

## Sermon Series: *The Gospel of John*

# The Right To Become Children of God

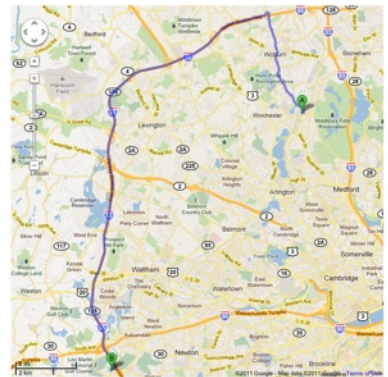
John 1:1-18 (ESV)

When you go on a long trip would you rather have a list of directions that told you where to go or would you rather have a map so you could see where you were going? Or would you rather have both?

**A** 58 Mt Vernon St, Winchester, MA 01890

1. Head east on <b>Mt Vernon St</b> toward <b>Washington St</b>	go 387 ft total 387 ft
2. Take the 1st left onto <b>Skilling Rd/Washington St</b> Continue to follow <b>Skilling Rd</b> About 2 mins	go 0.4 mi total 0.5 mi
3. Turn right onto <b>Main St</b> About 3 mins	go 1.8 mi total 2.2 mi
4. Turn right to stay on <b>Main St</b> About 3 mins	go 1.5 mi total 3.8 mi
5. Slight left to stay on <b>Main St</b>	go 489 ft total 3.9 mi
6. Merge onto <b>I-95 S</b> via the ramp to <b>Waltham/Providence RI</b> About 19 mins	go 15.2 mi total 19.1 mi
7. Take exit <b>22</b> for <b>Grove St</b>	go 0.2 mi total 19.3 mi
8. Turn left onto <b>Grove St</b> Destination will be on the right	go 0.1 mi total 19.4 mi

**B** 545 Grove St, Newton, MA 02462



The first 18 verses of the gospel of John are like a map where John shows us where he will take us throughout the letter. This morning we are going to look at these verses from 30,000 feet and see what we can see. These opening verses are commonly referred to by theologians as the Prologue. They are absolutely profound and uncharacteristic among the other gospels.

## The Prologue As Introduction

This prologue serves as an introduction, or even a table of contents, to the entire book of John. John introduces significant words and themes that he will consistently emphasize throughout the letter. Words such as life, light, witness, world, true (i.e. genuine or authentic), truth, belief, and glory along with themes such as,

1. Jesus' union with the Father (1:1; 8:58; 10:30; 20:28),
2. Jesus as the source of life (1:4; 5:26; 6:33; 10:10; 11:25-26; 14:6),
3. Jesus as the source of light (1:4, 9; 3:19; 8:12; 12:46),
4. The conflict between light and darkness (1:5; 3:19; 8:12; 12:35, 46),
5. Belief (i.e. faith) in Jesus (1:7, 12; 2:11; 3:16, 18, 36; 5:24; 6:69; 11:25; 14:1; 16:27; 17:21; 20:25),
6. The rejection of Jesus (1:10, 11; 4:44; 7:1; 8:59; 10:31; 12:37-40; 15:18),
7. Divine regeneration or new birth (1:13; 3:1-7),
8. The glory of Jesus (1:14; 12:41; 17:5, 22, 24),
9. Jesus and Moses/the law (1:17; 1:45; 3:14; 5:46; 6:32; 7:19; 9:29),

10. Jesus' unique & supreme revelation of the Father (1:18; 3:34; 6:46; 8:19, 38; 12:49-50; 14:6-11; 17:8).<sup>1</sup>

The central actor of these verses is the Word, who is explicitly named as the person of Jesus. Jesus is so much more than a mere man—so much more than even a prophet. He is the one-and-only Son of God, who is co-equal with God. This Jesus will enter the darkness of this world as the source of both the life and the light of God.

The darkness of the world is so pervasive that many will not understand who He truly is. However, in the end, He will be victorious over the darkness. The Word stands in the line of the prophets and will be the ultimate fulfillment of all that the prophets have spoken of before. But the world will reject Him and even His own people will reject Him.

