

IS THE GOSPEL REAL?

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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter
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Let's Begin

Have you ever heard news so good that it was just unbelievable? One easily pictures Ed McMahon showing up at your door announcing you've just won the \$100,000 sweepstake from American Family Publishers! It is hard to believe.

In one sense, the Gospel is like that—it is news too good to be true. A Holy God offers a free pardon for every kind of sin and evil to all who come to Him. No strings attached. We have no secret works to perform to earn it, nor will we ever be expected to pay God back for His pardon. To us, salvation from sin is absolutely free (salvation does carry a very high price tag but more on that later).

The Apostle John begins his trilogy of three short letters focusing on the reality of the good news, the Gospel. Hence, in our study, that is where we begin. We will explore the question, "Is the Gospel for real?"

Therefore, as we make our way through chapter one, let's turn attention to the outline below as our guide:

- I. The Reality Of The Gospel (vv. 1-4)**
- II. The Reason For The Gospel (vv. 5-7)**
- III. The Result Of The Gospel (vv. 8-10)**

I. The Reality Of The Gospel (vv. 1-4)

Jesus loved all His disciples. There were some of them, however, who seemed to have a greater capacity to respond to His love and become a part of an "inner circle" so to speak. One such disciple and Apostle was John, a former fisherman and the one whom the Bible identifies as the one "whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7; 21:20). This same John wrote five books contained in the New Testament, not only three letters and a Gospel bearing his name, but also the book of Revelation.

As John opens the first letter, he immediately addresses about Whom he writes, "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; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and

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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, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full" (vv. 1-4).

Note the *reality* of Jesus Christ (vv. 1-2). John faced a unique group within the Christian community—*Gnostics*, coming from the Greek word *gnosis* meaning "knowledge." The Gnostics believed matter to be evil. Hence, the body of Jesus could not have been real because that would make Jesus in some way evil. So, they reasoned His body only appeared to be real, a type of phantom, ghost-like apparition from Heaven. John deals with this gross error head-on.

Hence, Christ is *eternally* real—"That which was from the beginning...with the Father..." John reaches back into eternity and shows us the Lord Jesus, the eternal Word, the Second Person of the Triune God (cp. Gen. 1:1; John 1:1). Christ is the "unbegun beginning"! However, while Christ has always existed (Heb. 13:8)—



Reflection Connection

If Christ is eternally, historically, and experientially real, how may one come to know Him? Be prepared to share with the entire class how one may be saved.

co-existent with God the Father (John 1:1-3)—He manifested Himself in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, making Him *historically* real. The baby born in Bethlehem was the Eternal of the Ages. Nonetheless, He cried like other babies when He was hungry and grew up under the care of Joseph and His mother, Mary.

John piles one sensory experience upon another to demonstrate the Gnostics were dead wrong. He Who in eternity has been, we have “seen,” “heard,” and even “handled” with our own hands. Jesus Christ—God incarnate—was a flesh and blood man. Therefore, according to John, Jesus was not only *eternally* and *historically* real, He was also *experientially* real. Is Christ experientially real to you? Do you know Him? Have you seen Him with your spiritual eyes?

Second, note our *relationship* to Jesus Christ (vv. 3-4). John moves from the *reality* of Christ to *relationship* with Christ. The reality of Jesus Christ pushes toward a three-dimensional relational model. The core of the relationship is obviously God Himself. However, John is quick to explain how our relationship with Christ brings us into a family fellowship. We are the family of God. Fellow believers are our spiritual brothers and sisters, spiritual fathers and mothers. John says he wrote, “that ye also may have fellowship with us” (v.3). No real fellowship can exist between believer and unbeliever. We may be friends—very good friends—with unbelievers, but we will never experience spiritual fellowship (cp. 2 Cor. 6:14; Gal. 2:9; Phil. 2:1; Acts 2:42).

How is spiritual fellowship with other believers possible? Because, as John says, our fellowship with others is founded upon our fellowship with God, “and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” And, just what is the result of our fellowship with God and other believers? We belong to a community of joy! (v.4).

The reality of Jesus Christ pushes toward a three-dimensional relational model.

II. The Reason For The Gospel (vv. 5-7)

Moving from the *reality* of the Gospel, John takes us to the *reason* for the Gospel. He writes, “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (vv. 5-7). We have become sons and daughters through our Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently, we now have fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, John hammers the nail on fellowship once again.



