

5. THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST (1:14-18)

WORLDVIEW

Worldview, as the terms suggests, is simply the way people view and interpret things in the world, be it things related to politics, religion or just everyday life, how one interprets the events and relationships of life is determined by one's worldview. It is at the heart of who we are and influences our beliefs, values, and ultimately our words and actions.

But worldview not only affects our everyday life, it also affects our spiritual life. Just consider the Christmas season. Christians generally view and celebrate Christmas different to the rest of the world. For many, the season is very commercialised. That is why you can have slogans like, "Christmas isn't Christmas without Bakers Choice Assorted", or songs like *Imagine* by John Lennon being considered part of the Christmas playlist.¹³ In the business world, Christmas is the busiest shopping, commercial and economic time of the year. It is big business, as materialism and emotionalism have become the focus.

This illustrates how worldviews influence society, culture, and even the church. Worldviews have a lot to say about God and Jesus, and how we are to relate to Him. If we are not careful, these worldviews can influence what we believe about God and how we approach Him. But if we are to consider and worship God rightly, we have to go to the source, the Bible, which challenges all non-Biblical worldviews.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. What other situations have you witnessed non-Christian worldviews in action? How do the consequences of those worldviews compare to when the Biblical worldview is applied to the same situation?
2. I once heard someone say on the radio when announcing a Christmas carol he was about to play that we must not think about things like sacrifice at Christmas time, but rather focus only on the good things of the season. What does this statement reveal about his worldview? How does it compare to the Biblical worldview?

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The apostle John writes from a Jewish background and with an understanding of the Old Testament, and to people with the same background and worldview. To understand their worldview, it is helpful to study some Old Testament passages.

Read: Exodus 33:19-34:7; Deuteronomy 5:22-28.

13 In 2017, during a Christmas special in the US, the song *Imagine* was featured with Christmas carols and other specifically Christmas songs, putting it across that a song that contains the line "Imagine there's no heaven" can also be a Christmas song. In the same year, there was an online article entitled *The Atheists Guide to Christmas* which gave advice on how Atheists should talk to their children about the season and gave ways that Atheists can participate in the festivities without all the Christian activities and meaning attached.

These passages answer two important questions about God: “What is God like?”, and “What is it like to be in God’s presence?”. How one answers these questions says a lot about a person’s worldview, theology, and their relationship with God.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. Without using Christian jargon or theological terminology, how would you describe God to someone who does not know Him?

What is God like? Who is God? (Exo. 33:19-34:7)

In John 1, the Apostle John paints a picture of the Word, Jesus Christ, and unashamedly declares that He is God. But note that apart from the declarations, John does not describe God at all. He takes it for granted that his readers would be aware of who He is.

In your Christian walk you will become familiar with some of technical terms used to describe God. For example, that He’s omnipotent – He’s all-powerful. We are given a taste of that in verse 3 as John describes Jesus as being the Creator of everything out of nothing simply by speaking it into existence. Another word, omniscient – God is all-knowing. He knows absolutely everything. In a way, you get a sense of this also in the fact that He is Creator. You only need to study the wonders of DNA to realise that there is some greater intelligence behind it all. No scientist could ever come up with that kind of stuff. But God did. This is super-intelligence.

Or what about that God is omnipresent – He is everywhere. From the furthest reaches of the universe, to being here with us, right now, there is nowhere that God is not. He is also immutable – unchanging. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. Yes His methods may change. The way in which He interacts with people may change, but He, in His character, does not change. God is also eternal. He is infinite in His existence. He had no beginning and will have no end. There has never been, nor will there ever be a time when He doesn’t exist. We see this clearly at the beginning of John 1 in verses 1 and 2.

Most people have a basic idea of those five attributes of God, even though not everyone fully understands them, they’re pretty much generally accepted. But there are other attributes that we cannot ignore. Some nice, some not so nice. At least from our perspective. For example, God is holy, pure and without sin. There is no sin in Him and He cannot stand sin in any way. People may accept God as being holy, but there are some implications of that fact that many choose to ignore or forget, because God’s holiness implies judgement. It means that those who fall short of His standard will face His wrath. And this is seen throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament people were struck dead for disobeying God, for idolatry and for other things that were in opposition to His law. And it is in the New Testament too. In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira are struck down for lying to God and stealing from His people. Revelation and all the end time prophecies point to God judging those who fall short of His standard. It is a truth that cannot be ignored.

