

The Divine Word

John 1:1–2

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Introduction

“What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is He?” That question that Jesus asked the Pharisees in Matthew chapter 22 is a question that every last person throughout history must answer—and must answer *correctly*. It is a question of absolutely universal relevance. Is He, merely, the son of Joseph, the carpenter, and of Mary, Joseph’s wife? Is He, merely, a good moral teacher, an inspiring non-violent revolutionary, an enlightened prophet, a wonderful example of self-sacrifice and true love?

Or is He, most ultimately, the divine Messiah prophesied throughout history by Israel’s prophets? Is He “the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16), who has been pierced for the transgressions of the ones who trust in Him for righteousness (Isa 53:5), who has risen from the grave in victory over sin and death, and who has *ascended* to the right hand of the Father in heaven, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion (Eph 1:21), the One whom every eye will see coming on the clouds of heaven (Rev 1:7), to judge the living and the dead (2 Tim 4:1), to destroy the enemies of righteousness, and to be marveled at among all who have believed (2 Thess 1:10)?

The answer to this question will determine where every human being who ever lived will spend eternity. The answer to this question is the difference between heaven and hell. It was John Newton who wrote a hymn, headlined by this very question in Matthew 22:42. It says, “What think ye of Christ? is the test / To try both your state and your scheme; / You cannot be right in the rest, / Unless you think rightly of him; / As Jesus appears in your view, / As he is beloved or not, / So God is disposed to you, / And mercy, or wrath [is] your lot.” You cannot be right in the rest, unless you think rightly of Him! You can believe ten thousand true things about Christianity, but if you’re wrong about Christ, you’re no true believer in the Gospel at all.

The Apostle Paul says this very thing in 2 Corinthians 11:3–4. He tells the Corinthians he’s fearful for them, because they so willingly tolerate those who preach “*another Jesus* whom we have not preached,” that they “receive a different spirit which [they had] not received, or a different gospel which [they had] not accepted.” But there is no other Gospel than the apostolic Gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. In fact, in Galatians 1, Paul condemns the “gospel” of the Judaizers as “a different gospel; which is really not another”—or, as another translation says, “which is really no gospel at all” (NIV). There’s no

such thing as “another gospel.” Nor is there truly any other Jesus than the Jesus who is revealed in the pages of the Bible.

You see, there are a lot of people who call themselves Christians—who say they believe in Jesus—but who teach something about Jesus that is so fundamentally unlike the true Christ, so fundamentally contrary to what Scripture reveals about Jesus, that their “Jesus” is different from the only Jesus who actually exists. They’ve concocted a whole other Jesus in their own imagination, and therefore they don’t believe in the biblical Jesus. They think they’re Christians, and yet they don’t believe in the only Jesus who exists, and so they don’t believe in the only Gospel that saves, and so they are as dead in their sins as any Hindu, Buddhist, or atheist.

And so, when someone professes to believe in Jesus, we’ve got to press and find out: Which Jesus? The Jesus of the Scriptures, or the Jesus of the false teachers? Is this the Jesus who is the spirit-brother of Lucifer, as the Mormons teach? Is it the semi-divine but not truly-God Jesus of the Jehovah’s Witnesses? Is it the Jesus of the Charismatic movement, who exists to be the believer’s personal genie, and deliver them unto health, wealth, and prosperity? Is it the Jesus of popular American culture who “*gets us*”—who winks at sin and never calls anyone to repentance? The fact of the matter is that there are certain things which, if believed, preclude someone from salvation, because to believe those things is to believe in *another* Jesus—in a *phantom savior* that doesn’t exist, and therefore who cannot save, but only condemn.

And this is not just a present-day phenomenon. The history of Christianity is littered with heresies that deny fundamental truths about the person of Christ—and especially the fundamental truth of His deity: that He is very God of very God. The early adoptionists denied the genuineness of Jesus’ deity. They taught that the merely-human Jesus was “adopted” by God at His baptism, where He was endowed with divine power but nevertheless remained a mere man. He was truly man, but not truly God. The fourth-century heretic Arius, and his followers, labeled Arians, denied the fullness of Jesus’ deity. They taught that He was *like* God—that He was of a similar substance as the Father, but not of precisely the same and identical essence. He was not *homoousios*—of the *same* nature; He was *homoiousios*—of a *similar* nature. He was not the uncreated Creator but was the first and greatest being created by the Father. The modern-day Jehovah’s Witnesses hold to just such an Arian Christology, arguing that the man Jesus pre-existed as Michael the Archangel—the greatest angel of heaven, but not God. The Monophysites, especially the followers of the heretic Eutyches, taught that Jesus was a sort of divine-human hybrid—a person with one nature that was a mix of divinity and humanity, and thus that He was neither truly human nor truly God, but a sort of third thing in between the human and divine. As I mentioned a moment ago, the Mormons teach that Jesus, like Lucifer, was the spirit-child of God—created, not the Creator of all things. Muslims believe that He was a great human prophet, but not God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity. Present-day apostate Judaism believes