However, there will be some from the world who will receive Him. Those who receive Him will see all of His glory, experience His grace, and know the truth. He is the highest and most complete revelation of God's nature and when His days are fulfilled, He will return to the side of the Father.

### What is the Heartbeat of the Prologue?

But, what is the heartbeat of these 18 verses? What is the heartbeat of this prologue? What is the dominate idea that should always remain in the front of our minds? What is the central truth that we should never forget?

Is it verse one that the Word was *with* God and the Word also *was* God? The deity of Jesus is certainly infinitely important. Is it verse two, which tells us that Jesus is life and light? We would be wise never to forget this. Is it verse 14, that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us? This is a truly glorious truth that we should treasure, but is this the heartbeat of the these 18 verses?

Why is it important that Jesus is God? Why do we need to know that He is life and light? For what reason did the Word, Jesus, become flesh and dwell among us? Why did any of these events take place? We might get some help in answering these questions if we pull out a literary tool from our grammatical toolbox.

### The Structure of the Prologue

Scholars<sup>2</sup> have noted a chaistic progression of thought in the structure of these verses. Chi is the twenty-second letter in the Greek alphabet and is shaped like an X. Chiasm is a literary structure used in ancient literature, in epic poetry, and utilized frequently in the Bible. It was used by Homer (who lived c. 8th century B.C.) in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. And we also find this structure in the Anglo-Saxon epic, *Beowulf* (c. 10th century A.D.).

Chiasm follows a progression of thought in which the symmetrical alignment of the content allows the main point of the section to be easily identified. This structure is much more easily noted in Greek than in English.<sup>3</sup> “Within chiasms it is generally the central paragraph that contains the most

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<sup>1</sup> Kruse, 58.

<sup>2</sup> First put forward by R. Alan Culpepper (1980). Others are D.A. Carson, Andreas Köstenberger, and Colin Kruse. Their works are noted below.

<sup>3</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004), 21.

significant statement.”<sup>4</sup> It is like the negative image of an arrow, where the point of the arrow directs our attention to the most important idea. If we apply this literary technology to John’s prologue, we discover some interesting observations.

A <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 were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. <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 has not overcome it.

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

C <sup>9</sup> The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup> He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

D <sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

D1 <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

C1 <sup>14</sup> 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.

B1 <sup>15</sup> (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.’ ”)

A1 <sup>16</sup> And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.

There is a progression of thought, so let’s follow it.

### Paragraph A (vs. 1-5) Corresponds to A1 (vs.16-18)

In both of these paragraphs God and the Word are pictured as being together. In paragraph A the Word is explained to be God and in A1 explicitly named as Jesus. In A Jesus is pictured as “the light” and in A1 He has entered the darkness and made the Father known.

John opens the prologue by locating the Word “with” God and similarly he closes the prologue with Jesus “at the Father’s side” evidently having finished His work and having brought to light all that

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<sup>4</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *John: The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Vol. 4, Gen. ed. Leon Morris. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 61.

needed to be seen. Moses and the law revealed (i.e. brought to light) much about God and His character, but Jesus has revealed (i.e. brought to light) so much more of the Father's character than Moses ever did. Jesus is a far more superior revelation of God and His character than Moses or the law ever was. Jesus has surpassed the law in revealing God the Father. Moses probably saw more of God's glory than any other human but even he could not see the undimmed brilliance of the fullness of God's face (Ex 33:11, 20). But Jesus was more than just a man. Verse 18 calls Jesus the only God who is at the Father's side, therefore Jesus has made known the Father in ways that Moses could never do.

### Paragraph B (vs. 6-8) Corresponds to B1 (v.15)

Last week we covered the first five verses and today we begin with the next paragraph, vs. 6-8, which focus' on John. Paragraph B (vs. 6-8) corresponds to B1 (v.15). John the baptist is the central character who serves as a witness of the "true light," (i.e. Jesus) and His superiority over all things, including John himself. If vs. 6-8 introduce John, vs. 15 elaborates on the content of John's message.

Seeing the chiasm in the structure of these verses helps us avoid the wrong conclusion that verse 15 is an abrupt reintroduction of John in order to list again some fact that he forgot to mention in verses 6-8. Verse 15 is intentionally placed and is intended to amplify the superiority of the role of Jesus and the subservient role of John.

