

The Gospel of John (2); The Prologue (1:1-18) (part 2)

Introduction:

Last Lord's Day we began a study of the Gospel according to John. We declared then that the main doctrine of John's Gospel is his Christology, the doctrine of Jesus Christ. At the heart of this doctrine of Jesus Christ in this Fourth Gospel is the deity of the Lord Jesus. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. **Arthur Pink** wrote of this major theme of John:

Each book of the Bible has a prominent and dominant theme which is peculiar to itself. Just as each member in the human body has its own particular function, so every book in the Bible has its own special purpose and mission. The theme of John's Gospel is the Deity of the Savior. Here, as nowhere else in Scripture so fully, the Godhood of Christ is presented to our view. That which is outstanding in this fourth Gospel is the Divine Sonship of the Lord Jesus. In this Book we are shown that the One who was heralded by the angels to the Bethlehem shepherds, who walked this earth for thirty-three years, who was crucified at Calvary who rose in triumph from the grave, and who forty days later departed from these scenes, was none other than the Lord of Glory. The evidence for this is overwhelming, the proofs almost without number, and the effect of contemplating them must be to bow our hearts in worship before "the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).¹

On this second Lord's Day in our study of the Gospel according to John, we desire to address in some detail 1:6-8, in which we read of the calling and ministry of John the Baptist. These verses are a part of the Prologue to the Gospel, which is contained in chapter 1, verses 1-18. The purpose of the prologue was to establish at the outset of the Gospel that the invisible God was working within history through His Word to save His people from their sin.

We were introduced to the Word of God last Lord's Day, Who is set forth as being outside of time (1:1-5). John the Baptist, the witness to the Word, is set forth within time (1:6-8).

The invisible Word was introduced.
Now something visible is introduced: 'a man.'²

In order to remain informed of our progress through this Gospel, last week we addressed...

I. The Prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18)

A. The Introduction of the Word (1:1-5)

And today we will consider...

B. The Witness of the Word (1:6-8)

There are only three verses in this Prologue that address John the Baptist (1:6-8). They read as follows:

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. ⁸He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

¹ Arthur Pink, *The Gospel According to John*.

² Edward W. Klink, III, *John*. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 66.

John the Baptist is introduced here, but he will re-enter several times later in the Gospel story.³ More precisely, it could be said that verse 6 *introduces* John and then verses 7 and 8 *explain* John's ministry. John is set forth as a witness to the Word of God--the Word, which was set forth in verses 1 through 5. Lord willing, our contemplation of John as a witness to the Word will enable us to be better witnesses to the Savior to whom we owe all things.

1. "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John." (1:6)

John the Baptist was a man, but a very special man. On one occasion John sent his disciples to ask Jesus if He were the Messiah or if they should be looking for another. Some of Jesus' disciples might have thought less of John because of the nature of this doubting question, and so, our Lord bolstered the name and character of John before His disciples. He said to them:

"What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ²⁵But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed those who are gorgeously appareled and live in luxury are in kings' courts. ²⁶But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. ²⁷This is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.' ²⁸For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist..." (Luke 7:24-28)

The first words of verse 6 introduced John were simply, "There was a man sent from God." "His mission was not of human, but divine origin."⁴ God had sent him. "The forerunner's significance to the story is grounded in the fact that he was *sent from God*, assigned to this specific task."⁵

We mentioned last week that one of the literary characteristics of the Gospel of John was that he would introduce a word or a theme, but then develop that theme throughout his Gospel. Here the word, "sent" introduces a theme that is quite predominant in this Fourth Gospel.

The primary idea of being "sent" in this Gospel has to do with the mission that God the Father entrusted to the Son of God. God the Father "sent" His Son into the world in order to bring salvation to His people. The frequency of this idea of Jesus having been sent by the Father is extensive. In John's Gospel one scholar noted that there are

"seventeen examples of the participle phrase "he who sent me" (*ho pempsas me*). Plus six occurrences of the expression "the Father who sent me" (with the same verb); he noted fifteen corresponding statements in which the synonymous verb *apostellein*, "send out," is used. This phenomenon led Marinus de Jonge to observe, 'No other single Christological expression appears so often in the fourth Gospel.'"⁶

That God the Father "sent" His Son into the world conveys several ideas that fill out our understanding of our Lord's ministry. Actually, the concept of being sent as a messenger on behalf of a sender was common in the ancient world. There were three basic elements in this sending of a messenger. These included (1) the giving of news by the messenger; (2) the carrying out of the task by the one sent; and (3) the return of the messenger to the person who sent him, especially for the purpose of report.⁷ With these three basic elements there were two assumptions on the role and responsibility of the one sent. (1) The messenger was viewed as the representative of the sender. And (2) obedience on the part of the messenger is demanded.