Him to have been no more than a human heretic, and the Talmud even says that He is presently in hell, boiling in excrement.

Everybody has a “Jesus”! But one telltale sign that their “Jesus” is *another* Jesus, and not the *biblical* Jesus, is that He is something other than very God of very God. You say, “Wait, I get that we might *disagree* with someone who says that they believe in a Jesus who isn’t fully God. But does denying Jesus’ deity really make Him into another Jesus?” And the answer is: absolutely, yes. Why? Because there is no more fundamental of a difference than the difference between God and what is not God. God is infinitely above, infinitely beyond, infinitely other than man. The difference between Creator and creature, between “God” and “not-God,” is an infinite difference. And so the difference between (a) the biblical Jesus who is the eternal Creator, God the Son incarnate, and (b) a “Jesus” who is not God, is an infinite difference.

A Jesus who is not God could never be said to be the same Jesus who *is* God, just understood a bit differently. No, a Jesus who is not God is “another Jesus,” fundamentally different—infinite different—than the Jesus of Scripture. And that “another” Jesus simply cannot save those who trust in him, because he does not exist. Those who say they believe in and love Jesus but just don’t believe He’s God, put their trust in a fictitious savior. And that means they *have* no savior. There’s only one Savior, our great *God* and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13).

And it’s for that very reason that the Apostle John begins his Gospel unequivocally and unmistakably proclaiming the true and full deity of Jesus Christ. We observed last week, as he tells us in chapter 20 verse 31, John has written his Gospel “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.” If faith in Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation, and the only Jesus there is is God of very God, it’s no mystery as to why the John begins this book defending Christ’s deity.

He begins with that Mount Everest of a verse, as I called it last week: John chapter 1 and verse 1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” And verse 2: “He was in the beginning with God.” And we could only begin last week to scale this majestic mountain peak of divine truth, focusing especially on what John means by calling Jesus the Word of God. We spoke about how John was co-opting an extremely pregnant term in Greek philosophical thought: *Logos*—a word that the Greeks used to speak of the supreme, organizing, stabilizing, governing principle of the entire universe—which they identified with the impersonal force of reason. John is saying, this *Logos* that forms the center of your worldview and the marrow of all your wisdom is not an impersonal force! That is the personal Creator, Sustainer, and one and only *God* of the universe!

But we also said that the Greek philosophical background wasn’t primary in John’s mind. When he calls Jesus the *Logos*—the divine Word—he intends to identify Him as the One who is the

eternal generation and the **supreme revelation** of God the Father. Eternal generation refers to that great mystery that the Father eternally fathers the Son by communicating to the Son the fullness of the undivided divine essence. Just as God’s Word is to be identified with God Himself, but also as God’s Word goes forth from Him, to speak of Jesus as the Word of God is to identify Him as one consubstantial with the Father, but also *from* the Father—equal to Him, but also distinct from Him.

And then, “the Word” indicates that Jesus is the supreme revelation of the Father—just as a man’s word is his own self-expression, so also the Word of God is the pinnacle self-expression of Almighty God to mankind. He is the substance of all of Scripture’s teaching and the personal embodiment of everything that God would reveal of Himself by the Scripture. And we learned that the Word supremely reveals God by being the divine Creator of all things, the Sustainer of all creation, and the Savior of God’s people. This is the Word.

But John doesn’t just call Him “the Word” and then move on. As he begins his Gospel, he takes these first 18 verses—what we call the prologue—and he introduces us to this Word. And in the first five verses of John chapter 1, the Apostle presents to us **seven characteristics** of the Word, that we might know and worship Jesus Christ as Holy God. **Seven characteristics** of the Word, so that we might know and worship Jesus Christ as Holy God. And we’ll begin to work through three of those this morning.