John lists several facts about this John.

1. **The John named is not the John who is the author of this gospel** (v.6). John, the author of the gospel, is never named, but is simply referred to obliquely as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Verse 15 tells us that John, "*cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me''*" (Jn 1:15). The John who said this was the John who was baptizing (Jn 1:25) people in the Jordan River (Jn 1:28). He is a different John than the author.
2. **John was sent by God** (vs.6). John stood in the long line of the Old Testament prophets. In fact, John was the last of the prophets (Mt 11:13; Lk 16:16). The people understood John to be a prophet and so did Jesus (Mt 21:26, cf. Mt 11:7-9). In fact, Jesus said that John was the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy that Elijah would go before Messiah and prepare the way (Mt 11:14; Mal 3:1; 4:5-6). Luke clarified that what Jesus meant was that John would minister "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Lk 1:17).
3. **His primary role was to bear witness to the light** (v.6). "Witness" is a word we will see often in this gospel and carries the primary idea of being an eye-witness who testifies (i.e. speaks) about what has been seen.

John bore witness to who Jesus was. We never consider someone's own account of themselves without their claims are confirmed by someone else. Remember the Old Testament injunction that a testimony was valid only if it could be established by two or more witnesses? (Dt 17:6; 19:15; Mt 18:16; cf. Jn 5:31; 8:13-14). John was specifically sent by God to speak of Jesus, to proclaim what he had seen and heard, and to proclaim Him as Messiah.

4. **Faith is introduced** (vs. 7). The word believe (πιστεύω, *pisteuō*), is mentioned almost one hundred times in this gospel which is about three times as many as in the other gospels.<sup>5</sup> This

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<sup>5</sup> Köstenberger, 34.

belief is the kind of trust and confidence in God that pleases Him. This belief is what pleased God about Abraham (see Gn 15:6).

John's role as "witness" was to prepare the hearts of the people to believe in Jesus. John pointed people to Jesus because God had appointed Jesus as the only means of salvation, therefore, all who would be saved, would be saved through faith in Him.

5. **He was not the light** (v.8). That means that John was not the messiah. The author is clear about this and so is John the baptizer. We will discover this as we move forward through the text. John did not claim any significance for himself. He knew who he was not.
6. **John was subordinate to Jesus** (vs. 15). The mention of John again in verse 15 gives us the content of John's message. John says, "*He who comes after me ranks before me, because was before me.*" John both began his public ministry before Jesus (Lk 3:1-20) and was born six months earlier than Jesus (Lk 1:24, 26). In the Old Testament (generally, though not in all cases) and in middle eastern, as well as many other cultures, rank and honor are based upon age. The older in the family were more highly honored than the younger in the family. This is especially the case with the firstborn.

We see this today in the workplace. Seniority is based upon length of service. So those who have served longer are given preference. There is good reason for this—they have greater experience and perhaps wisdom as it relates to the job. So both John the baptizer and the author, John the Evangelist, clearly explain that Jesus was "before" John. The ministry of Jesus began before John since Jesus' work began at creation. And of course the life of Jesus began before John's since Jesus existed before the existence of time itself. Jesus is preeminent over John.

### Paragraph C (vs.9-11) Corresponds to C1 (vs. 14)

In these paragraphs, the main idea is the incarnation of Jesus and the world's response to Him. In verses 9-10 the majority of the world failed to see Him for whom He truly was, however, in verse 14, some, the minority, indeed have seen His true glory.

Now we move forward into verses 9-11. John continues the theme of the light, but he advances the idea by saying that the Word is the "true light."

1. **The True light coming into the world** (v.9). The Word, who is the true light, was coming into the world (*kosmos*, κόσμος - used 78 times in this gospel<sup>6</sup>). The **true light** is implicitly contrasted over against all other false lights and pretenders. There have been and always will be false saviors. Jesus is the genuine light, the authentic light.
2. **Enlightens everyone** (v.9). This does not refer to a universal salvific enlightenment, because the very next verse, v.10, explains that the world that He made didn't know Him. He even went to His own people, the Jews, and they rejected Him (v.11).

