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The Divine Word

1

(John 1:1–5)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. (1:1–5)

The opening section of John's gospel expresses the most profound truth in the universe in the clearest terms. Though easily understood by a child, John's Spirit-inspired words convey a truth beyond the ability of the greatest minds in human history to fathom: the eternal, infinite God became a man in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The glorious, incontrovertible truth that in Jesus the divine "Word became flesh" (1:14) is the theme of John's gospel.

The deity of the Lord Jesus Christ is an essential, nonnegotiable tenet of the Christian faith. Several lines of biblical evidence flow together to prove conclusively that He is God.

First, the direct statements of Scripture affirm that Jesus is God. In keeping with his emphasis on Christ's deity, John records several of those statements. The opening verse of his gospel declares, "the Word [Jesus]

was God” (see the discussion of this verse later in this chapter). In John’s gospel Jesus repeatedly assumed for Himself the divine name “I am” (cf. 4:26; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5, 6, 8). In 10:30, He claimed to be one in nature and essence with the Father (that the unbelieving Jews recognized this as a claim to deity is clear from their reaction in v. 33; cf. 5:18). Nor did Jesus correct Thomas when he addressed Him as “My Lord and my God!” (20:28); in fact, He praised him for his faith (v. 29). Jesus’ reaction is inexplicable if He were not God.

To the Philippians Paul wrote, “[Jesus] existed in the form of God,” possessing absolute “equality with God” (Phil. 2:6). In Colossians 2:9 he declared, “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.” Romans 9:5 refers to Christ as “God blessed forever”; Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1 call Him “our God and Savior.” God the Father addressed the Son as God in Hebrews 1:8: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom.” In his first epistle John referred to Jesus Christ as “the true God” (1 John 5:20).

Second, Jesus Christ receives titles elsewhere in Scripture given to God. As noted above, Jesus took for Himself the divine name “I am.” In John 12:40 John quoted Isaiah 6:10, a passage which in Isaiah’s vision refers to God (cf. Isa. 6:5). Yet in verse 41 John declared, “These things Isaiah said because he saw His [Christ’s; cf. vv. 36, 37, 42] glory, and he spoke of Him.” Jeremiah prophesied that the Messiah would be called “The Lord [YHWH] our righteousness” (Jer. 23:6).

God and Jesus are both called Shepherd (Ps. 23:1—John 10:14); Judge (Gen. 18:25—2 Tim. 4:1, 8); Holy One (Isa. 10:20—Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:27; 3:14); First and Last (Isa. 44:6; 48:12—Rev. 1:17; 22:13); Light (Ps. 27:1—John 8:12); Lord of the Sabbath (Ex. 16:23, 29; Lev. 19:3—Matt. 12:8); Savior (Isa. 43:11—Acts 4:12; Titus 2:13); Pierced One (Zech. 12:10—John 19:37); Mighty God (Isa. 10:21—Isa. 9:6); Lord of lords (Deut. 10:17—Rev. 17:14); Alpha and Omega (Rev. 1:8—Rev. 22:13); Lord of Glory (Ps. 24:10—1 Cor. 2:8); and Redeemer (Isa. 41:14; 48:17; 63:16—Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:12).

Third, Jesus Christ possesses the incommunicable attributes of God, those unique to Him. Scripture reveals Christ to be eternal (Mic. 5:2; Isa. 9:6), omnipresent (Matt. 18:20; 28:20), omniscient (Matt. 11:27; John 16:30; 21:17), omnipotent (Phil. 3:21), immutable (Heb. 13:8), sovereign (Matt. 28:18), and glorious (John 17:5; 1 Cor. 2:8; cf. Isa. 42:8; 48:11, where God states that He will not give His glory to another).

Fourth, Jesus Christ does the works that only God can do. He created all things (John 1:3; Col. 1:16), sustains the creation (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3), raises the dead (John 5:21; 11:25–44), forgives sin (Mark 2:10; cf. v. 7), and His word stands forever (Matt. 24:35; cf. Isa. 40:8).

Fifth, Jesus Christ received worship (Matt. 14:33; 28:9; John 9:38;

Phil. 2:10; Heb. 1:6)—even though He taught that only God is to be worshiped (Matt. 4:10). Scripture also records that both holy men (Acts 10:25–26) and holy angels (Rev. 22:8–9) refused worship.