I. Eternal (1:1a)

And the **first characteristic** of the Word that we see in this passage, is that the Word, number one, is **eternal**. Look at it: “*In the beginning* was the Word.”

John begins his Gospel in a manner similar to the other Gospel writers by referencing “the beginning.” In Luke 1:3, Luke says, “it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully *from the beginning*, to write it out for you in consecutive order.” And of course, he’s referring to “the beginning” of Jesus’ life and ministry during His time on earth. Mark opens his Gospel with the title, “The *beginning* of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”—he also referring to the beginning of the life and ministry of Jesus. It’s not as obvious in Matthew, whose Gospel begins, “The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” You say, “I don’t hear a reference to ‘the beginning’ there.” Well, the word *genealogy* happens to be the Greek word *gènesis*, which speaks of the origins of Jesus’ familial line according to His humanity.

But John makes explicit what Matthew perhaps spoke of more subtly. He uses the same phrase as in the opening words of the first book of the Bible to introduce us to Jesus. “Luke investigated from the beginning. Mark started out at ‘the beginning’ of Jesus’ public ministry. Matthew spoke

of His genesis. But I want to show you that the story of this Jesus traces back all the way to the beginning of all things! In fact, it traces back to *before* the beginning of all things!” (cf. Carson, 114). And so just as the Book of Genesis begins with, “In the beginning,” so the Apostle John begins his account of the person of Christ with, “In the beginning.” Just as Genesis begins with, “In the beginning, *God*,” so John begins by saying, “In the beginning ... the Word was *God*.” Just as Genesis begins with, “God created the heavens and the earth,” so John begins by saying, “All things came into being through Him.” Just as Genesis speaks of “every thing that moves on the earth which has *life*” (1:30), so John says of the Word, “In Him was *life*.” Just as Genesis speaks of God’s creation of *light*, and how “God separated the *light* from the *darkness*,” So John says the life that was in this Word was “the *Light* of men,” and that “the *Light* shines in the *darkness*, and the *darkness* did not comprehend it.”

There can be no mistaking it: John wants us to see His account of Jesus Christ as a new genesis, a new creation! Genesis describes the creation of the old order, which, though created very good, was nevertheless corrupted by the sin of the first Adam. The coming of Jesus signals the inauguration of the new creation, brought to fruition by the doing and the dying of the Second Adam, who succeeds where Adam fails, and who brings “life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim 1:10).

But even more than signaling that Jesus is the cause for the coming of a new creation, John wants us to see that Jesus Himself—as the eternal Word—was the *God* who created the first creation. Genesis tells us that in the beginning God created all things, and John tells us that the Word *was* in the beginning, and that He made all things (cf. Owen, 2:391). In the opening verse of John’s first epistle, John speaks of what happened from the beginning *forward*. He says he proclaims to them the One that “was *from* the beginning”—*ap’archē*. Here in his Gospel, we find that the Word was already there *in* the beginning—*en archē*. In other words, before the beginning began, this Word already was. He was already existing, already being. As Matthew Henry put it, “The world was from the beginning, but the Word was in the beginning. ... The Word had a being before the world had a beginning.”

This is to say nothing other than that this Word is **eternal**, which is precisely what the Old Testament promised the Messiah would be. When Micah 5:2 predicts the birth of Messiah in Bethlehem, God says, “From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago”—literally, *from the beginning*—“[and] from the days of *eternity*.” In Isaiah’s prophecy of the child that will be born and the son that will be given to us, chapter 9 verse 6, we read, “His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty *God*, *Eternal Father*, Prince of Peace.” This Messiah is **eternal** God! And so what Moses declares about God in Psalm 90 verse 2 may be spoken of this Word: “Before the mountains were born Or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.”

And so, when the Word comes into the world, *He* testifies of His own **eternality**! In John chapter 17, as the Son prepares to undertake His great work of atonement, He cries out to the Father in prayer and asks, in verse 5, “Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You *before the world was*.” Before there was a creation, the Word was with the Father in eternal glory!

And so all of the glory, all of the grandeur, all of the mystery that belongs to a God who exists eternally—who never had a beginning, who never began to be but just always *was*—that glory, that grandeur, that wonder belongs to Jesus Christ the Word of God!

