

In The Beginning Was The Word

En arche en ho logos, kai ho logos en pros ton theon, kai theos en ho logos, "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God" (John 1:1).

This passage is foundational to understanding the relationship between Jesus and God. Before we look at places where we see a distinction made, such as in the Upper Room Discourse (ch. 14 – 17), we must first understand what John is saying here. It is no wonder that John (which makes the most distinction of any New Testament writer) puts this at the outset. He is laying a foundation. John says both that the word was with God and that the word was God. In one and the same breath, the word is distinguished from God and yet immediately identified as being God. How is that possible? I believe that the answer to this is the key to understanding other passages in scripture where a distinction is made.

First I would like to point out what John does not say. Notice that John does not say that, "In the beginning was the Son and the Son was with the Father and the Son was also God." Had John been a Trinitarian we would expect him to say something to this effect to be consistent with Trinitarian doctrine. To find a Trinity in his words we are forced to redefine the word "God" in the middle of a verse. John would be saying that the word was with *God the Father* but that the word was *God the Son*. But that is not what he said. The same God whom John identifies the word as being with is the one whom he states that the word is (*the word was **with God** and the word **was God***).

Trinitarians claim that the distinction is justified because the second phrase contains the article before God (*ton theon*) but that the last phrase does not (*theos*). My first response would be: Why does the presence of the article demand that this is God the Father? Why not God the Holy Spirit? For some reason, when a Trinitarian reads "God" they first assume it is a reference to God the Father unless they have reason to believe otherwise. Somehow the Father is more "God" than the other two persons. Second, I would simply point out that almost every time the phrase "God the Father" or "God our Father" appears in Scripture, the article is lacking. This includes every one of Paul's benedictions as well as several other verses (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal. 1:1,3; Eph. 1:2; Eph. 6:23; Phil. 1:2; 2:11; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1,2; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4; Phm. 1:3; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:17; 2 John 1:3; Jude 1:1). So there is no justification to claim that the second *theos* in John 1:1 does not refer to God the Father simply because there is no article. Finally, John was a devout Jew who had no concept of

persons in the Godhead. The only God he knew of was God the Father. Therefore, to identify the word as God was to identify him as the Father.

I have also heard it claimed that the Greek word *pros* (with) means "in a face to face relationship" in this passage. Now *pros* can mean "in a face to face relationship," but this would only hold true in our passage if it is first demonstrated that the word is another person from God. If, however, the word does not refer to a person in this phrase then it would still mean "with" but not "in a face to face relationship." That it does not refer to a person can be seen in the parallel account by the same author in 1 John. In a very similar statement, John says "*What was from the beginning . . . concerning the Word of Life . . . which was with (pros) the Father and was manifested to us*" (1 John 1:1,2). God's life was *with* him, but not "in a face to face relationship" with him. God's life is not a separate person from himself and neither is his word.

I believe that the *word* of God is simply a reference to the *expression* of God. In Revelation 19:13 (John writing again), Jesus is called "*the Word of God.*" The book of Hebrews tells us that, "*God . . . has spoken to us in his Son*" (Heb. 1:1,2). Jesus is himself the content of what God has spoken. He is the visible "*image of the invisible God*" (Col. 1:15), "*the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person*" (Heb. 1:3, KJV). "*No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him*" (John 1:18, KJV). The word translated "declared" in this last verse is *exegeomai*, from which we get the word exegete. Jesus has "made known," "explained," "described" or "revealed" God. To use colloquial terminology, he's the spittin' image of his daddy. No one can see God, but you can see his glory. Jesus is "*the brightness of his glory.*"

Trinitarians often use analogies to express their concept of God, such as the three points on a triangle, the three states of water or three interconnected circles. Analogies can be helpful, *if they accurately express the reality*. However, they can be very damaging if they do not. The only analogy that I am going to use is found in Scripture. Jesus is said to be both the *root* and a *branch* (Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12; Rom. 15:12; Rev. 5:5; especially 22:16). This is beyond our comprehension. You cannot diagram it; you can't explain it, but this is what Scripture says. Scripture does not state that God is three points of a triangle, but it does state that Jesus is both the root and a branch. This we must affirm whether or not we can explain it. And I believe that this will answer the issue of distinction which we see in the Bible. From the viewpoint of Jesus as root, he is God Almighty and can be called such. From the viewpoint of Jesus as a branch, he can legitimately be distinguished from God. He is both the Creator and part of the creation. How this is possible I do not know, but this is what Scripture affirms.

Attention has also been drawn to the fact that the pronouns which follow are in the masculine. It has been claimed that because of this, the word must be a person. Now when such a claim is made, I must conclude that either the person who said it knows very little about the Greek language or they are not being fully honest with what they are saying. The rules of Greek grammar require that pronouns must agree with the nouns they represent in case, number and gender. Since the word *logos* (word) is masculine, its pronoun would of necessity be masculine. For example, the word church (*ekklesia*) is feminine. So the church is called a "she" in the Greek whenever a pronoun is used. No one would claim that this makes the church as person. This can also be seen where John later calls the comforter (*parakletos*) a "he." Commenting on this, Greek scholar Daniel Wallace makes this observation:

The use of *ekeinos* [he] here is frequently regarded by students of the NT to be an affirmation of the personality of the Spirit. . . . But this is erroneous. In all these Johannine passages, *pneuma* [spirit] is appositional to a masculine noun. The Gender of *ekeinos* thus has nothing to do with the natural gender of *pneuma*. The antecedent of *ekeinos*, in each case, is *parakletos* [comforter], not *pneuma*. . . . Thus, since *parakletos* is masculine, so is the pronoun. . . . Indeed, it is difficult to find *any* text in which *pneuma* is grammatically referred to with the masculine gender.^{[1](#)}

Finally, I would also like to state that this is how we are to understand statements of Christ's preexistence. In the beginning was the *logos* (word). Whether we want to say the word of God, the expression of God or the glory of God, this is what existed in eternity past, not an eternal second person in the Godhead. Jesus is the visible representation of the one invisible God. It can be said that he was with God and it can be said that he was God, but this does not make God himself multiple persons for the scriptures emphatically teach that God is one.^{[2](#)}

Footnotes

1. Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*. (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1996), 331-332.