



A Course

*In*

**THE EPISTLES OF  
I, II and III JOHN,  
STUDIES IN**

Prepared by the  
Committee on Religious Education  
of the

**American Bible College**

Pineland, Florida 33945

A COURSE  
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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The compiler of this course is using by gracious permission the EXPOSITORY NOTES OF DR. THOMAS CONSTABLE of Dallas Theological Seminary as the basis for this course. Dr. Constable is a fundamental/evangelical Bible scholar who compiled these commentary notes over years as a pastor and seminary professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. Dr. Constable holds to the verbal, plenary and infallible inspiration of the Word of God. We encourage our readers to further study Dr. Constable's other commentary notes found on the Internet at <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries>.

As a biblical theologian, Dr. Constable will often quote various authors and use his own Greek translations. Although the American Bible College believes the King James Version is the preserved Word of God, this method of study allows the writer to occasionally condense a passage in his own paraphrase. This should not be construed to imply that the American Bible College is correcting God's Word.

During this course the student is required to read through the entire Epistles of John ten times.

It is our desire that this study will be spiritually enlightening and rewarding as you understand John's history and doctrines as relevant to the Church. All additional references will be footnoted and bracketed.

Respectfully your servant in Christ Jesus,

Dr. Marvin W. Royse

# FOREWORD

## APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF THESE BOOKS

The Epistles of John are most profound in their doctrine and prophetic aspects. A lifetime of study would be too short to master them. The thoughts are deep, and the student who is not willing to do prolonged and patient thinking ought not to undertake these books. Each phrase and each verse is of value, and to get at the meat of these books they must be carefully broken down and analyzed into their component parts. Each part must be studied for itself and then in its relation to the other parts. Analysis is not enough. We must synthesize each phrase to see John's epistles as a whole.

### *Suggestions for Study*

As we undertake these studies in the Epistle of I John, our primary effort should be to familiarize ourselves with the text itself. This we may do through careful reading and rereading. Following Dr. James M. Gray in his book, *How to Master the English Bible*, we suggest the following five rules for this reading:

- (1) Read the whole book at one time, ignoring chapter and verse divisions.
- (2) Read it continuously, right through at a single sitting, without break or interruption.
- (3) Read it repeatedly, over and over again; not twice, but ten or fifteen times.
- (4) Read it independently, without consulting other people's interpretations until you have direct contact and immediate acquaintance with the book itself.
- (5) Read it prayerfully, seeking your interpretation from the Holy Spirit who is present in the subject matter and also in the heart of the devout reader.

Reading is our First step, but mere reading is not study. Having read the book, we should study it carefully and purposefully, closing the book from time to time to summarize our study. We will use as our guide in this study the comments of Dr. Constable and other recognized Bible scholars. Additional books should be consulted where available, and a comparative study made of the different interpretations.

### *Some Values to Be Sought*

Closely connected with our purpose in reading and with the problems that we face are the values that we seek. First, we want a working knowledge of the *content* of the Epistles of John. Then, we want to know their *aim* and *purport*. Finally, we want to lay hold of the message of the books both for their original writing and its present century readers. The final test of value will be not how much of the text we have mastered, but how much Christ has mastered our lives through these *Studies in the Epistles of John*.

# ANALYSIS OF THE EPISTLE OF FIRST JOHN

**John, First Epistle Of**, the most important of the so called catholic or “general” Epistles, of which it is the fourth in order.

I. Its Authenticity. — That this is the production of the same author as wrote the fourth Gospel is so manifest that it has universally been admitted. ... The establishment of the genuineness of the one, therefore, involves the admission of that of the other. The evidence, however, in favor of the Epistle is sufficient to establish its claims, apart from its relation to the Gospel.

1. External. — Eusebius informs us that Papias knew and made use of it (H.E. 3, 39); Polycarp quotes a passage (4, 3) from it in his Epistle to the Philippians, ch. 7; Irenaeus uses it (with 1 John 2:18; 4:1, 3; 5, 1); it is quoted or referred to by Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian; and Eusebius assures us that it was universally and always acknowledged in the Church

2. With this the internal evidence fully accords. The work is anonymous, but the apostle John is plainly indicated throughout as the writer. The author asserts that he had been an immediate disciple of Jesus, and that he testifies what he himself had seen and heard (1 John 1, 1-4; 4:14), and this assumption is sustained throughout in a way so natural and unaffected that it would be doing violence to all probability to suppose that it could have been attained by one who felt that he was practicing in this a deliberate imposition.