And don’t miss the glory of that little word “*was*.” We read this word as if it was—that tiny little word that I just said: “*wuz*.” We read it as a short, insignificant throwaway word that just signals that we’re talking about something that happened in the past. “In the beginning ‘*wuz*’ the Word.” But that is emphatically not how it’s intended here. It’s meant to be pronounced long, and with emphasis! “In the beginning *was* the Word.” Or, “In the beginning, the Word *was*.” “And the Word *was* with God, and the Word *was* God.” This is a word of existence! Before the beginning, the Word was already existing. He *was* existence itself!

You see, “*was*”—an inflected form of the Greek verb *eimi*—is a word of *being*. *Ginomai*, the word that gets translated “came into being” in verse 3, is a word of *becoming*. All things came into being, but the Word *was*. In the beginning, “God said, ‘Let there be light,’” Genesis 1:3, “and,” literally, “light *came into being*.” There *became* light. But in the beginning, the Word *was*. You see, we call ourselves, “human *beings*,” but really, we are human *becomings* (Sproul). We are in a constant state of change, of development, moving from a state of rest to a state of action, and then back to a state of rest again. But God is pure *being*. There is no ‘becoming’ whatsoever in God. He is self-existent. He does not “need anything,” Acts 17:25 says. He depends on nothing outside of Himself to be what He is. He has no passive potency by which He might be brought into a state of being other than what He is eternally. His very name is *Yahweh*: “I Am!” And being the One who *is*, He says in Malachi 3:6, “I, Yahweh, do not change.”

And we see this illustrated in Jesus’ case in that amazing interaction with the Pharisees in John chapter 8. After telling the Jews that they were of their father, the devil, and after they replied that they were Abraham’s children, Jesus tells them, John 8:56, “Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.” And they say, “You’re not yet fifty years old, and You’ve seen Abraham?” And Jesus responds, John 8:58, “Truly, Truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, *I am*.” What a thing to say! Not just: “I pre-existed this 2,000-year-old man,” which would have been enough of a whopper on its own! Not even, “Before Abraham was born, *I was*.” But before Abraham was born—and literally, “before Abraham *became*”—*I am*! Jesus is saying, “Before Abraham ever came into being, I never came into being! I am who I am! I am the Great I AM, who spoke to Moses out of the burning bush in Exodus 3! I am the One who has all life in Myself and am **eternally** existent!”

And so it is nothing but a vain delusion—a delirious fever-dream—to say, with the Arians of the fourth century, “There was when the Word was not.” This was the Arian rallying cry. There was a time when the Word was not—when He did not exist. But the great church father, Cyril of Alexandria, points to these opening words of John’s Gospel and asks, aptly, “How will ‘was not’ intrude where ‘was’ is?” (9). And I love that! How can you say, “The Word was *not*,” when *John* says, “In the beginning the Word *was*”? No, dear people. Before there was a beginning—before there was the creation of time itself—the Word *was*! This Savior of ours is **eternal** God!

II. Distinct (1:1b)

But then, a **second characteristic** of the Word. He is not only eternal, but He is, also, number two, **distinct**. Look again at verse 1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was *with God*.”

Now, it’s as plain as it could be that if you are *with* someone, you are not that someone. You are personally **distinct** from that someone. If I said to you, “The other day, when I was preparing this sermon, I was at home *with myself*,” you’d look at me strange and ask if I was feeling alright. The Word was *with* God the Father (cf. 1 John 1:2), and so that means that the Word is **distinct** from God the Father.

Last week we spoke about how a man’s word is as the man himself. There is an appropriate way in which we identify a man with his word. But there’s also an inappropriate way to identify a man with his word, and that is to say not that the man’s word is *as* the man himself, but that the word *is* the man himself. That’s just not true. I am not my word. My word is to be very closely identified with me, but it is also to be distinguished from me. In the same way, God’s eternal Word is as the Father Himself; we’ll see in the next phrase that, “the Word was *God*.” But God’s eternal Word is eternally *from* Him, and that means His Word is **distinct** from Him. You say, “Wait, how can He be *with* God and *be* God at the same time? Well, in John’s first letter, He has a very similar opening and says in chapter 1 verse 2 that the “Word of Life” was *pros ton Patera*, “with the Father.” And so, as is often done in Scripture, “God” in John 1 stands for “God the Father.” God the Father is God, and the Word is God. But the Word is not the Father, but **distinct** from the Father.

