

FIRST JOHN

Chapter 1

The Word of Life

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life — 2 the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— 3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

1:1–4 The introduction to this letter deals with the same subject and uses several of the same words as the introduction to John’s Gospel (1:1–4)—“beginning,” “Word,” “life,” “with.” (CSB)

1Jn is traditionally known as a letter, but it lacks the typical introductory greetings of early Christian letters. Compare the teaching of these verses with Jn 1:1–18. (TLSB)

The purpose of John’s letter, similar to that of his gospel (Jn 20:31), is to bring the readers into communion with the Word of Life. By doing so they also become part of the “communion of saints” with the apostolic witnesses, and their joy is fulfilled. This is the “basic, pivotal statement on which he [John] builds the thoughts of the epistle in ever-widening circles” (Lenski, p. 69). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

This epistle begins with a long sentence. However, though long, it is quite intelligible. The object is placed in front to make it most emphatic. “that which was from the beginning” is what the following message is about. In verse 3 this object is repeated as it is joined with the predicate. “That which we have seen and heard we proclaim to you.” And what is the purpose of their proclamation? That is stated in verse 4. Also verse 2 with a further description belongs to the object as a modifier. Verse 3: “That which we have seen and heard we proclaim to you.” And verse 4: “That your joy may be complete.” Verse 2 is a parenthesis, also modifying the object. “And this (concerning the Word of life) we write to you.” Why does the Apostle change the form of the object at the end of the first sentence, putting it this way: “Concerning the Word of life.” No doubt by this variation of expression he would bring out the greater emphasis that he has a personal object in mind. The Apostle would set before the eyes of his readers that which was from the beginning. “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and which we have touched with our hands,” he has reference to a most remarkable person, the Word of life, the Son of God, Christ. John is going to set Christ before his readers. (Stoekhart)

1:1 The whole substance and blessing of the Gospel is found in the unique person who is both God and man—Jesus Christ. (TLSB)

that which - “That which,” *ho*, is a neuter, perhaps because it “conveys more than the masculine would, namely in addition to the person all that this person was and is and ever will be for us” (Lenski, p. 370), including “life” and “fellowship” (both grammatically feminine). “From the beginning” connects the Epistle to the Gospel and Genesis, indicating the timelessness of God’s plan of salvation. The repetition of “that which” intensifies the apostolic witness to drive

home the resurrection of Christ. The content of apostolic proclamation is the “Word of life” who was made flesh (cf. Jn 1:4,14; 5:26; 11:25; 14:6). “He is the truth about God, the ultimate reality, and a mediator of personal relationships that bring complete and perfect joy” (Charles Laymon, ed., Interpreter’s One Volume Commentary [Nashville: Abingdon, 1971] 936). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

was from the beginning. Has always existed. (CSB)

“That which was from the beginning”: (cf. Gen 1:1), “In the beginning” (Jn 1:1). “In the beginning was the Word.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

we. John and the other apostles. (CSB)

heard ... seen ... looked at ... touched. The apostle had made a careful examination of the Word of life. He testifies that the one who has existed from eternity “became flesh” (Jn 1:14)—i.e., a flesh-and-blood man. He was true God and true man. At the outset, John contradicts the heresy of the Gnostics. (CSB)

(see Introduction: Gnosticism - CSB). - Follows below...

One of the most dangerous heresies of the first two centuries of the church was Gnosticism. Its central teaching was that spirit is entirely good and matter is entirely evil. From this unbiblical dualism flowed five important errors:

1. Man’s body, which is matter, is therefore evil. It is to be contrasted with God, who is wholly spirit and therefore good.
2. Salvation is the escape from the body, achieved not through faith in Christ but by special knowledge (the Greek word for “knowledge” is *gnosis*, hence Gnosticism).
3. Christ’s true humanity was denied in two ways: (1) Some said that Christ only seemed to have a body, a view called Docetism, from the Greek *dokeo* (“to seem”), and (2) others said that the divine Christ joined the man Jesus at baptism and left him before he died, a view called Cerinthianism, after its most prominent spokesman, Cerinthus. This view is the background of much of 1 John (see 1:1; 2:22; 4:2–3). See especially 5:6 and note.
4. Since the body was considered evil, it was to be treated harshly. This ascetic form of Gnosticism is the background of part of the letter to the Colossians (2:21–23).
5. Paradoxically, this dualism also led to licentiousness. The reasoning was that, since matter—and not the breaking of God’s law (1Jn 3:4)—was considered evil, breaking his law was of no moral consequence.

