

## CHAPTER 2

### 1 JOHN

#### I. Preface, 1:1-4

1 John begins with a ponderous, formal preface, which is not John's normal style. However, there are similar passages in John (1:1-14; 6:22-24; 8:2-4; 13:1-4). The main verb for the first three verses is in v. 3, ἀπαγγέλλομεν *apangellomen*, "we declare." Then v. 4 follows with γράφομεν *graphomen*, "we write." These verses express the contents of John's declaration and writing, and the purpose of it.

#### A. Theme of the declaration: Jesus' incarnation, 1:1-2

Object of declaration—ὅ *ho*, neuter, "that which"

Impersonal word, message

Or personal, Christ the Logos

Preferred, because of personal references in context: heard, saw, beheld, handled

Neuter sometimes used for God (John 4:22; Acts 17:23), and for man (John 6:37; 17:2)

Preexistence of Christ, "was from the beginning"

Cf. John 1:1, "in the beginning"

Incarnation of Christ

Proven by: We have heard him  
We have seen him with our eyes  
We observed him

Our hands handled him (cf. Acts 17:27; Luke 24:39)

The word of life, word which is life (John 1:4; 14:6)

The theme reiterated, v. 2

The apostles' declaration

### **B. Purpose of the declaration, 1:3-4**

1) v. 3, Fellowship

κοινωνία *koinonia*

With disciples

With God

Fellowship is a fellowship of life, main theme of section

2) v. 4, Joy

Text variant: *our* joy, or *your* joy; UBS “our joy” {A}

“Might be made full,” periphrastic use for pf. pas. subj.

## **II. The believer's fellowship, 1:5 - ch. 2**

### **A. Tests of fellowship, 1:5 - 2:11**

John notes that fellowship, to be genuine, must have three elements: (1) a proper attitude toward sin, (2) an obedient life, and (3) love for the brethren. These three requirements are similar to the three main tests of 1 John for assurance of salvation: (1) obedience to God's commands, (2) love for the brethren, and (3) orthodox doctrine.

#### **1. A proper attitude toward sin, 1:5 - 2:2**

1) Not antinomianism, 1:5-7

God is light—related to three spheres:

Physical—glory of God  
Mental—truth of God  
Moral—holiness of God (primary thought here)

No darkness (John 3:19-20; 2 Cor 6:14; Eph 5:6-13; Jas 1:17)

v. 6, Cannot have fellowship if not obedience; 3<sup>rd</sup> class conditional sentence

Note moral nature of truth, “do the truth”

v. 7, Opposite truth

3<sup>rd</sup> class condition

“Walk in light” same meaning as “do the truth”

Benefits: (continual) cleansing, fellowship

From “all sin” (anarthrous); i.e., every kind of sin

2) Not perfectionism, 1:8-10

v. 8, False claim

Parallel with v. 10 shows that these people are ignorant (3<sup>rd</sup> class condition)

v. 9, Opposite truth: how a Christian deals with sin

ὁμολογέω *homologeō*, present—be confessing (3<sup>rd</sup> class condition)

Forgiveness, ἀφῆ *aphei*, aorist

Cleansing, καθάρσις *katharisei*, aorist

v. 10, Perfect tense: present state based on past sinless life

3) Not despair, 2:1a

Don't give up against sin

Because of thinking it impossible

Because of thinking it unimportant

#### 4) The remedy for sin, 2:1b-2

3<sup>rd</sup> class condition: if anyone sin (follows with “we”)

An advocate, παράκλητον *parakleton* (often a legal advocate; defense attorney)

Used only by John—John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; here

Cf. Heb 7:25, makes intercession for us always

Satan, our accuser, Rev 12:10

Christ’s righteousness required for him to be our . . .

Sacrifice, Heb 9:14, 22-23

Priest, Heb 7:26-28

Advocate, 1 John 2:1

Propitiation, ἱλασμός *hilasmos* (“atoning sacrifice” in NIV)

Used in NT only here and in 4:10

Related term ἱλαστήριον *hilasterion* (mercy seat, atonement cover), in Rom 3:25; Heb 9:5; and in LXX for כַּפֹּרֶת *kapporet*

Related verb ἱλάσκομαι *hilaskomai*, Luke 18:13 (be merciful); Heb 2:17 (make propitious)

Must refer to Christ’s death as the means by which God’s wrath for our sins is turned away from us (good discussions by Leon Morris in his works *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, pp. 125-85; *The Cross in the New Testament*, pp. 225-26, 348-50)

“Not for ours only, but also for the whole world”

Unlimited atonement?

