
Things (or beings) that exist because they were created	Things (or beings) that were <i>not</i> created because they have always existed

Anything “not created”—that is, anything that was not brought into being—is deity. For the Hebrew in particular, only God was “not created.” Therefore, anything said to be “not created” is, by definition, God.

## JOHN'S PROLOGUE, AN ANCIENT RUBIK'S CUBE

### JOHN 1:3

Why is John's prologue so important? Because false teachers—starting in John's day and persisting even now—claim that Jesus Christ is not God, coeternal and coexistent with the Father in eternity past. Many claim that He was the first created being—that the Father brought the Son into existence, and the Son then brought everything else into being. Arius, a third-century false teacher, was fond of saying, "There was a time when He was not."

This teaching continues today as official doctrine for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons) and the Jehovah's Witnesses, and both organizations have translated John's prologue to suit their theologies. However, John's prologue is not unlike a Rubik's Cube, the puzzle-toy popular in the early 1980s: You can't change one sentence of the prologue without causing logical problems with the others.

For example, Joseph Smith altered John's prologue in his *Inspired Version* of the Scriptures to support the notion that Christ is not God, but an exalted figure created by God before anything else:

In the beginning was the gospel preached through the Son. And the gospel was the word, and the word was with the Son, and the Son was with God, and the Son was of God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made which was made. (John 1:1-3, *Inspired Version*)

However, Smith failed to account for 1:3. According to his version, the Word created "all things." Furthermore, anything that "came into being"—that is, anything (or anyone) that had a beginning—was created by the Word. But if "there was a time when Christ was not," if He came into being at some point in time, this would mean that Jesus had to have created Himself before He existed.

If you think that sounds like nonsense, you're right. It *is* nonsense! Therefore, on this point we can agree: "Without him was not anything made which was made." The Son of God could not have made Himself, therefore He is God, and He created all things.

With this ancient worldview in mind, reread 1:3 carefully:

All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.

John emphasizes the phrase "come into being," which he uses three times. Anything that "came into being" had a beginning. At one point it did not exist, and then it began to exist. John takes us back to eternity past, far beyond Genesis 1:1, to say that the Son of God was already

existing. As “very God” (as the Nicene Creed puts it) who existed alone as “not created,” He brought everything else that exists into being.

Why is this point so important? Because false teachers—starting in John’s day and persisting even now—claim that Jesus Christ is not God, not coequal, coeternal, or coexistent with the Father in eternity past. Many claim that Christ was the first created being—that the Father brought the Son into existence, and the Son then created everything else. Arius, a third-century false teacher, was fond of saying, “There was a time when He was not.” However, John points to the moment of creation to say that before anything existed, Christ, who is the Creator, called “all things” into being.

— 1:4-8 —

**The Word is the Source of life; nothing remains alive apart from Him.**

In 1:4, John’s Gospel does something not done by the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Matthew traces Christ’s genealogy back to Abraham. Luke traces His roots to the first human, Adam. But John reaches beyond them to the creation of the universe. John states that in Jesus Christ was life and light, two images Moses used in reference to God in Genesis 1. The Creator spoke the universe into existence and then filled it with the light of His truth (Gen. 1:3). The Creator then began filling the earth with life: vegetation, sea creatures, birds, land animals, and His crowning achievement, humanity. He breathed His own life into the man and woman, who together bore His image.

John says, in effect, “In the beginning, God the Son created humanity and filled them with life. He then came to earth as a human to bring life again to humanity, which is spiritually dead because of sin.” While it is true that John did not specifically mention the fall of humanity (see Gen. 3), it is safe to assume that by the end of the first century, the doctrine of human depravity was well understood by most. Nevertheless, John did highlight our desperate need for salvation by describing the world’s reaction to the appearance of Life and Light.

John declares that the darkness of the world did not “comprehend” the Light. The underlying Greek word, *katalambanō* [2638], has a range of meaning depending upon the context and therefore has no direct English equivalent. The primary meaning is “to seize,” “to attack,” “to overpower,” or “to hold without losing grip.” However, as often happens in language, the literal definition eventually led to its metaphorical use, “to comprehend or understand.” Which did John mean?

“The darkness did not overpower the Light,” or “The darkness did not comprehend the Light”?

John could have intended a double meaning. In the end, darkness was not able to *suppress* the Light even by placing the Light in a tomb. However, the verses that follow appear to stress the mental deficiency of the darkness: its unwillingness to believe and therefore its *inability to comprehend*. Then, as the story of Jesus unfolds, John will show that truth is nonsense to a mind darkened by sin (8:44-45, 47; 14:17; 18:38).

