

1 John 1:1 Commentary

PREVIOUS

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FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND HIS CHILDREN
Click chart to enlarge
Charts from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission
Another Overview Chart - [1 John](#) - Charles Swindoll

BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP		BEHAVIOR OF FELLOWSHIP	
Conditions of Fellowship	Cautions of Fellowship	Fellowship Characteristics	Fellowship Consequences
Meaning of Fellowship 1 Jn 1:1-2:27		Manifestations of Fellowship 1 Jn 2:28-5:21	
Abiding in God's Light		Abiding in God's Love	
Written in Ephesus			
circa 90 AD			

From Talk Thru the Bible

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND HIS CHILDREN
Click chart to enlarge
Charts from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission

1 John 1:1 What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life-- ([NASB: Lockman](#))

Greek: [Ο](#) [en](#) (3SIAI) [ap'](#) [arches](#). [o](#) [akekoamen](#). (1PRAI) [o](#) [eorakamen](#) (1PRAI) [tois](#) [ophthalmois](#) [hemon](#). [o](#) [etheasametha](#) (1PAMI) [kai](#) [ai](#) [cheires](#) [hemon](#) [epselaphesan](#). (3PAAI) [peri](#) [tou](#) [logou](#) [tes](#) [zoes](#)

Amplified: [WE ARE writing] about the Word of Life [in] Him Who existed from the beginning, Whom we have heard, Whom we have seen with our [own] eyes, Whom we have gazed upon [for ourselves] and have touched with our [own] hands. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

ESV: That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— ([ESVBible.org](#))

KJV: That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;

NLT: We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning,* whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

Phillips: We are writing to you about something which has always existed yet which we ourselves actually saw and heard: something which we had an opportunity to observe closely and even to hold in our hands, and yet, as we know now, was something of the very Word of life himself! ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

Wuest: That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard with the present result that it is ringing in our ears, that which we have discerningly seen with our eyes with the present result that it is in our mind's eye, that which we gazed upon as a spectacle, and our hands handled with a view to investigation, that which is concerning the Word of the life

Young's Literal: That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we did behold, and our hands did handle, concerning the Word of the Life--

WHAT WAS FROM THE BEGINNING, WHAT WE HAVE HEARD, WHAT WE HAVE SEEN WITH OUR EYES, WHAT WE HAVE LOOKED AT AND TOUCHED WITH OUR HANDS, CONCERNING THE WORD OF LIFE:

Greek - O en (3SIAI) ap' arches, o akekoamen, (1PRAI) o eorakamen (1PRAI) tois ophthalmois hemon, o etheasametha (1PAMI) kai ai cheires hemon epselaphesan, (3PAAI) peri tou logou tes zoes:

- **What was from the beginning:** 1Jn 2:13 Pr 8:22-31 Isa 41:4 Mic 5:2 Jn 1:1,2-18 John 8:58 = Jesus testimony of His eternality; Rev 1:8,11,17,18 2:8
- **Have heard... seen... looked at:** 1Jn 4:14 Lk 1:2 Jn 1:14 Ac 1:3 4:20 2Pe 1:16-18
- **and touched with our hands:** Lk 24:39 Jn 20:27
- **Word of Life:** 1Jn 5:7 Jn 1:14 5:26 Rev 19:13)
- [1 John 1 Resources](#)

First John is a book About Life: A life of assurance, a life of confidence

- About Light: light in the midst of darkness...
- About Truth: Truth in the midst of error...
- About Love: Love in the midst of a loveless society.

([1John Inductive Bible Study-sample](#))

([1 John-Precept Workbook -quote is from Lesson 2](#))

FIRST... A SUGGESTION... AN ENCOURAGEMENT

Let me encourage you to print out a copy of John's epistle in a literal version (NAS, ESV, KJV, not NLT or other paraphrased versions - Click the following link for a copy of [First John double spaced, wide margins in NAS - goto page 23](#)) and take a month to read through it once each day. With a printed copy you can feel the freedom to record your observations on the text (you may want to leave yourself wide margins on both sides -- if you read and study this letter for a month, you will need room to record your observations!).

As you read First John be alert for the apostle's frequent use of contrasts - light vs. darkness, truth vs. falsehood, love vs. hatred, love of the world vs. love of the Father, Christ vs. antichrists, children of God vs. children of the devil, righteousness vs. sin, the Spirit of God vs. the spirit of the Antichrist, and life vs. death.

You might also consider keeping a personal notebook as you study First John, recording your observations on the striking contrasts, the repeated key words (remembering to interrogate each occurrence of a contrast or a key word with the 5W/H'S), etc. The more time you spend observing this "simple" epistle, the more profound your insights will become. And even more important, the greater the sanctifying effect the Word of Truth will have on your daily walk in Christ (cp John 17:17) as the Spirit transforms you from glory to glory (2Cor 3:18-note). I can assure you that in both time (this present life in Christ) and eternity (our future life with Christ), the month you commit to spend in communion and fellowship with John vis a vis (French literally means "face-to-face" with) his first epistle, will yield incalculable benefits and surpassing, complete joy (cp 1Jn 1:4)!

Sidlow Baxter writes that First John "is a wonderful epistle. The words are very simple, but the thoughts are rich and deep. The

style is direct and plain, yet there is a subtle, mystic depth in the way that truths are stated and in the way they are developed from one sentence to another... the tone of the epistle is *paternal* both in the fatherly affection and in the fatherly authority which characterize it." (Explore the Book. Zondervan. 1960)

The apostle John probably wrote this letter sometime around AD90 (although one cannot be dogmatic) and probably wrote from Ephesus (but again one cannot be dogmatic). **Baxter** comments...

There seems to be no good reason why we should reject the common tradition that all the apostles were martyred except the Apostle John. God had special purposes in preserving John alive upon the earth. One of these purposes finds its expression in the apocalyptic visions which were given to him on the lonely isle of Patmos, and which have been transmitted to us by pen in the last book of the Bible. But another purpose we may well suppose was that John should live long enough to see not only the Satanic inoculation of Christian doctrine with the virus of "antichrist" heresy but its process and principal characteristics, so that he might write this First Epistle of John for the future guidance of the Lord's people. Let us be deeply grateful for this epistle of the seven contrasts. May we learn it thoroughly and heed it constantly! (Explore the Book, Zondervan)

Assuming John is near the end of his life (and the only surviving apostle), his words in this epistle remind me of Paul's words in his last communication to Timothy. Both wanted to make sure that the reader understood that the "main things are the plain things" and so without the customary epistolary greeting, John begins his letter affirming that...

JESUS CHRIST IS... FULLY MAN FULLY GOD

Oh, gift of gifts! oh, grace of grace!
That God should condescend
To make my heart His dwelling-place,
And be my closest Friend!
-J Sidlow Baxter

John's letter may be simple Greek and may not be as "hard to understand" as Paul's letters (2Pe 3:16+note), but oh how deep the current of this letter flows! Virtually every Greek word he uses is of vital importance, especially in these opening passages! The more I read and study it, the less I feel that I truly understand John's "simple" prose! For that reason, we want to make sure that we do not miss John's main point -- we as modern day followers (disciples) of Jesus Christ can trust the historical fact that Jesus was (is) fully Man and fully God. And so without delay (or formal introduction), John "eagerly" presents the evidence to support that truth.

What are the 5 facts he states about Jesus in 1John 1:1?

- (1) Jesus Christ (His Name is first mentioned in 1Jn 1:3) was from the beginning
- (2) We have heard Him speak
- (3) We have seen Him - we are "eye witnesses"
- (4) We have looked at Him closely and contemplated Him
- (5) We have touched Him-He was not a ghost, phantom or apparition, but a flesh and blood man.

Frankly if John had said nothing else, these facts would have been enough upon which we could stake our present life and our eternal destiny! Dear reader, do you believe John's introductory affirmation? (Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary says an "affirmation" is "*A solemn declaration made under the penalties of perjury, by persons who conscientiously decline taking an oath; which affirmation is in law equivalent to testimony given under oath.*")

As **John Piper** phrases it...

The spring from which the river of this text (1Jn 1:1-4) flows is Christ who never had a beginning but has existed eternally with the Father. And the ocean to which the river of this text flows is the joy of our fellowship with each other and with the Father and the Son (1Jn 1:3-4)... My goal (in his sermon) would be that God will use the water of his Word to refresh your confidence in Christ and intensify your desire for the joy of his fellowship. (See [Eternal Life Has Appeared in Christ](#))

John wrote 5 books of the Bible: His Gospel, I, II, III John, and Revelation

- Epistles—"Be Sure!"
 - Revelation—"Be Ready!"
-
- Book of John--salvation
 - Epistles--sanctification
 - Revelation—sovereignty
-
- Book of John—portrays Jesus as the prophet.
 - Epistles--priest
 - Revelation--king

Brian Bill ([Walk the Talk](#)) has a simple but accurate summary of John's profound prologue 1Jn 1:1-4...

- · Christianity is fact, not fiction. (1Jn 1:1)
- · Christianity is proclaimed, not private. (1Jn 1:2)
- · Christianity is shared, not selfish. (1Jn 1:3)
- · Christianity is rejoicing, not repressive. (1Jn 1:4)

David Legge has another summary...

- · Jesus must be encountered
- · Jesus must be experienced
- · Jesus must be expressed

Christ, Community and Communion

Now let's digress for a moment. Whenever you read the Bible, always remember **toread with a purpose**. You are not in a race to see how quickly you can complete your daily reading. You are instead invited to a relationship with the Creator of the Universe Who seeks to actively communicate with you through His "love letter", His letter of redemptive love. Remember that we only get to know someone by spending time with them. So take time to know your Father in heaven. As the psalmist says...

Cease striving and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.
Psalm 46:10

The Hebrew word for "cease" conveys the idea of sink down, let go, wait. It means to take your hands off and relax! It's so easy for us to get impatient with the LORD and start meddling in matters that we ought to leave alone. He is God, and His hands can accomplish the impossible. Our hands may get in the way and make matters worse. As Spurgeon said "Sit down and wait in patience, believers!" The practical implications are manifold - for one thing your life is only as big as your faith, and your faith is only as big as your God. If you spend all your time looking at yourself, you will get discouraged, but if you look to God by faith, you will be encouraged. So pull up a chair and sit awhile - in fact you might cease reading these notes and read prayerfully through First John asking the Spirit to enlighten the "eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." (Eph 1:18, 19a).

Katharina von Schlegel, the author of the hymn "[Be Still, My Soul \(sung by Selah\)](#)", drew her inspiration for the beautiful hymn Be Still My Soul from Psalm 46:10...

Be still, my soul; thy God doth undertake
To guide the future as He has the past.
Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake;
All now mysterious shall be bright at last.
Be still, my soul: the winds and waves still know
His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below.