To put it another way, there are genuinely two divine persons, here. Later, in John 10:30, the incarnate Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, will say, “I and the Father are one.” Now, they are one because they subsist in the identical divine essence. The Father is God, and the Son is God. They are not two Gods but one God. But they are two persons. There is an “I,” the Son, who is speaking, and there is “the Father,” whom the Son says He is one *with*. There are two subjects of

that sentence—two divine *Whos* who nevertheless subsist in the same divine *What*. Two distinct *persons*, who subsist in the identical divine essence.

You see this truth illustrated in Genesis chapter 19, in the midst of God’s judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. In Genesis 19:24, it says, “Then *Yahweh* rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire *from Yahweh* out of heaven.” Did you catch that? *Yahweh* rained fire and brimstone from *Yahweh*. There are two persons called “*Yahweh*” in that verse. But of course there’s only one *Yahweh*: “*Yahweh* is our God, *Yahweh* is *one*,” Deuteronomy 6:4. Or consider the baptismal formula in Matthew 28:19. As Jesus gives the apostles the Great Commission, He commands the church to baptize His disciples “in the *name*”—singular—“of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” There is one name into which the believer is baptized, because there is only one true and living God. But there are three persons who bear that name: three persons subsisting in one divine essence.

And so, this Word who was *with* God in the beginning is a **distinct** divine person. He is eternal along with the Father, and so He is nothing less than God Himself. But He is a **distinct** person from the Father, and so not simply just another manifestation of God—as the Unitarians and Oneness Pentecostals say. He is not just another name for God or another mode by which God reveals Himself—sometimes as Father, sometimes as Son, and sometimes as Spirit—as the *Sabellians* and *modalists* teach. He is not an attribute of God or an emanation from God—as the Gnostics taught. He is a genuinely distinct person—a distinct personal subsistence in the identical divine essence as the Father.

And note, this term “*with* God” does not only denote distinction. It also denotes an intimate relationship. The Greek phrase, *pros ton Theon*, is an emphatic way to underscore personal relationship. It carries the significance of being in front of someone, or face to face with them. It’s a stronger way to express “withness” than the prepositions *metá* or *pará*. It’s not just that the Word existed *alongside* the Father; the Father was there and the Word was there too. No. It speaks of an orientation *toward* the Father (Morris, 67); one commentator says “eternal *intercommunion*” with the Father (Klink, 91); and another says it speaks of “exist[ing] in the closest possible *connection* with the Father” (Morris, 68). This destroys any notion that the Son is in any sense less than the Father. No, as verse 18 says, He is “the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father.” Just as the Apostle John, at the Last Supper, “reclined on Jesus’ bosom,” John 13:23, indicating a nearness and a closeness beyond the other disciples, so for the Son to be in the bosom of the Father speaks of the nearest possible relation to Him—as eternal God of very God.

And that state of being *with* God in intimate relationship was a state of eternal felicity and blessedness. We mentioned John 17 verse 5, where Jesus speaks of “the glory which [He] had with [the Father] before the world was.” Proverbs 8 personifies divine Wisdom, and many

believe Solomon intends to speak of the Son in that chapter, seeing that Christ is called “the wisdom of God” in 1 Corinthians 1. Well, in Proverbs 8:30 Wisdom speaks of how He was with God when He laid the foundations of the earth and He says, “I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him.” From all eternity, the Son was *pros ton Theon*, in the bosom of the Father, rejoicing in the Father’s presence, and the Father delighting in His eternal Word of Wisdom! It’s just glorious! It makes me smile just to think of it!

The Puritan John Flavel calls it “a state of matchless happiness” (1:46). He says, “God...is the fountain, ocean, and center of all delights and joys; Ps 16:11. ... To be wrapt up in the soul and bosom of all delights, as Christ was, must needs be a state transcending apprehension; to have the fountain of love and delight letting out itself so immediately, and fully, and everlastingly upon this only begotten darling of his soul, ... judge what a state of transcendent felicity this must be. Great *persons* have great delights” (1:46).

III. Consubstantial (1:1c)

And then, as we come to the *end* of verse one, we find a **third characteristic** of the Word. Not only is He eternal, and not only is He personally distinct from the Father, but He is, also, number three, **consubstantial**. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was God*.”

It cannot be said any more clearly! Pastor John is right when he says this is “the clearest and most direct declaration of the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ to be found anywhere in Scripture” (18). Though the Word is *with* God and therefore distinct *from* God, He also *is* God Himself, by nature, eternally subsisting in the full and undivided divine essence, and is therefore in no way less than or unlike the Father (Cyril, 12). Everything that you can say about God as God may be said about the Word. The Word *is* God!

