

1 John

Read 1 John 1:1 – 2:6

This short letter has always been loved and valued by Christian believers ...

The assurance of God's love 3:1a

The certainty of God's forgiveness ... 1:7

The promise of life with God ... 5:13

And with some challenge ... 2:28

This letter is not like other NT letters because it has no introduction, no author's greeting, no signing-off signature. It reads like a short sermon.

A punchy sermon. The author has an unmistakable air of authority. He expects to be listened to and has sufficient status and age to be able to address the Christians as, 'My dear children' 2:1a, 2:12. He can be stern 4:1-3. The author stands out as a man of considerable spiritual stature.

This is John – son of Zebedee – an apostle - personally called by the Lord Jesus. So well known, so much respected, that he does not need to sign his name!

We have to do a bit of mirror-reading to get the most from 1 John. Using the evidence in the letter (and of 2 & 3 John plus the Gospel of John & Revelation)

We can construct the situation at the time:

1. John is in Ephesus and he leads a church. [Show on map]

2. His church has links to other small house churches in Asia – Read Rev 1:4a

** A loose association of Christian fellowships some started by the apostle Paul

** They are gospel churches – Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

(earliest fragment of NT – a creedal statement)

3. Some people left John's church 2:19a 'They went out from us ..'

** Denying gospel truth and adopting self-interested beliefs. 2:22, 2:15-16

** Circulating among the association house churches spreading error 2:26 and encouraging them to leave their church and join the new fellowship.

We can also work out, from the received text of 1 John, what the false teachers were believing and not believing.

[A] It began with doubt – doubt that God really could become man. We believe 1 John 5:1a; they denied that truth. They were taking the heart out of Christianity.

We believe that Jesus is fully human and fully divine and both are necessary for the salvation of sinful human beings.

But their doubt (that God could never really become man) led onto a more definite and very convenient belief.

[B] That the 'heavenly Christ' could never become the 'human Jesus' because matter is evil. Christ could never become Jesus. The heavenly and the spiritual is good; the earthly and the material is evil and secondary. So the body is earthly and secondary and therefore how we use our bodies doesn't really matter. A licence to indulgence and immorality.

We now have the background John, the house churches and the opponents of true gospel Christianity ...

We will be helped in our studies by one more piece of background – by contrasting the Gospel of John with these letters of John.

Read - John 20:31

We see it is a Gospel concerned with bringing us to belief
(in the Gospel of John there are 7 signs to trigger belief)

Then in - 1 John 5:13

We see that 1 John is a letter concerned with assuring the believer that his faith is real

In the Gospel of John - Signs to point to faith

In this Letter of John - Signs to prove that faith exists ... such as -
Hate of sin, Love of the brethren and Power to obey.

This letter should bring joy 1:4, assurance 5:13, affirmation 2:20-21,
deeper convictions 2:1 about sin and the Saviour.

Our chapter today is Chapter 1

It has an unusual opening paragraph

We can look at the first 3 verses by letting the eye rest upon the opening phrase in verse 2.

THE LIFE APPEARED

Seen, testified to, proclaimed in verse 2 & 3

Heard, seen, looked at, touched in verse 1

This LIFE is the central thought in the opening verses.

A life which was from the beginning – there.

He – Jesus Christ – was from the beginning. He is the Gospel message which defines and separates the true from the false church member.

We enter territory now in which there is crystal clear clarity – the Gospel message is none other than the WORD of LIFE.

Our Christian faith is based on Him. This (*your church's name*) church is based on the existence of Jesus Christ. BUT none of us has seen him!
None of us were there when the Life appeared.

Perhaps that worries someone here.
Should it?
It could worry us apart from these verses.

JOHN ASSURES US – He was there – heard/saw/touched – steadily increasing emphasis on the reality – the realness of Jesus.

JOHN was our ears, eyes and hands.

And we now have the written evidence v4 'We write this ...'

The evidence is not just hearsay – spinning around in the markets - it is now in the precise written and abiding form.

In addition it wasn't just John's personal observations he writes: **we** have heard, **we** have seen **we** have touched. The confirming joint apostolic testimony.

There are 105 verses in 1 John and 51 of them contain the plural form.

So let us be assured that the testimony about the 'Life which appeared' is true.

That's verse 1-4

Verses 5-10

Those who left John's church wanted to set up their own group and tried to get young and immature believers to join them. They promised fellowship and freedom regardless of belief. They denied that Jesus was the incarnate Son of God yet said that, they with their special knowledge could have fellowship with God and behave any way they liked.

John says that it is only possible to have fellowship with each other and God the Father by accepting the witness of the apostles that Jesus is the Christ. Because He is, as John writes in the Gospel of John, the door and the vine. Jesus connects us to God in fellowship.

There are other views floating around – as there always are ...

Verses 5-10 will expose 2 errors of the pretenders.

They are called the 'deceivers' in 2 John 7. These people have 'run ahead' thinking it is time to move on from traditional faith. Read 2 John 9.

Error 1 of the deceivers – claiming a relationship with God when they were walking in darkness rather than 'doing the truth'. Read 1:6

Error 2 of the deceivers – thinking they were without sin rather than owning up to what they were really like and confessing wrong doing. Read 1:8

The new brand of 'fellowship' of the deceivers claimed to be enlightened and better than the dull old beliefs of the apostle John. [Where have we heard that before?!]

John encourages and strengthens us ...
True enlightenment comes only through obedience.
True fellowship only comes through forgiveness.
1 John 1:7

Group Questions:-

- 1] The apostles heard, saw and touched and then wrote down their witness.
Is it satisfactory for us to believe on the basis of second-hand evidence? [1:1-4]
- 2] Imagine teaching 1 John 1:1-4 at an 'All-age' service.
Explain the connections between 'that which was from the beginning' / 'the eternal life' – and 'the life (*which then*) appeared – and 'that you may have fellowship with (*the*) Son'. [1:1-3].
Why is it important that we believe in the eternal-Jesus, the historical-Jesus and the ever present-Jesus?
- 3] In 1:3 would you not have expected John to have placed fellowship with the Father before fellowship with each other? Why does he give it this way round?
- 4] Consider 1:6 and 1:8 How is it possible for church members to be guilty of such self-deception?
Are there stages which lead to this sad outcome?
- 5] Give examples of the way in which true believers demonstrate that they are 'living by the truth' 1:6
- 6] If fellowship is not 'tea and cucumber sandwiches at the back of church' what is it?
Do you believe that (*your church's name*) Church is a true fellowship?
What is the cement of fellowship according to 1 John 1?