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Gospel of John 1:1-18, English Standard Version

1 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. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

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

Logos: We Are the Face of God.

The opening to the Gospel of John, Chapter 1, verses 1 to 18 is quite famous. It is poetic and it's moving. There are some who think that it might have been added

later to the Gospel, but most scholars believe that John did indeed write it. We

think that the Apostle John wrote this Gospel – remember that none of the Gospels name their authors – but we cannot be sure. Like today, this was a common name.

His Hebrew name would have been “*Yohhanan*”, which very roughly means “he bestows” or “God is gracious”. When we look at John’s magnificent Gospel introduction, what many do not realize is that the word “word” in this passage, in the original Greek, was “logos”. We’re going to look closely at this word “logos”. But first, let’s consider how the other three Gospels begin. Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus Christ, followed by the birth of Jesus. Mark begins with a quick reference to Isaiah in the Old Testament, then moves into John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus, and then continues with Jesus calling his disciples together. Luke begins with a brief dedication, and then moves into the birth of John the Baptist and then the birth of Jesus. But the fourth Gospel, the one we just read the beginning of, begins with some very abstract material, and it is not particularly brief. It talks about the Word, the Logos, and how it was in the beginning, and how it was with God, and how it was God. Some feel that this beginning has a very different feeling than the rest of the Gospel of John, and that the passage has the cadence of an early Christian hymn. The most logical explanation is that it is original to the Gospel, but that the author of John adapted it from somewhere else, something that was in broad use as a prayer. It does fit in as an opening. It’s not truly a strange introduction – since it provides a critical overview of just who Jesus is and why he exists, and we must remember that the Gospel is, of course, an overview of Jesus’ life. But regardless of where the intro of John came from, this

passage is both very fundamental to the nature of Christianity, as well as something that has been badly misinterpreted over the centuries – especially in modern times, as high literacy rates have caused people to focus on the Bible, the written Word of God - as the core of Christianity. But is it really the core of our faith?

The first words of John are: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God***. The problem, the reason this passage has been misinterpreted, has to do with that word “word”, or “logos” (λόγος). This translation - or turning the word “logos” into the word “word” - has led people to think that this passage is talking about Scripture, about the Bible, which we call “the Word of God”. But this reference to the word “word” is not a reference to “the Word of God”, that is, the Bible. This passage says that *the Word was God*, but it does not say that the Bible is equivalent to God. People sometimes think that this passage says that God and the Bible are somehow equivalent, that the Bible is as fundamental to our faith as God. But while the Bible tells us about our God, it does not claim to be as important as God.

Now, it is true that in our first Bible quote, the word logos has been translated into the word “word”. But that’s not the only meaning of the word “logos”. This Greek word also meant “reason” or “plan” or “personal action”. Its roots are ancient. In classical, pre-Christian Greek philosophy, it referred to divine reason or the order of the cosmos. But the author of the Gospel of John wasn’t a pagan, an ancient

Greek philosopher. Very importantly, as an early Christian, the author would have interpreted the word *logos* as referring to *God's* divine reasoning. Consider this line from our first passage: *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*. In other words, God's divine reasoning became flesh and dwelt among us. Considering the passage as a whole, it says that God's reasoning is behind everything, that the universe only makes sense through God, that God is the beginning and the end of everything. It also means that God has always existed, that God precedes all that we know. And most importantly, it means that God's plan from the beginning was to send his son to Earth.

And the Gospel is about Jesus in particular. So, the intro, this possible hymn or prayer, makes perfect sense where it is. Again, consider that in our first passage it says that the Word became flesh – in other words, that God's will, God's divine reasoning was transformed into his son, Jesus the Christ. The word Christ comes from the Greek word "*Christos*", meaning the anointed one or the Messiah. So, God's divine reasoning led to the creation of the Messiah – our Messiah. That's what this passage says. It has nothing to do with the Word, in the context of the Word meaning Scripture.

Let's look at a second, briefer passage. It's from Hebrews, Chapter 4, verse 12:

12 *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

Hebrews is one of the letters in the New Testament. We don't know who wrote it. Some have suggested Paul. But the style, the vocabulary, and the emphases in the sentence structure are very different from Paul's Greek. Some have suggested Barnabas, who worked with Paul, and others have suggested Priscilla or her husband Aquila, who were Christians mentioned in the Bible; they were early martyrs. This couple instructed a man named Apollos, and some have suggested that he wrote this letter. But the plain truth is that Hebrews is anonymous. Interestingly, the writer of this letter – whoever it was – was very literate. Hebrews has a rich vocabulary and highly eloquent Greek and also exhibits the writing style of a highly educated rabbi. It quotes the Old Testament frequently. It has the severest warning for sinners and the warmest encouragements for the faithful. Hebrews is about Jesus, who he is, and what he has done for us. It is a message of hope. It promises us an eternal fellowship with God. It tells us to take action - to actively become more like Jesus Christ.