Now, because that’s such a clear declaration of the deity of Jesus, the cults have expended a lot of effort in trying to explain why this text doesn’t mean what it says. The Jehovah’s Witness cult claims that the phrase is mistranslated—that it really says, “and the Word was *a* god.” And they argue that because unlike the first occurrence of “God,” this second time the word *theos* is used it doesn’t have the definite article. In Greek, there is no word that acts as an indefinite article—like the English word “a” or “an”—and so when a noun doesn’t have a definite article (the word for “the”), its meaning *can* be indefinite. And so they say the text is teaching that “the Word was godlike, divine, *a* god,” but not to be identified with Yahweh—whom they call “Jehovah.”

Now, for one thing, there is no Greek lexicon that will tell you that a plausible meaning of *theos* is “divine” or “godlike.” It means *God*, period. Second, if the Apostle John were trying to convey that Jesus was merely godlike, or divine in some sense but not fully God, there was a perfect

word available to him in order to convey that. It's the term *theios*. Not *theos*, but *theios*, with an extra "I" in there. But John doesn't say the Word was *theios*, but that He was *theos*—God Himself!

Third, requiring the translation "a god" here violates a well-attested rule of Greek grammar, which is known today as Colwell's Rule. Scholars have observed that in sentences with this identical structure—that is, where a predicate noun occurs before the verb and without a definite article—that predicate noun is not necessarily indefinite in meaning. In fact, the grammar books tell us that such nouns are rarely indefinite (Wallace, 262). And, when an author *is* trying to convey a definite predicate noun—in other words, if John were *trying* to say "the Word was *God*" and not merely "a god"—he would use the very construction that he used in John 1:1 (Wallace, 257, 260).

Interestingly, though the Jehovah's Witnesses demand the "a god" translation here, the New World Translation translates the anarthrous *theos* as "a god" in only six percent of its occurrences. 266 out of 282 times, they translate it as *God*, too. In fact, you don't even have to leave John's prologue to find these inconsistencies. *Theos* without the article occurs five other times in these first 18 verses, but the New World Translation doesn't translate any of them "a god." Verse 6: "There came a man sent from *God*," not "a god." Verse 12: "He gave the right to become the children of *God*," not "a god." That inconsistency speaks volumes. The Jehovah's Witnesses have a heretical Christology in search of justification; they're not submitting themselves to the text of Scripture and surrendering to whatever it says.

And still further, if John had used the definite article in the way the Jehovah's Witnesses demand, the Greek construction would have communicated that the Word was *the Father*. And John wants to avoid saying that, because that's the heresy of modalism, or Sabellianism, as I mentioned before. The Word was *with* the Father, and so is *not* the Father. But using the definite article would have *equated* the Father and the Word—as if to say that there was nothing to God *other* than the Word. The Word is fully God, absolutely. But there's more to God than just the Word. There's also the Father and the Spirit. The Word is God, but the Word is not the Father (Klink, 92). And this grammatical construction was the only way to communicate that very nuanced, Trinitarian truth. Grammarian Dan Wallace says, This "was the most concise way he could have stated that the Word was God and yet was distinct from the Father" (269).

And so the peculiar grammar of John 1:1 yields precisely the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity—that the Father is God and the Word is God, but that the Word is not the Father. They are two distinct persons who, along with the Holy Spirit whom we meet later, eternally subsist in the whole, undivided divine essence. They are **consubstantial**, of the same substance! One commentator even said you could paraphrase these opening two verses like this: "In the

beginning was the Son, and the Son was with the Father, and the Son was God. He was in the beginning with the Father.” And that is exactly right.

How can the Word be with God (and therefore distinct from God) if He *is* God? Only if there are several persons who are God, but only one essence that is God. John dives in at the deep end, doesn't he? He wastes no time! In this first *sentence*, He introduces His readers to the mystery of the Trinity—that both the God who is with the Word and the Word Himself are God. There are two **consubstantial** persons subsisting in a single nature—two “Whos” subsisting in a single “What.” When should we teach believers the doctrine of the Trinity? John says, “This is the first thing you need to know about your Savior! He is God of very God—not the Father, but every bit as much God as the Father. And there is only one God.” Leon Morris rightly observed, “To the Jews of the day monotheism was more than a belief commonly held. It was a conviction to be clung to with fierce tenacity.” And then he says, “Even though [John] regarded monotheism as a central tenet in his religion he yet could not withhold from the Word the designation ‘God’” (69). Amen!