"Enlightens everyone" most likely means that Jesus is the savior of people from all over the globe, stretching beyond the boundaries of ethnic Jews. He enlightens everyone not just the Jews. He enlightens everyone, that is, who receives Him. For example, if I say, "This flash light will enlighten the path of everyone," it is obvious that what I mean applies only those who actually pick up the flashlight and use it.

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<sup>6</sup> Köstenberger, 35.

3. **The Word became flesh** (v.14). In verse 14 John picks up the idea of the “true light coming into the world” by explaining how that happened and what that looked like. The true light came into the world by **becoming flesh and dwelling among us**. The preexistent Word, who is God, entered the world (i.e. *kosmos*) by becoming human and living with us.

**He dwelt among us** (v.14). The Greek verb σκηνώω (*skēnoō*), commonly translated “dwelt,” literally means “to pitch one’s tent”<sup>7</sup> as in a “temporary dwelling” like the tabernacle.<sup>8</sup> This term would have called to mind the Old Testament tabernacle which God instructed Moses and the people of Israel to build while in the wilderness.

In **Exodus 25:8**, God said, “Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.” Moses called this tabernacle “the tent of meeting” (Ex 33:7) because it was the place in which He met with God. The translators of the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament dating back to the third century B.C.) referred to the tabernacle as the “tent of witness.”<sup>9</sup>

The point of John is clear. The coming of the Word into the world is far more wonderful than the Old Testament tabernacle. Through Jesus God Himself has come into the world in an infinitely more personal way than through the tabernacle. God Himself has come to live among His people in the person of Jesus.

4. **Glory as of the only Son** (v.14). John indicates that His glory is a unique glory. The glory of Jesus which they witnessed was like the **glory that comes from the one-and-only Son from the Father**. The unique Son has been endowed with a unique glory placed upon Him by the Father.

Again this “glorious” terminology takes us back to the Old Testament. In **Exodus 40:34** when the tabernacle was dedicated, the glory of God filled the tabernacle and shined so intensely bright that Moses was unable to even enter the tent (Ex 40:35). The singular glory of God that had been manifested as a result of God’s presence in the Old Testament was now resident upon Jesus who was the physical representation of the fullness of God Himself (full of grace and truth).

This is wonderfully glorious and yet at the same time tragically sad because the majority of Jews , who were His own people, rejected Him and did not receive Him (v.11). However, there were some who saw His glory. There were some who saw the “true light” for the truly glorious Savior that He is. Who were these people? What must one do to see the glory of God? This leads us to verses 12-13 and the heart of the prologue.

### Paragraph D (v.12) Corresponds to D1 (v.13)

This leaves the D paragraphs (vs. 12-13) as the center of the chiasm<sup>10</sup>, or the “pivot on which the chiasm turns, the centre of attention.”<sup>11</sup> If this structure is indeed what John intended, then these

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>8</sup> Frank E. Gaebelin, Merrill C. Tenney and Richard N. Longenecker, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 9: John and Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 33.

<sup>9</sup> Carson, 127.

<sup>10</sup> Köstenberger refers to verse 12 as “the major climax of the entire prologue.” Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004), 23.

<sup>11</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 113.



two verses are the heartbeat of the prologue. The crux of the issue is that the world is made up of people who are **not** the children of God. The reason the Word became flesh was to solve this problem. Jesus took on human flesh so that people might **become** children of God by believing in Him.<sup>12</sup> If there is a need to *become* children of God, then that means that the natural condition of all humanity is **not** His children.

Jesus became flesh and entered this world as life and light so that those who were dead to God and blind to the glory of God might live to God and see the glorious truth of who He really is. The great glory of the incarnation was necessitated by the fact that humanity is separated from God. He created the world but the world does not know Him and so Jesus came to reveal God to the world so that orphaned souls might have the right to become His children.