III. Time and Place of writing the First Epistle. — On these points nothing certain can be determined.

1. It has been conjectured by many interpreters, ancient and modern, that it was written at the same place as the Gospel. The more ancient tradition places the writing of the Gospel at Ephesus and a less authentic report refers it to the island of Patmos. Hug infers, from the absence of writing materials (3 John 13), that all John’s Epistles were composed at Patmos. The most probable opinion is that it was written somewhere in Asia Minor, in which was the ordinary residence of the apostle (Eusebius, Hist. Eccl. 3, 23); perhaps, according to the tradition of the Greek Church, at Ephesus, but for this we have no historical warrant.

2. It is equally difficult to determine the time of the writing of this Epistle, although it was most probably posterior to the Gospel, which seems to be referred to in 1 John 1:4. Some are of opinion that the Epistle was an envelope or accompaniment to the Gospel, and that they were consequently written nearly simultaneously (Hug, Introd.). As, however, the period when the Gospel was written, according to the evidence of tradition and criticism, “fluctuates between the sixth and ninth decennium of the first century”

IV. For whom written. — The writer evidently had in his eye a circle of readers with whom he stood in close personal relation — Christians, apparently, who were living in the midst of idolaters (1 John 5, 21), and who were exposed to danger from false speculation and wrong methods of presenting the truths of Christianity (1 John 2, 22-26; 4:1-3; 5, 1-6, etc.). If the Epistle was written by John at Ephesus, we may, from these circumstances, with much probability conclude that the Christians in that region were the parties for whose behoof it was first designed.

V. Character. — Though ranked among the catholic Epistles, this writing has not the form of an epistle in this respect it more resembles a free homily; still, in fact, it undoubtedly was sent as a letter to the persons for whose instruction it was designed. The general strain is admonitory and the author seems to have written as he would have spoken had those whom he addresses been present before him. One great thought pervades the book — the reality of Christ’s appearance in the flesh, and the all sufficiency of his doctrine for salvation — a salvation which manifests itself in holiness and love. But the author does not discuss these topics in any systematic or logical form; he rather allows his thoughts to flow out in succession as one suggests another and clothes them in simple and earnest words as they arise in his mind. Some have imputed a character of senility to the work on this account, but without reason. Under a simple and inartificial exterior there lies deep thought and the book is pervaded by a suppressed intensity of feeling that recalls the youthful Boanerges [a surname of Zebedee’s sons, James and John, Mk. 3:17] in the aged apostle. The mighty power that is in it has drawn to it in all ages the reverence and love of the noblest minds, “especially of those who more particularly take up Christianity as a religion of love — a religion of the heart”

VI. Contents. — A strict analysis of this Epistle, therefore, seems hardly possible, as the writer does not appear to have been systematic in its plan, but rather to have written out of a full and loving heart. “He asserts the pre-existent glory and the real humanity of our Lord, in opposition to false teachers, and for the comfort of the Church (1 John 1:1-

7). Then follows a statement of the sinfulness of man, and the propitiation of Christ, this propitiation being intended to stir us up to holiness and love (1 John 1:8; 2:17); Jesus and the Christ are asserted to be one, in opposition to the false teachers (1 John 1:18-29). The next chapter seems devoted to the singular love of God in adopting us to be His sons, with the happiness and the duties arising out of it, especially the duty of brotherly love (ch. 3).

The following chapter is principally occupied with marks by which to distinguish the teaching of the Spirit of God from that of false teachers and of Antichrist, with repeated exhortations to 'love as brethren' (ch. 4). The apostle then shows the connection between faith, renewal, love to God and to the brethren, obedience, and victory over the world, and concludes with a brief summary of what had been already said (ch. 5)" (Fairbairn).

