

John 03 – The True Light (Part Two)

01/21/2024

Scripture 1: (Jn. 1:4-13 ESV)

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.

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.

The true light, which gives light to 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.

Sermon:

This morning we are continuing to consider the idea of Jesus as the Light, the “True Light”: the *Phos*, who is the *Logos*, and the *Theos*. Next we transition to the effect His entrance had upon the *Kosmos* as “*The true light, which gives light to everyone, [came] into the world.*”

Unfortunately, one of the many peculiarities which make Greek such a difficult language to learn and understand {there is valid cause and justification for the historic complaint, “It’s all Greek to me.”} is the fact that “word order” does not matter greatly, at least not as it does with English grammar. Instead, through Greek’s many grammatical variables of: tense, person, case, voice, and overlapping layers of conjugation; each word has distinct linguistic markers connecting and relating verbs, nouns, adjectives, prepositions, and adverbs appropriately. Ordinarily, most Bible translators try to preserve the underlying word order {literal; KJV, ESV}, or at least the thought order {dynamic equivalent; NIV} of the text, but sometimes this causes the translation to be somewhat confusing, becoming misunderstood when it is only read in a foreign {non-original} language. The next few sentences and phrases written by John, suffer from this issue as he offers us an overview, or summary of the whole history of redemption.

“*He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.*” The underlying phrase order is preserved here, making it feel kind of awkward, moving from “coming into” to “He was in...” without any transition. This feels awkward until we recognize that John is shifting his narrative time and perspective from when the “*true light...was coming into the world.*”, describing a time prior to the miracle of the Incarnation and Jesus’ birth and subsequent life, to after when the light had revealed Himself before all the world; to when John was writing His testimony and commenting on the divine revelation many years after the events recorded.

By considering this sentence alone, yet without removing it from its context, our understanding can be improved by using the dynamic approach through rearranging the phrasing slightly and by inserting extra qualifying explanatory descriptors {which would have been implicitly understood by John’s original audience}:

- {*And the world (the Kosmos) was made through (or by) Him (the Phos/Logos/Theos). He was in the world, yet the world did not know Him;* (it did not *ginosko*: recognize or comprehend; who He is).}.

So, when the sentence is phrased this way, we can see it as being a summary of redemptive history until Jesus’ Gospel ministry (from Creation until Jesus’ birth and baptism).

John continues next with, “*He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.*”, {the use of the word “people” in this verse is an interpretive, clarifying addition provided by the translators and is not “literally” reflected in the Greek text}. The *Phos* who is *Theos* came to those who belonged to Him as a “treasured possession”, but they rejected Him because they preferred the darkness to light.

Thus John summarizes the whole of Jesus’ earthly ministry through His death on the cross. He explains how God the Son, Jesus of Nazareth, was born a Jew and how He ethnically belonged to God’s chosen people, Israel, understanding that all of Israel belongs to God (even the believing Jews of the First Century); everyone who places their faith in the LORD alone is a part of that people, Israel. But:

- Although many Jews followed Jesus and His teachings, calling Him “prophet” or “good teacher”, coming to Him for His miraculous power.;
- Although they welcomed Him into Jerusalem like a king visiting in peace.;

- Instead of receiving or accepting Him as their Savior and Lord, they rejected Him and had Him killed.

Instead of receiving Him or accepting Him as Who He truly is: the Sovereign God and the true, eternal Davidic King:

- They falsely accused Him of blasphemy and of treason against the earthly, Roman authorities.;
- The Jewish leaders conspired together {as representatives of all the people} to charge and convict Him; to have Him disgraced, humiliated, and executed in order to preserve their status quo and “save” Israel (John 11:50) from the dangerous, life transforming change that Jesus preached and represented.
- Although the Jews had “Moses and the Prophets”: possessing the Torah and all the oracles of God (Romans 3:2, 9:4-5); they did not recognize the LORD whom they were looking for when He appeared (Mal 3:1) because they did not possess the “*ears to hear*” or “*eyes to see*” Him (Isaiah 6:9-10; Ezek 12:2; Matt 11:15).

Then to conclude his overview, John summarizes the present, post-resurrection and heavenly ministry of the *Phos*, “*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...*”. John describes for us the “Now”; the present reality of all God's people Israel. He describes what the coming of the *Phos* means for us; the effect His coming has upon us. Our adoption as God's children.

Yet his statement, “*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...*” is also confusing because of all the questions it raises:

- How does someone “receive” Him? Is this receiving an active or passive action?
- What does it mean to “believe” in His Name? Is our believing a “saving” work?
- If we are given this ability as a right, how then do we exercise it? How do we become God's children? Since He made us, were we not already His children?

