

John 1:15-18 "Can I Get Someone to Testify?"

JOH 1:15-18 "John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'" 16 From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known."

This section of Scripture is the conclusion of the prologue of John's gospel which is his introduction to this gospel. And this foreword, from verses one through eighteen, has had to do with introducing us to the Creator of the universe who took on flesh as He came into this world to redeem sinful men.

And now that we have met this God through the pen of the apostle John he once more goes back to the importance of declaring this God and Savior as he reintroduces the one who was given the responsibility of heralding God's entrance into this world as he fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah as described in Isa. 40:3.

ISA 40:3 "A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God."

Of course, this is John the Baptist who was given the privilege and responsibility by God to go to the Jews as the one who is to prepare the nation of Israel for receiving their king and Savior.

And there are a variety of things here we can glean from the ministry of John the Baptist not the least of which is that, like John, we too are called by God to testify about Jesus Christ in a world which may not be all that receptive to our message, any more than Israel was receptive to receive this message at the time of Christ.

But despite this what we also see here is that the grace of God is working among those who were not receptive as John had no intention of hiding the fact that the Son of God was now among men as the Word became flesh.

Let's look at verse 15.

JOH 1:15 "John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'"

The NASB puts it this way. "John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me."

When it says that John testifies about Jesus there is a Greek word being used here for testify that is *martureo*, and it means to bear witness to the facts. It is also where we get our English word martyr, which implies that someone would be willing to hold to those facts without wavering, even giving up their life for that truth.

And of course, John the Baptist would eventually give his life for the testimony he was not willing to stray from when it came to the truth of who God is and what His will is. But his testimony was for the sake of lifting up Christ with the express purpose of snatching men from the fire, if you will.

JOH 1:7 "He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe."

And this is what you and I have been called to do as well; not necessarily give our lives for our faith, but to be willing to be so passionate about the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ that if necessary we would not deny this truth so that others may come into the light and be saved from the penalty of their sin.

But when we testify to this good news we need to keep in mind that our testimony is to line up with the written word of God which addresses who Christ is and why He came into this world.

You may have heard the expression which is used among some churches that they like to testify in the congregation. "Testify brother!" And then they'll stand up and often give an emotional declaration of what God is doing in their lives as their testimony resembles more of a personal declaration of a change God has done in their lives. "God delivered me from a life of sin. I don't smoke or drink or chew, and I don't hang around with those who do."

In fact, in many evangelism programs one of the keys to those programs is to begin your conversation with people by giving your testimony. And what that means is to give your life story of how

you came out of a life devoid of Christ and how you ended up turning to Him for salvation.

And these approaches can certainly be a legitimate way of expressing our faith and gratitude in the grace of God in our lives. But when the word testify is used here in our text it is keying in on the truth of God's word as it pertains to the Messiah and why He came.

In other words, John's testimony had little to do with expressing to the Jews how his life had personally changed, as his testifying had more to do with someone other than himself as his testimony was exclusively about Jesus Christ.

In fact, Jesus Himself points this out when confronting the Jews of His day as He testified to the Jews the real intent of God's word.

JOH 5:39 "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me..."

This is ultimately what our testimony is to be about; it is to be about Jesus Christ. Now that doesn't mean we can't give our personal testimonies or that we can't testify to how the Lord is working in our lives, but if when testifying in such a way we don't testify of the truth of God's word as it speaks of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, then our testimony becomes only so much about self.

And so, for example, whenever I share my personal testimony it always comes around to the Scriptures which testify of Jesus Christ and the reason for Him coming into this world; to redeem men and save them from the penalty of their sin enabling them to come into the Kingdom of God through faith in Christ alone.

And that's what John the Baptist did in his ministry of being that voice in the wilderness. But notice too in verse 15 that he speaks of one who comes after him who has a higher rank than John the Baptist.

Again, this is designed to point out that John is not the answer. He is only the messenger to the one who is the answer. This is the one who came before him as the NIV puts it, or as the NASB says, existed before me.

This is kind of a play on words here with the purpose of making the point the apostle John starts with in the beginning of this gospel. Remember how he started?

JOH 1:1-3 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."

This is clearly stating that this Word is none other than God and that He is the creator of all things which necessarily means He was before men and time.

And so, when John the Baptist says, "He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me," he is making the point that Jesus Christ is not only higher in rank as God is higher than man, but that Jesus Christ existed before John the Baptist despite the fact that Jesus, as a man, was chronologically younger than John the Baptist by about 6 months.

And many of the Jews of John's day would have known this. And so, John the Baptist is saying at the outset that the one about whom I testify is the One who always was, always is and always will be. And so this puts his testimony about Jesus in the category of one who is eternal, and thus God Himself.