What, then, may be said regarding the authority of the one sent?

³ See 1:19-34; 3:27-30; and Cf. 5:33.

⁴ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 89.

⁵ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1991), p. 120.

⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 15f.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 18.

Only on the basis of the assumed obedience of the messenger is it possible to view the messenger as the representative of the sender. The combination of the two assumptions supplies the messenger with credibility, legitimacy, and authority. This position is embodied in the famous statement of Jewish halachic law: “One sent is as he who sent him.” The messenger is thereby granted authority and dignity by virtue of his bearing the status of the one who sent him.⁸

Now, just as we have been speaking of the credibility, legitimacy, and authority of the Lord Jesus because He had been “sent” into the world by God the Father, we could also say of His forerunner, John. Again, we read in verse 6, “*There was a man sent from God whose name was John.*” God *sent* John the Baptist. His witness was credible and legitimate. He came with the authority of God who had sent him. John, too, was faithful in the mission to which he had been sent, in that he faithfully bore witness of Jesus Christ. The point of emphasis is that God had sent John, therefore John came forth with divine authority to bear witness to Christ. John was a trustworthy and authoritative witness to the Word of God incarnate.⁹

This authority to speak on behalf of God can be seen in a prophecy of the coming of John the Baptist that is set forth in the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah. We read in **Isaiah 40:3-5**:

The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way of the LORD;

Make straight in the desert

A highway for our God.

⁴Every valley shall be exalted

And every mountain and hill brought low;

The crooked places shall be made straight

And the rough places smooth;

⁵The glory of the LORD shall be revealed,

And all flesh shall see it together;

For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

The voice was that of John. But through that voice, “the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

There are two places in the last book of the Old Testament that foretold of the coming and the ministry of John the Baptist. There, too, we see the authority of John the Baptist declared. The first of these is **Malachi 3:1**,

“Behold, I send My messenger,

And he will prepare the way before Me.

The second reference in Malachi is the last verses of the Old Testament.

⁵Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet

Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

⁶And he will turn

The hearts of the fathers to the children,

And the hearts of the children to their fathers,

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Here is a more detailed and somewhat difficult to read assertion of John’s authority based on verse 6: “The end of the clause brings explanatory force to what the aorist implies: John was sent from God. The periphrastic construction, “who was sent from God” (*ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ*), not only coordinates effectively the creative force of “came” (*Ἐγένετο*), but the perfect passive participle also places stress on the abiding quality of the one sent rather than on the once-for-all fact of the mission. Even the verb for “sent” (*ἀπεσταλμένος*) was traditionally used to entrust, charge, or commission someone with a message or task. In the majority of the term’s uses in secular Greek and the LXX, all the emphasis is on the authority of the sender, and the sender is almost universally divine. It has been described as “a technical term for divine authorization.”

Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.” (Mal. 4:5-6)

The Lord Jesus Himself declared that these prophecies of the coming of Elijah were fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist. John the Baptist was the promised Elijah to come. Our Lord told His disciples in response to their question:

⁷As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft *clothing* are in kings’ houses. ⁹But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰For this is *he* of whom it is written:

‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,
Who will prepare Your way before You.’

¹¹“Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹²And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. ¹³For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. ¹⁴And if you are willing to receive *it*, he is Elijah who is to come. ¹⁵He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

It is said in verse 6 of the man that God had sent: “**whose name was John.**” John was a divinely given name. You will recall the situation. John’s father was Zacharias, a priest that had the privilege and responsibility to serve in the temple, performing the daily service and offering prayer on behalf of his people. While praying in the temple, the angel of the Lord—Gabriel—appeared to him, “standing on the right side of the altar of incense” (Luke 1:11). Zacharias was struck with fear and was greatly troubled. We then read of the communication of the angel to Zacharias:

But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and ***you shall call his name John.*** ¹⁴And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. ¹⁵For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. ¹⁶And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” (Luke 1:13-17)

God named John, “John.” “The name ‘John’ without any qualification is used eighteen times in the Gospel and one every occasion refers to John the Baptist.”¹⁰ In no place in the Gospel is John identified as “John the Baptist.” Clearly, that is who John is, but he is never called by that name and title in this Fourth Gospel. He is simply called “John.”

