



CHARLES R. SWINDOLL

SWINDOLL'S LIVING INSIGHTS

NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

1, 2 & 3 JOHN • JUDE



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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

For more than sixty years I have loved the Bible. It was that love for the Scriptures, mixed with a clear call into the gospel ministry during my tour of duty in the Marine Corps, that resulted in my going to Dallas Theological Seminary to prepare for a lifetime of ministry. During those four great years I had the privilege of studying under outstanding men of God, who also loved God's Word. They not only held the inerrant Word of God in high esteem, they taught it carefully, preached it passionately, and modeled it consistently. A week never passes without my giving thanks to God for the grand heritage that has been mine to claim! I am forever indebted to those fine theologians and mentors, who cultivated in me a strong commitment to the understanding, exposition, and application of God's truth.

For more than fifty years I have been engaged in doing just that—*and how I love it!* I confess without hesitation that I am addicted to the examination and the proclamation of the Scriptures. Because of this, books have played a major role in my life for as long as I have been in ministry—especially those volumes that explain the truths and enhance my understanding of what God has written. Through these many years I have collected a large personal library, which has proven invaluable as I have sought to remain a faithful student of the Bible. To the end of my days, my major goal in life is to communicate the Word with accuracy, insight, clarity, and practicality. Without informative and reliable books to turn to, I would have “run dry” decades ago.

Among my favorite and most well-worn volumes are those that have enabled me to get a better grasp of the biblical text. Like most expositors, I am forever searching for literary tools that I can use to hone my gifts and sharpen my skills. For me, that means finding resources that make the complicated simple and easy to understand, that offer insightful comments and word pictures that enable me to see the relevance of sacred truth in light of my twenty-first-century world, and that drive those truths home to my heart in ways I do not easily forget. When I come across such books, they wind up in my hands as I devour them and then place them in my library for further reference . . . and, believe me, I often return to them. What a relief it is to have these resources to turn to when I lack fresh insight, or when I need just the right story or illustration, or when I get stuck in the tangled text and cannot find my way out. For the serious expositor, a library is essential. As a mentor of mine once said, “Where else can you have ten thousand professors at your fingertips?”

In recent years I have discovered there are not nearly enough resources like those I just described. It was such a discovery that prompted me to consider

becoming a part of the answer instead of lamenting the problem. But the solution would result in a huge undertaking. A writing project that covers all of the books and letters of the New Testament seemed overwhelming and intimidating. A rush of relief came when I realized that during the past fifty-plus years I've taught and preached through most of the New Testament. In my files were folders filled with notes from those messages that were just lying there, waiting to be brought out of hiding, given a fresh and relevant touch in light of today's needs, and applied to fit into the lives of men and women who long for a fresh word from the Lord. *That did it!* I began to work on plans to turn all of those notes into this commentary on the New Testament.

I must express my gratitude to Mike Svigel for his tireless and devoted efforts, serving as my hands-on, day-to-day editor. He has done superb work as we have walked our way through the verses and chapters of all twenty-seven New Testament books. It has been a pleasure to see how he has taken my original material and helped me shape it into a style that remains true to the text of the Scriptures, at the same time interestingly and creatively developed, and all the while allowing my voice to come through in a natural and easy-to-read manner.

I need to add sincere words of appreciation to the congregations I have served in various parts of these United States for more than five decades. It has been my good fortune to be the recipient of their love, support, encouragement, patience, and frequent words of affirmation as I have fulfilled my calling to stand and deliver God's message year after year. The sheep from all those flocks have endeared themselves to this shepherd in more ways than I can put into words . . . and none more than those I currently serve with delight at Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas.

Finally, I must thank my wife, Cynthia, for her understanding of my addiction to studying, to preaching, and to writing. Never has she discouraged me from staying at it. Never has she failed to urge me in the pursuit of doing my very best. On the contrary, her affectionate support personally, and her own commitment to excellence in leading *Insight for Living* for more than three and a half decades, have combined to keep me faithful to my calling "in season and out of season." Without her devotion to me and apart from our mutual partnership throughout our lifetime of ministry together, *Swindoll's Living Insights* would never have been undertaken.

I am grateful that it has now found its way into your hands and, ultimately, onto the shelves of your library. My continued hope and prayer is that you will find these volumes helpful in your own study and personal application of the Bible. May they help you come to realize, as I have over these many years, that God's Word is as timeless as it is true.

The grass withers, the flower fades,
But the word of our God stands forever. (Isa. 40:8, NASB)

Chuck Swindoll
Frisco, Texas

THE STRONG'S NUMBERING SYSTEM

Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary uses the Strong's word-study numbering system to give both newer and more advanced Bible students alike quicker, more convenient access to helpful original-language tools (e.g., concordances, lexicons, and theological dictionaries). The Strong's numbering system, made popular by the *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, is used with the majority of biblical Greek and Hebrew reference works. Those who are unfamiliar with the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek alphabets can quickly find information on a given word by looking up the appropriate index number. Advanced students will find the system helpful because it allows them to quickly find the lexical form of obscure conjugations and inflections.

When a Greek word is mentioned in the text, the Strong's number is included in square brackets after the Greek word. So in the example of the Greek word *agapē* [26], "love," the number is used with Greek tools keyed to the Strong's system.

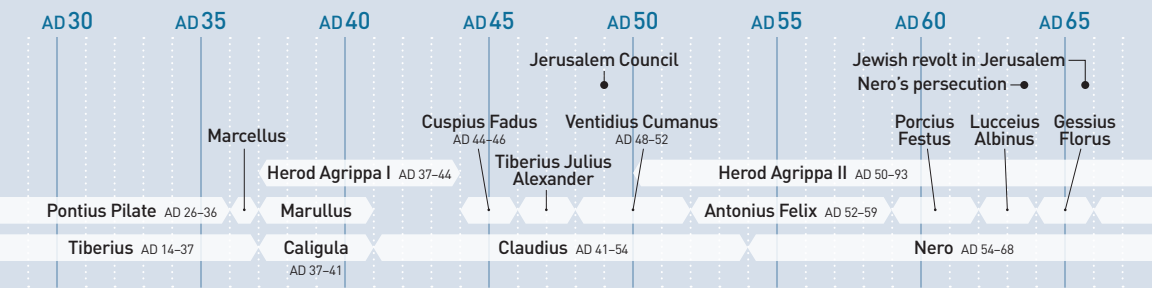
On occasion, a Hebrew word is mentioned in the text. The Strong's Hebrew numbers are completely separate from the Greek numbers, so Hebrew numbers are prefixed with a letter "H." So, for example, the Hebrew word *kapporet* [H3727], "mercy seat," comes from *kopher* [H3722], "to ransom," "to secure favor through a gift."

