

“In the Beginning Was the Word”

Why it is Taught Incorrectly

Summary

The inner meaning of the Prologue in John 1 includes a verse about you that the church stopped preaching after 325 AD. By the time the Council of Nicaea fixed the Prologue as proof of Christ's divine nature, verse nine had effectively been omitted from sermons. Not erased from the text; simply left at the point where the institutional argument was won. Grammatically and without qualification, verse nine says that every human who enters the world is continuously illuminated by the Logos's light. Not will be. Not can be. Present tense, universal, no condition attached. This article investigates the Greek verb John chose for the Logos in verse one and compares it to the verb he chose for everything else. Those two verbs are not the same, and the difference places the light described in verses four and nine in a category that allegorical Bible reading has always held, but Sunday preaching stopped naming. What you find when you read this far is not a doctrine about someone else.

Introduction

For centuries, tradition read the Prologue outward, fixing it as a cosmological statement about who Jesus was before anything existed. In this reading, the Greek verb Ἐν (en, meaning in) in verse one carries the sense of unoriginated, continuous being, a state reserved for the Logos alone, in contrast to ἐγένετο (egenetō, meaning "it happened," "became," "came into being," or "was made"), the verb used for everything that came into being at a point in time. The phrase φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων (phōs tōn anthrōpōn), “light of men,” in verse four can be read as a light belonging to humanity rather than shining on them from outside, a genitive construction that preserves an interior correspondence that the English rendering of “men” tends to deflate. The verb φαίνομαι (phainei, shines) in verse five points to a shining that is present and ongoing rather than a past event, while καταλαμβάνω (katalambanō, comprehend) in the same verse corresponds to the double condition of a darkness that can neither extinguish nor comprehend what it contains. Verse nine extends this to πάντα ἄνθρωπον (panta anthrōpon), every human, with φωτίζει (phōtizei, enlightens) again in the present active, placing the illumination as a continuous condition of arriving in the world. Thus, the Prologue is not only a statement about Christ but a map of what is already awake in the one who is listening.

An Examination of the Text

"In the beginning was the Word." You have heard that sentence. It has been read at Christmas Eve services, Easter mornings, and funerals. You have heard it treated as a statement about Jesus, his eternal nature, and the foundation of Christian doctrine. That reading is not wrong because the text supports it. However, John didn't stop there; he kept writing beyond verse one. He wrote eight more verses, and by verse nine he had named you. Not the congregation being addressed about someone else, but as the true subject.

The part nobody preaches is this: the Prologue was written about something already present within you, and it has never been made the subject of the Sunday morning sermon. So we need to ask:

1. when did that decision get made?
2. What does the verb in the very first sentence reveal about when the Word first arrived in the listener?
3. what changes, right now, in how you read this passage, when you understand that John was not only writing about Jesus?

Every Christian tradition you were raised in handed you the Prologue as proof that Jesus existed before creation, proof of his divine nature, and proof of the doctrine the early church was fighting to defend.

Because that proof was real and strong, the tradition stopped reading at verse three and skipped verse nine. You have probably never heard verse nine made the center of a message. You have probably never heard a pastor pause on it and say, "This verse is about you." That absence is not carelessness. But what was that choice, and when exactly was it made? The question is not whether the tradition was careless; it was not. The question is whether the tradition made a dateable, nameable choice about what the Prologue was for.

It did so in 325, when the Council of Nicaea convened to resolve one of the largest theological disputes in Christian history. The question before the council was whether Jesus was fully divine, of the same substance as the Father, or a created being of lesser divine status.

The Prologue of John was the primary text in that debate. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." That single verse became the anchor of the council's position. Jesus was the Logos. The Logos was God. The council produced the Nicene Creed. The Prologue was institutionalized as a Christological proof text. Thus, after 325, the Prologue had an institutional function. It existed to establish who Jesus was. When a text is assigned an institutional function, passages that do not serve that function begin to disappear from public reading. They are not removed; they are simply not made the subject of sermons.

