

**Grace Upon Grace****John 1:14-18**

John begins his gospel account stating who Jesus is, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:1–5) Jesus is the Word who is God. Look in your Bible, John defines the Word who is God in verse 14 as, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Because Jesus is God in flesh and dwelt among mankind for about 33 years, mankind has the historical Jesus, but what does the ministry of Jesus mean for us today? The answer is given to us in verse 14, “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.”

Jesus is God and brings mankind God’s glory, grace and truth. All three of these are important, but John’s emphasis becomes clear in verse 16, “For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” Jesus Christ brought mankind “grace upon grace.” What is God’s grace? Grace is the love and mercy given to us by God because God desires us to have it and not because of anything we have done to earn it.”

**Grace**

John could have said we received “truth upon truth.” But he said, “grace upon grace.” In fact, after this verse the word “grace” will never appear again in John’s Gospel, but the word “truth” or “true” or “truly” will occur 55 times. In other words, there is no minimizing “truth” in this Gospel. Truth is the way grace works, Jesus said, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:32) What or who is the truth? Jesus asked of God the Father, “Sanctify them in the

truth; your word is truth.” (John 17:17) God’s truth is found in His written Word, the Bible and in Jesus Christ, the Living Word, and these truths are eternal. But, here John wants his readers to know it is all about “[grace upon grace.](#)”

This is enormously important for us to see and for the world to see. What John is saying is that the way people meet God today, see God today, and get to know God today, is by looking at the glory of Jesus, namely by seeing the fullness of His grace. If you want to be alert to seeing Jesus’ divine beauty, His glory and the spiritual brightness that sets Him apart from every one else as eternal truth, then make sure you focus yourself to see His grace. That is what Jesus’ glory is full of, “[grace upon grace.](#)”

## **Grace and Glory**

Verse 14 says, “[We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.](#)” This is the great issue for all of humankind. How will mankind see the glory of the Son of God? One of the reasons I am making an effort for you to understand God’s grace is to help you know how to point your friends to Christ. [The Gospel According to John is explicitly designed by God to reveal the glory of Christ and to awaken people to see Him and enjoy eternal life.](#) As Christians you are called to share the Gospel with love, mercy and grace.

It is hard to exaggerate what we find in this Gospel. Astonishing things are revealed in the Gospel of John; miracles, signs and wonders are recorded historically.

Herman Ridderbos, who wrote a massive commentary on John’s Gospel, said, “[By means of incarnation God has visibly appeared among humankind. And ...we may immediately add ...the entire Gospel of John is proof of it: proof of that abundant glory, a glory manifested before the eyes of all](#)” (The Gospel of John, page 49)

That is an amazing statement, “[The entire Gospel of John is proof of it.](#)” How can

that be? Well, because in this Gospel, we read the deeds and words of the Son of God and how He died and rose again. In this gospel story the glory of the only Son from the Father shines through the life of Jesus. If we have eyes to see it, we will see it. I hope you will join me in being the means for people to see the glory of the Son of God as we live out the gospel in our lives with love for Christ for all those who come into our lives to see.

Why do the people you know need grace or as verse 16 says, “[grace upon grace?](#)” I would follow up this question with another, “Where you not called by God’s grace and did you not need God’s grace?” Of course the answer is, yes. John tells us here in this first chapter that without grace we are not the children of God. This is overwhelmingly relevant to everyone you know. This is made clear in verses 12 and 13, “[But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,](#) <sup>13</sup> [who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.](#)” We are born again spiritually as Christians by God’s grace.

When you are born of God, not the first birth, but the second one, this is a work of pure and free grace, by which you become a child of God. That happens consciously through faith in Christ. Think of how amazingly important this is. Even though people say things like, “We are all God’s children,” that’s not what Jesus taught.

Listen to these words of Jesus written in John chapter 8. He was disputing with the Jewish leaders. They are the ones who knew their Old Testament backward and forward. They took their worship seriously. They said to Jesus, “[We have one Father—even God.](#)” <sup>42</sup> [Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me.](#)” <sup>43</sup> [Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to](#)

hear my word. ... <sup>47</sup> **Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.**” (John 8:41-43 and 47) Everyone has the right to believe or not to believe in the true God of the Bible. However, one’s choice, in this case, has radically difference consequences. In other words, the most religious people of Jesus’ day were **not** children of God. They understood the law, but not God’s grace. This is the condition of everyone if they do not hear about Jesus, experience new birth by God’s grace, see the glory of Jesus, and believe Him as God incarnate.

