

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this Bible study series you may learn how to build up the Christian Church. Two teachers will do Bible study together from John 1:1-18. We will use “the five steps” method of Bible study. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. You may join our Bible study every week by preparing for the next Bible study. You may also gather a few people around you and use this method of studying the Bible together. Doing Bible study together with a few other Christians is one of the best ways to grow to maturity as a Christian.

(S)      **STEP 1. READ**

Let us read John 1:1-18. When you are two or more people, take turns to read one verse each until you have completed the reading. Due to shortage of time, please read John 1:1-18 for yourself.

(T)      **STEP 2. DISCOVER**

Let us discover and discuss some important truths in John 1:1-18. “Which truth in this passage is important for you?” or “Which truth in this passage touches your mind or heart?” Think and write your answer in your notebook. After a few minutes take turns to share your discoveries with one another.

(S)      An important truth for me is in John 1:12-13 about becoming a child of God. It says, “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, or a husband’s will, but born of God.” These verses teach me how to become a child of God.

First. Everyone who hears the gospel can become a child of God.

Although Jesus Christ created the world and even came into the world to live among the people, many people did not welcome him. But there are also many who welcomed him. Jesus fulfilled the prophecy spoken in Luke 2:34, “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many, not only in Israel, but according to 1 Peter 2:6-8 also in the world. He will be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.” When John says “to all” who received him, then he means “whosoever” of any nation in the world. Jesus Christ did not come only to save the believers from among the Jews, but believers from among every nation and language in the whole world.

Second. Only those who believe in Jesus Christ, become children of God.

To believe in “the name” of Jesus Christ means to believe in him *as he has revealed himself*. A person, who “believes” this truth in his heart, will “accept” Jesus Christ into his heart and life. “To accept” means he will “welcome” him into his heart and life, “acknowledge” openly that he is the Saviour and “take possession” of him in his inner and his outer life.

Third. Jesus gives believers the right to become children of God.

While Jews *called* themselves the children of Abraham, believers receive “the right” from Jesus to actually *be* the children of God! This means that Jesus gives them “the authority” to actually be the children of God, not simply children from Abraham. “To *become*” children of God, does not mean that believers only become children of God in the future. It means that they *already now are* children of God through the instantaneous act of God, which is called “regeneration” in the Bible. They are justified, forgiven and have eternal life. Their position is that they *are* children of God. But it also means that they *become more and more* a child of God through the gradual process, which is called “sanctification” in the Bible. As they grow as believers, they begin to look more and more like Jesus Christ. The highest realisation of becoming a child of God is when in the future at his Second Coming we will see him as he is (1 Jn 3:1-3).

Fourth. Becoming a child of God is a sovereign act of God.

The Bible teaches that everyone who truly believes in Jesus Christ has been “born of God”. When I heard the gospel, it was not my physical descent from my parents, nor my own desire, will, choice or decision, which made me a child of God, but only the grace of the sovereign God. God, the Holy Spirit, worked in my heart, convicted me of sin, convinced me of the truth about Jesus Christ and warned me of judgement if I rejected Jesus Christ. God, the Holy Spirit, regenerated me and began to continually transform me. The sovereign God does this to all people that he saves.

(T)      An important truth for me is in John 1:16-17 about the difference between the law and grace.

It says, “From the fullness of his grace, we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”. These verses teach me the real difference between the law and grace. “The law” in the Old Testament consisted of the moral, ceremonial (ritual) and civil (social) law. There was nothing wrong with this law. It had been given by God to Moses and its purpose was *to prepare* the people of God. The

moral law revealed to people their lost condition, because they could not keep the moral law. And the ceremonial law foreshadowed God's salvation. But there were two things which the law could not do. *The law did not supply grace* to forgive people their sins or to help them in their needs. *The law also did not supply truth* that revealed the reality of the "types" (illustrations) it pointed to. For example, the ceremonial law did not reveal the real nature of the Old Testament temple, priesthood and sacrifices that were "types" or "illustrations of the New Testament realities! Only Jesus Christ, through his death and resurrection could supply both grace that forgives sin and supply truth that reveals the real nature of God's plan of salvation. Jesus Christ merited grace and fulfilled the types (illustrations) of the Old Testament law.

**(S) STEP 3. QUESTION**

Let us try to understand all the truths in John 1:1-18 and ask our questions about the things we still do not understand. "Which question about anything in this passage would you like to ask to the group?" Think and write your question in your notebook. Then discuss the questions and try to find answers.

