

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

And The Word Was God John 1:1-2

I am confident that before this year is up that some of us here this weekend will have Jehovah's Witnesses knocking on our door. How will you respond when this takes place? Will you hide and not answer your door? Will you answer the door but politely refuse to talk with them? Or will you engage them? And if you choose to engage them in conversation, will you be characterized by a calm confidence in the position that you're representing, or will you be characterized by a nervous apprehension perhaps thinking that you are ill prepared to defend your faith? Hopefully this weekend's message will help you in your next encounter with Jehovah's Witnesses who may choose to visit you.

We are now studying the fourth Gospel and what have we learned so far? We have learned that the Apostle John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, a member of Christ's inner circle, wrote the fourth Gospel. We have also learned why he wrote this Gospel. He wrote this Gospel so that people might believe in Jesus and be saved.

What did John 20:31 say? **"But these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."**

We must come to understand that believing in just any "Jesus" is not enough. We must come to believe in Jesus as He has been revealed in the Scriptures. And how has He been revealed in the Scriptures? He has been revealed in the Scriptures as the Christ, the Son of God.

If we reject the fact that Jesus was the Son of God, or in other words "God the Son," then we have rejected Christ, as He has been revealed in the Scriptures, and we cannot be saved. The deity of Christ is therefore a very important theological truth that John not only emphasizes in his purpose statement in John 20:31 but throughout his Gospel. We, in fact see this emphasis by John not only throughout the fourth Gospel but throughout the introduction to the fourth Gospel as well.

In the introduction, which consists of eighteen verses, John makes it very clear to us that the only way we are going to know God is through Christ. What does **John 1:18** say? **"No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him."** Because Jesus is the only person who can reveal God to us John chose to refer to Him as "The Word."

Words; signed, written, or spoken might be the vehicle that we use to reveal what is on our minds and in our hearts, but it is only "The Word," or in other words Jesus who can reveal God to man.

What makes Jesus qualified to reveal God to man? John gives us a list of different things that qualifies Him. First of all, what we learn about the Word and God in **John 1:1-2** makes Jesus qualified.

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What did we learn about the Word and God last week from these two verses? We learned that the Word like God was eternal. How does **John 1:1** begin? "**In the beginning was the Word**" or in other words "**At the beginning of time was continuing the Word.**" What else did we learn? We learned that the relationship between the Word and God throughout eternity was close. We see this in the very next phrase, "**In the beginning (at the beginning of time) was the Word (was continuing the Word) and the Word was with God.**" It could be paraphrased and the Word was face to face with God. Throughout eternity the Word and God have been locked in an intimate and joyous embrace.

But John was not finished. We learned that the Word was God. This is exactly what the verse said. "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**"

This is how we finished last week's message. John's emphasis on the deity of Christ comes out in the very first verse of his Gospel. There should be no question in our mind that John wants us to see Jesus as God.

Embracing the deity of Christ is necessary if we are going to be saved. Embracing the deity of Christ is also the doorway that we must pass through before we can see the true magnificence and glory of Christ. Embracing the deity of Christ is the doorway that we must pass through before we are in a position to see Jesus as bigger and bigger and bigger.

Not only was the Word eternal, not only was the Word eternally close to God, but the Word was God. These are the things that we learned about the Word and God in John 1:1 that makes Jesus qualified to reveal God to man.

But unfortunately there are numerous false religions and cults who have stumbled over these truths. Rather than embracing the deity of Christ they have rejected it. In order to reject the deity of Christ they have to get around John 1:1. They have done this primarily by coming up with other so-called inspired writings that they would say either clarifies what John said or supercedes what John said.

Those groups that use other so-called inspired writings to negate or to supercede the Scriptures can be quickly dismissed. But there is one cult, the Jehovah's Witnesses, who rather than concocting other inspired writings to negate or reject John 1:1 has simply chosen to rewrite John 1:1.

The New World Translation, the Jehovah's Witness Bible, renders John 1:1, "In the beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God and the Word was a god." Obviously this translation of John 1:1 totally changes the meaning of the passage. How significant is this change in the translation of this verse? It is extremely significant. A person's salvation can very easily hang in the balance in respect to how they understand how this verse is translated. Hopefully there is not a single person here this morning who has not embraced "**And the Word was God**" as the correct translation.