- Could refer to ours as Jewish Christians, and the whole world as Gentile Christians
- Could refer to ours as present Christians, and the whole world as Christians everywhere and in all times
- Could simply mean that there is no other propitiation for anyone in the

world; he is the only one that the world has

- Could refer to the redemption of the cosmos as a whole

Generally agreed that his propitiation is not effective to whole world, only to believers (Rom 3:22, “unto all who believe”)

Thus the first requirement for fellowship with God and fellow Christians is a proper attitude toward sin. We must recognize that we have it; we must find forgiveness and cleansing in Christ; and we must not sin (the ideal).

## **2. Keeping his commandments, 2:3-6**

The second requirement has already been stated (obedient life); here it is elaborated. We must obey God’s commandments in order to enjoy fellowship with him and one another.

v. 3, Assurance

Obedience is the best way to attain assurance of salvation (cf. WCF 18, on assurance of faith)

v. 4, False profession

A man known by his fruits

v. 5, Progress

Love of God perfected (pf. tense) in the one keeping his word

“Love of God,” probably objective genitive (cf. 2:15; 3:17; 4:12; 5:3); subjective genitive clearly only in 4:9

v. 6, Obligation to follow Christ

A walk (Hebrew concept, הַלְכָה *hālākāh*, “way of life,” “daily conduct”) like Christ’s

## **3. Loving the brethren, 2:7-11**

John introduces the third, and perhaps most immediate, requirement for fellowship—loving the brethren.

vv. 7-8, Old and new command

Had it from the beginning (Lev 19:18; John 13:34, “new command”); probably beginning of their Christian lives, however

Yet new, *καινός kainos*, fresh

As light is replacing darkness in your lives

vv. 9, 11, Hatred

Hatred comes from and produces spiritual darkness

v. 10, Love

Love produces spiritual light

Love does not cause scandal

*σκάνδαλον skandalon* usually means causing others to stumble  
here, causes oneself not to stumble

### **B. Encouragement for true believers, 2:12-14**

Having presented a very idealized portrait of what a true Christian is and does, John encourages his readers. He knows that they fall short of the ideal. He is not writing this epistle to discourage them, but rather to reassure them, even while he exhorts them (cf. 1:4; 5:13).

This section tells why he is writing as he does (*ὅτι hoti*, because).

The groups:

Little children (*τεκνία teknia* and *παῖδια paidia*)—probably all the believers (cf. 2:1, 18, 28; 3:7; 5:21)

Fathers – older, established believers

Young men – younger believers (in Gk. lit., in 20s and 30s)

The repetition:

Probably for emphasis

Sometimes “I write,” sometimes “I have written”; probably no significance (epistolary aorist), used for variety

All the believers:

Their sins are forgiven  
They know the Father

The fathers:

They know the one from the beginning (older than they are!)

Their lives are testimony to his faithfulness

The younger believers:

Have overcome the evil one (perhaps recently) (perfect tense; conversion)  
They are strong  
Word of God remains in them

### **C. Destroyers of fellowship, 2:15-29**

Having discussed the tests of fellowship, and having given an encouragement to the believers, John now warns them about the enemies they will face. These enemies will destroy the fellowship they have with God and the church, unless the Christians are prepared to withstand them. John groups these enemies into two main types: the spirit of the world, and the spirit of antichrist.