Satan’s assaults on the church, on God’s Word, and on Christ Himself never cease. Already in the first century, false teachings arose, put forth by respected and intelligent men Like Cerinthus, which undermined the teachings of the apostles. Cerinthus was an Egyptian Jew who cobbled together teachings from the OT, fragments of Christianity, and pagan philosophy. This early movement promised that there was much more spiritual knowledge, secret knowledge, the Bible did not have. The Greek work for knowledge, *gnosis*, gave the name Gnosticism to this movement. Just like the new agers of today, gnostic teachers asserted the following: (PBC)

- There was no incarnation or virgin birth, not atoning death or bodily resurrection.
- The heavenly Christ and earthly Jesus were two separate things.
- All matter was evil and only mind and spirit were pure: thus since human bodies are basically evil anyway and just temporary tents for the soul, it didn’t matter how you live.
- The “spiritually advanced” gnostic leaders were no longer sinful.

- The Bible was an insufficient source of information.
- The apostles had no special authority for telling people how to think and live.

The sad result of Gnosticism was that believers were losing their confidence in the Bible, losing their certainty of being saved, drifting into unrepentant sinful lifestyles, growing selfish and hypocritical and unloving in their churches and families, becoming confused about leadership and authority, and losing their ability to distinguish truth from error. John's letter is a powerful blast of truth, rebuke, passionate exhortation, and love in order to bring people back into a stronger more vital relationship with their Lord. (PBC)

The Gnosticism addressed in the NT was an early form of the heresy, not the intricately developed system of the second and third centuries. In addition to that seen in Colossians and in John's letters, acquaintance with early Gnosticism is reflected in 1,2 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Peter and perhaps 1 Corinthians.

“Which we have heard” (perfect). The words of Jesus made a lasting impression on their minds and hearts. Peter said, “Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:68). The “we” emphasizes that it was more than a personal account of John's hearing and observing. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

There were other eyewitnesses: “have seen with our eyes” (perfect). “The perfects denote lasting effect” (*An Analysis of the Greek New Testament* [Rome: Typis Pontificiae Universitatis Gregoriana, 1984] 726). It was not John's imagination or an optical illusion. John saw Jesus with his own eyes in his ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension. “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (Jn 20:29). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

“Which we have looked at”: (aorist of *theaomai* “to contemplate, look upon, behold”). John and the others did more than just “see” Jesus; they gazed upon him with intense scrutiny and interest. They contemplated who he was and where he came from. We see the same form in Jn 1:14, “We beheld his glory.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

“And our hands have touched”: These same graphic words are used in the Gospel—“touch [feel] me and see” (Lk 24:39) and with Thomas last Sunday, “put your finger here” (Jn 20:27). Jesus was not a phantom. He had a physical body. He did not only “seem” human as the Docetists claimed. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

“This we proclaim concerning the Word of life” (original language, “the word of the life”). Jesus is the divine Logos (John 1; Genesis 1). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

The expression, “touched with our hands,” reminds us of Christ's appearance to His disciples a week after Easter, when Thomas touched the scars of Jesus's hands, feet and side. (Stoeckhardt)

Absolute affirmation of Christ's physical, human nature. Luther: “By the grace of God I have learned not to turn my eyes away from that Person who was born to Mary, and not to seek or acknowledge another god. One's eyes must be fixed on that Person who was born of the Virgin Mary. Where the Son of God is, there Christ is; where Christ is, there the Father is.” (TLSB)

Word of life. The one who is life and reveals life. “Word” here speaks of revelation. (CSB)

Christ is the personal Word (Logos), which has come from the innermost essence of the Father, even as a human word proceeds from the thoughts and desires of man's heart. (Stoeckhardt)

1:2-4 The Word of Life is further explicated. "The life appeared" from his Baptism to his ascension, the time span of the apostolic witness. The mission of the apostolic church is to testify to and proclaim Christ so as to bring humanity into communion with God. Faithfully carrying out this mission brings great joy to those who participate in it. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

1:2 *The life ... the eternal life.* Christ. He is called "the life" because he is the living one who has life in himself (see Jn 11:25; 14:6). He is also the source of life and sovereign over life (5:11). The letter begins and ends (5:20) with the theme of eternal life. (CSB)

Eternal life is found in God the Son, who was conceived in human flesh in the womb of His mother, Mary, and born in Bethlehem. (TLSB)

