

The crux of the opening line (v. 8) is to determine the antecedent of the demonstrative “that” in the phrase “and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Since both of the words “grace” (χάρις, *xaris*) and “faith” (πίστις, *pistis*) are feminine nouns, we might expect Paul to have used the feminine demonstrative “that” to refer to “grace” and “faith.” But instead, he uses a neuter demonstrative. Why? Because he intends us to understand that both the grace of God as well as the faith to receive His grace, are a gift of God. Thus, in all aspects of our salvation, beginning with our initial confessing of Yeshua as our Savior and Lord, we were moved upon by the Spirit in accordance with God’s sovereign grace.

Thus God has given to all the elect, those who are eternally saved, the ability to grasp the truth to the end that all who are His would have full understanding that He, and He alone is the one and only true God. It is significant to recognize that John utilizes the adjective ἀληθινός (*alēthinós*, “true”) rather than ἀληθής (*alēthēs*, “to be truthful, honest, etc.) when he writes “so that we may know Him who is true.” Surely it is true that God is the source of all that is true, but in this text John is emphasizing that God, revealed in His fulness to mankind in the incarnate Son, is the one and only true God in distinction from the imaginary and demon “gods” (i.e., idols) put forward by the fallen imagination of sinful mankind. As Calvin notes:

By true God he does not mean one who tells the truth, but him who is really God; and he so calls him to distinguish him from all idols. Thus true is in opposition to what is fictitious; for it is ἀληθινός, and not ἀληθής.¹

It is clear that God revealed Himself in truth from the very beginning, for the creation itself manifests the Creator, as Paul teaches:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. (Rom 1:18–20)

Yet, as John emphasizes here, the ultimate and final revelation of God is vested in the appearance of His Son, Yeshua. From the very beginning of creation, God promised to Chavah that One would come from

¹ Calvin, *1John*, p. 273.

her Who would defeat the serpent¹ and would therefore be the One by Whom mankind would regain its rightful place of honor as bearing the image of his Creator. This promise was woven throughout the Scriptures as given to Israel by God's prophets, culminating in the appearance of Yeshua as the incarnate Son of God. Indeed, John's repeated use of the term "Son of God" throughout this epistle (7x²) emphasizes this important and central theme. If in any way the centrality of Yeshua as the incarnate Son of God is diminished, then the truth about God, and His being the one and only true God, is lost. This is John's concluding point.

We find Yeshua Himself, in His high priestly prayer, teaching us this grand truth as well.

This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Messiah Yeshua whom You have sent. (Jn 17:3)

To know God in truth is possible only as we are united with the incarnate Son of God through the gift of salvation acquired by faith. And it is obvious that the enemy of our souls will therefore do all in his power to diminish the centrality of Yeshua, to sow doubts as to His being God in the flesh, with the intent of portraying God as unknown and as unknowable. It is therefore understandable why John has so often emphasized the absolute and infinite unity between the Father and the Son, not trying to explain the mystery of the Godhead, but proclaiming the utter necessity and centrality of Yeshua as God in the flesh. Indeed, He alone is the full revelation of the true God and the only One through Whom there is access to the Father, the forgiveness of sins, and the promise of eternal life. And it is through the gracious and sovereign work of the Spirit of God in concert with the work of Yeshua, that such grace is given to all He has purposed to save.

Once again Calvin offers an excellent exposition of this very truth as he notes how John's words explain the matter.

And he justly ascribes to Christ this office of illuminating our minds as to the knowledge of God. For, as he is the only true image of the invisible God, as he is the only interpreter of the Father, as he is the only guide of life, yea, as he is the life and light of the world and the truth, as soon as we depart from him, we necessarily become vain in our own devices.

1 Gen 3:15.

2 1 John 3:8; 4:15; 5:5, 10, 12–13, 20.

And Christ is said to have given us an understanding, not only because he shews us in the gospel what sort of being is the true God, and also illuminates us by his Spirit; but because in Christ himself we have God manifested in the flesh, as Paul says, since in him dwells all the fullness of the Deity, and are hid all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom. (Col 2:9). Thus it is that the face of God in a manner appears to us in Christ; not that there was no knowledge, or a doubtful knowledge of God, before the coming of Christ, but that now he manifests himself more fully and more clearly. And this is what Paul says in 2Cor 4:6, that God, who formerly commanded light to shine out of darkness at the creation of the world, hath now shone in our hearts through the brightness of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Christ.