Finally, Jesus Christ received prayer, which is only to be addressed to God (John 14:13–14; Acts 7:59–60; 1 John 5:13–15).

Verses 1–18, the prologue to John’s presentation of the deity of Christ, are a synopsis or overview of the entire book. John clearly defined his purpose in writing his gospel in 20:31—that his readers “may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing [they] may have life in His name.” John revealed Jesus Christ as “the Son of God,” the eternal second person of the Trinity. He became a man, the “Christ” (Messiah), and offered Himself as a sacrifice for sins. Those who put their faith in Him will “have life in His name,” while those who reject Him will be judged and sentenced to eternal punishment.

The reality that Jesus is God, introduced in the prologue, is expounded throughout the book by John’s careful selection of claims and miracles that seal the case. Verses 1–3 of the prologue teach that Jesus is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father; verses 4–5 relate the salvation He brought, which was announced by His herald, John the Baptist (vv. 6–8); verses 9–13 describe the reaction of the human race to Him, either rejection (vv. 10–11) or acceptance (vv. 12–13); verses 14–18 summarize the entire prologue.

The prologue also introduces several key terms that appear throughout the book, including light (3:19–21; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35–36, 46), darkness (3:19; 8:12; 12:35, 46), life (3:15–16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:21, 24, 26, 39–40; 6:27, 33, 35, 40, 47–48, 51, 53–54, 63, 68; 8:12; 10:10, 28; 11:25; 12:25, 50; 14:6; 17:2, 3; 20:31), witness (or testify; 2:25; 3:11; 5:31, 36, 39; 7:7; 8:14; 10:25; 12:17; 15:26–27; 18:37), glory (2:11; 5:41, 44; 7:18; 8:50, 54; 11:4, 40; 12:41; 17:5, 22, 24), and world (3:16–17, 19; 4:42; 6:14, 33, 51; 7:7; 8:12, 23, 26; 9:5, 39; 10:36; 11:27; 12:19, 31, 46–47; 13:1; 14:17, 19, 22, 27, 30–31; 15:18–19; 16:8, 11, 20, 28, 33; 17:5–6, 9, 11, 13–16, 18, 21, 23–25; 18:36–37).

From the first five verses of John’s gospel prologue flow three evidences of the deity of the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ: His preexistence, His creative power, and His self-existence.

THE PREEXISTENCE OF THE WORD

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. (1:1–2)

Archē (**beginning**) can mean “source,” or “origin” (cf. Col. 1:18; Rev. 3:14); or “rule,” “authority,” “ruler,” or “one in authority” (cf. Luke 12:11;

20:20; Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15; Titus 3:1). Both of those connotations are true of Christ, who is both the Creator of the universe (v. 3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2) and its ruler (Col. 2:10; Eph. 1:20–22; Phil. 2:9–11). But *archē* refers here to the **beginning** of the universe depicted in Genesis 1:1.

Jesus Christ **was** already in existence when the heavens and the earth were created; thus, He is not a created being, but existed from all eternity. (Since time began with the creation of the physical universe, whatever existed before that creation is eternal.) “The Logos [Word] did not then begin to be, but at that point at which all else began to be, He already *was*. In the beginning, place it where you may, the Word already existed. In other words, the Logos is before time, eternal.” (Marcus Dods, “John” in W. Robertson Nicoll, ed. *The Expositors’ Bible Commentary* [Reprint; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002], 1:683. Emphasis in original.). That truth provides definitive proof of Christ’s deity, for only God is eternal.

The imperfect tense of the verb *eimi* (**was**), describing continuing action in the past, further reinforces the eternal preexistence of the Word. It indicates that He was continuously in existence before the beginning. But even more significant is the use of *eimi* instead of *ginomai* (“became”). The latter term refers to things that come into existence (cf. 1:3, 10, 12, 14). Had John used *ginomai*, he would have implied that the Word came into existence at the beginning along with the rest of creation. But *eimi* stresses that the Word always existed; there was never a point when He came into being.

