



That belief is the major theme of John's gospel is beyond doubt. The Greek term *pisteuō* is found 98 times in the book, translated as "believe" 97 times and once as "entrusted" (John 2.24) in the NASB95. Furthermore, the importance of believing is stressed throughout:

- Believing in Jesus is how we can attain eternal life (John 3.15-16).
- Believing in Jesus is the work God has given us (John 6.29).
- Failure to believe in Jesus means dying in one's sins (John 8.24).
- Believing in Jesus assures us of life after death (John 11.25).
- Believing in Jesus is to believe in God (John 12.44).

Given the essential nature of believing in Jesus, we shouldn't be surprised to read John's purpose in writing the gospel: "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." (John 20:30-31)

But what are we supposed to believe about Jesus? It's a crucial question, and John does not keep us in suspense about its answer. The prologue found in John 1.1-18 provides the essential facts we must come to believe about Jesus, facts which will reappear and receive fuller explanations throughout the book.

We must believe that He is Deity (vss. 1-2)

It is unfortunate that this passage has been the subject of debate and division through the centuries, for its message is really quite simple: Jesus is Deity. Everything in the passage emphasizes that point. The use of "in the beginning" takes our minds back to Genesis 1.1, emphasizing to us that just as God was there at the beginning (and so was always there), so was the Word (note also John 17.5). "The Logos did not then begin to be, but at that point at which all else began to be He already was. In the beginning,

place it where you may, the Word already existed. In other words, the Logos is before time, eternal." (Expositors Greek New Testament)

The reference to Jesus as "the Word" emphasizes His relationship to God throughout time. Just as words are the verbal expressions of our minds, so Jesus (the Word) is the expression of God's mind and purpose in creation (Genesis 1.3; Psalm 33.6), revelation (Jeremiah 1.4) and salvation (Psalm 107.20). Thus, "the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This unity of being, but distinction in "person", is taught in this book and throughout the Scriptures (see John 10.30; 5.17-18; Phil. 2.6; Psalm 45.6-7; Hebrews 1.8). As another has rightly said, "what God was the Word also was" (Kruse quoting Moloney in the Tyndale commentary).

This passage is essential to understanding the rest of the book, for to see Jesus (the Word) is to see God. Thus, when Jesus cleanses the Temple (chapter 2), it is God repudiating the Jewish system. When Jesus extends mercy to the Samaritans (chapter 4), it is God extending mercy to them. When Jesus forgives the sinful woman (chapter 8), it is God forgiving her. "the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner." (John 5.19).

We must believe that He is the source of life (vss. 3-4)

Harkening again to the Genesis account, we see the essential role of Jesus in creation. As the Word, He created all things (Psalm 33.6; cf. Colossians 1.16; Hebrews 1.2). But while vs. 3 may emphasize Jesus' role in the physical creation of all things, vs. 4 emphasizes His essential role in the spiritual creation. If all things were made by Him (vs. 3), then He can give new life to them (vs. 4)! His ability to give this life will be emphasized throughout the book:

- He is living water (John 4.10,14).
- He is the bread of life (John 6.35,48).
- He is the good shepherd, giving life abundantly to His sheep (John 10.10-11).
- He is the resurrection, providing life from death (John 11.25).
- He is the way, truth and life, giving the only access to God (John 14.6).

We must believe that He is the Light, showing the way to become children of God (vss. 5-13)

As the Light, He is contrasted with darkness. Light illuminates and leads to God, darkness seeks to conceal evil deeds and thus hides one from the ways of God. But, the good news is that the darkness did not overcome (better translation than "comprehend") the Light! And if the Light conquers darkness, those who follow the light can be victorious as well (John 12.35)! Next, we are introduced to John who was faithful in his charge to bear witness to the Light (cf. Malachi 3.1). John's witness (i.e. testimony) was important, but Jesus would rely on the testimony of One greater (John 5.31ff).

The purpose of the Light is to enlighten, to show the way to God. Jesus came into the world to illuminate man's way, but the world rejected Him. Even His own people refused to receive Him. As Jesus says in John 3.19-20, the Light was rejected because the world loves darkness. But some would receive Him, and these would be given the right to become children of God. This relationship with God would not depend on any

physical heritage, but would come by the will of God. God's will was to send His Son to enlighten men, and these who receive Him have truly followed the will of God.

We must believe that He became flesh and "tabernacled" among men (vss. 14-18)

Here is another passage which has been subject to intense debate through the years, but again the message is not hard to understand. The key to our understanding is found in the phrase "dwelt among us", literally "tabernacled". God once dwelt with His people in a tabernacle, and His glory filled it (cf. Exodus 40.34-38). It was also during this time that God proclaimed to Moses that He abounded in lovingkindness and truth (Exodus 34.6).

But in the Word, God dwelt among men in the flesh. When the Word became flesh, the glory of God truly "tabernacled" among men. And since Jesus was the "fullness" of God's grace, it was through Him that God's "grace and truth were realized." Thus, while no one has seen God (see Exodus 33.20), Jesus fully explains Him to us. He alone can do this because He is both "the only begotten God" and "in the bosom of the Father"... which is another way of saying He was "with God" and "was God".