

If We Confess Our Sins (1 John 1:5-10)

Water of Life

Dr. John Niemelä

September 10, 2015

INTRODUCTION TO 1 JOHN

Author = John the apostle

Date: sometime after AD 50, but not after the mid-60s

Readership: Leaders of a Local Church (likely Ephesus)

Zane Hodges argues:

. . . First John might have actually been intended for the leaders of the various churches to which it went. There are indeed indications within the epistle (2:12-14; 2:20; see Commentary) that the readership is regarded as spiritually mature [“you are strong, God’s word abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one”]. In that case, the First Epistle was intended to fortify the leaders who would bear the major burden of resisting the false teachers.¹

Consider 1 John 2:12-14:

2:12	little children (forgiven)	little children (know Father)	2:13c
2:13a	fathers (know God)	fathers (know God)	2:14a
2:13b	young men (overcomers)	young men (overcomers)	2:14b

These are not three separate audiences:

A son, a father (of his grandchildren), and a young man.

These are three ways of looking at the same audience.

Purpose: To enjoy the same fellowship with the Father and Son that John enjoyed

False (but common) view sees 5:13 as the purpose statement

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life... (1 John 5:13a)

Many think that “these things” refers to the whole book.

Referent to other similar statements (1:4; 2:1, 26) is to the prior paragraph

- A. And **these things** (1 John 1:1-3) **we write to you** that our joy may be full. (1 John 1:4)
- B. My little children, **these things** (1 John 1:5-10) **I write to you**, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. (1 John 2:1)
- C. **These things** (1 John 2:18-25) **I have written to you** concerning those who try to deceive you. (1 John 2:26)
- D. **These things** (1 John 5:6-12) **I have written to you** who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. (1 John 5:13)

The actual purpose statement of 1 John is 1 John 1:4:

John wants his readers to enjoy the same fellowship with Jesus Christ and the Father that He enjoys. Thus, the rest of the book explains how sinful human believers can enjoy fellowship with a sinless holy God.

¹ Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John* (Denton, TX: GES, 1999), 94-101.

EXPOSITION

Making sense of 1 John 1:1-3

“That which” is neuter. If John wished to refer to Jesus Christ, he would say “He who.”

“We” is distinct from “you.” Note 1:3, “We declare to you.” This is not a subset.

We = the apostles (cf. John 21:24 and 1:14). You = mature church leaders in Ephesus.

¹ **That which** was from the beginning,
that which we [apostles] have heard,
that which we [apostles] have seen with our eyes,
that which we [apostles] looked upon, and our hands have handled concerning
the message of life—★

² and the life was manifested, and we [apostles] have seen and declare to you [readers]
the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us [apostles]—★

³ **that which** we [apostles] have seen and have heard, we [apostles] declare to you [readers], in
order that you [readers] also may have fellowship with us [apostles and with the Father
and His Son].

Em-dashes which set off verse 2. Em-dashes that verse 2 is a parenthesis:

The proof that verse 2 is parenthetical is that the text reads smoothly without it. However,
we gain tremendous insight from verse 2.

Note that verse 1 ends with: concerning the message of life. Your English translations render it
as concerning the Word of life. They think that John uses Word as a synonym here for Jesus
Christ (as in John 1:1 and 1:14). I disagree. Remember that “that which” is neuter. Translations
seemingly connect “Word” with “that which.” That is incorrect, so word should be lower-case.

Should the idea be word of LIFE. Or should it be WORD of life?

The parenthetical verse 2 does not use the word **WORD** a single time. Verse 2 emphasizes **LIFE**.
Therefore, I take this as “MESSAGE of life.”

We can substitute message of life for each use of “that which.”

¹ **The message of life** was from the beginning,
the message of life we [apostles] have heard,
the message of life we [apostles] have seen with our eyes,
the message of life we [apostles] looked upon, and our hands have handled concerning the
message of life—

² and the life was manifested, and we [apostles] have seen and declare to you [readers]
the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us [apostles]—

³ **the message of life** we [apostles] have seen and have heard, we [apostles] declare to you
[readers], in order that you [readers] also may have fellowship with us [apostles and with
the Father and His Son].

Jesus Christ embodies the message of life, so the apostles had intimate contact with that message during the whole time that they were with Jesus on earth. He declares these truths to these mature believers so they may enjoy the same fellowship that the apostles have with the Father and with His Son (1:3)

**John writes verses 1-3 (and the whole book) so the apostles' joy may be fulfilled (1:4).
The KJV and NKJ incorrectly say "your." It should be "our."**

Note 2 John 1:4 and 3 John 1:4

END OF REVIEW; START OF NEW EXPOSITION

Issues related to all of 1:5-10

The purpose of these verses is to serve as a preventative for sin (per 1 John 2:1)

Logically (by itself) this negates any contention that 1:5-10 could describe unbelievers
(The seminary I attended has a dissertation arguing this view)

The referent of "we." Cf. 1 John 1:3, 5. It may be profitable to substitute (mentally) "the apostles" for "we/us/our" in this passage

Two Theses: God is without taint of sin, but people (even apostles) have the taint of sin

Verse 5 states a fellowship-related truth

Verse 3 presents the idea that ordinary-sinful men can have fellowship with God.

Verse 5 poses the issue that God is without any taint whatsoever

How can sinful man (even apostles) have fellowship with a holy God?

Verse 6 would be a false word by an apostle about fellowship.

Verse 7 would be a true word by an apostle about fellowship.

Verse 8 would be a false word by an apostle about sin.

Verse 9 would be a true word by an apostle about sin.

Verse 10 would be a false word by an apostle about sin.

How can sinful man (even apostles) have fellowship with a holy God?

God is without any taint of sin (1:5)

The apostles would be liars and would not be doing the truth, if they claimed to have fellowship while walking in darkness (1:6)

The apostles have fellowship with God (and God has fellowship with the apostles) and Jesus Christ's work on the cross cleanses the apostles from all sin, if the apostles walk in the light (as God Himself walks in the light) (1:7)

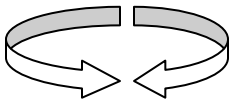
The underlined words clarify: we have fellowship with one another:

God fellowships with the apostles and the apostles fellowship with God

The apostles would be deceiving themselves and would be without truth, if they claimed not to have sin (1:8)

The phrase "have sin" does not mean possessing a sin nature. Cf. for example, John 9:41.

The apostles would make God a liar, if they claimed not to sin (1:10)



I am dealing with verses 9 and 10 in reverse order. Verse 10 reinforces the statement of 1:8. (I want to end with verse 9).

God is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse the apostles from all sin, if the apostles acknowledge their sin (1:9)

Forgiveness is not a judicial term. It is not the term for the once-for-all dealing with sin. Propitiation (which appears in 1 John 2:2, in the next paragraph) is the once-for-all dealing with sin.

All the apostles (especially, John, the author) wanted the readers (mature believers leading churches) to enjoy the same type of fellowship that the apostles did. Thus, we know that the apostles would affirm verses 5, 7, and 9.

CONCLUSION

If believers were to affirm the wrong statements (1:6, 8, or 10), they would lack the type of fellowship that John wished for them to have. The "forgiveness" of verse 9 is to have, rather than to lack this fellowship.