"The life appeared": He was "the life eternal." He was the very incarnation and personification of God's life; he was the incarnation and personification of God's light (Jn 1:4-5); the incarnation and personification of God's grace, "The grace of God . . . has appeared" (Titus 2:11); and the incarnation and personification of God's love, "This is how God showed his love among us" (1 In 4:9). (Original language uses the same form: "by this was manifested the love of God.") This is an astounding truth. Jesus is God's life, light, grace, and love to us. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

The Word (Logos), the Son, issued from the Father, was born of the very essence of the Father and is now with the Father. Person is with Person - - Logos, the Life, and the Father. The two stand in an intimate relation to each other. One is with the other. They are intimately connected. And now,, says the Apostle, He who was with the Father and remains with the Father and who not for a moment is out of communion with the Father – He we saw, heard, and touched, and Him we make known as One who actually appeared unto us. (Stoeckhardt)

testify to it - "We have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life": John was an eyewitness of "the life eternal." (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

with the Father - "Was with the Father and has appeared to us": "He was with God in the beginning" (Jn 1:2). *Pros* "with" conveys a dynamic personal relationship. Note *pros* also in Jn 1:1, "with God." (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

Jesus, the Eternal Word, has always been with the Father. He was with Him at creation. (TLSB)

1:3 *we have seen* - "What we have seen." John states the third time that he saw the Word of Life with his own eyes. "We proclaim . . . so that . . ." His witness is that they might come to faith and fellowship. "Faith comes from hearing the message" (Rom 10:17). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

you. All Christians who read this Letter. (TLSB)

fellowship with us. Participation with us (vicariously) in our experience of hearing, seeing and touching the incarnate Christ (v. 1). Fellowship (Greek *koinonia*) is the spiritual union of the believer with Christ—as described in the figures of the vine and branches (Jn 15:1-5) and the

body and the head (1Co 12:12; Col 1:18)—as well as communion with the Father and with fellow believers. (CSB)

More than friendship; a common share in something (or in this case, someone). Christians have a common share in God the Father through the human nature of Jesus. Since we are all members of one Body of Christ, we share in fellowship with all other Christians through Jesus. (TLSB)

us. John and the other apostles who saw, heard, and touched Jesus, even after He was crucified and raised from the dead. (TLSB)

What the Apostle here wants to bring home is that later Christians have full fellowship with Christ's own apostles. It is a faith-fellowship. (Stoeckhardt)

Here the subject of the fellowship is greatly widened: Our fellowship is with the Father and the Son. (Stoeckhardt)

“Fellowship”: *koinōnia*. John proclaims “the word of the life” so that they may “keep on having” (pres. act. subj.) fellowship with them (*us*) and with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

Jews also saw and heard the incarnate Word and with hostile hands also touched this Word, but they did not enter into fellowship with Christ. It is therefore self-evident the Apostle here speaks of such hearing and seeing which includes faith. (Stoeckhardt)

1:4 *our joy may be complete.* John's joy in the Lord could not be complete unless his readers shared the true knowledge of the Christ (see 2Jn 12). (CSB)

We can enjoy the intimate communion with Christ just as much as one did the apostles and early disciples, if we use the Scriptures properly. Those who have no more than the Scriptures may have complete joy. The faith of such can be just as great as it was in those who once were the intimate companions of Christ in the days of His earthly sojourn. Christ is just as near to us as once He was to His apostles. And the salvation which He brings He pours out into the hearts of those who hold to the Scripture in the same manner as once He did bestow it upon His immediate disciples. (Stoeckhardt)

“Our joy complete”: Some manuscripts have “your joy.” The end of fellowship with believers and the Father and the Son is complete joy. Jesus came to give joy: Jn 16:24; 17:13. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

1:1–4 John begins this Book much like his Gospel account, with the Eternal Word, who was always with the Father and was working with the Father at creation. But here John's point is that this same Word who is “eternal life” is the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, whom all the apostles had physically seen, heard, and touched. We owe the Eternal Word our perfect obedience. Despite our disobedience—our lack of recognition and faithfulness of our Creator—the Eternal Word did not come to condemn us but to save us. • Heavenly Father, by the writings of the apostles, grant that we may ever share in Christ and His kingdom, that our joy may be complete. Amen. (TLSB)

