

Christ: Systematic Summary of Christology, I

There are different words for God in the Old Testament and they are reflected in different ways that the translators spelled them. In the Old Testament, “God” is the name *Elohim* or *El*, which speaks of God as the strong one. This is the word used in Genesis 1: “In the beginning God created the heavens and earth.” The word “Lord” represents the name *Adon* or *Adonai*, which speaks of Him as the master, the ruler to whom obedience is due. “GOD” and “LORD” are *Yahweh*; older writers used to say Jehovah, which is God’s covenant name. This is His name whereby He reveals Himself in taking His people into relationship with Himself, emphasizing His grace. In Psalm 110:1 it says, “The LORD said to my Lord,” both of those names were used. The translations at least since King James have followed this pattern of distinguishing the Jewish words for God. You can read and get much more information than my little summary.

John 1 is a great chapter that deals with the person of Christ. First, I would like to speak about the literary context of the chapter. I spoke once before about chiasm (or inverted parallelism) and regular parallelism. I will show you from John 1. If John 1 followed a regular scheme of parallelism, we would have this formula: Word, light, and then Incarnation in terms of Word and Incarnation in terms of light. We would have the Son of God introduced by the designation, “Word,” as we do in verse 1: “He is the Word,” the Son of God then referred to by another designation, “light,” which we have at least by verse 7. Then we would have “Word” again, “The Word became flesh,” for example, and then we would have the light coming into the world. So it would be Word, light, and then Incarnation in terms of Word, and Incarnation in terms of light. But what we do have is an inverted parallelism, or a chiasm, and it works along these lines. First, we have the Son of God designated as “Word” in verse 1, then we have Him designated by “light” at least by verse 7; we could label these A and B. The chiasmic structure is seen in the inversion, then B prime and then A prime. Verse 9 speaks of the Incarnation not in terms of the Word, but in terms of the light coming into the world. And then the famous verse 14 speaks of the Word becoming flesh. What is the force of the chiasm? It is certainly to direct our attention to the Incarnation of the Son of God. It is to direct our attention to the light coming into a dark world—in terms of the knowledge of God. Here comes the word, “shining,” which means bringing the knowledge of God into that world or the Word becoming a flesh-and-blood human being. So this is the structure and it points us in the direction of the Incarnation of Christ.

The literary structure underscores the Incarnation. The theological context of John 1:1-18 is called the prologue of the Gospel of John. Understanding it introduces the Gospel of John and the Incarnation, which is emphasized by that inverted parallelism, is foundational for all that follows. The rest of the Gospel of John assumes that we understand that the Word has become flesh. What about literary background? Where do some of the ideas in John 1 come from? Genesis 1 is the background. Let me demonstrate that verbatim: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” And friends, if you keep that in mind, any Jew would understand that something radical is being said about this Word. Even before the end of verse 1, the deity of Christ is implied. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” “In the beginning was the Word.” The Word is put in the place of God in the first verse of the Bible. This is radical and John does not back off a bit—“and the Word was God.” What strong affirmations. In Genesis 1 we have these words repeatedly, “and God said let there be.” We do not have repetition of that phrase in John 1, but we have that concept personified in this very word, “Word.” We have taken it for granted. It goes like this: “In the beginning was the Word [...] Word became flesh.” Verse 14 is referring to Jesus, so go back to verse 1 and plug in the word Jesus. You cannot plug in the word, “Jesus,” because John said “Word.” What does he mean by “Word?” It means speech and communication. We use words every day to communicate our thoughts. God has done the same. The

Word is the speech of God. It is the communication of God. God is saying that His Son is the revealer of God. The term prophet is too weak; He is more than a prophet. He was the revealer of God even before the creation of the world, verses 3 and 4. The life in Him that was the source of all the creation was the light of men. It was the revelation of God shining on human beings so it is no surprise then that the incarnate Word reveals the Father. Think of John's frequent emphasis like this: the words I give to you, Jesus says, are not from me. The Father who sent me told me what to say and how to say it. The roots of that picture of Jesus being the revealer of God is the truth, for example, "I am the truth," the one who makes the Father known. No one has seen God at any time but the unique God who is at the Father's side, verse 18, has made Him known when John calls the Son Word. He is talking back to the words of Genesis 1: "And God said," but now he is saying God speaks in His Son. This means especially the incarnate Son is revelation from God. One of the subsets of the doctrine of revelation is Incarnational revelation. When God became a man He revealed God as God had never been revealed before.

