

# The Word in His Absolute, Eternal Being (John 1:1)

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*John 1:1 In the beginning was existing the Word, and the Word was face to face with God, and the Word was by quality God,*

As seen from the text above we come to the gospel of John to meditate upon “the Word” but first we need to have a view of the context. One of the many interesting elements about the gospel of John is that in chapter 20 verses 30-31 he offers up the reason for writing this gospel narrative. A couple of things that are fascinating about the purpose statement: (1) it is found positioned in a context surrounded by Christ’s appearances – *Christ appears to Mary Magdalene (20:11-18); Christ appears to the disciples (Thomas not included) (20:19-25); Christ appears to the disciples (Thomas included) (20:26-29); The purpose for the writing (that you might believe that the Messiah, the Son of God has appeared, namely Jesus)(20:30-31); Christ appears to seven disciples (21:1-14); Christ affirms Simon Peter (21:15-23);* (2) it reveals that many other “signs” were performed by Jesus (20:30) but that he (John) chose certain ones (7) to record – *water into wine (2:1-11); healing of nobleman’s son (4:46-54); healing of paralytic (5:1-16); feeding of the five thousand (6:1-13); walking on water (6:16-21); healing of man born blind (9:1-7); raising of Lazarus (11:1-44)* – all combined to show that Jesus is the Son of God. These seven signs fall within the framework of the revelation of the Son of God (2:1-12:50). The overall flow of the gospel narrative is as follows – *(1) The incarnation and presentation of the Son of God (1:1-18); (2) The revelation of the Son of God in the world (1:19-12:50); (3) The revelation of the Son of God to the disciples (13:1-17:26);(4) The rejection and revelation of the Son of God to the world (18:1-21:25).*

John as he opens up his gospel narrative will not take us back merely to the beginning (“In the beginning” Ἐν ἀρχῇ) but back before the beginning (“was the Word” ἦν ὁ λόγος). This introductory section has been divided up into two parts (vv. 1-5) dealing with the essential nature of the Word, (vv. 6-18) dealing with the historical manifestation of the Word, or into three parts (vv. 1-5, 6-13, 14-18) laying out the progressive revelation of the Word, growing in detail from section to section.

Our focus for this meditation is v. 1 – the Word in His absolute, eternal being. What we have in this first sentence of the gospel is a super example of symmetry but not just mere symmetry but stately symmetry because of the subject matter of the sentence. We find three clauses that make up this sentence placed side by side (...and [καὶ]...and [καὶ]); the subject (the Word [ὁ λόγος]) repeated three times; the substantive verb repeated three times in the same relative position and the three clauses contain all that is possible for man to comprehend as to the essential nature of the Word in relation to time, mode of being, and character. Hence what we find revealed here is that: He was (1) in the beginning, He was (2) with God, and He was (3) God.

These same three clauses in the first sentence of the gospel correspond to the three great moments of incarnation in v. 14 – He who “was God,” became flesh (σὰρξ); He who “was with God,” tabernacled (ἐσκήνωσεν) among us; He who “was in the beginning,” became (ἐγένετο) (in time).

The first phrase that I would like to look at is “in *the* (Note italics, not in the original) beginning” in that which is by quality beginning, in that which is in its very essence all that a beginning can and should be “the Word was.” Note that John does not write *from* the beginning indicating the Word’s existence and activity in time from that initial point. But he writes “*in beginning*” emphasizing the Word’s existence and activity at the initial point, and so before time. Notice vv. 2-3 “He was in the beginning with God” and “All things through Him came into being, and apart from Him came into being nothing that has come into being.” John does not end there however he will take our thoughts further beyond by writing “was the Word.” This verb “was” does not express a completed past, but rather a continuous state. It is an imperfect indicative of εἶμι (as a predicate “be” relating to what exists) indicating a continuous state of being. The imperfect tense in the Greek suggests in this relation, as far as human language can go, the notion of absolute, transcending-temporal, existence and this is affirmed by the fact that v. 14 corresponds to v. 1 contrasting between the two verb forms, between the Word “continuously existing” and “becoming.” He is presenting the Word in His absolute, eternal existence. In the beginning the Word was already continuously existing.

The question then comes to mind; was this merely a static existence? Did the Word merely become “personal” at the point of creation or at the moment of incarnation? Notice the next clause of this very symmetrical sentence. “And the Word was with God.” Literally “the Word was face to face (πρὸς) with God.” The verb (“was”) again repeated from the earlier clause indicating that this was the eternal existence of the Word in relation to God. This is one of the most awe inspiring phrases. First it reveals that the Word was personally distinct from God indicating that there is a personal distinction in relation to the persons of the triune Godhead. As amazing as this truth is this phrase takes us even beyond that of simple coexistence, of two persons contemplated separately in company (εἶναι μετὰ ‘with’), or united under a common conception (εἶναι σὺν ‘together with’), or in local relation (εἶναι παρὰ ‘beside, alongside’), but of being directed towards and regulated by that with which the relation is fixed (πρὸς ‘facing, face to face’). As A.T. Robertson notes πρὸς with the accusative presents a plane of equality and intimacy, face to face with each other. The personal being of the Word was in active intercourse and in perfect communion with God. As Robertson states “though existing eternally with God the Logos was in perfect fellowship with God.” This brings to mind such statements from Christ in His ‘high priestly prayer’ (John 17:5, 24), “with the glory which I had before the world was (πρὸ τὸν κόσμον), with You;” and “for You loved Me before the foundation of the world (πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου),” thus indicating that this deep, intimate, and supremely transcendent communion was so impressed upon the consciousness of the Word that it could not

be erased. Who else could come to “tabernacle” among man (1:14) and “exegete” (ἐξηγήσατο) the Father than the One who is in the bosom of the Father (1:18)?

We are then taken to the third clause of this beautifully symmetrical sentence, “and the Word was God.” What a powerful climax in this trilogy. In Greek the article (i.e. “the”) being with the noun and not with the adjective means that the articular noun is the subject. Therefore ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν can only mean “God is love,” not love is God. So in like manner θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος the meaning has to be “the Logos was God,” not God was the Logos (see also 1:14). Here in this last clause “the Word” (ὁ λόγος) is the subject but the predicate “God” (θεὸς) is emphatically placed to the fore. It is necessarily without the article because it is describing the nature of the Word. The Word was by quality God. All that is ascribed to God the Word is. What is presented here is a clear and concise affirmation of the true deity of the Word. We have seen “the Word” placed in personal relationship to God the Father, while in this third clause “the Word” is declared to be “God” and so included in the unity of the Godhead.

How awesome and awe inspiring this sentence is but how soul moving and heart transforming to see it in light of the rest of this gospel narrative. The Word in His absolute, eternal being (1:1) took on flesh (human nature) (1:14) and has exegeted the Father to us. “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (14:9).

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