INSIGHTS ON 1, 2 & 3 JOHN

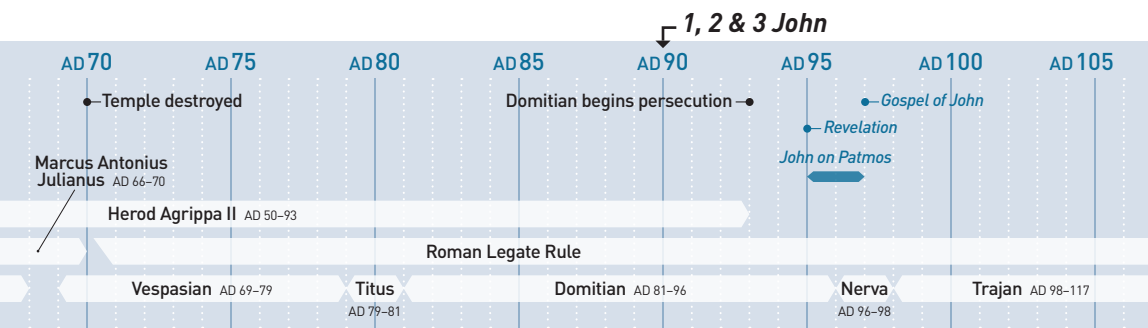
Here, nearing the end of his life, with clarity of perspective and singularity of purpose, the Lord's "beloved disciple" sought to revive the faith, love, and hope of his younger readers.

He hoped to encourage them to renew an authentic, contagious walk with Christ.

And his message of right living in a wrong world is as relevant today as it was then.



When John wrote these letters, he was most likely living in Ephesus, but he might have sent them while in exile on the island of Patmos. John's most likely recipients were Christians living in the towns and cities in western Asia Minor near Ephesus.



1, 2 & 3 JOHN

INTRODUCTION

In the twilight of his long life, the apostle John gathered his thoughts, surveyed the landscape of the world around him, and then sat down with parchment and ink to sum up his final words to the churches.

So much had changed since he had walked with Jesus as one of the original Twelve. Those brief but impactful three-plus years John spent with Jesus were followed by six long and painful decades. Erosion had set into the life of the church. In many places, the newness of fresh faith had begun to wane now that the church was in the hands of second- and third-generation Christians. A subtle, lethargic boredom had replaced the excitement modeled by those early followers of Jesus. The initial thrill had subsided, the bright flame of devotion reduced to a flicker.

In a setting like that, the subtle seeds of heresy are easily sown and rapidly grown. Cults feed off complacent churches, where ho-hum indifference replaces dynamic enthusiasm. Also, over the course of time, core values like truth, love, and hospitality can begin to be compromised, misdirected, and abused. Tragically, these scenarios were playing out in the church of John's day—and that's precisely what led him to write these letters.

THE BOOK OF 1 JOHN AT A GLANCE

SECTION	THE JOYFUL LIFE	THE CLEAN LIFE
PASSAGE	1:1-10	2:1-17
THEMES	<p>“These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.” (1:4)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By walking in the light with the Son of God 	<p>“I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.” (2:1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By obeying in love with our Advocate
KEY TERMS	<p>Life Joy Fellowship</p>	<p>Universe Little children Light/darkness Propitiation</p>

THE BOOK OF 2 JOHN AT A GLANCE

SECTION	INTRODUCTION	WALK IN THE TRUTH
PASSAGE	1:1-3	1:4-6
THEMES	<p>Personal greeting</p>	<p>Love one another Walk in obedience</p>
	<p>Encouragement to love and affirm</p>	
KEY TERMS	<p>Truth . . . Children . . . Teaching</p>	

THE BOOK OF 3 JOHN AT A GLANCE

SECTION	CONFIRMATION OF GAIUS	DENUNCIATION OF DIOTREPES
PASSAGE	1:1-8	1:9-10
THEMES	<p>John commends and encourages Gaius for “walking in the truth” (1:3-4).</p>	<p>John calls out Diotrepes for his misdeeds and his arrogance.</p>
KEY TERMS	<p>Beloved . . . Walking</p>	

THE DISCERNING LIFE	THE CONFIDENT LIFE
2:18-4:6	4:7-5:21
<p>“These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.” (2:26)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By testing in truth with the Holy One 	<p>“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.” (5:13)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By believing in knowledge with our Propitiation
Anointing Abide	Love Conquer

STAND AGAINST ERROR	CONCLUSION
1:7-11	1:12-13
Beware of false teaching Continue in true teaching	Personal farewell
Exhortation to be discerning	

TESTIMONY OF DEMETRIUS	CONCLUSION
1:11-12	1:13-15
John sets up Demetrius as a worthy example and a contrast to Diotrephes.	John wishes to see Gaius “face to face” (1:14) and sends greetings.

1 JOHN

When he wrote the letter known today as 1 John, it's likely that the aged apostle had more years behind him than he had months ahead of him. He was probably somewhere between 88 and 93 years of age. Let's just call him a 90-year-old man. Isn't it remarkable that a man at that age was so in touch with his times? In fact, I would argue that *because* of his age, he saw more clearly than ever. And that's what troubled him enough to write this letter.

Here, nearing the end of his life, with clarity of perspective and singularity of purpose, the Lord's "beloved disciple" sought to revive the faith, love, and hope of his younger readers. He hoped to encourage them to renew an authentic, contagious walk with Christ. And his message of right living in a wrong world is as relevant today as it was then.

THE AUTHOR, PLACE, AND DATE OF 1 JOHN

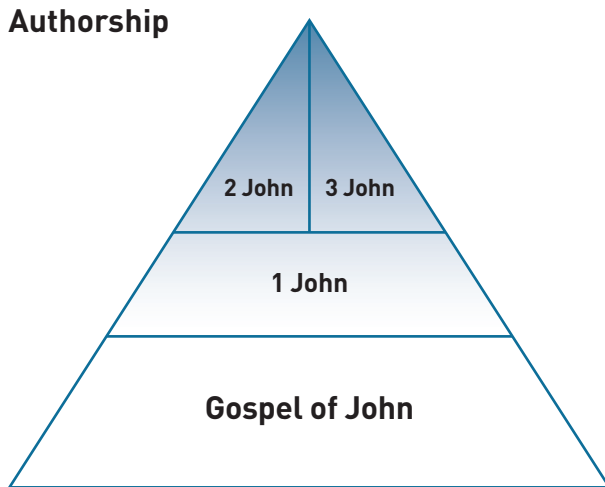
Although the author of this five-chapter message never names himself, several clues point us to the writer's identity. First, the author clearly places himself as part of a group of apostolic eyewitnesses to the life and ministry of Jesus, noting that "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also" (1 Jn. 1:3). This narrows our pool of potential candidates and points us to one of the original disciples of Jesus. But which one?

