

THE WORD OF LIFE

1 John 1:1

INTRODUCTION

This morning we sang the beautiful words “*No condemnation now I dread*” in the hymn And Can It Be. Why? Do we own those words? Do we have certainty when we sing these words?

We live in an age of uncertainty. I think we are witnessing a philosophical shift from a post modern thinking as the intolerance in our world increases. However, God has given us His certain Word, with certain promises, that are based on the certain character of God.

Beloved, let’s begin with a quiz:

- What is the name of the last Old Testament (prophesying under the Old Covenant) prophet? → John the Baptist
- What is the name of the last New Testament prophet? → John the Apostle

These men are different “Johns” but with the same message.

→ READ 1 John 1:1-4

If you look at 1 John as a building, vv. 1-4 are the foundation John lays. And v. 1 is the cornerstone.

Weighty theological prologue at the heart of the Gospel.

Of all the New Testament epistles, 1 John is the least like an epistle. He doesn’t conform to customary practice of Greco-Roman letters.

- He doesn’t mention a single person’s name in his letter.
- There’s not a single definite statement, personal, historical, or geographical, concerning either the writer or the readers.

Illustration – I was reminded of a sermon Paul Washer gave at the Shepherd’s Conference. Normally, most would offer an

introduction of some sort to lead the listeners in the direction you will be going. Paul Washer launched out of a cannon with his sermon, preached for his allotted 50 or 55 mins, and then without slowing down, closed his Bible and sat down. It was an incredible blessing but full speed the entire time.

Application – In the same way, John has no introductory material, no author's greeting, no thanksgiving, no concluding salutations. He launches right into this weighty theological letter.

1 John has perhaps the strangest ending of any of the 66 books in the Bible. 5:21 – “Little children, guard yourselves from idols.”

John wrote this letter almost in the form of a written sermon.

Among the simplest Greek in the NT, for Greek students, this is often the first New Testament book they translate.

D. Edmund Hiebert said this about 1 John – “*The simplicity of its language makes it intelligible to the simplest saint, while the profundity of its truths challenges the most accomplished scholar.*”

Hiebert also described this same book as – “*artless simplicity yet majestic beauty*”

1 John has a quality of rhythm. He introduces a topic, leaves it and returns later (Paul uses more linear structure/approach)

He uses constant repetitions and antithetical parallels. This is patterned after Jewish teaching. This parallelism was especially common in the Wisdom literature in Old Testament.
→ We can see this in the Psalms - for example Psalm 1
→ **1 John 1:5-10** - in the odd verses he is talking about a believer and in the even verses he moves to unbelievers, back and forth.

For the Unbeliever → What does it mean to be a Christian?

For the Believer → How to diagnose your spiritual health?

For All → John addresses the question “what does a Christian look like?” How can you tell a real Christian from someone who is merely a professing Christian? How does one have assurance that he or she is truly trusting in Christ and has a saving relationship with Christ?

John gives three practical tests to answer these questions
→ a **Doctrinal Test**, a **Devotional Test**, and a **Directional Test** – he talks about **Truth**, **Love**, and **Obedience**. He goes back and forth between these thought this book.

Doctrinal Test of Truth → **2:24** – “As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.”

Devotional Test of Love → **4:8** – “The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

Directional Test of Obedience → **2:4** – “The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;”

And what does the Apostle of Love say in his letter if you fail any of these tests?

→ You are a fraud.

→ You are a liar.

→ You are a deceiver.

→ You are an antichrist.

This Apostle of Love uses very strong words.

This is an incredible picture of “The Son of Thunder” blazing forth against sin and error. No other NT writer uses stronger words in denunciation of sin and error than John.

→ The Apostle of Love was transformed from The Son of Thunder BUT he doesn't lose his thunder

Proposition : 3 Facets of Gospel Truth in v. 1, all tied together:

- I. The **Eternal Gospel**,
- II. The **Historical Jesus**,
- III. The **Vital Word**

1st Facet of Gospel Truth ...

I. The Eternal Gospel **1 John 1:1a**

Point – This message didn't just fall off the turnip truck.

→ These Gospel Truths are **Eternal** and **Stable**

Proof – “^{1a}**What was from the beginning**”

“**What**” - we see this word four times - what is this pronoun representing?

“**the Word of Life**” - who is Christ (also in 1:3).

Strange grammar → High energy! It captures your attention.

“**the beginning**” – Gen 1:1; John 1:1-2

John wants you to know the Messenger and the Message are rooted in Eternity.

He is saying the Gospel Message is eternal in origin.

It is rooted in the Word of Life Himself.

It is fixed and unchanging. AND it is everlastingly fresh.

The Gospel Message is not subject to change because of the current **worldly fad**.

The Word of Life does not bow the knee to the reigning **avant-garde philosophy** of the day.