So, while the translators have tried to help make things more clear and plain for us here, every English translation is actually missing a lot of the Greek's grammatical significance, regardless of how you order these words and phrases. Therefore, we need to slowly unpack each phrase to find the answers and get to the heart of what John is saying.

“*But to all who did receive him...*”. The King James renders this as to “...**as many as** received him ...” (Jn. 1:12 KJG), while the ESV renders it as “*all who*”. Here the word “all” inclusively means “*everyone and only those who*” receive **and** accept the *Phos* and the *Logos*, the Light and the Word. Grammatically the verb “to receive” conveys the sense of an action that has been completed in the past {aorist}. However, we cannot re-frame this as merely being “those who were given” because this “to receive” is also an active verb, making it something “we do” rather than something that is “done to us”. Christ did not come into the world, giving Himself for us, to us, like a “process server” forcing us to receive Him and His gift of grace; we are still required to reach out and accept it ourselves, taking it from His hand.

So in this sense, we “receive” by taking and accepting something that is being given to us directly and personally. We do not “receive” in the sense of “receiving” a package at our front door when we are not home, (like when we get a notification from Amazon that something has been delivered), because although we have technically received it (and Amazon is no longer responsible for it) we have not yet “received it” into our possession. It is ours, but we do not yet have it.

- Therefore according to John, in order to receive, the receiver **must** actively respond and accept something given. We still must bring the package inside.
- Therefore, in order for us to “*receive Him*”; for us to receive Christ, every Christian is required to actively respond and willfully accept Him. Jesus does not force Himself into our heart, we must still respond to His gracious offer of Himself and accept Him.
- Therefore, receiving Jesus Christ and all that He offers us, requires us to intentionally, positively, and actively respond to Him in faith, by believing and trusting in Him.

However, as we will see by the end of this sentence, we still cannot **first** ask Him to come so that we may receive Him. Although His work is done and His offer of grace has been extended to us, we cannot invite Him first because we, our sinful selves, do not want to invite Him since we are spiritually dead in our sin.

The dead cannot want life, because the dead cannot want anything at all. We are not drowning, we are dead. We cannot cry out asking for help, because the dead do not speak. We cannot receive Jesus Christ as a life preserver that has been cast out to us, because the dead cannot grab and hold onto anything. We need someone else to come save us because we are beyond saving ourselves. That is why we need Jesus to save us, before we can ever hope to receive Him.

We receive Him first, then we actively respond to the life that is in Him, like a person being resuscitated by an EMT. We cannot ask Him for aid, but He gave Himself freely to us and so we respond by being raised to life. However, even though we do not ask Him, we may still reject Him and refuse Him, as if we have a spiritual DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) and then He will sorrowfully leave us in our sorry state.

Next, to those “...*who believed in his name...*”, a phrase that appears later in the Greek order. Grammatically the verb “to believe”, *pisteuo*, here conveys the sense of a present, on-going active action which can be better rendered as, those “who are believing...” because, if you are chosen by the Sovereign God to believe, then you will never stop “believing”. Also, Christians rarely use the expression of believing “*in His Name*” anymore. We consign it to our thoughts on prayer, where we ask God things “*in His Name*”; but the two uses share the same sense:

- Whenever we pray “in Jesus' Name”, we are asking “as if” we are Jesus and we are hoping that the LORD will answer us “as if” we were Jesus; by asking “in Jesus' Name” we are representing Jesus.
- When we are believing “in Jesus' Name”, we are believing in and trusting in the Jesus; in the Divine Person, whom His Name represents: God the Son, the *Logos*.

What this means for us is that receiving Jesus is not a one time act of faith, or one single moment of choice. Instead, believing requires our constant attention and intention to believe in Him. Just because we once went down to an “altar call”, or because we once made a public profession of faith, or because we were baptized, we cannot assume that afterwards we may continue living as if nothing has changed (that would be “cheap grace”). “Believing in His Name” requires us to live in relationship with Jesus; to be obedient and faithful to Him by loving others and loving God because Jesus gave Himself for us and because we have received Him.

Then to them “...*he gave the right to become children of God...*” Now this phrase gives us three questions to consider: Why did God give?, How did God give?, and What did God give?

The answer to the third question is, “*the right to become*”. We Americans know a thing or two about “Rights”, right? Whenever we think about our “rights”, we think about things that we believe we are due, deserve, or are

owed but that is not what rights actually are. We insist upon having our “rights”, but we forget that “rights” are not things that are earned. The Founders of our country were correct when they codified and recorded some of our “rights”, because they described them as being “inalienable” and “natural”, implicit and intrinsic to us as human persons. rights have been given to us and are placed within us through the power of someone beyond and outside of ourselves, someone transcendent: God, our Creator.

