

Christians love Christ and yearn to know Him better and to understand better why He came into the world. In 1 John, the apostle, filled with the Spirit, teaches us of these things in a magnificent prologue (read text).

This text is perfectly intelligible, wonderfully complex, so full of profound truth that human language groans under the mountainous gospel burden. The main point grammatically is “we declare” (3) parallel with “we write” (4). This verbal message so conveyed is the powerful word of the Spirit causing spiritual effects in God’s elect by His sovereign grace, namely, fellowship and joy (i.e., salvation). The content can be summarized:

We declare Jesus Christ for your salvation.

I. OUR SUBJECT: JESUS CHRIST, THE ETERNAL LIFE

So interestingly, the Subject is described rather than named at first, like a riddle. Then we realize it is our Lord Jesus Christ, who is also called “that eternal life” (2). All of this assumes and implies the Triune God. The gospel is nearly gibberish without some knowledge of the Trinity.

Digression of the Trinity: 1 Jn 5.20 sheds light, with its distinction of persons (the Son, the Father), its testimony to one God alone, its identification of both persons as true, and announcement that the Son Jesus Christ “is the true God.” “The life” of which John writes is a reference to God, and in 1.2, specifically the Son. This “life” is not creaturely or human life but the very essence of God, God Himself. John also wrote, “God IS light” (1.5, not created light, only analogous to Him), “God IS love” (4.8, not creaturely love, only analogous), and in the same way, God IS life. Light, love, and life are not parts of God. These are just different words to describe God. He is simple, utterly without parts. All that is in God is God. He is *eternal* life—without beginning, ending, and succession: “I AM” (Exod 3.14). Anything said of God can be said of Jesus Christ because He is God (Jn 8.58, 59; cf. 10.33; 11.25; 14.6, etc.). John also affirms the deity and distinction of the Holy Spirit (1 Jn 5.6, 7 AV). So when John writes about “that eternal life,” much more than forgiveness of sins or going to heaven is in view. The phrase “eternal life” reveals God!

The movement of God’s triune life has its perfection in and of itself, and is utterly sufficient to itself; but this perfect movement is not self-enclosed or self-revolving. In its perfection, it is also a movement of self-gift in which the complete love of Father, Son and Spirit communicates itself ad extra, creating and sustaining a further object of love (John Webster, *God Without Measure*, p. 24).

- * The Eternal One. “That which was from the beginning” → eternal Being (i.e., God). Same phrase of Christ in Mic 5.2 LXX and John 1.1-3, and of Jehovah in Hab 1.12. ==> Jesus is Jehovah, the Creator!
- * The Speaking One. “Which we have heard” → via His speech: from God in a unique sense (Jn 12.49, 50; 7.46). The Twelve heard His audible voice. He still speaks in Scripture.
- * The Visible One. “Which we have *seen* with our *eyes*” emphasizing the convincing nature of the evidence, alt. trans., “we gazed upon.”

Eyewitnesses include “doubting Thomas” (Jn 20.25, 28, 29).

Eyewitnesses “saw and heard” (v. 3) Jesus, even raised to life after He died. Powerful and persuasive evidences of this historical reality!

- * The Incarnate One. “And our hands have handled” emphasizes “the corporality of the resurrected Jesus (Luke 24.39)” (EDNT). Refutes heresy of Docetism (phantom Jesus, not truly, completely human). Cf. 1 Jn 4.2. John lays a foundation for the Nicene Creed (AD 325): We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father [the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made [both in heaven and on earth]; Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man . . .
- * The Revelatory One. “The Word of life” uses the term (Logos) that here means “the independent personified expression of God” (BDAG). See John 1.1, 4, 14, 18, “the only begotten Son . . . hath declared” God, or, *made Him known*, lit. “to set forth in great detail, *expound*” (BDAG). Remember John 14.9, 10; Heb 1.1-3.

The Eternal One speaking in time, the Invisible made visible, who assumed the whole human nature (body, soul), revealing God, is the Subject declared.

II. OUR AIM: YOUR FELLOWSHIP AND FULL JOY

Counterintuitively and amazingly, hearing *this* message about Jesus Christ and receiving Him by faith is our salvation from enmity with God and deliverance from being justly condemned to everlasting miseries. Parallel lines (vv. 3, 4) use “that” to indicate purpose or intention.

We declare unto you → *THAT ye also may have fellowship with us*
We write unto you → *THAT your joy may be full*

- * The Fellowship of Salvation. “Salvation” means God’s act of graciously choosing (Father), definitively redeeming (Son), and powerfully transforming (Spirit) an innumerable host of people to the fullness of the reflected glory (imago Dei) and incomprehensible blessing for which He originally designed and created us. In this way, sinners are rescued from utter ruin to the praise of the glory of His mercy. “Fellowship” (lit., *sharing*, imp. mutual love and closeness) is both a means and the substance of this salvation. It is 1) “with us”—“the apostolic we,” by inf., all believers, and 2) “with the Father and Son.” These two are inextricably linked (Jn 13.20). Fellowship with the Father, Son, & Spirit (implied, Phil 2.1) is most ineffable (Jn 17.20, 21).
- * The Joy of Salvation. “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation” (Psa 51.12). “Joy” (lit., *the emotion of great happiness and pleasure*) is also, in its fullness, beyond comprehension, because it is an appreciation and enjoyment of God Himself (Psa 16.11). “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever” (WSC #1). It is capable of degrees; hence, “full joy,” which comes by understanding, believing, and meditating upon the subject, our Lord Jesus Christ, and His grace to us. That is WHY ==> **we declare Jesus Christ: for your salvation** (fellowship, full joy)! Ω