1. **All who receive the true light** (v.12). Jesus, the true light, came to His own people but by and large they did not receive Him. A small number did receive Him, but most rejected Him. Luke tells us that after Jesus' ascension into heaven only 120 (including Jesus' family and the Twelve) were willing to gather in His name publicly (Acts 1:14-15). But, and here is the turning point of the chiasm, ***all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, to them He gave the right to become the children of God.*** There were more than just Jews who received him. Some Jews did receive Him, but only a few, but all—no matter where they were from or who they were—all who received the true light were granted the right to become the children of God. Jesus is a Savior for all kinds of people, not just the Jews.
2. **Receiving Him is believing in His name** (v.12). What does it mean to receive Him? Receiving Him means *believing in His name*. Receiving Jesus means believing that He is all whom He claimed to be. Believing in Him means you accept that He told the truth about being the Son of God. It means putting your faith in Him. *Believing in His name* means you trust in *all* of who He is—Savior, Son, and long awaited messiah. His name carries all of the authority which was given to Him by the Father. Believing in Him means entrusting the safety of your soul into His hands. Believing in Him means you accept that He paid the debt for your sins. Believing in Him means you receive into your soul the life that He gives.
3. **Belief and life**. These two verses express the very purpose of the entire book. Remember **John 20:31** *These things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

This is the greatest need of humanity—to have life. That life only comes by believing in His name. This is why the Word became flesh. This is why the Father sent the Son into the world. This is why Jesus died, ***so that by believing in Him we might have life!!!*** Jesus came to give life. Life is what those who are dead in trespasses and sins most need. The greatest problem is that not everyone has this life.

4. **Not all people are the children of God** (v.12). The only ones who *become the children of God* are those who *believe in the name of Jesus*. *The only people who receive the right to become the children of God are the ones who believe in His name* (i.e. the name of Jesus). If you do not believe in the name of Jesus then you have no right to become a child of God.

We have to get our heads around this. We must understand that not every human being is a child of God. People often use this language saying, “We’re all God’s children.” What they mean

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<sup>12</sup> Kruse, 61.

is we are all God's creation and that is true. However, it is not true that we are all God's children in the sense that John is talking about. Remember that Jesus said to the Pharisees, "*You are of your father the devil*" (Jn 8:44).

We pass people every day who are wonderful, intelligent, creative, and beautiful creations of God who are not God's children; who are not in relationship with Him because they are not believed in the name of Jesus. The only ones who have the right to become the children of God, are those who believe in the name of Jesus. What happens when you believe in Jesus? You are born again.

5. **New Birth** (v.13). How do we become children of God? It happens through new birth. How does new birth happen? John first states three ways it does **not** happen and then concludes by describing the way it **does** happen. It happens through regeneration. This is completely a work of God.
  1. New birth does not happen, by of blood, literally "of bloods." Meaning new birth or spiritual birth does not come about as the result of the mixing of bloodlines of mother and father. New birth does not result from your parentage. Being in the blood line of Abraham does not give you the right to become a child of God and being born outside the line of Abraham does not exclude you from that right.
  2. New birth does not happen "by the will of the flesh." This means that spiritual birth is not the result of human will or a human decision. You can't decide to make yourself be born again or will yourself into becoming a child of God. No one has that power.
  3. New birth does not happen by "the will of man" or by the "will of a husband." This means no one else can make this happen either. You can't will yourself into new birth and neither can anyone else.

New birth is completely an act of God apart from any human action. Regeneration comes about only as a result of the sovereign will of God. Our part is to believe in Jesus and God's part is to give us new birth. This is a mysterious, supernatural work of God through the power of His Holy Spirit.

We live in a very dark world, a spiritually dark world. It is so dark that the very God who created this world stepped out of eternity and into time and walked among His own chosen people and they, who were expecting Him, did not recognize Him. Some did, but only a few. Yet He is the light of this world and His light will not be overpowered by the darkness of this world.

Some of us need to remember that we God might be using us to prepare the way for others to receive Jesus. Like John we are called to help prepare people to receive Jesus. This takes time and we must be patient.

The natural position of the people of this world is that they do not possess an intimate relationship to God. The way to have that relationship is through faith in Jesus. Our responsibility is to believe in the name of Jesus and when we do that then God's sovereignly grants us new birth, to be born into the family of God.

Jesus came as a wonderful Savior, full of grace and truth. The only way to see God is through faith in Him. May the Lord allow us to see His glory as we journey through this gospel.