From his heart as a pastor, John also lays the foundation here of his devastating assault on those who dare to try to sell a new and improved version of Christianity.

Same sentiment at in **Jude 3** – “Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”

If someone comes with a new message, a new and improved method.....run!!

Illustration – The Sirens from Greek Mythology were dangerous creatures on an island surrounded by treacherous cliffs and rocks off the coast of Greece. They lured sailors to their doom with the allure of their beautiful voices.

When Ulysses and his men set out on their journey of conquest, they were warned by Circe to avoid the sirens at all costs. They were told the sirens' voices were alluring, but fatal to all who listened. They would either crash their boat on the rocks and drown or become rooted like a tree until they died of starvation.

Application – Beloved, the siren song today is alluring. It sounds beautiful to the undiscerning ear. The siren song today is: – Speak the truth ... but speak it softly. Speak the truth ... but speak it shyly. Speak it without conviction.

Not John!!! And not lined up with Scripture.

John is categorical. He is dogmatic. He is black and white. He has no room for compromise.

John's zeal for the truth shaped the way he wrote. Of all the writers of the New Testament, John is the most black and white. He thinks and writes in absolutes. He draws a comparison between:

- Light vs. Darkness
- Truth vs. Error
- the Children of God vs. the Children of the Devil
- Love and Hate
- Life and Death
- God and the World

There is very little gray, if any, in John's thinking.

John is a Preacher of exclusivity → desperately needed in a Time of inclusivity such as ours.

MacArthur – *“His epistles provide for us a powerful message for a compromising, conviction-less, open-minded, permissive and liberal-thinking church. He’s ... the perfect writer to address the church today.”* MacArthur also said, *“The most clear-cut, black and white, authoritative, absolute writer of the New Testament is known in history as the Apostle of love. Not a love that takes you down the road of tolerance, but a love that takes you down the road of truth.”*

John has decisive judgment blended beautifully with gentleness and tenderness.

By the way, the word love (agapew) and its derivatives occur 52 times in 1 John. The words for knowledge (ginoskw and oida) appear 41 times.

Application – John tells us to love the Truth and to love one another

→ You do not love the Truth, if you do not love one another

→ and you do not love one another, if you do not love the Truth

If you have love without Truth ... you have a train wreck of tolerance and sentimentality

If you have Truth without love ... you have a disaster of hypocrisy and cold indifference.

Look at: **2 John 1-6** → Truth, Love

2nd Facet of Gospel Truth ...

II. The Historical Jesus

1 John 1:1b

Point – These Gospel Truths are **Historical** and **Corporeal** (which means related to the body) → A Visible Message ☺

- the historical Jesus was a real man; he had a real body

Proof – “^{1b}**what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled**”

“**we**” – some measure of literary flair, but more importantly, John is speaking of himself as the one remaining, living apostle on behalf of the Apostles (in vv. 1-4)

Illustration – Let me pause for a moment. When my beloved Margie and I were first married, there was a Mexican café by her house in Newark, CA, called Taqueria Los Gallos. We used to go there – I would get a super burrito – and they had a certain hot kind of salsa, make with a certain kind of chile that we loved. Some 15 years later, I was teaching a theology course at a seminary in Mexico City with my love by my side (on the trip, not teaching ☺). We went to a restaurant - there were 8 of us and we had a wonderful lunch for \$19. My beloved and I each had a taste of their salsa and we simultaneously exclaimed, “Taqueria Los Gallos!!!”
→ The point here is that we had a vivid memory of a personal experience.

John has a vivid memory of Jesus even in his old age. Some 60 years later, this testimony is permanently etched on his mind as if it had just happened.

John had direct personal experience. And he shares it with ... escalating credibility of witness → **Audible, Visual, Physical**

“**have heard ... have seen**” abiding memory; abiding impact
“**heard**” –

“**seen**” repeated in v. 1 and v. 2

→ They didn’t have highlighters in those days.

That is part of why they repeated things in Bible times.

Many heard the Word of God read to them. ☺

“**beheld**” – gazed intently, see with understanding

John 1:14 – “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Turn to: **John 20:1-8** → John and Peter ran to the tomb, young John got there first. He saw the empty tomb, the linens, etc.

Progression → from the audible to the visual to the physical (material)

“**our hands handled**” – touch, feel, grope after in order to find like a blind man (**III^a**)

Luke 24:39 – “See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” John 20:20-28 perhaps in mind?

Transⁿ – John is being personal, practical, and polemical here

He is not concerned, you see, with **persecution from the outside** of the church.

He is concerned with **infection on the inside** of the church.

John writes to instruct and to warn.

He wants to give true assurance.

And he wants to remove false assurance.

John is writing to believers who are threatened with false teaching → **4:1-6**

“**antichrists**” (2:18), “**false prophets**” (4:1), “**deceivers**”

Also, the Gnostics claimed to have secret knowledge. This is in contrast to the Life that was visible, physical and openly manifest to all! To women, to children. Jesus the man asked for the children to be brought to him.