John recorded Jesus’ word of warning and of great hope. **“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”** (John 3:3) Without being born again; that is, without becoming a child of God, we will never see the glory of God’s kingdom.

It would not be an overstatement to say that the ultimate goal of John’s Gospel is that God’s children see and enjoy the glory of Jesus Christ as fully as humanly possible. I based my statement on John 17:24 where Jesus is praying for us. He says, **“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”**

The ultimate goal of Jesus’ prayer for us is that we see the fullness of His glory after He returns to His Father. Seeing His glory will make Christ central in our lives and will make us supremely happy. This is what the Gospel is aiming at, the exaltation of the glory of Christ and the fullness of the joy of God’s children who see it.

**“Father, glorify me,”** is what Jesus prays, **“in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.”** (John 17:5) God revealed His glory to mankind through Jesus who has always possessed glory since before Creation.

Jesus’ glory is seen when, **“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be**

in you, and that your joy may be full.” (John 15:11) His glory and is our joy. These are the twin goals for Jesus coming to earth. He came for us to see His glory and to live with joy by His glory.

### **Grace Revealed Through Glory**

Now for this to happen, two difficulties or obstacles have to be overcome. Two kinds of darkness have to be removed. The glory of the Son of God has to be revealed in the world for us to see, and the blindness and darkness of our own hearts has to be removed. There is darkness in the world and there is darkness in our souls. Both have to be overcome. Otherwise, we cannot see the glory of the Son of God.

How does this happen? The darkness in our souls is overcome by regeneration of one's soul we call new birth; and the darkness in the world is overcome by the incarnation meaning the Word of God that became flesh. Our sinful blindness is removed by regeneration allowing us to see the light that came into the world in the incarnation of Jesus. Of course, the two are inseparable and interrelated. The incarnation revealed the glory that overflowed with God's grace and that very grace is what was needed to bring about our regeneration. So the revelation of the glory of Christ in the incarnation was both the means and the goal of regeneration. **It is the grace of the Son of God that opens our blind eyes. It is the glory of the Son of God that we see when our eyes were opened.**

We can see how John develops regeneration is how we see the incarnation in verses 15 to 18. He has just said in verse 14 that because the Word became flesh and dwelt among us “we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Before explaining this further in verse 16, we read of John the Baptist bearing witness in verse 15, “John bore witness about ~~him~~ Christ, and cried out, ‘This was he of whom I said, “He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.” ’ ’ ” The emphasis here falls on the ranking of Jesus

above John the Baptist. In one sense, John came first. He appeared on the scene first. Jesus' ministry came after. But John says Jesus is before him in two ways. Jesus is before John because He has existed before creation, meaning that Jesus had His beginning in eternity. Therefore, Jesus is absolutely before John the Baptist in rank, "He ... ranks before me." John is explaining in his own way the truth that the glory of the incarnation in verse 14 really is a glory absolutely superior to his own. This is the glory as of the only Son from the Father.

### Grace To See Glory

Now verse 16 continues on the thought of verse 15 and connects back to verse 14 and begins with "~~For~~ because from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." So we can read it like this, starting with verse 14, "We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth ... because from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace."

What John is saying is that receiving grace is the reason why we could see the glory.

Seeing God's glory is not natural but supernatural sight when we receive supernatural grace. Blind eyes are enabled to see the glory of Christ. Jesus said to Martha just before He raised her brother Lazarus from the dead, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" (John 11:40) Many people saw the raising of Lazarus as a physical fact, but only some saw in it the glory of God. That is a work of grace.

The logic of verses 14 and 16 is this, "We have *seen* his glory . . . because . . . we have all received *grace upon grace*." The grace enabled the seeing. Grace is the supernatural power of God regenerating us and opening our blind eyes so that we can see Christ for who He really is. This is what we pray will happen for many during our lives and their lives. As they hear the story of Christ, may the grace of God open their eyes to see His self-authenticating glory and that they would become

children of God.