We also read in passages like Psalm 5:5-6, 11:5; Proverbs 6:16-19; Romans 9:13 that God is capable of hatred, especially of sinners (see also Lev. 20:23; 26:30; Deu. 1:27; 9:28; 18:12; 22:5; Psa. 106:40; Jer.

12:8; 14:19; Hos. 9:15; and Mal. 1:2). This challenges the worldview of many a Christian who states that God hates the sin but loves the sinner. From these verses we clearly see that He hates both.

Here some people might object by saying, “Yes God hates sin and is going to judge the wicked, but He is also merciful, gracious and loving. He is going to have pity on some”, and they would be right. God is indeed merciful and loving, but He is also holy. One cannot ignore that. It is part of His character. They are two sides of the same coin as it were.

This brings us to Exodus 33. Here Moses is on Mount Sinai with the Lord. He has the privilege of speaking one-on-one with God. After being told what God's plan was for Moses and the people of Israel, Moses asks God, in verse 18, “*Now show me your glory*”. God’s response to this request is rather telling. Instead of showing Moses His glory, God describes His character. As the story unfolds, Moses gets a taste of God’s glory, but he does not see God's face, His complete glory. This is because God is holy and man cannot look upon God's holiness without experiencing God's wrath, His judgement for sin.

But note especially Exodus 34:4-7. Most people stop after the phrase, “*forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin*”. This is how many tend to think of God – full of compassion, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love, and forgiving. But the end of verse 7, the part many do not like or choose to ignore, is equally important and part of God’s character – “*but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation*”.

However, the amazing thing is that God is all of these attributes (plus every other mentioned in Scripture) perfectly, all the time, and all at the same time. He loves and hates perfectly, and without sin, at the same time. He is merciful and pouring out His wrath at the same time. As sinful man we can never be like this, but God, who is perfect, can be and is.

To have a correct perspective of who God is, you have to believe all of His attributes. You cannot focus on one and disregard the others. You cannot just focus on the ones you like, while ignoring those that you do not. To do so affects not only your theology, but how you live and interact with God and others.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. Think of some of the ways that focussing on one attribute of God can lead to disregarding other attributes. How would this affect one’s understanding of God? How would it affect evangelism?
2. How does the fact that God hates not only the sin, but also the sinner, challenge how you have always viewed God? How does this change your attitude to sin, bot in others and yourself?

R.C. Sproul wrote in his book entitled *God's Love*, “God does not come to us like a chef who operates a smorgasbord restaurant. We cannot take our plates and help ourselves to the attributes of God we find tasteful and pass by those attributes we find unpalatable”. So true. To have a biblical worldview you have to believe and accept all of God's attributes, even though you cannot fully understand them, or even dislike them.

Going back to the initial question, what is God like? How would you define Him now?

I quite like the Jewish definition. They say, “God is a mountain covered by a cloud on top”. In other words, the things that we know about God, the things He has revealed to us in His Word and through Christ, are the parts of the mountain that we can see, they are real and tangible. But the top of mountain, the part covered by the cloud, we cannot see. We have no idea of how grand or tall the mountain is. These are the things of God that we do not know. Some of which we may never know, even when we are with Him in eternity.

What is it like to be in the presence of God? (Deu. 5:22-28)

Your answer to this question depends on your answer to the first. For how you understand Him to be is going to influence whether you want to be in His presence or not and how you will interact with Him when you are.

How did the Jews understand what it meant to be in the presence of God? Deuteronomy 5 gives us a good idea. Here Moses recounts the giving of the law, the Ten Commandments, to Israel by God. The nation had escaped from Egypt, witnessed the parting of the Red Sea, and their enemies destruction. Now they were camping at the foot Mount Sinai, and they hear the voice of the Lord from the fire and cloud at the top of the mountain. Here God does not speak through Moses or a prophet, but preaches directly to the assembly. They hear His voice, and now they fear for their lives. But as terrifying as this experience is, things are going to become more terrifying, because God is about to move into the camp. No longer is He just going to be at the top of the mountain, He is going to set up His tent in the middle of their camp. What we know as the Tabernacle or Tent of Meeting.