VIII. Design. — That the apostle sought to confirm the believers for whom he wrote in their attachment to Christianity as it had been delivered to them by the ambassadors of Christ is evident on the surface of the Epistle. It is clear, also, that he had in view certain false teachers by whose arts the Christians were in danger of being seduced from the faith of Jesus as the incarnate Son of God, and from that holy and loving course of conduct to which true faith in Jesus leads; but who these false teachers were, or to what school they belonged, is doubtful. ...

The main object of the Epistle, therefore, does not appear to be simply that of opposing the [Christian] errors of the Docetae (Schmidt, Bertholdt, Niemeyer), or of the Gnostics (Kleuker), or of the Nicolaitans (Macknight), or of the Cerinthians (Michaelis), or of all of them together (Townsend), or of the Sabians (Barkey, Storr, Keil), or of Judaizers (Löffler, Semler), or of apostates to Judaism (Lange, Eichhorn, Hänlein): the leading purpose of the apostle appears to be rather constructive than polemical. John is remarkable both in his history and in his writings for his abhorrence of false doctrine, but he does not attack error as a controversialist. He states the deep truth and lays down the deep moral teaching of Christianity, and in this way, rather than directly, condemns heresy. In the introduction (1 John 1:1-4) the apostle states the purpose of his Epistle. It is to declare the Word of life to those whom he is addressing, in order that he and they might be united in true communion with each other and with God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. He at once begins to explain the nature and conditions of communion with God, and, being led on from this point into other topics, he twice brings himself back to the same subject. The first part of the Epistle may be considered to end at 1 John 2:28. The apostle begins afresh with the doctrine of sonship of communion at 1 John 2:29 and returns to the same theme at 1 John 4:7. His lesson throughout is, that the means of union with God are, on the part of Christ, His atoning blood (1 John 1:7; 2:2; 3:5; 4:10, 14; 5:6) and advocacy (1 John 2:1) — on the part of man, holiness (1 John 1:6), obedience (1 John 2:3), purity (1 John 3:3), faith (1 John 3:23; 1 John 4:3; 1 John 5:5), and, above all, love (1 John 2:7; 1 John 3:14; 1 John 4:7; 1 John 5:1). John is designated as the Apostle of Love and rightly; but it should be even remembered that his "love" does not exclude or ignore but embraces both faith and obedience as constituent parts of itself. Indeed, Paul's "faith that worketh by love," and James' "works that are the fruit of faith," and John's "love which springs from faith and produces obedience," are all one and the same state of mind described according to the first, third, or second stage into which we are able to analyze the complex whole.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John McClintock and James Strong, *CYCLOPEDIA OF BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL LITERATURE*, Vol. IV, John, First Epistle Of, pp. 28-37. Hereafter referred to as [MCCLINTOCK].

# OUTLINE OF THE EPISTLE OF FIRST JOHN

- I. Preface (1:1-4)
- II. Requirements for Fellowship With God Who Is Light (1:5-2:28)
  - 1. Walking in the Light (1:5-2:2)
  - 2. Obeying His Commands (2:3-11)
  - 3. Knowing the Father and Abiding Forever (2:12-17)
  - 4. Warnings Against Antichrists (2:18-28)
- III. Requirements for Fellowship With God Who Is Righteous (2:29-4:6)
  - 1. Doing What Is Right (2:29-3:10)
  - 2. Loving One Another (3:11-24)
  - 3. Warning Against the False Spirits (4:1-6)
- IV. Requirements for Fellowship With God Who Is Love (4:7-5:12)
  - 1. Brotherly Love (4:7-12)
  - 2. Living in God and Living in Love (4:13-16)
  - 3. Love Displaces Fear (4:17-18)
  - 4. Love Summarized (4:19-21)
  - 5. Love for the Father and Faith in the Son (5:1-5)
  - 6. The Spirit, the Water, and the Blood (5:6-12)
- V. Concluding Remarks (5:13-21)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Glenn W. Barker, THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE COMMENTARY, Volume Twelve, The Book of First John, (Zondervan Pub. House, Grand Rapids, MI., 1981), p. 305. Hereafter referred to as [BARKER].



