

Text: John 1

Section 1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
(John 1:1-5)

The beginning of John 1 self-consciously parallels the beginning of Genesis 1. The purpose: to establish Jesus Christ as one and the same God as Yahweh or Jehovah, the creator of all things.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.
(Genesis 1:1-2)

John identifies Jesus as *the Word*. Jewish readers of John's day would have understood this as a reference to the Messiah or Christ, since Jewish writings outside of the Scriptures refer to the promised Messiah using this term. John further identifies Jesus as *the Word* when speaking of his future Second Coming in Revelation 19.

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.
(Revelation 19:11-16)

Word is also an appropriate title for Jesus Christ because He embodies what perfect fulfillment of God's Word looks like. During His time on earth he followed the Jewish moral, ceremonial, and judicial Laws perfectly, and also fulfilled the hundreds of prophecies about Himself contained in the Old Testament.

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.
(Matthew 5:17-18)

Now, let's move on to a more difficult subject: How can Christ be God and be *with God* at the same time? First of all, even in Genesis 1 God refers to Himself in the plural, saying "let us."

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.
(Genesis 1:26-27)

Next, we see in the New Testament that Jesus plainly identified Himself as God to His hearers, referring to Himself using the Divine Name "I AM" as God revealed Himself to Moses. That the Jews understood this as a claim of divinity is clear because the Jews that did not believe Him to be God attempted to stone Him for blasphemy.

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"
(Exodus 3:13-14)

Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

(John 8:54-59)

Further, the Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus Christ identify Him as God. For example, this text in Isaiah 9, which was famously set to music by Georg Friedrich Händel.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

(Isaiah 9:6)

The Scriptures identify the Father as God, Jesus Christ—the Son or the Word—as God, and the Holy Spirit as God, placing the Three on equal footing. Take, for example, the Great Commission of Matthew 28.

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

(Matthew 28:18-20)

Further, these three are not simply different manifestations of a single Person, since on more than one occasion the Three have appeared simultaneously, as during Jesus' baptism.

And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

(Matthew 3:16-17)

Yet, the Bible is very clear that there is only One God.

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

(Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

So, the Bible teaches that there is One God, and it also teaches that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all God. So, how can there be only One God? This difficulty has been explained as best we can by the doctrine of the Trinity. This doctrine has been presented in a somewhat understandable form in the Westminster Larger Catechism, which uses a series of memorized questions and answers to present basic doctrines to children. Questions 7-11 address the subject of the Trinity:

Question 7: What is God?

Answer: God is a Spirit, in and of himself infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection; all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, everywhere present, almighty, knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.

Question 8: Are there more Gods than one?

Answer: There is but one only, the living and true God.

Question 9: How many persons are there in the Godhead?

Answer: There be three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one true, eternal God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory; although distinguished by their personal properties.

Question 10: What are the personal properties of the three persons in the Godhead?

Answer: It is proper to the Father to beget the Son, and to the Son to be begotten of the Father, and to the Holy Ghost to proceed from the Father and the Son from all eternity.

Question 11: How does it appear that the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father?

Answer: The Scriptures manifest that the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father, ascribing unto them such names, attributes, works, and worship, as are proper to God only.

Another way to explain this is my own condensation of James White's teaching in his book *The Forgotten Trinity*. I will explain this in three steps:

1. There is one Being/Essence/Substance that is God.
2. God eternally exists in three Divine Persons/Subsistences.

3. These three Persons/Subsistences are coequal and coeternal.

Now, is it possible for us as finite people to fully understand this? No, but if God were fully comprehensible to us would he be much of a God at all? God has revealed to us as much about Himself as He has deemed necessary, and part of that revelation to us is that HE exists in Three Persons. That should and must be sufficient for us.

Next, John says that in Jesus Christ is life and light. As Creator and God, Jesus is the source of all life. Furthermore, He alone is the only Way to eternal life.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

*The darkness has not overcome it. Nor will it. At the end of history, Christ will throw Satan, his followers, and all that have not confessed Christ as Lord and Savior in **the lake of fire.***

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while. Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:1-15)

Section 2

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. (John 1:6-8)

The John being referred to here is not John the Apostle, who wrote this book, but John the Baptist, who came in fulfillment of a prophecy by Isaiah as a forerunner to Christ.