We have light and darkness in Genesis 1; we have it here, too, but used in a moral way. "The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not conquered [extinguished] it." It seems to have a double meaning. John uses double meaning although it gets complicated at points. This means the darkness has not ceased with the mind, hence in the sense of comprehending. It could mean cease with the hand as in a wrestling match or mortal combat—that means to try to overcome. If I have to choose between the two, I will take overcome. The darkness is not trying to understand the light in the Gospel of John, but the darkness is trying to stamp it out whenever possible. But if you could even reflect the double meaning, if there is double meaning, it is somewhere in John for sure. Commentators, such as C. K. Barret in his fine commentary on John, suggest that it is here. If it is double meaning, you can use one English word, master. The darkness has not mastered it as in mastering one's notes for one's test and as in mastering an opponent in the gymnasium. In Genesis 1, light and darkness are used as moral principles and not merely as physical principles. And of course, creation is here too, "Through Him all things were made." What does this great passage teach about the Son of God? One thing it teaches is the pre-existence of the Son. Here is what I am doing at this point: I am taking the theological categories and the conclusion in my notes on Christ and I am introducing them now in light of this passage to run you through the grid one time.

Pre-existence is the first category. The meaning is that the Son of God existed before He became a human being. It is not proper to speak of the pre-existence of the Father and of the Holy Spirit because they never changed the mode of their existence. They did not become a man. You can talk about the eternity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, but pre-existence only pertains to the Son because He alone changed the mode of His existence from being God in heaven to God on Earth. He became the God-man. It is taught in verses 1 to 5. "The Word was with God in the beginning," verse 2. It is taught in verse 9, "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world." It is taught in verse 14, "The Word became flesh." It is taught in verse 15 when John the Baptist says, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me'"—literally has come before me—"because He was before me." John is basically saying He who comes after me in His ministry and in time. John was born six months before Jesus. He who comes after me has become before me in rank. He has outstripped me—surpassed me is a good rendering of the idiom—because, notice this, He was before me in time. In other words, Jesus' human birth was not the beginning of the Son of God. It is like with presidents we cannot be anachronistic, so you talk about President Clinton when he was a boy; he was not President Clinton until he grew up. In the same way technically the name Jesus is the name given to the Son of God at His birth. But I cannot help but say, "Jesus in heaven before the Incarnation." He is technically the Son, the Word, and the Light. Jesus is His human name, but I cannot help but talk like that sometimes. John the Baptist confesses, "The one who is to come after me in time and ministry has outstripped me in rank because He existed before me in time as the pre-existent Son of God."

The Incarnation of the Son is also taught in verses 9 and 13, as we have seen. “The light was coming into the dark world” and “The Word became flesh.” If you want to meditate on that which is mysterious, there it is. The eternal, almighty Word of God became a flesh-and-blood human being. It is no wonder that the poor disciples did not understand that. They had no categories for such a thing. They knew that the rabbi who was within their midst was a great person. “What manner of man is this,” they said, because the elements of nature obeyed Him? The demons obeyed Him. Too often the disciples did not obey Him and they were rebuked. “What manner of man is this?” He teaches us to pray and pray like this, “Father, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors,” but He never once confessed a sin Himself. Is He a megalomaniac? No, He is very sober and sane. He is not vain at all though He tells us to confess our sins and He never confesses any Himself. Could He have no sins? A man with no sins? They did not expect God to become a man. There is Old Testament revelation that, looking back with New Testament understanding, makes sense, but how could they expect that? Thus for Thomas to make that confession after Jesus’ resurrection, to look a Jewish man in the face—Has he gone crazy? Is he no longer a monotheist?—and to say, “My Lord and my God,” is incredible. By the way, the cultic myth’s understanding of that passage will not do. They say that he said, “Oh my God.” The text says very expressly that Thomas said to Him, “My Lord and my God.” The Father knew who He was all the time and He revealed it to different persons. The shepherds came, for example, and they worshipped the baby—that is incredible. It is correct, but it took time before the poor disciples understood—it took them our Lord’s resurrection for them to understand that God had become a human being. His humanity is also taught in this passage. “The Word became flesh,” the standard New Testament Greek dictionary definition for the word, *sarx*, says a human being of flesh and blood. That is exactly the intention; the Word became flesh. It does not mean the Word took a body and not a full orb of humanity, but exactly the opposite. He became a human being of flesh and blood. Likewise, when John the Baptist says in 15, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me.’” He was born six months after John. He was carried in His mother’s womb. The God-man was carried in Mary’s womb for nine months! The God-embryo, that is right, though my mind cannot wrap itself around this. God becoming a man defies our full comprehension.

