



TALKS FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS TRANSCRIPT

John 1: 14-18: A Clear Statement of the Incarnation

"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.

15 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.'"

16 And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. 17 For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him."

Background Notes

Verse 14 refers to Jesus Christ as the "only begotten from the Father," and verse 18 refers to Him as the "only begotten God," or the "only begotten Son." The Greek word that is translated "only begotten" is the same word that is used in that most familiar verse in the Gospel of John, John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."*

"Only begotten" is probably not the best translation of this Greek word, because "only begotten" sounds like the Bible is teaching that Jesus Christ was "begotten," or had a beginning. We know that is not true -- Christ always existed. That truth is clearly taught in John 1:1-2, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God."*

Also look at verse 15. Here John the Baptist, referring to Jesus Christ, said: *"This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.'"* John the Baptist was six months older than Jesus, but he said that Jesus existed before him. Why? Because Jesus Christ did not have a beginning -- He always existed.

What it gets down to is this: the Greek word translated "only begotten" doesn't mean "begotten." It would have been better had the misleading word "begotten" been left out of the translation. The Greek term has to do with the **uniqueness of the relationship** between God the Father, and God the Son. Christ is the **"one and only"** Son of God. By very nature, He is God. He possesses every attribute of God. These ideas are all involved in the term that is translated, "only begotten." There is **no** idea in this term of a "beginning."

The term also implies the deep affection between the Father and the Son. We see that in verse 18: *"No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him."* The phrase, *"who is in the bosom of the Father"* portrays the intimate fellowship between the Father and the Son.

When John wrote his Gospel in about 85AD, the seeds of an early Christian heresy had already been planted. This heresy later became known as Gnosticism. One of the false teachings of this early heresy was that Jesus was not fully God. The gnostics said that there

was no way that God, who is pure Spirit and inherently good, would allow Himself to take on a material body, because (in their view) matter was inherently evil. Thus the gnostics taught that Jesus was only a man. They said that the divine "Christ-spirit" came upon the man Jesus at His baptism and left at His death. The man Jesus was not God, said the gnostics.

The seeds of that early Christian heresy were around when John wrote this Gospel. The seeds of Gnosticism are clearly refuted in the verses before us.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. The incarnation was not a subtraction, but an addition.

Verse 14: "*the word became flesh, and dwelt among us.*" We have already seen that "the Word" in the prologue of John's Gospel refers to Jesus Christ, who was fully God. Notice what verse 14 does **not** say: it does **not** say that the Word **appeared** as flesh. It doesn't say that the Word **came upon** flesh. It doesn't say that the Word became **partly** flesh, and it doesn't say that the Word **changed** to flesh. It says that the Word **became** flesh!

The eternal Word took on flesh without in any way ceasing to be the eternal Word. The incarnation was not a subtraction, but an **addition**. No attribute of deity was subtracted when God the Son, the eternal Word, became flesh – that is, when He took on humanity. The word "flesh" here doesn't mean sinful flesh – it means "human flesh," or humanity. When God became man, He didn't become less than God. The incarnation was not a subtraction, but an addition.

Before Bethlehem, the eternal Son of God was 100% God and 0% man. After Bethlehem, the eternal Son of God was 100% God and 100% man. This was not a quick flash of deity taking on humanity. The God-Man dwelt, or "tabernacled" "among us, says John. His glory was **seen**! This was not just the glory at the Mount of Transfiguration -- this is referring to His moral glories, His sinlessness, and His perfections throughout His life. In the Old Testament, God dwelt in the midst of His people, and His glory was seen, focused in the holy of holies of the tabernacle. Now the glory of God is focused and seen in the person of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, who **became man forever**.

2. God's grace is not at the expense of truth.

In verse 14 we read that the glory of Christ is "full of grace and truth," and in verse 17 we read, "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." This is the first mention of "grace" in the New Testament. Grace is defined as "God's unmerited favor toward man."

Verse 17 says, "*For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*" This doesn't mean that there was no grace in the Old Testament. Think of the grace of God that is seen in the Old Testament, as God tolerated Israel's gross idolatry and immorality for centuries. Think of God's grace going out to the pagan Assyrians under the ministry of Jonah, the reluctant prophet. So verse 17 is not saying that there was no grace in the Old Testament under the law, but the Old Testament was not characterized by grace. The law was not a display of God's grace. Grace has come, or has been realized, through Jesus Christ. Christianity is characterized by grace. That is why the time of Church is known as "the day of God's grace."

Notice, however, that God's truth was not abandoned by the coming of grace through Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus is full of grace **and truth** (v14). Grace **and truth** came through Jesus Christ (v17). God's undeserved favor toward man is certainly seen fully in the coming of Christ, but God's grace did not come at the expense of His truth. God didn't lower or change His righteous standards with the coming of Christ. That is why grace can be defined by the acrostic G-R-A-C-E: God's Riches At Christ's Expense. God's grace is not at the expense of truth.

3. No human being has ever seen God in His essence.

"No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." John reiterated this point in his epistle. 1 John 4:12 says, *"No one has seen God at any time."* But you might ask, "What about Abraham, who spoke with God in Genesis 18 before Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed? What about Moses who requested to see God's glory there in Exodus 33? What about Isaiah 6:1, *"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple"*? Well, these men (and others) did not see God in His **essence**. They saw visible manifestations of God's glory. They saw visions of God, or "theophanies," -- that is, God taking on the appearance of a man. But no human being has ever seen God in his essence. The good news here is that Christ has made God known: *"... He has declared Him"*(v18).

In verse 18 we see that Jesus Christ has **declared** God. He has explained God, or declared Him -- He has made God known. While no human being has ever seen God in His essence, Jesus Christ has made God fully known. In Jesus Christ we see God, because Jesus Christ is God.

Practical application

We should never have a stale testimony!

"Of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace." "Grace for grace" means one blessing after another! In verse 14 we saw that the Lord Jesus Christ was *"full of grace and truth."* If you are a Christian, that grace has been extended to you not only in salvation, but also in blessings every day. We should never have a stale testimony. Why? Because of God's continuing grace!

Think of an ocean labeled "God's grace." Now think of standing on the beach at the edge of the surf, as wave upon wave comes in to shore. As Christians we've all received blessings out of the ocean of God's grace, and we continue to experience it, wave after wave -- one blessing after another! So why do we complain so often? We need to remember that God's grace has reached out to us, not only for salvation, but His grace comes to us wave after wave! We should never have a stale testimony, because we experience new waves of God's grace every day.

Christians who don't have something new or something recent to share about God's grace in their testimony are not realizing the truth of this verse. We should never have a stale testimony!

Yesterday while I was out running I was thinking of this verse, and I began to count my blessings, like the words of that hymn "Count your blessings, name them one by one." Blessings in the ministry, blessings in my family, blessings of answered prayer, blessings in areas and things that I had never even prayed about! I was amazed at the waves of grace that God has brought into my life!

Grace for grace – one blessing after another -- that is the idea in verse 16, "*And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.*" We should never have a stale testimony!