

The New Math of the Gospel of John

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God (John 1:1).

In the first verse of this first chapter of the Gospel of John, we discover three phrases used to describe the totality, complexity and wholeness of the Word of God. The context leads us to conclude the Word is the Son of God, Jesus Christ, the second person of the Triune God.

1) In the beginning was the Word, and 2) the Word was with God, and 3) the Word was God.

Three phrases describing one of the three divine Persons of the One Triune God. One yet Three. Is it $1+1+1=3$ or is it $1+1+1=1$? Three is a number of harmony and wholeness. Typically, within the biblical revelation the number three means completion. Our physical universe is composed of time, space and matter. As our boundaries and limitations, time, space and matter define human existence.

- **TIME** has *three* dimensions: past, present and future.
- **SPACE** can be described by *three* dimensions – length, width and height.
- **MATTER** exists in *three* states -- solid, liquid and gas.

$$\underline{1+1+1=1}$$

Our human efforts to count, measure and comprehend God always fall short of defining the totality of who and what he is. As we search the Scriptures and then historic Christianity, that “great cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1) who have gone before us, and as we come to increasingly know and love God, we discover God is one God, who exists eternally as Three Distinct Persons, co-essential and co-substantial, perfectly of one mind, heart and soul – perfectly united and harmonious. Three Holy Divine Persons, one yet three!

Isaiah 6:3 describes seraphim, angelic beings, singing “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.*” Revelation 4:8 describes angelic creations called the four living creatures singing, “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is and is to come.*”

Here’s one of the majestic and soaring refrains within the lyrics of the incomparable hymn, *Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty:*

Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty! God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Let’s look more closely at The New Math of the Gospel of John, particularly as taught and expressed in this first chapter:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (vs. 1).

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (vs. 14).

1) In the beginning was the Word

The same three words “In the beginning” introduce the book of Genesis and the Gospel of John. In the book of Genesis “In the beginning” primarily has reference to the physical creation, while here in the first chapter of the Gospel of John those three words focus on a new spiritual creation.

The Word of God is the *Logos* – that’s the Greek word translated as “Word.”

Logos is a word that embraces a great deal of meaning and substance – but let’s just pause and hover over the obvious. Word implies communication. The Word of God is the speaking, the communicating God – the God who connects rather than hides, the God of conversation rather than silence, the God of reason and thinking rather than the God of anger and wrath.

The Word was in the beginning, he was the Creator God – John 1:3 says “*through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*”

As we think back to the first chapter of Genesis we remember the oft-repeated phrase “And God **said**” or “Then God **said**.” See, for example, Genesis 1:3, 1:6; 1:9; 1:11; 1:14; 1:20, 1:24, 1:26 and 1:29.

In the Gospel of John, when God came to us personally, we read that one of the defining ways in which we came to know him was as “The Word.” Jesus, the Word of God, was a Master Communicator. Read his stories – his parables – read how he both listened and responded – how he taught and how he answered questions. How he interacted. How he reasoned and debated. Jesus – The Word of God.

The physical creation recorded in the first chapter of Genesis was, as the third verse of this first chapter of John says, made through the Word of God – “*without him nothing was made that has been made.*”

The spiritual creation introduced in this first chapter of the Gospel of John is centered in and on the creator of all things, the ever-existent Word of God. This spiritual creation is spoken of in verses 12 and 13 of this first chapter of John:

“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of a human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”

2) And the Word was with God

The entire existence of the Word was toward Father God – the twin ideas of *connectedness and union* as well as *belonging and relationship* are a part of what John 1:1 means by saying the “Word was **with** God.”

The Word was **with God** in an intimate way – in union with, in relationship with, connected to and belonging to God. The Word was NOT **with God** in a casual way, randomly or haphazardly spending a little time over at his house, emailing or texting him or just having coffee.

The word “**with**” in the phrase “And the Word was **with** God” indicates both equality with God as well as distinction of personhood. The word “with” therefore is communicating that the Word was equal to God while having an individual and distinct identity. Whatever Father, Son and Holy Spirit DO in this world, because of their divine identity, they do together without division, despite their distinct personhood.

We understand from this second phrase that “the Word” was not an impersonal idea or a philosophy, but an eternal, divine Person, who is one with Father God while at the same time distinguishable from the Father.

3) **And the Word was God**

To erase any doubt about the divine, eternal identity of the Word, John 1:1 says “the Word **was** God.” All that can be said about God is said in and through the Word.

John 1:1 does not claim Jesus is *like* God, John 1:1 is saying that Jesus, the Word, **is** God.

Of course, all of the verses between verse one and verse 14 of this incredible first chapter of the Gospel of John reveal more about Jesus – but for the sake of brevity, we will now skip to verse 14 where the descriptions of the Word builds on what was revealed in verse 1.

Here in vs. 14 we read that *the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us*.

“*Made his dwelling*” among us is literally “tabernacled with/among us.” The first readers of the Gospel of John would have read these words in the light of the Bible they then knew, which was the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, the glory of God was revealed in the tabernacle.

God in the person of Jesus – God who is the Word, came and pitched his tent with humanity – he brought his glory to this earth and became one of us, in all that it means to be a human. After saying that the Word made his dwelling among us, John tells us that we have seen his glory – the glory of the One and Only Son.

That’s what the birth, life and death of Jesus is all about.

The Human Birth of the Word

The Lord of Glory came into the very life you and I live – in his humanity he fully entered into all that it means to be a fragile and vulnerable and corruptible human. He not only came to visit and see what it's like to be a human, but he came for the long run. He came to stay. He came into our lives and promised never to let go of us. Even in his glorified and resurrected state, Jesus, the Word, forever remains the human God!

If you have ever camped out under the stars in a tent, you will know that a tent is far from perfect. When it's cold outside, the temperature in most tents is also cold – when it's hot outside, the inside of a tent offers no air conditioning. When it's raining, well, most tents eventually have a few holes allowing for the rain to invade any space we thought was to some degree comfortable. Sort of like our human bodies, right?

When God in the person of Jesus tabernacled with us by becoming one of us he made himself vulnerable. That's what the birth of Jesus is all about. When we follow Jesus, we become more and more like God – and in so doing we discover what it is like to live a full life of generosity, sharing, caring and giving – and that such a life involves suffering, as indeed it did with Jesus, the Word of God.

Many if not most of you have imbibed from the cup of pain, sorrow and grief. After you drink deeply of this cup, your ability to empathize and understand the hurt and pain of others increases exponentially. I have always loved the way Eugene Peterson, in the Message Bible, translated John 1:14 into the more commonly spoken English – I think he captures the vulnerability of the Word made flesh.

“The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.”

He moved into YOUR neighborhood.

- If you live in a small apartment, he moved into an apartment right down the hall – the same size, with the same modest furnishings you have.
- If you are living in an Assisted Living facility, Jesus moved into the room right next to yours.
- If you live in a mobile home, then Jesus backed his mobile home onto the pad right next to yours and used the same hook ups for water and power you do.

He came *to understand us*. It is amazing to comprehend the incredible lengths to which God went in order to become one of us. He came *to be understandable to us*. He did not remain aloof and distant, outside all of the dimensions we experience, but he came into all of those dimensions so that, as Jesus so often said, he could be more fully revealed.

Jesus said on many occasions he came to reveal the Father. If you want to know God, then you will want to study and read all about Jesus, for God is Christ like. The Word of God is what God has to say about himself.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Amen