

The Eternal Word: God the Son in Eternity Past  
John 1:1-3

These familiar words are revolutionary; they set Christianity gloriously apart from every other belief system. But yet, really, John is simply exegeting Genesis 1. The Spirit was there to anoint the Word as He went out to do His work. God speaks, and on His divine breath His Word goes out and light and life and all created beings are brought into existence.

Here is a Word who was with God and was God. He did not come into being. That in itself tells you something about this being that is delightful and glorious. God does not happen to speak. This is a different claim — it is of the very nature of this God to have a Word to speak. This God cannot be wordless. For the Word is God. And think what that means. Here then is a God could not ever be anything but communicative. He cannot be without His Word. He could not be anything but expansive and outgoing. Here is a God who cannot be reclusive. For eternity this Word sounds out telling us about an uncontainable God. He is an overflowing, not needy, but a glorious God of grace. Here is a God who loves to give Himself.

Genesis 1 is clearly in John's mind as He writes these verses; as John writes, he has a Hebrew Scriptural idea of what the Word is. It is not a Hellenistic import of what the Word is.

Something else from the OT seems to have been on his mind. See v. 14 — “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory” [John 1:14 ESV]. The Word *tented* among us — John is thinking about the Tabernacle — the tent where God would come and be with His people and where His glory would be seen. As the glory of God is seen in the Tabernacle so we see His glory and grace and righteousness and gentleness and faithfulness in the One who went all the way to the cross. This is glory unlike any other.

In the Holy of Holies, the Lord is described as being enthroned between the cherubim over the ark (1 Sam 4:1); inside that ark were kept the two tables of the Law — the ten commandments. The Word of God belongs in the very presence and throne of God. The Word of God belongs in the very deepest and essential closeness of God and displays the innermost reality of who God is. He is the radiance of God's glory, the exact imprint of God's being (Heb. 1:3). He is God's “Amen,” the faithful and true witness.

This was the topic of the greatest battle in the early years of the church — that Christ is very God. He is true God from true God, begotten and not made, of one being with the Father. Those doctrinal words are pastoral dynamite. Cf. John Owen, *Communion*. He is One with the Father. He is the expression, radiance, glory of who His Father is, so if you've seen Him, you've seen the Father. That means that through Christ I can know what God is truly like. And that upsets all my arguments — I see how much God detests sin and through Christ I see that like the sinful dying thief, a sinner like me can cry, “Remember Me.” Though I am so spiritually lame and leprous, I've seen how He's treated people like me — He's gracious.

Charnock: Is not God...the most delectable God...love without unkindness, purity without filth, all excellency to please, without a spot to distaste...are not all things infinitely short of Him?...” How could Charnock be so besotted with God? He goes through the gales of life and he carries a core of sunshine with him. “True knowledge of the living God is found in and through Christ and what we find in Christ is so beautiful, transforming that it can make the sad sing for joy...nothing of God looks bad in Christ to the believer. The Son has risen...justice has left it’s sting in the Saviour’s side...sweetness and love is in all His carriage...”

In Jesus Christ you exchange darkness for light because He shows us an unsurpassably full God — a righteous and a kind God. A God who makes us tremble in awe and rejoice in wonder.

And see verse 3 — Christ was the One through whom all things were made. But secular thinking has eaten away the thinking about this leaving many Christians with the sneaking suspicion that while He might be the Savior, but He is not really the Creator of all. So they will sing of His redemption on Sunday, but walking on the streets they don’t feel that this is all Christ’s world — as if this world is a secular world. The result is Jesus gets reduced to a comforting nibble of chocolate...an imaginary friend. The Bible knows nothing of such a piffling Christ.

Christians are not playing at a hobby that one can put at one’s side — He is the Word of creation who upholds and sustains at every moment the world that He brought into being. All things bear His stamp. The heavens cannot but declare His glory. They continue to exist and move *only* in Him. His character is so written into the grain of the universe is to think against Christ, you must think against logic, which is to send it to folly — “The fool has said in his heart...” All our faculties work more fully when they are rooted in Him.

Christ, the glorious eternal Word, the radiance of His Father’s being.