We become transformed into the “*children of God*” because of this new right that we have received. The quality of our relationship with God is changed foundationally. No longer are we in a relationship with God that is defined merely by the Creator/creature dynamic, or the Sovereign/vassal dynamic (the order between a King and his subjects). Instead, our relationship is now that of Father and child. Now we get to boldly go to our heavenly Father and make the outrageous ask because of this relational change. Now we get to ask Him for grace, mercy, and forgiveness, trusting that He will answer us with whatever is right and best for us because of His great, adopting love.

The word translated here as “*right*” is the Greek word *exousia*, a word which is more often rendered as “power” or “authority” in the New Testament. Thus rights are power or authority which are within us. This is why Jesus' words against retaliation are so poignant in Matthew 5:38-48; and this is why we usually emphasize Jesus' point there as us **not** insisting upon having our rights. Truly, Jesus was talking about these complementary powers within us: the power “to do” and the power “to not do”. Those powers are what we call “rights”. But the greater power, the stronger and more *agapic* power, is often when we choose “to not do”. Being given this “right” in love is the “Why” that drives all the rest and answers our first question.

The conjugation of the verb “...to become...” within this phrase, **does not** give the sense of, “the right to choose whether or not to become children of God”, instead the verb applies a different force to the phrase, making it more “He gave [them] the right to be caused to become children of God”. Grammatically, this verb carries the sense of a completed, past action the effect of which is now being imposed upon the those who “*receive Him*”. This is implying the sense of our having been chosen to become God's children, rather than our choosing to become. The “How” of the choice is God's sovereign will and power to choose, which answers our second question.

- We “become” because God chose us. He gives us the right and He causes us to “become”.

Receiving Jesus Christ comes through our active response of believing in Jesus' Name, which gives the right to be transformed, changed, and regenerated by God, therefore becoming His beloved, adopted child. So,

- First, God the Son, the *Logos*, the true *Phos*, Jesus entered into the world that He created and gave Himself to us, for us.
- Next, we actively respond to this by believing in and trusting Him, receiving Him and all that He offers.
- Then, once we respond to Him in faith, we are caused to now become “*children of God*”.

Jesus Saves. We receive Salvation and God adopts us as His children.

Yet some think that “If we simply just choose to believe in Jesus, then (because we have chosen to believe) we must be adopted as God's children.”. But, thinking that suggests that human choice (the power imposed by our will) is the first cause, which is then followed by faith, our our work of believing, which is lastly followed by our spiritual regeneration and adoption by God. That suggests that we may save ourselves by choosing to allow Jesus to save us, like grabbing onto a “life preserver”.

That is the unfortunate error of the Arminian's perspective. They over inflate and over emphasize the importance of our human will when choosing to respond to God's grace. They give power to the human will over God's grace. Meanwhile, the Reformed side also affirms that we must choose to respond and believe God, yet we believe that neither the ability nor desire resides within any “natural man” except that it comes first as the gift of God (Eph 3:8-10).

If the Arminian understanding were correct, this would make God appear to be weak and desperate for our human faith; for our love and affection. It would suggest that He needs us to choose Him, the Sovereign Creator of the universe, before He can act upon and within us. This suggests that the human will to be saved, or not be saved, can trump God's sovereign will to save or not save. This makes both God's grace and mercy in salvation, and the enforcement of His just wrath upon our guilty selves subject to our choice; as if the cross of Jesus Christ merely gave us a “Get Out of Jail Free” card that we may or may not choose to use.

But any god like that, would not be God. They would be just like all the old gods of pagan religion, unworthy and undeserving of our faith and worship. Ultimately, they are something less than humanity because they are merely fantastical imaginings: the creation of depraved human minds.

Finally, John completes his summary of redemptive-history by describing the most important and implicit quality that is found within, which is placed within all and only these who receive Jesus Christ, those “...*who were born* {the Greek word here is *gennao*, which ordinarily means “begotten” in the natural, physical sense of conception and birthing children but, it could also be used to describe adoptive relationships within genealogies thereby expanding its used meaning to describe legitimate, generational relationships; *gennao* is also the root of *monogenous* or *mongenes* which has been translated in the past as “only begotten” and is used in John 3:16 to describe the special and unique relationship between God the Son and God the Father (leading to the Trinitarian formula found within the Nicene Creed of “begotten, not made”), but also used in the Septuagint to describe Isaac and his unique relationship with Abraham as his “only begotten” son according to God's promise and the sole heir to God's covenant with Abraham}, *not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God*.”. Again, certain phrases were reordered here by the translators for our benefit, but where the verb for “...*who were born*...” is, it reverses the directional emphasis. If the expression followed the Greek word order instead, then it would read as, those {who were not from blood, and not from the will of the flesh, and not from the will of a man (meaning a husband), but they were born (or begotten) from God.}. Can you hear how the verbal emphasis changes with the order? The emphasis changes from the {children being born} to {God begetting children}. The operative active emphasis of the verb is changed from being upon us, to being from God.

