

The Purpose Driven Apostle

It is the mission of the Church to preserve, maintain and proclaim to the whole world the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the whole counsel of God; to gather into her fellowship those of every race and people who accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and promise obedience to Him; [and] to build them up in their most holy faith.

So reads the *Testimony* of the Reformed Presbyterian Church (25.2). And in essence, such was the purpose of the apostle John. His Gospel (Evangel) and first Epistle are both concluded and governed by purpose statements.¹ They both reflect a thoughtful, careful, and highly refined presentation of their related content. This content should not be seen as two distinct and unrelated bodies of data, but rather as one body of revelation with two complementary facets; much like a single coin with two sides. Indeed, the writings and overarching purpose statements are two. But the message is essentially one - the evangelization and edification of John's readers; not one without the other, but both together. The evangelized are edified. The purpose of this essay, therefore, is to make more apparent the apostle John as not only the 'purpose driven' apostle, but in doing this, also to show his apostolic purpose.

Donald Guthrie's comments are useful in setting the tone for what is considered hereafter:

The author himself furnishes his readers with so specific a statement of his purpose that this must form the starting-place for any discussion. Yet it has not always done so. Many scholars are more intrigued with John's beginning than with his conclusion, as a result of which John xx.31 is passed by with less than just attention, and theories of purpose are proposed which are entirely out of harmony with this statement.²

In an effort, then, to give 'just attention' to the purpose statements of both the Evangel and the Epistle, attention will be given to the explication and application of them.

¹ These purpose statements are: ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται ἵνα πιστεύ[σ]ητε ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ ἵνα πιστεύοντες ζωὴν ἔχητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ (*John* 20:31, 'These have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.'), and, Ταῦτα ἔγραψα ὑμῖν ἵνα εἰδῆτε ὅτι ζωὴν ἔχετε αἰώνιον, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ (*1 John* 5:13, 'These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.').

² Guthrie, *NT Introduction*, p.271. Such theories deemed 'out of harmony' with John's primary stated purpose are further distilled by Guthrie: that John aimed to supercede the Synoptic Gospels, to be a polemic against unbelieving Jews, to combat Gnosticism, to present a Hellenized Christianity, to correct a Baptist cult, to pursue an ecclesiastical polemic, to correct the Church's eschatology, and to preserve a tradition suitable for liturgical use. Guthrie's emphasis of John's specificity certainly can (and should) be applied to the first Epistle as well, as Stott indicates (*The Epistles of John*, p.184). Both Evangelic and Epistolary purpose statements should be in the foreground of discussion and interpretation.

Purpose is undoubtedly a prominent feature of the Johannine corpus. John employs the *ἵνα* -clause ('in order that; so that') approximately 213 times in a total of 194 verses. Some 145 occurrences are in the Evangel;³ 19 are found in the first Epistle. Surely John's use of the *ἵνα* -clause is not without significance.⁴

Having established John's affinity for the *ἵνα* -clause, we turn now to the explication of the purpose passages themselves.

The Apostolic Purpose of the Evangel (*John* 20:30-31)

John 20:30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

John 20:30 Πολλὰ μὲν οὖν καὶ ἄλλα σημεῖα ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐνώπιον τῶν μαθητῶν [αὐτοῦ], ἃ οὐκ ἔστιν γεγραμμένα ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ· 31 ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται ἵνα πιστεύ[σ]ητε ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ ἵνα πιστεύοντες ζωὴν ἔχητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ.

An operative term and starting point for grasping John's purpose is *σημεῖα* (signs; *σημεῖον*, sign). The word joins others which describe the miraculous power of God (cf. *Acts* 2:22; *Heb.* 2:4; *2 Cor.* 12:12).⁵ But distinct from these, *σημεῖον* 'signifies' a greater reality. As a 'sign' it grabs attention, and so points to, or 'indicates' (*σημαινω*), a spiritual truth therein revealed by (and about) God. There are 9 signs which are the focus of John's Evangel⁶: Jesus' changing water to wine (2:1-11), healing the royal official's son (4:46-54), healing the man sick for 38-years (5:1-9), feeding the 5,000 (6:1-14), walking on water (6:16-21), healing the man born blind

³ As a bare observation, this is rather striking in comparison to the occurrences of other Gospel writers – Matthew (39x), Mark (64x), and Luke (46x).

⁴ Morris (*Commentary*, p.92), in a brief refutation of *ἵνα* being employed imperatively at *John* 1:8, insightfully comments, 'It may be that John uses the construction as a way of hinting at the divine purpose which he sees working out in each of the happenings where this construction occurs. The telic force in *ἵνα* would be favorable to such a significance. John incidentally is very fond of constructions with *ἵνα*.'

