

Jn 1:1-18

- I. Jesus came, bringing Life, Light, Grace, and Truth (1-17)
 - A. The preexistent Word brought Life and Light, and received a mixed response (1-13)
 - 1. The preexistent Word brought Life and Light, being verified with testimony (1-8)
 - a. The preexistent Word is creator of all (1-3)
 - 1) The preexistent Word (1-2)
 - a) The Word was God, with God, from eternity past (1)
 - (1) In the beginning was the Word (1a)

In the beginning

John's Gospel begins with the phrase "in the beginning." This is an echo of the very first words of the Bible, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

John is making reference back to creation at the start of his Gospel. The other Gospels may start with John the Baptist, or with the birth of Jesus, but John starts way back before anything existed. John put Jesus in the biggest picture context of the entire Bible, starting with cosmic creation.

Therefore, John is saying that Jesus is eternal; He was there in the beginning. Jesus did not come into being when He was born in Bethlehem. He never came into being. Because there never was a time when He did not exist. He was in the beginning.

Was the Word

Even though John was talking about Jesus, he does not make this clear until later in the prologue. He does not specifically mention Jesus in these first verses, but he used the term "the Word."

This term is a translation of the Greek word *logos*, which means a word – something spoken or thought. But it also has a much broader meaning of "message" or even broader meaning of "content" or "matter about which something is spoken." This term also had a technical meaning in Greek philosophy. When ancient philosophers, the first scientists, began to investigate the fundamental material which makes up our planet – the most basic reality, some said "earth," some said "air," some said "water," and some said "fire." Each of these suggestions had some evidence to commend it, and some evidence against it, so they could not come to a consensus.

So, they agreed that the world was made of a combination of these four things, and began to ask about an underlying principle, a more fundamental matter or reality that unified and explained these four things. They didn't describe this underlying reality in much detail, but the name they gave to it was "*logos*." They assumed it was some kind of purposeful arrangement that explained all of reality. In other words, for an educated Greek speaker, the term "the Word" would bring connotations of the most foundational principle underlying and causing everything.

And for a Jew, the term "the Word" would bring up thoughts of the Word of God from the Old Testament, especially because John had just referred to creation. In the creation narrative, God spoke, and that called light into existence, and then God spoke and other things were created, solely through the power of God's speech.

"The Word" in the Old Testament, was the creative power of God, but also the expression of His will, and even the expression of His very being. In the Old Testament, God's Word was equal with God, because it was an expression of Who He is.

D. A Carson wrote, "God's 'Word' in the Old Testament is his powerful self-expression in creation, revelation and salvation, and the personification of that 'Word' makes it suitable for John to apply it as a title to God's ultimate self-disclosure, the person of his own Son." (The Gospel According to John, p. 116)

This is what John said existed in the beginning.

(2) **And the Word was with God (1b)**

And John located "the Word" in the presence of God in the beginning. The Word was in close relation with God, something like face to face intimacy (see 17:5).

(3) **And the Word was God (1c)**

John also claimed that "the Word" was equal with God, that "the Word" was God. Both Greeks and Jews thought of "the Word" as somehow being divine. But this is still an astounding statement for John to be making.

Right from the beginning of his Gospel, John says the very most about "the Word", that He is God Himself. And this is a theme which John will revisit throughout his Gospel. Some, like Jehovah's Witnesses, try to deny this, translating this phrase as "the Word was a god." – in other words, somehow a lower level of divinity, but not equal with God. However, this is a complete misunderstanding of the grammar John used. John clearly equated "the Word" with God. And John placed the term "God" in emphatic position, kind of like using bold print or an exclamation point to certify that the One he labeled as "the Word" was the same as the God of the Old Testament.

b) **This One was in the beginning with God (2)**

Then John repeated two items:

The Word was in the beginning

And the Word was God

Notice the sandwich structure, which is typical of Jewish writings:

A. In the beginning was the Word

B. The Word was with God

X. The Word was God

A. This One was in the beginning

B. With God

This is to highlight, to emphasize the center item, that "the Word" is equated with God, which is a theme throughout John's Gospel

2) **The Implication: Everything was created through Him, with no exceptions (3)**