However, despite God’s nearness, they continue sinning. We see countless times through the Exodus that they made presumptions about, and demands of, God. And although God chose them, loved them and had showed them grace, on occasion He strikes down those who disobey Him or trust in themselves rather than Him. The same thing happens throughout the Old Testament. It eventually becomes so bad that in Ezekiel 8 to 11 God abandons Jerusalem and the temple because of the people’s idolatry. Clearly it is not easy to live in the presence of God.

Yet, at the same time there is joy and peace while living in His presence. The Psalms are full of praise to God and speaks in a number of places of what it’s like to be with God (See Psa. 23:6; 84:10; 91:9-10).

There exists a tension of keeping both the seemingly good and bad attributes of God in focus, and the tension of the negative and positive consequences of living in God's presence. Both sides are true at the same time.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. Many in the modern church desire to be in the presence of God. In trying to fulfil that desire, some can become rather mystical about it by trying to raise people to God’s level, or try to draw

God to come down to man's level as if it were possible to draw Him. How does the tension seen in the Bible of what it is like to be in the presence of God challenge your thinking?

All of this helps us to understand the imagery of John 1:14-18.

JESUS IS THE INCARNATE WORD (VV14-15)

John uses a peculiar word here for "*dwelt*". A word that only he uses, and only here and four times in Revelation (7:15; 12:12; 13:6; 21:3). In Greek there are several words for "*dwelt*", but John uses a very specific word, *skēnoō*. This word refers to a very specific manner of dwelling. It is directly translated as "to pitch a tent" or "boothed". His Jewish readers would have been so familiar with the whole idea of the tent of meeting, or the tabernacle, that this would have had such deep significance to them. Another way you could phrase this verse would be "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us".

What John is saying here is that when Jesus became man, it was in exactly the same manner that the Lord descended and dwelt among His people in the tabernacle in the wilderness. He did not just visit for a short while or send someone in His place. No, Jesus, God, literally came and dwelt, pitched His tent, made His home, in the midst of mankind.

The God we have tried to define above, became human flesh. This is truly a great miracle that cannot be fully explained or understood. But what does it mean that Jesus "*became flesh*"? Well, the word "*became*" here literally means came into being. He became something that He wasn't before by taking on a mortal human state. In effect, Jesus now has two natures; the divine nature He has had for all eternity, and human nature. Deity and humanity are united in one person. This is what is referred to theologically as the hypostatic union of Christ.

John here is attacking the false teachings of the day that are still very much around today, even in the church, called Docetism and Modalism. These heresies claim that there is no Trinity, but that God as one person only revealed Himself in different forms at different times in history. In the Old Testament He revealed Himself as the Father, in the New Testament as the Son, and today in the church age as the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ According to 1 John 2:22-23 and 2 John 1:7, those who deny the Son deny the Father and is the deceiver, a liar, and the antichrist. Therefore, anyone who teaches this heresy is not of God and is to be avoided at all costs.

John is also very specific in the use of the word "*flesh*" in verse 14 which opposes the false teaching of Gnosticism that claimed that all flesh is evil, but spirit is good. In the Greek this word does not merely mean body, but refers to the entire human existence complete with its frailties and vulnerabilities. Jesus' physical body was made out of the same stuff as ours, and as a human He would have suffered from the same frailties that you and I suffer from. He grew hungry in the wilderness. He got tired and fell asleep in the boat. He was thirsty and bled on the cross. He was just as human as any other person that has ever lived. Somehow the eternal, infinite God, enveloped Himself into a collection of cells in Mary's womb and became one of us. God put on human skin.

¹⁴ A modern teacher of this heresy is the well-known T.D. Jakes.