And therefore, when we testify about Jesus Christ we need to express to people that we're not talking about a mere man, but God who became man. And in this way people will be shown that we're not talking about a man who was just a good person, or a man who was a mere prophet, or a man who ended up being a martyr for his cause.

But rather people will be informed that our Jesus is truly a man who was good and perfect, who was a prophet and who did die for the cause of redeeming men, but that also He was the God who created men and loved us so much that He came into this world to make sure we would be with Him forever as we put our trust and faith in Him as Lord and Savior.

And this is what the apostle John expresses in verse 16 of our text.

JOH 1:16 "From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another."

The KJV puts it this way: "And of His fullness have all we received, grace for grace."

The NASB uses a similar translation. "For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace."

Now the difference may not seem all that important and yet there is a difference here between the KJV, the NASB and the NIV.

The NIV once again says, "from the fullness of His grace", whereas the other two say, "of His fullness." One speaks of the fullness of grace while the other two speak of the fullness of God from which His grace emanates.

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Stay with me here. It is true that God's grace is full, but only because God is God. And this is what the KJV, the NKJV, the NASB and others point to. In other words, John is saying that it is because of the fullness of God that we receive this grace which is so full and marvelous.

And who has he been talking about? The Word become flesh, Jesus Christ. The point here is that this is another passage which declares that Jesus Christ is God who showers us with this grace.

In fact, this word fullness, as it addresses the fullness of God, is the same word which is used in other portions of Scripture to identify Jesus Christ as God.

When Paul was writing to the Christians in Colossae he pointed out that this Jesus Christ was no ordinary man.

COL 1:15,19 "He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him..."

COL 2:9 "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form..."

For those cults that come to your door and try and convince you that Jesus Christ was a super-man, or an angel sent from God to look like a man, or that He was simply a man who was very very good, you can show them from the very word of God that Jesus Christ was fully man, but also fully God.

Only God can give such grace to people. And by the way, when the NIV uses the phrase, "we have all received one blessing after

another," it is a legitimate way of saying that we have received from God grace upon grace.

The word grace here is the Greek word *charis*. And it means that which affords joy, pleasure, delight. That's what a blessing is. And in God's goodness and mercy He has expressed to us in His Son that which will bring us into the kind of relationship which is designed to bring us joy and pleasure and delight in our God and Savior. That's a blessing; that's grace.

Grace from God is also something we don't deserve which is why our salvation is also referred to as a gift. And so, this grace John refers to in verse 16 is meant to show how the fullness of God is expressed in the fullness of grace from God.

In other words as awesome and unfathomable and infinite and eternal is our God, so is the grace that has been extended to us. It is grace upon grace, blessing upon blessing. So much so that we could never fully comprehend it all on this side of eternity. This is what we have received in Christ.

But now John moves from grace as is expressed in God becoming man to redeem us, to the law which could never save us.

JOH 1:17 "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

Now, we need to be careful not to read into this sentence something it's not saying. John does not mean to suggest that when God gave the law to Moses that there was no truth being extended or that there was no grace being extended.

That simply isn't the case. The fact that God would reveal Himself to people through His law is an act of grace and blessing on God's part. But the grace which is found in the law is grace only because it points to Jesus Christ who is the promised one found in the law.

This is why, for example, that the risen Jesus makes the OT Scriptures the focal point in pointing to Himself when He spoke with those two disciples on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection.

LUK 24:13-17 "Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed these things with each

other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16 but they were kept from recognizing him. 17 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast."

They then went on to explain the tragedy of losing their Master on the cross at Golgotha and how He died and was buried. And then they explained how when the women went to the tomb they couldn't find him. They actually thought someone stole the body to add insult to injury. But here's how the risen Jesus responds to them.

LUK 24:25-27 "He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."

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The first five books of the bible, known as the Pentateuch, were written by Moses. And whenever the name Moses came up to the Jews as it related to the word of God it was understood to include the law.

The law was always meant to demonstrate grace and truth, but only because it pointed to the One in whose fullness we have received grace upon grace. In other words grace is not found in a law, it's found in a person who is Christ.

GAL 3:24-25 "So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. 25 Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law."

And this is the point John makes here in our text. Though God's grace was extended to men through the law, when compared to what the law pointed to one can only conclude that grace and truth came through Jesus Christ, which is why Jesus could say, "I am the way, and the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father, but by Me."

That law cannot accomplish life, only the life-giver who is our risen Lord and Savior.

But now John goes on to end this section with a very interesting statement about God, again keeping in mind the context which is dealing with the fact that Jesus Christ is this Word, who is God.

JOH 1:18 "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known."

Let's take the first part of this verse. "No one has ever seen God." Some might argue this point and say that God has been seen by men. Didn't Abraham see God when one of those three men who visited him stayed behind and Abraham recognized Him as the Lord? Didn't Moses see God in the burning bush? Didn't Israel see God in the cloud of fire?