John the Baptizer, the man Jesus called the greatest of all the prophets (Matt. 11:9-13), was no match for the darkness. Like Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and all the luminaries of the Word throughout the centuries before him, John failed to enlighten humanity. After all, they were only human. The only hope for humankind was the Source of light, who can illumine every mind because He is more than human.

## ILLUMINATING “LIGHT” IN BIBLICAL LITERATURE

### JOHN 1:9

Some symbols are so universal, so common to human experience, they have the power to cross cultural and even linguistic barriers. Students of art and literature know these symbols as *archetypes*. Green, for example, symbolizes growth or new life. Winter alludes to death or hardship. In the Bible and other ancient literature, truth is often pictured as light. When someone gains wisdom, we say he or she has been “enlightened.”

When Moses told the story of creation, he drew upon the literary symbol of light to communicate an important truth. Immediately after the formation of space and matter, the Lord filled the void and formless earth with light—literal light, yes, but not merely illumination. Before He fashioned physical sources of light on the fourth day—the sun, moon, and stars—He filled the universe with the light of His presence, with truth, the foundation upon which everything else would be built. Before giving the world order (dividing day from night, sky from earth, dry land from ocean), the Lord suffused every atom with His truth so that everything would reflect His character.

One day, perhaps sooner than we think, a new heaven and a new earth “will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them” (Rev. 22:5). Evil will be gone and all of creation will again reflect the One in whom “there is no darkness at all” (1 Jn. 1:5). This is our hope because “these words are faithful and true!” (Rev. 22:6).

— 1:9-13 —

Verse 9 can be troublesome at first glance. It would seem to contradict what John had just declared in 1:5: “The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” Read on and John’s point becomes clearer. Now that the Source of light has come to earth and has illumined the minds of humanity, no one can legitimately claim ignorance. All who do not believe are without excuse. That is why, before His arrest, Jesus told His disciples,

“If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well. But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, ‘THEY HATED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE.’” (John 15:22-25)

Let me illustrate John’s point another way. Every modern house is connected to an electric grid, which provides all the energy necessary to illumine every dark corner. However, the people living in these homes can choose to live in the dark. The light is available but it isn’t compulsory. The Source of light has come to the world and has illumined all minds; however, many choose to draw the shades and shun the light. Now that Christ has come, belief or unbelief is no longer a crisis of the intellect (if it ever was); it is a crisis of the will. When a darkened mind chooses to remain in darkness, no one is to blame but the individual making that choice.

Many have rejected the light; but many have chosen to receive it through faith—the choice to believe in Jesus Christ. John foreshadows the teaching of Christ in 3:1-21 by declaring that those who have chosen to believe are “children of God” as the result of supernatural birth from above. A natural birth is the result of two humans choosing to procreate. By contrast, spiritual birth is the result of God’s sovereign choice.

— 1:14-18 —

**The Word, though completely human, fully reveals the Father.**

In our day, the influence of naturalism has so permeated culture that we have trouble accepting the deity of Christ. In John’s day, most people had no problem accepting Christ’s deity. They were more troubled by His humanity. The influence of Plato permeated every aspect of religion and philosophy so that anything tangible came to be seen as inherently

## God with us

### JOHN 1:14

The truth of Christ's dual nature, His unblemished deity and His complete humanity, is vitally important theologically, but it's crucial in a practical sense as well. When I am tempted to shake a fist at the heavens or wonder if God is being cruelly indifferent while I suffer down here on earth, John's Gospel reminds me of an important truth. When Adam brought sin into the world, and death with sin (Rom. 5:12), the Lord could have incinerated the world as just punishment and He would have been no less holy or righteous. But He didn't. Furthermore, when we sin—as individuals and collectively as humans—God has every right to turn His back and say, "Fine. Run the world your way. The mess you make of it is yours to bear." But He doesn't.

On the contrary, the Creator voluntarily became one of us in the person of Jesus Christ, who suffered as we suffer, who was tempted as we are tempted, and who endured injustice like we will never know—yet without sin. I am comforted to know that God understands and empathizes. Through His incarnation, we can appreciate His compassion more fully. Because He lived and died as a man, we can more easily understand and accept that, in His resurrection, the Son is for us even while we feel abandoned, mistreated, or punished by God.

evil. The great hope of Greek philosophers was to escape the foul, obnoxious material realm in order to commune with the divine mind, which existed only in the realm of pure ideas. In life, they tried to deny the body as a means of connecting with what they conceived of as god. They saw death as the liberation of the soul (the good aspect of man) from the prison of the body (the evil aspect of man). So, naturally, they recoiled from the notion that God would become anything genuinely physical.

