

Jesus Christ as the *Logos* (Jn 1:1-3)

Logos Doctrine

The word, *logos*, as used by the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus, had the following semantic range: the word was used to describe human knowledge, and the inherent order in the absolute universe (a stable constant in the face of daily change). *Logos* was the inherent, or imminent, ordering and rationality of the universe. Heraclitus was the first to use the word, *logos*, in a metaphysical sense—as the order and pattern discernable in nature.

By the time of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, *logos* described the faculty of human reason and knowledge that men had of the world and each other. In the Socratic view; mankind wanted to get the most from life by finding values in the universe; but the quest for these values was conducted *rationally* rather than *revelationally*.

Aristotle, who studied under Plato, developed the concept of *logos* (or logic) as depicting the rules of human rationality. Stoics saw *logos* as the animating power in the universe; nature's overall rational structure.

At the time of Christ's earthly ministry, both the Jews and the Hellenists understood the idea of logos. As a result, John's Gospel must have hit like a 'smart bomb'. Especially for the Hellenists, the Apostle John turns the concept of *logos* on its head when he claimed "*Logos* became flesh and dwelt among us" (1:14).

To paraphrase Christian apologist and theologian Gordon Clark, *we could say of the Logos of John 1:1—in the beginning was Logic; Logic was with God and Logic was God. Christ embodies the laws of logic contained in creation and the Bible—Christ (Logos) is the Agent of creation (1:3). Thus, Clark observes, the laws of logic are not a secular principle imposed on Christian world view; the laws of logic perfectly correspond with Scripture's assertion that Christ, who is the eternal Logos, 'upholds all things' (Col 1:17; Heb 1:3). He is the source of rationality which gives order and purpose to our universe.*

For John, Logos is God, the creative Word, who takes on human flesh in the man Jesus Christ. The Logos of John's Gospel is personal, and active; He is divine reason; He acts as the ordering principle of the universe.

To the Hebrew, "the word of God" was the self-assertion of the divine personality (Ps 33:6). To the Greek, the *logos* formula denoted the rational mind that ruled the universe. In his Gospel, John was endeavoring to bring out the full significance of the Incarnation to the Gentile world as well as to the Jewish people. John asserts that the "Word" is the source of all that is visible and antedates the totality of the material world.

The Jewish Hellenist philosopher Philo used *logos* to try to synthesize Jewish tradition and Platonism. According to Philo, *logos*, was the mediating principle between God and the world. Philo in part, drew the concept from the O.T.—that *logos* can be understood as God's word, or divine wisdom, which is immanent in the world.

In the prologue to John's gospel (Jn 1:1-5), the Apostle declares that the Logos was already present at the creation—He was 'in the beginning' (Genesis 1:1). The *Logos* had the closest possible relationship with God (Greek – *pros*, 'face to face with'). *Logos* was preexistent to all creation; *Logos* was God. The entire work of creation was carried through by the *Logos* (Gk. – *dia*, through the agency).

Logos is the source of life; and the light of every man (1:4, 9). God's life incarnate in Christ is called 'light'. Christ sheds light on the value of ontological existence; upon morals and ethics. Truth and love are synonyms for light. Evil, darkness, and hatred, are antonyms of light.

Christ illumines the fact that the universe is ‘value packed’ with moral structure. ‘Light’ is the moral/ethical dimension of truth and knowledge; the inescapable connotation is that men are accountable to God. The light gives us our moral mandates. This cosmos is not ‘value free’. John 1:5 tells us that when the Word shone into the darkness, *the darkness did not comprehend it*. (The darkness did not grasp the light; the darkness did not embrace the light; nor was it able to quench the light).

Christ is the revealer of God (Jn 1:18). His office is to make God known. The way in which the ‘darkness’ reacted to light manifests just how deep man’s depravity is and how entrenched man’s hatred is toward God (see Jn 3:18-21 on man’s love of darkness).

In Revelation 19:11-16, the *Logos* is a ‘conquering general’—the ‘*Logos* of God’ takes back the title deed to the earth. As in Hebrews 4:12, it is the O.T. picture of the shattering affects of God’s Word upon the mind of fallen men.

In the philosophic use, *logos* is depicted as a ‘shock absorber’ between God and the universe—the manifestation of divine principle in the world. In Stoicism, it is divine reason, and reason distributed in the world, and thus reason as it resides in the mind of man.

The use of Logos in John chapter one differs radically from philosophic usage. For Greeks, the word, *logos*, was essentially reason. For John, *Logos* was essentially “Word,” – the eternal utterance of God; the second Person of the Godhead. In philosophy *logos* is impersonal ‘it’. For John (and thus for all true believers), *Logos* is ‘He’. He is God incarnate; revealing, upholding, and redeeming. John lifts Christ above the materialistic, pagan concept of deities.

The source of John’s *logos* doctrine is the historical Person, and work of Christ, of whom, and of which John was an eyewitness. ***John does not interpret Jesus by the logos; John interprets logos by Jesus.***

John’s expression takes its cue from the O.T. in which God’s Word is personified as wisdom. Christ is God’s active Word; He bears a saving relation to fallen man. It is no accident that both the Gospel, and Christ are called, ‘the Word’ (Phil 2:16; 1 Jn 1:1).

Early Christian apologists found *logos* a convenient term in expounding Christianity to pagans—they used it in the sense of reason. These apologists saw the use of some logic as preparatory for the Gospel.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- 1.) Discuss the difference between searching for values *rationally*, versus, *revelationally*. Which is the final authority in each approach (human reason, or God’s Word)?
- 2.) How do proponents of philosophic naturalism account for an ordered universe? If chance and contingency are ultimate (or absolute), then why isn’t chaos reigning at present? Note the passages of Scripture which refer to Christ upholding all things.
- 3.) Why would the truth of the Incarnation of the *Logos* have been devastating, or at least shocking, to the world view of Hellenistic philosophy? How would the doctrine of the *Logos* incarnate affect modern scientists who explain everything in terms of ‘natural laws’ (matter and motion) operating independently of God?
- 4.) In a discussion about the origin of logic, how would you respond to a philosophic naturalist whose world view cannot account for the laws of logic? (Hint: Christ is the source of rationality.)
- 5.) Comment on John’s hermeneutic (or method of interpretation), why does he interpret the *Logos* by Christ instead of Christ by the *Logos*? (Note the first Century philosophic definition of *logos* as impersonal.)
- 6.) How does the knowledge that *Logos* is the source of human reason and rationality shape our entire Christian worldview?
- 7.) How does the *Logos* doctrine connect science and the Bible? (See the following passages: Jn 1:1-5; Col 1:15-21; Heb 1:1-3).

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