The concept of the **Word** (*logos*) is one imbued with meaning for both Jews and Greeks. To the Greek philosophers, the *logos* was the impersonal, abstract principle of reason and order in the universe. It was in some sense a creative force, and also the source of wisdom. The average Greek may not have fully understood all the nuances of meaning with which the philosophers invested the term *logos*. Yet even to laymen the term would have signified one of the most important principles in the universe.

To the Greeks, then, John presented Jesus as the personification and embodiment of the *logos*. Unlike the Greek concept, however, Jesus was not an impersonal source, force, principle, or emanation. In Him, the true *logos* who was God became a man—a concept foreign to Greek thought.

But *logos* was not just a Greek concept. The word of the Lord was also a significant Old Testament theme, well-known to the Jews. The word of the Lord was the expression of divine power and wisdom. By His word God introduced the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 15:1), gave Israel the Ten Commandments (Ex. 24:3–4; Deut. 5:5; cf. Ex. 34:28; Deut. 9:10),

attended the building of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:11-13), revealed God to Samuel (1 Sam. 3:21), pronounced judgment on the house of Eli (1 Kings 2:27), counseled Elijah (1 Kings 19:9ff.), directed Israel through God's spokesmen (cf. 1 Sam. 15:10ff.; 2 Sam. 7:4ff.; 24:11ff.; 1 Kings 16:1-4; 17:2-4., 8ff.; 18:1; 21:17-19; 2 Chron. 11:2-4), was the agent of creation (Ps. 33:6), and revealed Scripture to the prophets (Jer. 1:2; Ezek. 1:3; Dan. 9:2; Hos. 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jonah 1:1; Mic. 1:1; Zeph. 1:1; Hag. 1:1; Zech. 1:1; Mal. 1:1).

John presented Jesus to his Jewish readers as the incarnation of divine power and revelation. He initiated the new covenant (Luke 22:20; Heb. 9:15; 12:24), instructs believers (John 10:27), unites them into a spiritual temple (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21), revealed God to man (John 1:18; 14:7-9), judges those who reject Him (John 3:18; 5:22), directs the church through those whom He has raised up to lead it (Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1-3), was the agent of creation (John 1:3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2), and inspired the Scripture penned by the New Testament writers (John 14:26) through the Holy Spirit whom He sent (John 15:26). As the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ is God's final word to mankind: "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son" (Heb. 1:1-2).

Then John took his argument a step further. In His eternal pre-existence **the Word was with God**. The English translation does not bring out the full richness of the Greek expression (*pros ton theon*). That phrase means far more than merely that the Word existed with God; it "[gives] the picture of two personal beings facing one another and engaging in intelligent discourse" (W. Robert Cook, *The Theology of John* [Chicago: Moody, 1979], 49). From all eternity Jesus, as the second person of the trinity, was "with the Father [*pros ton patera*]" (1 John 1:2) in deep, intimate fellowship. Perhaps *pros ton theon* could best be rendered "face-to-face." The Word is a person, not an attribute of God or an emanation from Him. And He is of the same essence as the Father.

Yet in an act of infinite condescension, Jesus left the glory of heaven and the privilege of face-to-face communion with His Father (cf. John 17:5). He willingly "emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. . . . He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:7-8). Charles Wesley captured some of the wonder of that marvelous truth in the familiar hymn "And Can It Be That I Should Gain?":

He left His Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace!
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race.

Amazing love! How can it be
 That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
 Amazing love! How can it be
 That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

John's description of the Word reached its pinnacle in the third clause of this opening verse. Not only did the Word exist from all eternity, and have face-to-face fellowship with God the Father, but also **the Word was God**. That simple statement, only four words in both English and Greek (*theos ēn ho logos*), is perhaps the clearest and most direct declaration of the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ to be found anywhere in Scripture.

But despite their clarity, heretical groups almost from the moment John penned these words have twisted their meaning to support their false doctrines concerning the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. Noting that *theos* (**God**) is anarthrous (not preceded by the definite article), some argue that it is an indefinite noun and mistranslate the phrase, "the Word was divine" (i.e., merely possessing some of the qualities of God) or, even more appalling, "the Word was a god."