Always make an effort to look for "key words", which will aid you in discerning the author's major subjects and themes. Key words are often detected by repetition (for more discussion see **key words**). Sometimes key words are placed throughout the book, but

other times they are "key" in a single chapter. For example, in First John chapter 1 we find **koinonia** (fellowship) 3 times (and no other uses in the book) - 1 John 1:3, 1 John 1:6, 1 John 1:7. Without being too simplistic, from this observation, what does John seek to emphasize at the beginning of his epistle?

KEY WORDS FIRST JOHN BY CHAPTER				
1 John 1	1 John 2	1 John 3	1 John 4	1 John 5
Fellowship Seen "If..." Sin	Write Know Abide Commandment	Love Know Abide	Love Know Abide	Know Life

Key words in 1 John:

- **Truth or True** - 1 John 1:6 1 John 1:8 1 John 2:4 1 John 2:8 1 John 2:21 1 John 2:27 1 John 3:18 1 John 3:19 1 John 4:6 1 John 5:6 1 John 5:20
- **Write/written/writing** (grapho) - 1 John 1:4 1 John 2:1 1 John 2:7 1 John 2:8 1 John 2:12 1 John 2:13 1 John 2:14 1 John 2:21 1 John 2:26 1 John 5:13
- **Dark or Darkness** - 1 John 1:5 1 John 1:6 1 John 2:8 1 John 2:9 1 John 2:11
- **Light** - 1 John 1:5 1 John 1:7 1 John 2:8 1 John 2:9 1 John 2:10
- **Born** (Used metaphorically ~ "born again" like Jn 3:3) - 1 John 2:29, 3:9 (2x), 1Jn 4:7, 1Jn 5:1 (2x), 1Jn 5:4, 1Jn 5:18
- **Life** (zoe) - 10x - 1Jn1:1, 1:2, 2:25, 3:14, 3:15, 5:11, 5:12, 5:13, 5:16, 5:20.
- **Zoe** is also a key word in the Gospel of John - 36x in 32v (135 uses in entire NT). - John 1:4; 3:15, 16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 26, 29, 39, 40; 6:27, 33, 35, 40, 47, 48, 51, 53, 54, 63, 68; 8:12; 10:10, 28; 11:25; 12:25, 50; 14:6; 17:2, 3; 20:31
- **Love** (loves, loved) (agape; agapao) - 46x in 26v (Total # uses of love(s)(ed) in NT [NAS] = 291x in 228v) - 1 John 2:5, 2:10, 2:15, 3:1, 3:10, 3:11, 3:14, 3:16, 3:17, 3:18, 3:23, 4:7, 4:8, 4:9, 4:10, 4:11, 4:12, 4:16, 4:17, 4:18, 4:19, 4:20, 4:21, 5:1, 5:2, 5:3
- **Abide** (21x in 15v) - 1 John 2:6 1 John 2:10 1 John 2:14 1 John 2:24 1 John 2:27 1 John 2:28
- 1 John 3:6 1 John 3:9 1 John 3:14 1 John 3:17 1 John 3:24 1 John 4:12 1 John 4:13 1 John 4:15 1 John 4:16
- **Word (logos)** - 1 John 1:1, 1:10 1 John 2:5, 2:7, 2:14 1 John 3:18 1 John 5:7
- **Know** - 37x (Based on the use of the Greek verbs for "know")
Ginosko (22x) - 1 John 2:3 (2x), 1Jn 2:13, 14, 18, 29; 3:1 (2x), 1Jn 3:6, 16, 19, 20, 24; 4:2, 6 (2x), 1Jn 4:7, 8, 13, 16; 5:2, 20
Eido (15x) - 1 John 2:11, 20, 21 (2x), 1Jn 2:29; 3:2, 5, 14, 15 (2x); 1Jn 5:13, 15, 18, 19, 20

Note: Both verbs appear together in the following verses - 1Jn 2:29, 1Jn 5:20. In addition the word **know** occurs more in the Gospel of John than in any of the other gospels, and occurs in 1 John more than in any other epistle, another piece of indirect evidence in support of John as the author of this epistle. Exactly the same phenomenon is noted for many other vocabulary words. These include such words as; love, light, truth, fellowship, commandment, abide, witness, eternal, manifest, keep, overcome, beginning, father and son.

Although the **author** never states his name, all conservative scholars agree that it was written by the apostle John. Comparison of the thought and style of parallel passages in the Gospel of John (whose authorship is well established) and First John make it clear that the same person wrote both works. As Robert Law quipped, "*On internal grounds, it would appear much more feasible to assign any two of Shakespeare's plays to different authors, than the Gospel and the First Epistle of 'St. John.'*" Study the following parallel passages...

COMPARISON OF THOUGHT AND STYLE IN JOHN'S GOSPEL AND FIRST EPISTLE		
First Epistle of John		Gospel of John
1 John 1:1	The Word	John 1:1, 1:4, 1:14
1 John 1:2	Christ Manifested	John 1:14

1 John 1:4	Complete Joy	John 15:11
1 John 2:5	Obedying the Word	John 14:23
1 John 2:6, 28	Abiding in Jesus	John 15:4, 7
1 John 2:8; 1 John 3:11	New Commandment	John 13:34
1 John 2:8, 2:10	Light in Darkness	John 1:5, 1:9; 11:10
1 John 2:13-14	Knowing God	John 17:3
1 John 3:1	Children of God	John 1:12
1 John 3:2	Seeing God	John 17:24
1 John 3:8	Satan's Deeds	John 8:44
1 John 3:13	Hated by the World	John 15:19, 17:14
1 John 4:9	God sent His only begotten Son	John 3:16
1 John 4:12	No One Has Seen God	John 1:18
1 John 5:1	Born of God	John 1:13
1 John 5:13	These things Have been written	John 20:31
1 John 5:14	Ask Anything	John 14:14
1 John 5:20	The True God Eternal Life	John 17:2,3

Below is a table comparing the general ideas or themes in John's three major writings (these are generalizations for there is significant overlap between the points in each column)...

GENERAL SUBJECTS OR THEMES OF JOHN'S THREE MAJOR NT WRITINGS		
The Gospel of John	The Epistles of John	The Revelation of John
Salvation	Sanctification	Glorification
Past History	Present Experience	Future Hope
Christ Died for us	Christ Lives in us	Christ Comes for us
The Word made Flesh	The Word made real for us	The Word conquering
Evangelistic	Pragmatic	Prophetic

John was an eyewitness of Jesus' life - he heard, saw, touched the Word! Some have suggested that John may have been portraying himself as a "father figure" to the readers because of his frequent use of terms like **children** (1John 2:13, 2:18, 3:1, 3:2, 3:10, 5:1, 5:2) or **little children** (1John 2:1, 2:12, 2:28, 3:7, 3:18, 4:4, 5:21).

Whenever you read a letter, try to discern the author's **purpose** for writing, which is sometimes clearly stated as in John 20:31.

What is John's purpose according to the following verse?

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that (hina = introduces a purpose statement) you may know that you have eternal life. (1Jn 5:13)

Comment: To whom is John writing? Believers. Compare the "identity" of those addressed in 1Jn 2:1, 2:12, 13, 14

First John is a gateway to the New Testament, presenting the deepest truths in the simplest terms. (Complete Biblical Library Commentary).

D Edmond Hiebert introduces his exposition on First John writing that...

This weighty and challenging opening paragraph plunges into the heart of the Christian message, proclaiming that eternal life has been manifested in the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ. This paragraph is unusually involved and intense, unlike John's normal style. "It gives the impression that the author was so 'full of his subject,' so overwhelmed by the truth he sought to express, that his thoughts became crowded and his expression complicated."

Martin Luther had this to say about First John...

I have never read a book written in simpler words than this one, and yet the words are inexpressible.

Henrietta Mears offers this simple outline of First John...

- Right Behavior (1 John 1:1-3:24)
- Right Belief (1 John 4:1-5:11)
- Rich Rewards (1 John 5:12-21)

A WORD OF CAUTION A "BEREAN MINDSET" REQUIRED

Acts 17:11+ Now these (BEREANS) were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

James Rosscup writes on **Zane Hodges'** commentary on First John that "Passages given Hodges' turns will **surprise and dismay** {bolding mine} many from an exegetical standpoint... He opposes the view that First John aims to lead readers to see how to be assured of salvation, as some say in 1Jn 5:13... (Hodges believes) The person who "*abides in death*" (1Jn 3:14) is saved (!!!), not having fellowship with God, but will be safe forever, though missing out in terms of special reward. (See Rosscup's excellent work [Commentaries for Biblical Expositors](#) or [hard copy](#))

Related Resources:

- See Sam Storms' Discussion of Hodges' Interpretation of Fellowship
- [Paul Apple's Introduction to his commentary and Discussion of Zane Hodges](#)
- [Review of Zane Hodges' book The Gospel Under Siege](#)

Here is a letter written by **Dr John Piper** in 1986 entitled "[Who Am I Talking About?](#)"

I have referred several times to a contemporary movement of evangelicalism that offers assurance of salvation to professing Christians who go on living in sin. Who am I talking about? Here is an example.

Zane Hodges, who teaches at Dallas Seminary, has written a book entitled The Gospel Under Siege (Redencion Viva, 1981).

His position is the very opposite of mine:

"An insistence on the necessity or inevitability of works fundamentally undermines assurance" (p.13). That is, "if good works are really . . . an essential fruit of salvation," we cannot be sure of our eternal salvation (p. 9). Therefore, "works have nothing to do with determining a Christian's basic relationship to God." "There is not even a single place in the Pauline letters where he expresses doubt that his audience is composed of true Christians." (p. 95).

Apart from the fact that 2 Corinthians 13:5+ contradicts his last statement, 1 John remains an insuperable obstacle. His interpretation will not stand. Consider for yourselves what he says concerning 1 John 3:14+ ("We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brothers."). Here assurance of passing out of death into life is the product of loving our fellow Christians. **How will he escape it?**

He tries to escape it by saying that the verse has "no reference to conversion as such." He says that there is

a sphere of light and a sphere of darkness within the Christian life. "If anyone does not love his brother he is out of touch with God. He is not living as a true disciple of his Master" (p. 63). But he is still a child of God because eternal security has nothing to do with whether you are a loving person or not.

This will not stand scrutiny. The one other place where John uses the same Greek phrase ("We have passed from death to life") is John 5:24, where he says, "Truly, truly I say to you that the one who hears my word and believes the one who sent me has eternal life and does not come into judgment but has passed from death into life." Therefore it is **grasping at a straw** to say that "passing from death to life" in 1 John 3:14 refers to two states within Christian life. It plainly means: passing from lostness to eternal life.

I appeal to you, judge for yourselves, does John's assurance in 1 John 3:14 come from loving the brothers or not?