**1<sup>st</sup> Question.** (1:1-3) Who is "the Word" and what did he do?

**(T) One.** Jesus Christ is called "the Word", because he expresses and reveals God.

In speech, "a word" gives expression to a thought and reveals this thought to others. Likewise, Jesus Christ is called "the Word", because he "is the expression of" the inner thought or mind or soul of God and because he reveals God to man. Christ is the visible expression of the invisible God (Col 1:15) and thus reveals the almighty and all glorious God to us humans within the framework of our limited human words and our limited human existence. Only Jesus Christ was present with God to read his thoughts, to know his plan, to hear his words, etc. And he revealed to us what we need to know about God and God's plan.

Two. Jesus Christ is God. The Gospel of John emphasises that Jesus Christ was nothing less than God. From eternity he existed and had the same nature as God the Father.

Three. Jesus Christ was always with God. He was never created. In order to stress the fact that Christ himself was never created, verse 1 and 2 use the continuous tense of the verbs! He existed continuously from all eternity. He always existed in the closest possible fellowship and intimacy with God the Father. From all eternity he existed as a distinct Person from God the Father. Thus, the Gospel of John emphasises three truths about Jesus Christ: he is fully divine, he existed from all eternity, and he existed as a distinct Person from God the Father, with whom he enjoys loving fellowship for ever.

Four. Jesus Christ created the universe. In order to stress the fact that everything without exception was created by Jesus Christ, verse 3 uses the past tense of the verb. The universe with its uncountable stars, the earth and everything on it, and every human being, was created by Jesus Christ.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Question.** (1:4-5) What does it mean that Jesus is "the life" and "the light"?

**(S)** Jesus Christ is called "the life" because he *expresses God's attributes*, and he is called "the light" because he *manifests or reveals God's attributes*. In order to stress the fact that life from eternity resided in Jesus Christ, including throughout the Old Testament period, verse 4 uses the continuous tense of the verb. The term "life" refers to the fullness of God's essence, to his glorious attributes, like his truth, which is his knowledge, wisdom and truthfulness, and also his almighty power, his presence everywhere, his holiness, his love, his sovereignty in every matter, etc. This life is completely spiritual, but is also the source of all physical and spiritual life on earth. It is the source of both the general and special revelations of God himself to mankind.

When this life is manifested, then it is called "the light"! Thus, *Christ is the expression and revelation of God and his glorious attributes*. For example, we can only know and experience God and his love through Jesus Christ. Christ as "the light" shone throughout the Old Testament period in the prophecies, promises, invitations and the types (illustrations) in the Old Testament. For example, "the Passover Lamb" pointed forward to Jesus Christ whose blood cleanses from all sin and turns God's wrath away from believers. "The daily sacrifices in the temple" pointed forward to the blood of Christ that was shed on the cross. "The serpent lifted up on a pole in the desert" pointed forward to Christ who was lifted up on the cross. But Christ not only shone throughout the Old Testament, he also shone throughout the New Testament. He said, "He who has seen me, has seen the Father". Every attitude, word and deed of Christ revealed the nature of God.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Question.** (1: 9) If Jesus Christ "gives light to every man", that is, illumines every man, does it therefore mean that every man will be saved?

**(T)** When a person hears the gospel, Christ illumines him. He gives him a degree of understanding concerning spiritual matters. He might realise that God really exists. Or that he is a sinner, misses God's purpose for his life and

lives in darkness. Or that God has provided a way of salvation for everyone who believes in him. But such understanding does not necessarily lead to salvation. The context teaches that not everyone is saved. Verse 5 says that not everyone “took possession” of the Light. Verse 10 says that not everyone “acknowledged” the Light. And verse 11 says that not everyone “welcomed” the light. Many people, who hear the gospel, prefer to continue to live in darkness. Others, due to God’s sovereign grace, receive Jesus Christ as their Saviour and are definitely saved. The Gospel of John teaches “a limited atonement”, which means that although Christ’s sacrifice was sufficient to atone for the sins of all people and save all people, not all people in the world are saved, because not all people believed. But the Gospel of John teaches “the assurance of salvation”, which means that everyone who is saved remains saved forever!

**4<sup>th</sup> Question.** (1:10) What is meant by “the world”?

(S) The word “the world” has several different meanings in the gospel of John.

One. John 17:5 says that Jesus had glory in the presence of the Father before *the world* began and in John 1:10 that *the world* was made through him. Here “the world” means “the orderly created universe”.

Two. In John 7:4, Jesus’ brothers say that he must show himself to *the world*. Here “the world” means “the general public”.

Three. In John 1:9 and 3:19, Jesus says that the Light has come into *the world*. Here “the world” is “sinful and lost mankind”, “mankind alienated from the life of God, laden with sin, exposed to God’s judgement and in need of salvation”.

