

1 John Chapter 1

Verses 1-4

As an apostolic eyewitness to Jesus' ministry, including His death and resurrection, and as one of the three most intimate associates of the Lord (John, Peter, James), John affirms the physical reality of Jesus Christ's having come "in the flesh" (4:2-3).

In this way, John accentuated the gravity of the false teaching by immediately focusing on a strongly positive affirmation of the historic reality of Jesus' humanity and also the certainty of the gospel.

Although the false teachers claimed to believe in Christ, their denial of the true nature of Christ (i.e. His humanity), demonstrated their lack of genuine salvation (2:22-23).

The affirmation of a proper view of Christ constitutes the first test of genuine fellowship.

1 John 1:1 "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;"

John here and below alludes to his eyewitness status.

That of which he speaks, he has witnessed personally.

His witness pertains to "the Word of Life", which is the proclamation concerning the One in whom was life (John 1:4).

John was there from the beginning.

His knowledge is first-hand.

John is not writing from something someone else has told him, He is stating things he knows to be fact.

John is aware that Jesus is the Word, which created all things.

John 1:1-4 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." "The same was in the beginning with God." "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." "In him was life; and the life was the light of men."

"Which was.":

This phrase refers to the proclamation of the gospel that centers in Christ's person, words, and works as contained in apostolic testimony.

“From the beginning”.

Although John’s gospel uses a similar phrase meaning eternity past (John 1:1, “in the beginning”), the phrase here (in the context of verses 1-4), refers to the beginning of gospel preaching when the readers first heard about Jesus (2:7, 24).

The phrase also emphasizes the stability of the gospel message.

Its contents do not change but remain stable from the very beginning; it is not subject to change due to current worldly fads or philosophical thinking.

“We have heard ... we have seen ... we have looked upon ... our hands have handled”:

The words used here point to the vivid recollection of the person of Jesus that John still had even in his old age.

For John, even 60 years later, those memories were permanently etched on his mind as if the events had just happened.

John was there when Jesus spoke to evil spirits, and they came out of people.

John saw the miracles of those being raised from the dead, and the sick healed.

John was there when Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount.

John was there when Jesus walked on the water.

He uses terms that strongly affirm the physical reality of Jesus, for a spirit cannot be heard, gazed at for long periods (“looked at”), or touched as Jesus was by John during His earthly ministry and even after His resurrection.

“One in whom was life”:

This refers not only to Jesus Christ but the proclamation of His gospel.

It is a gross understatement to say that he touched Jesus.

John lay with his head on the chest of Jesus.

John was called the apostle of love, because of his great love for Jesus.

John understood Jesus being the Lamb of God.

John knew that Life itself was contained in Jesus.

John knew that Jesus was the source of all Light and Life, as we see in the following Scripture.

John 1:4 "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." The only life we have is in Jesus, all else brings death.

Verses 2-3

“Manifested ... seen ... bear witness ... heard ... declare”:

John dramatically reemphasizes through repetition of these terms (in verses 2-3), the authority of his own personal experience as an eyewitness of Jesus’ life.

Such repetition pointedly reminds his readers that John’s personal testimony refutes the false teachers who boasted arrogantly and wrongly about the Christ they had never seen or known.

1 John 1:2 "(For the life was manifested, and we have seen [it], and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)"

"Manifested":

This means made real or appeared.

The life John and others saw (John 14:6), is what 1 John seeks to convey to its readers.

John says this life, which is summed up and was shown forth in Jesus Christ, “was with the Father;” this statement echoes (John 1:1), and points to Christ’s preexistence, His eternal presence and oneness with God the Father.

Jesus is eternal Spirit (the Word), and yet He took on the body of mortal man to reveal Himself to mankind.

He took on the form of flesh and dwelt among us for the purpose of experiencing our difficulties in the flesh.

He also, took on the form of flesh that He might save us from our sin and death.

With this phrase, John accentuates the eternality of Christ in His Pre-reincarnate glory.

The death of His body on the cross brought salvation to all mankind.

He gave the opportunity of salvation to all who would believe.

"And bear witness":

This means to tell of something you have seen with your own eyes.

Jesus is the quickening Spirit that brings eternal life to us.

John 11:25-26 "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:" "And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?"

John 14:6 "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

1 John 5:11 "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son."

1 John 1:3 "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."

John seeks to establish, or perhaps to broaden, the fellowship between himself and his readers.

"Fellowship":

Here means "a close association or relationship".

In Christian terms this word means mutual acceptance of and submission to the verities of Christian faith.

It means sharing in personal knowledge of and heartfelt obedience to God through Jesus Christ.

The reason God made man in the first place, was for fellowship with him.

John 14:20 "At that day ye shall know that I [am] in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you."

John 17:21 "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, [art] in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."

We read so much about man being made in the image of God.

This is exactly what this Scripture is stating here.

It is our spirit that becomes like the God Spirit.