⁵ Among the words, *τερας* (wonder) refers to the effect the miraculous has on the recipient or observer, i.e., surprise, amazement, or fear. *Δυναμις* (power) speaks of the demonstration of the divine influence in effecting that upon which it acts, i.e., a body being healed. At the same time, it should be noted that Jesus frequently (but not exclusively) called 'works' (*εργα*) what John and others referred to as 'signs' (cf. 5:36; 7:3; 9:3; 10:25,32,37-38; 14:10-11; 15:24). Morris (*Commentary*, pp.688-691) observes, 'They are distinctive works. They are not to be compared to other men...What to men are miracles, to God and to Christ are no more than "works". This is their normal way of working...What John is doing then is indicating the continuity of the work of God in the Old Testament with that which He does in the ministry of Jesus. This is seen in all manner of activities but especially in those of creation and salvation. The "wondrous works" of God are brought to their climax and fulfillment in the "works" of Christ.'

⁶ Although there are a total of nine, the first seven comprise the narrative body of the Evangel itself (chs. 2-11).

(9:1-7), raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44), raising Himself from the dead (2:19,21 and 10:17-18 with 20:1-29), and providing a large catch of fish (21:4-11).

Each of these signs indicate something of Jesus as the Father's Son and commissioned Messiah (per 5:36; 10:25). Jesus' change of water into wine indicates that the 'glory' therein manifest will be most fully displayed at his 'hour' of death (cf. 2:4,11).⁷ His healing of the royal official's son demonstrates that well being originates in 'the word Jesus spoke' (4:50,53). The healing of the 38-year sick man on the Sabbath was occasion to associate publicly the Son's person and work with the Father's person and work, as well as underscore the spiritual nature of Sabbath and work (5:17-18 and ff.). The feeding of the 5,000 reveals Christ as the heavenly Bread of life (6:35,41,48,51,58), a Bread which contrary to the bread of the old covenant, actually gives eternal life (6:32-33,48-58). The bestowal of sight to the man born blind affirms that, for those in darkness, Christ is 'the true Light, which coming into the world, enlightens every man' spiritually (1:9). Lazarus' resurrection testifies to Christ as not merely a means or occasion of resurrection, but Himself 'the resurrection and the life.' Therefore 'he who believes in [Him] will live even if he dies,' and more, 'everyone who lives and believes in [Him] will never die' (11:25-26). So, the signs point to and reveal Jesus in His capacity of Messiah. They truly are means to ponder the Father's revelation in Christ His Son.

John notes basic points concerning the signs of Christ. They were 'many' (πολλα).⁸ Also, they were 'performed' by Jesus (ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς) 'in the presence of His disciples' (ἐνώπιον τῶν μαθητῶν [αὐτοῦ]).⁹ But the main structural emphasis concerning the signs is the contrast between '[the signs] which are not written' (ἃ οὐκ ἔστιν γεγραμμένα) and 'these [which] have been written' (ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται); the *unrecorded* signs (v.30) contrasted with the *recorded* signs (v.31). Through *this* emphasis and contrast concerning the signs, John declares his purpose.

His statement of purpose actually contains two purposes; an initial purpose, and an associate purpose. The initial purpose for recording Jesus' signs is: 'so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God' (ἵνα πιστεύ[σ]ητε ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ). The associate purpose hinges on and flows from the initial purpose. It is: 'that believing you may have life in His name' (καὶ ἵνα πιστεύοντες ζωὴν ἔχητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ). John selected and recorded what he did, then, 'so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name' (v.31). His initial desire is that his readers 'believe,' and in consequence to believing, that they 'have life.'¹⁰ All signs recorded are

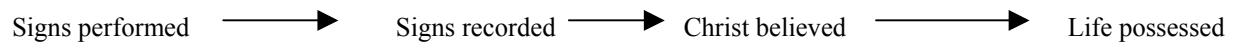
⁷ John associates Jesus' glory with His death. His glorification was, in essence, His crucifixion (cf. 12:23; 13:31-32; 17:1,4). For an excellent study of this theme see Edward Donnelly, "Glory and Suffering in the Fourth Gospel," *Reformed Theological Journal*, Vol.18 (November 2002), pp.5-15.

⁸ The forward placement of πολλα iterates the vast quantity of Jesus' signs, as John reiterated at the conclusion of the Evangel: 'There are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written' (21:25). As well, there is here legitimate (though implicit) reason as to why John necessarily was selective in his catalogue of Jesus' signs (20:30).