There is another eternal title of Christ that begins creeping into John’s prologue. John focuses on *The Word*, but we see the beginning of the shift in v. 12, 14, 18. As well as being God’s eternal Word, this One is also God’s eternal Son. Word is a title that speaks of His oneness with God. Son brings out another sphere of truth — He has a real relationship with God His Father. This is something against every other belief system in the world. John is saying God is eternally a Father who has and who loves His Son.

Where every other belief system has nothingness or chaos at its foundation, here at the bottom of Christianity we do not see fundamental nothingness or chaos or a god exercising arbitrary Father, but we see a God who *is* love. This God would not be who He is if He did not love. If He did not love, He could not be the Father. To be who He is, He must love. To be the Father means to love and to beget the Son.

Now the eternal sonship of Christ is such a precious truth to Christians, as proven by Arius when he denied it in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. He conceived of a time when the Son was not. Arius saw God as One who would not want to dirty His hands with creation, so He created the Son to do the dirty work for Him. And there is much fallout from that — the Father is not eternally the Father. And since He created Him, He is not really a Father at all. And the Father did not truly love the Son,

but He is merely the hired workman. And if He has pleasure in the Son it is only because He did a good job for Him, and that becomes the means to pleasing God — to work for Him and *earn* His favor. And Christ's work in Philippians 2 is so that He is doing it to gain a position He's never had before. But that cannot be if He is the eternal Son! His motivation is not to get a glory He's never had before but to share with us what He's enjoyed before — sonship — to bring us back with Him to the position He's always had with the Father.

Who He is, shapes what He offers in the gospel. Who He is shapes the nature of the gospel. He comes to us to bring us into the life that is His so that we might be brought before the most High, not just as forgiven and not just as righteous, but as dearly loved children. So the Father's eternal love can encompass us! That's verse 12. That gets woven through the rest of John's gospel: 1:18; 17:24. And that is modeled for us in 13:23.

The Son shares with us His own sonship that we might be sons and heirs of God. Without the eternal sonship of Christ we don't get that. If Christ is not the eternal Son then God is not the eternal Father then He cannot make us His sons. Christ has no closeness to share with us. If the Son had never been close He could not bring us to that relationship. So, with no eternal Son, then God would be loveless and salvation would look entirely different. Hirelings we would be, but not sons. But the gospel of the eternal Son gives us an intimacy and confidence with the most High, beloved children of the most High. There is not other God who can do that to give us such an exalted status. With this God only we can say with all sincerity, "Our Father..." We pray this "through the mouth of Jesus...the most High delights to hear our prayers..." (Calvin) The eternal Son enables a delighted hearty prayer. With this God, prayer becomes a delightful privilege.

We sometimes speak as if our only problem is that God is perfectly holy and we are not. And if that is our *only* problem, then we'll just try again. But if the problem is the necessity to be brought into the family, then no amount of effort will suffice. Effort will produce slaves, but not sons. Sonship is free.

Five hundred years ago, the neglect of the eternal Son was at the very heart of the problem of the church. The person of Jesus Christ and His identity did not shape and drive the gospel as people heard it. In Medieval Catholicism, Jesus was only the delivery boy of the gospel. We were after grace and Heaven, not Christ. And so, Jesus Christ was reduced to one little brick in the wall of the system — and it didn't even need to be Christ. Any other "saint" could have done it. And then in the Reformation the world heard a remarkably Christ-centered message — God gives His Son and from Him we receive grace upon grace and all who receive Him, He gave the right to become children of God. It is in Him we are clothed with righteousness and we are saved and kept to the uttermost. In Reformation thought, Christ is the treasure and our security and Christ is the jewel and cornerstone of the gospel giving us a joy that no gospel without Him could match. In Reformation thought, *solus Christus* was the centerpiece of the gospel and the solas. Faith is not some *thing* we do, it is the empty hand that receives Christ. Only through Christ is the living God glorified.

Brothers, preach Christ. Christ alone. The eternal Word. the eternal Son, for there is no other gospel without Him. There is no Christ if you do not preach Christ alone. This is the center we

must hold ourselves to. We preach Christ. Christ alone. We preach Him to ourselves, to His people, to the world. And that is what honors the Reformation. And that is the beginning of all reformation. And that is what will reform lives and the church today. When Christ is faithfully preached, the world will see His glory and that is the only light that will drive out and overcome all darkness.

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