

“I Am,” Saith Christ

Joseph Hart (1712–1768)

“I am,” saith Christ, “the Way”;
Now, if we credit him,
All other paths must lead astray,
How fair soe’er they seem.

“I am,” saith Christ, “the Truth”;
Then all that lacks this test,
Proceed it from an angel’s mouth,
Is but a lie at best.

“I am,” saith Christ, “the Life”;
Let this be seen by faith,
It follows, without further strife,
That all besides is death.

If what those words aver,
The Holy Ghost apply,
The simplest Christian shall not err,
Nor be deceived, nor die.

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

As Many As Received Him

Kevin T. Bauder

In the introduction to his Gospel, John identifies the Word as both life and light. By naming Him this way, John teaches that the Word is the one who mediates salvation to human beings. The Word is the one through whom God saves whoever gets saved.

But that salvation is not automatic. It is conditional. God saves only some people, not all of them. In John 1:10–13, John specifies the condition of salvation. He tells us how people get saved.

He begins by rehearsing a part of what he has already said about the Word. First, the Word was in the world. John is probably not referring to the Incarnation here. He is probably talking about the divine presence of the Second Person of the Godhead. From the instant of creation, God the Son was everywhere present. He was active in His creation.

Second, the world was made by Him. Creation is usually associated with the First Person of the Godhead, God the Father. But John here reminds his readers that the Father made the world through the Son. The Son never came to be. He never had a beginning. But the world did have a beginning, and it began as the result of the creative activity of the Word.

John is here repeating what he has already taught in John 1:3, “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” Other texts teach this same truth. For example, 1 Corinthians 8:6 states that, “there is...one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.” Colossians 1:16 says, “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.” Hebrews 1:12 names the Son as the one, “by whom also he [God] made the worlds.”

The Word is not the Father, but He is the Creator. Because He is the Creator, He has a creator’s rights over all things. Everything belongs to Him. Every rock, every tree, every microbe is His.

Humans belong to Him in a special sense. We are created in His image and likeness. He has granted us dominion (Gen 1:26–28). Furthermore, when



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He entered the world in the Incarnation, He came to be in human likeness (Phil 2:7). What that entails will be the subject of a later conversation. One thing is clear, though: by entering the human race, He came unto His own.

The Word was not only incarnated as a human being. He was specifically incarnated as a descendant of Abraham (Gal 3:16). He was an Israelite of the tribe of Judah and the family of David. He was not a generic human, but a specific human of a specific ethnicity and clan.

The expression “He came unto His own” (1:11) is therefore freighted with meaning. All created things are His own, but inanimate creatures could hardly receive or reject Him. All humans are His own by both creation and kinship. Jewish people are particularly His near kin. When He came into the world, He came to and for human beings in general, and He came to offer Himself to and for Israel specifically.

The result, surprisingly, was rejection. He came unto His own, but His own did not accept Him. His own did not take Him to themselves. The majority of both Jews and Gentiles rejected Him.

But not everyone rejected Him. Some received Him. And here is the astonishing thing: as many as received Him, He gave authority to become children of God. In the most important sense, they were not children of God by creation. But they received authority to become God’s children, and they received it from the Word. Only the Word has the power to make humans into God’s children.

But we must receive Him. What does that mean? John clarifies: “to the ones who believe on His name.” A person’s name often stands for that person’s authority. When a police officer says, “Halt in the name of the law,” the officer is invoking the authority of the law. When we believe on Jesus’s name, we are recognizing the authority of Jesus to make us children of God. In plain language, we are trusting Him.

To receive Jesus is to trust Him. We are born “by nature the children of wrath” (Eph 2:3) We need a change of family. To receive everlasting life, we must be born into God’s family. We need to be born again (John 3:3). When we trust Jesus, He gives us the authority to become God’s children. At that point, we are born into God’s family.

John explicitly equates becoming a child of God with being born (John 1:13). He denies that this birth ever came from blood (human descent), from fleshly will (human decision), or from the will of a man (a father’s wish). On the contrary, those who become children of God are born of God.

Often Christians will comment that they are adopted into God’s family. That is not correct. Nobody is ever adopted into God’s family We only get into God’s family by being born, and specifically, by being born again.

Of course, we are also adopted as sons, but our adoption is not an entrance into God’s family. Adoption assumes that we are God’s children. Adoption tells us where we stand in God’s family. Sonship stands opposed to slavery (Rom 8:15). It is our standing of adulthood as those who have received their inheritance. Our adoption is not yet complete. It will be completed at the redemption (resurrection) of our bodies (Rom 8:23).

We are born as children of disobedience and wrath (Eph 2:2–3; Eph 5:6). But the Word has the authority to make us children of God. He is the life. He is the light. He has come unto His own, and He is able to change our family. But whether we become God’s children depends upon how we respond to Him. If we receive the Word and believe on His name, then He gives us the right to become children of God. But refusing Him is the very thing that makes us children of disobedience. If we reject Him, then we must continue toward judgment as children of wrath.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