And the answer is no. They saw a manifestation of God as God chose to reveal part of His glory to them in these different ways. Again, we know this by the term Theophony. But this statement by John is absolutely true. No one has ever seen God. And there's a very good reason for this.

God is Spirit as Jesus says in Joh. 4:24. And so, by very definition spirit is something which the natural man cannot see. But even more than that if man could see the fullness of God he could not live to tell about it. This is what the Lord conveyed to Moses.

EXO 33:18-23 "Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." 19 And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 20 But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." 21 Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. 22 When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."

Moses wanted to see the glory of God and God said, 'I'll let you see My goodness'; one aspect of God's glory. And even at that Moses couldn't see the Lord's face, but only His backside.

Now keep in mind here that what Moses is describing is an anthropomorphism, which is just a fancy word for trying to describe something you can't describe as you use human attributes to explain God.

In other words, when the word of God describes God's hands touching us, or His arms wrapping around us, or His feet using the world as His footstool this is a human way of trying to explain the



way God interacts with humans using human characteristics. That is an anthropomorphism.

If God is spirit then, again by definition, He doesn't need hands and feet and eyes as human beings understand such things. This doesn't mean that God is without the ability to embrace us, or comfort us or see us. But to try and explain God as an invisible human looking being is to really limit the eternal infinite God.

And so, when we come to the passage in Exodus which describes God as having a backside it simply implies that what the Lord allowed Moses to see was only a fraction of the glory of the invisible Almighty God who is Spirit.

But again the question could be asked, if God revealed Himself to men in the OT, through the angel of the Lord, for example, or through the burning bush, or through human manifestations were they not really encountering God?

Absolutely. Those were real encounters with the living God. But that is different from saying that they saw God. They saw what the Lord allowed them to see so that they could have some sense of reference to their human experience with an invisible Spirit, who is God.

So, how do we have any sense of who this God is if we've never seen Him? This is where Jesus Christ comes in.

JOH 1:18 "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known."

By the way, in some of your translations of verse 18 it reads, the only begotten God. The KJV reads the only begotten Son.

All of the oldest Greek manuscripts have "only begotten God." The beauty of this statement is that it clearly speaks of Jesus Christ, who was sent by the Father, as being none other than God.

"The only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him." (NASB)

And of course this makes sense since only God can explain Himself. And so, Jesus Christ explains or makes God known in a way that only He can, since He is God. This is why when the disciples asked Jesus if they could see the Father He said, if you have seen Me, you have seen the Father.

Well, if we carry the logic of Exodus to its conclusion then none of those disciples, or for that matter, all men who saw Jesus Christ should have lived since, as the Lord essentially said to Moses, you cannot see Me and live.

So, what did Jesus mean when He said if you have seen Me you have seen the Father? He meant as a human being Jesus was manifesting all of the love of the Father, all of the grace and mercy of the Father. In other words, Jesus is God in the flesh in such a way that men can see who God is without the benefit of the full glory of God, which would kill them.

In other words, this is the closest a human being can get to actually seeing the glory of the Lord without seeing His fullness which was veiled in flesh at that time.

Even John, who is writing this gospel, understood that when he spent some three plus years with Jesus Christ, that he had not seen the fullness of God, even though he knew He had been with God in the flesh.

1JO 4:11-13 "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. 13 We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit."

Does this diminish Jesus Christ as being fully God? Of course not. In fact, it is through Christ that we get a real glimpse of our eternal God. In ages past men did not have the advantage we have today. Why? Because the eternal Son of God, literally revealed Himself as God with the express purpose to allow us to know Him so that one day we will get to see Him face to face.

Moses was not allowed to see the Lord's face during the desert wanderings, but you and I will, in all His glory. Paul touches on this when writing about God's love in 1Cor.13.

1CO 13:12 "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

We are told that we human beings are a little lower than the angels, but that one day we will be elevated above them in our glorified

bodies. And yet, they have the privilege of being in the very presence of God as they behold Him face to face.

MAT 18:10 "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven."

Jesus also speaks of this intimate relationship in His Sermon on the Mount.

MAT 5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

REV 22:3-4 "No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads."

This is what we long for. And it is Jesus Himself who has made it possible. He has explained the Father. He has declared Him. And it's all for the purpose of coming into His presence in perfect fellowship forever.

The alternative is too awful to even consider. Not to trust in the Son of God who came to take away the sin of the world will result in being separated from God forever with no hope of ever meeting their Creator and experiencing His love as God's wrath will be the only thing they will experience forever.

I don't like that alternative. And since we have the hope and the message of life may we always be willing to testify to the grace and truth which is found only in Jesus Christ so that all who would believe on Him would also receive this life and share in the hope of being in the bosom of our Lord, the very presence of our loving God forever.