⁹ Mention of the particular audience seems at first to be incidental. But upon consideration of the special role the disciples would fulfill as eyewitnesses (15:27; 19:35; 21:24; cf. also *Acts* 1:8; 2:32; *Luke* 1:2; 24:48; *2 Pet.* 1:16), their observation of the totality of signs performed is noted intentionally. Therefore the 'other signs performed' (ἄλλα σημεῖα ἐποίησεν) refer to *all* signs Jesus ever performed, and not merely to those done after His resurrection or to those recorded in the Evangel. Additionally, Jesus said, 'Blessed are they who have not seen' the signs Thomas had seen and yet 'believe' (20:29). This creates a fitting point (and reason) for John the eyewitness to introduce his purpose as he has, and where he has.

¹⁰ Eternal life is associated with saving faith, the former realized through the latter (3:15-16; 5:24; 6:40,53,57-58; 8:24; 11:25-26).

recorded in order to attain that great end – faith, which therein possesses life. The direction of John’s thought and purpose can be represented visually as follows:



But John’s purpose is neither mechanical nor impersonal. In view is not a mere transaction of phases through which the reader should go (or be taken) on account of apprehending the signs. Rather, to believe and possess life is for a person to come to the very person of the Christ (5:40) and to know God through Him (17:3). This is highly personal. Saving faith is centered on the real, living person who has revealed the Father. Thus, John purposed to bring his reader to believe that the real, historical person of Jesus is ‘the Christ’ (ὁ Χριστός) who is ‘the Son of God’ (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ).¹¹ These aspects of Jesus’ person confront the reader.

The designation ‘Christ’ is the Greek term for ‘anointed one.’ In view is Jesus in His capacity as the long-awaited Messiah. The *Westminster Larger Catechism* (A.42) aptly summarizes the biblical meaning and import of the term:

Our Mediator was called Christ, because he was anointed with the Holy Ghost above measure; and so set apart, and fully furnished with all authority and ability, to execute the offices of prophet, priest, and king of his Church, in the estate both of his humiliation and exaltation.

John portrays the Christ as active in these offices. Seeing Him in the role of Prophet is anticipated by the Levitical delegation’s question to the Baptizer (1:21,25), and likewise considered by the Samaritan woman (4:19) and the crowd of 5,000 (6:14). The attendants at the Feast of Booths also perceived a peculiar unction in Him, and so professed, ‘This is certainly the Prophet!’ (7:40). The man whose sight was restored acknowledged the same when asked (9:17). The many occasions of Jesus’ referencing His being ‘sent’ by the Father (12:49; 20:21; cf. 5:23,36-37; 6:44,57; 8:16,18,42; 10:36) further emphasize His prophetic call as one in line with the prophets formerly ‘sent’ (*Exod.* 3:12-15; *Jer.* 7:25; *John* 1:6).

Jesus also was recognized (and confessed) in terms of His kingly office as well.¹² Nathanael’s confession was, ‘You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel’ (1:49). The final entry into Jerusalem saw the Christ heralded as ‘King of Israel’ (12:13). He proclaimed His kingliness before Pilate (18:33-37), who later acknowledged Him as such (19:14-15), and crucified Him with public testimony as being ‘King of the Jews’ (19:19-22). Certainly, the multitude’s confession had only political and militaristic overtones that reflected the then common perception of Israel’s Messiah. This explains why Jesus ‘found a young donkey’ in order to portray the true nature of the messianic king as ‘humble and [so] mounted on a donkey’ (cf. 12:14-15 with *Zech.* 9:9). Similarly, Jesus withdrew when He perceived that the 5,000 He fed were ‘intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king’ (6:15). He would not

¹¹ Carson (*The Gospel*, p.662) insightfully notes concerning the Greek text, ‘...it can be shown that, with very high probability, the *να*-clause must on syntactical grounds be rendered “that you may believe that the Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus.”’ Carson makes this observation in the context of providing arguments in favor of an evangelistic purpose for the Evangel.

¹² Guthrie (*Introduction*, p.272) goes too far in emphasizing this as the proper sense of ὁ Χριστός to the exclusion of other facets.

allow misperceptions of His person to commingle with supposed allegiance to Him. And so, John often presented the Christ's true kingly office by contrast to the claims of the populace.

The priestly role of Christ's office was not ever confessed with public, explicit clarity as the prophetic and kingly offices. We read of no one voicing the words, 'You are a priest.' But priestly imagery is peppered throughout the Evangel. As the Word is made flesh (1:14), He, like a true priest, is able to sympathize with human weakness, being characterized by human traits also, i.e., weariness (4:6), thirst (4:7; 19:28), sorrow (11:33,35), etc. His many healings demonstrate His affinity with a humanity touched by weakness. Jesus is 'the Lamb of God' who in His death was a true sacrifice which 'takes away the sin of the world' (1:29,36). His voluntary death (10:17-18) would further reveal Him as not merely 'Lamb' but therein 'Priest,' since He offers Himself. As well, His prayer under the shadow of the approaching cross is commonly regarded as His 'priestly' prayer (17:1-26).

