

Exegetical Analysis of John 1:14-18

The Incarnation of Christ

Daniel Rangel

February 15, 2024

Introduction

The closing of the section, which in tradition has come to us as John's prologue, is found in verses 14 to 18 and is equally rich and beautiful as its introduction. This section gathers the arguments made previously by John and concludes at least four points: that the Word is God, that there are witnesses to bolster this claim, that He has come to establish a New Covenant, and that He is the only image of God.

Exegetical Analysis

καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο

The word was not “attached to” nor did He “partnered with” the humanity of the man Jesus, as some would claim.¹ He became like one of us (Phil. 2:6-7; Heb 2:14) so that, in turn, He could make us like Him² (Phil. 3:21; Rom. 8:29; 1 Jn. 3:2; 2 Co. 3:18). Otherwise, “...why is it said that ‘He was made like his brethren in all things’ (Heb. 2:17), which means like us? How can we possibly understand Him³ to take up our likeness unless He⁴ is not of our condition and different from us in nature? For whatever is ‘made like’ certain other things must, of necessity be different from them.”⁵

¹ Cyril of Alexandria. *On the Unity of Christ*. Edited by John Anthony McGuckin, (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 58.

² Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2012), 43.

³ Capitalization mine.

⁴ Capitalization mine.

⁵ Cyril, *On the Unity of Christ*, 64.

καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν

Just as God dwelt among the Israelites through the Tabernacle (Exo. 25:8), so did Christ live in a tent of flesh⁶ (2 Co. 2:5) among His creation. For this reason, He is said to be Emmanuel, a name that is given “only to the one who was so wondrously born of a woman.”⁷ One can easily make the connection to Romans 8:11 when looking at the resemblance of the syntax, *οἶκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν* (in talking about Christ’s Spirit). Hence, it could be stated this way: that Christ pitched His tent among us temporarily, so that He could live with us, at home for eternity. In this way fulfilling the promise that “God will ‘dwell’ with his people, not for a limited time, but forever.”⁸

καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας

This phrase maintains the imagery of YHWH in the Exodus introduced in the previous line. When Moses asked the Great I AM to show him His Glory, “He⁹ placed Moses on a rock and passed by, saying, ‘The Lord, the Lord compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, great in mercy and truth’...”¹⁰ The apostles, in the same manner as Moses, were able to see the invisible God through His grace and truth, namely Jesus Christ. The term grace speaks to humanity about the cross,¹¹ while the word truth testifies that, although He became flesh and partook in our humanity, He did not share in our sin. He was full of Grace and Truth because the

⁶ J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2010), 55.

⁷ Cyril, *On the Unity of Christ*, 53.

⁸ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 55.

⁹ Capitalization mine

¹⁰ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 57.

¹¹ Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 44.

fullness of the Deity lived in Him (Col. 2:9). His life demonstrated what is said of men and God: that men are all liars (Psa. 116:11; Rom. 3:4) and cheaters, but of God that He is true (Rom. 3:4; Tit. 1:2) and faithful (2 Tim. 2:13). Then, is accurate to say that “Christ is truth...the Word remained what He¹² was even when He¹³ became flesh.”¹⁴

*Ἰωάννης μαρτυρεῖ περὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ κέκραγεν λέγων οὗτος ἦν ὃν εἶπον ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος
ἐμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν ὅτι πρῶτός μου ἦν*

An interesting aspect to note in the last four verses of the epilogue is John's shift to using the plural form of the first-person pronoun. This transition occurs precisely when he begins to recount his witness of Christ (2 Cor. 13:1) in the last verse. In addition, John now reinforces his witness by invoking John the Baptist as another beholder¹⁵ to the claim that “the Word exists eternally and before the ages,”¹⁶ for he says “He was before me” (verse 30).

ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πληρώματος αὐτοῦ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἐλάβομεν καὶ χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος

The preposition ἀντὶ is most often used to juxtapose or declare interchangeability between two sides.¹⁷ Taking into account the next verse, which compares the Law of Moses against the Grace that Christ Jesus imparts to us, it is quite possible that John is making the same comparison here. He is alluding to the contrast Jesus made of the Old and New Covenants (Mat.

¹² Capitalization mine.

¹³ Capitalization mine.

¹⁴ Cyril, *On the Unity of Christ*, 129.

¹⁵ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 57.

¹⁶ Cyril, *On the Unity of Christ*, 93.

¹⁷ Edward W Klink III, *John*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 2016).

9:17; Mk. 2:22; Lk. 5:37-38). Through Christ, we have received a greater Grace than that which the Law provided, for the Law came to reveal our sin, but Christ came to fulfill the Law, and if Christ is greater than the Law that no man could keep, it follows He must be greater than a mere man.¹⁸ He must be God.

ὅτι ὁ νόμος διὰ Μωϋσέως ἐδόθη ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐγένετο

In this verse is made explicit the comparison between the Law and Grace introduced in the last verse. In addition, the juxtaposition between Moses and Jesus Christ is introduced.¹⁹ The Law that was given through Moses “is as much grace as the new [Testament]”²⁰ and during its time, it provided the necessary guidance and awareness of sin until Christ was revealed (Rom. 7:1-6; Gal. 2:24). But, since Christ has now been revealed, John explains, we have received a different grace, one that is founded upon better promises (Heb. 8:6).²¹ Of special attention should be the two verbs utilized to depict the arrival of the Law and Grace, the Law was given (ἐδόθη), but Grace came (ἐγένετο). It is true that Israel’s promised Messiah would be a type of Moses (Deut. 18:15; Act. 3:22-23; Jn. 5:46), but He had to be greater than Moses, and any other Israelite leader for that matter. For though God said of Moses to Joshua ““As I was with Moses I will be with you (Jos. 3:7)...neither of them [are] called Emmanuel.””²²

θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε μονογενὴς θεὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο

¹⁸ Cyril, *On the Unity of Christ*, 60.

¹⁹ Klink, *John*, n.p..

²⁰ Klink, *John*, n.p., [note: brackets mine]

²¹ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 57.

²² Cyril, *On the Unity of Christ*, 52, [note: brackets mine].

Apostle John wraps up his introductory discourse by solidifying the claim that Jesus Christ is the invisible God in visible flesh.²³ If humans were ever to see God it had to be in a nature like that of their own, “for he is God by nature, as such invisible and incorporeal, and only in this way, in form like our own, could he be made manifest to earthly creatures.”²⁴ The final deduction is simple, none can see nor reveal God, but God himself. The Man Christ Jesus is the revelation of God. Therefore, He must also be God.

To Jesus Christ be the glory forever, Amen!

²³ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 59.

²⁴ Cyril, *On the Unity of Christ*, 64.

Bibliography

Cyril of Alexandria. *On the Unity of Christ*. Edited by John Anthony McGuckin. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995.

Bruner, Frederick Dale. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2012.

Michaels, J. Ramsey. *The Gospel of John*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2010.

Klink III, Edward W. John. *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 2016.