# INTRODUCTION by John Gill

## INTRODUCTION TO FIRST JOHN

The author of this epistle was John, the son of Zebedee, the disciple whom Jesus loved: he was the youngest of the apostles, and survived them all. He does not indeed put his name to this epistle, as the Apostles Paul, Peter, James, and Jude do to theirs; and it is easy to observe, that when this disciple, in his writings, had any occasion to speak of himself, it was usually by such a circumlocution, as the disciple whom Jesus loved, or the other disciple, studiously concealing his name: so that his not putting his name to this epistle need not create any scruple about his being the author of it, which everywhere breathes the temper and spirit of this great apostle; and whoever compares this epistle, and the Gospel written by him, together, will easily conclude it to be his, both from the style and subject matter of it: besides, as Eusebius asserts (Eccl. Hist. l. 3. c. 24), this epistle was generally received without scruple, both by ancient and modern writers. It is called "general", because it was not written and sent to any particular church, or person, and not because it was for the general use of the churches, for so are all the particular epistles but because it was written to the Christians in general, or to the believing Jews in general wherever they were; for that it was written to the Jews seems evident from 1 John 2:2. It was called, by some of the ancients, the epistle of John to the Parthians (Augustin. apud Grotium); by whom must be meant not the natives of Parthia but the Jews professing to believe in Christ, who dwelt in that empire. We read of Parthian Jews at the feast of Pentecost, Acts 2:9, who at that time might be converted, and, upon their return to their own country, lay the foundation of a Gospel church state there Dr. Lightfoot (Hor. Hebr. in 1 Cor. i. 14) conjectures from a passage in 3 John 1:9 that this epistle was written to the Corinthians; but there does not seem to be any sufficient reason for it. As for the time when, and place where, this epistle was written, it is not easy to say: some think it was written at Patmos, whither the apostle was banished in the reign of Domitian, and where he wrote the book of the Revelations; see Revelation 1:9; and here some say he wrote his Gospel, and this epistle, and that a little before the destruction of Jerusalem, and which he calls the last time or hour; and that his design in writing it was to exhort the believing Jews, either in Parthia, or scattered about in other countries, to brotherly love, and to warn them against false Christs and false prophets, which were now gone forth into the world to deceive men; see 1 John 2:18. Others think that it was written by him, when a very old man, after his return from his exile to Ephesus, where he resided during his life, and where he died, and was buried. It is called his "first" epistle general, not that it is the first general epistle, for the other two are written to particular persons, but is the first he wrote, and which is general: the occasion, and manifest design of it, is to promote brotherly love, which he enforces upon the best principles, and with the strongest arguments, taken from the love of God and Christ, from the commandment of Christ, and its being an evidence of regeneration, and the truth and glory of a profession of religion: and also to oppose and stop the growth of licentious principles, and practices, and heretical doctrines. The licentious principles and practices he condemns are these, that believers had no sin in them, or need not be concerned about it, nor about their outward conversation, so be they had but knowledge; and these men boasted of their communion with God, notwithstanding their impieties; and which were the sentiments and practices of the Nicolaitans, Gnostics, and Carpocratians. The heresies he sets himself against, and refutes, are such as regard the doctrine of the Trinity, and the person and office of Christ. There were some who denied a distinction, of persons in the Trinity, and asserted there was but one person; that the Father was not distinct from the Son, nor the Son from the Father; and, by confounding both, tacitly denied there was either, as Simon Magus, and his followers; regard is had to these in 1 John 2:22 and others, as the unbelieving Jews, denied that Jesus was the Messiah, or that Christ was come in the flesh; these are taken notice of in 1 John 2:22. Others, that professed to believe in Jesus Christ, denied His proper deity, and asserted He was a mere man, and did not exist before He took flesh, of the virgin, as Ebion and Cerinthus; these are opposed in 1 John 1:1. And others denied His real humanity, and affirmed that He was a mere phantom; that He only had the appearance of a man, and assumed human nature, and suffered, and died, and rose again in show only, and not in reality; of which sort were the followers of Saturninus and Basilides, and which are confuted in 1 John 1:1. This epistle is, by Clemens Alexandrinus (Stromat. l. 2. p. 389), called his "greater" or "larger epistle", it being so in comparison of the other two that follow.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John Gill's commentary on the entire Bible can be found on the Internet at Biblecentre.org. This is our source for his commentary on the Book of First John. Hereafter, referred to as [GILL].

