

THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST: JOHN'S PROLOGUE PART 1

THE THREE FOUNDATIONAL TRUTHS

1. There is only one _____.
2. The Father is _____. The Son is _____. The Spirit is _____.
3. The Father, Son, and Spirit are not _____.

James White in the book *The Forgotten Trinity* offers this definition:

Within the one Being that is God, there exists eternally three coequal and coeternal persons, namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

JOHN'S PROLOGUE

John 1:1–18 says, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.² He was in the beginning with God.³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men.⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

⁹The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'")¹⁶ For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."

WHO IS THE WORD?

The Greek term that is translated here "Word" is *logos* (λόγος). It is a common term used over 300 times in the NT alone. If you had an ancient Greek dictionary, you would see words like "word, message, statement, speech." It was also a term used in Greek _____.

I. The Word Is _____ (v. 1a)

"In the beginning was the Word" (Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος) (*en arche en ho logos*)

Notes/Questions

II. The Word Is _____ (v. 1b)

"and the Word was with God" (καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν) (*kai ho logos en pros ton theon*)

Notes/Questions

III. The Word Is _____ (v. 1c)

"and the Word was God" (καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος) (*kai theos en ho logos*)

Let's consider three possibilities concerning the meaning of this little enigmatic phrase.

1. "the Word was a god"

The New World Translation (used by the Jehovah's Witnesses) renders the verse this way. What gives them warrant for doing such a thing?

Notes/Questions

Two major reasons why this cannot be a valid translation:

i) _____. If the Word was a god then we have two Gods. By using a phrase like "a god" it means that Jesus is in a class of others God's of which he is one and the Father is one. In reality, this translation introduces polytheism which would be unthinkable for John and other Jews.

ii) _____. While it is grammatically possible to translate the verse this way, it is by no means necessary, or even likely, to translate *theos* without the article (ὁ) as "a god." Consider these verses that have *theos* without the article.

Verse	NWT (2013)	Greek	ESV
John 1:1c	and the Word was a god	καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος	and the Word was God
John 1:6	There came a man who was sent as a representative of God	Ἐγένετο ἄνθρωπος, ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ	There was a man sent from God
John 1:12	he gave authority to become God's children	ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι	he gave the right to become children of God
John 1:13	but from God	ἀλλ' ἐκ θεοῦ	but of God
John 1:18a	No man has seen God at any time	θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε	No one has ever seen God
John 1:18b	the only-begotten god who is at the Father's side is the one who has explained Him.	μονογενῆς θεὸς ...	the only God , who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

* I've spoken to people recently who point to the difference in spelling (θεὸς / θεοῦ or θεὸν) as the reason for difference in translation. However, Greek is an inflected language meaning that the spelling of a word changes depending on how it's used in the sentence (object, subject, plural, masculine, feminine, etc.)

F.F. Bruce states, "Those people who emphasize that the true rendering of the last clause of John 1.1 is "the word was a god," prove nothing thereby save their ignorance of Greek grammar."

So why then does *theos* not have the article?

It is argued (by those who deny the Trinity) that if John wanted to say that the Word was equal with God he would have wrote καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. This would be translated, "the God (of v. 1b) was the Word." That is, the Word and God are completely equal.

2. God = the Word and the Word = God?

Which leads us to consider that possibility. If God equals the Word and the Word equals God then for the Word to be with God (as just stated) is a contradiction.

3. The Word was God (in _____ or _____)

Grammatically (and sparing the lengthy details), a construction like this normally is understood *qualitatively*. That is "and the Word was God" is understood to mean that "the Word was (in nature) God." That is, the Word shares the nature and being of God (as F.F. Bruce states). The *New English Bible* translates it this way, "what God was, the Word was." Kenneth Wuest says, "And the Word was as to His essence absolute deity."

Daniel Wallace says, "Although I believe that θεὸς in 1:1c is qualitative, I think the simplest and most straightforward translation is, "and the Word was God." It may be better to clearly affirm the NT teaching of the deity of Christ and then explain that he is *not* the Father, than to *sound* ambiguous on his deity and explain that he is God but is not the Father."

CONCLUSION

What's the bottom line then?

Remember, the focus is on the Word and who he is. The Word is eternal, has been forever with God, is the Creator (as we'll see in **verse 3**), and so cannot possibly be "a god" but rather is in his essence (or quality or nature) God.

So all the grammatical details we'll soon forget, but the **ONLY** way John could say that the Son shares the nature of God but is not the Father (i.e., affirm the doctrine of the Trinity) is to write it this way. The Scriptures perfectly walk the line, avoiding contradiction and heresy on either side to clearly state in one short phrase what the entire prologue makes clear.

Notes/Questions