What does the name mean? “John” means, “Jehovah has been gracious.” God had been gracious in sending John to bear witness of the Savior, who would redeem souls from their sin.

2. “**This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe.**” (1:7)

We read in the first clause, “***This man*** came for a witness” (NKJV). The newer translations simply read, “***He*** came for a witness.” The Greek pronoun (οὗτος), which is translated as “This man”, is a demonstrative pronoun, which is used for emphasis. The NKJV translation, “This man” perhaps better conveys this emphasis rather than with the English translation simply as “He.”

¹⁰ Klink, *John*. p. 66.

It is said that this man “*came*.” This was a result of John having been sent by God. God “*sent*” John to be a witness, and John “*came*.” John would fulfill his divine calling, being obedient to God who sent him.

“This man came *for a witness*.” In the other Gospels, John’s ministry is set forth as preparing the people for the arrival of the King and kingdom of God, calling on people to repent and be baptized with view to receiving the forgiveness of sins by God. In John’s Gospel there is no emphasis given to John baptizing. In the Fourth Gospel John’s ministry is chiefly that of a “witness.”

The word, “witness”, or the theme of “witness”, is another important idea of this Fourth Gospel. The Greek word for “witness” (*martupia*), from which we get our word, martyr, is used frequently in this Gospel. It is used more so in this Gospel than in the Synoptics. The noun, “witness” (*marturia; μαρτυρία*), is used 14 times in John’s Gospel, but only 3 times in Mark, once in Luke, and is not present in Matthew. A form of the verb, “to witness” (*marturea, μαρτυρεω*), is used 33 times in John’s Gospel, but only once each in Matthew and Luke, but is not found in Mark. John used the word more frequently by far than any other writer of the New Testament.¹¹

“John (the Gospel) often emphasizes a concept by the simple device of repeating it. He speaks of John as witness and only. In the Synoptists John’s preaching of repentance and his practice of baptism are noted. In this Gospel his one function is to bear witness to Jesus. We know him as “John the Baptist” but in this Gospel the references to his baptism are incidental. It is perhaps significant that there is no mention of his baptizing Jesus. But there is repeated reference to his witness; cf. 1:7, 8, 15, 19, 32, 34; 3:26 (cf. 3:28); 5:33. For this Evangelist John’s witness is what matters. He came for witness and nothing else that he did can be compared in importance to this.”¹²

This Gospel identifies seven witnesses to Jesus. Seven is a number that is common to John’s Gospel. Who are these seven witnesses? Three witnesses include each of the persons of the Trinity, including Jesus Christ Himself; each of them bear witness to Jesus.¹³ In addition, the “works” of Jesus bore witness (5:36; 10:25; cf. 14:11), as did the Holy Scriptures (5:39; cf. 5:45ff). A sixth witness is John the Baptist, which is set forth in our passage. The seventh witness to Jesus are human witnesses, which include the disciples (15:27; cf. 19:35; 21:24), the Samaritan woman (4:39), and the multitude (12:17)

The first clause of verse 7 defines John’s commission. The second clause states what it was to which he was to bear witness. The Apostle John wrote that “This man came for a witness, *to bear witness of the Light*.” The “Light” is Jesus Christ Himself. Here, the verb, “to bear witness”, is in the aorist tense in Greek, which speaks of the overall life and ministry of John the Baptist. It is a verb tense that simply states the matter as factual. John bore witness of Christ. That is what John the Baptist did and what he accomplished. “He accomplished a finished work. He bore his witness to the Word, and there was nothing more that he could do.”¹⁴ John did not bear witness of himself. His witness was not a personal testimony, a witness of what God had done in his life. His witness was of another, one other than himself; his witness was of Jesus Christ.

Earlier in verse 4 the incarnate Word was described as “life, or “the life.” And then in verse 5 the Word was said to be “the light of men.” What the Gospel writer was declaring was that John’s witness of Jesus Christ as the Light was that Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God, illuminated his hearers in the realm of their darkness of spiritual ignorance and error. John’s witness of Jesus Christ served to give understanding with respect to the true God and with regard to their own sinful condition, which is characterized as “darkness.” Jesus Christ is the only way that sinful, ignorant people can come to see the true God and learn how to relate to Him. As a witness to the Light, John was bearing witness to the true condition of mankind and of the remedy for their lost condition through Jesus Christ alone.