Beloved, the 80+ year old Apostle John comes out swinging ☺

Perhaps his age had something to do with his brevity and getting right to the point in his letter without the usual niceties.

John uses the word witness in his writings more than all the other Bible writers put together, even including the Septuagint. John uses it 44 times out of 84 times in all of Scripture.
→ 1 John 1:2; 4:14; **5:7-11**

The witness of the truth. He speaks of the witness of John the Baptist (in his Gospel), the witness of Scripture, the witness of the Father, the witness of Christ, the witness of the miracles, the witness of the Holy Spirit and the witness of the Apostles.

Importance of Witness → **Deut 17:6** – “On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness.” – Remember, John says, “**we**” → The Apostles!

3rd Facet of Gospel Truth ...

III. The Vital Word

1 John 1:1c

Point – “**Vital**” is a late Middle English word that comes to us through Old French from the Latin *vitalis*, from *vita* meaning “**Life**.” → It literally describes the animating principle of living beings.

The **Vital Word** is → The **Life-Giving Word**

Proof – “^{1c}**concerning the Word of Life--**”

“**the Word of Life--**” – Christ, same as in John 1:1, to be sure

John is writing about Jesus, the Messenger of eternal life. And he is writing about the Message of eternal life! Phil 2:16

Jesus is both the Preacher of God’s message and the Message itself....the life-giving Gospel

He is the Substance and Source of eternal life.

John 5:24 – “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”

“**the Word of life**” gives life to the dead sinner.

“**the Word of life**” gives vitality to the weak saint.

“**the Word of life**” is the key to the 3 purpose statements in 1 John.

1. It gives us joy (1:4).

2. It makes us holy, pure and blameless (2:1).

3. And “**the Word of life**” gives us assurance (5:13).

In an age of uncertainty, 1 John gives us certainty!

→ 5:13 → 2:19

I like what the author of the hymn Amazing Grace, **John Newton**, said – *“I am not what I ought to be. I am not what I want to be. I am not what I hope to be in another world. But still, I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am.”*

Application – Beloved, the Word of Life does the work of life in the child of life.

CONCLUSION

Those sirens that I told about earlier...

When **Ulysses** and his men set out on their journey of conquest, they were warned by Circe to avoid the sirens at all costs. She did offer counsel. “Fill your companions' ears with wax”, she counseled. “If you yourselves want to listen to their song, first let your men bind you to the mast.” Ulysses heeded her advice. “If the melody beguiles me,” he ordered them, “I charge you, disobey my word, and bend more strongly to your oars.”

At length Ulysses heard the beautiful strains that stole into his mind, overpowered his body, and overcame his will. As the music came sweeter and sweeter, Ulysses' love for home weakened. He struggled with his shame, but at last the bewitching voices of the sirens prevailed.

"Loose me and let me stay with the sirens!" he raged. He threatened and entreated; he promised his men mountains of gold with desperate signs and gestures. His men only bound him more securely. He raged and tore at his bonds, for it was agony for him to leave the spot. But not until the last sound of music died out did they loose him. He had passed out in the way of temptation.

Beloved, the application here is that you can tie yourself up to prevent yourself from giving into temptation, BUT → if that is the only thing you are doing, you are not winning the battle. The battle must be won in the heart!

There is a better way than plugging your ears with the wax of Circe:

Jason and his Argonauts set out in search of the Golden Fleece. Medea warned Jason and his men of the menace of sirens, as they began to hear their bewitching strains. All around they could see the shore strewn with the bones of those who had succumbed to the sirens' charms.

On board the boat was Orpheus, the king of minstrels. "Let them match their songs with mine," he challenged the three maidens whom they could see, and whose silvery voices stole over the moonlit waters.

There were seagulls in long lines and shoals of fish that came to listen. The oars of Jason's heroes fell from their hypnotized hands. Their heads drooped, and their heavy eyes closed. Then Medea cried to Orpheus, "Sing louder!" Wake up these sluggards!" Orpheus struck his skillful hand over the strings of his lyre, and his voice rose like a trumpet. The music penetrated the sounds of the infatuated men, and their souls thrilled. Orpheus kept on singing until his voice completely drowned the voices of the sirens. Once again the Argonauts

took up their oars, and Jason and his men sailed to victory. "Sing the song again, Orpheus," they cried. "We will dare and suffer to the last."

As you and I fall more in love with our Savior and His Word, the beautiful music of the chords of His Doctrines of Grace, the body life of Christ, His victory over death and our Victory over sin – this music drowns out the alluring voice of sin and temptation, of discouragement and despair.

When the melody of the song of the Redeemed fills your soul, you will recognize error when it rears its ugly head, and you will discard it without a thought.