God is a Spirit.

If we are to be like Him, it is in our spirit.

To fellowship with the Father and Jesus Christ, we would have to become spirit man, not flesh man.

Flesh fellowships with other flesh.

“Fellowship with us”:

Fellowship does not mean social relations, but that his readers were to be partakers (or, partners), with John in possessing eternal life.

John writes not only to affirm the physical reality of Jesus (verses 1-2), but also to produce salvation in the readers.

That genuine Christians are never “out of fellowship” is clear, since this verse equates fellowship with salvation.

To fellowship with God, we must crucify our flesh and live in the spirit.

John was just such a man.

On the Isle of Patmos, when no one else was looking, he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day.

Let your Spirit rule over your flesh, and you will be like John.

1 John 1:4 “And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.”

“That your joy may be full”:

A main goal for this epistle is to create joy in the readers.

The proclamation of the reality of the gospel (verses 1-2), produces a fellowship in eternal life (verse 3), and in turn, fellowship in eternal life produces joy (verse 4).

To realize the relationship we can have with the Father and also the Lord Jesus Christ does bring joy unspeakable.

Christians have hope of the resurrection that the world does not have.

Our fellowship with the Father and Jesus does not have to wait until we are in heaven with them.

When we allow Jesus to dwell within us, we can have constant fellowship.

This brings peace in the midst of the stormy world.

The major purpose of 1 John (is stated in 5:13), but another purpose is stated here.

For the recipients, and no doubt John as well, to enjoy and share in the deep sense of satisfaction and purpose that knowing Christ and walking with Him brings.

Verses 1:5 – 2:2

To conquer the false teachers who had denied the existence or importance of sin, John then affirms its reality.

This affirmation of sin's reality constitutes the second test of true fellowship (verses 1-4 for test one and 2:3-6 for test three).

Those who deny the reality of sin demonstrate their lack of genuine salvation.

The "we" (in verses 6, 8 and 10), is not a reference to genuine Christians but a general reference to anyone claiming fellowship, but denying sin.

The "we" and "ours" (in verses 7, 9 and 2:1-2), is a specific reference to genuine Christians.

1 John 1:5 "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."

"We have heard of Him".

The message that John and the other apostles preached came from God not from men (Gal. 1:12).

"God is light".

In Scripture, light and darkness are very familiar symbols.

Intellectually, "light" refers to biblical truth while "darkness" refers to error or falsehood.

Morally, "light" refers to holiness or purity while "darkness" refers to sin or wrongdoing.

The heretics claimed to be the truly enlightened, walking in the real light, but John denied that because they do not recognize their sin.

About that basic reality, they were unenlightened.

"No darkness at all":

With this phrase John forcefully affirms that God is absolutely perfect and nothing exists in God's character that impinges upon His truth and holiness (James 1:17).

Again, John implies his eyewitness status, having heard of Him, that is, Jesus.

John passes on to the church teaching he first received from Jesus.

Light and darkness here have ethical overtones.

John is saying that God is perfect and good; there is thus no sin or evil in Him.

This will have implications for followers of the God in the following verses.

Notice in this, that God is not a Light.

He is Light.

He is the source of all Light.

Light does away with darkness.

There is no darkness at all where there is God.

Light destroys darkness.

We hear some say that Christians can be possessed of devil spirits.

This cannot be, because Christians have the Light of the world dwelling inside of them.

They are possessed of the Light.

This Light does away with darkness.

Devil spirits are of darkness.

You cannot be possessed of darkness and Light at the same time.

Light does away with darkness.

A Christian can be oppressed from without, but not possessed from within.

God does not give light, He is Light.

We Christians give off His Light.

Christ in me is the hope of glory.

Jesus Christ is the Light of the world.

If He is in me, I am consumed with His Light.

So Christian, let His Light shine forth from you so brightly that the Father will be glorified in your works.

To "declare" is more than just tell.

It means it is so.

He (John), is stating a fact.

“Simplicity of God”.

Simplicity means that God is not complex, compounded, or divisible in His nature.

Simplicity does not deny the three distinct persons of the Trinity.

The three distinct persons all share in the same “essence” of God.

Neither does this mean that it is easy to understand all that is to be known of God because;

(1) sin has a limiting effect upon human understanding. And

(2) man’s understanding is finite, whereas God is infinite.

1 John 1:6 "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:"

Walk in darkness means walking in sin.

John may have had in mind people who claimed to be enjoying a close relationship with God, but whose lives were clearly characterized by sin.

Such a state of affairs, John says boldly, is impossible, such persons are lying.

Walk, in this instance, is speaking of the life that we live every day.

To fellowship with darkness, means we are away from the Light.

To be part of the dark side of life makes us a part of the devil.

Despite their claims to enlightenment and although the false teachers may have claimed fellowship with Christ, their walking in darkness refuted such claims, and consequently, demonstrated their lack of genuine salvation.

