

1John 1:1-2:1

Why Has God Written to Us?

And these things write we unto you... – v. 4

Purpose statements are great things to discover when you're studying a particular book of the Bible. If the student of God's word can discern exactly why an epistle or why one of the gospels has been written then he gains a lens through which he can view that entire gospel or that entire epistle.

I've cited on a number of occasions, usually whenever I'm preaching from the gospel of John the very clear purpose statement for John writing his gospel. It's given to us in 20:31 *But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*

Luke's gospel also comes with a very clear statement of purpose. So we read in 1:3,4 *It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.*

I believe this purpose statement in Luke's gospel also carries itself forward into the book of Acts since that book may be regarded as the second volume of Luke's gospel. So these things are valuable when we study the Bible. Once we know the purpose for which a book is written we are ready then to read with the question in view – how does the author accomplish his purpose? How does John convince us that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? How does Luke show us the certainty of the things in which we've been instructed?

Not every book in the Bible has a clear purpose statement. Sometimes you must read the book and re-read the book and you must devote time to meditation and reflection in order to discern the purpose behind a book. I had to approach the book of Job that way some time ago when I taught that book in the adult Sunday School class. It wasn't until I had read the book many times that I eventually came to the conclusion that the purpose behind that book was that God might show us the course that redemption must inevitably take. The Christian will suffer and the reason he'll suffer is because his Savior has suffered and we're being conformed to his image.

So some books have purpose statements – other books require contemplation to discern their purpose. The question I want to raise now is this – what about a book in the Bible that is saturated with purpose statements? That's what you find in this first epistle of John. Listen to these purpose statements:

1Jo 1:4 *And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.*

1Jo 2:1 *My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not.*

1Jo 5:13 *These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.*

And in a similar vein we find these other statements in chp. 2. These statements don't precisely express purpose as much as they express reasons for John's writing. But since the difference between purpose for writing and reasons for writing is only a slight difference I include them:

1Jn. 2:12 *I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.*

1Jo 2:13 *I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him [that is] from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.*

1Jo 2:14 *I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him [that is] from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.*

1Jo 2:21 *I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.*

1Jo 2:26 *These [things] have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.*

You begin to see what I mean by this epistle being saturated with purpose statements or with reasons for the writing of this epistle. The repeating refrain is *I have written unto you that – or – I have written unto you because.*

The thought did occur to me while reading through this epistle that if you recognize that ultimately God himself is the author of this epistle and that *all scripture is given by inspiration of God* – then I don't believe we would be doing injustice to these verses in 1John by regarding them not merely as purpose statements that governed John's writing to the particular Christians he addressed long ago, but we may take these statements as expressing the various purposes that govern God's writing the entire Bible to us.

In other words, these verses can serve to answer a very important question that I want to consider this morning. The question simply put is this:

Why has God Written to Us?

I could express the question another way by asking – What purposes does the Bible serve? Why has God written to us – or what purposes does the Bible serve. I want to draw from these purpose statements in 1John this morning in order to answer those questions. Why has God written to us? Consider with me first of all that:

I. God has Written to Us That Our Joy may be Full

1Jo 1:4 *And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.*

Skeptics may question how a book like the Bible can serve such a purpose. After all – isn't this the book that reveals terrible things about God? Don't we have the account in this

book of Adam and Eve being driven from the garden of Eden? And don't we have the account in this book of the entrance of death into this perfect world that God created?

We do have those accounts and we have much more than that. We have the account of God destroying the world by a universal flood. And we have the fearful account of God descending upon Mt. Sinai with fire, the mountain shaking in a very fearful manner. And we see plainly in what God has written that he's the ruler of all nations and he moves with judgment upon the nations in accordance with his will.

And what's more – we have the account of a very fearful judgment to come. We have the account of the dead small and great standing before God's throne, being judged by their works, being cast into a lake of fire. There are, to be sure, fearful things contained in this book that God has written, and yet we have such a statement as this that we can take as coming from God himself directly to us – *these things I have written that your joy may be full.*

Our joy, you see, cannot be full without being a joy that is based on truth. This is what separates the joy of the Lord from the joy of the world. The joy of the world must be had by suppressing the truth of God or by denying the truth of God. The joy of the world must be gained by accommodating sin and that is why the world's joy and the world's peace is very shallow and temporal at best. It may bring pleasure to the flesh for a moment but in the end it leaves a sinner in misery and despair. And so we find Christ distinguishing between what he gives and what the world gives when he says in Jn. 14:27 *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