And so all these elements – prophet, priest, and king – should be understood as embodying the nature and function of 'the Christ.' As 'the Christ' Jesus is the Prophet who declares and explains the truth concerning God. He is the Priest who offers Himself in death, as well as makes intercession, for those who believe. He is the King who subdues to Himself those who believe, ruling and defending them, restraining and conquering all His and their enemies.

John has written, then, that the reader in this way regard Jesus as 'the Christ.' And so, the Baptizer rightly announced 'I am *not* the Christ' when the Levitical delegation came (1:20; cf. 3:28), but instead pointed men to the One who would occupy that position. Thus, at his bidding, the first disciples in time confessed, 'We have found the Messiah,' which the apostle John noted and translated as meaning 'the Christ' (1:35-37,40-41). John's purpose is especially fulfilled in Martha, who 'believed [Jesus] is the Christ, the Son of God' (11:27). There apparently was much public discussion among the people, both Jewish (7:25-31, 40-43; 10:24) and Samaritan (4:25,29), as to the nature and identity of the Christ for there to be implicit confessions of faith in the Christ among them.

A corollary to Jesus being 'the Christ' is that He is 'the Son of God' (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ). This too is a proper description of 'the Christ,' and sometimes found in conjunction with that reference, as demonstrated by the high priest's question (*Mark* 14:61) or by the confessions of Peter (*Matt.* 16:16), John the Baptizer (*John* 1:34), Nathanael (1:49), and Martha (11:27). The title also admits of the divine nature of Jesus the Christ. Jesus made this plain in His use of Psalm 82 to buttress His claim of unity with the Father (10:30) over against the readiness of the Jews to stone Him on account of making Himself 'out to be God' (v.33). The argument goes like this: If it was said to civil judges that they are 'gods' (i.e., authorized by God with His authority to judge righteously, per *Psa.* 82:6), then how much more appropriate it is for the very Son of God to set forth His true, essential identity with the Father (vv.35-36). Jesus possesses His position as Son of God not by the new birth and faith (per 1:12-13), but by eternal existence. He is 'from above' and 'not of this world' (8:23; cf. also vv.14,58 and 17:5,24) and 'had come forth from God and was going back to God' (13:3).

Yet there is more in the designation 'Son of God' than admission of deity. It also communicates, as noted above, the exercise of a prophetic commission.¹³ It is the Son of God

¹³ Dodd (*Interpretation*, pp.254-255), although emphasizing the description 'Son of God' as primarily a reference to deity, also sees it as a reference to the prophetic activity of Messiah. He has compared John's Gospel to several Old Testament passages, words, themes, and characteristics of the prophets that are similar to those of Jesus as 'Son of God.' Ridderbos (*Gospel*, p.91) helpfully notes, 'However much the fulfillment in the coming of Christ...pushes the Sonship of Christ back to "the beginning," this does not mean that in the Fourth Gospel "Son of God" has acquired

sent by His Father, who being the only One who has seen God and rested in His bosom, that ‘has explained Him’ (1:18). So the title ‘Son of God’ communicates the constant union and communion between the Father and the Son not only ontologically, but also economically; not only with regard to eternity, but also in regard to all the facets of the works of revelation and redemption in history.

Thus, the Son, as the Word, ‘was with God in the beginning’ (1:1-2), ‘in His bosom’ most intimately (1:18). He shared glory with the Father ‘before the world was’ (17:5). In this context was the command to accomplish redemption for all whom the Father gave to the Son (17:2,6,9,24; 6:37,39; 10:29) given by the Father and accepted by the Son (10:18; 4:34). Therefore Jesus voiced the redemptive mission in the context of the Father’s ‘sending’ (3:16-17), it being truly ‘His work’ to be ‘accomplished’ by His Son at the cross (cf. 4:34 with 17:4; 19:28,30).

As well, the entire gamut of privilege held by the Son, and redemptive ability executed by the Son, consists in a sharing of it with His Father (5:19-20,26). Like the Father, the Son also raises the dead and gives life (v.21), judges (vv.22,27), and receives honor (v.23). Even as the Father is a true object of faith, so also is the Son (14:1). Therefore, to ‘see the Son’ is truly to ‘see the Father’ (14:9). Both the Father and Son have sent the Spirit (14:26; 15:26), who in turn takes what properly is the Father’s and the Son’s and makes it the possession of the believer (16:12-15). To believe in the Christ as ‘the Son of God,’ then, means to apprehend and enter in to the glorious, Spiritual fellowship of the Father and the Son on account of His finished, applied work of redemption (per 14:23; 17:3, 20-24; cf. 1 *John* 1:3).¹⁴

The nine signs, and related commentary, serve then to summons the reader to saving faith in the Christ, the Son of God.¹⁵ Indeed, such was fulfilled in His disciples who ‘believed in Him’ after His first miracle at Cana (2:11). Many during the Feast of Passover ‘believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing’ (2:23). The royal official, too, ‘believed, and his whole

an exclusively ontological significance abstracted from its “official” messianic meaning.’ Vos’ thorough treatment (*Self-Disclosure*, pp.140-141) rightly summarizes and unfolds the Christ’s Sonship as *moral* (child of God), *messianic* (description of office), *nativistic* (the human nature ascribed to the supernatural paternity of God), and *trinitarian* (referencing eternity and ontology).