Bowing before the Word with you,

Pastor John

While I agree that John does not specifically delineate a list of "test questions" to assess the authenticity of one's faith, there is no question that the apostle deals forthrightly ("head-on") with the subject of "professors" versus "possessors" of genuine life in Christ, a serious subject which has eternal consequences! To read First John with a mindset that this epistle has *"no relevance to authenticity of one's salvation"* is to **pervert the message of the beloved apostle** and even worse misses the greatly needed application to the modern church where as one pastor has quipped *"many have joined the church, but have missed Jesus by a mile"*

Tom Wells (a pastor and respected Christian author) from his article **Some Pitfalls in Understanding First John** amplifies this warning to all evangelicals who would seek to accurately interpret and apply the important Epistle of First John...

The first letter of John has often been used to create a contrast between **two kinds of Christians**. The contrast is put in the following ways: 1. Those who walk in the light, and those who do not. 2. Those who confess their sins, and those who do not. 3. Those who are worldly, and those who are not. 4. Those who abide in Christ, and those who do not. 5. Those who are overcomers, and those who are not. The point of this article is to show that John is not thinking of different categories of Christians when he uses those divisions. **It is very important to recognize this because the sustained contrast between Christians and non-Christians is the main theme of the letter.** If we misapply it, we effectively pervert the teaching of the letter as a whole. Yet this has been done times without number...

... the distinction between the believer and the non-believer is the major distinction in John's eyes.

Twentieth-century evangelicalism, on the other hand, has often used this book to distinguish between two categories of Christians. In my judgment this reflects one of our present-day misunderstandings of Scripture. It seems to me that Scripture is more concerned about whether we are genuinely Christians than it is about what kind of Christians we are. Modern evangelicalism has reversed this. **I think that the reason is this: we have made becoming a Christian so easy that there is really no need to ask whether we are really Christians or not.** This is sometimes referred to as **easy-believism**, and it appears to me to be rampant. But you need not accept my analysis of modern evangelicalism to see where the emphasis lies in 1 John. John would heartily join in Paul's admonition: **"Examine** yourselves, whether you are in the faith!" (2 Cor 13:5-note) (Excerpt from "Some Pitfalls in Understanding First John" - I can no longer find the original article online or even for purchase. If you have access to the full article please send me an email. Thank you.)

In view of the finding that up to 75% of Americans identify themselves as Christians, it is imperative that those who call themselves by this name understand how the Bible defines a **"Christian"** and so another Resource you might consider one of the following resources:

- Mike McKinley - [Am I Really a Christian?](#)
- J D Greear - [Stop Asking Jesus Into Your Heart](#)
- [Is it biblical to ask Jesus into your heart?](#)
- David Platt - [Why Accepting Jesus in Your heart is Superstitious & Non-Biblical](#)
- Thomas Kidd - ["Ask Jesus into Your Heart": A History of the Sinner's Prayer](#)

To further substantiate the importance of rightly dividing First John's message it is notable that many highly respected pastors and commentators also interpret the message of First John as **definitely related to the authenticity of one's salvation** - John Piper, John MacArthur, Steven Cole, J C Ryle, Henry Morris, Charles Ryrie, and the list goes on and on and includes men from the modern era as well as past eras. The "school" that interprets First John as not relating to the authenticity of one's faith is distinctly in the

Related Resources:

- [What is easy believism?](#)
 - [What is free grace? What is Free Grace Theology?](#)
 - [What is the relationship of faith, works, and security in salvation?](#)
 - [Why is faith without works dead?](#)
 - [Does the Book of 1 John Present Tests of Fellowship or Signs of Life?](#)
 - 1 John 3:10 [Children of God and Children of the Devil](#)
 - [Loving the Brethren - Teachings of Zane Hodges](#)
 - [The Unusual Teachings of Zane Hodges](#)
 - Multipart discussion of [the unusual teachings of Zane Hodges](#), et al click [Index](#)
 - [What is lordship salvation?](#)
-

See an [Excellent summary chart from ESV Study Bible](#).

Below is the last entry in the ESV chart:

"Because they have been born again, have received the Spirit, abide in God as God abides in them, and know and love God, **Christians bear observable fruit**. They:

- practice truth/righteousness (1 John 1:6; 2:29; 3:7, 10)
 - walk in the light/as he walked (1 John 1:7; 2:6)
 - confess sins and have forgiveness (1 John 1:9; 2:12)
 - keep/obey his commandments/Word (1 John 2:3, 5; 3:22, 24; 5:2, 3)
 - love one another/the brothers (1 John 2:10; 3:10, 11, 14, 16, 18, 23; 4:7, 11, 21)
 - overcome the evil one/the world (1 John 2:13, 14; 4:4; 5:4)
 - do the will of God/cannot keep on sinning (1 John 2:17; 3:9, 22)
 - confess the Son/believe in Jesus (1 John 2:23; 3:23; 4:2, 15; 5:1, 4, 13)
-

Jim Bomkamp lists the following indicators or marks of a genuine believer as recorded by John in this important letter...

1. Walks in the light - 1 John 1:6
2. Has fellowship with other Christians who walk in the light - 1 John 1:7
3. Believes he has a sin nature - 1 John 1:8
4. Occasionally sins - 1 John 1:10
5. Continually keeps His commandments - 1 John 2:3, 3:24
6. Continually keeps His word - 1 John 2:5
7. Walks in the same way Jesus walked - 1 John 2:6
8. Does not hate his brother - 1 John 2:9
9. Loves his brother - 1 John 2:10, 3:10
10. Does not love the world (cosmos - the world in rebellion against God) - 1 John 2:15
11. Does not love the things in the world - 1 John 2:15
12. Does the will of God - 1 John 2:17
13. Stays in the Body of Christ - 1 John 2:19
14. Has an anointing and as a result understands the truth of the gospel - 1 John 2:20-21
15. Believes that Jesus is the Christ (Jewish Messiah of Scripture) - 1 John 2:22, 5:1
16. Abides in Christ (as a branch in the vine - John 15:5) - 1 John 2:27-28
17. Continually practices righteousness - 1 John 2:29, 3:10

18. Purifies himself just as He is pure - 1 John 3:3
19. Does not continually practice sin - 1 John 3:6, 5:18
20. Practices righteousness and is righteous, just as He is righteous - 1 John 3:7
21. His seed abides in him and he cannot sin because he is born of God - 1 John 3:9
22. Loves the brethren - 1 John 3:14
23. Loves not only with word and tongue, but in deed and in truth - 1 John 3:18-19
24. The abiding presence of the Holy Spirit gives assurance of salvation - 1 John 3:24, 4:13
25. Confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (the eternal Son of God/Messiah) - 1 John 4:2
26. Has overcome the false prophets and teachers (and the spirit that animates them) - 1 John 4:4
27. Listens to, receives, and believes in the sound teaching from the apostles (the Bible) - 1 John 4:6
28. Loves (with agape love) - 1 John 4:7,8
29. Confesses that Jesus is the Son of God - 1 John 4:15
30. Abides in (agape) love - 1 John 4:16
31. Loves (agape) because He first loved him - 1 John 4:19
32. Loves the child born of the Father (either Jesus, other Christians, or all men) - 1 John 5:1
33. Overcomes the world - 1 John 5:4
34. Believes that Jesus is the Son of God - 1 John 5:5

WHAT WAS FROM THE BEGINNING

NET Bible Note - In the Greek text the prologue to 1 John 1:1-4 makes up a single sentence. This is awkward in Greek, and a literal translation produces almost impossible English.

What - ESV, KJV, NIV translate the Greek pronoun as "**That**." It is surprising that John does not say "Who" or "Jesus Christ, Who..."

Kistemaker explains "The term *that* ("*what*" in NAS) is broader than the word *who*, for it includes the person and message of Jesus Christ. The term refers to God's revelation, namely, the gospel which, says John, "we proclaim concerning the Word of life." ([Simon J. Kistemaker: New Testament Commentary - James, Epistles of John, Peter, and Jude](#))

Was ([1510](#)) (**eimi**) means to be, to take place, to become. **Vincent** says the idea of **eimi** in the **imperfect tense** is that "It **was** already existing when the succession of life began."

Wuest adds that "John begins his letter with a relative pronoun in the neuter gender, **that which**." The reference is to things relating to the Lord Jesus. We are not to understand the expression as equivalent to "He who." "**Was**" is the verb of being in the Greek text (**eimi**), "to be," not *ginomai*, "to become." (**Ed**: See Vine's note below) It is in the **imperfect tense** which speaks of an abiding state in past time. Thus, John has reference to those things that were true of our Lord since the beginning. ([Wuest, K. S. Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: Eerdmans](#))

W E Vine adds that the idea is "Having been preexistent He (Jesus) became manifested. Neither in the Gospel nor in the epistle does he open with the phrase "that which came to be," which would imply that Christ had a beginning (**Ed**: As taught by cults such as Jehovah's Witnesses). He did not begin to be, He essentially "was." This statement at once combats one of the great errors of the Gnostics, who regarded Christ as impersonal, a mere emanation. On the contrary the apostles had themselves been in intimate contact with His person. ([Vine, W. Collected writings of W. E. Vine. Nashville: Thomas Nelson](#))

Thou Breath of Life since time began,
Breathing upon the lips of man,
Hast taught each kindred race to raise
United word to sound Thy praise.
-Laurence Housman

What was from the beginning - There are two main interpretations by conservative scholars: (1) From the beginning of the Gospel

message (favored by commentators such as A W Pink, F F Bruce, Robert Law, John MacArthur) or (2) From eternity past (He was there from the beginning of time signifying He had to pre-date the beginning of time). (Favored by John Piper, John Stott).

Those who favor interpretation (1) quote the similar phrase in Genesis and John...

IN the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Ge 1:1)

Comment: Christ is the Creator of the beginning of this world, so obviously He had to be present before it was created which supports His eternity. Similar reasoning applies to John's verse below.

IN the beginning was the Word (= Jesus see Jn 1:14), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He **was in the beginning** with God. 3 All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. (Jn 1:1-3)

Hiebert summarizes the 2 main interpretations of **from the beginning**...

The "beginning" in view here has been variously understood. Some, like Plummer and Burdick, understand the expression to mean "from all eternity." The expression has also been taken to mean from the beginning of creation, from the beginning of Christ's ministry, or even from "the earliest stage of the Christian Church." The meaning of "**the beginning**" must always be determined by the context. In keeping with the following clauses, it seems best to understand that "**beginning**" here points to the unique events, described in Luke 1–2 that characterized the actual Incarnation, which John is proclaiming. "John's message must seem incredible until we start where he starts—at Bethlehem."

Used without the definite article, "**beginning**" (arche) does not so much point to a specific event, which went largely unnoticed by the world, but rather serves to characterize the event as a new beginning in God's manner of speaking to mankind (Heb 1:1,2). This clause starts with the Incarnation, while the following clauses focus attention on the manifestation of the incarnate Christ during His ministry. The manifestation of the Christ did not begin at Jesus' baptism, as [Cerinthus](#) taught; the verb "**was**" (en) marks the continued fact of the Incarnation since the birth of the Virgin Mary's Babe in Bethlehem. John's thought in this verse parallels John 1:14, "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory." ([An Exposition of 1 John 1:1-4](#))

Henry Morris favors interpretation (1)...