In this verse, John gives the implication of what he just wrote – that the preexistent Word is the source of every created thing. He is continuing the allusion to the creation account in Genesis. (see also Psa. 33:6)

a) **Pos: All things came to exist through Him (3a)**

“All things” means everything, leaving no exceptions except “the Word” through Whom all things came to exist

b) **Neg: And not one thing which came into existence, existed without Him (3b)**

John further clarified and elaborated the previous statement by insisting that absolutely nothing which came into existence, came to exist without Him. He is the agent through which absolutely everything was created. This again proves that “the Word” was not created. And there is nothing uncreated except “the Word”

The eternal, uncreated creator created everything that exists. And “the Word” is that creator and the agent of creation. There are some logical inconsistencies with John’s statements unless we assume a Trinitarian understanding of the Godhead – that “the Word” is equated with God, yet can also be distinguished in some ways from God the Father.

b) **His Life and Light invaded the darkness, verified with proper testimony (4-8)**

1) **His Life and Light is overcoming darkness (4-5)**

a) **He brought Life and Light, invading the darkness (4-5a)**

(1) **Life was in Him (4a)**

“in Him” is actually placed first for emphasis. He is the bearer and source of all life (see 11:25, 14:6). Life is a major theme in John, as we see in John’s purpose statement that we would have life in His Name by believing in Christ.

Just like in Genesis, life was not inherent in the chaos before creation, but it came from the Creator. So here, “the Word” is the source of all life, dependent on nothing else (see 5:26).

And, as we see throughout John’s Gospel, eternal life is more than just physical life. It is a quality of life, as will be defined throughout the rest of John.

(2) **And the Life was the Light of men (4b)**

This life was defined as the Light of men. Light is also a major theme in John. “The Word” somehow gives enlightenment and life to people, in ways that John will later elaborate (see 8:12, 9:5). In this phrase also, we hear echoes of Genesis where God said “let there be light.”

(3) **And the Light is shining in the darkness (5a)**

And just like in Genesis, the light shines in the darkness. John is just starting to hint at what he will later elaborate – that somehow the Light and Life from God is invading the world of darkness and making a profound impact. We will see the contrast between light and darkness throughout John’s Gospel.

This is a two-level symbolism, kind of a double entendre: It is light and enlightenment verses darkness, creation life vs. non-creation chaos. But it quickly also takes on the idea of moral value, where light = good and darkness = evil.

b) **And the darkness has not overcome/understood it (5b)**

Darkness has not received, understood, or overcome the light. This introduces a major theme of either receiving or rejecting God, Christ and the truth (see 3:19-21).

There is an ambiguity here, and translations differ in different Bible versions. It could mean “the darkness did not receive the light.” It could mean “the darkness did not understand the light.” And it could mean “the darkness did not overcome or overpower the light” (see 12:35). This also is probably an intentional double meaning from John, having all of these connotations. But the emphasis is most likely on the fact that the darkness does not stop the light.

Darkness not receiving nor overcoming the light is like a bug meeting a windshield. Just like the bug does not receive or understand the windshield, and this does not slow down the car. Likewise, people will reject Jesus because they do not truly understand Jesus. But this does not hinder Jesus one bit. Darkness is not the last word; Light is more powerful than darkness. Darkness in its rejection of the light hurts the darkness. It does not impact the light.

The darkness does not and will not overcome the light, Because Life is in Jesus and He is the Light of the world, shining in the darkness.

2) **John [the Baptist] arrived as a witness to the light (6-8)**

a) **John [the Baptist] arrived, having been sent by God (6)**

(1) **A man arrived, because God sent Him (6a-b)**

(a) **A man came on the scene (6a)**

(b) **Having been sent from God (6b)**

The author emphasized that John the Baptist was sent from God. This validates John’s ministry, but this also is a theme throughout this Gospel. Jesus is the ultimate One sent from God

(2) **His name was John (6c)**

John, the author of this Gospel, is not to be confused with John the Baptist, who is the one being described in these verses

b) **He came as a witness to the light (7-8)**

(1) **He came testifying so that people would believe in the light (7)**

(a) **This one came for the purpose of testimony (7a)**

The reason John was sent from God was to be a witness, which is also a theme throughout this book.