#### **1. The world, 2:15-17**

v. 15a, Command

Pres. impv. + μή = continual attitude

Don't love world or things of world

κόσμος *kosmos*, world system here (cf. John 3:16)

v. 15b, Reason; such a love is against the Father

Cf. Jesus' statement, “You cannot love God and Money” (Matt 6:24 = Luke 16:13)

v. 16, The center of the world's love is not the Father, but the self

- Desire of the flesh; cf. σάρξ *sarx* in Paul as well
- Desire of the eyes
- Pride of life

ἀλοζονεΐα *alazoneia*, pride, ostentation of wealth, boasting

βίος *bios*, life, livelihood, possessions, accomplishments

Cf. narrative of Eve's fall in Eden (Gen 3:6), also Christ's temptation in the wilderness (Matt 4:3, 6, 9)

v. 17a, End of the world, passes away

v. 17b, End of the believer, remains forever

## 2. Antichrists, 2:18-29

v. 18, The last hour

Eschatological forces now at work

“You have heard that Antichrist is coming”—future Antichrist

Now many antichrists (2 John 7), sign of last days (Matt 24:5, 24)

v. 22, A way to identify modern antichrists; they deny that Jesus is the Messiah

v. 19, Apostasy from the fellowship

Doctrinal apostasy leads to separation from the fellowship; meaning of “heresy”

vv. 20-21, The enlightening anointing

χρῖσμα *chrisma*, anointing, material used

Related to χριστός *christos*, person anointed

“From the Holy One,” Holy Spirit, symbolized by oil

Text variant: “you all know” (UBS {B}), or “you know all things”

Cf. Isa 61:1; Acts 10:38; 2 Cor 1:21-22

The anointing teaches truth; cf. v. 27

But the anointing teaches truth using apostolic doctrine (revelation), 4:6.

vv. 22-23, Apostasy from the doctrine

Doctrinal orthodoxy in basic Christian truth (“the Messiah is Jesus”), a prerequisite for Christian fellowship, even for being a Christian

Note rule of Lane C. McGaughey, with ἐστίν *estin* the word(s) with the article is the subject; further work by E. V. N. Goetchius; good article by D. A. Carson, “The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel: John 20:31 Reconsidered,” *JBL* 106:4 (Dec., 1987) 639-51; esp. pp. 642-43.

vv. 24-25, The abiding promise

Constant faith in God’s promise leads the Christian to be faithful in doctrine and fellowship

3<sup>rd</sup> class condition; “if it remains”

vv. 26-27, The safeguarding anointing

(Note how the subjects keep revolving; cf. vv. 20-21; and vv. 22-23 with v. 19)

The spiritual enlightenment of God protects Christians from false teachers

Note that there is no excuse given here for a Christian to neglect his duties (obedience, doctrine, love); rather, the promise that God will protect the Christian who remains faithful in them.

vv. 28-29, Persistence in the truth

How to have boldness when Jesus is manifested (φανερωθῆ *phanerothe*) at his appearing (παρουσία *parousia*)

By abiding in him, we share his righteousness

“Has been begotten (born) of him”—pf. tense

v. 29, A transition to the next major section—sonship based on righteousness

3<sup>rd</sup> class condition: “if you know”

### **III. The believer’s sonship, ch. 3**

While the transition from the previous section has been anticipated already, in chapter 3 the emphasis clearly is more on our position as sons of God, and the resulting responsibility to live lives of righteousness. Remember the three tests of life: right doctrine, obedient life, and love of the brethren.

#### **A. Our obligation as children of God, 3:1-3**

v. 1, Present position

Amazing quality of love of God for us

δέδωκεν *dedoken*, pf. tense; we received it and still have it

“Children of God,” same terms as in John 1:12

“and we are” – UBS {A}

Result: world not know us

v. 2, Future prospect

3<sup>rd</sup> class condition; time uncertain

Christian goal—to be like Christ; perfected at second coming

v. 3, Resulting desire

Present purification of life

Thus, assurance of sonship does not produce carnal security, but is a powerful motive toward a present life of obedience.

#### **B. Sonship revealed by righteousness, 3:4-9**

False sonship: vv. 4-5, 6b, 8

v. 4, Definition of sin = lawlessness (*ἀνομία anomia*); disobedience to God's law

v. 5, Sinlessness of Jesus

v. 6b, Sin incompatible with being a Christian

v. 8, Sin and the devil

Devil's own sin "from the beginning"

Jesus destroys devil's work

Thus those who practice sin are false sons of God, are actually sons of the devil.