¹⁴ The Evangel highlights significant benefits of believing in relation to this life-communion: sonship (1:12), acquittal (3:36), escape from death (3:16; 5:24; 11:25-27), fruitfulness (15:5), and brotherly unity (17:20-21).

¹⁵ There is some disagreement among interpreters as to the precise understanding of John’s initial purpose. The differences arise from the variant readings of the first occurrence of the verb ‘believe,’ whether it should be viewed as a strict present subjunctive (πιστευητε, ‘continue to believe’) or an ingressive aorist subjunctive (πιστευσητε, ‘come/begin to believe’). Both readings find support among early manuscripts, the only possible textual balance to the earlier witness of the present subjunctive would be that the aorist subjunctive has more numerous witnesses. But all this is at best inconclusive. C.K. Barrett (*Gospel*, p.575) is surely wise when he notes, ‘The question is raised but cannot be determined by the tenses, even if we could determine the tenses.’ As expected, reputable commentators line up on each side, some affirming the ‘Evangelistic view’ (Carson, *Gospel*, p.661; Dodd, *Interpretation*, p.9; Guthrie, *NT Introduction*, p.271; Morris, *John*, p.855-856 ; Stott, *Epistles*, p.184) and others the ‘Edification view’ (Hendriksen, *John*, pp.34-35, 466-467; Ridderbos, *Gospel*, p.652). Carson’s survey of the interpreters concludes that those who take up the ‘Edification view’ do so primarily on the basis of ‘reconstruction of the setting of the Fourth Gospel as a whole rather than on particular details in [v.31].’ Admitting a preferred inclination toward the aorist subjunctive reading, and thus the ‘Evangelistic view,’ this writer nonetheless recognizes that it is in God’s providence that the exact rendering has been kept from us, leaving us an important lesson to seek both the evangelization and edification of many via God’s Word; and that God’s Spirit in fact accomplishes both by means of John’s Evangel.

household' in consequence of his son's healing (4:53). Nicodemus' interest was peaked by the signs, becoming convinced of Jesus' supernatural identity, for as he confessed, 'no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him' (3:2). Later we read of Nicodemus' apparent faith (7:50-52; 19:39). Apparently the man sick for 38 years also believed upon being healed (5:14). Martha, Mary, and some of the Jews 'believed in Him' upon the raising of Lazarus (11:27,45). And of course, the premier sign of Jesus' own resurrection was a means to confirm the disciples' faith (20:8,16-20,25-29).

However, the purpose of 'believing unto life' was not always realized through the signs among the people. The feeding of the 5,000 at John 6 presents an overview of the manner in which people regarded (or, disregarded) Jesus' signs, and came short of belief. Upon being fed from Jesus' miraculous supply of food, the people 'saw the sign which He had performed,' but had not come to see what the sign indicated of the Christ Himself. Although they saw in some sense that He was 'the prophet who is to come into the world,' their inner thought was to make Him king according to their own political, self-serving end (vv.14-15; cf. Jesus' brothers at 7:3-5). They also viewed and desired the signs for their own selfish ends. Jesus' indictment was, 'You seek Me not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled' (v.26). They sought the Christ insofar as their physical, temporal desires were met. The thought was also prevalent that signs justified belief, and that in the absence of signs, then, there was in reality no call to belief. Many would not believe unless they first saw signs, as they said, 'What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do you perform?' (v.30; cf. 4:48). Such questions were in reality a testing of God in unbelief, and not an exercise of belief in the Christ.

But no attitude toward (and reasoning about) the signs was as unfaithful as that of the religious leaders. The ground on which they rejected the Christ was 'How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?' (9:16). Their prior commitment to human tradition regarding the Sabbath, and thus a consequent and erroneous notion that Jesus was therefore a sinner, led them away from the truth and into further hardness of heart. And moreover, 'though He had performed so many signs before them, they were not believing in Him' (12:37). They suppressed the truth in unrighteousness.¹⁶

In review, we have seen John's initial purpose of bringing his reader to saving faith in Jesus the Christ, the Son of God in conjunction with careful consideration of the recorded signs Jesus performed. A necessarily related purpose to this initial purpose is that through faith one possess life, i.e., a full participation in and enjoyment of Spiritual communion with the Father and the Son. Although we have taken the view in this essay that the Evangel was written purposely for the evangelization and conversion of the reader, it at the same time provides the result of edification and confirmation to those already believing in Christ as the Son of God. This is made more explicit when exploring the first of John's Epistles.