Note the similarity between the opening verses of John's gospel and his first epistle; both starting with a reference back to creation. The gospel of John looks back before the beginning of time when only God existed, and Jesus Christ was God. His epistle, on the other hand, proceeds forward from that beginning of time (Genesis 1:1) to the incarnation of the eternal "Word," which became "the Word of life;" the manifestation of the Father in "His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

Paul Apple comments that Jesus Christ had...

Continuous existence from the beginning with particular manifestation in time and space; the divine Christ did not just come upon Jesus at His baptism. (**Ed:** This latter fact would be significant as some heresies talk just that - and that His divinity left Him on the Cross - the significance is that if such teaching were true then Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross would have been no avail in bringing atonement to sinful mankind!)

Marvin Vincent seems also to favor interpretation (1)

From the beginning (tes arches). The phrase occurs twice in the Gospel (Jn 8:44; 15:27); nine times in the First Epistle, and twice in the Second. It is used both absolutely (1Jn 3:8; 2:13, 14), and relatively (John 15:27; 1 John 2:24). It is here contrasted with "**in** the beginning" (John 1:1). The difference is that by the words "**in** the beginning," the writer places himself at the initial point of creation, and, looking back into eternity, describes that which was already in existence when creation began. "The Word was **in** the beginning." In the words "**from** the beginning," the writer looks back to the initial point of time, and describes what has been in existence from that point onward. Thus, "**in** the beginning" characterizes the absolute divine Word as He was before the foundation of the world and at the foundation of the world. "**From** the beginning" characterizes His development in time. Note the absence of the article both here and in John, 1:1. Not **the** beginning as a definite, concrete fact, but as apprehended by man; that to which we look as "beginning." ([Word Studies in the New Testament](#))

Steven Cole notes that those who favor interpretation (1)

while not denying the eternality of the Son, argue that that is not John's meaning here. They would argue that instead the phrase means what it later means in 1 John 2:7, 2:24, and 3:11, namely, the beginning of the gospel. They point out that John's emphasis here, to counter the recent message of the false teachers, is that the apostolic message has not changed. It is the same message that has been proclaimed from the earliest days of the gospel. Also, the emphasis of the rest of verse 1 is on Christ's humanity. So John's point would be that his message is not the new message of the Gnostics. Rather, it is the old message, which has been proclaimed from the earliest days of Christ's ministry. It is the same message that his readers had heard and believed from the beginning of their Christian experience. (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of John* [Eerdmans], p. 35; A. W. Pink, *Exposition of 1 John* [Associated Publishers & Authors], pp. 7-8; and Robert Law, *The Tests of Life* [Baker], p. 369, argue for this view.) It is difficult to decide between these two views, but I lean toward the second view, in that John here seems to be appealing to his apostolic authority, and the fact that he had been with Jesus from the beginning of His earthly ministry. Thus the records of the four Gospels bear witness to the person of Jesus Christ. ([1 John 1:1-3 The Tests of True Christianity](#))

John Piper favors interpretation (2) explaining **in the beginning** writing that...

This life is eternal. **"The life was made manifest ... and we proclaim to you the eternal life."** (1Jn 1:2) This is the best commentary on the first phrase of 1Jn 1:1: "That which was from the beginning... " **"From the beginning"** means, Christ our Life was when creation began. He is eternal. He had no beginning. He will have no ending. He is not part of creation. In the beginning He is the source of creation. All life comes from Him. He is the spring, not part of the river. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:1-3). ([Eternal Life Has Appeared in Christ](#))

The phrase **"in the beginning"** is **key** in First John occurring 8x in 7 verses - 1 John 1:1, 1 John 2:7, 2:13, 2:14, 2:24, 1 John 3:8, 3:11.

Robert Lightner notes that...

Three great beginnings are referred to in Scripture.

In Genesis 1:1 "the beginning" refers to the beginning of time.

"In the beginning" in John 1:1 speaks of eternity before the universe was.

In 1 John 1:1 "the beginning" refers to the beginning of the Christian era and relates the Savior to His life on earth.

In other words, John wrote in his gospel of the preincarnate Christ and in His first epistle of the incarnate Christ.

This is such language as John would use respecting him, and indeed the phrase "the beginning," as applicable to the Lord Jesus, is peculiar to John in the writings of the New Testament; and the language here may be regarded as one proof that this epistle was written by him, for it is just such an expression as he would use.

Heard... seen... beheld... handled - These verbs speak of Jesus' incarnation-- He would have to have to be true "flesh and blood" (and not an apparition as some heretically taught) for all of these verbs to actually be experienced by John and the other apostles in their encounters with Jesus.

THE APOSTLE'S FIRSTHAND KNOWLEDGE... (1) HEARD

John proceeds to present first hand personal knowledge of the apostle's objective, historical auditory, visual and tactile interactions proving that Jesus Christ was God and Man, a knowledge which would far surpass any so-called superior knowledge of the **Gnostics**. Most scholars agree that John was refuting some aspect of [Gnosticism](#), which in simple terms taught that salvation was achieved by obtained special knowledge (gnosis).

J M Boice adds that...

The Gnostics had a system, just as many professional religionists have a system today. But a system is not life, nor does it transform a life. A system in and of itself is nothing. What Christianity has and the others do not have is life, in fact, the life of Jesus Himself, the One who is the creator and sustainer of all life and who as the

life is also the light of men (John 1:4). It is Christ, then, who is proclaimed in Christianity.

Brian Bell observes that...

The word **"heresy"** means to "select or choose." False teachers teach some truth but then mix in their opinion as they select certain themes and ideas to focus on (**Ed**: or "to choose"). John is dealing with a false teaching called Gnosticism which taught that matter is evil and only the spirit is good. This has a lot of nuances but the most dangerous is that they believed Jesus did not really have a flesh and blood body but was more like a phantom. According to this view, Jesus didn't really die or rise from the dead. Gnosticism, which got its name from the word "knowledge" in Greek, also taught that only those who had special knowledge could be saved.

Because of this belief, two behaviors emerged. By the way, wrong beliefs always lead to wrong behaviors.

- **Flesh fasting** – Since the body is evil, any urge must be purged. In this view, people would unplug from the world.

- **Flesh feasting** – Do whatever you want because matter doesn't matter. These people went to the other extreme and unplugged from any moral restraint.

There's a legendary story that one day John went to bathe and noticed that a false teacher named Cerinthus was beginning to descend into the pool. John immediately rushed out and is reported to have said, "Let us fly, lest even the bathhouse fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within."

John doesn't waste any time getting to the core issue of Christianity, which is Christ Himself. I don't have to tell you that there is much confusion today on the street about the essence of true Christianity. As we will see, Christianity is not just a system of thought or a philosophy. It is a person – Jesus Christ – and He is a fact, He is to be proclaimed, He is to be shared and He leads us to joy. ([Walk the Talk](#))

Related Resource: [Chart Illustrating the Main Beliefs of Gnosticism](#)

Hiebert writes that...

It is generally agreed that the heresy confronted in First John was some form or forms of **Gnosticism**, but it is unwarranted to identify it with the full-blown Gnosticism of the second century. Among the numerous converts won to Christianity in Asia doubtless were former adherents of religious systems marked by Gnostic tendencies. Some of those converts soon sought to syncretize their old views with their newly accepted Christianity. Sharp controversy arose when they sought to propagate their new interpretations and they withdrew (1Jn 2:19 But they did not sever all their contacts with members of the churches (1Jn 2:26). A fuller development of the varied Gnostic views may indeed have been promoted by these heretics after their withdrawal from the churches. That the incipient elements of Gnosticism were active in the first century is clear.

As a speculative philosophy of religion, Gnosticism was marked by a kaleidoscopic variety of views. Basic was the dualistic view that spirit is good and matter is inherently evil, and that the two are in perpetual antagonism. This assumed dualism created a gulf between the true God and this material world. The Gnostics, meaning "knowing ones," held that spiritual excellence consisted not in a holy life but in their superior knowledge, which enabled them to rise above the earthbound chains of matter in their apprehension of the heavenly truth that had been made known to them. This knowledge, they claimed, had been made known to them through Christ as the Messenger of the true God. Thus *"the Gnostic Christ was not a Saviour; he was a revealer. He came for the express purpose of communicating his secret gnosis."*⁸ This undermined the Christian view of sin and the atonement.

Acceptance of Gnostic dualism made the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation unthinkable; two alternative views were advanced.

Docetic Gnosticism held that Christ seemed to have a human body; His supposed humanity was a phantom.

Cerinthian Gnosticism, named after Cerinthus, a late contemporary of John at Ephesus, held that the man Jesus, son of Joseph and Mary, was preeminent in righteousness and wisdom, that "the Christ" came on Him at His baptism and empowered His ministry, but left Him before His crucifixion; it was only a man who died and rose again.

Either view eliminated the Incarnation and nullified Christ's atoning work.

Since the Gnostics held that fellowship with God comes through the esoteric knowledge brought by Christ, they often expressed their assumed enlightenment in scandalous disregard of the ethical demands of

Christianity (**Ed**: "Licentious Living" = Practicing Sin as a Lifestyle). At other times their view led to asceticism. In opposition, John insisted that true Christian knowledge, which comes as a result of the anointing of the Holy One (1Jn 2:20), involves spiritual enlightenment as well as holiness of life (1Jn 1:5–2:5). For true assurance of eternal life (1Jn 5:13) the Christological test as well as the ethical test must be applied. ([An Exposition of 1 John 1:1-4](#))

What we have heard - John was one of the select twelve who followed Jesus from the His baptism (the beginning of His ministry) until His ascension into Heaven. Luke records Peter's address to the other 10 disciples [Acts 1:12, 13] in the upper room as they prepared to select a replacement for Judas Iscariot...

Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us— **beginning** with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." (Acts 1:21, 22)

Heard ([191](#))(**akouo**) means to hear with attention, to hear with the "ear" of the mind, to hear with understanding. As used in the Scriptures **akouo** often signifies obedient hearing. In other words one hears the truth with conviction of one's mind, and this disposes the mind to submit itself to the doctrine presented. In fact, Paul says it is in this way that faith springs up (Ro 10:17+).

Akouo is in the **perfect tense** which speaks of an abiding effect. When John wrote this letter, some 60 years had passed since he had last heard the voice of Jesus and yet, the words of His Lord continued to be an abiding truth in his heart! Imagine that you had heard Jesus speak! Would not His majestic words continue to reverberate and resonate in your mind for the rest of your days on earth? I think they would!