The third clause of verse 7 speaks of the purpose of John’s witness: “This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, *that all through him might believe*.” We might look at the phrase, “through him” and assume that this is a direct reference to Jesus Christ, a reference to faith in God through Him. And

¹¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 89.

¹² Ibid, pp. 89f.

¹³ God the Father (5:31, 34, 37; 8:18); Christ Himself (8:14, 18; cf. 3:11, 32; 8:37), the Holy Spirit (15:26; cf. 16:14).

¹⁴ Morris, *John*, p. 91.

certainly the Holy Scriptures speak of faith in God *through* Jesus Christ. But in John's Gospel the emphasis is not to believe on God *through* Jesus Christ, but to believe *in* Jesus Christ. No, "through him" is a reference to John the Baptist. John's ministry was to so bear witness of Jesus Christ as the source of all knowledge and life from God in order to lead people to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation.

We then read...

3. "He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light." (1:8)

The question might be asked, why did the Apostle John see the need to declare that John the Baptist was not that Light? There are those who believe that in the first century there were some who had come to think too highly of John the Baptist, that some had even regarded John the Baptist as the Messiah.

In pointing out that John himself was not that light, but a witness to that light, the Evangelist may have had in mind a group of people, surviving at the time when this Gospel was written, who looked back at John as their founder and venerated him as the one through whom God made his final revelation to mankind, the last and greatest of the prophets. We know very little about this group, if indeed it existed; but some emphases in the Gospel would be especially appropriate if the Evangelist knew of such people.¹⁵

That there were some who had a very high view of John the Baptist is suggested in the Book of Acts. In Ephesus, a city far from Palestine, some had embraced the message of John and had been baptized according to his teaching, with view to the coming kingdom that the soon arriving Messiah would inaugurate. But although Jesus Christ had come and died and rose, the message of faith in Jesus Christ had not yet reached these followers of John the Baptist. We read of this in **Acts 19:1-7**.

And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples ²he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."

³And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?"

So they said, "Into John's baptism."

⁴Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

⁵When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. ⁷Now the men were about twelve in all.

This passage suggests the possibility that there were groups of people who may have had a very high regard for John the Baptist, even too high a view. And further, since John's Gospel was probably written within Ephesus or its environs, it may be possible that moved its writer to declare forthrightly, "*He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.*"

Yes, as asserted earlier, our Lord declared of John the Baptist, "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist" (Matt. 11:11). But John's true greatness was due to the One to whom he bore witness, Jesus Christ, rather than due to himself. John's greatness was derivative from his Savior.

John himself dispelled any notion or suggestion that he was the Promised One. He declared openly, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Luke 3:16).

But one would have to assume, because John the Baptist was a great man,

¹⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Eerdmans, 1983), p. 35.

the Evangelist gives this warning, lest his excessive brightness might obscure the glory of Christ. For there were some who gazed so eagerly upon him (John the Baptist) that they neglected Christ; just as if a person, enraptured with beholding the dawning of the day, would not deign to turn his eyes towards the sun. (John Calvin)

Now the Evangelist declared, “He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.” And yet, we read later in John’s Gospel that our Lord Himself said of John the Baptist, “He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light” (John. 5:35). But there our Lord used a different Greek word for the light (lamp -- ὁ λύχνος) from what is used here in John 1:7 to identify the Lord Jesus as the Light (light -- φωτός).

The Apostle Paul in one place declared that all Christians are as light in the Lord. Ephesians 5:8f reads, “For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true).” Here in Ephesians 5:8f Paul used the same Greek word (φῶς) that John used to describe the Lord Jesus in John 1:7. But, of course, whereas the Lord Jesus emanates the light from His own person, the light that characterizes you and me as Christians is derived from the Lord, not generated from us personally or individually. Taking in consideration these references to Christians being light and Jesus being the Light, of John’s declaration in John 1:7 **John Calvin** wrote,

All the godly, indeed, are light in the Lord, (Ephesians 5:8,) because, in consequence of their being enlightened by his Spirit, they not only see for themselves, but likewise direct others by their example to the way of salvation. The apostles likewise are peculiarly called light, (Matthew 5:14,) because they go before, holding out the torch of the Gospel, to dispel the darkness of the world. But here the Evangelist speaks of him who is the only and eternal source of illumination, as he immediately shows more clearly.

