



Book of Faith Bible Study John 1:14, 16

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.... From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

The first four verses of the Prologue to The Gospel According to John (1:1-4), together with John 1:14, provides the church with the clearest expression of the central mystery of the Christian faith – the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth. Centuries after the witness of John's Gospel, at the Council of Chalcedon (481 C.E.) this passage would be used to solidify the paradoxically expressed Christian doctrine that the Son is one person in two natures, fully human and fully divine, thereby protecting this mystery from the human tendency to reduce the power of the incarnation. Beginning with Luther himself, Lutherans have extended John's testimony concerning the two natures of the Word, by analogy, to the Bible; it too is both fully human and fully divine. That is, though the Bible is very much a product of human culture and history, it is the means of grace that God uses to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ ("full of grace and truth!") to a world that is suffering deeply from sin and in dire need of the revelation of God in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus. Because John's Gospel narrates God's work of revelation and restoration by means of the incarnation so clearly, Luther held the Fourth Gospel, along with Paul's letters to the Galatians and the Romans, in particular esteem.

The Prologue to John's Gospel (1:1-18) functions as an introduction to the Gospel itself. Many of the themes introduced in these eighteen verses are more fully developed in the Gospel's ongoing narrative. The language of the Prologue, then, is tightly packed, somewhat like poetry. Much is suggested in a very few words.

As you consider opening Scripture individually or with others, you may wish to consider these general questions:

How does the Bible feed your daily life?

How does the Bible feed the life of this community?

How are we renewed, empowered, and enlivened by the Word?

What stands in the way of our opening the Bible and joining the conversation?



Given the condensed nature of the language and the fact that the original language of the New Testament is Greek, some of the nuances of the Prologue can be lost in English translation. For instance, the NRSV translates verse 14a as: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us.” The verb that is well translated by the English “lived among,” in Greek, also carries the literal sense of “tented” (*skenao*). John, in using this language, subtly refers to the Old Testament tradition of God’s “tenting” in Israel, in the “tabernacle” (*skene*, Exodus 27). It was, of course, in the tabernacle that the “glory” of the Lord resided (Exodus 40:34). In John 2:21, however, John informs us that Jesus’ “body” — that is, his own being — has now replaced the temple as place in which the glory of the Lord resides.

Throughout, the Gospel John continues to elucidate, in various ways, how we can behold God only through God’s glory revealed in that most unlikely of “places,” Jesus of Nazareth (1:46). Despite all appearances, and to the scandal of many of his contemporaries (5:18), Jesus reveals in 10:30 that “I and the Father are one.” The manner in which John develops the notion of “tenting” illustrates how the themes tersely introduced in 1:14 (God’s glory has come to reside in the body of Christ rather than in the temple; the relationship of Jesus as Son to God as Father; the “grace” that flows from this relationship marked by the cross, as well as its “truth”) receive further narrative commentary in the remainder of the Gospel. If we really want to understand the Bible, we must commit ourselves to close readings of its books, from their beginnings to their ends. In doing so our relationship to the Word is nourished by being attentive to the interconnected details of the biblical text as well as the larger and more immediately visible concerns of the forward moving narrative.

If verse 14 describes the person of Christ (fully human as well as fully divine), verse 16 begins to articulate the work of Christ, what Lutherans among others have come to call the “justification” of sinners before God — “From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” The little phrase “grace upon grace” in verse 16

In addition to questions found in the studies, here are general questions that can be used for each of the texts:

What is God saying to us through this passage?

What does this passage tell us about God?

How does this passage speak to us as individuals and to us as a community?

What does this passage teach us about our neighbors and our world?

has been the cause of much interest through the years. If one stays within the prologue to inquire of its meaning, then it may be that the “first” grace is creation, all of which experiences to some degree the “light” of the Word (1:3). That is, God’s creation, however much it is plagued by “darkness” (1:5), is “good.” If this is so, then the “second” grace is experienced by those who are drawn by the power of the cross (3:14; 12:32) into the knowledge of Christ. In this movement, they have come to recognize not only the insidious nature of evil but also the “lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (1:29). The “we” of verse 16 are then they who have experienced a second creation “from above” (2:3), that is, from the cross (3:14). Through this rebirth in Christ, they/we have received “the power to become children of God” (1:12), a power that is expressed in the worship as well as the discipleship of the Crucified One (20:28) under guidance of the Holy Spirit working through the means of grace (14:26).

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Questions on John 1:14, 16

- *How do we understand the centrality and importance of the incarnation?*
- *Is the Bible, like Jesus, both human and divine? How so?*
- *How does the poetry of John 1 speak to us about who Jesus is and what we have received through him?*