We are helped by the fact that the language, style, and themes of this letter are similar to those found in the fourth Gospel. Although the author of the fourth Gospel is also unnamed, it doesn't take Sherlock Holmes to narrow the possibilities to one. The author of the fourth Gospel refers to himself indirectly as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). This is undoubtedly a reference to the apostle John for a few reasons. First, he had to be one of the twelve disciples who had personally witnessed the events about which he wrote. In John 21:24, the author said, "This [disciple whom Jesus loved] is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true." Second, because the description "the disciple whom Jesus loved" implies a close, personal relationship with Jesus, it's most likely that the author was one of the three disciples in Jesus' "inner circle"—Peter, James, or John (Matt. 17:1; Mark 5:37; 14:33). Third, the author couldn't be Peter because he distinguishes himself from Peter (John 20:2), and he couldn't be James because James was martyred too early to have written the Gospel (Acts 12:2). This leaves

only one reasonable conclusion for the authorship of the fourth Gospel: John, the son of Zebedee and brother of James (Mark 3:13-17).¹

Because we have great confidence regarding the authorship of the Gospel of John, we can rely on that knowledge to determine the author of 1 John, which we can then use to determine the authorship of 2 and 3 John. One commentator of yesteryear describes the reasoning this way: “If the Gospel were wanting, we might be in doubt as to who wrote the Epistles. If the First Epistle were wanting, we might be in doubt as to who wrote the two short Epistles. If the Second Epistle were wanting, we should certainly be in serious doubt as to who wrote the third. But as it is, there is no room for reasonable doubt.”²

Because of the close relationship between John’s Gospel and the first of these three epistles (1 John), we can identify John as the author of this letter as well. And because of the relationship between 2 and 3 John and their common relationship with 1 John, all the puzzles about authorship fall into place.



The clarity of the authorship of John’s Gospel helps us determine the authorship of 1 John, which in turn helps us determine the authorship of 2 and 3 John.

Besides this evidence, among the earliest Christians there was little doubt that the apostle John wrote the fourth Gospel as well as 1 John. In fact, both of these books are included as authentic works of John in the Muratorian Canon, a list of New Testament books used in the church of Rome in the middle of the second century:

The fourth book of the Gospels [was written by] John, one of the disciples. . . . What marvel therefore if John so firmly sets forth each statement in his Epistle too, saying of himself, “What we have seen with our eyes and heard with our ears and our hands have handled, these things we have written to you”? For so he declared himself not an eyewitness and a hearer only, but a writer of all the marvels of the Lord in order.³

Already, in the early second century (around AD 110), one of John’s disciples, Polycarp of Smyrna, offered a paraphrase of 1 John 4:2-3, when he wrote, “For everyone who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is an antichrist.”⁴ In the next generation, Irenaeus of Lyons, a disciple of Polycarp, clearly linked the Gospel of John and 1 John as written by the disciple of that name:

John, the disciple of the Lord, verifies [this], saying: “But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have eternal life in His name.” . . . For this reason also he has thus testified to us in his Epistle: “Little children, it is the last time; and as ye have heard that Antichrist doth come, now have many antichrists appeared; whereby we know that it is the last time.”⁵

Not only did John refrain from naming himself as the author of 1 John, but he also declined to name the recipients. It’s likely that he intended the letter to be shared among numerous churches with which he was familiar, rather than being written to an individual or a particular local church. This is why the letter has been reckoned among the “Catholic Epistles,” where “catholic” means “universal” as opposed to “local.”

It may very well be that John originally had this epistle sent to the churches in the immediate vicinity of Ephesus, the city that had become his final home toward the end of his life. This would have included the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2–3 as well as numerous others dotting the map of western Asia Minor. From there, however, the letter would have spread far and wide until all churches throughout the world were blessed by its profound message.

Just as we can’t zero in on the precise location of John’s original audience, neither can we triangulate the letter’s place of origin. We know that toward the end of John’s life, he dwelled in the city of Ephesus in western Asia Minor. But sometime in the early nineties, a persecution against the Christians arose under Emperor Domitian, who reigned from AD 81 to 96. During this persecution, the apostle John was arrested and

allegedly thrown into boiling oil, from which he was miraculously preserved.⁶ As a “plan B,” John was exiled to the tiny island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, from which he wrote the book of Revelation (Rev. 1:9). After the persecution ended, John returned from exile and continued to minister among the churches of Asia Minor until his death after the crowning of Emperor Trajan around AD 98.⁷

John could have written his first epistle before, during, or after his exile on Patmos. Most likely, 1 John was written around AD 90.



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Emperor Domitian reigned from AD 81 to 96. During his persecution against Christians, the apostle John was exiled to Patmos.

OCCASION OF 1 JOHN

In his first epistle, the apostle John presents a simple, uncomplicated worldview of right and wrong: Christ versus antichrists, light versus darkness, truth versus falsehood, righteousness versus sin, love of the Father versus love of the world, the Spirit of God versus the spirit of the world, children of God versus children of Satan. In this way, John redraws lines that had begun to fade in the minds of his readers who were beginning to compromise and capitulate in the fog of relativism around them. However, John’s hard stand on truth doesn’t neglect love. Love for God and for one another is a major theme of the letter (see, e.g., 1 Jn. 4:7). His first epistle thus teaches that while it’s important to recognize the lines between truth and error, it must always be done in a spirit of love.

As he did in his Gospel, John stated the purpose of 1 John with clarity. Right up front he informed his audience of the reason for writing to them: “so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ . . . so that our joy may be made complete” (1:3-4). Later, John added two more purposes for writing: “so that you may not sin” (2:1) and “so that you may

QUICK FACTS ON 1 JOHN

When was it written? Around AD 90

Where was it written? Ephesus or Patmos

Who wrote it? John the apostle, son of Zebedee

Why was it written? So that believers would have fellowship with the Father and the Son and fellowship with one another in the Spirit, resulting in a joyful, clean, discerning, and confident life (1 Jn. 1:3-4; 2:1; 5:13).

know that you have eternal life” (5:13). In short, John wrote to them so they would have fellowship with the Father and the Son and fellowship with one another in the Spirit, resulting in a joyful, clean, discerning, and confident life.

To help them reach those lofty goals, John focused on three issues: the zeal of the believers, their ability to stand firm against false teachers, and the reassurance they could have with respect to eternal life. John wrote to churches full of people who had likely struggled with discouragement—whether due to their own sinful failures or the presence of false teachers in their midst. The aging apostle hoped to ignite the zeal of these

believers so that they might follow the Lord more closely and stand firm against those who meant to sow discord among the churches. In doing so, they would solidify their relationship with God and gain confidence in His work in their lives.