His humanity is taught in verses 14 and 15. Most of all, His deity is taught in verses 1, 3, 4, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 18. It is all over the place—three times in John we have direct affirmations that He is God. Thomas said in chapter 20, “My Lord and my God,” and by the way, Jesus did not say, “Do not talk like that, I am just a man.” No, He said, “You have seen me and you believed. Truly happy are those who do not see and who believe.” Jesus pronounced and blessed. If Jesus were a good prophet, a good man, He would have corrected that one immediately if it were not the truth. Thus we have in chapter 1: “The Word was God” and then chapter 20, “My Lord and my God,” bookends surrounding the whole Gospel of John. And we have the same structure for the prologue, chapter 1, verse 1: “The Word was God” and in 1:18 it says, “No one has ever seen God, but God the One-and-Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made Him known.” Thus we have bookends on both ends of the prologue and bookends around the whole book with chapter 1, the straightforward affirmations that the Son is God and Thomas’ statement later on in chapter 20. What about the “Word was God?” Why are the cultists wrong when they say the Word was a god? Is it not the Greek word god, *theos*, without the article? Yes. Should not that therefore be rendered a god? No, not at all. Is it not a possibility? It is in certain contexts that talk about a god. Just to demonstrate, the same word, *theos*, or god, without the article is used throughout this passage and I like to tease my cultic friends and try to get them to think—not to mock them—because they pretend to know Greek. Now there is no sin in not knowing Greek, but you should not pretend to know something you do not know. I do not let on right away that I taught Greek for 12 years. I got into a funny one once. I said, “That it is the same in verse 6: ‘There was a man who was sent from God; his name was John.’” Would you translate that to mean ‘a god’?” The man at my door, I had invited him in, which might have

been a mistake, but I was trying to help him and learn how to do that, too. One thing you can do is if you invite them into your house, you can set the agenda. We are going to talk about who Jesus is and why He came, not transfusions, not Christmas trees, not nonsense, but get right to it. We are going to be gentlemen and gentle women. You can go first and take one passage and stay on it and show me who you think Jesus is or why He came. I will be quiet and when you are done, I will say, “Are you done?” and you say, “Yes,” and then I will make some comments. And then when it is my turn, you do the same thing. Does that sound good? If they say, “No,” I say, “Okay, see you later.” If you want them in your house you can set the rules. I was nice about it. But that worked. It worked in the sense that we had order; we did not have jumping all around. It worked well that way, but we got into a funny thing. I said, “it is the same word, *theos*, without the article in verse 6 and you do not want me to translate it as, ‘He was sent from a god,’ and why not?” He replied, “It is obviously God.” I said, “That is interesting. Why, all of the sudden in verse 1, did you translate it that way when it is the same word, god without the article, in verse 12: ‘He gave them authority to become children of a god.’?” How do you like that one? They did not like that one a bit. I said it is the same word. So then the guy who did not know Greek looked over on the right side of his Bible and said, “Wait a minute; it is not the same word”—see, the endings vary in Greek according to the location in the sentence and the use. He did not know enough Greek to know that and so a funny thing came out of my mouth. I said, “Oh, you can take my word for it. You can trust me. I would not lie to you. I taught Greek, and it is the same word. The ending changes because of the function in the sentence.” Well, this was hardly a trust relationship we had going here. But I was telling him the truth.

Likewise, at the end of 13 it would be translated as, “Children born not of human devising, but born of a god”; how does that stand? It does not. It is a true, living God. It is the same in verse 1 and the reason they do not translate it “God” is because they have a presupposition of commitment to Jesus not being God and they cannot allow that translation. They certainly should because it says, “The Word was God.” His deity is taught in verse 3: “Through Him all things were made.” And it is a comprehensive statement because we have the negative in the next clause: “Without Him nothing was made that has been made.” He is said to be the Creator of Genesis 1. It is through Him—the Father’s position is implied. God the Father used the Son as His agent to create the world. Who creates the world in Scripture? Angels and human beings are creatures. Christ does the work of creation—He is God. The world was made through Him, as stated in verse 10. You could say, “Since when did someone get saved by believing in the name of an angel or a man?” It does not work. God is the object of faith. Verse 14 says, “The Word became flesh. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and only who came from the Father full of grace and truth.” Glory, grace, and truth are divine attributes and they are here ascribed to the Son of God. Verse 16 says, “From the fullness of His grace, we have all received one blessing after another.” It is not that angels and men give grace. The deity of Christ is written on almost every verse and, in case we missed it, verse 18 says, “No one has ever seen God”—God in His essence is invisible—“but God the One and only, who is at the Father’s side, has made Him known.” So the deity of Christ is all over the place in this passage.