Verse nine did not serve the Christological argument, so it was ignored. Around the year 400, a man named Augustine of Hippo wrote a long theological work called *On the Trinity*. In that

work, Augustine turned to John chapter one and read it in a way that had nothing to do with Christological proof. He focused on the Greek word *logos* itself. The standard lexicon for *logos* lists not only “words and speech” but also “reasoning and the mental faculty.” Augustine heard that range and wrote about what he called “the inner word,” a word that exists inwardly, in the very man himself, distinct from any spoken sound. It exists before the sound, before even the idea of the sound. He said that whoever can grasp this inner word has seen, as if in a glass, some reflection of the Word of which John writes.

"In the beginning was the Word." Augustine heard the interior reading and wrote it down. Sadly, it stayed in the monastery and did not become the sermon on Sunday morning. The institutional use of the Prologue had already been decided: John chapter one was for establishing who Jesus was, not for telling the congregation who they were. The question now is whether Augustine was reading into the text or whether the text actually says what he heard. That question does not require tradition. It requires Greek.

Read verse one again. "In the beginning was the Word." When you read “was” in English, it sounds like a simple statement of past existence—Jesus existed before creation began. However, in the Greek, the verb translated as was is *en* (meaning in), which conveys unoriginated, continuous being, a state reserved for the *Logos* alone, not *ἐγένετο* (*egenetō*, meaning "it happened," "became," "came into being," or "was made") nor *γίνομαι* (*ginomai*, "I become," "I happen," or "I come into existence"). **En!**

In Greek there are two different ways a thing can exist:

- The first is simply to be, continuously, with no moment designated as the beginning. The verb for this is *εἰμί* (*eimi*, meaning "I am," "I exist," or "I am present"). Its past form is *en*.
- The second is to come into being, to begin at a specific point. The verb for this is *γίνομαι*. Its past form is *ἐγένετο* (*egeneto*), meaning "it happened," "became," "came into being," or "was made.”

John used both of these verbs in the Prologue, and he did not use them interchangeably.

Now, look at what verse three says is *egeneto*: "All things were made by Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (NASB). *Egeneto* appears twice in verse three, and the root appears a third time as *γέγονεν* (*gegonen*, meaning "it has happened," "it has come into existence," or "it is done") at the close of the verse. Everything that was created, everything that has a starting point in time, uses the verb "come into being."

Creation is on the *egeneto* side of the ledger. But the Word is *en*. *En* is the imperfect form of *eimi*. The lexicon reads: the imperfect of the verb “to be.” It is crucial to understand that the imperfect does not simply denote a past state. It signals a continuous, unbroken condition in the past, with no named point of origin. The Word was not created; the Word was not begun. The Word simply was, continuously, with no moment of arrival, before any beginning that verse one

acknowledges. This is not a theological argument; it is grammar. John chose one verb for the Logos and a different verb for everything else.

The Logos never appears on the *egeneto* side. It belongs to an entirely different category from everything that came into being. Now consider what this means for the light John says came from that Logos. If the Logos was never originated, never caused, never made to begin, then the light the Logos carries into human experience does not arrive. It does not come to you from somewhere else. It simply is, in the same continuous sense as the Logos itself simply is. The question is whether John places that light within the listener. For the answer, we need verses four and five.

The tradition of stopping at verse three was not dishonest. It built something that held people together through centuries of real suffering and real faith. The proof it found in the Prologue was real. What it did not do was continue to verse nine. John 1:4, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men." In English, that sounds like a lamp pointing outward at people. The Logos has life. The Logos has light. And this light shines on the humans standing in the dark.

That is the most natural reading in English, but it is not what the Greek says. The phrase is τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων (*to phos ton anthropon*)—"The light of men." The genitive *ton anthropon* can, in Greek, mark possession, belonging, or relation. Standard translations read this as the light for humanity, the light pertaining to human beings. But it can also be read as a possessive, placing the light in native correspondence to humanity, as something that belongs to what they are rather than something arriving from outside.