THE OUTLINE OF 1 JOHN

John wrote this letter to drive home the point that Spirit-enabled fellowship with the Father and the Son produces a joyful life, a clean life, a discerning life, and a confident life. He does this through a four-part outline:

- Fellowship produces *a joyful life* (1:1-10).
- Fellowship produces *a clean life* (2:1-17).
- Fellowship produces *a discerning life* (2:18–4:6).
- Fellowship produces *a confident life* (4:7–5:21).

Fellowship produces a joyful life (1:1-10). The key verse for this section is 1 John 1:4: “These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.” When we have intimate fellowship with God, through His Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we have an overflowing joy. Joy comes from walking in the light rather than the darkness. Those who walk in ignorance, sin, and falsehood will reap the misery of anxiety, guilt, and confusion. In our own dark and angry world, the joyful Christian becomes a bright beacon of light. What a refreshing discovery it is

for people of the world to witness a group of believers who really enjoy life! Let your joy be full.

Fellowship produces a clean life (2:1-17). In 2:1, John says, “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.” When we have a close, personal relationship with God and fellowship with His people, our battles against sin become winnable. We don’t have to surrender to temptation. This doesn’t mean that temptations vanish or that we won’t ever sin, but sin’s power is diminished. Even when we do sin, Christ steps in as our Advocate with the Father, making His victory our own (2:1-2). This, in turn, drives us to live a clean life before Him. In our “anything goes” society, the clean Christian is a contagious witness, so let your integrity shine forth.

Fellowship produces a discerning life (2:18–4:6). In 2:26, John writes, “These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.” A close relationship with God requires a deep understanding of His truth. Sadly, as Christians grow comfortable and complacent, their ability to discriminate between truth and error, light and darkness, right and wrong, is diminished. So, in this section, the longest of the four, John reinforces the need to beware of “antichrists” (2:18), to “test the spirits” (4:1), and to remember the “anointing” of the Spirit that teaches them the truth (2:20, 27). In a world of falsehood, John emphasizes the need for knowing and applying the truth. In our own deceptive culture the discerning Christian is a convicting presence, so proclaim the truth and conform your life to it.

Fellowship produces a confident life (4:7–5:21). In 5:13, John writes, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.” Assurance of our eternal, irrevocable salvation is one of the greatest promises we can embrace in the Christian life. Those who lack assurance of salvation fear death, worry about tomorrow, and often view God as an angry drill sergeant ready to pounce whenever they step out of line. Those who have assurance understand that God is the one who saved us by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone . . . and that He’s the one who will keep us through the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. In an age confused about the future, the Christian is a strong centerpiece of confident expectation. Let the stream of hope flow!

2 JOHN

Only thirteen verses long, the tiny memo that is 2 John would have barely filled a single sheet of papyrus.⁸ It’s like a note we might write and drop in the mail to a close friend. As a personal letter, it cradles some secrets we as outsiders aren’t privy to. Already in the opening line, we’re faced with some big questions: Who is the elder? Who is the lady? What’s the situation? These are some questions we should try to answer before wrestling with the text itself.

First, who is “the elder”? The Greek term for elder is *presbyteros* [4245], which has the basic meaning “being relatively advanced in age.”⁹ It can also refer to an official in a civil or religious office—as in an elder of a guild, synagogue, or church.¹⁰ In that instance, the primary focus would have been on the person’s office as a community leader, not on his age. However, these two meanings of *presbyteros* aren’t mutually exclusive. Generally, the leaders of civic or religious organizations would have been the more senior members of the community.

Whoever “the elder” is in 2 John, he doesn’t identify himself by name. However, a little probing helps us solve this first mystery. The same fingerprints of the author of 1 John are all over 2 John, in terms of writing style, themes, and vocabulary. And the book of 1 John likewise shares numerous similarities with the Gospel of John. Because we know the author of the Gospel of John to be the aged disciple of Jesus—John, son of Zebedee—we can identify the author of 2 John as the same person. This is confirmed by the language and style of John that indelibly mark this letter.¹¹

Second, who is the “chosen lady”? Two main views have been held from earliest days by commentators on this letter. One sees the phrase “chosen lady and her children” as a reference to a particular church (figuratively called a “chosen lady”) and the individual members of the church (figuratively called “her children”).¹² However, John switches between the second-person singular (“you”) and the second-person plural (“you all”) throughout these thirteen verses. If the singular

SECOND-PERSON SINGULAR (YOU)	SECOND-PERSON PLURAL (YOU ALL)
2 John 1:4	2 John 1:6
2 John 1:5	2 John 1:8
2 John 1:13	2 John 1:10
	2 John 1:12

addresses the whole church, whom is the plural addressing? And if the plural addresses all the members of the church, whom is the singular addressing?

Another view, which I have adopted, is that John has a particular person in mind when he uses the term “chosen lady” and employs the second-person singular (1:4, 5, 13). This seems to make the most sense of John’s very personal tone in the letter. John’s other personal references (“lady” [1:5]; “your house” [1:10]; and “your chosen sister” [1:13]) lead me to this conclusion. Like Lydia in the book of Acts (see Acts 16:14-15, 40), perhaps this lady of 2 John was a gracious hostess who opened her home for the sake of the ministry.

But what’s the situation? The specific historical context of the churches in the late first century is important to understanding the letter. At that time, as in some places in the world today where Christianity is an illegal religion, churches were not buildings or big-budget operations. The Christians mostly met in homes and flew under the radar of the Roman authorities and local power holders. So it may very well be that the believers addressed in 2 John met in the house of the “chosen lady.”

Also, at the time, there was no complete Bible like we have today. No leather-bound Old and New Testaments. Larger churches would have had access to the Old Testament translated into Greek, the common language. But the New Testament was still being written and compiled. Some of the older and larger churches like the ones at Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome would certainly have had a substantial collection that may have included Gospels, writings of Paul, and perhaps a few other books. But John’s works were either brand-new or not even written yet. In any case, the time and expense it took to gather, copy, and distribute a New Testament (when it was complete) would mean that smaller churches and new church-plants would have had to make do with parts and pieces of the Bible for years or even decades.

In a ministry situation in which the New Testament was not yet a complete collection of writings, early Christians had to depend on itinerant prophets and teachers to bring an authoritative message. The prophets of the apostolic era were bearers of divine revelation—just like the prophets of the Old Testament. Their ministry, like that of the apostles, was a temporary, foundational ministry of the church that was needed until the entire Bible was complete and the church had grown to a point of doctrinal stability. (See “Are There Apostles and Prophets Today?” page 105.)