(b) **Purpose: So that he would testify, so people believe in the light (7b-c)**

(i) **Purpose: So that he would testify concerning the light (7b)**

The content of his testimony was the Light, to tell people about Jesus and the Life He brings. A good witness does not talk much about himself, but points to the light.

(ii) **Purpose: So that all may believe through him (7c)**

The ultimate purpose of John being sent and testifying is so that people would believe in Jesus, which is also the purpose of the Gospel of John

(2) Clarification: He was just a witness to the Light (8)

(a) Neg: This one was not the Light (8a)

The author clarified the identity of John, that he was not the Light. He was not the hoped-for Messiah. He was not to be the center of attention.

(b) Pos: Rather, he came to testify to the light (8b-c)

(i) But [this one came] (8b)

(ii) Purpose: So that he may testify concerning the light (8c)

Rather, John came to witness to something greater than himself - so that he may witness to the light. This purpose statement is repeated verbatim from 7b above.

Notice that the parallel structure strongly suggests the connection back to the ultimate purpose of John's testimony in 7c:

A. A man was sent from God, named John

B. This one came to witness

C. So that he may witness concerning the light

X. So that All may believe through him

A. This one was not the light

B. But [he came to witness]

C. So that he may witness concerning the light

Again, John used a sandwich structure to emphasize his most important themes, believing in "the Word" – the Light

2. The light came into the world, with a mixed response (9-13)

a The True Light, which is giving light upon every person, was coming into the world (9)

Here John circles back to the theme of "the Light," which was the light of men, which was shining in the darkness, as we saw in previous verses. He emphasized the same kind of things in this verse, but took it a step further.

In one sense, verses 9-13 are an explanation and elaboration of verses 1-8. He is drawing on what he said in those verses, but here he takes it to the next level. And verse 9 also serves to introduce the responses to the light, which he will describe in verses 10-13

John described Jesus as "the true Light" – that is, the real, genuine light, as opposed to fake or false counterfeit lights. But more so, this means that Jesus is the epitome, the definition of all light. He is the lightest light that is ever possible. He is the ultimate self-disclosure of God. The theme of Jesus being true also runs through this Gospel. Jesus is the true bread from heaven, the true vine, etc.

And John also described this true Light as that which enlightens all men. In verse 4, Jesus was called the Life which was the Light of men. Now, it is said that He brings light to men. He shines on people to give them this light. This may have reference to the same kind of idea as 3:19-21, that the light exposes people for what they truly are, as shown in their response to the light.

But the main idea in this verse is that this true Light was coming into the world (see 3:19, 12:46). In one sense, this Light has always been in the world, because "the Word" was in the beginning. But John is again picking up and anticipating a major theme of Jesus coming into the world from the Father, which he will develop through the rest of the book. Just like John showed up to witness, because he was sent from God – so now, the Light is showing up to do something significant. John will fully explain this starting in v. 14. But before then, this verse sets up for the discussion of how the light was received in the next few verses

b The mixed response: Some reject Him, some receive Him and find life (10-13)

1) Neg: The world did not acknowledge its Creator and Lord (10-11)

Verses 10-11 tell us of the rejection of the Light

a) The world did not acknowledge its own creator (10)

(1) The creator was in the world He created (10a-b)

John circled back to the fact that “the Word” created everything

(a) He was in the world (10a)

Because He existed from the beginning, cf. v. 1

(b) And the world came to exist through Him (10b)

As John had stated earlier in v. 3

(2) And the world did not know Him (10c)

This is against all expectations – the world should have known Him

The term “world” has a range of meanings, and it changes connotations throughout this passage. In 10a, it means “the world of men,” that is, the totality of humanity. In 10b,

“world” means “the created universe” especially concentrating on earth. And in 10c, it means the hostile sinful world, humanity in rebellion against and in opposition to God.

It is ridiculous that the world would not know and acknowledge God. He is “the Word.” He is God. Nothing exists except from Him. Something is twisted and broken if creation does not acknowledge its creator. And it gets worse in the next proposition.

b) His own world did not receive its owner (11)

(1) He came into His own things (11a)

That is, His property, His possession, His beloved, His home. This is the same expression used in 19:26-27 where John is to take Jesus’ mother into his own home, literally “into his own.”