THOUGHT - May we go to His Word desiring to hear from Him even as John first heard Him. And may this "foretaste" make us long for (and live for) eternity future when we shall have the holy privilege of hearing His voice... and see His glorious Face... forever and ever! Amen! The prophet Isaiah's words should be our "watchword" as we await His return...

**Your eyes will see
the King in His beauty...**

(Isaiah 33:17)

HALLELUJAH!

Steven Cole comments...

John and the other apostles (the "**we**" of 1Jn 1:1-4) had **heard** the very words of Jesus, and what amazing words they were! Even His enemies testified (John 7:46), "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks." How true! If you are trying to bear witness to someone who has never read the Gospels, direct him to do that. The words of Jesus bear witness of Who He is (cp Jn 20:31). ([1 John 1:1-3 The Tests of True Christianity](#))

Henry Morris...

Tradition suggests John was writing from Ephesus where he served many years as bishop and pastor, possibly intending his letter to be circulated among all the churches of the region, including the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3. He stressed to his readers of the younger generation that he and the other apostles had actually heard Jesus speak (John 5:24), seen Him with their own eyes (John 1:18), "beheld" Him in His glory (John 1:14) and handled Him with their own hands (Luke 24:39). (Defender's Study Bible)

**(2) SEEN WITH OUR EYES
(3)... LOOKED AT**

What we have seen with our eyes - The verb **seen** is in the **perfect tense** signifying past completed action with abiding results or effect. In other words the apostles had seen Jesus in the past and an image of the living Word of God (Jn 1:1) had so speak been "burned" on their mind's eye. They were "eyewitnesses". One can only imagine... what an image it must have been!

Wuest beautifully conveys the idea of the **perfect tense** in his excellent paraphrase...

That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard **with the present result that it is ringing in our ears**, that which we have discerningly seen with our eyes **with the present result that it is in our mind's eye**, that which we gazed upon as a spectacle (theaomai), and our hands handled with a view to investigation, that which is concerning the Word of the life. (Ibid)

John could have just said "**we have seen**" but he adds the phrase "**with our eyes**" which emphasizes the apostle's "*direct, personal*

experience in a marvelous matter." (Vincent)

Compare **Peter's eyewitness testimony**...

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"--and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. **(So What?)** And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well **topay attention** as to a lamp shining in a dark place (cp Ps 119:105, 1Jn 1:5), until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. (2Peter 1:16-18-note 2Pe 1:19-note)

Steven Cole adds that the phrase **seen with our eyes**...

shows that John is not talking about a mystical "vision" of Christ, but of actually watching Jesus as He lived before them. The apostles saw Jesus turn the water into wine, feed the 5,000, walk on water, heal the multitudes, and raise the dead. The 35 miracles recorded in the four gospels are only a fraction of those that the apostles witnessed. John (Jn 21:25) ends his gospel by stating that if all the things that Jesus did were written in detail, the whole world couldn't contain the books. Jesus' sinless life and the powerful miracles He performed validate that He is the unique Son of God. ([Ibid](#))

A T Robertson says "**with our eyes**" shows...

it was not imagination on John's part, not an optical illusion as the Docetists claimed, for Jesus had an actual human body. He could be heard and seen.

What we looked at (beheld) - This is not simply a repetition of "**seen**" as explained in the definition below. Paul Apple describes the two visual aspects as (1) Long Distance -- "what we have seen with our eyes" and (2) Up Close and Personal -- "what we beheld"

A R Fausset writes...

The apostle is not weary of describing faith's various actings in the soul. And it is for our edification that he sets before us his own experience in this matter. **It is in order that such of us as have heard and seen Jesus may still fix on Him the eyes of our understanding with an intent and protracted gaze.** And can one view of "the King in His beauty" satisfy the spiritual eye? No; it will rest with a mingled feeling of sorrow and joy on Him whom our sins have pierced. When Jesus has been seen as "full of grace and truth" — "fairer than the children of men" — the believer will surely look upon Him with a steady contemplation of the soul and fixed devotion of the heart. It may be that it is not given to all believers to attain to the full experience of the beloved disciple, or to realize all He felt when He says "which we have looked upon"; but in a measure the same contemplative faith is proper to all the saints. And without it there could be no due assimilation to the image of Christ.

It is by the contemplation of Christ's Person that we become in a measure changed into His likeness. Christ looked upon as a wondrous spectacle, steadfastly, deeply, contemplatively. (see 2 Cor 3:18+)

Looked at ([2300](#))(**theaomai** from **tháomai** =to wonder, from **thaúma** = wonder, admiration <> English = theatrical spectacular performance) means (1) to have an attentive look, to have regard for something, to contemplate, to take in with one's eyes (implying that one is impressed by what he sees - see use in Mt 22:11). **Theaomai** implies an intent contemplative gaze. The point is that it is not a mere glance or quick look, but a long, searching gaze (e.g., Lk 23:55). **Theaomai** describes intelligent beholding, a "careful and deliberate vision which interprets its object" (G. Abbott-Smith). It means to gaze at a show or demonstration or to watch as in a theater. (thus giving us the origin of our English word "*theater*"). (2) **Theaomai** can mean to see for the purpose of visiting as in Ro 15:24. (3) Finally some lexicon's (BDAG) state **theaomai** can mean to perceive something above and beyond what is merely seen with the eye (this nuance clearly overlaps with definition #1 above).

Vincent notes that in 1Jn 1:1 - The tense (of **theaomai**) is the **aorist** ; marking not the abiding effect of the vision upon the beholder, but the historical manifestation to special witnesses. (**Ed**: As in John 1:14)

A T Robertson says **theaomai** in this passage means "a spectacle which broke on our astonished vision (D. Smith)."

Westcott says **theaomai** "expresses the calm, intentional continuous contemplation of an object."

William Barclay writes that "The verb for to gaze is **theaomai**, and it means to gaze at someone or something until something has been grasped of the significance of that person or thing. So Jesus, speaking to the crowds of John the Baptist, asked: 'What did you

go out into the wilderness to look at **[theaomai]**?' (Luke 7:24); and in that word he describes how the crowds flocked out to gaze at John and wonder who and what this man might be. Speaking of Jesus in the prologue to his gospel, John says: 'We have seen his glory' (John 1:14). The verb is again **theaomai**, and the idea is not that of a passing glance but of a steadfast searching gaze which seeks to discover something of the mystery of Christ." (Barclay: The Daily Study Bible 1 John)

Theaomai - 22x in 22v in the **NAS** - Translated look(1), look over(1), looked(1), noticed(3), saw(5), see(3), seeing(2), seen(5), watched(1).

Matthew 6:1 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be **noticed** by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 11:7 As these men were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to **see**? A reed shaken by the wind?

Matthew 22:11 "But when the king came in to **look over** the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes,

Comment: This verse helps us discern the added attention inherent in the verb theaomai (to look over) compared with simply seeing (he saw a man). He saw the man was distinctive because he had looked attentively (**theaomai**) over the guests.

Matthew 23:5 "But they do all their deeds to be **noticed** by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments.

Comment: The ostentatious religious leaders did not just want others to see them, but to see them with special attention (theaomai).

Mark 16:11 When they heard that He was alive and had been **seen** by her, they refused to believe it.

Mark 16:14 Afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table; and He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had **seen** Him after He had risen.

Luke 5:27 After that He went out and **noticed** a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, "Follow Me."

Comment: Jesus not only saw Levi (Matthew) but gave him special attention (theaomai).

Luke 7:24 When the messengers of John had left, He began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to **see**? A reed shaken by the wind?

Luke 23:55 Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and **saw** the tomb and how His body was laid.

Comment: They looked at the empty tomb with special attentiveness.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we **saw** (Beheld - theaomai) His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Comment: This might refer to John's experience on the Mount of Trans-figuration, when he and Peter and James saw Jesus' glory unveiled (Mk 9:2-7, Mt 17:11-13, Lk 9:28-36). Peter also refers to the transfiguration in his second letter to emphasize that he and the other two apostles "did not follow cleverly devised tales" but that they "were eyewitnesses of His majesty." (2Pe 1:16-note). This use of **theaomai** helps one understand that this verb does not describe a mere casual glance, but an intentional, contemplative gaze.

John 1:32 John testified saying, "I have **seen** the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him.

John 1:38 And Jesus turned and **saw** them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" They said to Him, "Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?"

John 4:35 "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest '? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and **look** on the fields, that they are white for harvest.

Comment: Jesus used theaomai rather than a verb meaning simple sight, because He wanted His disciples not only to see the people streaming out of the city, but to contemplate the meaning and significance of this.

John 6:5 Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and **seeing** that a large crowd was coming to Him, said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?"

John 11:45 Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and **saw** what He had done, believed in Him.

Comment: They had come and were there to be eyewitnesses to the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection from the dead. Their "seeing" including their contemplating what they saw with the result that they believed in Jesus.

Acts 1:11 They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand **looking** into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

Comment: The 11 disciples had followed this Man for three years and now He was gone. This is the last time they would see Him in this lifetime, so they were not just casually looking into the sky.

Acts 21:27 When the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon **seeing** him (Paul) in the temple, began to stir up all the crowd and laid hands on him,

Acts 22:9 "And those who were with me **saw** the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me.

Romans 15:24 whenever I go to Spain-- for I hope to **see** you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while--

1 John 1:1 What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have **seen** with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life--

1 John 4:12 No one has **seen** God at any time; if (*ean* = used in a 3rd.-class conditional clause. which views the condition as possible) we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected (brought to completion or to the goal) in us.

Westcott comments that "Here the thought is of the continuous beholding that answers to abiding fellowship."

1 John 4:14 We have **seen** and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

(4) OUR HANDS HANDLED

Our hands handled - This is an amazing statement. John (and the other apostles) literally touched the Lord Jesus Christ during His time on earth! One wonders if we will touch Him or He will touch us in eternity future? I have no doubt we will see the scars on His hands (cp John's vision in Rev 5:6). Whether this touching of Jesus refers to before or after the resurrection is not clear, thus it could refer to both (cp Lk 24:39 which supports possible post-resurrection touching and Mt 14:29, 30, 31 is clearly touching prior to His resurrection).ared to the disciples. He said (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*" (see also, John 20:27). So John is saying that Jesus Christ was revealed and that He was historically validated by the apostles in all of these objective ways ("heard... seen... beheld... hands handled"), both before and after the resurrection. ([1 John 1:1-3 The Tests of True Christianity](#))

Handled ([5584](#)) (**pselaphao** from **psáo** = touch lightly) means to feel or grope about expressing motion of hands over a surface, so as to feel it. To verify by contact (see Ge 27:21,22). The figurative sense means to search for or to make an effort to come to know something (Acts 17:27). Thus **pselaphao** denotes not merely the bare handling, but the searching, exploring use of the hands, that tests by handling. Like the verb **beheld**, **handled** is also in the **aorist tense** which describes a past completed action. In other words, it is a historical fact that John "**beheld**" and "**handled**" or touched Jesus, clearly substantiating His possession of a material body.

