

APPENDIX 1

John 1:1-3

Many Trinitarians will argue that the first three verses of the gospel of John provide strong proof that Jesus is God. A footnote on John 1:1 in *The MacArthur Study Bible* (New King James Version) states,

Before the universe began, the Second Person of the Trinity always existed . . . Because of John's theme that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity he did not include a genealogy as Matthew and Luke did.¹

Yet *nowhere* in the gospel of John does he ever state that his theme is to show that Jesus Christ is the *eternal* Son of God. All John says is that his gospel was written "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:31)." So what does John 1:1-3 say and what does it mean? Here are the verses in question.

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 were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

The manner in which these three verses are translated from the Greek lead many Christians to hear in their minds something like this:

In the beginning was the Son of God, and the Son of God was with God, and the Son of God was God. The Son was in the beginning with God.

In fact, here is how *The Good News Bible* translates John 1:1-3.

Before anything else existed, there was Christ, with God. He has always been alive and is himself God. He created everything there is. Nothing exists that he did not make.

But is this really what the Greek text of John 1:1-3 is telling us? First of all, let's understand what the word "Word" means. "Word" is a translation of the Greek word *logos*, and it means a plan, purpose, saying, expression of thought, a message, or an intention. Here are some examples of how *logos* is used in the New Testament.

Matthew 7:8, "saying"; 8:8, "word"; Mark 1:45, "matter"; Luke 1:4, "things"; 16:2, "account"; Acts 8:21, "matter" or "ministry"; 1 Corinthians 1:18, "preaching"; Colossians 4:6, "speech"

The Greek word *logos* was used to correspond to the Old Testament Hebrew word *davar*. Here are some examples of how *davar* is translated.

I have hoped in Your word [i.e. wisdom, plan, promises].
(Psalm 119:74)

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.
(vs. 105)

So shall My word be that goes from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it.

(Isaiah 55:11)

In this last example from Isaiah, we are to understand God's "word" as His plan or purpose. So there is no good reason for the word *logos* to refer to a preexisting Son of God. In fact, nowhere in the entire Bible can you find any Hebrew or Greek word for "word" that implies another preexisting person in the Godhead.

Also in John 1:2, 3 the words "He" and "Him" are impersonal pronouns in the Greek and therefore should be translated as "it" when referring to *logos*. Every English Bible before the King James Version of 1611 translated the pronouns this way. The following is an example.

In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God: and the word was God. The **same** was in the beginning with God. All things were made by **it**, and without **it** nothing was made that was made. ² [my emphasis]

Now, what does it mean that the "word" was "with God" and the "word was God"? The Greek preposition *pros* translated "with" means to be intimately associated with or together with and yet distinct and separate. My wife can be with me but she is not me. In the same way, God's word was with Him but it was not him personally. In the Old Testament we learn that "wisdom" was also with God.

Then I [wisdom] was beside [with] Him *as* a master craftsman.

(Proverbs 8:30)

No Trinitarian will say that because wisdom was with God that wisdom is now another person within the Godhead. Everyone understands that when we read “I [wisdom] was beside God” what we have is a figure of speech called personification. In the same way in John 1:1, God’s word was with Him but it was not another person. Concerning the meaning of the phrase “the word was God” I can do no better than to quote the comments of scholar William Barclay,

In the AV [King James Version] John 1:1 reads: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.’ For long the newer translations continued this rendering with the exception of Moffet and Goodspeed, who both render: “the Word was divine.” . . . In a case like this we cannot do other than go to the Greek, which is *theos en ho logos*. *Ho* is the definite article, *the*, and it can be seen that there is a definite article with *logos*, but not with *theos*. When in Greek two nouns are joined by the verb to be and when both have the definite article, then the one is fully identified with the other; but when one of them is without the article, it becomes more an adjective than a noun, and describes rather the class or sphere to which the other belongs.

An illustration from English will make this clear. If I say, ‘*The* preacher is *the* man,’ I use the definite article before both preacher and man, and I thereby identify the preacher with some quite definite individual man whom I have in mind. But if I say, ‘The preacher is man,’ I have omitted the definite article before man, and what I mean is that the preacher must be classified as a man, he is in the sphere of manhood, he is a human being.

John has no definite article before *theos*, God. The *logos* therefore, is not identified as God or with God; the word *theos* has become adjectival and describes the sphere to which the *logos* belongs. We would therefore, have to say that this means that the *logos* belongs to the same sphere as God; without being identified as God. Here the NEB [New English Bible] finds the perfect translation “What God was, the Word was.”

This passage then does not identify the *logos* and God; it does not say that Jesus was God, nor does it call him God . . . ³

In other words, when we read the phrase “the word was God” the original intent of the Greek text was to convey the idea that the “word” was fully representative of God. The word was and is a revelation of God’s heart and character. If we understand God’s word we know what God is like. The *logos* fully expresses God’s purpose and mind. Therefore you could very accurately paraphrase John 1:1-3 like this,

In the beginning God had a creative and redemptive plan. And this plan or purpose revealed His heart and was fully representative of all that God is. All things were made through this plan and without this divine plan nothing was made.

With all of this in mind John 1:14 reveals a wonderful truth.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,
and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only
begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

The word, the *logos*, God’s plan, His purpose, became flesh and dwelt among us. With the coming into existence of Jesus

Christ at his conception⁴ and birth, the full plan and heart of God was expressed as a human being. Jesus Christ was full of divine grace and truth. What became flesh in John 1:14 was not a preexistent or eternally begotten Son of God. What became flesh was God's full plan of salvation revealed in the Man Jesus Christ.

A plan can take "flesh" when it is carried out or acted upon. When an architect's plan actually becomes a building it becomes "flesh." In the same manner God's plan became literal flesh in Jesus Christ who fully revealed His will. Hebrews 1:1 declares,

God, who at various times and in various ways
spoke in time past to the father's by the prophets,
has in these last days spoken to us revealing His
word, [*logos*] by His Son

The Son of God, Jesus Christ is not a preexistent being. He is not the second person in the Godhead. He is simply and uniquely the Son of God who fully reveals God to us.