The absence of the article before *theos*, however, does not make it indefinite. *Logos* (**Word**) has the definite article to show that it is the subject of the sentence (since it is in the same case as *theos*). Thus the rendering "God was the Word" is invalid, because "the Word," not "God," is the subject. It would also be theologically incorrect, because it would equate the Father ("God" whom the Word was with in the preceding clause) with the Word, thus denying that the two are separate persons. The predicate nominative (**God**) describes the nature of the Word, showing that He is of the same essence as the Father (cf. H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* [Toronto: MacMillan, 1957], 139–40; A. T. Robertson, *The Minister and His Greek New Testament* [Reprint: Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978], 67–68).

According to the rules of Greek grammar, when the predicate nominative (**God** in this clause) precedes the verb, it cannot be considered indefinite (and thus translated "a god" instead of **God**) merely because it does not have the article. That the term **God** is definite and refers to the true God is obvious for several reasons. First, *theos* appears without the definite article four other times in the immediate context (vv. 6, 12, 13, 18; cf. 3:2, 21; 9:16; Matt. 5:9). Not even the Jehovah's Witnesses' distorted translation of the Bible renders the anarthrous *theos* "a god" in those verses. Second, if John's meaning was that the Word was divine, or a god, there were ways he could have phrased it to make that unmistakably clear. For example, if he meant to say that the Word was merely in some sense divine, he could have used the adjective *theios* (cf. 2 Peter

1:4). It must be remembered that, as Robert L. Reymond notes, “No standard Greek lexicon offers ‘divine’ as one of the meanings of *theos*, nor does the noun become an adjective when it ‘sheds’ its article” (*Jesus, Divine Messiah* [Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presb. & Ref., 1990], 303). Or if he had wanted to say that the Word was a god, he could have written *ho logos en theos*. If John had written *ho theos en ho logos*, the two nouns (*theos* and *logos*) would be interchangeable, and God and the Word would be identical. That would have meant that the Father was the Word, which, as noted above, would deny the Trinity. But as Leon Morris asks rhetorically, “How else [other than *theos en ho logos*] in Greek would one say, ‘the Word was God?’” (*The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979], 77 n.15).

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John chose the precise wording that accurately conveys the true nature of the Word, Jesus Christ. “By *theos* without the article, John neither indicates, on the one hand, identity of Person with the Father; nor yet, on the other, any lower nature than that of God Himself” (H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of John* [Reprint; Winona Lake, Ind.: Alpha, 1979], 48).

Underscoring their significance, John restated the profound truths of verse 1 in verse 2. He emphasized again the eternity of the Word; **He** already **was** in existence **in the beginning** when everything else was created. As it did in verse 1, the imperfect tense of the verb *eimi* (**was**) describes the Word’s continuous existence before **the beginning**. And as John also noted in verse 1, that existence was one of intimate fellowship **with God** the Father.

The truth of Jesus Christ’s deity and full equality with the Father is a nonnegotiable element of the Christian faith. In 2 John 10 John warned, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching [the biblical teaching concerning Christ; cf. vv. 7, 9], do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting.” Believers are not to aid heretical false teachers in any way, including giving those who have blasphemed Christ food and lodging, since the one who does so “participates in [their] evil deeds” (v. 11). Such seemingly uncharitable behavior is perfectly justified toward false teachers who deny the deity of our Lord and the gospel, since they are under God’s curse:

There are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (Gal. 1:7-9)

Emphasizing their deadly danger, both Paul (Acts 20:29) and Jesus (Matt. 7:15) described false teachers as wolves in disguise. They are not to be welcomed into the sheepfold, but guarded against and avoided.

Confusion about the deity of Christ is inexcusable, because the biblical teaching regarding it is clear and unmistakable. Jesus Christ is the eternally preexistent Word, who enjoys full face-to-face communion and divine life with the Father, and is Himself God.

THE CREATIVE POWER OF THE WORD

All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. (1:3)

Once again John expressed a profound truth in clear language. Jesus Christ, the eternal Word, created everything that **came into being**. John underscored that truth by repeating it negatively; **apart from Him nothing** (lit., “not even one thing”) **came into being that has come into being**.