"The experience of deliberate touch is the culminating evidence for the reality of the Incarnation." (Hiebert)

The New Linguistic & Exegetical Key to the New Testament says **pselaphao** means...

to grope or feel after in order to find, like one blind or in the dark; hence, "to handle, to touch." The idea of searching sometimes disappears altogether; here (1Jn 1:1) it naturally suggest all the evidence available for sense perception other than hearing and sight. The author is claiming a physical contact with Jesus. Perhaps this is to combat a type of **Docetism** (**Editorial Comment:** In simple terms this heresy taught Jesus only seemed to have a body -- He did not really have a flesh and blood body but was only a ghost in human form! They refused to believe that God could ever degrade himself by taking human flesh and blood upon Himself. John would counter by saying we touched Him! Understand the import of this genre of heresy -- if Jesus did not have a real human body, then He would not be qualified to serve as genuine atoning sacrifice for sins for such a sacrifice demanded a perfect victim and spillage of His blood. John more directly refutes this heresy in

1Jn 4:2,3 and in 2John 7).

Vincent has this note on *pselaphao*...

"It never expresses the so handling an object as to exercise a molding, modifying influence upon it, but at most a feeling of its surface (Lk 24:39, 1Jn 1:1); this, it may be, with the intention of learning its composition (Ge 27:12, 21, 22); while, not seldom, it signifies no more than a feeling for or after an object, without any actual coming in contact with it at all" (Page 58 in Trench's [Synonyms of the New Testament](#)). Compare Acts 17:27. Used of groping in the dark, Job 5:14; of the blind, Isa. 59:10; Deut. 28:29; Judges, 16:26. See on Heb. 12:18.

There are 4 uses of **pselaphao** in the NT. Here are the other 3 uses...

Luke 24:39 (**Context** - Jesus' appearance to His disciples after His Crucifixion and Resurrection) **'See** (aorist imperative) My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; **touch** (aorist imperative) Me and **see** (also aorist imperative) , for a spirit (NET = "ghost") does not have flesh and bones as you see (theoreo - observe with sustained attention, be a spectator) that I have."

Jamieson comments that here Jesus "lovingly offering them both ocular (sense of sight) and tangible (sense of touch) demonstration of the reality of His resurrection." Compare this to John's affirmation in 1Jn 1:1 - heard, saw, beheld, held (touched). As he saying goes "looks can be deceiving" but touch would not. So He commands the disciples to touch Him and verify that He had a human body and that He was not a ghost. Clearly the apostle John got the point! They heard His command, saw His Body and presumably touched His Body, the very order John follows in his description on 1Jn 1:1

Acts 17:27 (**Context** - Acts 17:24, 25, 26) that they would seek God, if perhaps they might **grope** for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

Comment: The verb gives the idea of groping after God in the darkness when the light of His full revelation is not available. (Bruce)

Hebrews 12:18-note For you have not come to a mountain that can be **touched** and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind

Pselaphao - 17x in 15x in the **Septuagint (Lxx)**- Gen 27:12, 21,2; Deut 28:29 (2x); Jdg 16:26; Ps 113:15; 134:17; Job 5:14; 12:25; Nah 3:1; Zech 3:9; 9:13; Isa 59:10 (2x). Virtually all of the Lxx use denote literal touching with the hands. Here are some uses of **pselaphao** (3x) in the Old Testament...

Genesis 27:12 "Perhaps my father will **feel** (Hebrew = mashash = feel or grope as with one's hands; Lxx = *pselaphao*) me, then I will be as a deceiver in his sight, and I will bring upon myself a curse and not a blessing."... 21 Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come close, that I may **feel** (Hebrew = mush = handle an object with one's hands; Lxx = *pselaphao*) you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not." 22 So Jacob came close to Isaac his father, and he **felt** him and said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau."

Deuteronomy 28:29 and you will **grope** at noon, as the blind man **gropes** in darkness, and you will not prosper in your ways; but you shall only be oppressed and robbed continually, with none to save you.

Judges 16:26-note Then Samson said to the boy who was holding his hand, "Let me **feel** (Hebrew = mush = handle an object with one's hands; Lxx = *pselaphao*) the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them."

Psalms 115:7-note They (idols) have hands, but they cannot **feel**; They have feet, but they cannot walk; They cannot make a sound with their throat.

Bible Background Commentary...

By saying that Jesus' witnesses had touched and felt him, John indicates that Jesus had been fully human; he was not simply a divine apparition like the current "manifestations" of the gods in which the Greeks believed

Paul Apple applies John's experience with Christ to our lives today as believers...

What is the result of people's first-hand interaction with us? We are as close as they are going to get to the current historical manifestation of this life of God. What do they hear from us? What do they see? What do they closely observe as they check us out? May it be the eternal life that is Christ Himself living through us. (cf. Out of the Salt Shaker -- there is a danger that we isolate ourselves in Christian circles and never allow the world

to examine us. The willingness to be proclaimers involves the spirit behind the evangelism book entitled: "I'm Glad You Asked" ([1 John - Tests of Eternal Life - A Devotional Commentary](#))

John Stott writes that...

The historical manifestation of the Eternal Life was proclaimed, not monopolized. The revelation was given to the few for the many. They were to dispense it to the world.

Practical Application - It is vital that we point people to the historical facts of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and not get sidetracked into debates about other less important issues!

THE WORD OF LIFE

Concerning the Word (Logos) of Life - This is John's designation for Jesus Christ, Whom He identifies specifically by Name in 1Jn 1:3. Paul uses the phrase "Word of life" as a description for the Scriptures in Phil 2:16.

The NIV adds a verb not present in the Greek rendering it "this we proclaim [proclaim not in Greek text] concerning the Word of life."

Word of Life, most pure and strong,
Lo! for Thee the nations long,
Spread, till from its dreary night
All the world awakes to light.

[Spread, O Spread, Thou Mighty Word](#)

Hiebert writes...

That "the Word" here carries a personal implication seems obvious. But in reality the subject matter and the Person are identical in a unique fashion. The incarnate Christ is both God's message and Himself the Messenger. He is the embodiment of divine life and the Revealer of that life to mankind (John 14:6–9).

In John's description of the Second Coming of Christ he writes that Jesus is

clothed with a robe dipped in blood; and His name is called **The Word (Logos) of God.**" (Rev 19:13-[note](#))

Garland comments: Like God's literal word which He has magnified above His name (Ps 138:2), God highly exalted Jesus and has given Him the name above every name (Php 2:9). Scripture informs us: "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth" (Ps 33:6 cf. Heb 11:3; 2Pe 3:5). Elsewhere, John uses this title to emphasize Jesus as the revelation of God in His incarnation (1Jn 1:1-3) The Logos or Word is the expression of God's nature in understandable terms, and whether those terms be mercy or judgment they are both equally the message of God. This title also emphasizes Jesus' role in creation (John 1:1-3; Eph 3:9; Col 1:16; Heb. 1:2; Rev. 3:14)—a key theme explaining why God has ultimate dominion to retake the earth at His Second Coming (Rev 3:14; 4:11; 10:6).

Marvin Vincent writes

The phrase "*ho logos tes zoes*", the **Word of the Life**, occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. The nearest approach to it is Phil 2:16; but there neither word has the article (*ho* or *tes*). In the phrase words of eternal life (John 6:68), and in Acts 5:20, all the words of this life, **rhema** is used. The question is whether logos is used here of the Personal Word (**Ed**: i.e., is a name for Jesus), as John 1:1, or of the divine message or revelation. In the four passages of the Gospel where logos is used in a personal sense (John 1:1, 14), it is used absolutely, the Word (compare Rev 19:13). On the other hand, it is often used relatively in the New Testament; as word of the kingdom (Mt 13:19); word of this salvation (Acts 13:26); word of His grace (Acts 20:32); word of truth (Jas 1:18). By John *zoes* of life, is often used in order to characterize the word which accompanies it. Thus, crown of life (Rev 2:10); water of life (Rev 21:6); book of life (Rev 3:5); bread of life (John 6:35); i.e., the water which is living and communicates life; the book which contains the revelation of life; the bread which imparts life. In the same sense, John 6:68; Acts 5:20. Compare Titus 1:2, 3

Though the phrase, the **Word of the Life**, does not elsewhere occur in a personal sense, I incline to regard its primary reference as personal, from the obvious connection of the thought with John 1:1, 4. "In the beginning was the **Word**, — in Him was life." "As John does not purpose to say that he announces Christ as an abstract single idea, but that he declares his own concrete historical experiences concerning Christ, — so now he continues, not the **Logos** (Word), but concerning the **Word**, we make annunciation to you" (Ebrard). At

the same time, I agree with Canon Westcott that it is most probable that the two interpretations are not to be sharply separated. "The revelation proclaims that which it includes; it has, announces, gives life. In Christ life as the subject, and life as the character of the revelation, were absolutely united." ([1 John 1 Word Studies in the New Testament](#))

Word (3055) (**logos** from **légō** = to speak with words; English = logic, logical) means something said and describes a communication whereby the mind finds expression in words.

John Phillips...

The Word! Thoughts remain invisible and inaudible until they are clothed in words. With words, what we think and feel and are can be known. And just as our words reveal us, so, too, the Lord Jesus, as "the Word of life," clothes and reveals the great thoughts and feelings of God regarding our sin and our salvation.

Thou holy Light, Guide divine,
Oh, cause the **Word of Life** to shine!
Teach us to know our God aright
And call Him Father with delight.
From every error keep us free;
Let none but Christ our Master be
That we in living faith abide,
In Him, our Lord, with all our might confide.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

[Come, Holy Ghost, God & Lord-Martin Luther](#)

Vincent (commenting on Logos in John 1:1) adds that...

