

God in the Flesh

| B. Zornes | 1 John 1:1-2 |

Introduction

Where did life come from? What is the meaning of life? How can we face the death that inevitably comes to all of us? These are the questions that have occupied man's thoughts for our entire history. We want to know where we came from; and we cannot help but fear that specter of death that lingers just a heartbeat away. So we wonder: is there any escape from the death that is sure to someday find us? Life. Death. What is beyond? Those are our age-old musings. We have life. We are terrified to die. What does this all mean?

The Text

1 John 1:1-2

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;).

Summary of the Text

John opens with a clear echo of Genesis 1:1, which he also used to open his Gospel (Jn. 1:1). John is putting forth claims about a favorite topic of every scholar, skeptic and seeker: first things. He then describes these “beginning things” in terms of tangibles: heard, seen with eyes, looked upon, and handled (v.1).

Notice the theme of life in these two verses; we learn that Life is a Person (i.e. the Word of life). The Life was from the beginning and was with the Father. The Life has been manifested in the flesh. John is now bearing witness and showing that this Life is the eternal life (v. 2). There is a world of glory in that adjective “eternal”, for mankind is lost in death and darkness unless the Word of Life grants us the light of eternal life.

Jewish Thought & Greek Thought

John is tangling with the Jews on one hand and the prevalent Greek philosophy on the other. Christianity owes much to our Jewish roots. A great deal of Jesus' ethical and moral teachings were compatible with Jewish thought and practice. Jesus exhorted His disciples to do what the Pharisees taught them to do (Mt. 23:3). The Jews knew life came from God, and He had entrusted His covenant of life to His chosen people. They had the way of life. So the Jewish faith was *not* in conflict with the monotheism of early Christians, the claim that life was found in God, nor that the Word of the Lord made the world (Ps. 33:6).

The pagan philosophers on the other hand, had no problem with the sophistry of “what-ifs” when it came to seeking the secrets of eternal life. They enjoyed vigorous philosophical discussion. They were even content to allow the wide variety of contradictory philosophies; and tolerated the many asserted paths to spiritual illumination and the eternal life which such knowledge promised. It was pluralistic and ok with that. Thus their polytheism. Everyone was encouraged to seek for truth,

but no one was really allowed to claim to have found *the* truth. But these verses are not John's attempt to "fit in" with the philosophical mumbo-jumbo of the day,

The Offensive Truth

The message of the Gospel was offensive to both the Jews and to the Greek-thinking Roman Empire. Rome was willing to tolerate diversity of views. In fact, it *had* to accommodate the various pagan philosophies about all things divine. Rome was inclined to entertain all views.

Quite like our modern culture which makes great claims about its desire for welcoming and encouraging diversity of thought, culture, way of life, religion, sexual orientation, etc. Our culture wants to praise our "unity in diversity." What both Roman and modern thought can't stand is the Christians' claim to be more than just a way of viewing life, truth, philosophy, theology, etc.

Christians proclaimed that Jesus Christ was God manifested in the flesh. This meant that He was the *only* way to eternal life. He was Lord. Caesar was not. He alone was God. Their idols were not. This claim to exclusive truth made the pagan world bristle in irritation, and motivated the persecutions that followed.

For the Jews, *their* problem was the Christians' claim that the Word of the Lord had become incarnate in the man Jesus. Jesus' as Rabbi wasn't their bone to pick. Jesus' claim to be the Christ of God was the step too far.

The Word Made Flesh

These verses are Gospel basics. The Gospel is the good news that God came in the flesh to judge sin and redeem mankind. Adam's sin in Eden brought death and damnation upon our race, and in order to atone for mankind's sins, and free us from the penalty of our sins, a man had to die. But that man had to be sinless. It took God to be a man.

God would not simply wipe the slate clean for mankind, because of His justice. Nor would He leave man without hope, because of His mercy. Thus, the incarnation was of utmost necessity in God's purpose to save the world. Only a man could pay the propitiation for our sin (1 Jn. 2:2). And only the Son of God could be that innocent sacrifice. Thus, God became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn. 1:14).

That which was from the beginning was the Word of *life*. We have no hope of obtaining this eternal life apart from it being made manifest in Jesus. Death is our just sentence (Rom. 3:23). John offers hope in declaring the truth that eternal life is found in neither the Greek-philosophers' pipe-dreams, nor the Jews' Messianic hopes. It is found in the Lord Jesus who *is* the Messiah promised to the Jews, and the *Logos* and *zoe* the Gentiles were seeking.

Saving Faith

The fact that the *Logos* of God came in the flesh does not permit us to dispel faith. Evangelical Christians aren't likely to buy into the sinful pluralistic "diversity" demands of our Liberal neighbors. Yet, what sin may we be prone to? Could it be that we've come to hold a "scholasticism" when it comes to the "faith once delivered?" Perhaps we think that if we can reason our way through the doctrines of justification by faith that we will be reckoned righteous.

This is not too dissimilar from the Jews of Jesus day, who had long studied God's Word and parsed it out to its "nth-degree." However, when the demand to believe and place their faith in Christ alone, they faltered as their father's did in the wilderness. Indeed, Christ was a stumbling block to unbelieving Israel (Isa 8:14).

Your faith ought never to rest in your understanding of faith, your reasoning of the Christian faith, nor even in your faith itself. Your faith must be in Christ, and in Him alone. The eternal Word of Life has been made manifest in the person of Jesus Christ, and by faith in Him we are rescued from the death and damnation that would otherwise await us. As Calvin wonderfully says, “this [life-giving] distinction belongs to the Son of God on two accounts, because he has infused life into all creatures, and because he now restores life to us, which had perished, having been extinguished by the sin of Adam.” So now, in the second Adam, we are offered eternal life through the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

John intends to shew unto us eternal life. *That* life is our light for seeing by faith (Jn 1:4). How can we see such a mysterious and seemingly abstract thing? We see it in the God-man Jesus Christ, in His two natures; fully God, fully man. We see by believing upon the Word of life which was manifested.