The genitive does not close the question, but it leaves open a reading that the English translation "of men" reduces. Light of men carries an intimacy that light for men does not. The word translated as light is *phos*, which the lexicon defines: "light, a source of light, radiance." But the syntax carries the weight here. *Phos ton anthropon* is the light that belongs to humans; not the light sent to humans, not the light waiting for humans to accept it, but the light that is theirs by possession.

There is a quality of knowing in you that you cannot locate the beginning of or pinpoint the moment it switched on. It was simply there when you arrived in awareness. If *phos* corresponds to that — the knowing with no traceable origin — then John 1:4 is not describing something outside of you. It is naming what you already are.

Then verse five says, "And the light shines in the darkness." The verb "shines" is φαίνει (*phainei*), in the present active indicative. It is not shone; it shines: right now, as you read the text. The light is not a past event; it is an active, ongoing condition. And it shines in darkness, within a condition that has not yet recognized it, that cannot comprehend or seize it. The word translated as "comprehended" is κατέλαβεν (*katelaben*), from καταλαμβάνω (*katalambano*). It carries two senses: to overcome or overpower, and to understand or grasp. The darkness can do neither. It cannot extinguish the light, nor can it understand what the light is.

Three things now stand in two verses:

1. The light belongs to humans as a possessive.
2. The shining is present tense, happening now.
3. The darkness in which it shines cannot stop it.

But John is not finished. He has one more statement to make, and it is the most direct declaration in the entire Prologue.

Verse nine: "There was the true Light, which, coming into the world, enlightens every man." In the Greek, it is πάντα ἄνθρωπον (panta anthropon), where panta means "all, every, without remainder," and anthropon means "person, human being." Every single human who enters the world. No qualifier and no exception based on belief, tradition, or correct theology.

The Logos light corresponds to every person simply by their arrival in the world. The verb translated as "enlightened" is φωτίζει (phōtizei). Again, this is present active, indicating continuous action. The light does not illuminate them only when they believe; it is already illuminating them. According to John, shining is the condition of being human. This is not a promise about what will happen. It is a statement about what is already the case.

This is not a doctrine about salvation. John is making a statement about light. This was in the Prologue the entire time (John 1:9). The part that nobody preaches is not a hidden verse or a translation buried in a footnote. It is in plain text, grammatically unambiguous, and placed in the ninth verse of the most famous opening in the New Testament. Every human who comes into the world is continuously illuminated by the Logos' light, which has no beginning and can correspond to them as something native to who they are, actively shining in the darkness right now, in the part of them that has not yet understood what it is.

Augustine was not reading mysticism into the text. He was simply reading verse nine as it was written. He wrote that the inner word, the one that exists before sound and before the thought of sound, gives the reader a reflection of the Word John writes about. He heard what John actually said. The tradition chose not to preach it from the pulpit. That choice was institutional and dateable. But the text itself never changed!

Now let the Prologue run again from the beginning. Here is what John 1:1–9 contains once the Greek has been read. A Logos that was never created and never arrived, simply was before any beginning, in a category entirely separate from everything that came into being. A life within that Logos that became light. A light that can be read as belonging to humans, to what they are. A shining that is in the present tense, not historical, happening now, inside any condition that feels dark, contracted, or unaware. A darkness that can neither extinguish nor understand the light. And every human who enters the world is continuously illuminated by it, without exception, without condition, right now.

This is what John wrote. This is what Augustine heard, recorded, and placed in a monastery. Unfortunately, this is not what is preached to you, not because it was concealed, but because the text has been assigned a different function. Its function was to establish Jesus' identity. The truth was present the entire time, waiting. The first practice comes from verse four, "In him was life,

and the life was the light of men." According to John, the light is not something you need to generate. It is already shining in the dark. John 1:9 says, "Every human that comes into the world." That includes the person who was handed this text and never told what verse nine said.

The Prologue was not only about Jesus. It was about what was already awake in you before you were given a name for it. John did not stop there; he kept writing. By verse nine, we recognize that the subject of the Prologue has always been YOU.