

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

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INTRODUCTION TO 1 JOHN

1

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

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 & false teachers had access to all Pauline letters

Under author-distribution model, pseudo-apostolic writings would fail
Search YouTube for keywords: Niemela Peter Paul Canon

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 likely absent from Asia Minor (cf. 2 John 12-13; 3 John 10 & 14)

2 John 12 suggests a return shortly after 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 between AD 36 and 41)

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 Him) | fathers (know Him) | 2:14a |
| 2:13b | young men (overcomers) | young men (overcomers) | 2:14b |

These are not three separate audiences:

The first column’s sequence (little children, fathers, young men) argues against three audiences

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

A son, a father (of his grandchildren), and a young man. It is 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 3

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 John’s Gospel’s purpose statement near the book’s end

However, similar statements refer to immediately prior paragraphs

And these things we write to you that our joy may be full. (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. (2:1)

refers to 1 John ___:___-___

These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you.(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.

What do I mean that this is not about initial assurance?

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.

Making sense of 1 John 1:1-3

“That which” is neuter, It is not “He whom.” It cannot refer to Jesus Christ.

“We” is distinct from “y’all.”

“We [group 1] write to y’all [group 2].” (1:4)

We = the apostles (cf. John 21:24 and 1:14).

You = mature church leaders in Ephesus.

1 **That which** was from the beginning, (Verses 1-3)
that which we [apostles] have heard,
that which we [apostles] have seen with our eyes,
that which we [apostles] looked upon, and our [apostles’] 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, (Verses 1 and 3, without verse 2)
that which we [apostles] have heard,
that which we [apostles] have seen with our eyes,
that which we [apostles] looked upon, and our [apostles’] hands have handled concerning
the message of life—
2
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. The next page will clarify.

Note that verse 1 ends with: **concerning the message of life**. Your English translations 5 capitalize Word. They think that John uses Word as a synonym for Jesus Christ as in John 1:1 and 1:14, **but** “that which” is neuter. Translations seem to want to connect “Word” with “that which.” That is incorrect (because it is not “He whom”), so word should be lower-case.

Should the idea be word of **LIFE** (= **MESSAGE** 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 [apostles'] 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