# COMMENTARY ON THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

## I JOHN 1:

### Verse 1

The "beginning" (Gr. *arche*) may refer to the beginning of all things (John 1:1) or the beginning of the creation (Genesis 1:1). It could also refer to the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry (i.e., His incarnation; John 1:14), the beginning of the readers' experience as Christians, or the beginning of the Christian gospel. The last option seems most consistent with what John proceeded to say about that beginning (1 John 2:7; 1 John 2:24; 1 John 3:11; cf. Mark 1:1-4; Acts 1:21-22). The baptism of Jesus, the start of His public ministry and its proclamation, signaled this beginning.

John's verbs indicate progressively closer approach to the object of investigation. The essence of fellowship is increasing intimacy. Our fellowship with God must involve drawing closer to Him and viewing Him more intently all the time to be genuine fellowship. The same is true of fellowship on the human level. John used his three basic senses to highlight the reality of the object so his readers would know that he was not speaking metaphorically. He cited personal experience and appealed to empirical evidence to support the humanity of Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 24:39). Some false teachers denied His humanity. [Note: Bruce, pp. 16-17.] {"God" as found in the KJV usually refers to God the Father; however, sometimes it refers to Jesus (Gal. 4:4), and the Holy Ghost (Matt. 3:16); and sometimes to the entire Godhead.}

"Extreme Docetism [i.e., Docetic Gnostics] held that Jesus was not human at all but was merely a prolonged theophany, while moderate Docetism [i.e., Cerinthian Gnostics] considered Jesus the natural son of Joseph and Mary, upon whom Christ came at the time of baptism." [Note: Ryrie, p. 1464. Cf. Robertson, 6:200.]

Specific instances of personal encounter with Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 24:39) had left a continuing impression on John, as is clear from the verb tenses (perfect in the Greek text).

John may have used "we" editorially to represent himself personally, or "we" may include all Christians. It is more likely, however, that "we" represents John and the other eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ. In this

epistle John was speaking for others beside himself, and he was seeking to persuade still other believers of something not all of them had experienced or acknowledged (cf. Luke 1:2). [Note: D. Edmond Hiebert, "An Expository Study of 1 John," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:578 (April-June 1988):203.]

[Some believe] the "word of life" probably refers to the message about Jesus Christ, namely, the gospel. [Note: Westcott, pp. 6-7; C. H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles*, pp. 3-6; and J. L. Houlden, *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, pp. 50- 52.] John referred to Jesus as "the Word" in his Gospel, and he described Jesus claiming to be "the life" (John 14:6). The phrase "word of life" seems more likely to describe the message about the Person who is and who personifies life (cf. 1 John 1:2; Philippians 2:16; Acts 5:20). John probably spoke of Christ as "what" rather than "He" because John wanted to emphasize here the content of the message about Christ rather than the person of Christ.

In the following, Dr. Peter Pett contends the "beginning" refers to the beginning of all things.

'That which was (imperfect) from the beginning, that which we have heard (perfect), that which we have seen (perfect) with our eyes, that which we beheld (aorist), and our hands handled (aorist), concerning the Word of life, (and the life was manifested (aorist), and we have seen (perfect), and bear witness (present), and declare to you (present) the life, the eternal life, which was (imperfect) with the Father, and was manifested to us (aorist)); that which we have seen (perfect) and heard (perfect) we declare to you also (present), that you also may have fellowship with us (present): yes, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ: and these things we write, that our joy may be made full (or 'fulfilled').'

The main verb in this complex sentence is 'we declare to you'. This letter is a declaration, and John's purpose is to declare Christ in all His fullness. But the question is, what does he wish to declare? And his answer is, 'That which was (imperfect) from the beginning, that which we have heard (perfect), that which we have seen (perfect) with our eyes, that which we beheld (aorist), and our hands handled (aorist), concerning the Word of life.'

‘That which was from the beginning.’ In the light of John 1:1 this can only signify the eternity of ‘the Word of life’, of Christ and of His powerful and life-giving word. ‘In the beginning the Word was already in existence’ he had said in John 1:1, and that Word had created all things, and in Him was life which was as a light to men (John 1:1-5). Now he declares again that from the beginning there was that which already in existence before the commencement of the beginning, that which began the beginning, the Word, the Source and Creator of all things, for He spoke and it was done (Genesis 1:3; Psalms 33:6), and the Source and Creator of all truth and life. And here his especial emphasis is on Him as the Word of life. He is thus about to speak of the Eternal Life Who is the source of all life, and Who gives eternal life to His own.