To preserve the sinlessness of God, philosophers invented all kinds of myths to explain how Christ could appear human without actually having earthly material be a part of His nature. The most common, *Docetism*, suggested that He only *seemed* to be tangible, but was in fact a heavenly apparition. The so-called “Gnostic Gospels” tell stories of how Jesus created the illusion of eating food while never actually digesting it or needing to relieve Himself.

John’s terminology was boldly offensive to these false teachers. He says, in effect, “The Word became meat.” He lived among us in the material world. We literally saw Him, and heard Him, and touched Him. In 1 John 1:1, the apostle puts it in unmistakable terms: “What was from the beginning, what we have *heard*, what we have *seen* with our eyes, what we have *looked at* and *touched* with our hands . . .” (emphasis mine).

God didn’t remain abstract. Having revealed Himself in dreams and visions, as supernatural fire in the midst of a bush, as an otherworldly glow above the ark of the covenant, and not content to send angels in His place, God became a man. A flesh, blood, and bone human being, who could be seen, heard, touched, and even smelled. The Son of God became a tangible representation of the Father in all His glory. If we have trouble understanding God the Father, we need only look to God the Son for all we need to know. Or, to summarize John: We saw His glory (1:14) and we received His fullness (1:16), because Christ has “explained” the Father (1:18). The Greek term translated “explained” describes what I am doing right now: *expositing*. The Son has *exposited* the Father far better than all the best commentators can explain Scripture.



People have always wondered, *What’s God like?* Throughout Jesus’ thirty-plus years on earth, you could have observed His visible presence. As Jesus conducted ministry among the inhabitants of Galilee,

Samaria, and Judea, the disciples could have said, “Come and see for yourself. He is the rabbi of this band of disciples; God is declared and displayed through Him.” To this day, people struggle to know who God is and what He’s like. We can point to Jesus Christ and say, “Get to know Him, and you will know God.”

## APPLICATION: JOHN 1:1-18

### Five Qualities of Authentic Faith

What does it mean to be a genuine believer whose life is characterized by authentic faith? I find in John’s Gospel five practical qualities that flow out of a life of trust in Christ.

First, *a genuine believer is not too independent to admit his or her own needs*. Throughout John’s narrative, those who needed healing, or forgiveness, or enlightenment understood their own helplessness and came to Christ for help. While pride kept many trapped in their sin, others’ vulnerability gave Jesus the opportunity to perform miracles in their lives.

Trust in the Lord should translate into vulnerability with others. Children long to hear their parents apologize after making a rash decision, or reacting harshly, or behaving hypocritically. Wives long for the Lord to break the wills of their husbands so they might finally hear the words, “Honey, I’ve reached the end of my rope. I need your help.” Husbands long to have their wives give themselves without reservation, rather than remain locked away in towers of distance and distrust. Only when we trust the Lord enough to admit our weaknesses and our inadequacies will we enjoy intimacy with the people He has given to us as a blessing.

Second, *a genuine believer is not too busy to know the people around him or her*. People, not tasks, are the priority of believers living out their faith in truth. All too frequently, men and women say the people they love are more important than anything else, but then fail to express it or even feel appreciation until a loved one lies cold in a casket at the front of a church. Authentic trust in Christ recognizes the value of others, despite their failures or their shortcomings, and devotes adequate time to knowing them well.

Third, *a genuine believer isn’t too proud to rely upon God’s Word*.

Most churchgoers do their best to live in obedience to the Scriptures they know. Genuine faith, however, hungers to know as much about God's Word as possible because it doesn't trust in self. Genuine trust in Christ remains humbly devoted to knowing what *He* thinks about life and how *He* would have us live.

Fourth, *a genuine believer doesn't rely solely upon his or her own perspective*. Genuine believers have no trouble admitting the continuing impact of their sinful natures, and they do whatever is necessary to nullify its influence when making decisions. They seek truth in God's Word, they pray for the Holy Spirit's leading, they submit to the wisdom of mature counselors, and they remain sensitive to the constructive criticism of others—even their enemies.

Fifth, *a genuine believer doesn't take self or life too seriously*. That's not to suggest that life isn't serious or even dismal at times. Life in a fallen world can be hard! Nevertheless, genuine believers maintain a loose grip on the people they love and an even looser one on their possessions. They accept injustices and abuses and setbacks as confirmation they are on the right road to glory. They maintain a composed perspective, they refuse to allow bitterness to spoil their outlook, they choose joy, and they never pass up an opportunity to laugh. Believers can do this when they genuinely trust God as unfailingly good and utterly sovereign.

Of course, authentic belief in Jesus Christ has eternal implications. He came to seek and save the lost, to receive them to Himself, and to enjoy their worship forever. But genuine faith has profound implications for life here on earth. Our abundant life begins now.