That Jesus Christ created everything (cf. Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2) offers two further proofs of His deity. First, the Creator of all things must Himself be uncreated, and only the eternal God is uncreated. The Greek text emphasizes the distinction between the uncreated Word and His creation, since a different verb is used here than the one used in verses 1 and 2. As noted in the previous point, John used a form of the verb *eimi* (“to be”), which denotes a state of being, to describe the Word in verses 1 and 2; here, speaking of the creation of the universe, he used a form of the verb *ginomai* (**came into being**). That Jesus is the Creator also verifies His deity, because God is portrayed throughout the Bible as the Creator (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 102:25; Isa. 40:28; 42:5; 45:18; Mark 13:19; Rom. 1:25; Eph. 3:9; Rev. 4:11).

By stressing the role of the Word in creating the universe, John countered the false teaching that later developed into the dangerous heresy known as Gnosticism. The Gnostics embraced the philosophical dualism common to Greek philosophy that held that spirit was good and matter was evil. They argued that since matter was evil, the good God could not have created the physical universe. Instead, a series of spirit beings emanated from Him until finally one of those descending emanations was evil and foolish enough to create the physical universe. But John rejected that heretical view, strongly affirming that Jesus Christ was the Father’s agent in creating everything.

The present world, however, is radically different from God’s original good creation (Gen. 1:31). The catastrophic results of the fall not only

affected the human race, but also the entire creation. Jesus therefore will one day redeem not only believers, but also the material world as well, as Paul noted in Romans 8:19-21:

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

When the curse is lifted during Christ's millennial reign,

The wolf will dwell with the lamb,
 And the leopard will lie down with the young goat,
 And the calf and the young lion and the fating together;
 And a little boy will lead them.
 Also the cow and the bear will graze,
 Their young will lie down together,
 And the lion will eat straw like the ox.
 The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra,
 And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den.
 They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,
 For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
 As the waters cover the sea. (Isa. 11:6-9)

The wolf and the lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox; and dust will be the serpent's food. They will do no evil or harm in all My holy mountain, says the Lord. (Isa. 65:25)

THE SELF-EXISTENCE OF THE WORD

In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. (1:4-5)

Displaying yet again his Spirit-inspired economy of words, John in these two brief verses summarized the incarnation. Christ, the embodiment of **life** and the glorious, eternal **Light** of heaven, entered the sin-darkened world of **men**, and that world reacted in various ways to Him.

As noted earlier in this chapter, the themes **life** and **Light** are common in John's gospel. *Zōē* (**life**) refers to spiritual life as opposed to *bios*, which describes physical life (cf. 1 John 2:16). Here, as in 5:26, it refers primarily to Christ having life in Himself. Theologians refer to that as aseity, or self-existence. It is clear evidence of Christ's deity, since only God is self-existent.

This truth of God's and Christ's self-existence—having life in themselves—is foundational to our faith. All that is created can be said to be “becoming,” because nothing created is unchanging. It is essential to understand that permanent, eternal, non-changing being or life is distinct from all that is becoming. “Being” is eternal and the source of life for what is “becoming.” That is what distinguishes creatures from the Creator, us from God.

Genesis 1:1 establishes this fundamental reality with the statement, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Because it is the most important truth in the Bible, it is the one most assaulted. Unbelievers know that to be rid of creation is to be rid of a Creator. And to be rid of God leaves men free to live in whatever way they want, with no judgment.

The whole universe falls into the category of “becoming” because there was a point when it did not exist. Before existence it was the self-existent eternal being—the source of life—God, who is pure, self-existent being, pure life, and never becoming anything. All creation receives its life from outside, from Him, but He derives His life from within Himself, depending on nothing for His life. There was a point when the universe did not exist. There was never a point when God did not exist. He is self-existence, life, “I am who I am” (Ex. 3:14). He is from everlasting to everlasting. Acts 17:28 rightly says: “In Him we live and move and exist.” We cannot live or move or be without His life. But He has always lived and moved and been.

This is the purest ontological description of God—and to say Jesus is the **life** is to say the most pure truth about the nature of God that He possesses. And, as in verse 3, He then is the Creator.