But having embraced the translation "and the Word was God" as the correct translation of John 1:1, certainly does not prepare us for an encounter with a Jehovah's Witness at our door who wants to engage us on the topic of what is the best translation of John 1:1.

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How can we prepare ourselves for a dialogue with a Jehovah's Witness about the best translation of the last phrase of John 1:1?

First of all we need to see ourselves as free to speak with them for the purpose of evangelism. Why would this even be an issue? Most of the opportunities that we will likely have to dialogue with Jehovah's Witnesses about any biblical issue will most likely be in or at our homes and some well meaning Christians do not feel that they are free to do this because of **2 John 9-11**. Let me read this passage for you. "**Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. (10) If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; (11) for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.**" This is a pretty strong statement. Does this mean if Jehovah's Witnesses knock on our door and want to talk with us that we are obligated to turn them away? I believe that answer is absolutely not.

In order to properly interpret John's statement we need to be familiar with the historical setting. There were no centralized church buildings where believers could congregate as there are now. Rather, various Christians in a particular city or town would open their homes for prayer, praise, the breaking of bread, and instruction. With this background I believe we can better understand the concern expressed in **2 John 9-11**. It was all about extending to false teachers, through the use of your home, assistance in maintaining or extending their so-called ministry. In other words, 2 John 9-11 prohibits Christians from assisting false teachers in spreading their doctrinal errors, but it does not prohibit Christians from seeking to evangelize them.

What can we do to prepare ourselves for a dialogue with Jehovah's Witnesses about the best translation of John 1:1? First of all we need to see ourselves as free to do this. What else might help us to prepare ourselves to dialogue with Jehovah's Witnesses about the best translation of the last phrase of John 1:1?

We need to be prepared to engage them in the kind of dialogue that would honor the Lord (2 Timothy 2:24-25). Too often Christians when talking to Jehovah's Witnesses will treat them with disrespect. This does not honor the Lord. Listen to **2 Timothy 2:24-25**. "**And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient with wronged, (25) with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.**"

If gentleness is something that you struggle with when you are interacting with a cultist perhaps it would be helpful to remember that they are not just cultists but they are people just like ourselves created in the image of God.

A man named Ron Rhodes, the author of the book *"Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Jehovah's Witnesses,"* shared the following story in his book to illustrate this point. This is what he said, "I remember one Sunday afternoon a Jehovah's Witness – a man about 35 years of age – stopped by my house with his son, who appeared to be about five years old. Several times during our conversation, the young boy looked up at his father admiringly. He seemed so proud to be with

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his father, going door to door talking to people about God. I could picture him thinking, "I'm going to be just like my dad when I grow up!"

Ron Rhodes then goes on to say after sharing this story, "This experience, more than any other, showed me that Jehovah's Witnesses are people before they're cultists. They have families and children and all the other things that are important to normal human beings. This man loved his son, and his son loved him. No doubt this man was trying to set a good example for his son. In my mind's eye, I can see this young boy running up to his mother upon returning home, telling her all about how he and daddy had talked to many people about God.

If we can keep in mind that Jehovah's Witnesses are people with families and children, people who have the need for friendship, love, and security, people who laugh and cry, we will find it much easier to treat them with respect and kindness when they show up on our doorstep.

I believe a helpful tool in maintaining that respectful attitude when talking with them is to attempt to guide the discussion by asking purposeful questions. Of course for you to do this effectively you must be biblically knowledgeable. This brings us back to the last phrase of John 1:1.

If we are going to be prepared to speak to Jehovah's Witnesses about the last phrase of John 1:1 we first of all need to see ourselves as free to speak with them at or in our homes for the purpose of evangelism. Secondly, we need to be prepared to engage them in the kind of dialogue that would honor the Lord.

Thirdly, we need to be familiar with grammatical issues involved in the translation of the last phrase of John 1:1.

Let's first of all consider how the Jehovah's Witnesses have come to their particular translation. It begins with an observation. They correctly see that in the Greek text there are two references to God (THEOS) in John 1:1. The first reference is translated by both the New World translation, as well as every other translation in the very same way, "And the Word was with God", big "G." However, the New World Translation handles the second occurrence of the word "God" (THEOS) in quite a different way. Rather than translating the second occurrence of "God" with a big "G," making Him deity, they translate it "a god" using a little "g" differentiating him from Jehovah God. Why do they do this?