(2) And His own ones did not receive Him (11b)

He should have received a reception of honor and glory and gratitude. But He received no reception at all. Just like Paul says in Romans, “...though they knew God, they did not acknowledge God. They traded their Glory for images” (see Rom. 1:18-25). You might expect that Romans, Greeks, pagans, etc. would have this kind of response. But John is talking about Jews. They were the chosen people with a long history with this God. They had the Law and the Prophets. They were waiting for the Messiah!

But they rejected the Lord of life, the source of life, the true Light Himself. Remember, this does not hurt the light, but harms those who reject the light. Again, by the structure, John highlights the unbelievably inappropriate reaction of people to the Light.

A. He was in the world

B. The world exists through Him

X. The world did not know Him

B. He came to His own

X. His own did not receive Him

John is beginning to hint at a theme that he will develop through this book, the theme of judgment – that it is real, and that it is deserved.

2) Pos: But those who received Him are given new life from God (12-13)

In verses 12 and 13, John gives a possible alternative to rejecting the Light, and describes the result that comes from this positive response

a) But the ones who received Him (12a)

This is obviously the opposite of rejecting Him as seen in vv. 10-11. John clearly highlighted two and only two options (reject or receive), and he strongly hinted that one option is better than the other

b) He gave them new birth as God's children, born from God (12b-13)

(1) He gave to them – to those believing in His Name – authority to be children of God (12b)

In this next proposition, John more precisely defined what it means to receive Him, as “those who believe in His Name.” Believing in His Name is a major theme throughout this Gospel, which is seen in his purpose statement, “by believing, we have life in His Name” (see 20:31).

And then John tells the result of receiving Him. It is the gift of authority to be children of God. Being children of God is yet another major theme of John introduced in this prologue. And it is a gift given, not a reward earned for believing – faith is not a work. The term “authority” is not to be understood as an independent power to be wielded in pride at our discretion. It is not a “right” in the sense of the western mindset. Beware of a mindset of entitlement and privilege when dealing with God. We have no inherent right to be in God's family, it is only bestowed by a gift of God's grace.

But “authority” means proper ability, resource, access or capability, like an employee who has a right/ability/authority to enter the building, even though he does not own or control the building.

And this is an authority to be children of God. This is a close family relationship, characterized by care, provision, inheritance, and so many other things that will be elaborated in the rest of John, and in the rest of the New Testament.

(2) Having been given life, not from human decision, but from God (13)

John elaborated on how we become children of God, first negatively, and then positively (see 3:6, 8:42).

(a) Neg: Not having been given life from human decision (13a-c)

(i) Who [have] not [been born] from blood (13a)

This may be a reference to Jewish ethnicity, which was a big deal for the Jews of Jesus' day. It was a source of pride, and believed to qualify a person for inclusion in the people of God. But Jesus and the rest of the New Testament clarify that ethnicity has no bearing whatsoever on inclusion in God's true people.

(ii) Neither [have they been born] because of the will of flesh (13b)

This likely refers to the sexual desire, which often results in procreation.

(iii) Neither [have they been born] because of the will of a man (13c)

This refers to the male partner, who in this culture typically initiated any sexual activity.

All three of these speak of natural childbirth. And there is nothing natural about what John is describing in this passage. Jesus will be very clear in chapter 3, that this is not something we are able to do for ourselves. And it is not something we can cause to happen to someone else. It is a miracle beyond our control. Negatively, our becoming children of God is not from human design,

control, or working, because, as Jesus will say in 3:6, “flesh gives birth to flesh, but spirit gives birth to spirit.”

(b) Pos: But they have been born from God (13d)

The word translated “have been born” refers to the male parent’s part in procreation, similar to the old word “beget”. This points to our birth into God’s family as being God’s doing, and only God’s doing. It is not self-help, self-reformation, or self-improvement. As we’ll see in ch. 3, it is new birth. It is miraculous. It is not something we can manufacture or program. It is a miraculous gift from God that we are born from God as we receive Him by believing in His Name.

