

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **The Word's Superiority John 1:17-18 Part 2**

My daughter and son-in-law came down for my son's wedding, along with their two children. Guess where they have been staying these past three weeks? They have been staying with us. It has been a very tiring time but it has also been a very encouraging time in many ways.

There was one conversation that particularly stood out to me that I had with my son-in-law, Edmond. He was telling me about a friend that he has made up in Fairbanks, Alaska. This friend, from the standpoint of the world has his life together. He has a wonderful family, a great career, financial security, and a outgoing and helpful personality. Edmond has really appreciated his friendship. But Edmond shared with me that there is one thing that he still lacks, a personal relationship with God.

Unfortunately in spite of Edmond's efforts, God is still a total non-factor in his friend's life. This of course is a disappointment to Edmond, but far worse, it is a tragic loss for his friend. A tragic loss that only those who by faith, have been able to behold the glory of Christ can appreciate. This leads us to the passage that we are studying this morning.

Because of this burden that he felt for his friend, he purposed to share the Lord with Him. His hope was that as Jim would see the void in his life, would take steps to change his situation. But this did not happen. His friend would not even acknowledge the existence of God.

We are now concluding our study of the introduction of the Gospel of John which outlines for us a list of reasons why the Word is qualified to reveal God to man. The last reason that we are presently considering is the Word's superiority over certain specific Old Testament prophets in John 1:15-17 makes Jesus qualified to reveal God to man.

I would hope that as we finish our study of this last reason, that we will ourselves be increasingly grateful that the Lord has given us the grace to see the glory of Christ ever more clearly and that this will allow us, in our eyes, to see Christ always getting bigger, and bigger and bigger.

The first Old Testament prophet that we considered was John the Baptist. The superiority of Christ over this great Old Testament prophet is spelled out for us in **John 1:15-16**. We are now going to consider the second Old Testament prophet that the Apostle John lists.

The Word is not only superior to John the Baptist but the Word is superior to Moses (John 1:17). Let us read **John 1:17, "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ."** Obviously the Apostle John is communicating to us that what came through Jesus Christ was in some way superior to what was given through Moses. But how was it superior?

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It must have something to do with grace. Why would I say this? Let us go back to the prior verse. Let us go back and read **John 1:16**. What did it say? "**For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.**" The Apostle John in verse 16 had just referred to that amazing marvelous constant grace that is available to those who, with the eyes of faith, are able to behold the glory of the only begotten from the Father.

Having given us this wonderful picture of grace that is always available to us, the Apostle John in John 1:17 gives us a specific illustration of how the principle of grace upon grace can be seen in the transition from one *dispensation* to the next.

What is a dispensation? A dispensation is a stewardship arrangement in which the management or oversight of one's property is entrusted to a *steward*. Two parties are involved in a dispensation; the one who delegates the duties and the one whose responsibility it is carry them out. The steward is both responsible and accountable, so that at any time a change can be made if the steward is found *unfaithful*.

When a steward is found unfaithful he can be removed and replaced with another steward. Spiritually speaking, God unfortunately over a period of time has had to replace a number of unfaithful stewards. And each time God has replaced an unfaithful steward, He has given the new steward a new set of responsibilities. We see such a transition in **John 1:17**.

Let us again read **John 1:17** but this time looking for a possible change in dispensations. What did the apostle John say? "**For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.**"

The "Law" (NOMOS) is referring to the first five books of the Old Testament, all written by Moses, and which contains the Mosaic *Covenant* (Exodus 20:1-31:18).

God, in the five books of the Law gave the Israelites various commands and ordinances to follow. The Jewish people promised that they would do this according to **Exodus 24:7**. And God promised them that if they in fact would do what they promised that he would bless them according to **Leviticus 26:1-14**.

The time period, when this covenant was in place, is called by theologians the "dispensation of Law."

If they had done what they promised to do, they would have been incredibly blessed, especially in terms of their land, which had been given to them by God.

Some people today try to take the Mosaic Covenant, which was in the dispensation of the Law, and try to apply it to the United States. There are some people who say that if we as Americans would simply live our lives in a certain way that the promises made to Israel by God, in the Mosaic Covenant would be applicable to us as well. There is no such promise in the Scripture regarding the United States. But there was a promise to the nation of Israel.

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Obviously it did not take very long for the Jewish people to mess up, but even in spite of this God graciously left the possibility of blessing them open by keeping the covenant in place for hundreds and hundreds of years. But God did not keep this conditional covenant open to them indefinitely.