A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. (Isaiah 40:3)

Section 3

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:9-13)

Christ, *the True Light*, came, but *the world did not know Him*, nor did *his own people*, the Jews. This remains true today. The vast majority of people, Jew and Gentile alike, reject Christ and embrace their sins. The ultimate result of this will be **the second death in the lake of fire**. Temporally, the result is a society like that described in Romans 1, which looks amazingly...and sadly and embarrassingly, like our own.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

(Romans 1:18-32)

The first-century Jews' rejection of Christ (collectively—some, of course, believed in Him and were saved) led not only to their condemnation, but first resulted in Christ's crucifixion. Even this was prophesied in the Old Testament, but Isaiah made it clear that Christ's suffering was purposeful and necessary to allow God to regard His people—those that believe on Christ—as righteous, while maintaining His own perfect justice. Christ allowed Himself to be crucified, taking the sins of His people upon Himself so that we might have eternal life.

Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned--every one--to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

(Isaiah 53:1-12)

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

(1 Corinthians 15:1-8)

Christ died for our sins, but He was raised on the third day, so that we also could have the promise of eternal life. Why was this necessary? Because we all—all of us, without exception—have sinned, and God, while perfectly loving and merciful, is also perfectly just and wrathful. He is holy, and cannot abide sin in His presence. Sin must be punished.

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

(Romans 3:23)

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Romans 6:23)

Most people did, do, and will reject Him. Why? Because in our sins we are blinded to God's Truth. The teachings of Christ appear foolish to us.

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

(1 Corinthians 2:14)

Christ has done everything necessary to redeem and grant forgiveness of sins eternal life to anyone and everyone that believes, yet we are so blinded by our sin that we are totally dependent upon God to make us able and willing to actually believe and receive that life.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

(Ephesians 2:8-9)

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

(John 6:37)

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

(John 6:44)

So, what hope am I offering to you, since our situations all seem so hopeless? Only this: if you seek God, you will find Him. If you truly want to know God, to leave your sins behind and follow Christ, then seek Him out. Study His Word, seek Him in prayer, and confess Christ as Lord, Master, and Savior. If you have this desire, be thankful—He is the One that has given you that desire!

You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.

(Jeremiah 29:13)

because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

(Romans 10:9-10)

Section 4

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. (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.'") And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

(John 1:14-18)

Jesus Christ *became flesh and dwelt among us*. Interestingly, John the Baptist said of Christ that *He was before me*. Yet, in human terms, John the Baptist was about six months older than Jesus.

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home. After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach

among people." In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy--the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever." And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home. Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him. And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

(Luke 1:1-80)

In saying *He was before me*, then, John is acknowledging that Christ existed eternally BEFORE He took on human flesh and entered history as a baby in a stable. Christ made the Father known to us. How? Because He is One with the Father.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

(John 14:6-11)

Section 5

And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.)

(John 1:19-24)

At this point we need to address an alleged contradiction, because while John said that he was neither Elijah nor *the Prophet*, Jesus later identified John the Baptist as both a prophet and as **Elijah who is to come**.

When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities. Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me." As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, "'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.' Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

(Matthew 11:1-15)

So, who is right? Both of them are. The Pharisees, the leading Jewish religious party of the day, were looking for "Elijah" to come as a forerunner to the Messiah. However, they sought a resurrection of the Old Testament prophet Elijah himself, and/or one or more of the other Old Testament prophets. John came with a powerful spirit of prophecy, one like that possessed by Elijah and the other prophets, as Jesus indicated, but John rightly denied being a literal return of one of these individuals, as the Pharisees expected.

Section 6

They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."
(John 1:25-34)

John's role was to point the way to the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Once Christ's ministry was firmly established, he was not only willing but happy to step aside, and always spoke to emphasize and magnify the Person and ministry of Christ.

After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized (for John had not yet been put in prison). Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness--look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease." He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

(John 3:22-36)

John spoke of Jesus being one that *baptizes with the Holy Spirit*. There is much confusion about the meaning of this these days. It is true that, especially in the very early days of the Church, the Holy Spirit came with great power and miraculous signs, even causing a large, "multicultural" crowd of people to each hear the apostles speaking in his own language. As a result, thousands of people were saved.

And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

(Acts 1:4-5)

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians--we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine." But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: "'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'" "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know-- this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him, "'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'" "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'" Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

(Acts 2:1-41)

I want to point out two things about this event. First, the "tongues" being spoken by the apostles—or rather heard by the crowd—were actual languages, not the gibberish about which we sometimes hear. Secondly, the only purpose of this miracle was to confirm the veracity of the message preached. These events decreased in frequency after the first decades of the Church, since the power of God and the Truth of Christianity had been sufficiently demonstrated and confirmed by thousands of eyewitnesses. I am not willing to say that God never does or can work through miraculous means today (I think we've all heard of such instances), but doing so has never been His normal practice—think about it: the Bible contains records of numerous miraculous events, but it was written over a period of 1500 years! Once you consider that, the frequency of great miracles decreases dramatically.