So from the beginning of all things there was that which already was, that which already existed before time began, that which still continues in being, and ever will, that which was, that which is, and that which will be (compare Revelation 1:4; Revelation 1:8). And it is that which John seeks to declare.

The use of the neuter pronoun ‘that’ stresses the all-pervasiveness of what he is speaking about. ‘That’ which is spoken of was all in all. It was everything. Apart from ‘that’ there was nothing. The masculine pronoun (which would have indicated ‘the Word of life’ as a person) would have drawn attention away from the fact that what he was describing was this all-pervasive ‘everything’. God was all. Prior to the beginning there was nothing apart from God and His Word and His Spirit. And he will now reveal and declare that which already existed when the beginning began, and has been ever since. And it is ‘concerning the Word of Life’ Who also existed in the beginning.

So what John is telling us is that He Who was always in existence in the beginning, He Who was everything, came out of eternity into time, He came as the One Who ‘was continually in existence even in and before the beginning’, and He came in Jesus. Thus he is declaring that this Jesus Christ of Whom he will write has eternal essence and existence, and comes from the Source of all things, because He is essentially in His being of the Source of all things. The use of the neuter pronoun ‘that’ draws attention to the fact that he wants us to look at What Jesus is rather than just Who He is. Here is the Almighty, pre-existent One, the All-in-all, come as a Word from God bringing life, come from the Beginning,

personally revealing God to man (John 14:6-11; Hebrews 1:1-3).<sup>5</sup>

## **I. INTRODUCTION: THE PURPOSE OF THE EPISTLE 1:1-4**

### **Verses 1-4**

"This writing begins without any of the formal features characteristic of a letter, such as we found in 2 John and 3 John. Since the conclusion also lacks any typical features of a letter, we must conclude that the writing is not so much a letter as a written sermon or address." [Note: I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, p. 99.]

John began this epistle by explaining to his audience why he wrote. He said he wrote so his readers would enjoy the fellowship with God that is possible only to those who have seen [received] Him. This fellowship, he explained, rests on the reality of Jesus Christ's incarnation, and it results in full joy for those who experience it.

"No writer in the New Testament holds with greater intensity the full reality of the incarnation." [Note: William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, p. 17.]

### **Verse 2**

"Life" is a title of Jesus Christ here as "Word" is in John's Gospel (John 1:1). It reflects Christian experiences about which John wrote here whereas "Word" (Gr. *logos*) reflects the facts Jesus declared and that John recorded in the fourth Gospel. Grace and truth explain the Logos in John's Gospel (John 1:14), but light and love clarify Life in his Epistles.

In 1 John 1:1 the progression in the series of verbs (heard, seen, beheld, and handled) reflects increasingly intent attention to Jesus as the essence of fellowship. The progression in the verbs in 1 John 1:2 (manifested, seen, bear witness, and proclaim) shows the result of contemplating Jesus Christ and enjoying His fellowship, namely, witness. One first sees the manifested Christ. Then, having seen, he or she is able to bear witness. Finally one feels impelled by what that one has seen to announce to others the message of life.

There is a strong stress on the eternity of the life, Jesus Christ, in this verse. The emphases on the quality of the life (eternal) and its equality with the Father make this point (cf. John 1:2). The Incarnation is in view.

Eternal life is such a dominant theme in this epistle that one writer even entitled his commentary on 1 John,

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Pett, PETER PETT'S COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE, <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/pet/view.cgi?bk=61&ch=1>

*The Epistle of Eternal Life.* [Note: G. Goodman.] In John's writings "eternal life" is synonymous with "salvation." [Note: Smalley, p. 10.]

### Verse 3

"This verse introduces the purpose of the Epistle: 'that you [the readers] also may have fellowship with us [the apostles].' 'And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.'" [Note: Glenn W. Barker, "*1 John*," in *Hebrews-Revelation*, vol. 12 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 307.]