God only kept the Mosaic Covenant, which was contained in the Law, in place until the promised seed came according to Galatians 3:19. Let me read this verse for you, **"Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made."** The Law came it says because of transgressions. And this verse also says that it would remain in place **"until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made."** The Lord knew when He gave Israel the Law that they would ultimately fail keeping the covenant they had made with Him. And the Lord knew the Law would remain in force until the coming of the promised seed, or in other words, Christ.

But why would the Law have a built-in expiration date? Why didn't the Lord just simply keep the Mosaic Law in place forever? He didn't keep it in place because it had served its purpose. And what was the purpose of the Law? Let us consider first of all what was not its purpose.

The Law was not given to save man from the penalty or power of sin. What does **Romans 6:12-14** tell us? **"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, (13) and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. (14) For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under LAW but under grace.** Paul is telling us loud and clear in these three verses that the Law delivered to the Jewish people through Moses, in and of itself could not save man either from the penalty or power of sin.

Neither was the Law given to justify us. Listen to **Romans 3:20**, **"Because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin."**

Neither could the Law make anything perfect. Listen to **Hebrews 7:19**, **"For the Law made nothing perfect, and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God."**

But, we should not conclude because the Law could not save us from the penalty or power or sin, or justify us or make anything perfect, that there was something wrong with the Law or that it had somehow failed to achieve its purpose. Listen to **Romans 7:12-13**, **"So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. (13) Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful."** Why did God give the Law through Moses?

God did not give the Law in order to save sinful men, but to *prepare* sinful men for their Savior by exposing their sinfulness (Galatians 3:24). Let me read **Galatians 3:24**, **"Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith."**

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And what happened when the purpose of the Law in God's eyes was fulfilled? He changed stewards from Israel to the church. And He changed their responsibilities. We are not responsible for keeping the Law given through Moses, we are no longer under the Law, but we are responsible for fulfilling the great commission.

This leads us to the second half of **John 1:17**, which details for us the transition from the dispensation of the Law to the dispensation of grace. Let us read this verse, "**For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.**" The word "realized" (EGNETO) can also be translated "came." The first half of the verse introduces us to the dispensation of the Law. The last half of this verse introduces us to the dispensation of grace.

What does John mean when he says, "**grace and truth were realized by Jesus Christ?**" Let us first of all consider what it does not mean. Certainly when John says that grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ he does not mean that grace and truth cannot be found in the dispensation of the Law. Let me ask you a question, "Was grace and truth present before Christ entered this world?" And the answer is, "Of Course!"

Was the Law that God gave to the Israelites an expression of grace and truth? And the answer is absolutely! Without the Law they would not have known what God expected of them morally, socially, and ceremonially. Without the Law they would not have had the opportunity to be blessed through their obedience or to be rendered guilty in their disobedience so that they could be prepared for the Savior. When John says, "**grace and truth came through Jesus Christ**" he does not mean that grace and truth were not present before the coming of Christ. Grace and truth can be found all through the Old Testament.

What else does he not mean? When John says that grace and truth came through Jesus Christ he does not mean that grace and truth were not instrumental in the *salvation* of Old Testament saints. Grace and truth were always instrumental in the salvation of Old Testament saints. In fact, no Old Testament saint was ever saved apart from grace and truth.

Let me read for you **Romans 4:1-3**, "**What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? (2) For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God. (3) For what does the Scripture say? "And Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."** How was Abraham saved? Abraham was saved not by works but rather by grace through faith. How about Isaac, Jacob, Joseph? How were they saved? They were also saved by grace through faith. How about Moses the one through whom God gave the Law? He also was saved by grace through faith.

If this is true then what in the world does John mean when he says, "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ?" The phrase "Grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ" means that no person at any time has been *saved* apart from the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. If the Word, or in other words Christ, had not chosen to become flesh and dwell among us and had not willingly gone to the cross to make atonement for our sins we could not be saved. In fact, no one at any time in the history of the world could be saved.

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Let me ask you this question, Could Adam and Eve have been saved apart from the death, burial and resurrection of Christ? No! Could Noah have been saved apart from the death burial and resurrection of Christ? No! Could Moses have been saved apart from the death burial and resurrection of Christ? Could the Apostle John have been saved apart from the death, burial, and resurrection of the incarnate Word? No!

