

- 3) Verses 10 and 11 address in general terms the transition from the pre-incarnate Logos and His witness in the world to the Logos' incarnation and the dynamics of His new interaction with men. Verses 12 and 13, in turn, build on that discussion by contrasting the human response of unbelief and rejection with that of faith and embrace. To those unfamiliar with the salvation history and the Lord's scheme for His creation, these verses may seem to be little more than an addendum. Others find in them a proof-text for the doctrine of monergism (that is, God's sovereign work in salvation). But treated in context, and in the light of what's been considered thus far, it becomes clear that John was addressing something other than the fact that God is sovereign in the salvation of individual believers (a topic that departs from the context and its subject matter). John was speaking to the profound effect of the Logos' coming into the world in a new way; how, as the apex of the salvation history, it has brought the fulfillment of all that the Scriptures recorded and promised, and so the inauguration of the creational renewal associated with the eschatological kingdom of God.

Because verses 9-13 provide John's transition from his treatment of the pre-incarnate Logos to his introduction of the incarnate Logos, this passage must be read against the backdrop of the "fullness of the times" and all that that salvation-historical context embodies and implies. The monumental paradigm shift that has come in the "Christ event" is often overlooked (or even denied) by Christians, but to the detriment of their understanding of the Scriptures, the meaning and effect of Christ's life and work, the Christian life and the Church He established.

- Whether unconsciously or as an interpretive premise, multitudes of Christians read the Bible in a flat manner. That is, they read it as if every part of it applies to them exactly as written. So, for instance, the Lord's promise to Solomon following his dedication of the temple (2 Chronicles 7:11-14) is appropriated by contemporary American Christians as God's promise to them and the United States of America. The same pattern of a flat reading results for Reformed Christians who embrace the premise of one "covenant of grace" and its implication that both testaments are defined by the complementary principles of "law" and "grace."
- Dispensationalism also obscures the transformative significance of the Christ event, but in a different manner. It does so by its so-called "literal hermeneutic" which preserves the historical particulars of the preparatory salvation history and projects them forward for future fulfillment. This means that God's promises to Israel didn't point to and find their fulfillment in the Christ event; rather, they look to a "literal" fulfillment at the end of the present age. For dispensationalism, prophecy isn't christological as such, but history recorded in advance.

Whether due to theological premises or the inescapable human condition of inhabiting their own personal and historical context, Christians all too easily miss the significance of the Christ event and so fail to read the Scriptures in that light.

And that is certainly true with John's prologue in general and verses 12-13 in particular. As noted, perhaps the most common "take-away" from these two verses is that they comprise a biblical proof-text for God's absolute sovereignty in the salvation of individual persons (in contrast to the doctrine of *synergism* that argues that people play a role in their appropriation of Christ's saving work). Read through this lens, this passage is said to affirm that people are saved by a sovereign work of God (which divine work includes their personal faith through which they lay hold of Christ's saving merits), not by family relations, personal choice or the influence of other people. But whatever the correctness of this doctrine (even within John's writings), it surely is out of place here. If John indeed intended to impress upon his readers the truth of God's sovereignty in personal salvation, he stepped aside from the topic at hand to do so. And having made that brief diversion, he then returned to his topic in verse 14. The truth is, John was making a different point in these two verses – one that doesn't deny the doctrine of monergism, but has an entirely different concern focused on the significance and effect of the Christ event in the fullness of the times.

In considering this passage, it's worth noting that there exists an alternate reading. This reading is found in several of the early church fathers and it involves a *singular* verb (*begotten*) in the text of verse 13 rather than a plural one. The effect is that this verse is then treated as a statement about *Jesus'* birth as the incarnate Logos, not the spiritual "birth" of believers. In addition to the evidence in the writings of various church fathers, there is some manuscript support for this reading but it is very limited. And so, short of compelling contextual arguments for adopting it, this reading should be rejected in favor of the preponderance of the manuscript evidence. And this evidence has verse 13 elaborating on verse 12 and its concern with those who receive the Logos that has come into the world.

- The first thing to observe about verse 12 is that it stands in antithesis to verse 11. Whereas the Logos' "own" shunned Him, the subjects of verse 12 welcomed and took hold of Him. John didn't specify who these individuals are; rather, he treated them generically, identifying them only in terms of their embrace of the Logos. By doing so John was emphasizing that there is only one thing that binds together and defines these people as a group, and that is their shared relation to the Logos. The balance of the verse clarifies this as John went on to identify them as *children of God*. Furthermore, this generic reference ("as many as") indicates that John had in mind Gentiles and Jews alike (individual Jews in distinction from the Jewish nation which refused its Messiah – 1:11; cf. 3:1-21, 4:1-42, 5:1-47, 7:1-44, 8:1-59, 9:1-41, 10:1-29, 11:45-53, etc.).
- Secondly, John indicated that taking hold of the Logos involves "*believing in His name*." He thus associated this reception with faith, but specifically faith directed toward the Logos' *name*. This way of speaking about the idea of faith is common in the Scriptures and was perfectly clear to John's original audience, though it is often lost upon modern readers.