True sonship: vv. 6a, 7, 9

v. 6a, Christian to live a life of righteousness

v. 7, Doing righteousness reveals a righteous character

v. 9, The one begotten by God does not sin

γεγεννημένος *gegennemenos*, γεγέννηται *gegennetai*

His seed remains in him

Seed = Word of God, Holy Spirit (cf. parable of the sower)

Or seed = believer (remains in God)

### **C. Sonship revealed by love, 3:10-24**

Just as the true sons of God are shown by their righteous lives, so they are shown by their true love for God and their brethren.

v. 10, Transition, from righteousness to love

v. 11, Message summarized

v. 12, Negative illustration of Cain

“Slaughtered” his brother because of jealous hatred

vv. 13-15, Nature of hatred

World hates Christians

μεταβεβήκαμεν *metabebekamen*, pf. we have moved, migrated

Our love tells us we have entered into life

But their hatred shows them to be still in death

Hatred related to murder, ἀνθρωποκτόνος *anthropoktonos*

From κτείνω *kteino*, kill

Cf. Matt 5:21-22; interpretation of sixth commandment

vv. 16-18, Nature of love

v. 16, Love shown by Christ giving his life for us

Likewise, we ought to die for the brothers

vv. 17-18, Love shown in practical ways

Helping the needy (same principle as Jas 2:14-17)

βίος *bios*, property to be used, not loved (cf. 2:16)

vv. 19-21, Assurance of love

Love causes us to overcome our own natural doubts about our spiritual condition. It is an important part of our assurance of salvation.

vv. 22-24, Benefits of love

v. 22, Prayers answered

v. 24, Perseverance and assurance

vv. 22b-24a, Requirements for these blessings

Faith, keeping his commandments (especially to love one another)

## IV. The believer's assurance, ch. 4 - 5:12

Having treated of the three tests of life within the realms of Christian fellowship and Christian sonship—right doctrine of Christ, a righteous life, and love for the brethren—John now ties them together and relates them explicitly to our assurance of salvation. Assurance comes through truth, love, and faith.

### A. Assurance through truth, 4:1-6

v. 1, Warning to test the spirits

Danger of false prophets

False spirits contrasted to Holy Spirit (3:24)

Test, δοκιμάζω *dokimazo*, by Scriptures, agreement with apostles (same as 1 Thess 5:21)

vv. 2-3, The test defined

The confession: “Jesus Christ has come in the flesh”

—Or, “Jesus is the Messiah come in the flesh”

Pf. emphasizes person of incarnation more than fact of incarnation

Summarized in v. 3, “confesses Jesus”

There is a variety of readings for this confession (actually, failure of confession) in the Greek NT manuscripts. The UBS edition gives an {A} rating to the simple text, “every spirit who does not confess Jesus.” Other readings expand on the word “Jesus”; e.g., “Jesus Christ,” “Jesus having come in the flesh,” “the Lord Jesus having come in the flesh,” “Jesus Christ having come in the flesh,” etc. The phrase “having come in the flesh” apparently is drawn from verse 2.

Those who fail the test

Even neutrality is bad: “every spirit which does not confess”

“The Antichrist” which is coming (“man of lawlessness” in 2 Thess 2:3)

“Many antichrists” (2:18)—motivated by the same spirit

vv. 4-6, The test results for the believers

You emphasized

Confession of faith is an overcoming of the world

Believers not heard by the world, which hears itself

Believers hear the apostles

Therefore, the believers know that they have the Holy Spirit, and can be assured of their salvation. Reason: they receive the apostles’ doctrine and do not follow the spirit of the world/antichrist. Rather, they confess that Jesus is the Messiah and that he has come in the flesh.

## **B. Assurance through love, 4:7 - 5:3**

While one source of assurance is true belief in Christ and the doctrines of the apostles, another source of assurance is a heart-felt love for the believers. Both true faith and true love are the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Natural sinful man is incapable of them. Therefore, their existence in the heart of the believer is a strong evidence of the Holy Spirit’s work, and of true spiritual life.