When John viewed the glory of Christ with the eyes of faith and was able to see Jesus clearly, what did he see?

Listen to his words in **John 1:14**, "**And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.**" John saw Jesus as the source of life for every person who has ever lived. If anyone tried to be saved apart from Jesus, John would see that person as going down the path of destruction. John would see that person as going down a path that had no truth and down a path that would lead to no grace.

Do you want to be saved? Where must you go? You must go to Jesus and be able with the eyes of faith to see His glory, the glory of the only begotten from the Father full of grace and truth. Why is the only begotten from the Father full of grace and truth? Because He, as the incarnate Word, was willing to die for our sins in order to secure for us a place in heaven which He offers to us as a free gift by faith.

We now have only one more verse left in order to complete the introduction to the Gospel of John. Let us read **John 1:18**, "**No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father; He has explained Him.**"

How does this verse fit in with the context? John 1:18 forms the *climax* to the entire introduction of the Gospel of John. In the introduction, John has given us a list of reasons why the Word is qualified to reveal God to man.

What have we learned from the introduction that makes the Word qualified to reveal God to man?

What we have learned about the Word and *God* in John 1:1-2 makes Jesus qualified to reveal God to man.

What we have learned about the Word and *creation* in John 1:3-5 makes Jesus qualified to reveal God to man.

What we have learned about the Word and *John the Baptist* in John 1:6-8 makes Jesus qualified to reveal God to man.

What we have learned about the Word *incarnate* in John 1:9-14 makes Jesus qualified to reveal God to man.

And finally what we have learned about the Word's *superiority* over certain specific Old Testament prophets in John 1:15-17 makes Jesus qualified to reveal God to man.

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The introduction to the Gospel of John has given us all the reasons why the Word is qualified to reveal God to man, verse 18 tells us that the Word has in fact *done* this.

But what do I mean when I say that the Word has in fact revealed God? Does this mean that we will actually see God as the angels in heaven see God? And the answer is no! When we talk about the Word revealing God, we are not talking about Him drawing back the curtain of heaven so that you can actually see God on His throne. In fact, I don't think that this is something that you would necessarily want to happen, at least not at this particular moment. Why is this? Let me read for you **Exodus 33:17-20, "And the Lord said to Moses, 'I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight, and I have known you by name.' (18) Then Moses said, 'I pray Thee, show me thy glory!' (19) And He said, 'I myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.' (20) But He said, "'You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!'"** The Word revealing God to man does not mean that He will show us the *face* of His father (Exodus 33:20). Obviously if Jesus did that it could cause some significant problems for us. Then what does it mean? Let us go in and look at the verse further.

**"No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him."** If the Word is not going to pull back the curtain of heaven so that we can see His Father, then how is He going to reveal God to us? The Word is able to reveal God to man by *explaining* Him to us. Isn't this exactly what the verse says? Let us read it again, **"No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him."**

The verb "explained" (EXEGESATO) comes from a root from which we get the word "exegesis." Jesus is the exegesis of the Father, or in other words, Jesus the incarnate Word explains the Father.

Why is Jesus able to exegete, or explain the Father to us? Look again at the verse, **"No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him."**

Jesus is a very unique individual. Who is He? The only begotten God. The NIV translates it **"God the one and only."** Both of these are excellent translations of this verse. The KJV using fewer Greek manuscripts, and not the best manuscripts that are available to modern biblical scholars, unfortunately has a different translation. The KJV translates this phrase **"the only begotten Son."** Certainly the true meaning of what John is trying to convey to us is present in the KJV but unfortunately it is not the most accurate translation.

Why was the Word in such a great position to exegete God or explain God. First of all because He was the only begotten God. What else? He was in the bosom of the Father.

The word "bosom" (KOLPON) in this context is figuratively used to describe the *affectionate* relationship that the Word enjoys with His Father.

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**John 1:18** should sound very familiar to you. Do you remember **John 1:1**? "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**" We have now come full circle with John re-emphasizing the same truths that he did in **John 1:1** but this time John explains the significance of this for our lives. Because the Word was in the beginning with God, in the very bosom of God, and was God, the only begotten God, He can explain God to us.

### CONCLUSION

My son-in-law's friend thinks that his life is fine without God. He would not be able to say this if he were able by the grace of God to behold the glory of Christ. When we by faith behold the glory of Christ and He explains God to us, our lives will be dramatically and wonderfully *transformed*.