B. The Word has come to us and has completed bringing us grace and truth (14-17)

1. The Word has come to us, and we have seen His glory (14)

Verse 14 signals the major transition of this prologue. This is the first use of the term “the Word” since verse 1. And it is taken up again to show that “the Word,” the Light that John has been talking about has now become present among us, revealing God’s glory to us.

a The Word became human and dwelt among us (14a-b)

1) And the Word became flesh (14a)

Now the identity of “the Word” is made clear

The man Jesus of Nazareth is not just an ordinary man. He is the eternal Word come to us as a human. He did not just have the appearance of a human, as some early heresies taught. He did not just put on a human costume, or appear like a human. But He truly became human. He took on the actual substance of humanity. John used the term “flesh” to emphasize the material human substance that was thought to be inferior to spiritual reality in much Greek thought. That which was an offense to human philosophy became reality in the incarnation (“incarnate” literally means “in flesh”). Jesus participated in the concrete physicality and corresponding limitations of human existence.

This is absolutely astounding. The eternal/infinite Word confined Himself to a finite human in a particular place in time and space. It will make your head hurt if you think about it too much. The Creator God of the universe became one of His creatures. This is impossible according to Greek and Jewish thought. And there is so much about it that is hard to wrap our mind around. But that is exactly what He did. Nothing is impossible with God.

So, Jesus is still fully God, and now Jesus is fully human. He is God Who took on our humanity.

2) And He tabernacled among us (14b)

I’ve used the unusual term “tabernacled” to show that John did not use the typical generic word for dwelling. He used a very specific word that means to pitch a tent in order to dwell somewhere. It is a reference to the Old Testament tabernacle – the movable tent set up at the Exodus, as a place for God’s presence to travel with the Israelites from Egypt to the promised land (see Exo. 25:8). Just like the first part of John’s prologue made reference to the creation narrative, this last part makes reference to the Old Testament Exodus in multiple ways.

The purpose of the tabernacle in the Old Testament was for God to be present with His people. And here John is saying that God has now made Himself present with His people in an even more direct way – in Jesus. And, by the way, this means that there is no more need for a physical temple, as Jesus will make clear later in John’s Gospel.

b We have seen the glory of the One from God, full of grace and truth (14c-e)

1) And we have seen His glory (14c)

The Word becoming flesh and coming to dwell with us was for the purpose of revealing His glory, for making it known.

This also is a reference to the Old Testament tabernacle, which was filled with the glory of God in a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire. This miraculous amazing glory that filled the temple in the Old Testament, John says, is present with us in Jesus (see also 12:41).

The way they saw His glory was not in outward manifestation (except at the transfiguration). The way that Jesus revealed God's glory is a major theme throughout John's Gospel. So, watch for how Jesus displays His glory throughout the story. Just a hint – the cross, where Jesus dies in weakness and shame, is the height of His glory, according to John.

2) Glory as the One from God, Who is full of grace and truth (14d-e)

a) Glory as of the one and only One from God (14d)

Here John elaborated on what he meant by "His glory." He said it is the glory of the One and Only from the Father. This term "One and Only," which is sometimes translated "only begotten" does not have the connotation that Jesus came into being at some time. Rather, it simply means that Jesus is one of a kind. He is completely unique. There is none other like Him. This term is also used in v. 18 and 3:16. This One of a kind from the Father shows His glory.

He is from the Father. Remember that "the Word" was with God in the beginning. Now He has come to be WITH us. Yes, John the Baptist was sent from God. But Jesus is sent from God in a more primary way. He has the glory that is fitting and appropriate for the Unique One from God, Who is God. And He displays it to people somehow by becoming a man and living present among us.

b) [the One] full of Grace and Truth (14e)

John continued to describe the glory that he saw by saying that Jesus is full of grace and truth. "Full of grace and truth" does not describe "glory" directly, but describes the "One and Only from God."

And this is another allusion to the Old Testament Exodus story. Moses had asked to see God's glory, and God replied, "I will show you my goodness" (Exo. 33: 18-19). God connected His Glory with His goodness.

Contrast this with Muslims, who claim that their god is great, but they don't claim that he is good. The real God is great. He is powerful beyond measure. But He is also good. If God was all powerful, but mean and spiteful, that would not be beneficial to us. But our God is all powerful AND He is full of grace and truth.