We don't even know for a fact that Hebrews was originally written as a letter. It does not begin with a greeting, like Greek letters, such as those of Paul, usually did. We know that it is ancient and not fraudulent: in about the year 90, a letter written by someone in Rome references the Book of Hebrews. The author of that letter was a man named Clement. He was a leader of the Roman church and possibly a Bishop. This passage from Hebrews also contains that word "logos", translated into the word "word".

This passage says that the purpose of God, the grand scheme of God, the divine reasoning of God is alive and active in us, that it is sharper than any sword, and that it can discern what is in our hearts. Remember, from our first, long passage, that the divine reasoning of God led to Jesus. We could reason that Jesus is alive and active, within us, and sharper than any sword.

Let's continue with this thought, and consider a third passage, this one from late in Hebrews. It offers some evidence that this was indeed written as a letter, as it seems to be the kind of benediction that might occur at the end of a pastoral letter. The passage is Hebrews, Chapter 13, verses 20 and 21.

***20** Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, **21** equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

This says that we can do God's will through Jesus Christ. That's why Jesus came to us, so that he could be alive and active within us, so that we could carry out God's divine plan, or - the logos. Jesus is part of the plan, the logos, and so are we.

But going back to the beginning of John - this highly poetic introduction - it tells us so much about our religion. It is a heartfelt wish for blessings to all believers. It says that the same power that sent Jesus to Earth will equip us to do God's work. It says that

we can be confident of God's power and that we will carry out God's will. Notice how our third passage ends: *Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever*. This is called a "doxology", a liturgical, or ritualistic, expression of praise to God, saying just what we think Jesus Christ deserves to be given. It is much like the communion doxology used in many churches, and it is like the doxology at the end of the Lord's Prayer. This passage says that Jesus is due glory forever and ever. So, our three Bible quotes today collectively tell us that Jesus came here to carry out God's vision for us, and that we, through Jesus, can then carry out God's will. That's the mission of the Christian – to live the way Jesus taught us, not simply to read the Bible. Our faith encompasses the Bible; it is explained by the Bible. But our faith and God are not equivalent to the Bible. In my messages, I may like to focus on the Bible – but it is God that matters the most. God – and Jesus, who is God – deserve all glory and power forever and ever.

As a former academic serving in an engineering school, I have always liked this word "logos". However, it's not because it superficially seems to refer to the Word of God, to Scripture. That's not what I love. It's because I'm attracted to a God who is deliberate, whose vision for us is directly related to why Jesus was sent to this planet. I'm an engineer who is a believer. I like having something concrete to do for God. That's how we should live as Christians – as people with a mission. We are God's engineers. We

are here to carry out his divine vision.

One of the things I like to talk about is how we can live the way Jesus taught us to live, the things that we can do, like praying to God, and forgiving others, treating everyone with love and respect, refusing to judge others, offering comfort to others, and bringing faith to those around us. Perhaps the most important thing is simply to have faith. We also insist on always doing the right thing. We also give thanks to God for what we have - and we share what we have with others.

But there is one more thing we can do. It's a powerful thing, and it consists of taking God up on a very special offer that he makes to us. Here is the last part of our first passage, only this time, from the New Living Translation, because I think these particular lines are easier to understand in this translation: *For the law was given through Moses, but God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ.*¹⁸ *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.* There is a reference in here that isn't obvious to the casual reader. The part about Moses is a reference to Exodus, Chapter 33, at the end of the chapter, where God tells Moses that he, Moses, must not look at him, God. God says *you may not look directly at my face, for no one may see me and live.* But John's Gospel, in what we just read, tells us that although Moses couldn't see God, all of us can see God now. That's the big shift from the Old to the New Covenant. Through the

New Covenant, brought from God by Jesus, we can look into God's face. That is also part of God's divine reasoning, of the logos: our ability to look directly into God's face. Give it a try. It's easy to do – I can tell you what you will see.

What do we see when we look in God's face? Remember that we were made in the image of God. That's what it says in Genesis. When we look into God's face, we see joy and we see sorrow. We see laughter and we see tears. Ever wonder why we can't just be happy all the time? God made us to be like him, right? That is what Jesus brought to us: the full confidence that we are precisely what we are meant to be – because we can look into the face of God and see. Moses could never quite know just what it meant to be made in the image of God, but to still be human. Because he could never see God. He always had a doubt. But this what we know: we are made in the image of God, but we are *not* God. And so, we are imperfect, which is what God wanted us to be. We are made in his image, but imperfectly. Take a look, not up at the sky to see God, but at your fellow humans. See God in us. See fear, anger, disgust, surprise, delight, trust, anticipation, boredom, worry, satisfaction, friendship, envy, love, indignation, pity, kindness, shame, helplessness, surprise, astonishment, modesty – the full breadth of emotions, good and bad - they are all necessary, because they are all in the face of God.