The world's joy or the world's peace can please the flesh but it can't fulfill the needs of one's heart. In order for our joy to be full, therefore, our joy must be based on truth, it must be consistent with the truth. In that connection note again the words of 1Jn. 2:21 *I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.*

The fulfillment of our joy, therefore, comes to us based on the truth, based on the truth of God's character and based on the character of sin and based on the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. It is true that we're sinners – it is true that God must and will judge sin – it is true that in our sin condemnation is what we deserve but note this purpose statement again from 1Jn. 2:12 *I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.*

This is what fulfills our joy – the knowledge that our sins are forgiven and that there is a basis for our sins to be forgiven. It's sometimes easy to overlook statements like the statement we find at the end of 1Jn. 2:12 note how it states that *your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.* They are not forgiven simply by God forgetting them. They're forgiven on account of Christ. *His is the propitiation for our sins* John writes in 2:2. In other words he bore the wrath of God that was our due. He took our condemnation to himself. This is the meaning of our sins being forgiven *for his name's sake.*

This is what completes or fulfills our joy – our sins are forgiven for his name’s sake. Now would you note with me here the truth that *these things are written*. These things are written that your joy may be full. If we’re going to gain the benefit, then, of what has been written to us, then we must cultivate the habit of reading what has been written.

We cannot establish and maintain our joy if we are not constantly reading what has been written to us. Show me a Christian who is lacking in joy and I’ll show you a Christian that is neglecting time in the word of God. Such a Christian knows what the joy of salvation is. He knows the joy that initially filled and thrilled his heart when he gained the knowledge of sins forgiven for Christ’s sake.

But his joy is little more than a memory to him. He could state and state honestly that he remembers something of the joy of the Lord but he has to visit his memory in order to know it. He could not say that the joy of the Lord is his present experience. He needs, like the Psalmist, to have the joy of salvation renewed to him. And here is the means by which God will renew that joy – *these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full*.

So we must read what is written. This is what can keep your joy full. This becomes all the more apparent in the next point I want to consider. We’ve seen that God has written to us that our joy may be full. Would you consider next that:

II. God has Written to Us that We May Maintain Communion with Him

It’s interesting to note in chp. 2 how John breaks down the reasons for the writing of his epistle among three classes of men. He makes reference to little children 1Jn. 2:12 *I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake*. He also makes reference to Fathers in the next verse – *I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning*. And he makes reference to young men – *I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one*.

Little children, Fathers, and young men – and if you look at these categories carefully and note what is said exactly to each specific category then you’ll notice that little children have something in common with the Fathers. And the thing they have in common with the Fathers is that they know God. Look at how this comes out in v. 13 *I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father*.

I think it would be fair to say that the knowledge of God transcends the ages that are addressed in these verses. In other words – little children, young men and fathers have this common – indeed all Christians of any age have this common – they know God. They don’t simply know about God but they know God.

This is the essence of salvation and eternal life – the Christian knows God. *And this is life eternal*, Christ says in Jn. 17:3 *that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent*.

And because you have come to know God by being reconciled to God through Christ – God has written to you. He has written to you so that your knowledge of him may grow and your communion with him may be constant.

This truth comes out very clearly in the opening words of this epistle. I never will forget the first time I saw this and how this puts our use of God’s written word in the right perspective. Look at what John says in the opening verses of this epistle.

1Jo 1:1 *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life.* Commentators believe that John is placing a strong emphasis on the tangibility of Christ here. He really was a man. He was not, as the heretics of that day suggested, some sort of a phantom man, he was truly God come in the flesh.

And in order to emphasize this truth all the more John follows up in the very next verse, v. 2 by saying (*For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us; That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you...*)

Now the thing to note in these verses is that John is referencing his own experience as well as the experience of the other apostles. It was John, and Peter and James and the others that heard and saw and looked upon and handled Christ, the Word of life. But notice now that the purpose in John declaring these things is not merely that others might be impressed with John’s experience. Look at what v. 3 goes on to say *That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship [is] with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*

These things are declared and are declared through writing in order that the ones to whom they are written may enter into fellowship (or communion) with Christ. Do you see, now, what these verses convey to us about the purpose that the written word of God serves?