QUICK FACTS ON 2 JOHN

When was it written? Around AD 90

Where was it written? Probably Ephesus

Who wrote it? The apostle John, son of Zebedee

Why was it written? To balance unconditional love with discerning truth

Small, remote churches welcomed these traveling prophets, providing comfortable lodging, sustaining them, and honoring them as messengers from the Lord. However, the kind of love and respect shown by churches to authentic apostles and prophets began to attract charlatans. As the first century progressed, not all of the roving “reverends” were worthy of their room and board. False prophets and teachers, claiming to be sent by God, would show up occa-

sionally to cash in and lead small, unsuspecting churches astray. Even secular writers attested to their abuses:

Lucian, the Greek writer, in his work called the *Peregrinus*, draws the picture of a man who had found the easiest possible way of making a living without working. He was an itinerant charlatan who lived on the fat of the land by travelling round the various communities of the Christians, settling down wherever he liked and living luxuriously at their expense.¹³

This kind of threat from false prophets and teachers seems to be the background of John’s brief dispatch to the “chosen lady” and “her children.” John no doubt caught wind of some of these foul-smelling false teachers and wanted to cut them off at the pass. The dear lady’s practice of hospitality demonstrated open-armed love, but in the face of the reality of false prophets and teachers, such hospitality needed to be checked by the important task of protecting doctrinal truth. While affirming her charitable spirit, John sent the “chosen lady” an urgent message: Balance unconditional love with discerning truth.

OVERVIEW OF 2 JOHN

The postcard-sized letter of 2 John urges believers to balance unconditional love and discerning truth. What an important message for us today! Our own twenty-first-century church faces charges of hatred when believers stand for the truth . . . and faces temptations to fudge on doctrinal and moral issues in the name of tolerance and acceptance.

In the introduction (1:1-3), John opens with a personal greeting that sets the affectionate tone of the letter but also introduces the key theme: the balance of love and truth (1:1, 3). The second paragraph

urges the lady and her children to continue to walk in the truth (1:4-6) and obey Christ’s command to love one another.

The letter then turns somber as John exhorts his readers to stand against error (1:7-11). Because many anti-Christian deceivers are on the prowl, the unconditional love characteristic of obedient Christians must be balanced by watchful discernment. Finally, in the conclusion (1:12-13), John returns to warm affection, expressing his longing to see his readers face-to-face and extending closing greetings.

3 JOHN

Though he isn’t named, I have little doubt that the apostle John authored this letter, most likely around the same time and under similar conditions as the letters of 1 and 2 John. Having established the authorship of those works earlier in this volume, the question of the identity of “the elder” (3 Jn. 1:1) has already been answered.¹⁴ The apostle John was an elderly man when he wrote this letter, perhaps in his nineties. He clearly wields great authority and deserves respect; but he writes with kindness, gentleness, and compassion.

COMPARISON BETWEEN 2 JOHN AND 3 JOHN

Second and Third John can be thought of as sibling letters. Both written around the same time by the same person, they have their own unique personalities but also have some striking similarities—much like siblings. If we place them side by side, we can clearly see some of these comparisons and contrasts.

	2 JOHN	3 JOHN
To Whom	To a lady and her children	To a man named Gaius
Occasion	Receiving the wrong kind of travelers	Rejecting the right kind of travelers
Problem	Misplaced hospitality	Missing hospitality
Solution	Truth to balance love	Love to balance truth

John addresses the letter to a particular person but mentions several others in general, and two by name. The recipient of the letter is Gaius, a common name in the Roman Empire, like “John” or “Jim” today. Three other men in the New Testament bore this name: Gaius

QUICK FACTS ON 3 JOHN

When was it written? Around
AD 90

Where was it written? Probably
Ephesus

Who wrote it? The apostle John,
son of Zebedee

Why was it written? To balance
truth with love

the Macedonian, who was with Paul at the riot of Ephesus (Acts 19:29); Gaius of Derbe, who transported a collection of money from his church to the suffering Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 20:4); and Gaius of Corinth, who was baptized by Paul and who served as Paul's host (1 Cor. 1:14; Rom. 16:23). Though it's possible that the Gaius of 3 John could be one of these, it's more likely that this particular Gaius was an otherwise unknown convert of John.

Who was Gaius? And what was his role in the church? These questions are best answered by exploring the occasion of the letter, which revolves around a few other individuals. First, there were the “brethren” who were “strangers” to the church (3 Jn. 1:5-8). These missionary workers—endorsed by John—were apparently shown good treatment by Gaius and others in the church, but poor treatment by another individual, Diotrephes, who even rejected the authority of John himself (1:9-10). Diotrephes epitomized wicked behavior, unbecoming of a Christian (1:11). However, another individual, Demetrius, is identified as a positive example to follow (1:11-12).

It seems most reasonable that two of these men—Gaius and Diotrephes—were among the church's leaders, possibly elders. However, Diotrephes appears to have succumbed to personal ambition, arrogance, and pride to the extent that he even set himself up against the authority of the apostle John and the traveling messengers commissioned by John. Instead of working as a team player among equals in the church, he wanted the first place of authority. Part of the purpose of the letter, then, was for John to indirectly urge Diotrephes to repentance through Gaius, backed up by the warning that John will show up in person and, if necessary, cut Diotrephes down to size.

OVERVIEW OF 3 JOHN

The little letter of 3 John breaks down nicely into four sections. First, John articulates a *confirmation of Gaius* (1:1-8), in which Gaius is commended and encouraged for his positive qualities and for doing what is right in the recent church conflict. Second, in his *denunciation of Diotrephes* (1:9-10), John calls out the scoundrel who is the source of the conflict, highlighting some negative attitudes and destructive actions

that simply needed to stop. Third, John ends the body of the letter on a positive note, the *testimony of Demetrius* (1:11-12), who serves as an example for others to follow, in contrast to the renegade Diotrephes. Finally, John ends the letter in virtually the same way as he did in 2 John, with a *conclusion* expressing his desire to see Gaius face-to-face (1:13-15).

Times haven't changed much, have they? Church people today—even those who hold the same truth and live according to the same moral principles—still often jostle for recognition, clamber for position, and break fellowship and ruin friendships to get to the top. Thankfully, most leaders do not behave this way. We have many examples of those who reflect good judgment, sound doctrine, and genuine love toward the brethren. The truth we hold must be balanced with genuine love for others.

A JOYFUL LIFE (1 JOHN 1:1-10)

When I was just a little boy, our family was vacationing at a bay cottage in South Texas near the Gulf of Mexico. One night my father told me, “I’m going to get you up early, Son. We’re going out where we’ve never fished before, but be ready to get up.”

It felt like he woke me up just minutes after I had fallen asleep. It must have been two o’clock in the morning. He shook me awake in the pitch dark and said, “Come on, come on. Put your sneakers on, let’s go.”

