

1 John

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1 John 1:1

Right off the bat John wants to establish two things. First, he wants to establish his own credentials. In John's time, as in ours, there were many people trying to sell a very different form of God's story and for the person hearing God's story for the first time, hearing conflicting stories was confusing. John wants to clear up the confusion right away. When he talks about Jesus, he wants the reader to know that his information is not second hand, that he was there, an eyewitness. He was not just repackaging something he had heard from some other source, he was sharing his first-hand account of his experience with Jesus.

Second, John wants to establish who the Jesus he saw and heard really was and really is. Just like today, John is surrounded by many different voices saying Jesus was many different things. Some say that Jesus was just a man and not the Son of God, not divine at all. Some say the opposite, that Jesus wasn't a man at all, but a spirit sent from God. Either opinion won't do. If Jesus is not God and just a man, he cannot forgive my sins, His death holds no meaning for me, His resurrection cannot save me, if he as merely a man actually could be resurrected. Nor can his teachings hold any truth. The moral code of Christ our Savior is not disconnected from His claim to be the Son of God. AND if Jesus is just a spirit, He knows nothing of my life, my temptations, my griefs and sorrows or my joys. Nor can He bear my sins. How can a spirit be crucified? How is the debt for my sin paid?

No, either position won't do. Either Jesus is both God and Human and is exactly who He claimed to be OR He is a madman who is as crazy as a loon. As CS Lewis said, "He did not leave us that option. He did not intend to."

John comes now to expel all such nonsense. He comes to offer what he personally saw and heard and experienced during his time with Jesus.

First and last, John's message is about Jesus and he begins by saying three great things. First, that Jesus was from the beginning. In Jesus Christ, eternity enters time, the eternal One comes into the world of humanity. Second, the Divine entry into the world of humanity was a true and purposeful entry and He took on humanity's flesh and bone and humanness, with all of its weaknesses and discomforts. Third, harkening back to his gospel, John declares that the entry of the Divine into fallen creation was performed by the Word of Life. This is who came to us as the baby of Bethlehem, as the carpenter's son from Nazareth, the Word. We experience this Word in a variety of forms. In the New Testament the most common reference to the gospel is "the Word of God". It is a revelation of God that we could not have discovered on our own, sinful as we are. It is a Word, a revelation that can only come from God. God knows us better than we know ourselves but because of sin, we can neither see nor hear Him correctly and thus cannot know Him as He would like for us to know Him, so His Word comes to us that we may know Him.

Throughout Acts and in 1 & 2 Thessalonians, the gospel is referred to as "the Word of the Lord". Here it is to be understood as a message God could not send to us by any other means than through His Son.

Twice, in 1 Thess. 2:13 and Hebrews 4:2, the gospel is referred to as "the Word of hearing". God's message accomplishes more when there is a voice ready to speak it and an ear ready to hear it.

In the Parable of the Sower of Matthew 13, Jesus refers to the gospel as "the Word of the Kingdom" (vs.19). The entry of the Divine into the world was nothing less than the invasion of the Kingdom of God back into Creation to regain what was rightfully God's, His own Creation, now corrupted by sin.

Acts 15: 7 and Colossians 1:5 refer to the gospel as "the Word of the gospel". Gospel literally means "good news". The entry of the Divine into the world is essentially Good News to all people.

In Acts 14:3 and 20:32 the gospel is called "the Word of grace". It is the good news that salvation and a restored relationship with God are not things to be earned but are freely offered and given by God through Christ.

In Acts 13:26 the gospel is called “the Word of salvation”. Here is God’s offer of forgiveness of all past sin and the life altering power to resist sin and carry His forgiveness with us throughout our lives.

The gospel is “the Word of reconciliation” in 2 Cor. 5:19. It is “the Word of the cross” in 1 Cor. 1:18. It is “the Word of Truth in 2 Cor. 6:7; Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:15. It is the “Word of righteousness” in Heb. 5:13. It is “the health-giving Word” of 2 Tim. 1:13. And here in 1 John and in Paul’s letter to the Philippians (2:16) it is “the Word of life”.

Remember, it was the Word that was God’s instrument of creation in the beginning, so it is no surprise that the Word is the all-encompassing means by which God’s power and salvation is brought to us.

John says he is bringing to us what he has heard. What John brings is not his opinion or his interpretation of someone else’s opinion. What John brings is a word directly from the Lord. He does not begin as the rabbi’s would by quoting another more learned and respected rabbi. John comes saying, “This is what I heard directly from Jesus Christ Himself”.

The disciple says he is bringing what he has seen with his own eyes, bringing what he has “looked at”. Here again, English is such a poor language. A better translation of “looked at” might be “gazed on”. The Greek verb here is *theasthai*, meaning to visibly lock in on something or someone until the significance of that thing or person has been fully grasped. What John is saying is that he watched Jesus until he had soaked in all of what Jesus taught and more importantly all of who Jesus was. This is what John is getting at in his gospel, in 1:14, when he says, “we beheld His glory”. John gazed on Jesus, intensely watched and studied Jesus, until he saw the full glory of the only begotten of the Father.

To erase any question as to the human reality of Jesus, John says he wants his readers to know that he actually touched the Word of Life. In Luke 24:39, the risen Christ invites the disciples to touch Him so they would know that He was real and not a ghost and that He was truly raised, resurrected and alive.