Then through this phrase John makes a series of denials and affirmations, proving his intended emphasis is God.

- “...*not from blood*...” - This denies the physical aspects of the human birthing process.
- “...*not from the will of the flesh*...” - This denies the physical aspects of human procreation, particularly as the natural consequence of human lust.
- “...*not from the will of a man*...” - This is not a second denial of human procreation. This is actually a denial of the work done by the human will through the formal, legal process of adoption: whereby a child (or other adult person) is chosen by a man {a *paterfamilias*¹} and becomes established as his legal and legitimate heir {a *filiusfamilias*}, over-riding their natural parentage and other relationships.

1 See my DMIN paper “The Gentile Perspective of Nomos as the Intended Audience of the Apostle Paul”, page 31

- “...but from God they were born (*begotten*).” - This affirms God as the principle, sole, and original generative source; “begetting” us by His Spirit rather than by the flesh.
- Thus it is by God's adoptive will, through His spiritual “begetting”, that we have now become the “*children of God*”

John's point of God as being the source of our spiritual begetting, is clearly made by denying the physicality of this birthing process. Yet even still, as with our physical birth, when we are spiritually born, we are regenerated by the Holy Spirit without our asking or giving our consent. Thus our spiritual birth, our adoption as His children, can only be by the monergistic work of God.

Therefore, because God has already first adopted us spiritually, when Christ offers Himself to us, we respond positively because we recognize Him as the only begotten Son of our shared spiritual Father. Recognizing Him, He gives us the confidence of faith to begin understanding our new relationship with Him, as beloved children of God.

Unfortunately, unless and until the LORD gives someone the “ears to hear” and “eyes to see”, they are blind and deaf to Christ's call. They can not respond to God positively. Until God's Holy Spirit worked within and upon us, we were numbered among the reprobate; just as unregenerate as every other wicked and sinful person (Eph 2:3). That is why we needed to be “born again”: to be spiritually born by God's Spirit; in addition to our natural, human birthing. That is the mystery which Jesus tried to explain to the Pharisee, Nicodemus.

So John's summary of redemption history is meant to serve as a spiritual warning and as a hopeful reminder and encouragement to us.

When the Creator entered into His creation, the creation failed to recognize Him. Jesus, the Son of God, came to the Jews, God's Chosen People, Israel, but the Jews failed to recognize Him for who He is and then rejected Him and killed Him. Although many rejected Him, God is faithful and chose to preserve for Himself a remnant of people (Gen 45:7; Ezra 9:8; Isaiah 10:20-22, 37:32; Jeremiah 23:2) faithful to Him; a remnant consisting of both the Jews and the Gentiles. When the Jews rejected God incarnate, they became *like* the Gentiles, so God opened up access to Himself more broadly; calling and bringing in all of His Chosen, spiritual children, into fellowship with Himself; disaffiliating us from the *Kosmos* by uniting us into the Israel of God.

Yet while it is by God's wonderful, merciful grace alone that we are called into a relationship of love with our heavenly Father, of *koinonia*, we must remember that relationships take work. Relationships require time and effort to grow, mature, and strengthen them. So, just as God requires us to respond to His free gift of grace with a “Yes” in order to receive Him, He also requires us to expend our personal effort in maintaining our relationship with Him. This effort consists of Sunday worship, prayer, daily devotions, good works and charity, Bible reading, and singing but that list is not exhaustive. We should also be more grateful knowing that unless God worked within us first, we never would have responded to Him with our “Yes”. We know that we would have no desire for salvation or the forgiveness of our sin.

Lastly, it is because God sent His light into His creation: a creation that had degenerated and fallen into sin and misery; we know that God loves us. His light is like a lighthouse which warns us away from the shoals and rocks of human sin and leads us along safe paths towards our eternal home and life with Him. So walk in the light build up your relationship with God. Remain within the *Phos* who is *Theos*, by obeying the *Logos* who is *Theos*; believing and trusting in Him alone, always.

AMEN