I staggered after him through a chilly night to the boathouse. We climbed into a little fishing boat not even sixteen feet long. The 35-horsepower Evinrude motor sounded like a thunderclap as it broke the stillness of the morning, and within moments we were cutting through the slick, moonlit water. There wasn’t a ripple on the surface except the shallow wake tailing behind our boat. We eased across the glassy bay and moved out toward the reef. He shut her down, and we slid up over the deep reef.

He slipped the anchor into the water and eased it down until it finally rested at the bottom. I peered across the shiny surface of the bay, which looked like a freshly tarred parking lot slicked with rain. I imagined I could walk on its surface or wade through it like a shallow pond. I dropped the line of my little cane pole into the water and, like the antsy boy that I was, I began to fidget.

My father looked over at me and said, “Sit still, Son. There’s big stuff down in there.”

I settled down for a minute or two. Maybe I’d catch something a little bigger than my hand. But a few minutes later I’d grown impatient bringing in my line and throwing it back out. As I scratched and shifted and spat in the water, my father just sat there, still as a statue. In the silence of the approaching dawn, he said to me again, “Sit still, Son. Be quiet. *There’s big stuff down in there.*”

All of a sudden, as if on cue, a huge Gulf tarpon jumped out of the water, flipped in the air, and splashed back down. It must have been

KEY TERMS IN 1 JOHN 1:1-10

***chara* (χαρά) [5479] “joy,” “cheerfulness,” “calm delight,” “gladness”**

Though only used once in 1 John, the word *chara*, meaning “joy,” has a prominent place in the purpose of the letter: “These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete” (1:4). Elsewhere in John’s writings, the term refers to the deep joy experienced at a wedding (John 3:29) or at the birth of a child (John 16:21). Lasting, genuine joy comes from a relationship with Jesus Christ, who answers prayer and comforts us in sorrow (John 16:22-24).

***koinōnia* (κοινωνία) [2842] “fellowship,” “communion,” “participation”**

The word *koinōnia*, frequently translated “fellowship,” should be thought of as more than just hanging out with friends, as the word often suggests today. Rather, it indicates “close association involving mutual interests and sharing” and is often used of the marriage relationship in literature outside of the New Testament.¹ Christian *koinōnia* begins with a believer’s spiritual union with God, which, in turn, results in a communion of fellow saints through the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 1:9; 1 Jn. 1:3). In 1 John, this kind of *koinōnia* is the basis for abiding joy (1:3-4).

***zōē* (ζωή) [2222] “life,” especially “spiritual life”**

Though this term is related to our English word *zoo*, in the New Testament, *zōē* rarely refers to animal life (cf. Rev. 16:3). Normally the term refers to the eternal life that comes from the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit. This is how it is used by John (e.g., 1 Jn. 2:25; 3:14; 5:11-13). Elsewhere, Jesus Christ is Himself called the *zōē* (Col. 3:4).

bigger than me. I almost leaped out of the boat, but my dad never budged. Without turning, he muttered under his breath, “Told you there was big stuff down in there.”

And right he was! By the end of that little excursion we had caught sixty-four speckled trout. (I’ve never forgotten that number, because Dad made sure I cleaned all of them!)

The apostle John’s unassuming, five-chapter book is like that slick bay we fished on that cold, quiet morning. Judging by a glance across its surface, 1 John looks like it might only be as deep as it is wide—containing a few minnows of truth and a couple of pan-fish principles swimming in a pool of shallow theology. A leisurely boat ride, but not good fishing. But the surface conditions can be misjudged. Despite the

simple language and short length of 1 John, *there's big stuff down in there.*

Ask any serious scholar of the Scriptures for their opinion on this letter and you'll hear that it's one of the most challenging of all the New Testament books. And unlike some books, like Romans, 1 Corinthians, or Hebrews, it doesn't have a few "problem passages" in an otherwise straightforward argument; 1 John is complicated from the very beginning. However, this must not stop us from dropping our lines in and pulling out some profound and practical insights.

John wrote this letter with a simple, overarching message in mind: Spirit-enabled fellowship with the Father and the Son produces a joyful life, a clean life, a discerning life, and a confident life. This first section (1:1-10) presents the principle that *fellowship produces a joyful life*. An intimate relationship with God through Jesus Christ will result in close relationships with fellow believers, leading to profound, inexplicable joy. This joy is based on the blessings that come through deep intimacy with the glorious God of the universe. These blessings include eternal life (1:2), right living in a wicked world (1:5-6), and cleansing from the penalty and power of sin (1:7-10).

The apostle John may have been an elderly fisherman-turned-fisher-of-men and may on the surface seem to have been a simplehearted follower of Jesus, but before long, we'll see that what he wrote with just a few dips into his inkwell is profound and deep.

God Is Life

1 JOHN 1:1-4

NASB

¹What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life— ²and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us— ³what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too

¹We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning,* whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. ²This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. ³We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard

NLT

may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. ⁴These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.

so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy.*

1:1 Greek *What was from the beginning.*

1:4 Or *so that our joy may be complete*; some manuscripts read *your joy*.

After new seminary students finish sipping on baby Greek by learning the alphabet, memorizing simple vocabulary, and processing the rudiments of grammar, they often cut their teeth on actual translation exercises from the letter of 1 John. The vocabulary is pretty simple—“beginning,” “word,” “life,” “light”—and quite repetitive, making it easy for the first-year Greek student to feel like a Greek scholar!

Then the professor asks the students a question that makes them feel like infants gumming teething rings: “Yeah, that’s what it says. But what does it mean?”

By the time they get to the fifth or sixth easy-to-translate-but-hard-to-interpret verse in 1 John, they’re about ready to throw up their hands and surrender. I’ve met lifelong Bible scholars who confess that they have so many unanswered questions about 1 John that they’ve avoided teaching or preaching on it for decades. Let me add my own confession to the pile: I’ve been preaching through books of the Bible virtually every Sunday since 1963, but not until 2009 did I build up enough confidence and courage to tackle 1 John in a verse-by-verse exposition.

Already in the first paragraph, we face great challenges for interpretation. In the following comments, I’ll try to slowly troll through this profound prologue and see if we can’t catch a few meaty principles for personal application. While Paul’s letters move logically and orderly through distinct themes toward a clear goal like steps on a staircase, John’s first letter feels more organic—like a dance in which a number of movements revolve around each other . . . or like a symphony, which visits and revisits distinct themes and melodies. Several major themes appear already in the opening chapter of 1 John: life, light, and truth. We’ll tackle the first of these in this section, which I have labeled *God Is Life* (1:1-4).