This expression ("the Word") is the keynote and theme of the entire Gospel of John. **Logos** is from the root *leg*, appearing in *lego*, the primitive meaning of which is to lay: then, to pick out, gather, pick up: hence to gather or put words together, and so, to speak. Hence **logos** is, first of all, a collecting or collection both of things in the mind, and of words by which they are expressed. It therefore signifies both the outward form by which the inward thought is expressed, and the inward thought itself, the Latin *oratio* and *ratio*: compare the Italian *ragionare*, "to think" and "to speak." (See [Word Studies in the New Testament where Vincent has several pages of notes on "Logos" if you are interested](#))

In the Greek mind and as used by secular and philosophical Greek writers, **lógos** did not mean merely the name of an object but was an expression of the thought behind that object's name. Let me illustrate this somewhat subtle nuance in the meaning of **lógos** with an example from the Septuagint (LXX) (Greek of the Hebrew OT) in which **lógos** is used in the well known phrase **the Ten Commandments**. The Septuagint translates this phrase using the word **lógos** as "the ten (**deka**) words (**logoi**)" (Ex 34:28), this phrase giving us the familiar term **Decalogue**. Clearly each of the "Ten Commandments" is not just words but words which express a thought or concept behind those words. This then is the essence of the meaning of **lógos** and so it should not be surprising that depending on the context **lógos** is translated with words such as "saying, instruction, message, news, preaching, question, statement, teaching, etc". This understanding of **lógos** also helps understand John's repeated usage of this Greek word as a synonym for the second Person of the Godhead, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lógos then is a general term for speaking, but always used for speaking with rational content. **Lógos** is a word uttered by the human voice which embodies an underlying concept or idea. When one has spoken the sum total of their thoughts concerning something, they have given to their hearer a total concept of that thing. Thus the word **lógos** conveys the idea of "a total concept" of anything. **Lógos** means the word or outward form by which the inward thought is expressed and made known. It can also refer to the inward thought or reason itself. Note then that **lógos** does not refer merely to a part of speech but to a concept or idea. In other words, in classical Greek, **lógos** never meant just a **word** in the grammatical sense as the mere name of a thing, but rather the thing referred to, the material, not the formal part. In fact, the Greek language has 3 other words (*rhema*, *onoma*, *epos*) which designate a **word** in its grammatical sense. **Lógos** refers to the total expression whereas **rhema** (see word study) for example is used of a part of speech in a sentence. In other words **rhema**, emphasizes the parts rather than the whole.

Lógos was in use among Greeks before John used it, the Greeks using it to denote the principle which maintains order in world. In connection with the Greek word for "seed" in its adjective form, **Lógos** was used to express the generative principle or creative force in nature. The Stoics believed that this world was permeated with that **Lógos**. It was the **Lógos** which put sense into the world. It was the **Lógos** which kept the stars in their courses and the planets in their appointed tracks. It was the **Lógos** which controlled the ordered succession of night and day, and summer and winter and spring and autumn. The **Lógos** was the reason and the mind of God in the universe, making it an order and not a chaos. In summary, Greek philosophers, in attempting to understand the

relationship between God and the universe, spoke of an unknown mediator between God and the universe, naming this mediator, "Logos". John tells them that this mediator unknown to them is our Lord Jesus, and thus he uses the same name "**Lógos**." In the first verse of his gospel John gives us a summary outline of Jesus' preexistence, His fellowship with God the Father in His preincarnate state and His absolute deity writing that

In the beginning was the **Lógos**, and the **Lógos** was with God, and the **Lógos** was God." (Jn 1:1)

If there is any doubt about Who John was referring to, he goes on to describe the incarnation writing that

the **Lógos** 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. (Jn 1:14)

The Word of Life - Jesus Christ, the One Who is essence of life and reveals that life to men. Note that **Life (Greek = Zoe)** is a key word in John's Gospel and in his first epistle. Life (zoe) is found 10x in First John - 1Jn1:1, 1:2, 2:25, 3:14, 3:15, 5:11, 5:12, 5:13, 5:16, 5:20. (**Zoe** = 36x in the Gospel of John - John 1:4; 3:15, 16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 26, 29, 39, 40; 6:27, 33, 35, 40, 47, 48, 51, 53, 54, 63, 68; 8:12; 10:10, 28; 11:25; 12:25, 50; 14:6; 17:2, 3; 20:31). It is notable that John's letter begins (1Jn 1:2) and ends (1Jn 5:20) with the theme of **eternal life**.

As an aside some commentators see **Word of Life** as a reference to the Gospel, which while not unreasonable is not as congruent with the context of John's presentation of the Person Who Himself is the foundation stone for that Gospel.

Christ, the blessed One, gives to all wonderful Words of Life;
Sinner, list to the loving call, wonderful Words of Life;
All so freely given, wooing us to heaven.
Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life,
Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life.
[Wonderful Words of Life by Philip Bliss](#)

S E Pierce comments on the phrase **Word of Life**...

He (John) styles Him (Jesus as) "**The Word of life**." (Generally speaking a **word** is the index of the mind. By what is contained in the mind is expressed. So Christ, as One in the self-existing Essence, speaks out the mind of the Eternal Father. It was by His Almighty fiat the heavens and the earth were created, and all the host of them. It was by Him all the secrets of the Most High were spoken out and proclaimed, and the invisible God brought out of His invisibility. It is in Him the full revelation of Godhead is made known. It is in the essential Word all the mind of God is opened, all the love of God expressed, the whole of God declared. It is as this essential Word, and only begotten Son of God, shines forth as God-Man, in His most glorious Person, mediation, work, grace, and salvation, in the everlasting Gospel, and enlightens His Church therewith, that they in His light see light. ([1John - Biblical Illustrator](#))

Life (2222)(**zoe - word study**) signifies the state of one who is possessed of vitality or is animate. **Zoe** is life real and genuine, active and vigorous. **Zoe** is the absolute fullness of life, both essential and ethical, which belongs to God. In the New Testament zoe speaks of life as a principle, life in the absolute sense, life as God has it, that which the Father has in Himself, and as John says "is in His Son." (1Jn 1:2) **Zoe** is "the higher life", the life that is really worthwhile. True life is only in Christ. Eternal life (zoe) is the present possession of the believer because of his or her relationship with Christ (Jn5:24, 1Jn 3:14). This **zoe** is assured by the Resurrection of Christ (2Ti 1:10, 1Cor 15:19, 20, 21, 22, 2Cor 5:4)

Contrast the other Greek Word for life = bios- used by John in 1Jn 2:16-note, 1Jn 3:17. **Bios** refers to everyday life including the daily functions of one's life on earth, such as our natural preoccupation with food, clothing and shelter

Kenneth Wuest in his comments on Phil 1:21-note has this description of **zoe**...

Christ is Paul's life in that He is that eternal life which Paul received in salvation, a life which is ethical in its content, and which operates in Paul as a motivating, energizing, pulsating principle of existence that transforms Paul's life, a divine Person living His life in and through the apostle. All of Paul's activities, all of his interests, the entire round of his existence is ensphered within that circumference which is Christ. (Comment: And beloved believer what was true in Paul's life is true in your life. Do you really believe this statement? It is true whether you believe it or not. And God wants us to live the rest of our days in light of this grand truth. (Ibid)

John later emphasizes the incredible, difficult to fully grasp, truth that Jesus is now the believer's very life (!)...

And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has

the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. (1Jn 5:11-12)

Comment: Observe that John uses the word "witness" indicating that this truth is something the believer knows because of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit (1Jn 5:7) and the witness of the Word (1Jn 5:13). While in this lifetime we can hardly begin to comprehend all that this truth signifies, we nevertheless can know beyond a shadow of a doubt that it is true of us now and forever! Hallelujah! "Given" signifies a gift from God, not something we earn (Jn 10:27, 28, 29, Ro 6:23, Eph 2:8, 9) and that this gift is not a concept or an idea but a Person, Christ Jesus! In 1Jn 5:12 the definite article ("the" in Greek) appears before the word "**life**," pointing out a particular life, specifically that life which God is and which He gives sinners who place their faith in His Son. In other words, believers receive not just "life" but "**the life**"—the life "which is **life indeed**" (cp 1Ti 6:19).

John has a similar opening in his Gospel...

John 1:1 In the beginning was the **Word**, and the **Word** was with God, and the **Word** was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

Comment: Observe (1) The Word (Whom John unequivocally identifies as Jesus in Jn 1:14) was present at the beginning (twice) with God emphasizing His pre-existence (2) He was the Creator of all things. (3) He is life. (4) He is light.

John introduces the reader to contrastive themes that occur throughout the gospel. "Life" and "light" are qualities of the Word that are shared not only among the Godhead (5:26) but also by those who respond to the gospel message regarding Jesus Christ (Jn 8:12; 9:5; 10:28; 11:25; 14:6). John uses the word "life" (zoe) about 36x (in 32v) in his Gospel, far more than any other NT book. It refers not only in a broad sense to physical and temporal life that the Son imparted to the created world through His involvement as the agent of creation (v3), but especially to spiritual and eternal life imparted as a gift through belief in Him (3:15; 17:3; Eph. 2:5).

Paul relates **zoe** to Jesus in the opening verse of his last letter...

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of **life** (zoe) in Christ Jesus (2Ti 1:1)

Comment: Here Paul uses zoe in the genitive (possessive case) indicating that the content of the promise is life and then explaining that this life is found in Christ Jesus.

Writing to the Colossians Paul explained to the believers their source of spiritual existence...

When Christ *Who is* our **life** (zoe), is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Col 3:4)

Comment: The verse more literally (and powerfully) reads "When the Christ -- our life -- is revealed... " There is no verb "*is*" in the original Greek. The phrase "*Who is*" is added by the translators, but I think "Christ our life" is even better! We as His bride are to be so focused on His return to take us home to His Father's house that (in the context of the practical section of Colossians 3) we are thereby motivated to lay aside our old filthy fleshly garments and put on His robe of righteous acts (see Col 3:5,10,12 for what those "acts" consist of... they in fact constitute our "wedding gowns" which we are in the process of making ready as John describes in Rev 19:7). See Jn 1:4. The life is not only "with" Christ, it "is" Christ. [Cp Jn14:6; 2Co 4:10,11; 1Jn4:9, 5:11,12, 2Ti1:1].

If your life does not demonstrate this new life in Christ you have missed the whole point about what this new life is about.

Wayne Barber comments: Living the Christ life is daily surrendering to His will and Word which allows us to enter into His divine enablement. I must decrease and He must increase (Ed: Actually the opposite - as He increases, I will decrease - see discussion Jn 3:30). As I am willing to deny self, and surrender to Him, He (His Spirit) takes it from there and energizes my very being, empowering me to do what He has commanded me to do. "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain." (Phil 1:21) (Ed: Compare Paul's command to walk by the Spirit in Gal 5:16)

When the angel of the Lord opened the prison gates to release Peter, his message was...

"Go your way, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this **Life**." (zoe) (Acts 5:20)

Paul explains this "**life**" in the "resurrection" chapter, First Corinthians 15...

If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. (1Cor 15:19, 20)

Jesus Himself explained the relationship of the lie and the Spirit declaring to His disciples...

It is the Spirit who gives **life** (zoopoieo) ; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are **life** (zoe). (Jn 6:63) (To which Peter responded) "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal **life**." (Jn 6:63, 68)

Smalley summarizes the purpose of First John as follows...

The purpose of 1 John may therefore be summarized as primarily an appeal to the faithful: to strengthen the faith and resolve of true believers in the Johannine community by encouraging them to maintain the apostolic gospel. To this end the writer appeals to his readers to adopt a proper estimate of the person of Jesus, and to act with Christian morality. As believers, that is to say, John exhorts his readers to live in the light as children of God (the paramount and complementary themes in the two main divisions of 1 John, 1:5–2:29 and 3:1–5:13). Belief and behavior, Christology and ethics, are together a consistent concern of the writer; and his insistence on the practice of Christian love and unity, as derived from the love of God (e.g. 1:3; 4:19), flows directly from the evident stresses and divisions within the Johannine circle...