### **1. Love, the evidence of God’s presence, 4:7-13**

vv. 7-8, The essence of God’s love

“Let us love one another”; cf. 2:7-11; 3:10-18

“Love is of God,” source of love

“God is love” (also in v. 16), a relative attribute (love for himself, love for us)

Does not exhaust what God is

vv. 9-11, The evidence of God’s love

God’s love shown by sending Christ to give us life

μονογενής *monogenes*, unique, one of a kind

Can be “only begotten,” Luke 7:12; 8:42

In LXX, precious, Ps 22:20; 35:17

In Koiné Gk., unique, one of a kind (as in Heb 11:17, Abraham & Isaac)

Cf. root from γίνομαι *ginomai* (aor. ἐγενόμην *egenomen*), has only one *nu*; not from γεννάω *gennaō*, with two *nu*'s

We are “begotten” by God by the new birth, but Christ uniquely, since he holds that relation by his very nature from eternity.

v. 10, God’s initiating love

ἱλασμόν *hilasmon*, propitiation, see under 2:2

v. 11, God’s love should cause us to love one another in the same way

vv. 12-13, The effect of God’s love

The Father unseen by men

The closest thing to seeing him is to see our love one for the other

The Holy Spirit in us causing this love is evidence of our being in God

## **2. The confession God’s love produces, 4:14-16**

These verses contain the testimony of the apostles who had seen God’s love manifested in the coming of Christ.

“Savior of the world,” only here and in John 4:42

The only Savior the world has

Confession that “Jesus is the Son of God” (or vice versa)

Argues against some Jewish heretical views which denied Jesus’ deity

Can be understood as a synonym for Messiah (as in Ps 2:7)

### 3. The fruits of love for God, 4:17 - 5:3

4:17-18, Confidence

Especially manifested in the future day of judgment

Incompatibility of perfect love and servile fear, which has to do with “punishment,”  
κόλασις *kolasis*

4:19-21, Brotherly love

v. 19, Text variant (UBS “A”), “We love, because he first loved us.” (“him” or “one another” understood)

Cannot love God and hate brother at same time

Seen . . . unseen

Prior commandment, Matt 22:37-39

5:1-3, Righteousness

v. 1, Active faith is the evidence of one being in a born-again condition (perfect tense)

Faith that “Jesus is the Messiah” (see note at 2:22)

Love for God the begetter, requires love for Christians, the begotten

vv. 2-3, Link loving God to doing his commandments

Commandments not βαρεῖαι *bareiai* (from βαρῦς *barus*) heavy, burdensome

Love for God is keeping his commands (as opposed to situation ethics)

### C. Assurance through faith, 5:4-12

So far John has taught that assurance of life comes from knowing the truth, loving the brethren, and loving God, shown by obedience to his commands. Now he sums up these concepts in the idea of faith (prominent words in this section, “faith,” and “bear witness”). Belief and life are so intertwined that they must coexist in the life of faith, and that life itself gives assurance of salvation.

## 1. The victory of faith, 5:4-5

Being begotten by God → faith → overcoming the world

Only NT use of noun νίκη *nike*, “victory” (verb νικάω *nikao*, “to gain the victory” and its substantive participle form ὁ νικῶν *ho nikon*, “the one overcoming” are often found in John)

Only Johannine use of noun πίστις *pistis*, “faith” (besides 4 uses in Revelation); John exceedingly frequently uses its verb form πιστεύω *pisteuo*, “to believe”

Required belief: “that Jesus is the Son of God”

## 2. The witness for faith, 5:6-12

John writes of two different types of witnesses that give certainty to our faith. One is the combined witness of the Spirit, the water, and the blood in the first coming of Christ; and the other is the continuing witness of God in the heart.

### a. The Spirit, the water, and the blood, 5:6-8

#### Textual note

The Trinitarian addition (*Comma Johanneum*) was added to late manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate and to a few very late manuscripts of the Greek: “. . . testify in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one. And there are three that testify on earth: the . . .” Originally this was an interpretation of the three witnesses placed in the margin of a Latin manuscript. From there it was later inserted into the text. It was later included in Gk. MSS 61, 629, 88 (marg), 635 (marg) dating from the 15th-17th centuries. Erasmus included it in his 3rd ed. under protest, whence it came into the KJV.

This Trinitarian reference was never mentioned by any church father until the end of the 4th century, in spite of the tremendous controversies in the church about this topic.

For further information, see Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek NT*, pp. 716-18; also his *The Text of the NT*, pp. 101-02. A long discussion, with facsimiles of MSS, is in Thomas Hartwell Horne, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures*, vol. 4, pp. 448-71.