—1:1-2—

The Greek of 1:1-3 is a single sentence, and the main verb doesn’t appear until verse 3—“we proclaim.” Four relative clauses comprise all of

1:1, each describing the same thing: the “Word of Life.” First John 1:2 is a parenthetical statement, sometimes set off with dashes, describing how the Word of Life was able to be heard, seen, and touched.² Rather than rearranging the sentence, let’s stick with John’s own presentation and begin by analyzing the four clauses in 1:1 that describe the main subject of the apostle’s proclamation.

The phrase “the beginning” is prominent in two other books of the Bible, and I think John is intentionally trying to pull ideas together from both of them in the opening words of this letter. In Genesis 1:1, Moses refers to the beginning of Creation, when God brought light out of darkness, life out of nonlife: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” He formed and filled the formless and empty heavens and earth, bringing order out of chaos. Then, in the opening lines of the Gospel of John, the apostle writes, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).

Each of these discussions of “the beginning” involves God’s Word—speaking everything into existence in Genesis 1 and becoming incarnate in John 1 and 1 John 1. And each of these passages also discusses the theme of *light versus darkness*. The following chart shows these passages side by side for comparison.

GENESIS 1:1-4	JOHN 1:1-5	1 JOHN 1:1, 5
In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.	In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.	What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life. . . . This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.

When John refers to his subject as “what was from the beginning,” he’s making profound biblical and theological connections. The subject of his proclamation, “the Word of Life” (1 Jn. 1:1) is none other than the eternal, creative source of all things visible and invisible. He’s the

one through whom all things were made. He's the one who, with the Spirit of God, fashioned the heavens and the earth, made light shine in the darkness, and stepped into that creation when "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14).

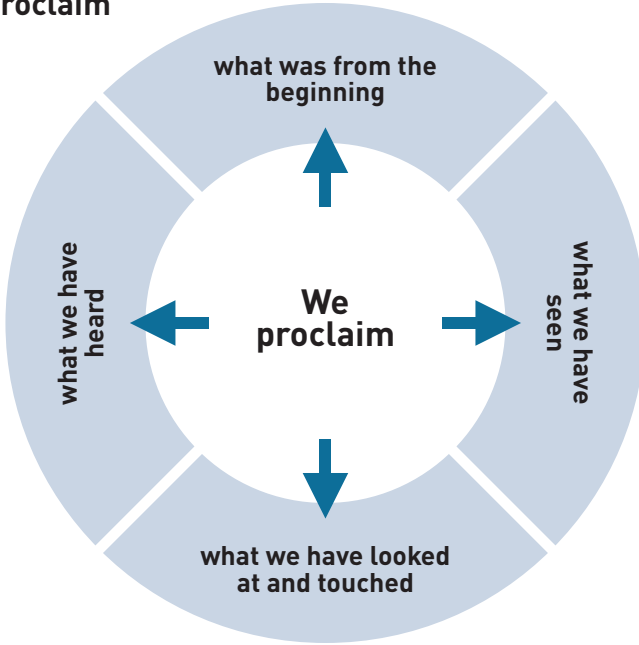
The term "word" (*logos* [3056]) had a profound significance to both Greeks and Jews in the first century. In Greek philosophy, *logos* referred to the uncreated principle of reason that gave order and structure to the universe.³ In the Old Testament, the "word" was both God's means of revelation—His message to humanity—and, on occasion, a divine presence that took some kind of physical form, indistinguishable from God (Jer. 1:1-14). In the early first century AD, the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria seemed to merge these Greek and Jewish concepts. One author notes, "Philo of Alexandria puts a great deal of emphasis on the notion of *logos*, making it the mediating principle between God and the world."⁴ By the end of the first century AD, when the apostle John was writing, Christians had no doubt about who this one mediator between God and men was—not an immaterial *logos*, but the Word made flesh, "the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

John's description of this *logos* is no mere discourse on secondhand information. The aged apostle isn't theologizing or speculating when he talks about the Word. He claims to have literally *experienced*, firsthand, the incarnate Word. The next three relative clauses, still referring to the same subject of his proclamation, emphasize this fact. John was among those few people still alive late in the first century who had heard and seen with their own ears and eyes the incarnate God-man, Jesus Christ. John made this same claim in his Gospel when he referred to events of the Crucifixion. Speaking of himself in the third person, he wrote, "And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe" (John 19:35).

It was vital for John that he had been an original earwitness of Christ's teachings and eyewitness of His life, miracles, death, and resurrection. In fact, when referring to the time he caught his first glimpse of the empty tomb, John wrote of himself (again in the third person), "So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed" (John 20:8).

John had also been present with the rest of the disciples when "doubting Thomas" obstinately declared, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe" (John 20:25). Eight days later, the resurrected Lord Jesus called that same doubter to put

We Proclaim



his finger in His hands and side and to feel for himself that He had indeed risen bodily from the dead (John 20:26-27). Because they were eyewitnesses, John and his fellow disciples could confidently confess to Jesus Christ, as Thomas had, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28).

With this background, the apostle John added in his letter that he and the other disciples had “looked at and touched” the incarnate God both during His earthly ministry and in His resurrected state (1 Jn. 1:1). Why does John say that he had “looked at” the Word of Life after he already said that he had seen Him with his eyes? The term “looked at” is the Greek word *theomai* [2300], which conveys more attentiveness than mere observation. It means “to have an intent look” or to perceive “above and beyond what is merely seen with the eye.”⁵ John also emphasized the fact that he and his companions had “touched” the Word of Life “with [their] hands” (1:1).

What a powerful testimony at a time when heretics were on the rise spreading a false doctrine of a fleshless, phantom Christ (4:2-3; 2 Jn. 1:7; see “The First Heretics’ Fleshless Christ,” page 25). One commentator sums up John’s testimony well: “John’s experience was both a mysterious perception of the living Lord and yet it was also very basic and down to earth. Jesus was no phantom of the spiritual realm but He was Jesus of Nazareth.”⁶

THE FIRST HERETICS' FLESHLESS CHRIST

1 JOHN 1:1

One of the most deceptive and destructive heresies in the first and second centuries of the church was called Docetism. From the Greek word *dokeō* [1380], meaning “to appear/seem so,” the Docetic heresy taught that Jesus Christ only *appeared* to be a man with a body of flesh, but in reality, He was just a spiritual being, a phantom.