Now verse 17 begins with the same word verse 16 does—*for* or *because*. We should read 16 and 17 together, “*For or because from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup> For or because the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*”

Now why does Apostle John bring Moses and the law in here? We have to stick close to the context to get this. If we run to Galatians or Romans too quickly, and the contrasts that Paul makes between grace and the law in Romans 6 and Galatians 2 and 5, we may miss what John is focusing on. John is focusing on seeing the glory of God as full of grace.

The reason John turns to Moses here is that Moses was the most famous Old Testament figure who passionately wrestled to see the glory of God. If anybody would be said to have seen God, it would be Moses. In Exodus 33:11 we read, “*The LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.*” But this face-to-face conversation was not enough for Moses because he heard God and spoke with Him but did not see His face. He wanted to see more of God. So Moses asks, “*Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight.*” (Exodus 33:13) He wanted to see God directly and in person. “*Show me now your ways.*” But that was not enough. He went one more step. He wanted to see God’s true glory. The “*LORD said to Moses, ‘This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.’ <sup>18</sup> Moses said, ‘Please show me your glory.’ ” To Moses’ request God said, <sup>19</sup> “*I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.*” Concerning Moses’ request <sup>20</sup> “*God said, ‘you cannot see my face, for man**

shall not see me and live.’<sup>21</sup> And the LORD said, ‘Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock,<sup>22</sup> and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by.’<sup>23</sup> Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.’ ” (Exodus 33:17–23)

The very next thing that happens in Exodus 34:1 is the giving of the law tablets for a second time, “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke.’ ...<sup>6</sup> The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.’ ” (Exodus 34:1 and 6) The law was given after God’s glory was revealed.

### **Grace Upon Grace**

Here is what I think John is telling us in John 1, verses 17 and 18, he is contrasting Christ with Moses not because the law is not a gracious gift. It is. That is why verse 16 refers to receiving “grace upon grace.” First, there is the grace of Moses giving the law and then a second grace, Christ bringing the fullness of the Father’s grace and truth to mankind. **The contrast is that Moses points to grace but Jesus performs grace. Moses records the words of God; Jesus is the Word of God. The law mirrors the light of God; Jesus is the Light of God.**

This contrast with Moses is continued in verse 18, “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” “No one has ever seen God” is John’s way of saying, even Moses, who said, “show me your glory,” was only allowed to see the back of God’s glory. But in contrast, Christ who is called “the only God” is not at the Father’s back; Christ and the Father are One. No one has seen God the Father, but Christ who is God the Son has been seen. Christ



was seen historically and He is seen in the Word of God and when God regenerates or awakens our soul we are able to see Christ in Spirit. That is the contrast with Moses who only saw the backside of God's glory. We see God's glory in its fullness through Christ.

So Moses rejoiced on the gift of God's Law and mediated on the gift of God's Law. But, John says in verse 18, that vastly superior to the law is the presence of God Himself through Christ. John writes of more contrasts between Moses and Christ. Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness for the people to look upon and be healed. Jesus was lifted up on the cross for the sins of all mankind. (John 3:14) Moses was given manna from heaven to feed the 2 million wandering people as they traveled. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.<sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world ... I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." (John 6:32-33, 35)

Moses wrote about Christ's coming and he believed in the coming Messiah. Jesus is the Messiah. The Law of Moses is the words of God but Christ is God and He is the Word of God. That is the contrast John wants us to see. John's whole point is the vast superiority of Jesus over Moses. John's focus and our focus is to be on seeing the glory of God. Moses glimpsed the back of God's glory. Jesus embodies the fullness of God's glory. There is an infinite difference between Moses the creature that glimpsed the back of God's glory and Christ the Triune God, the Creator of everything and is glory. There is a vast expanse between Moses who pointed to God's grace and Christ who is grace for all mankind and gives His grace to those who believe in Him.

No one has ever seen God, not even Moses. But now, the One who is at the Father's side, He has made God known. Christ is God in the flesh. The simplest believer who sees Jesus Christ sees God's "glory ... full of grace and truth." Or, as Jesus said, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9)

I will let Jesus have the last word of this message, "And Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me."<sup>45</sup> And whoever sees me sees him who sent me." (John 12:44–45) This is God's grace revealed in Christ. This is my prayer for all; that they might know God's grace by seeing Jesus as the Christ, the living God. Amen!