From the inception of His self-disclosure to Israel, Yahweh presented Himself in terms of His *name*. Unlike contemporary Western practice, in the ancient East a name conveyed some important quality or feature of the person or entity. So God revealed Himself in terms of names and titles He assigned to Himself; as such, His name became effectively synonymous with His being (cf. Genesis 14:18, 17:1, 21:33; Exodus 3:13-15, 15:3, 20:3; cf. also Exodus 20:7, 24, 23:20-21, 33:11-34:7; Psalms 8, 9, 20, 44, etc.). To believe or trust in Yahweh's name was to believe or trust in Him.

Here the object of faith is the *Logos'* name, and the context suggests that John had in mind the name of Israel's God, but as He had revealed Himself in the *Logos'* true light – *more specifically, as He had fulfilled His pledge of theophany and return to Zion*. Several things support this, among them the contextual emphasis on the Baptist and the fact that this passage forms the transition between the immanent *Logos* and the incarnate *Logos* (1:14-18). So also John's focus on the incarnate *Logos* as the true sanctuary (cf. 1:18 with 2:13-22, 4:1-26, 7:37-39, 14:6, etc.) highlights the fact that this act of theophany constituted Yahweh's return to Zion. John has made it clear that the incarnation of the *Logos* is the incarnation of God (1:1), but most importantly, it is Yahweh's return to Zion as pledged by the prophets and heralded by the Baptist – Yahweh's return in the person of the messianic Servant who is the Son of David and Abraham (Isaiah 7, 9, 40-55; Ezekiel 34; Zechariah 1-3; Malachi 3:1).

- Receiving this *Logos*, then, amounts to discerning and embracing Him for who He is and all who receive Him in this way are *children of God*. Notably, John expressed this status in terms of a *right* or *authority* that brings about a new outcome – an outcome of *becoming* (1:12b).

Verse 13, then, clarifies this idea of God granting to people to become His children through faith in the theophanic *Logos*. And central to that clarification is John's insistence that this incorporation into God's family is His doing: It is a right *He* endows and a "becoming" that originates *in Him*. The latter idea is especially important in grasping John's point, but both must be interpreted in the light of the surrounding context.

Fundamentally, John was here explaining how the relationship between God and the world of men – the relationship mediated by the *Logos* – has been affected by the fullness of the times, and specifically by the *new coming* of the *Logos*. *Just as this coming constituted a radical departure from the way the Logos was formerly in the world, so does the resulting divine-human relationship which the Logos mediates*. John treated that relationship under the imagery of a father and children, and so his overall point is that this new coming of the *Logos* – His mediating presence as incarnate rather than merely immanent – has brought about a new family dynamic between God and men; a new way for men to be His children.

The place to begin is with the recognition that the father-children concept had its origin in the creation of man as image-bearer. God created the human creature in His own image and likeness to be His image-son (Luke 3:38). From the beginning, God's design was that His human creatures should be His children, but this relationship was forfeited in the fall. Subsequently, God began the process of restoration by calling a people to Himself – an elect “son” through whom He would restore and regather to Himself all mankind. This election of sonship began in Abraham and was corporatized in the nation of Israel (Exodus 4:22-23). Israel was Yahweh's elect son – His “only-begotten,” but Israel's election was for the sake of the world; God's design was that He would have sons and daughters from all the families of the earth. The realization of this goal depended upon Israel fulfilling its sonship, but this was not to be. Israel was Yahweh's *son* in name only (Isaiah 1:1-6; Jeremiah 4:21-22; Ezekiel 2:1-6; Hosea 2:1-5, 11:1-4; etc.) and so shared the rest of mankind's need of restoration, ingathering and true sonship.

Yahweh had taken Abraham's offspring for His children, but they were false sons. Israel's sonship *testified* of the Lord's intent to gather the human race as His children, but it didn't see that design *realized*. This was true first in Israel's own experience, but also in its failure to fulfill its sonship on behalf of the world. The people of Israel were Yahweh's children by covenant calling, but not in reality; they were children of Abraham, but not children of God. Now, with the Logos' coming into the world to embody Israel and fulfill Israel's identity as “son of God,” God's design to fill the world with His children was finally to be realized. *These truths are fundamental to discerning John's point in verse 13.*

- Prior to the fullness of the times, God's children were defined first and foremost by descent from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: They were “*born of blood.*” But, from the beginning, the covenant family also included individuals who didn't share this line of descent. These came into the household of Israel as *proselytes* by willfully binding themselves to the covenant through circumcision and Torah (cf. Genesis 17:1-13 with Exodus 12:1-51 and Joshua 5:1-12): They were children of God “*born of the will of the flesh.*” In many other instances, Israelite men took foreign wives who then became daughters of Israel through marital incorporation. Ruth, the Moabite woman who became David's great-grandmother, is a notable example of this (ref. Ruth 1:1-4, 4:13-22): Such women were children of God “*born of the will of the man (husband).*”
- But now, with the incarnational coming of the Logos, these bases for being God's children have ended – not by abrogation, but by fulfillment. Now, at last, God's purpose for the world through Israel has been realized. Now and forevermore, God's children are delineated by one thing: *by sharing in His life by sharing in the life of the incarnate Logos.* Now, in the fullness of the times, the divine will for mankind is being carried out: God is taking for Himself children by a new birth of spiritual union with Him in the Son – true children who are “*born out of God.*”