Again, the Lord Jesus Himself described John the Baptist as a “light” (John 5:35). **John Gill** wrote of John as this light but to be distinguished from Jesus Christ, the one true Light.

He was a light; he was the forerunner of the sun of righteousness, the “phosphorus” of the Gospel day; he had great light in him; he knew that the Messiah was ready to come, and declared it; and upon his baptism he knew him personally, and signified him to others: he had great light into the person and work of Christ; and into the way of salvation by him, and remission of sins through him; into the doctrines of faith in Christ, and of evangelical repentance towards God; and into the abolition of the legal Mosaic and Jewish dispensation; and was an instrument of giving light to others; yea, he was a burning and shining light, in whose light the Jews rejoiced, at least for a season: but then he was not that light, the word and wisdom of God; that uncreated light that dwelt with him from all eternity; nor that which was the light of men, from the creation; nor that light, which was of old promised to the saints and patriarchs of the Old Testament, and shone in the ordinances and predictions of that state; nor that fountain and giver of light, of every sort, to men; not that light in which is no darkness, and always shines; not that true light, or sun of righteousness, the Messiah, or that lightens every man that comes into the world:

Arthur Pink also wrote on 1:8, which reads, “**He was not that Light**”:

No, John himself was not “that light,” for “light” like “life” is to be found only in God. Apart from God all is darkness, profound and unrelieved. Even the believer has no light in himself. What saith the Scriptures? “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye the light in the Lord” (Ephesians 5:8). There is a statement found in John 5:35 which, as it stands in the A.V., conflicts with what is said here in John 1:8. In verse 35 when speaking of John, Christ said, “He was a burning and shining light,” but the Greek word used here is entirely different from that translated “light” in John 1:8, and in the R.V. it is correctly translated “He was the lamp that burneth and shineth.” This word used of John, correctly translated “lamp,” points a striking contrast between the forerunner and Christ as “the light.” A lamp has no inherent light of its own — it has to be supplied! A “lamp” has to be carried by another! A “lamp” soon burns out: in a few hours it ceases to shine.

We may conclude our consideration of verse 8 by drawing our attention to the second clause, which states the similar truth we considered earlier. It is written of John the Baptist, “He was not that Light, *but was sent to bear witness of that Light.*” Here we read of the principle purpose and drive of John’s life and ministry. Notice again the words, “was sent.” God sent him for this purpose, to complete this task, to fulfill this mission: John was to bear witness of that Light, which is Jesus Christ.

Several words of implication and application

1. Some have used these verses 6 through 8 to set forth *what should characterize every true minister of Jesus Christ.* J. C. Ryle (1816-1900) gave attention to this in his classic work, *Expository Thoughts on John.* Here are some of his thoughts:

We see, firstly, in these verses, *the true nature of a Christian minister’s office.* We have it in the description of John the Baptist: “He came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.”

Christian ministers are not priests, nor mediators between God and man. They are not agents into whose hands men may commit their souls, and carry on their religion by deputy. They are witnesses. They are intended to bear testimony to God’s truth, and specially to the great truth that Christ is the only Savior and Light of the world. This was St. Peter’s ministry on the day of Pentecost: “With many other words did he *testify*” (Acts 2:40). This was the whole tenor of St. Paul’s ministry: “*testifying* both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). Unless a Christian minister bears a full testimony to Christ, he is not faithful to his office. So long as he does testify of Christ, he has done his part, and will receive his reward, although his hearers may not believe his testimony. Until a minister’s hearers believe on that Christ of whom they are told, they receive no benefit from the ministry. They may be pleased and interested; but they are not profited until they believe. The great end of the minister’s testimony is “through him, men may believe.”¹⁶

2. Clearly we can affirm from these verses that *the primary witness of the church should always be Jesus Christ.*

This might seem to be a given, that any and all would affirm. And maybe most would claim that this is their aim. But is it the case that every church keeps their witness to Jesus Christ as their foremost purpose, as John saw this as his foremost purpose, “**to bear witness of that Light?**” -- **to bear faithful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ?**

It is a relatively easy thing to depart from this central purpose. Paul was surprised that the churches of Galatia had departed so quickly. He wrote,

⁶I marvel that *you are turning away so soon from Him* who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, ⁷which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. ¹⁰For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ. (Gal. 1:6-10)

These churches turned away from Christ. Rather than pleasing God, they had become pleasers of men. People rather than Christ shaped their ministry and message. People became their principle concern rather than Christ. They had departed from Christ, and apparently were not even aware that they had done so.