And it must be observed, that this gift is peculiar to the elect. Christ, indeed, kindles for all indiscriminately the torch of his gospel; but all have not the eyes of their minds opened to see it, but on the contrary Satan spreads the veil of blindness over many. Then the Apostle means the light which Christ kindles within, in the hearts of his people, and which when once kindled, is never extinguished, though in some it may for a time be smothered.¹

and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Yeshua Messiah. – It seems most likely that the pronoun “Him” in the phrase “we are in Him who is true” refers to God, since the previous phrase, “so that we may know Him Who is true” refers to the Father as revealed by His Son, Yeshua. John is making the same point here that he made in 2:24.

As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. (1Jn 2:24)

For John, to “abide in the Son” is one and the same with abiding “in the Father.” And we see the same emphasis in our current text: to be in Him Who is true (i.e., the Father), is equally to be “in His Son Yeshua Messiah.” Thus, to abide in the Son and to abide in the Father are two ways of saying the same thing. Here again, John may have in mind those who were formerly part of the believing community but left, having denied Yeshua. Those who did leave and who denied Yeshua to be the promised Messiah may well have claimed to have a greater knowledge of God through their mystical experiences. But in denying Yeshua to be

¹ Calvin, *1John*, pp. 273-74.

the very Son of God by Whom the Father is fully known, they unwittingly have denied the true God regarding Whom they claimed to have a superior knowledge and relationship.

But what John teaches us here is that

it is only through the Son that men and women may dwell in God, just as it is only through the Son that God is pleased to dwell in men. "If a man loves me," says Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, "he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home (*monē*, cognate with *menō*, "abide") with him" (Jn 14:23).¹

We see, then, that the true knowledge and understanding we have of God, fully made known through the coming of Yeshua Who is Immanuel, "God with us," is not only true cognition or that which we affirm by external facts which are incontrovertible. For we also have a relational knowledge—a knowledge based upon being in union with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And this is what John means when he writes that "we are in Him who is true."

But how is it that we have a union with the true God? It is because we are "in His Son Yeshua Messiah." Once again, we see John and Paul utilizing a similar phrase, "in Yeshua Messiah," to teach a central truth of salvation. For to be "in Messiah" or (as John writes here in our verse) to be "in His Son Yeshua Messiah" means to be in union with Him in His death, His resurrection, His ascension to the Father, and His eternal life with the Father. This central theme of the Apostolic message is that very truth which the believers before the coming of Messiah saw revealed in the sacrificial system of the Tabernacle and Temple, and awaited with saving faith, anticipating His coming and His accomplishing eternal salvation for all who are His. Thus, to be "in His Son Yeshua" is to have died with Him and risen again with Him to eternal life. As Paul writes:

For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Messiah, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Messiah, having been raised from the dead, is never to die

1 F. F. Bruce, *1John*, p. 128.

again; death no longer is master over Him. (Rom 6:5–9)

Moreover, we hear the words of Yeshua Himself, as He gave final instructions to His disciples before ascending to the Father, making this promise:

... and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.
(Matt 28:20)

Indeed, His abiding presence with us, and our abiding in Him, is accomplished by the indwelling Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit), God Himself abiding with us and in us. As children of God (another of John's favorite phrases¹) we place our faith in what we know to be true, for God has revealed this truth to us by His Spirit, and in further confirmation of our union with God, we experience the comforting, guiding, and even convicting presence of the Ruach HaKodesh.

For what the Torah could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Torah might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom 8:3–4)

...and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Messiah, he does not belong to Him. (Rom 8:8b–9)

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (Rom 8:14)

... *This is the true God and eternal life.* – To Whom does the opening demonstrative “This” refer: to the Father or to Yeshua? Clearly, the nearest antecedent is “Yeshua Messiah” which immediately precedes this final clause of the verse, and would therefore be the most obvious referent. Some, such as Westcott, opt for the Father being the One to Whom the phrase refers, since John has emphasized that the Father is the One Who sent His Son. He paraphrases the verse this way:

This Being—this One who is true, who is revealed through

1 3:1–2, 10; 5:2.

and in His Son—is the true God and life eternal.¹

But there is good reason to take the bold statement of John regarding the deity of Yeshua as the correct interpretation. Akin lists the following:

(1) “Jesus Christ” is the nearest antecedent to the pronoun. (2) It would be repetitive to state that God is “true” after having already stated that “who are in Him who is true” earlier in the verse. (3) Jesus was designated as the source of eternal life in 1:2 (cf. 5:12; Jn 11:25; 14:6). (4) 1Jn 5:6 begins in the same way as this phrase (*houtos estin*), and there it clearly refers to Jesus Christ. (5) John has referred to Jesus as “God” on other occasions (Jn 1:1, 18; Jn 20:28).²

The comment of Marshall is also pertinent:

It is fitting that at the climax of the Epistle, as at the beginning and climax of the Gospel of John (Jn 1:1; 20:28), full deity should be ascribed to Jesus.³

We have noted how John, in these final verses of the epistle, is rehearsing the very themes by which he began the epistle, and we find it in our verse again. For he opened the epistle by describing Yeshua as

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life — and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us — (1Jn 1:1-2)

And John ends his epistle by describing Yeshua as “the true God and eternal life.” John boldly proclaims the utter, eternal, and infinite unity of the God-head. And though such infinite reality is beyond the ability of humankind to fully comprehend, we nonetheless know this to be true on the clear and emphatic teaching of the inspired Scriptures and as such, we fully confess it as foundational for the salvation Yeshua procured for His elect.

This is in full concert with John’s words in the Fourth Gospel, which opens by stating “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was

1 Westcott, *1John*, p. 196.

2 Akin, *1John*, p. 214.

3 Marshall, *1John*, p. 254, n. 47.

with (πρός) God, and the Word was God” (Jn 1:1). To deny that John would accredit the full divine nature to Yeshua would likewise deny that what he wrote in his Gospel or his Epistles is credible. As Barrett notes in commenting on the opening verse of John’s Gospel:

The deeds and words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God; if this be not true the book is blasphemous.¹

Thus, the confession that Yeshua is “true God of true God” is based squarely upon the Scriptures and clearly affirmed by John in our current verse.

Moreover, since eternal life can be granted only by One Who is Himself eternal, and since the Scriptures are clear that salvation is possible only through the work Yeshua has done, we see that Yeshua must surely be equal with the Father and the Spirit in essence and power. Thus He, being “the true God” is likewise the only one through Whom eternal life may be secured. As He Himself proclaimed to Thomas who questioned Him regarding the way to eternal life:

Yeshua said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. (Jn 14:6)

21 Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

“Little children” (Τεχνία, *teknia*) translates a single word in the Greek. As noted above in the commentary on 2:1, this is not a pejorative term but one of endearment, as a father writing to those for whom he had great love and whom he desired to assist and to give care. Some would therefore translate it “Dear children” (cf. NIV).

But the point is that, having established that eternal life is possible only through the salvific work accomplished by Yeshua, the Son of God, to have one’s heart turned to believe in any other way of salvation is to be doomed eternally. Thus, rather than ending his epistle with a typical farewell, he, as a father caring for his own children, issues a stern warning to be on guard against idols.

While some would read John’s final warning as meaning to guard oneself from material images, the context would rather suggest that John’s primary concern is that his readers guard themselves from the idolatry that consists of false conceptions of God, that is,

1 C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John* (SPCK, 1955), p. 130.

...any conception of Him that is at variance with His self-revelation in Christ is an idol.¹

This, of course, includes the worship of images and material idols, but obviously is much broader, including all false understandings of God as He has revealed Himself to us in His Son, the living Word, and in the Scriptures, His inspired word.

Here we see that the final exhortation of the Apostle John in this epistle is that we must guard ourselves from error—from wrong teaching and doctrine, which means we must set ourselves to know the Scriptures and to apply them to every facet of life. We must be able to use the inspired word of God to test every spirit (1Jn 4:1) and every teaching against the straight-edge of the Scriptures to see if they are true or false.

Nothing is more needful in our times, as in every era, than to set the Scriptures forth as the rule by which we test everything related to our faith in Yeshua and how we live out that faith. And this is particularly true in the current Torah movement, that we remain steadfast to know the Scriptures and hold them as the final authority in all matters of faith and halachah. May God grant that we should be strengthened to be bearers of His truth, for the glory of His Name and the expansion of His kingdom.

1 F. F. Bruce, *1John*, p. 128.