The Apostolic Purpose of the Epistle (*1 John 5:13*)

1 John 5:13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

¹⁶ The result of the signs, much like the parables, was that a person was either enlightened and drawn toward the thing (or, One) signified, or else hardened contrarily. This explains the divisions that occurred among the religious leaders (7:30-31; 9:15-16; 10:19-21; 11:47-48; 12:37-43) and general crowd of people (7:40-43).

1 John 5:13 Ταῦτα ἔγραψα ὑμῖν ἵνα εἰδῆτε ὅτι ζωὴν ἔχετε αἰώνιον, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ.

As the Evangel was penned ‘so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that believing you may have life in His name,’ the Epistle was written ‘to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.’ The purpose of the Evangel was the *conversion* of the reader to saving faith. Of the Epistle it is the *confirmation* of the reader in saving faith.¹⁷ The Evangel was written chiefly for persons to become believers, and so possess life, whereas the Epistle was written to believers to become assured about their having come to possess life.¹⁸

The vocabulary between the two passages is similar, which further supports the conviction of their complementarity in John’s overarching purpose of evangelization accompanied by edification:

<i>John 20:31</i>	<i>1 John 5:13</i>
‘these things have been written’ (ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται)	‘these things I have written’ (Ταῦτα ἔγραψα)
‘so that you may believe’ (ἵνα πιστεύ[σ]ητε)	‘to you who believe’ (ὑμῖν...τοῖς πιστεύουσιν)
‘...the Son of God...’ (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ)	‘in the name of the Son of God...’ (εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ)
‘...you may have life in His name’ (ζωὴν ἔχητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ)	‘...you may know that you have eternal life’ (εἰδῆτε ὅτι ζωὴν ἔχετε αἰώνιον)

Even as there is complementarity between Evangel and Epistle in terms of vocabulary and basic structure, there is also complementarity in the placement of the purpose passage in relation to the writing as a whole. Technically speaking, the demonstrative pronoun ‘these’ (ταῦτα) could qualify either what proceeds (5:14ff.) or what precedes (5:12). And if it qualifies what precedes, it could qualify either vv.11-12, the pericope of vv.1-12, or even the entire letter

¹⁷ Such distinction is reflected also by the framers of the Westminster standards. They consistently employed John 20:31 in regard to conversion unto salvation (*Larger Catechism*, 43; *Shorter Catechism*, 24) and 1 John 5:13 in regard to assurance of salvation (*Confession*, 18.1,3; *Larger Catechism*, 172; *Shorter Catechism*, 36).

¹⁸ Following the initial-associate purpose idea of John 20:31, there are other purposes in association with the main purpose stated at 1 John 5:13. John’s use of the *ἵνα* -clause elsewhere reveals his desire for the believers’ true, apostolic fellowship (1:3), and thus, fuller joy (1:4), and avoidance of sin (2:1). But these all fit under the rubric of the overarching purpose of 5:13. The several *οτι* (‘because’) clauses employed by John (2:12-14, 21) should not be read as purpose clauses, and so motivations for the Epistle, but rather as bases on which he reinforces his teaching.

to the point of 5:12. It is accurate, and in accord with John's style in the Evangel, to regard the purpose passage of 5:13 as basically qualifying the entirety of the letter, and in essence, concluding it (with some final material yet forthcoming, vv.14-21). The passage of 5:13 forms with 1:4 an *inclusio*, thus framing the body of 1:5 – 5:12 as the major section of the Epistle, and that which John especially has in mind for the assurance of knowledge. Chapters 1:5 – 5:12, then, are the 'these things' (ταῦτα) of 5:13.¹⁹

John wrote his first Epistle against the backdrop of incipient Gnosticism.²⁰ The Gnostics, or Γνωστικοί, (so-called per the Greek word [επι]γνωσις / 'knowledge') were those committed to a speculative, esoteric knowledge as the means of communion with deity. This heretical outgrowth of Judaism, mixed also with philosophical nuances of pagan philosophy and Christian themes, was a threat especially to the immature state of the 1st century Church even though its aberrant views became much more mature in the following century. Its syncretistic nature threatened to corrode the Church's faith and life. It posited a dualistic schema in which the good deity relates to humans through a chain of emanations, which in sum, are the fullness of the divine essence (Pleroma). As a result of a 'fall' within this Pleroma, attributed to the evil deity (Demiurge), the world was created. Thus it, and all matter, is inherently evil. This led to two theoretical and ethical implications: one ascetic (i.e., resist the desires of the flesh to avoid contamination), the other antinomian (i.e., indulge the desires of the flesh, since unavoidable and inconsequential). Deliverance came through association with (and advancement in) the secret knowledge of the Pleroma.²¹