In the Exodus story, God promised to show His goodness and have His glory pass in front of Moses, so that Moses could see part of it. In Exodus 34:5-7, it says that God proclaimed His Name as "the LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished." God described Himself to Moses as gracious and compassionate, and slow to anger. And this is even more striking when we remember that all of this happened right after the golden calf incident. God's people had just been unfaithful to Him with the grossest of idolatry right after He had rescued them from Egypt and entered into a covenant relationship with them. And as God was revealing His Name to Moses, He was forgiving and restoring them. He clearly demonstrated that He is gracious and compassionate, and slow to anger.

And then God said that He is “abounding in love and faithfulness.” These terms correspond to the words that John used to write “full of grace and truth” in this passage. The word translated “grace” or “love” means covenant faithfulness, covenant grace, loving kindness. It means keeping covenant commitments (even when you don’t have to) and delighting to do so. It is totally free and never owed nor can it be demanded. It is God, out of His own nature, determining to freely do good to people in covenant with Him, even when they don’t deserve it. And this is the word “grace” that John used. And the word translated “truth” means faithfulness, being true and firm and steadfast to what is true and real, to the way things should be, and faithful to what is promised. It has the connotation of unchanging, unfailing, holding to the ultimate standard of all right and wrong, and never deviating from that. This is the word that John used here (see also 14:6).

In other words, by using these two words, John was saying that the One that has tabernacled among us is the same One that Moses spoke with on the mountain. He has the same glory, and the same gracious and faithful character. He is glorious beyond imagination. And His glory is most displayed in His goodness. He is giving and faithful. He is full of grace and truth.

2. The validated greatness of Christ completes bringing us grace and truth (15-17)
 - a John testified concerning His greatness (15)
 - 1) John testified concerning Him (15a)

The author circled back to John’s testimony about Jesus. John testified about the incarnated Word (Who is the Light of the world, now displaying His glory in human life.)
 - 2) And he spoke about His greatness (15b-f)
 - a) And he cried out (15b)

This points to a more vigorous form of communication than just speaking. He loudly arrested attention and focused that attention onto Jesus. That is the job of a witness, to testify to something else.
 - b) Speaking about Christ’s eternal nature and greatness (15c-f)
 - (1) Saying: (15c)

This simply serves as a marker of the content of what John said in the next propositions.
 - (2) He is the preexistent, eternal One that I testified about (15d-f)
 - (a) This One was the One of Whom I said: (15d)

John pointed to Jesus as the One Whom he had been speaking about previously. As we learn later in this Gospel (and in the other Gospels), John spoke in anticipation of the coming One, Whom the Jews of the day would have assumed to be the Messiah. And then when Jesus showed up on the scene, John testified that He was the One. The next proposition gives part of the content John had said in predicting the coming One.

- (b) He is greater than me because He is preexistent (15e-f)
 - (i) The One coming after me turned out to be before me [in rank/status] (15e)

This is part of the content of what John had proclaimed. He spoke of someone Who was coming after him. The ministry of John the Baptist preceded the ministry of Jesus in time. But John said this One was before him. The term “before” used here means “in front of,” that is before in space. But it also has the meaning of “before/higher in importance/status” which is the meaning obviously intended here. There is probably a word play here. The One coming after John, Who showed up in front of him, was before him in rank and status. The One coming after was greater than John.

- (ii) Because He was before me [in time] (15f)

The reason John gave was that the One coming after him was actually before him. In this phrase, the word translated “before” is a different word than in 15e, and it means “before in time.” This is not a contradiction for John to say the One after him was before him. Rather, it is circling back to the idea that “the Word” was in the beginning. “The Word” always existed from the beginning, with the highest status. But only at a certain time in history did He become flesh and dwell among us. Only after John’s ministry had been going for a while did the eternal Word make Himself known publicly. The preexistent Word was now walking around as a human – Jesus of Nazareth. And John was the witness, sent from God, to point Him out for us.

b The explanation of what John was saying (16-17)

Verses 16 and 17 emphasize that the very character of God is present in the incarnate Word to overflow for our benefit

- 1) Because, from His fullness, we all have also received grace upon grace (16)

It was from His fullness, that is, the fact that He is full of grace and truth. God’s character is the source. The overflow of His goodness is the reason Christ came, not our worth, not even our need, but His superabundance.