First, he cites the *basis* of our fellowship—“God is light” (v. 5). To have fellowship with God we must know Who He is and what kind of God He is. On the positive side, He is “light.” To say God is light means several things for John. God being light *physically* points toward the glory of God, *intellectually* toward the knowledge of God, and *morally* toward the holiness of God. On the negative side, John says in God, there is “no darkness at all.” Not the faintest hint of non-light exists pertaining to God, including a shadow (James 1:17). This is the God of the Bible.

Reflection Connection

Take a few moments and describe your fellowship in your church. Do you think it reflects a genuine, Biblical fellowship? Think of ways which will lead to greater fellowship in the Lord.

Second, John cites the breaking of our fellowship—“walk in darkness” (v. 6). Our fellowship is broken when we walk in darkness. John develops his idea in three ways. First, he speaks of our *profession*. “If we say” we possess fellowship with the Father, then our profession points to the reality of the relationship (or at least it should). We then are children of the light and walk in it (cp. Col. 1:13; I Pet. 2:9; John 8:12; Eph. 5:8).

Next, John speaks of the *practice* of “walking in darkness.” Anyone may profess any number of correct beliefs. However, our walk constitutes evidence we actually possess life. As the old saying puts it, we practice what we preach. To walk in sin is to walk in darkness no matter what we profess to be. Finally, John speaks of *prevarication*; that is, “we lie.” Sometimes even leaders live lies, and how tragic when this is discovered. What shame and misery are brought upon the people of God. While the Lord is misrepresented the lost are misguided and perhaps deceived into thinking Christianity is a hoax. Hence, multitudes descend into Hell.

III. The Result Of The Gospel (vv. 8- 10)

Does the Gospel have consequences for a community, a family, a person? Absolutely! John says it like this, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 John 1:8-10). What is the result of the Gospel as the Gospel is faithfully embraced in a person’s life? Namely, a person’s sin is perfectly and completely addressed. In essence, there are two basic alternatives we possess in dealing with our sin.

John makes it clear that those who profess they have no sin are self-deceived.

On one hand, we may cover our sins. We cover our sins by concealment. How? By simply lying about them! John uses the phrase “if we say” three times in this section. Deceit has no place in the believer’s life. John makes plain we should not lie to others (v. 6), pretending before them to walk with God. A person who lies to others about his or her life is a hypocrite, and hypocrisy does not fit the Kingdom of God. Furthermore, we lie to ourselves (v. 8). John makes it clear that those who profess they have no sin are self-deceived. Being dishonest with one’s self is a sure way to live a miserable life.



Finally, lying to ourselves and others is only the tip of the iceberg; we also lie to God (v. 10). Anyone who claims he or she has no sin, thus claiming perfection, is lying to the Judge of all the earth. We are being deceitful to the King of Kings. What results from living a life of deceit and lies, covering over our sins? For believers, we may only expect chastisement (cp. Prov. 28:18; Psalm 32:3-4; 2 Pet. 2:8).

On the other hand, a more spiritually productive alternative in dealing with our sin is not to *cover* sin but to *confess* it. John says, “if we confess.” The Greek term for “confess” literally means to “agree with.” When we confess our sin to God we are doing more than saying “we’re sorry.” Rather we are sorrowfully lamenting over our sin, agreeing with God without qualification that we sinned and were wrong. Consequently, our confession of sin leads to cleansing from sin—“He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Christ is the only answer to the sin problem every person has.

Golden Greek Nugget

John spoke of the Gospel which he said he “declared” to the people when he was among them (v. 5). The Greek term translated “declare” is *anangelo*, and means “to inform,” “to tell,” “to report.” John was only a messenger. He did not create the good news of the Gospel, but he reported it. The church is in the business of spreading the good news of Jesus.

Wrap Up

John dealt with a group of people within the church community who wrongly believed people were saved by secret knowledge and that Jesus was not human at all. They were called Gnostics. Among us today are those who embrace false teaching though they are not called Gnostics. The Apostle sets the record straight about Who Jesus was and the reality of the Gospel of Christ. Only a real Gospel can deliver real salvation from sin and secure us a place in heaven.

We remain true to Him, exalting Him in all we do and are.