Walking in the Light

5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

1:5–2:27 Because false teachers have troubled congregations, John invites his “little children” (2:1) to examine their faith and practice in view of God’s standards. (TLSB)

1:5-7 The fellowship of the church is a fellowship of “light.” The metaphor of darkness describes sin, the absence of the light of divine perfection. The Christian lifestyle requires a distinct separation from the darkness of the old life of sin under the domination of the old self, and walking in the light of Christ, whose blood has given us life by the forgiveness of sins. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

1:5 *from him.* From Christ. (CSB)

“The message we heard from him [Jesus]”: John is relaying the message from Jesus that “God is light; and in him there is no darkness at all.” The whole ministry of Jesus was to reveal the glory, goodness, and grace of God (Jn 17:5). God is the Light of life and “fount and source of all goodness” (Collect). “With you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light” (Ps 36:9). God “lives in unapproachable light” (1 Tim 6:16). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

light ... darkness. Light represents what is good, true and holy, while darkness represents what is evil and false (see Jn 3:19–21). (CSB)

Light in Scripture often is used as a figure of salvation. Compare to Isaiah 60. But this figurative expression may also have a different meaning, as it does have at this place. Light may be a symbol of holiness. And the context shows that it is so to be taken here. (Stoeckhardt)

There is no evil or deception in Jesus, only truth. (TLSB)

1:6–7 *walk in the darkness ... in the light.* Two life-styles—one characterized by wickedness and error, the other by holiness and truth. (CSB)

To live and practice what is not truth, i.e., sin. The “walk” reveals the truthfulness of one’s claims and confession. (TLSB)

“If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in darkness, we lie”: We cannot keep on walking (pres. act. subj.) in the darkness and claim to have fellowship with God. “Fellowship” is a deep union “in Christ” like that of the vine and the branches. Note the many times “in me” occurs in John 15. It is worked by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14; Eph 4:3). It is a “partnership in the gospel” (Phil 1:5) and one to be nurtured and enjoyed. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship” (Acts 2:42). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

1:6 *we.* John and his readers. (CSB)

to have fellowship with him. To be in living, spiritual union with God. (CSB)

walk. A metaphor for living. (CSB)

If we call God our God and do the opposite of what that implies, namely, walk in darkness, live in sin, then it is evident that we do not do the truth. (Stoeckhardt)

“Do not live by the truth”: (original language, “not doing the truth”). Truth is not just intellectual knowledge, it is willed and done in the way we live our daily lives. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

1:7 *walk in the light* – To live openly and honestly, without covering up our behavior, since we confess our sins to God daily. Although we are sinners and still have sinful and selfish thoughts, words, and deeds, we do not dwell on such thoughts. We do not cultivate such words and perpetuate such deeds. (TLSB)

as He is in the light. Jesus lives and does all things according to the truth (the Word of God) (TLSB)

fellowship with one another. Believers have a common share in Christ (His life, death, resurrection, and ascension), which brings forgiveness and grace equally and blessedly to each. (TLSB)

But if we “keep on walking”: (pres. act. subj.) “we have” (pres. act. ind.) fellowship with one another. And the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies (pres. tense). This is real. Jesus as the Son of God (no phantom) shed his blood. The blood is real. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

sin. A key word in 1 John, occurring 27 times in the Greek. (CSB)

cleanses us from all sin – Only Christ’s blood could atone and has atoned for the sin of the world. He alone is righteous. “The Scriptures speak not merely in general of the Son of Man, but also indicate clearly His received human nature.... This is true not only according to the merit <of Christ’s blood> that was once attained on the cross. But in this place John means that in the work or act of justification, not only the divine nature in Christ but also His blood actually cleanses us from all sins” (FC SD VIII 59). (TLSB)

“Purifies us from all sin”: (original language “catharsis”). His “purifying” is true (cf. Heb 9:14). There is no false security of a false, formal relationship with God. The walking, the having fellowship, the purifying is all a present reality in fellowship with Christ, the Light. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

Two thoughts are here joined in one sentence. The first thought is this one: If you Christians walk in the light, you will walk in the mind and spirit of the holy Apostles. But do not think that this walk will be all perfect. The second point which the Apostle would make is that the blood of Christ ever and again purges these recurring sins. In other words, Christian walk in the light and alongside of their action goes the action of God continually forgiving their sins. (Stoeckhardt)