God has not written to us simply to provide us with a theological textbook. And God has not written to us simply to provide us a rule book on what to do and what not to do. God has written to us in order that we may have fellowship with him and with Christ. *That which we have seen and heard declare (through writing) unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*

If I may interject an “aside” here, it is worth pointing out that the word *declare* is the same word that is at times applied to preaching. Preaching is a declaration of the gospel. And preaching, therefore, should serve the same purpose as the written word. If I am truly serving God’s purpose in preaching this morning, then you should not simply be listening to a lecture and you should not simply be having information imparted to you through this means of communication but you should in fact and in truth be able to enter into fellowship with God and with Christ through this part of the worship service.

I like to think of our worship this way. In our praying and in our singing God hears from us. And in the preaching of God's word we hear from God. And in this fashion our worship becomes a time of fellowship with each other but especially with God himself and with Christ.

Now doesn't that put the use of your Bibles in a different light? If all this book amounts to is a theology textbook or a code of conduct manual then it need not be a book that you have to read every day especially if you've read the whole thing a few times. But if these things are written because you know God and because God would have you fellowship with him, then this is not a book that can be set aside. To set aside this book is to set aside communion with God.

And it's worth noting here that there is a definite connection between the points I've been making in this study. These things are declared in writing *that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.* And then comes v. 4 *And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.*

Do you see the connection? Joy comes through communion with God and with Christ. Joy comes through our speaking to God in prayer and God speaking back to us through his written word. In this fellowship we hear him saying to our souls that he is our salvation. It's a blessing to know that God is our salvation but the blessing is even greater to hear God himself communicate it to our souls.

These two things taken together contribute to our assurance of salvation. And here is yet another purpose statement given to us near the end of this epistle. 1Jn. 5:13 *These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.* Do you see the assurance that is ministered to us through what God has written? *These things have I written...that ye may know that ye have eternal life.* This verse also shows us how we go from faith to faith. *These things have I written unto you that believe...that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.*

Why, then, has God written to us? He has written to us that our joy may be full and he has written to us because we know him and he desires that we know him more fully and more intimately and that we draw assurance of salvation from this experiential knowledge. Would you consider with me finally that:

III. God has Written to Us that We May Live Triumphantly

Note the words of 2:14 *I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.*

You are aware, of course, that the Christian life is a battle. We battle against sin and unfortunately there are times when we cave into sin. There's no point pretending it's not so. John tells us in 1:8 *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

And you are aware, I'm sure, that you battle against the world. Perhaps one of the most challenging exhortations in the New Testament is what we find in 1Jn. 2:15 *Love not the world, neither the things [that are] in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

We fight the battle of competing affections while we fight the battle with our flesh over sin. And of course you're aware that there are many deceptive forces blowing around that are authored by the devil himself. We've just come through one such deceptive force by seeing May 21 come and go and the world is still here.

The Christian is expected in all these things to be more than conquerors. And we are able to be more than conquerors through the word that is written to us. *I have written to you* John says to the young men, and God says to us *because the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.*

It's good to note here a connection between the word of God abiding in us and our overcoming the wicked one. The verse indicates to us that we not only read the word of God, but we memorize the word of God. And we not only memorize the word of God but we internalize the word of God by meditating upon it and by communing with God through it.

I love the way God himself says it to Joshua in Joshua 1:8 *This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.*

We know, of course, that Joshua did enjoy great success by leading the Israelites into the promised land and that generation of Israelites did what the previous generation could not do – they took possession of what God had given them. They believed what the previous generation had trouble believing and that is the truth that God delighted in his people.

Here is the key to living a life of triumph, then. We must believe that God delights in us. I know it's easy to ask – *why would God delight in me? I come short of his glory and I transgress his laws and my heart for him is not what I would desire it to be. How can I gain assurance that God delights in me?*

And the answer is that God has written unto you. God bears testimony of his love to you and his acceptance of you and his delight in you by what he has written unto you. And if you'll devote yourself to his word so that it may be said of you that the word of God abides in you then you too will be strong and you too will overcome the wicked one and you'll never be led astray the winds of false doctrine that create wrong thinking.

What a wonderful blessing, then, is this truth that comes to us from God – *I have written unto you.* He has written unto us that our joy might be full. He has written unto us that we might enter into communion with him. He has written unto us that we may live triumphantly and be overcomers of any and all things that would come between us and our God.

With all of these benefits and blessings communicated to our souls through what God has written to us it certainly leaves us without excuse that our Bibles should be closed books. May we indeed avail ourselves of the blessings that God intends for us to have by keeping close fellowship with him through his written word.