#### The three witnesses

Holy Spirit, water, blood

“Water” is the hardest to interpret; possibilities:

- Water of birth, birth of Christ
- Water of baptism, baptism of Christ & witness of John and Father
- Water that came from side at death of Christ (John 19:34)
- Symbolical for purification and redemption
- Symbolical for Christian baptism (& Lord’s Supper)

Best interpretation seems to be the second: water of baptism. God witnessed to Jesus’ sonship when he was baptized (Matt 3:17). [interesting commentary favoring this view by Sir Isaac Newton, quoted by Horne, *Introduction to the Scriptures* 4/465]

“Blood” would include reference to his passion and resurrection, as God again proclaimed his sonship (cf. Rom 1:4)

### **b. The continuing witness of God, 5:9-11**

God’s witness is reliable, v. 9

To believe is to have God’s witness within oneself, v. 10

This witness tells us two things (v. 11; cf. Rom 8:16, “the Spirit bears witness that we are children of God”):

God has given us eternal life

This life is through his Son

### **3. The life of faith, 5:12**

Whoever believes in Christ already has the spiritual life of regeneration. Eternal life (including justification, adoption, and sanctification) is viewed as beginning at conversion. Belief is the evidence of spiritual life, and eternal justified life is the result of belief.

Regeneration → Faith → Justification (promise of eternal life) & adoption (sonship)

Cf. perfect tense in 5:1 and 2:29

(As opposed to Burdick, p. 358:

Belief → Regeneration → Love, righteousness,  
obedience)

The Arminian view of effectual calling sees faith as exercised by an unregenerate heart, a view which takes insufficient account of the effects of total depravity. It also confuses regeneration, the infusion of spiritual life, with justification, the granting of eternal life.

## **V. Conclusion, 5:13-21**

### **A. Primary purpose of the epistle, 5:13**

To know that they have eternal life, based on the three tests: doctrine, obedience, love

### **B. Assurance expressed in prayer, 5:14-17**

vv. 14-15, The believer's petitions

Promise to be heard by God

Petitions made according to his will

vv. 16-17, Believer's petitions for the sinning brother

Duty to pray for brethren, Eph. 6:18

Concern for those in sin, Gal. 6:1; Ja. 5:16, 19-20

God to give life (restoration) to "those who have sinned not unto death"

No command given with regard to those who have sinned unto death

It seems that the WCF 21:4 goes beyond John's statement when it states that prayer is not to be made for these people; John seems to say only that he is not requiring us to pray for these people; he does not forbid prayer for anyone.

"4. Prayer is to be made for things lawful, and for all sorts of men living, or that shall live hereafter; but not for the dead, nor for those of whom it may be known that they have sinned the sin unto death."

## The sin unto death

### a) Could be physical death

Committed by brother

NT examples, Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor 11:30

But problem in knowing when one has committed it, and problem in usage of “life” and “death” in 1 John (used spiritually)

### b) Probably spiritual death (cf. 3:14; 5:12)

Probably refers to professing Christian (although not demanded in context in vv. 16-17) who has finally rejected the gospel, or who has apostatized from the faith (cf. 2:19; Heb 6:4-6)

Note the thrust of this section (vv. 16-17). John’s concern is that the believers will pray for their brethren who are sinning. The mention of the sin unto death is only the recognition of an exception.

## **C. Three points of knowledge, 5:18-20**

Each of these three verses begins with the same word, οἶδαμεν *oidamen*, “we know.”

### v. 18, The Christian’s righteousness

Textual variant:

“The one begotten by God keeps him” (UBS {B})

“The one begotten by God keeps himself”

Probably the first reading is correct. Thus “the one begotten by God” refers to Christ, and the meaning is, “Christ, the one begotten by God, keeps the believer.” This interpretation fits the context, which follows with “and the evil one does not touch him.”

Result of this keeping: the Christian does not sin (as in 3:9)

### v. 19, The world’s wickedness

Whole world in control of the evil one (as in 2:15-17)

v. 20, The Lord's salvation

Our salvation the result of Jesus' coming and giving us understanding

***D. Timely warning concerning idols, 5:21***

Cf. 1 Cor 10:14, "flee from idolatry"