The reference to “lie” (in verse 6b), refers to the claim of fellowship (in verse 6a).

“Do not the truth”:

This points to their habitual failure regarding the practice of the truth.

To say we are a Christian, and live in darkness, makes us a liar.

The truth is, we have chosen the devil over God.

Life in Christ leaves no room for fellowship with the devil.

1 John 1:7 "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."

“God is light” (verse 5).

To walk in this light, which is to live free from bondage to sin (Romans 6:18), is to make true communion between believers possible.

Jesus’ violent death on the cross, which is what “blood” signifies, is the initial antidote for and ultimate defense against sin’s presence and power.

A Christian walks habitually in the light (truth and holiness), not in darkness (falsehood and sin).

Their walk also results in cleansing from sin as the Lord continually forgives His own.

Since those walking in the light share in the character of God, they will be habitually characterized by His holiness (see 3 John 11), indicating their true fellowship with Him (see James 1:27).

A genuine Christian does not walk in darkness but only in the light and cleansing from sin continually occurs (verse 9).

I see in this the need for Christians to have friends who are Christians too.

We must remain in the Light of God.

Walk daily with Jesus and other Christians, and the world will get dimmer and dimmer.

Notice the blood of Jesus Christ continuing to cleanse us from all sin, when we are in the Light.

The more we walk the Christian walk, the easier it gets to stay in the narrow path of Light that leads to Him.

1 John 1:8 "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

Others seem to have been claiming that they had no sin.

Jesus had taught that those who owned up to their sin could find forgiveness, while those who were blind to their sin would be left mired in it (John 9:41).

Not only did the false teachers walk in darkness, i.e. meaning sin (in verse 6), but went so far as to deny totally the existence of a sin nature in their lives.

If someone never admits to being a sinner, salvation cannot result (see Matthew 19:16-22), for the account of the young man who refused to recognize his sin.

Not only did the false teachers make false claims to fellowship and disregard sin (verse 6), they are also characterized by deceit regarding sinlessness (Eccl. 7:20; Romans 3:23).

We are not completely free of sin because we are saved, but the desire of our heart must always be not to sin.

The sin must be of an outward nature and not part of us.

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

We walk in His forgiveness.

1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us [our] sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

This is a restatement of (verse 7).

We ought not to deny our sins (verse 8), but rather to confess them before God.

This opens the door for His forgiving and cleansing light to purify our hearts.

“Unrighteousness”:

This is another way of saying “sin”.

"Confess":

This means this is the first step to forgiveness.

Christians are not righteous in their own right.

We have taken on the righteousness of Christ.

We are washed in the blood of the Lamb and robed in His white robe.

Continual confession of sin is an indication of genuine salvation.

While the false teachers would not admit their sin, the genuine Christian admitted and forsook it.

The term “confess” means to say the same thing about sin as God does; to acknowledge His perspective about sin.

While (verse 7), is from God’s perspective (verse 9), is from the Christian’s perspective.

Confession of sin characterizes genuine Christians, and God continually cleanses those who are confessing (verse 7).

Rather than focusing on confession for every single sin as necessary, John has especially in mind here a settled recognition and acknowledgment that one is a sinner in need of cleansing and forgiveness (Ephesians 4:32; Col 2:13).

1 John 1:10 "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

All have sinned.

When we become a Christian, we must not live in sin.

It must not be our way of life.

We must not desire to sin in our heart.

To deny one's sinfulness (verse 8), or sins is not just to deceive oneself; it is to make God a liar by denying His Word.

Both Old and New Testaments stress the universality of man's sin (Job 4:17; Psalm 14:3; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:10-18, 23).

"Make Him a liar":

Since God has said that all people are sinners (Psalm 14:3; 51:5; Isaiah 53:6; Jeremiah 17:5-6; Romans 3:10-19, 23 6:23), to deny that fact is to blaspheme God with slander that therefore defames His name.

1 John Chapter 1 Questions

1. How could this letter be classified?
2. Who wrote it?
3. Approximately when was it written?
4. What statement was stressed over and over in this letter?
5. What was the love of Jesus and John like?
6. The closeness of Jesus and John made John more aware of the _____ of Jesus.

7. What is Jesus called in verse 1?
8. Who created all things?
9. Name some of the things that John had first-hand knowledge of about Jesus' ministry.
10. In Him was _____.
11. What does verse 2 say was manifested?
12. What does the word "manifested" mean?
13. Jesus is _____ Spirit (the Word).
14. Why did Jesus take on the form of flesh?
15. Who did Jesus provide salvation for?
16. The life He has given us is in whom?
17. What brings unspeakable joy to the Christian?
18. What did John declare in verse 5?
19. Why can a Christian not be possessed of a devil spirit?
20. If we say we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we _____.
21. When does the blood of Jesus Christ cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
22. Who have sinned?
23. What does "confess" mean?
24. We must not desire to sin in our _____.