And the rest of Scripture testifies to the deity of Jesus, as clearly as it testifies to anything. Jesus is called “the only begotten *God*” in chapter 1 and verse 18. Thomas calls Him, “My Lord and my *God*” in John 20:28. In Romans 9:5, Paul calls Him “Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, *God* blessed forever.” In Philippians 2:6, Paul says that the Son eternally existed “in the form,” or *nature*, “of God” and possessed “*equality* with God.” In Titus 2:13, He is called “our great *God* and Savior, Jesus Christ.” Hebrews 1:8 cites Psalm 45, and says the Father says to the Son, “Your throne, *O God*, is forever and ever.” The Father calls the Son *God*! In 1 John 5:20, the Apostle John calls the Son, Jesus Christ, “the *true God* and eternal life.”

Besides explicitly calling Jesus God throughout the Bible, Scripture also calls Jesus the same **names** that it calls God. Yahweh is called “the King of glory” in Psalm 24:10. Jesus is called “the *Lord* of glory” in 1 Corinthians 2:8. Deuteronomy 10:17 says, “Yahweh your God is the God of gods and *the Lord of lords*.” Revelation 17:14 says, “The Lamb will overcome them, because He is *Lord of lords* and King of kings.” Psalm 27:1 says, “Yahweh is my *light* and my salvation.” In John 8:12, Jesus says, “I am the *Light* of the world.” Psalm 36:9 says, “For with You is the fountain of *life*.” First John 5:20 calls Jesus “the true God and eternal *life*.” In Isaiah 43:11, God says, “I, even I, am Yahweh, and there is no *savior* besides *Me*.” Second Timothy 1:10 speaks of “our *Savior* Christ Jesus, who abolished death.” Isaiah 41:14 says, “Your *Redeemer* is the Holy One of Israel.” Ephesians 1:7 says, “In [Christ] we have *redemption* through His blood.” That same text, Isaiah 41:14, calls the redeemer “the *Holy One* of Israel.” In Acts 3:14, Peter tells the Jews that they “disowned the *Holy* and *Righteous* One and asked for a murderer” to be released in His place. In Isaiah 44:6, God says, “I am the first and I am the last.” In Revelation 1:8, Almighty God is called “the Alpha and the Omega.” In Revelation 22:13, Jesus says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

There's only one Alpha and Omega! Only one first and last! And if Yahweh is first and last and Jesus is first and last, then Jesus *is* Yahweh!

And it's not just the names of God. Scripture also predicates the **attributes** of God to Christ. He is eternal, even as we've seen in our study of John 1:1. He is omnipresent, able to be in the midst of the brethren where two or three are gathered in His name (Matt 18:20), and with us always, even to the end of the age, according to Matthew 28:20. He is omniscient, as Peter says in John 16:30, "Now we know that You know all things." He is omnipotent, as Philippians 3:21 says He has power to subject all things to Himself. He is immutable—"the same yesterday, today, and forever," according to Hebrews 13:8. He is sovereign, declaring in Matthew 28:18, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." And He is glorious—"the Lord of glory," according to 1 Corinthians 2:8. And remember what God says in Isaiah 42:8: "I am Yahweh, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another." If Yahweh will give His glory to no other, and the Holy Spirit calls Jesus the *Lord* of glory, then Jesus *is* Yahweh! *His* glory *is* God's glory, because He is God!

And then, not just names and attributes, but the **works** of God are attributed to Jesus. Jesus is the Creator, even as we see in John 1:3: "Apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." He is the Sustainer of the entire universe. Hebrews 1:3, "He upholds all things by the word of His power." He raises the dead. He says in John 5:21, "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes." He forgives sin. In Mark 2:10, He heals the paralytic "so that [the scribes] may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." The scribes were right when they asked, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" But they were wrong to fail to recognize Jesus as that very God!

And then, finally, not just names, attributes, and works, but Scripture identifies Jesus as the believer's proper object of **worship**. When Jesus calls Peter to walk with Him on water, after He returns to the boat and calms the storm, Matthew 14:33 says, "Those who were in the boat *worshipped* Him, saying, 'You are certainly God's Son!'" After He was risen from the dead, He met His disciples, and Matthew 28:9 says, "And they came up and took hold of His feet and *worshipped* Him." In Hebrews 1:6, the Father commands the angels, "Let all the angels of God worship Him." And in John 5:23, Jesus says "all will honor the Son *even as* they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him." "Worship Me just as you worship the Father, or you don't worship the Father at all!"