The Gnostic teaching had drawn away alleged believers from the fellowship (2:19). Its syncretism with the apostolic gospel meant a denial of the true humanity of Christ (1:1; 2:22-23; 4:2-3),²² an indifference to sin (1:8 – 2:1; 3:4-6,9), and an absence of love (2:9-11; 3:11; 4:11). Thus the believers needed to persevere in these truths, and through them, they would 'know that they have eternal life' (5:13). John has in view the assurance of true believers over against the apostasy of false believers.

The method of addressing these three prominent, Gnostic denials was to restate the Christian teaching over against them comparatively and positively. In doing this, John advanced three 'tests' for the believers' assurance of salvation – a doctrinal test (proper belief in God's Son), an ethical test (obedience to God's commands), and a relational test (love to fellow believers). The Epistle is structured around these. John here gives a divine standard of comparison, whereupon sober self and life examination, one can 'know' of his standing before God and whether he possesses eternal life (5:13). The 'tests' can be arranged as follows²³:

¹⁹ Note also the point of demarcation which begins the formal body of the Epistle at 1:5, 'This is the message...' (Καὶ ἔστιν αὕτη ἡ ἀγγελία).

²⁰ Chapter 2:26, employing another now familiar 'these things I have written' (Ταῦτα ἔγραψα), addresses the Gnostic influence. As well, John's frequent usage of the verb 'know' (οἶδα [128x], γινώσκω [14x]) throughout the Epistle not only provides tactical play against the Gnostics, but also reinforces the believers' true knowledge as revealed by the Holy Spirit and received through the apostolic preaching.

²¹ The above condensation is a further condensation of Berkhof's useful overview (Berkhof, *History*, pp.45-50).

²² This particular denial also deprived them of all benefits of His redemptive work accomplished in the flesh, i.e., forgiveness and cleansing (1:9), advocacy (2:1), peace (2:2), answered prayer (5:13-15), and victory over the world (5:5). In short, the Gnostics were deprived of the all Spiritual life and communion with the Father (2:23).

²³ These 'tests' have been articulated in slightly different ways by different modern commentators, all of whom (whether knowingly or not) follow the basic idea as promulgated by Robert Law in his 1885 commentary, *The Tests of Life: A Study of the First Epistle of St. John* (cited in Stott, *The Epistles*, p.53).

- 1:1-4 > Doctrinal test, which also serves as Introduction to the Epistle
- 1:5-10 > Ethical test
- 2:1-2 > Doctrinal test
- 2:3-6 > Ethical test
- 2:7-11 > Relational test
- 2:12-17 > *1st summary combination of all 3 tests*
- 2:18-28 > Doctrinal test
- 2:29 – 3:10 > Ethical test
- 3:10-20 > Relational test
- 3:21-22 > Ethical test
- 3:23-24 > *2nd summary combination of all 3 tests*
- 4:1-6 > Doctrinal test
- 4:7-13 > Relational test
- 4:14-15 > Doctrinal test
- 4:16-21 > Relational test
- 5:1-4 > *3rd summary combination of all 3 tests*
- 5:5-12 > Doctrinal test
- 5:13-15 > Statement of purpose behind the tests
- 5:16-21 > Ethical test, which also serves as Conclusion to the Epistle

Although the tests do not follow an observably consistent pattern, each cycle (or rotation) begins with the doctrinal emphasis on the person or work of Christ. Afterward, the doctrine is applied in terms of ethics and relationships within the cycle. These ‘tests’ revolve, or spiral, throughout the Epistle, always reiterating and/or expanding the material, but always focusing on the realization of John’s chief purpose – that those possessing eternal life might indeed know that they have it. Such was not an esoteric knowledge available to only a few, but a plain knowledge apprehended by all the redeemed. As a review, we can illustrate John’s purpose through the Epistle as follows:

Christ Believed / Life Possessed → Epistle Written → Life Examined → Knowledge Confirmed

Applications from the Johannine Purpose

We have so far considered points of explication for the above two Johannine purpose passages. We now consider five points of application that can be derived from them. We shall limit them to points that relate to, and affect, the preacher's ministry of the Word among God's people. It should go without saying that the preacher should, like John, set forth the truth of Christ with plainness, passion, and of course, purpose. But in addition to these, and among the many others that could be mentioned, we note the following.