Closely associated with this false teaching were the various sects church historians commonly call Gnosticism. Early church fathers trace the beginnings of Gnosticism to the disciples of Simon the Magician, who is mentioned in Acts 8:9-24. According to tradition, after receiving a sharp rebuke from Peter (Acts 8:20-23), Simon began claiming that he was the great god who had come down from heaven and that his accompanying prostitute, Helena, was his first creation.⁷ Simon was in Rome during the reign of Claudius Caesar, the emperor preceding Nero. By some accounts, Simon, the father of Gnostic heresy, had made such an impact by his demon-inspired magical arts that the Romans made a statue of him that bore the inscription—“TO SIMON THE HOLY GOD.”⁸

Simon the Magician’s budding form of Gnostic heresy wasn’t alone in the first century. After him, numerous copycat heretics popped up. Other teachers and splinter groups attempted to mix pagan religion, Eastern mysticism, and dualistic philosophy with Christianity in order to “improve” on what they believed were Christianity’s unsophisticated doctrines. Most of the Gnostic groups believed that the physical world was evil. This world and everything in it was not the good work of the true, purely spiritual God, but the evil work of an inferior, devolved being.

The insistence of the apostle John that the truly divine Son of the one true God “became flesh” (John 1:14) would fly in the face of the early Gnostic heretics. This is why John made it perfectly clear that he had seen, heard, examined, and touched “the Word of Life,” who didn’t simply appear as an apparition, but who “was manifested” (1 Jn. 1:2) in the flesh. As John writes, “Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh” (2 Jn. 1:7).

The brief parenthetical statement in 1 John 1:2 explains how it was that John could experience the “Word of Life” in the flesh. The life—the very wellspring of eternal life itself—“was manifested.” This verb, *phaneroō* [5319], refers to the entire course of Jesus’ earthly existence—His earthly ministry (John 1:31), His resurrection (John 21:1), and even His future coming to earth in glory (1 Jn. 2:28).⁹

The life that was manifested wasn’t the normal, everyday, earth-bound life—what we may call “biological life” (Greek *bios* [979]). In John’s usage, this life, *zōē* [2222], refers to eternal, heavenly, divine life,

literally embodied in Jesus Christ. He is “the bread of life” (John 6:48), “the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25), and “the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). This is the life that was “with the Father and was manifested to us,” which is why He was able to be seen (1 Jn. 1:2). When a person has seen the Word of Life manifested in the flesh, the only reasonable response is to “testify and proclaim” this eternal life.

—1:3-4—

After the parenthetical comment in 1:2, John picks up his original thought and finally arrives at the main verb: “What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also” (1:3). The verb “proclaim” (*apangellō* [518]) is related to the word for “gospel” (*euangelion* [2098]), which refers to a message of good news. The content of John’s proclamation is the good news concerning Jesus Christ, defined so well by the apostle Paul in the opening verses of Romans. It is

the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. 1:1-4)

This proclamation of good news is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16).

Those who hear and believe the message concerning Jesus Christ, whom John personally saw, heard, touched, and experienced, will be ushered into a permanent relationship with God through Him. John unpacks this profound truth when he states the twofold purpose of his proclamation of the Word of Life in 1 John 1:3-4.

First, John’s proclamation concerning the Word of Life is to result in true communion (1:3). Though most translations use the word “fellowship” here, I believe the word “fellowship” has been weakened in the minds of most Christians who use the word when they don’t know what else to say. Too often “fellowship” means “coffee time” or “gabbing in the hall” or “going out with friends.” None of those things come even close to the kind of relationship John had in mind.

The word *koinōnia* [2842], as used by first-century Christians, conveys an intimate, mutual participation in a life shared with one another. Let’s call it communion. It’s the outworking of a deep, spiritual union between God and the believer as well as between brothers and

sisters in Christ (1 Cor. 1:9; 1 Jn. 1:3). As believers have this intimate communion “with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ,” they will have the same kind of deep communion with one another through the work of the Holy Spirit. John proclaimed the Word of Life so his readers could have this kind of fellowship.

Second, John’s proclamation concerning the Word of Life is to result in full joy (1:4). Just as the word “fellowship” has suffered from flippancy, so has “joy.” When we hear the word “joy” we immediately begin to think of the emotion we feel when we find out we’re getting money back on our tax return . . . or when we pass a big exam . . . or when the person we’ve fallen for says, “I love you.” That’s joy, right? Wrong! Martyn Lloyd-Jones proposes this definition of biblical joy—

Joy is something very deep and profound, something that affects the whole and entire personality. . . . It comes to this; there is only one thing that can give true joy and that is a contemplation of the Lord Jesus Christ. He satisfies my mind; He satisfies my emotions; He satisfies my every desire. He and His great salvation include the whole personality and nothing less, and in Him I am complete. Joy, in other words, is the response and the reaction of the soul to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁰

In 1:3-4, the purposes of true fellowship and full joy are closely related. In order for the apostle’s joy to be full, he needs to have a true, intimate relationship with his fellow believers based on their mutual relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Authentic, lasting joy is inseparably linked to the Word of Life whom we worship and adore. In this joy, shared by those who have fellowship with God and with one another, we are fully accepted as we grow together in the Word of Life.

APPLICATION: 1 JOHN 1:1-4

A Practical Response to a Profound Prologue

In just four verses, making up only two sentences, the apostle John has packed a lifetime’s worth of practical principles we should never forget. I wouldn’t be exaggerating if I said we could spend the rest of our Christian lives meditating on and living out these few verses. The truths expressed by this passage are fundamental to Christian faith and life.

Let me help us begin to ponder its truths by putting these four verses into a loose paraphrase that I hope catches the essence of the passage:

From the very first time we disciples laid our eyes on Him, taking it all in—hearing with our own ears, seeing with our own eyes, staring at and studying Him over the years . . . actually *touching* Him with these hands—we saw it all happen before our very eyes, literally, and we’re now declaring what we witnessed: incredibly, the infinite life of God Himself who took shape before us! And now I’m writing about it so all of you can experience what has transformed our lives: intimate communion with the Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ . . . and the same satisfying joy we’ve known since we began walking with Him. That’s why I’m writing you this letter today.

The Word of Life, Jesus Christ the God-man, paid the complete price for your sins—His death for your life. He did it for you. All you have to do to enter into this deep communion and to experience this full joy is to accept the gift that God offers through faith in His Son. You can pray a prayer like this, in your own words, from your heart, to take the first step into that relationship with Him:

Lord Jesus, I accept you now. I want to know this life. I want to know this deep communion with God and with others. I want to experience this life of joy. I admit I’ve lost my way. Thank you for giving Jesus to die for my sins and to rise again to be my living Savior and to give me new life—His life—through the power of the Holy Spirit who comes to live in those who believe. I believe.

If you haven’t accepted Christ before, do so now. Enter into communion with God and with all of us who have already done so. If you do, our joy—yours and mine—will be full.

God’s Light and Our Blight

1 JOHN 1:5-10

NASB

⁵This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say that

⁵This is the message we heard from Jesus* and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. ⁶So we are lying if we say

NLT