And don't forget: "My glory I will not give to another" (Isa 48:11). Jesus Himself battled the temptation of Satan by replying, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only" (Matt 4:10). And yet He accepted and received the worship of the disciples who fell at His feet and worshiped Him. That's not how a godly *man* reacts to being worshiped! You remember when Cornelius fell at Peter's feet? Acts 10:26: "But Peter raised him up, saying, 'Stand up; I too

am just a man.” Well, if Jesus received worship, what is He *not*? Just a man! Even the angel who gave John the vision of the Book of Revelation refused John’s worship of *him* in Revelation 22:9: “Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours.... Worship God.” Holy men and angels refuse worship! Jesus *receives* worship!

What more could we possibly require to prove this point beyond a shadow of a doubt? Dear people, the Word was *God*! After demonstrating the deity of Jesus from the Scriptures—even more painstakingly than *we* have done in these last few minutes—John Owen wrote, “If we understand not the mind of God and intention of the Holy Ghost in this matter, we may utterly despair ever to come to an acquaintance with any thing that God reveals unto us; or, indeed, with any thing else that is expressed or is to be expressed by words.” He concludes, “All the ways whereby we may know God are, his name, his properties, and his works; but they are all here ascribed by the Holy Ghost to the Son, to the Word: and he therefore is God, or we know neither who nor what God is” (2:394).

Conclusion

Dear brothers and sisters: Your Savior, your elder brother who subsists in the very same sort of human nature as you do, your intercessor, and comforter, and King, is none other than God Himself! Sometimes, kids like to brag on their older sibling: “My older brother is smarter than *your* older brother!” “Oh yeah? Well, my brother is *faster* than your brother!” “My brother can beat *your* brother up!” But *we* can say, “*My* older brother is *God*!” Your mediator and advocate, who pleads before the throne of the Father in heaven itself, is no less God than the Father is! O, some men have competent mediators! But if your mediator is very *God* of very *God*, how happy and blessed are you! How sure your case is before the Father! If you have a well-grounded trust in the *God*-man to avail with you before God, you have *God* interceding with *God* for the salvation of your soul! Dear brethren: your case is secure with a *divine* Advocate pleading for you!

I began by quoting Newton’s hymn: “What think ye of Christ? is the test / To try both your state and your scheme; / You cannot be right in the rest, / Unless you think rightly of him.” Well, Newton eventually goes on to say, “Some take him a creature to be, / A man, or an angel at most: / Sure these have not feelings like me, / Nor know themselves wretched, and lost; / So guilty, so helpless, am I, / I dare not confide in his blood; / Nor on his protection rely, / Unless I am sure he is *God*!” Do you hear the way he reasons? “There are some people who say He’s a mere man, or maybe an angel. Oh, but these have not feelings like me! I am so sinful, so guilty, so helpless, that I wouldn’t dream of trusting in Him for the protection my soul unless I am sure He is *God*! I am too wicked to have the *luxury* of entrusting the state of my sinful soul before a holy God into the hands of anyone who is less than God Himself. I am so sinful that I need a *divine* Savior, or I’m lost forever!”

Dear sinner, if you are in Christ, you *have* a divine Savior! God Himself takes up your case! But if you are not trusting Him, O, trust in Him this morning! Bow the knee in repentance this morning. Confess your sins, own your guilt before Him as a breaker of His holy law. Turn away from your sins, and turn away from your righteousness as any ground of trust to meet God's holy standards, and rest your weary soul upon the shoulders of the God-man! Entrust your soul to Jesus by faith alone.

John Owen asks the question that should pierce us all to the heart: "What am I the better if I can dispute that Christ is God, but have no sense or sweetness in my heart ... that he is a God in covenant with my soul?" Dear sinner, Jesus is God in covenant with the soul of each and every one who trusts in Him alone for righteousness. Trust in Him this morning. How worthy He is of your trust! And how willing He is to receive you!

And then, sing with Newton, the final stanza of that hymn: "If ask'd what of Jesus I think, / Although my best thoughts are but poor; / I say he's my meat and my drink, / My life, and my strength, and my store, / My shepherd, my husband, my friend, / My savior from sin, and from thrall, / My hope from beginning to end, / My portion, my Lord, and my all."