Ok, then: what does it normally mean or look like to be filled or baptized by the Holy Spirit? Mainly this: a changed life. Consider the differences between **the works of the flesh** and **the fruit of the Spirit**.

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

(Galatians 5:19-23)

We discussed last week the command in the Scriptures to "test ourselves" to see if we are true Christians. (2 Corinthians 13:5) These verses are a good place to start. Examine the two lists closely—if your life and character are more like the first list than the second, it is possible that you are no Christian at all, but are still in your sins and destined for **the lake of fire**. Each of us needs to constantly examine our lives and characters to make sure that we are true believers and, if not, repent and believe so that we can be truly saved!

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter). The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

(John 1:35-51)

Simon Peter, Philip, and especially Nathanael believed in Christ after the smallest of introductions. Nathanael especially was ready to confess Jesus as *the Son of God* and *the King of Israel*. While Jesus did offer proofs of His omniscience to them, these events pointedly demonstrate the supernatural and irresistible nature of God's call upon one's life, when He truly and savingly calls a person to Himself.

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

(John 6:37)

An even more dramatic display of this powerful calling came when Saul (later known as Paul) was called to follow Christ. Almost immediately, Saul went from being a persecutor and murderer of Christians to the most powerful witness for Christ the world has ever seen.

But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."

(Acts 9:1-20)

Andrew and Philip were eager to share Christ with their friends and relations. This is further discussed by two very famous Biblical scholars.

40. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. The design of the Evangelist, down to the end of the chapter, is to inform us how gradually the disciples were brought to Christ. Here he relates about Peter, and afterwards he will mention Philip and Nathanael. The circumstance of Andrew immediately bringing his brother expresses the nature of faith, which does not conceal or quench the light, but rather spreads it in every direction. Andrew has scarcely a spark, and yet, by means of it, he enlightens his brother. Woe to our indolence, therefore, if we do not, after having been fully enlightened, endeavor to make others partakers of the same grace. We may observe in Andrew two things which Isaiah requires from the children of God; namely, that each should take his neighbor by the hand, and next, that he should say,

Come, let us go up into the mountain of the Lord,
and he will teach us,

For Andrew stretches out the hand to his brother, but at the same time he has this object in view, that he may become a fellow-disciple with him in the school of Christ. We ought also to observe the purpose of God, which determined that *Peter*, who was to be far more eminent, was brought to the knowledge of Christ by the agency and ministry of Andrew; that none of us, however excellent, may refuse to be taught by an inferior; for that man will be severely punished for his peevishness, or rather for his pride, who, through his contempt of a man, will not deign to come to Christ.

Joh 1:41 He first findeth his own brother Simon,.... Either before the other disciple, or before he found any other person: after he and the other disciple departed from Christ, being affected with the grace bestowed upon him, and his heart warm with the conversation he had had with him, and transported with joy at finding the Messiah, goes in all haste in search of his relations, friends, and acquaintance, to communicate what he had seen and heard, in order to bring them to the knowledge of the same; for such is the nature of grace, it is very communicative, and those that have it, are very desirous that all others should be partakers of it:

The two men I've just quoted also clearly saw the necessity of Christian people sharing the Gospel with all that would hear them. Who were these men? The first was John Calvin—you know, that “evil heretic” that kills evangelism by because he taught God’s sovereign election. The second was John Gill, an old English Baptist who has been accused of being even more Calvinist than Calvin! Yet, even these men understood that a real, saving encounter with Jesus Christ would make one want to share the Good News with others. Furthermore, Jesus Himself commanded us to do so!

Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

(Mark 16:14-16)

Remember the two greatest commandments:

And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

(Matthew 22:37-40)

If we truly love God, we will share the Gospel out of obedience. If we truly love others, we will share it out of concern for their well-being. In both instances, we are to tell everyone that will listen the truth that they are sinners, that they have offended the holy and righteous God that demands sinless perfection in order to enter His presence, and that Jesus Christ took our sins upon Himself and died in our place so that we could be regarded as righteous in God’s sight, and was raised from the dead the third day so that we also can have the hope of a future resurrection and eternal life. This gives us encouragement and hope...

because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

(Romans 10:9-10)