Here in verse 14, everything that John has been saying in the first thirteen verses reaches its climax. All his theological declarations all point to this grand miracle. All of the attributes of Jesus (i.e. God) that He has had from the very beginning, both those that John has been declaring since verse 1 and those he has not mentioned, are contained within the person of Christ.

But before anyone can dispute John's words, he goes on to personally identify himself with Jesus by declaring "*we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father*" (Glory refers to the revelation of God through the Son and speaks of the total nature and activities of God). John moves from merely declaring truths to that of personal testimony. It is as if he is saying, "You know what guys, this holy God of the universe, this creator of everything, who became man, I have seen Him with my own eyes. And not only me, but others too". This is personal.

During Jesus' earthly ministry, John and the rest of the disciples see Jesus' glory. Every sign that He performs, every glimpse He gives them of God the Father through his life, are all testimonies to them of the glory of God. Not forgetting that glorious sight that Peter, James, and John are privileged to see on the mountain when Jesus is transfigured before them and they behold His glory with their own eyes. Just like Moses in Exodus 34.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. Spend some time reflecting on the miracle of the incarnation and then turn those thoughts into worship or prayers of adoration and thanksgiving. Ask God to open your eyes to see His glory as He reveals it to you from His written Word.

John continues with Old Testament imagery and declares that this glorious One whom they have seen with their own eyes is "*full of grace and truth*". This is a Hebrew idiom that is just another way of saying that Jesus Christ represents God fully and accurately. This and similar phrasing is used throughout the Old Testament to describe God. What John is saying is that the God you know from the Scriptures, the Holy One which is full of grace, truth, compassion, faithfulness, and all the other descriptions used there, is fully and accurately contained and displayed in the person of Jesus Christ.

In verse 15 John inserts another comment about John the Baptist which at first seems out of place, but is not as he is reinforcing his statements by using yet more Old Testament imagery. Throughout the history of Israel, the second or a later born child was favoured by God over the first born. This goes against the cultural norm (e.g. Jacob over Esau, David over his brothers). So too here, although John the Baptist is born first in human terms, it is Jesus, who came after him physically, who is greater because He came before John in that He has always existed. John is making sure that there is no doubt as to the deity of Christ. That although He came in human flesh like John the Baptist, Jesus is different in that He is God. This comparison to John the Baptist strengthens John's argument of the superiority and deity of Christ.

JESUS IS THE GRACE-GIVING WORD (VV16-17)

When it comes to salvation, there is nothing that we can do to save ourselves. Due to our sin we stand condemned before Him and cannot earn salvation. Therefore we need something that we cannot get on our own. We need grace. And Jesus is full of it.

These two verses can be difficult to understand, especially since the ESV does not fully capture how it is written in the Greek. Here is a more literal translation;

“And from his fullness we have all received, grace in the place of grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”.

The phrase that is underlined, *“in the place of”*, or as in some translations *“upon”* is the Greek preposition *antee* which means substitution. Such as Jesus died as a substitution, *antee*, in our place. It could also be rendered as *“grace substituted for grace”*. In other words, there was grace, but it has been replaced or superseded by an even greater grace.

Now that makes little sense until you read verse 17, *“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”*.

Many interpret this to mean that the Old Testament Law of Moses was void of grace, that it was graceless, because if Jesus brought grace that must mean that there was no grace in the law. But their interpretation is wrong on at least two counts.

1. What about truth? John says that both *“grace and truth”* came through Jesus. If there was no grace in the Old Testament, using the same logic, does that also mean there was no truth? Certainly not. Truth has always existed. Therefore, we can conclude that because John links the two together, grace has also always existed.
2. The purpose of the Law: Though there are many aspects to the law (e.g. how people were to live with each other, how to worship, or as signs of what was to come in Christ) the overall purpose was to show how God's people were to relate to God on His terms. It was the way that man was to live in the presence of God. To be able to live with Him without fear of judgement because of their relationship with Him.

But the question is this, which came first? Law or grace? You might be tempted to say law, but how did God begin the Ten Commandments? He said, *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery”* (Exo. 20:2). God rescuing His people from slavery in Egypt is grace. So first came grace and then came law.¹⁵ Obedience to the law is man's response to the grace they had already received. Understood this way, the Law then, is grace.