"You," the recipients of this epistle, must have been genuine believers in view of how John referred to them (cf. 1 John 2:12-14; 1 John 2:21; 1 John 2:27; 1 John 5:13). They had not known Jesus Christ in the flesh as the apostles had. John wrote so they could enter into and continue to enjoy the intimate fellowship with Him that the apostolic eyewitnesses enjoyed (cf. Acts 10:40-41).

'That which we have seen (perfect tense) and heard (perfect tense) we declare to you also (present tense), that you also may have fellowship with us (present): yes, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.' Having digressed in order to expand on his theme John now comes back to the main point. He has been declaring Christ as the Word of Life, the Word of life Whom he and his fellow-disciples had seen and heard, and Whom they still saw and heard in a different way, He Who is the Eternal Life. And his purpose was that through receiving from him that word and that witness which will bring home to them the Word of Life his readers too may be joined together with them 'in fellowship', sharing all spiritual blessing in common, including the blessing of the eternal word of life, and being joined together with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ in the same 'fellowship' in God that they, His disciples, had known with and through Him, and now knew with and through Him, a fellowship which brought them into sharing this life in common with God (see John 17:20-21). For in knowing the only true God, and especially as knowing Him through the One Whom He had sent, Jesus Christ, they would have eternal life. Indeed that was eternal life (John 17:3) [Peter Pett, *PETER PETT'S COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE*, 1 John 1:3]

"The main theme of the Epistle is fellowship with God." [Note: John G. Mitchell, *Fellowship*, p. 14. Cf. Hodges, *The Epistles . . .*, pp. 34, 50.]

"Here we are given, without any hesitation, a description, the *summum bonum*, of the Christian life; here, indeed, is the whole object, the ultimate, the goal of all Christian experience and all Christian endeavour. This, beyond any question, is the central

message of the Christian gospel and of the Christian faith." [Note: D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Fellowship With God: Studies in 1 John*, p. 77.]

Fellowship requires and rests on information, a common body of knowledge, and mutual acceptance of that data. John wrote to share this information with his readers.

"Thus two fundamental truths, which the philosophical heresies of the age were apt to obscure or deny, are here clearly laid down at the outset: (1) the distinctness of personality and equality of dignity between the Father and the Son; (2) the identity of the eternal Son of God with the historical person Jesus Christ." [Note: Alfred Plummer, *The Epistles of St. John*, p. 20.]

"It is an interpretive mistake of considerable moment to treat the term 'fellowship' as though it meant little more than 'to be a Christian.'" [Note: Hodges, "*1 John*," p. 883. See 3:24.]

False teachers were preaching information about Jesus Christ that was not true. John also wrote to combat their deception.

". . . the epistle . . . is written to a believing community that is dealing with fallout from the departure (1 John 2:19) of persons with beliefs and practices the author cannot endorse." [Note: Yarbrough, p. 29.]

### Verse 4

Here "we" is probably editorial. "These things" refers to what John wrote in this epistle. Not only would his readers experience full joy, but so would John as the readers entered into and continued in intimate fellowship with God (cf. 3 John 1:4). Joy is the product of fellowship with God. When there is no joy, there is no fellowship (cf. John 15:11; John 16:24).

In summary, John wrote as an apostolic eyewitness. He identified two dangers to readers that are still prevalent in the church today. One is the assumption that Christian fellowship is possible without common belief in Christ. The other is the assumption that someone can have a relationship with God without a relationship with Jesus Christ. [Note: Marshall, p. 107-8.] John wrote this epistle so his readers might join and continue in the fellowship with God that is possible only for those who have seen God, as the apostolic eyewitnesses of the incarnate Christ had done.

"He has the heart of a pastor which cannot be completely happy so long as some of those for whom he feels responsible are not experiencing the full blessings of the gospel." [Note: *Ibid.*, p. 105.]

These verses, rather than 1 John 5:13, constitute the comprehensive purpose statement of the epistle. There are four purpose statements in 1 John (1 John 1:3-4; 1 John 2:1; 1 John 5:13) plus 10 imperatives (1 John

2:15; 1 John 2:24; 1 John 2:27-28; 1 John 3:1; 1 John 3:7; 1 John 3:13; 1 John 4:1 [2 times]; 1 John 5:21) any of which could possibly provide John's purpose for writing. But 1 John 1:3-4 give his most comprehensive primary and secondary purposes in writing. [Note: Yarbrough, p. 46. See also Smalley, p. 15; and Gary W. Derickson, "What Is the Message of 1 John?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:597 (January-March 1993):89-105.]