The Jehovah's Witnesses argue that in the Greek text, a noun (such as "God") joined to a definite article ("the") points to an identity or personality, or in other words to a real person. Thus, the first occurrence of "God" (THEOS) in John 1:1 – since it is preceded by the definite article "the" – points to the person of Jehovah God.

In the second occurrence of "God" (THEOS) in **John 1:1**, the Jehovah's Witnesses will say that when a singular predicate noun (such as the second occurrence of "God" in John 1:1) has no definite article ("the") and it occurs before the verb (as is true in the Greek text of John 1:1), then this points to a quality about someone. This so-called grammatical approach led them to translate the last occurrence of THEOS, "a god" rather than "God."

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All that they observed about the second occurrence of the word "God" (THEOS) in **John 1:1** is true. It is a singular predicate noun. It does not have a definite article preceding it. And it does occur before the verb. All their observations are correct, the only problem is their conclusion.

Their conclusion is not based on good exegesis. Let us begin by looking at the words, or in other words the lexical aspect of this phrase. If John wanted to say that Jesus was godlike, he could have and should have used the Greek adjective (THEIOS) which can be understood in this way. But he didn't choose to use the adjective. He chose to use a noun (THEOS).

The Jehovah's Witnesses would have us to believe that this is not a problem in respect to their translation. But it is a problem and their problem is compounded by the word that John did choose to use. Not only did John not choose to use the adjective to describe the godlike or divine quality of Jesus, he chose a word, according to grammatical authorities, that is never used in this way.

Theologian Robert Reymond notes that no standard Greek lexicon offers "divine" (or in this case "godlike") as a possible meaning of THEOS, the Greek word for God. The Jehovah's Witnesses would have us to believe that the best translation of the last phrase of John 1:1 would be "and the word was a god" (or in other words godlike). But when we do a word study, or in other words when we do a lexical study this seems very unlikely.

Let us for a moment look at the syntax of this phrase or in other words let us look at the relationship between the words.

The Jehovah's Witnesses make a big deal about the absence of the definite article the second time the word God is used in John 1:1. They try to use the absence of the definite article to justify changing the basic meaning of the Greek word for God, as we have already seen.

But even though their effort to change the basic meaning of the Greek word for God should be resisted on the basis of a simple word study, we are still left with an important question. Why did John drop the definite article from his second reference to God in John 1:1? Let me assure you that it had nothing to do with changing the basic meaning of the noun THEOS from God to godlike.

It boils down to a very simple Greek grammar lesson. The last phrase of John 1:1 is a copulative sentence. A copulative sentence is simply a sentence that is joined together by the verb "to be." In Greek, one distinguishes the subject of a copulative sentence from the predicate nominative by which noun has an article in front of it. How did this grammar lesson apply to the last phrase of John 1:1? John placed the definite article before the noun "word" and not before the noun "God" to indicate which noun was the subject and which was the predicate.

Because John was careful in where he placed the definite article and where he did not place the definite article, we do not have to guess whether John meant to say "God was the Word" or if he meant to say "The Word was God." Because of where John placed the definite article and where he did not place the definite article we know that "word" is the subject and "God" is the predicate. In other words, we know with absolute certainty what John meant to say. And what did he mean to say? "And the Word was God."

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There is a reason why every Bible translation other than the New World Translation translates the third phrase of John 1:1 "and the Word was God" rather than "The word was a god." And what is that reason? It is the best translation.

And now we come to **John 1:2** and in effect John simply restates what he just said in **John 1:1**. Let us read it. "**He** (or literally "this one," referring to "The Word" who is identified as God in the third phrase of John 1:1) **was in the beginning with God.**" John 1:2 says the same thing as John 1:1 but uses fewer words. John is simply driving the truths of John 1:1 home to us in John 1:2.

CONCLUSION

Hopefully we are now prepared to dialogue with Jehovah's Witnesses about the last phrase of John 1:1.

Hopefully you feel the freedom to speak to them when they come to your door.

Hopefully you will honor the Lord in the way you choose to speak to them.

And finally, hopefully you are prepared to deal with the grammatical issues that are involved with any discussion involving the last phrase of John 1:1.

If you feel inadequate to effectively dialogue with Jehovah's Witnesses on this or any other biblical topic be prepared to simply share your testimony.