Even in the New Testament, Jesus shows grace first through His death and resurrection, to which we are to respond in repentance and faith. Thereafter, we are to obey His commandments. As

¹⁵ Another example is creation – God created the universe and everything in it, which He did not have to do, but chose to. Then He created man and gave the rest of His creation to man as a gift to take care of. His creating man is an extension of His love and grace. Only one Adam was created did God give Him law. Similar pictures of this are seen in the accounts of Noah and Abraham.

Jesus said in John 14:15, *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments”*. Our response to the grace we have received through the cross is obedience.

Consider also the animals that were sacrificed in the Old Testament. They did nothing wrong so why did they have to die? But the question should rather be, who was the one who was meant to die? The innocent lamb, or the guilty person who had committed the sin? The person. Is it not grace then that an animal died in the place of the person so that their sin could be dealt with? Unfair for the lamb, but grace for the man! Strange how Christians have no problem accepting the death of Christ as necessary for our forgiveness of sin, yet struggle with the death of an animal for the same purpose.

And when it comes to salvation, it is exactly the same. Jesus did not change it from being by works (obedience of the law) to grace. Because how was Abraham saved? In the words of Paul, he was saved by grace, through faith. Paul makes it very clear in Romans 3 and 4 that it was Abraham's faith in God and not his works that made him righteous. Nothing has changed in that regard. This was God's plan from the beginning.

So in verse 16, John is saying that the law given through Moses, which was full of grace and indeed was grace in itself, has been replaced by an even better grace. Grace found in Jesus Christ. And He is *“full of grace and truth”*. The fullest expression of the grace and truth found in the Old Testament, the very nature of God, has come to earth through Jesus Christ. He fully and accurately presents God to man.

JESUS IS THE EXPOSITORY WORD (V18)

Expository from the Latin word *expositus*, meaning to expose, or explain. It can also mean commentary.

Moses saw the afterglow of God on Mount Sinai, many saw visions of God throughout the Old Testament. Others saw a representation or other representatives of God in one way or another, and the disciples saw some of Jesus' glory, but no-one has ever seen the invisible, infinite, holy God in ALL His glory. He is just too majestic and awesome for us to comprehend. No-one has seen through the cloud that is at the top of that mountain. As Jesus Himself said later in John 6:46, *“not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father”*.

How then can anyone see God? The only way, is for God to reveal Himself. But as we have seen, God cannot show Himself completely otherwise man would die. The solution? God became man. Jesus, who is in an intimate, face-to-face relationship with the Father, at His side (literally bosom – showing how close the relationship is) is the only person who can explain the Father. And this is what Jesus did His entire ministry. He explains, exposes, and gives commentary on the Father. So, anyone who saw the Son saw the Father.

But how do we see the Son almost two thousand years later? Through the written Word. As you study the life and ministry of Jesus in the Gospel of John, and indeed throughout all the gospels, epistles, and

even the Old Testament, you not only see Jesus, but also the Father. In the same way that Jesus explained the Father to His disciples, He is explaining the Father to you today through this Bible.

SUMMARY OF THE PROLOGUE

In the opening verses of John we are presented Twelve Doctrinal Truths about the Person and Work of Jesus that cannot be disputed. Truths that help us to understand everything else in John, and indeed the other gospels, and introduce the themes that we will see repeated through to the last verse of the book.

Here is a summary of those truths:

Jesus is ...

1. ... the Eternal Word (vv1-2)
2. ... the Distinct Word (vv1-2)
3. ... the Divine Word (v1)
4. ... the Life-Giving Word (vv3-4a)
5. ... the Illuminating Word (vv4b-5)
6. ... the Expected Word (vv6-8)
7. ... the Enlightening Word (v9)
8. ... the Rejected Word (vv10-11)
9. ... the Regenerating Word (vv12-13)
10. ... the Incarnate Word (vv14-15)
11. ... the Grace-Giving Word (vv16-17)
12. ... the Expository Word (v18)

Jesus is, the Word who became flesh and tabernacled among us.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. Read the whole of the Gospel of John again, but this time noting each of the twelve doctrinal truths listed above.