"It is usually true that in the introduction to a book we find the key to that book. In the first four verses of this Epistle we find the key." [Note: Mitchell, p. 21. Cf. Hodges, "1 John," pp. 883-84.]

### Verse 5

A. Staying on the Path by Walking in God's Light  
1:5-2:2

["Light" in 1 John 1:5 is in a higher sense meaning the eternal source of truth, purity, and joy {McClintock and Strong}. It is spiritual enlightenment [knowledge] given by God to guide one in his living fellowship with God.]

John began his explanation of what it means to live in the light of God's fellowship by stressing the importance of continuing to walk in God's light. Some antinomian Gnostics believed that knowledge was superior to virtue and morality, and John's revelation here countered that error.

"If the readers are to have fellowship with the Father and with the Son (1 John 1:3), they must understand what makes this possible. They must know who God is in Himself and, consequently, who they are in themselves as creatures of God. So the author first describes the moral character of God in terms of light (1 John 1:5) and then goes on to deny three claims made by those who falsely boast of their knowledge and fellowship with God. The false positions are (1) moral behavior is a matter of indifference in one's relationship to God (1 John 1:6); (2) immoral conduct does not issue in sin for one who knows God (1 John 1:8); and (3) the knowledge of God removes sin as even a possibility in the life of the believer (1 John 1:10).

for walking in the light are (1) fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7), with subsequent cleansing by the blood of Christ; (2) confession of sin, (1 John 1:9) which brings both forgiveness and cleansing; and (3) trusting that if we sin we have Jesus Christ as an advocate and sacrifice for our sins (1 John 2:2)." [Note: Barker, p. 309.]

### Verse 5

This verse provides a basis for what follows in 1 John 1:6-10 and, in a sense, the whole rest of the letter. One commentator regarded this verse as the

main burden of the epistle. [Note: Yarbrough, p. 46.] It gives the standard against which the three following Christian professions fall short.

The "message" is the truth that Jesus Christ, the first "Him," revealed to the apostolic eyewitnesses.

The figure of light that John used to describe God emphasizes His ability to reveal and His ability to deal with what the light of His holiness reveals (cf. John 1:4-5; John 1:7-9; John 3:19-21; John 8:12; John 9:5; John 12:35-36; John 12:46; Revelation 21:23). John elsewhere described God as spirit (John 4:24) and as love (1 John 4:8). All three comparisons of God stress his immateriality and essence. God exposes and condemns sin (called "darkness" in John 1:5; John 3:19; John 12:35 [twice], and in 1 John 1:5-6; 1 John 2:8-9; 1 John 2:11 [twice]). The light figure emphasizes these qualities in God: His splendor and glory, His truthfulness, His purity, His self-communicative nature (cf. Psalms 27:1; Psalms 36:9; Isaiah 49:6; John 1:9), His empowering activity (cf. John 8:12; John 12:35; Ephesians 5:8-14), and His right to demand (cf. John 3:19-21). The light-darkness motif was common in both the Hellenistic and Jewish thought life of John's day and culture. [Note: Dodd, pp. 18-19; John R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John*, p. 70; Theodor H. Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures*, pp. 46, 49-51.] For John these concepts were mainly ethical (cf. Ephesians 5:8-14).

"Whatever other qualities this metaphorical designation may include, it clearly involves the intellectual and moral-*enlightenment* and *holiness*. Just as light reveals and purifies, so by His very nature God illuminates and purifies those who come to Him. His nature determines the conditions for fellowship with Him." [Note: Hiebert, "An *Expositional ...*," 145:331.]

"As darkness has no place in God, so all that is of the darkness is excluded from having fellowship with God." [Note: Barker, p. 310. See Westcott, pp. 16-17 for a good discussion of God being light.]

John frequently clarified and emphasized his propositions by restating them in terms of what they are not, as he did here.

**END OF SAMPLE**