¹⁶ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on John*, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, first published in 1869), p. 14.

The Lord Jesus denounced the church at Ephesus, for it had departed from its primary love for Christ. We read in Revelation 2:1ff

“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: ²I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; ³and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. ⁴***Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*** ⁵Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place-- unless you repent.” (Rev. 2:1-5)

A church of Jesus Christ must be as committed to its calling as John the Baptist was committed to his calling. God has sent us into the world to bear witness to the Light that is to Jesus Christ. Let us always be faithful to our calling.

3. Let us recognize that the Lord has *sent* us, which brings to us both responsibility and authority,

We read that that God had sent John the Baptist to be a witness to Jesus Christ. We also read that the Lord Jesus had sent out His disciples to represent Him and proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom to the people of Israel. In our Lord’s prayer to His Father in John 17, He declared that He was sending out His disciples as the Father had sent Him. Jesus prayed, “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world” (John 17:18). And then after His resurrection the Lord Jesus sent all of His disciples into the world to proclaim the gospel. We read in John 20:21-23:

So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” ²²And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

We should not only be mindful of this great responsibility the Lord has placed upon us, but we should also be mindful of the great authority that He has granted to us. When God sends His people, He confers His authority upon them enabling them to accomplish the task to which He sent them. The Lord Jesus said,

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” (John 13:20)

4. It is through preaching Jesus Christ that we will produce godly people. We may read of this in 1 Timothy 3:14-16. Paul wrote,

These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; ¹⁵but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. ¹⁶And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness:

God was manifested in the flesh,
Justified in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Preached among the Gentiles,
Believed on in the world,
Received up in glory.

Now take note, *the mystery of godliness is to be found in Jesus Christ*. This means that the way that people become *godly* is through faith in Jesus Christ. In hearing and believing and responding to the truth of God in Jesus Christ, people are transformed. They become godly.

Perhaps we should define what we mean by godliness. *Godliness speaks of a person who is devoted to God so as to be deeply concerned about knowing Him, pleasing Him, enjoying Him, and making Him known to others*. A godly man is one whose life is immersed with high thoughts of God, who is aware that He is living His life in the presence of God and under the scrutiny of God.

Paul declared that godliness was a mystery. It is a “*mystery*” in the sense that it occurs in a way beyond our natural comprehension. This is why it is so wrong and so fruitless to weigh teaching and preaching by whether or not it appears to “applies” or “gives me instruction how to live.” Christianity is not to be reduced to moralistic teaching and preaching. And please, we do not deny the need to know how to make godly decisions in daily life. But people do not become godly because they behave godly. The fact is, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit unbelievers or ones who have little thought or concern for godliness will never see the *relevance* of the preaching of Christ.

It is referred to as the “Great is the *mystery* of godliness”, because is an attitude of the heart. It exists out of sight. Oh yes, it will always be seen in works of righteousness, but godliness cannot be produced by doing works of righteousness. Godliness is a mystery because it is carried on by a work of God’s grace upon the heart. And the Holy Spirit only produces that work of grace. The Holy Spirit works grace in the people of God so as to make them godly as He uses the preaching about knowing God the Father through Jesus Christ in the hearing of the people.

This message was the substance of Peter’s preaching, as we read in **Acts 10:37-43**.

That word, I say, you know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and showed Him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after He rose from the dead. And He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of the quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. (Acts 10:37-43)

That godliness is produced through the preaching of Jesus Christ is why Paul wrote,

But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Cor. 1:23-25)

And also, he wrote, “For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2).

To spiritually dead people the doctrine of Christ will be deadening, unless the Spirit takes that Word of Christ and quickens life within the soul, the clear plain teaching of Christ will not only be boring, it will not be truly understood, it will most certainly not be viewed as relevant. But to those who are alive to God, the hearing and learning of Christ is immensely satisfying and spiritually transforming and enriching. We will increasingly become more godly as we increasingly look to Jesus Christ.

Christ “we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” (Col. 1:28)