While as the Creator Jesus is the source of everything and everyone who lives, the word **life** in John's gospel always translates *zōē*, which John uses for spiritual or eternal life. It is imparted by God's sovereign grace (6:37, 39, 44, 65; cf. Eph. 2:8) to all those who believe savingly in Jesus Christ (1:12; 3:15–16, 36; 6:40, 47; 20:31; cf. Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9–10; 1 John 5:1, 11–13). It was to impart spiritual life to sinners who “were dead in [their] trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1) that Jesus came into the world (10:10; cf. 6:33).

While it is appropriate to make some distinction between life and light, the statement **the life was the Light** halts any disconnect between the two. In reality, John is writing that **life** and **light** cannot be separated. They are essentially the same, with the idea of light emphasizing the manifestation of the divine life. **The life was the Light** is the same construction as “the Word was God” (v. 1). As God is not separate from the Word, but the same in essence, so life and light share the same essential properties.

The light combines with life in a metaphor for the purpose of clarity and contrast. God's life is true and holy. **Light** is that truth and holiness manifest against the darkness of lies and sin. Light and life are linked in this same way in John 8:12, in which Jesus says: "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." The connection between light and life is also clearly made in the Old Testament. Psalm 36:9 says: "For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light."

"The light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4) is nothing more than the radiating, manifest life of God shining in His Son. Paul specifically says: "God . . . is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (v.6). So light is God's life manifest in Christ.

In addition to its connection to life, light carries its own significance, as seen in the contrast between light and darkness, which is a common theme in Scripture. Intellectually, light refers to truth (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 6:23; 2 Cor. 4:4) and darkness to falsehood (Rom. 2:19); morally, light refers to holiness (Rom. 13:12; 2 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:5) and darkness to sin (Prov. 4:19; Isa. 5:20; Acts 26:18). Satan's kingdom is the "domain of darkness" (Col. 1:13; cf. Luke 22:53; Eph. 6:12), but Jesus is the source of **life** (11:25; 14:6; cf. Acts 3:15; 1 John 1:1) and the **Light that shines in the darkness** of the lost world (8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36, 46).

Despite Satan's frantic, furious assaults on the **Light, the darkness did not comprehend it**. *Katalambanō* (**comprehend**) is better translated "overcome." Even a small candle can drive the darkness from a room; the brilliant, glorious **Light** of the Lord Jesus Christ will utterly destroy Satan's realm of darkness. Since He came into the world, "the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining" (1 John 2:8).

The thrust of this verse, then, is not that the **darkness** failed to understand the truth about Jesus; on the contrary, the forces of darkness know Him all too well. In Matthew 8:29 some demons "cried out [to Jesus], saying, 'What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?'" In Peter's house in Capernaum, Jesus "cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was" (Mark 1:34). Luke 4:41 records that "demons also were coming out of many, shouting, 'You are the Son of God!' But rebuking them, He would not allow them to speak, because they knew Him to be the Christ." In Luke 4:34 a terrified demon pleaded, "Let us alone! What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!" The demons not only know the truth about Christ, but they also believe it. "You believe that God is one," wrote James, "You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder" (James 2:19).

It is because they understand with total clarity the judgment that awaits them that Satan and the demons have tried desperately throughout history to kill the **life** and extinguish the **Light**. In the Old Testament, Satan tried to destroy Israel, the nation from which the Messiah would come. He also tried to destroy the kingly line from which the Messiah would descend (2 Kings 11:1-2). In the New Testament, he prompted Herod's futile attempt to kill the infant Jesus (Matt. 2:16). At the beginning of His earthly ministry, Satan vainly tried to tempt Jesus to turn aside from the cross (Matt. 4:1-11). Later, he repeated the temptation again through one of His closest followers (Matt. 16:21-23). Even Satan's seeming triumph at the cross in reality marked his ultimate defeat (Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14; cf. 1 John 3:8).

Similarly, unbelievers are eternally lost not because they do not know the truth, but because they reject it:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (Rom. 1:18-21)

(For a further discussion of this point, see the exposition of 1:9-11 in chapter 2 of this volume.)

No one who rejects Christ's deity can be saved, for He Himself said in John 8:24, "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." It is fitting, then, that John opens his gospel, which so strongly emphasizes Christ's deity (cf. 8:58; 10:28-30; 20:28), with a powerful affirmation of that essential truth.