1:8-10 We Christians can face our sins because as we live in the light of life, we also live in truth. A lie is contrary to the new life. The power of forgiveness is known only by those who confess their sins. Moreover, only those who are confident of forgiveness have the courage to confess their sins honestly and fully. The desire to be a part of the fellowship of life and light may tempt one to piously proclaim innocence instead of confessing sins. But this makes for liars and hypocrites, denies God's love, and vitiates Christ's sacrifice. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

1:8 *have no sin.*† Note the singular. A claim of Gnosticism. (Cf. v. 9, "sins"—a confession of Christians.) (CSB)

Sin is not only what we do against God's commands in thought, word and deed, but is also what we do naturally from the moment of our conception (cf. Ps 51:5). Jesus taught that man's corrupted nature is incapable of doing any good (cf. Jn 6:63; 15:5). Luther, "Although we have become a new creature, nevertheless the remnants of sin always remain in us. We still have sin, and the poison is still in us; and that sin incites us to the fruits of sin, as in the case of David, to whom inherent, encompassing, and indwelling sin said: 'Slay Uriah (cf. 2 Sam. 11:15). David consented and sinned.... Although we are Christians sprinkled with the blood of Christ, yet we often err. Therefore the true knowledge of Christ causes a person to feel that he has sin. Furthermore, it causes us to lament this.... Finally we should hold most firmly to this, that no one is or becomes righteous before God except through the blood of Jesus Christ. For God alone is righteous, truthful, and wise. Whatever we do out of faith, we should always say: 'It is sin' and 'We are unworthy servants,' Luke 17:10. But we gain salvation solely because of the righteousness of God, and it is because of this righteousness that we are saved. (TLSB)

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves": It is a false claim. We follow the "father of lies." Some of the Gnostics held there was no guilt since matter was evil and the soul remained pure. Therefore, it didn't matter what you did with the flesh. But we are sinners. God knows it. Others know it, and we need to own up to it. "I kept silent. . . . Then I acknowledged my sin to you" (Ps 32:3-5). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

If a person imagines he is already above sin and has attained to sinlessness, he has put himself above Christianity itself. (Stoeckhardt)

1:9 *if we confess our sins* – This is not so to be understood as if our confession were the condition which moved God to forgive. (Stoeckhardt)

faithful and just. Here the phrase is virtually a single concept (faithful-and-just). It indicates that God's response toward those who confess their sins will be in accordance with his nature and his gracious commitment to his people (see Ps 143:1; Zec 8:8). (CSB)

God always does what is just and righteous. God is faithful to His promises and always keeps His Word. (TLSB)

faithful. To his promise to forgive (see Jer 31:34; Mic 7:18-20; Heb 10:22-23). (CSB)

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful": "I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'—and you forgave the guilt of my sin" (Ps 32:5). He is "faithful." God is trustworthy, worthy of trust (1 Cor 1:9; 1 Thess 5:24; 2 Tim 2:13). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

He is and remains the same. One should never think that daily confession of one's sins should annoy or weary Him. (Stoeckhardt)

forgive us.† Will provide the forgiveness that restores the communion with God that had been interrupted by sins (as requested in the Lord's Prayer, Mt 6:12). (CSB)

all unrighteousness. Sins we willfully commit (sins of commission), good deeds we fail to do (sins of omission), and the sinful nature of every person. (TLSB)

1:10 *we have not sinned.* Gnostics denied that their immoral actions were sinful. (CSB)

make him a liar – God has declared what fallen mankind cannot see; that all have sinned and fallen short of His glory. To deny this is to sit in judgment of God and declare Him to be untrue. Cf. Jb 40:8. (TLSB)

his word is not in us – Jesus Christ is the living Word who abides in those who abide in Him through faith. But He will not abide with lies, for He is the truth. Luther, “In the end God will prevail and gain the victory, either by His goodness or hereafter by His severity. It will do no good to be justified before men or in our own eyes, for we must ignore this and wait in fear to learn what God thinks about it.” (TLSB)

1:5–10 John writes about faithfulness in our walk with God. Our sinful pride rejects God's Word and seeks to deceive us so that we might not know ourselves as we are or know God as He has revealed Himself. God sees our true nature, and in Christ He reveals His nature, which is both just and gracious to us. For those who confess their sins, God is always faithful to His promise to forgive. This is just and right because of His Son, who has paid the price for our sins. • Heavenly Father, give us hearts to believe and to know ourselves as we are. Then we may truthfully confess our sins, trusting in Your forgiveness and mercy. Amen. (TLSB)