And from that superabundance, we have received grace upon grace. Literally, this says grace in place of grace. That could mean that God’s grace is like the waves on a shore – it keeps coming wave after wave with no stopping. That is true, no matter what John was intending to say here.

But more likely, John’s intended meaning is explained by what he wrote in the next verse.

- 2) The Grace and Truth given through Christ completes and fulfills what was begun with Moses (17)

- a) Because, the Law was given through Moses (17a)

John used the word “because” to transition to this verse. And so, this is probably an explanation of what John meant when he wrote “grace in place of grace.” For John, the giving of the Old Testament Law was a good thing, a gracious gift from God.

Remember, Jesus has already been connected with the Old Covenant. The Law and Moses are not negative. They are the previous, positive, gracious revelation of God, which is now being completed. It is being fulfilled by the next step, which is Jesus, the incarnate presence of the God of the Old Testament.

b) The Grace and The Truth came through Jesus Christ (17b)

That is, the grace that came through Moses is being replaced by the Grace that comes through Jesus. Notice that there is no contrast here. John did not say that the Law was through Moses BUT grace is through Christ. He said the Law was grace through Moses AND NOW the incomplete grace of the Law is now being completed with the FULLNESS of grace and truth in Christ. Jesus is the climax of God's revelation in the Law of Moses. Throughout John's Gospel, he highlights how Jesus is superior to all the Old Testament festivals and customs and fulfills the Old Testament.

Notice the repetition here of the phrase "grace and truth" which we saw in v. 14. And John stressed that it comes through Jesus Christ, because He is the perfect representation of God. Because He is the Son of God. Because He is the Word of God, Who was God with God in the beginning. But Who now has come to be human and dwell among us in order to reveal the fulness of God's glory.

II. The Word has truly, completely made God known to us (18)

This verse summarizes everything that John had written up to this point in the prologue. The Eternal Word, Who has come to dwell with us, is the revealer of God Himself.

A. No one has ever seen God (18a)

John started his summary with the contrast that no one has ever seen God. In the same story in Exodus where God revealed His Name to Moses, He said, "No one may see my face and live" (Exo. 33:20). We are unable to know God on our own. We can't reach that high (see 6:46).

Let me give a silly illustration: It is likely that you have never met either of my brothers. You don't even know who they are. You don't know what they look like or what they act like. I am the only one of us that is qualified to describe them, because I am the only one of us who knows them. And I could describe them to you, because I do know them.

In the same way, none of us is qualified to describe or reveal God, because we have no way of knowing Him on our own. But there is One Who is qualified to reveal God, because He has come from God, because He is God in the flesh.

B. But the One and Only God, Who was being in the bosom of the Father, This One made [Him] known (18b)

The One Who is qualified to reveal God is described by John as "the One and Only God." Some copies say "the one and only Son." Both are true, but the evidence strongly suggests that John wrote "the One and Only God." This is another clear teaching in John's Gospel of the deity of Christ. "One and Only" is the same term used earlier in v. 14 of the One and Only from the Father.

And John also described Him as being at the Father's side. Like being held to His chest, this indicates the most intimate kind of relationship. He is near the Father's heart. And this echoes John's earlier statement that "the Word" was with God (v. 1). This One that was intimately close to God because He is God, is definitely qualified to make God known.

And that is exactly what He does. Jesus revealed God. He made Him known. Because of our finitude and sinfulness, we could never approach God, let alone know Him. We could never get to God, but in Jesus, God has graciously come to us. The One we could never know on our own, has revealed Himself.

The term John used means to expound, to explain, to set forth in great detail Who God is and what He is like (see 6:46, 14:9).

How did Jesus reveal God? Well, we are at the end of the prologue, but the rest of John's Gospel develops this theme of Jesus revealing the Father so that we can know Him. And it shows the many ways that Jesus makes God known and brings people into deeper relationship with this God, giving them eternal life, primarily through His cross and resurrection.