Four. In John 1:29, John says that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of *the world*. Here “the world” does not and cannot mean “every individual person who has ever lived in the world”, because the Bible does not teach that all people will be saved. Here “the world” is “sinful and lost people from every nation and language on earth”. It is the same as the third meaning above plus the added idea that no distinction is made with respect to race, nationality, language or culture”. Thus, it means “people from every tribe and nation in the world”. Also in John 3:16 it has this meaning. “For God so loved *the world* that he gave his one and only Son, that everyone who believes in him, shall not perish but have eternal life.” Here “the world” is also “sinful and lost people from every tribe, nation and language on earth”.

**5<sup>th</sup> Question.** (1:14) What is the meaning of the sentence “The Word became flesh”?

(T) The word “flesh” also has several different meanings in the Gospel of John.

One. In John 1:13, John says that a believer is born of God and not of *the flesh*. Here “the flesh” means “man”, that is “the human nature without any negative ethical value”. Regeneration is from beginning to end not the work of man, but the work of God! Also in John 1:14, John says that Jesus became *flesh*. Also here “the flesh” means “man”, that is, “the human nature without any negative ethical value.” Thus, although Jesus was sinless, due to the curse of sin resting upon all human nature until the ransom had been paid, Jesus was subject to weariness, pain, misery and death.

Two. In John 3:6, Jesus says, “*Flesh* gives birth to *flesh*, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.” Here “the flesh” means “the human nature as the seat and vehicle of sinful desires”. It is an expression of “man as he is by nature”. The apostle Paul often uses the word “flesh” in this sense.

Three. In John 6:51-56, Jesus says, “Unless you eat the *flesh* of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” Here Jesus is speaking in a mystical sense of “his vicarious sacrifice on the cross”, which a person must “eat”, that is, “accept by faith” in order to have eternal life.

Four. In John 8:15, Jesus says that the Pharisees judge by *the flesh*. Here “the flesh” refers to “the outward appearance” or “the human standards”.

**6<sup>th</sup> Question.** (1:14,18) What is the meaning of Jesus Christ is “the only begotten Son of God”?

(S) There is only one God (Mk 12:29) and he is Spirit (Jn 4:24). Yet the one God revealed himself to us as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19). He revealed to us that there is an inner distinction in God’s divine nature that surpasses our ability to grasp and demands our obedient submission. No one and no religion knows God the Father except God the Son and those people to whom he chooses to reveal God (Mt 11:25-27; Jn 10:15; 17:25-26).

The term “only begotten son” does not refer to anything akin to the human world. It does not refer to any beginning somewhere in the past. It means that Jesus Christ is the Son of God from all eternity.

The term “Son of God” does NOT refer to a common misunderstanding that Jesus is a physical son of God. It rather expresses the thought that the invisible God himself took on the human nature and entered into his creation and into human history in and through Jesus. The Bible speaks of three kinds of “sons”.

One. The term “son” refers to a physical son or descendant. John 3:6 says, “Flesh gives birth to flesh.” It says that a physical child is born from physical parents. Although Jesus was born as a physical person from his physical mother, *the virgin* Mary, his physical nature was NOT derived from any physical father. Jesus was not begotten in any physical sense, because God does not have a body. The physical body of Christ is not God’s body. The Holy Spirit created the physical body of Jesus (Lk 1:35). Jesus Christ is from all eternity God, but took on the human nature and entered his created world and its history in time. Jesus Christ possesses the human nature, but he was absolutely without sin.

Two. The term “son” refers to a spiritual son. John 3:6 also says, “The Spirit gives birth to spirit.” The Bible clearly differentiates between a physical son and a spiritual son. Jesus is not the physical son of God, but the spiritual Son of God. Jesus Christ possesses the essential divine nature of God. Jesus Christ is the visible radiance of God’s essential divine attributes and the exact representation of God’s divine being (Col 1:15; 2:9; Heb 1:3).

Three. The term “son” refers to a symbolic son. Luke 16:8 calls the Christians “sons of the light”. This means that their essential characteristics are “light” and they belong to people that walk in the light. Likewise, Jesus Christ is called “the Son of God”. He expresses the essential divine nature and characteristics of God.

Conclusion. The term “the Son of God” expresses the fact that the *invisible* God revealed himself in the *visible* God by taking on the human nature through the virgin Mary and entering into this creation and this human history.

(T)     **STEP 4. APPLY and PRAY**

After brainstorming with one another and recording a list of *possible applications*, consider which possible application God wants you to turn into a *personal application*. Then take turns to pray about one truth that God has taught us in John 1:1-18.

**ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Prepare next week’s Bible study. Use “the five steps” method to prepare John 1:19-51.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and build Christ’s Church” and Internet on [www.dota.net](http://www.dota.net).

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to “Discipleship training on the air”.