

Concerning the Message of Life (1 John 1:1-4)

Water of Life

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September 3, 2015

REVIEW OF THE LAST TWO WEEKS

INTRODUCTION TO 1 JOHN

Author = John the apostle (writer of John's Gospel, 1–3 John, and Revelation)
An apostolic eye-witness of Jesus (cf. 1 John 1:1-3), John 21:24; and John 1:14

Note 1 John 4:6

Similarities between John's Gospel, 1–3 John, and even Revelation

(Excursus: Authorial dist. of NT books & canonicity versus discovery model)
Most argue for discovery model of canonicity (versus 2 Peter 3:15f)

Peter, his readers, and false teachers had access to *all of Paul's letters*

Under authorial distribution model, pseudo-apostolic writings would fail

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

John was in Ephesus in AD 50 (probably coming before that). Cf. Acts 16:6.

He may have founded some of the seven churches of Rev 2–3

(Paul wrote to Ephesus and ministered in Ephesus, further
dating the time that John was not in western Asia Minor)

John's apparent absence from Asia Minor (cf. 2 John 12-13; 3 John 10 & 14)

2 John 12 suggests that John planned to return shortly when writing 2 John.

2 John appears also in 1 John, suggests that 1 John followed 2 John.

John's Gospel preceded 1–3 John (I date it during the 30s)

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:

The sequence of the first column argues against three audiences

Fathers and young men share attributes (see criss-cross)

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

I see it as three ways of looking at the same audience.

Note that the audience consists of believers

These are mature believers, leaders of a local church (remember 3 John 9)

¹ Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John* (Denton, TX: GES, 1999), 94-101, argues that little children = fathers = young men. Each term addresses every leader. Similarly, Paul calls the Galatians *brethren* (3:15; 4:12, 28, 31; 5:11, 13; 6:1, 18), *foolish Galatians* (3:1), and *my little children* (4:19). Alternate terms (at times) do designate an entire audience, not diverse segments. All Scripture translation, unless otherwise noted, is the author’s.

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, and that you may *continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.* (1 John 5:13)

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

They note that the Gospel of John has its purpose statement near end of book

However, the referent to other similar statements is to the prior paragraph

And **these things we write to you** that our joy may be full. (1 John 1:4)

Refers to 1 John _____:_____ - _____

My little children, **these things 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)

Refers to 1 John _____:_____ - _____

These things I have written to you concerning those who *try to* deceive you. (1 John 2:26)

Refers to 1 John _____:_____ - _____

Is the whole book written concerning the false teachers?
These purpose statements to have as their antecedent the prior paragraph.

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, and that you may *continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.* (1 John 5:13)

Refers to 1 John _____:_____ - _____

This is not initial assurance.
They were to continue believing.

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.

EXPOSITION

Making sense of 1 John 1:1-3

“That which” is neuter, so it cannot refer to Jesus Christ.

“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].

Understanding the Em-dashes which set off verse 2. They say that verse 2 is a parenthesis:

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—

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].

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 for Jesus Christ as in John 1:1 and 1:14. I disagree. Remember that “that which” is neuter. Translations seem to want to 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 parenthetic 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].

In 1 John 1:1-3, John says that Jesus Christ embodied 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.

John writes these verses (1:1-3) 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

CONCLUSION