First, *the preacher must acknowledge the fallen condition of man*. It is not true preaching that does not consider humanity in its fallenness. The preacher's audience, as was a significant section of John's audience, does not consist merely of those who are disinterested in Christ, or those dominated by self-indulgence. Indeed, it consists of those who are dead in sin.²⁴ John acknowledged this when he announced as his end purpose that his readers 'have life' in the Son of God (20:31). This assumes spiritual deadness. To acknowledge the fallen condition of man means that, like John, the preacher's purpose will be to deal with the dark themes of sin, guilt, misery, judgment, and hell. It means also that he prayerfully will wait on the Holy Spirit to breathe new life over the valley of dry bones before him. And still, he will be gentle, patient, and persevering in his message until God raises the dead to stand in Christ.

In connection with this, *the preacher must announce the redemptive truth of Messiah*. John's purpose was purely Christ-centered. His Evangel (and Epistle) are centered on Christ – His origin, signs, words, benefits, indeed His very person and office as 'the Christ, the Son of God' (20:31). Whether John relayed the words of Christ Himself, or the testimony of the Old Testament, it all finds its 'yes' and 'Amen' in Christ. Every preacher should resist the moralistic, how-to style of our age, and instead declare the saving message of the bloody cross, empty tomb, and occupied throne. He should declare the Christ died and risen for His people, as well as their death and resurrection in Him. Christ's person and work is the sum and substance of preaching.

But simply to affirm the fallen condition of man, and announce the redemptive truth of Messiah, is not in itself sufficient. *The preacher must at the same time admonish the hearer to believe in Christ.*²⁵ John's purpose was clear both in his mind and on his parchment, 'These things have been written *that you may believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that *believing* you may have life in His name' (20:31). The proclamation that sounded from John's parchment must again echo in our preaching. At every point we too must call, invite, urge, and summon our hearers personally to come to (and trust in) God's appointed Provision of salvation.

In conjunction with the call to faith, *the preacher must address every believer's need of assurance*. Believers are of various sorts; weak and strong, humble and proud, doubtful and presumptuous, true and hypocritical. Those marked by uncertainty in Christ must be assured. Those who presume must be warned. Those of the truth should be confirmed; and those in hypocrisy must be exposed. Preaching that aims at the whole person, engages the whole mind, and penetrates the whole heart will see these purposes fulfilled in Spiritual power. The Spiritual

²⁴ Chapell (*Preaching*, pp.40-44, 201-202) helpfully articulates what he calls the Fallen Condition Focus (FCF) and how it fits into purposeful preaching. In fact, he delineates the FCF under the heading 'Purpose' (p.41).

²⁵ Greidanus (*The Modern Preacher*, p.90) rightly notes, 'The first four historical books of the New Testament are not called histories or biographies but Gospels, alerting us to the fact that the Gospel writers are interested not merely in producing a photograph of the past but in proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ in such a way that it will elicit from the readers/hearers a response of faith (see John 20:31).'

who sit under it will in time ‘know’ whether they have eternal life (5:13) and so live with ‘complete joy’ (1:4).

Finally, *the preacher must arm the believer against error*. Apostolic preaching creates a discerning person. Whatever the heresy of the age, whatever the perversion of the truth, those taught how to think will know what to avoid and what to affirm. The ‘things’ John wrote plainly, but pointedly, were for the assurance of the believer, entailing, too, the arming of the believer. The preacher who follows John’s lead will make ‘these things’ ‘his things.’

Conclusion

In this essay we have seen John’s purpose in the Evangel to bring his readers to saving faith in Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, in conjunction with careful consideration of the recorded signs Jesus performed. By believing, one possesses life, i.e., a full participation in and enjoyment of Spiritual communion with the Father and the Son. As both the apostasy of alleged believers and errors of manifest unbelievers can assault one’s assurance of faith and eternal life, John has written his Epistle for the saints’ self-examination and perseverance in matters of doctrinal fidelity, ethical holiness, and brotherly love. Insofar as these features are evident in one’s life, there is credible testimony that eternal life is truly possessed by him.²⁶

The apostle John, then, can rightly be deemed a ‘purpose-driven apostle.’ He was given to the evangelization and edification of God’s people. And as one transformed by (and matured in) Christ, He resembled his Master who was driven by, and indeed fulfilled, His purpose to ‘accomplish the work’ which His Father gave Him to do (*John* 17:4; 4:34). The apostle John teaches us that to be a truly purpose-driven preacher is to be Christ-called, Christ-consumed, and Christ-centered for the eternal good of all who hear.

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²⁶ Stott’s summary words (*Epistles*, p.185) are apt: ‘[John’s] emphasis is important because it is common today to decry any claim to assurance of salvation, to dismiss it as presumptuous, and to affirm that no certainty is possible on this side of death. But certainty and humility do not exclude one another. If God’s revealed purpose is not only that we should hear, believe, and live, but also that we should know, presumptuous lies in doubting His word, not in trusting it.’

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