A secondary intention behind the composition of 1 John may be regarded as a refutation and correction of the inadequate views (both Christological and ethical) which were being espoused by other, heretically disposed members in the Johannine community, of a Jewish or non-Jewish background. For such adherents, John's balanced teaching about Christian belief and behavior was entirely appropriate, and provided its own appeal. (Word Biblical Commentary : 1,2,3 John)

W E Vine...

One of the special objects for which this epistle was written was to counteract the errors of the Gnostics. There were three sects whose heretical teachings began to influence the churches in the latter part of the first century: The Ebionites, followers of Ebion, who denied the deity of Christ, teaching that He had not come in flesh; and the Cerinthians, followers of Cerinthus, who denied the union of the two natures in Christ, i.e., the human and the divine, prior to His baptism. The apostle therefore sets forth the truth relating to both the essential deity of Christ, and to His true humanity. The second great object of the epistle was to make clear to the readers the distinguishing features which characterize those who are born of God in contrast to those which mark the children of the evil one. These characteristics center round three great truths concerning God:

1. God is Light (1Jn 1:1-3),
2. God is Love (1Jn 1:3-5:5)
3. God is Life (1Jn 5:6 to end)

The children of God have fellowship with Him in respect of each of these, in contrast to those who are not born of God.

1. Light symbolically stands for righteousness. Those who have fellowship with God do righteousness "as He is righteous." Sin is spiritual darkness, and is utterly incompatible with fellowship with God.
2. Fellowship with God, in regard to His nature as love, produces love one toward another, in contrast to the spirit which was manifest in Cain and continues in the world.
3. The "life" which God imparts is in His Son. Associated with this is the witness which each believer has in himself—idolatry is incompatible with it.

D C Hughes outlines the first verses...

I. THE APOSTLES' TESTIMONY CONCERNING CHRIST AS A PERFECT SAVIOUR (1Jn 1:1, 2).

1. No stronger evidence can be conceived.
 2. The statement of such evidence proves the importance of giving facts as the foundation of Christianity.
 3. The terms of this statement deserve careful study.
- (1) The pre-existence of our Lord.

- (2) The real, objective humanity of our Lord.
- (3) The life-giving power of our Lord.

II. THE DESIGN OF THIS TESTIMONY — that others might participate in the peculiar privileges of the apostles of Christ (1Jn 1:3).

1. Fellowship.
2. Fulness of joy.

III. THE EVIDENCES OF REAL UNION WITH CHRIST AS PERFECT SAVIOUR.

1. A life of practical holiness (1Jn 1:5-7).
2. A Scriptural sentiment (1Jn 1:8-10).
3. Compliance with the condition of forgiveness and cleansing (1Jn 1:9).

Lessons:

1. The solid basis of Christianity — a historical Christ, attested by unimpeachable witnesses.
2. The distinguished privileges of a believer in Christ.
 - (1) Divine fellowship.
 - (2) Divine cleansing.
 - (3) Divine forgiveness.
3. The blessed and royal life of the Christian. To “walk in the light.” ([1 John 1 Biblical Illustrator](#))

We Touched Him! - Mythology is filled with legends of ancient gods who descended from heaven and took human form, but no one ever heard or saw them, and no one ever touched them. These were dreams born of human desire for God and the hope that someday He would draw near. The incarnation of Jesus—God who came in the flesh—is how those dreams came true.

Author **Dorothy Sayers** put it this way: [God] can exact nothing from man that He has not exacted from Himself. He has Himself gone through the whole of human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair, and death. When He was a man, He played the man. He was born in poverty and died in disgrace and thought it well worthwhile.

The incarnation of Jesus Christ is the irrefutable proof that God will do anything to draw near to us.

Augustine said, “[God] gave Himself for a time to be handled by the hands of men.”

And we have the written record of John, a man who actually did touch Him. We can trust his account—and we can trust that God wants to be near to you and me.—David H Roper ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Absolutely tender! Absolutely true!
Understanding all things; understanding you;
Infinitely loving, good and kind and near—
That is Christ our Savior. What have we to fear?
—Anon.

Love was when God became a man.
—Walvoord

The Human Camera - Steven Wiltshire, who has been called “the human camera,” has the amazing ability to recall tiny details about anything he has seen and then reproduce them in drawings. For example, after Steven was flown over the city of Rome, he was asked to draw the city center on blank paper. Astonishingly, he accurately reproduced from memory the winding streets, the buildings, the windows, and other details.

Wiltshire’s memory is remarkable. Yet there’s another kind of memory that’s even more amazing—and much more vital. Before

Jesus' return to heaven, He promised His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit to give them supernatural memory of what they had experienced: "The Helper, the Holy Spirit ... will ... bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26).

The disciples heard Christ's marvelous teachings. They heard Him command the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the dead to be raised. Yet when the Gospel writers recorded these events, their words were not the product of a gifted human memory. Their recollections came from a divine Helper who made sure they compiled a trustworthy record of Christ's life.

Trust the Bible with confidence. It was written with guidance from the "divine camera," the Holy Spirit. — by Dennis Fisher (Ibid)

The stories in the Word of God
Are there for us to see
How God has worked in people's lives
Throughout all history.
—Sper

The Spirit of God
uses the Word of God
to teach the people of God.

Eyewitness - "You don't want to interview me for your television program," the man told me. "You need someone who is young and photogenic, and I'm neither." I replied that we indeed wanted him because he had known C. S. Lewis, the noted author and the subject of our documentary. "Sir," I said, "when it comes to telling the story of a person's life, there is no substitute for an eyewitness."

As Christians, we often refer to sharing our faith in Christ as "witnessing" or "giving our testimony." It's an accurate concept taken directly from the Bible. John, a companion and disciple of Jesus, wrote: "We have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you" (1 John 1:2-3).

If you know Jesus as your Savior and have experienced His love, grace, and forgiveness, you can tell someone else about Him. Youth, beauty, and theological training are not required. Reality and enthusiasm are more valuable than a training course in how to share your faith.

When it comes to telling someone the wonderful story of how Jesus Christ can transform a person's life, there is no substitute for a firsthand witness like you.— by David C. McCasland ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Let us go forth, as called of God,
Redeemed by Jesus' precious blood,
His love to show, His life to live,
His message speak, His mercy give. —Whittle

**Jesus doesn't need lawyers.
He needs witnesses!**

INTRODUCTION TO 1 JOHN **DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY** **PAUL APPLE**

**ASSURANCE OF ETERNAL LIFE MATURES AS WE PASS
THREE PRACTICAL TESTS OF:**
- FELLOWSHIP = WALKING IN THE LIGHT
- SONSHIP = PRACTICING RIGHTEOUSNESS
- ABIDING = FAITH AND LOVE BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS EPISTLE

TWO TRACKS OF ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

Before beginning the detailed study of this epistle, I would like to offer a critique of the opposing evangelical view to show the significance of the issues involved -- how they touch on issues such as Lordship Salvation, the nature of the gospel message, the nature of true repentance and saving faith, the approach to eternal security, the perseverance of the saints, assurance of salvation ... the list goes on and on. The Book of 1 John makes very significant contributions to this discussion and will be interpreted quite differently ... depending on one's systematic theology.

To illustrate the opposing view I am going to quote extensively from **The Gospel Under Siege** by Zane Hodges (published by Redencion Viva in Dallas, TX, 1981). He is a respected servant of the Lord with excellent ministry and academic credentials. This critique is not meant as a personal criticism of him at all. I just think it serves to highlight some of the differences in perspective that genuine believers have as they approach some of these difficult issues where the Bible presents a certain degree of tension that often makes us uncomfortable ... to the extent where we seek out some more simplistic formulistic solution.

I need to quote his illustrative material in the **Prologue to The Gospel Under Siege** to set the stage:

Last night Jimmy accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. This morning he is bubbling with a joy he has never experienced before.

On his way to work he meets his friend Bill. Bill has always claimed to be a Christian. He also reads a lot of books on theology. But Jimmy has never been too interested in theology up until now.

"Say, Bill," Jimmy begins, "guess what! I got saved last night. I trusted Christ as my Savior. Now I know I am going to heaven!"

"Hmmm," Bill replies, "maybe you shouldn't quite say it that way. After all, you don't really know that you are going to heaven."

"What do you mean?" Jimmy enquires. "The Bible says, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved,' and that's what I did."

Bill give Jimmy a wise and knowing look. It is the kind of look all perceptive theologians know how to give the ignorant and the unlearned.

"But did you really believe? Maybe you just believed psychologically." "What do you mean?" Jimmy is feeling a little depressed now.

"I mean," Bill continues sagely, "you can't know yet whether you have real saving faith."

"How can I know that?"

"By your works. You'll have to wait and see if you live a real Christian life." Jimmy is dejected. "You mean that if I sin, I'm not a Christian after all?"

"No, I don't mean that," Bill assures him. "All Christians fail once in a while."

"But how much do they fail? I mean, how bad does it have to get before I find out I'm not saved?"

"Well, it can't get too bad for too long."

"But how bad? For how long?" Jimmy feels desperate.

"I can't tell you exactly. But a true Christian doesn't practice sin. If you find that you are practicing sin, that will show that you didn't have real saving faith to begin with."

"What if I do pretty good for several years and then things start going bad?" "In that case, maybe you weren't saved to start with."

"Maybe? What do you mean by that?"

"I mean," Bill's tone is solmen, "you'll probably have to wait until the end of your life before you can be sure you are a true Christian. You have to persevere in good works, or your faith wasn't real."

"Do you think I can be sure before I die?"

"Maybe, Listen, Jim, I've got to rush to work. We'll talk about this some other time. Okay?"

"Yeah, okay. See you, Bill."

Bill rushes off. Jimmy is devastated. All the joy he had experienced since last night has suddenly evaporated. He is now filled with questions and doubts. Jimmy has become a casualty in the siege of the Gospel!

Talk about a **"straw man"** approach! (ED: Straw man = an intentionally misrepresented proposition that is set up because it is easier to defeat than an opponent's real argument.) What believer wouldn't be repulsed by the approach taken by Bill in responding to the joy of Jim's testimony of conversion? But this type of emotional rhetoric glosses over the depth of the real underlying issues and fails to do justice to the view of salvation that says **"Where there ends up being no fruit it is because there never was any true root"**

My understanding of the Biblical perspective on **Assurance of Salvation** is that there are two different tracks which are designed to complement one another. These two tracks are not mutually exclusive but are designed to exist together and even grow as one matures in the faith.

1) TRACK #1 - Subjective Faith and confirmation by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

This track is immediately operative upon conversion so that Jimmy is totally correct in giving testimony immediately as to his confidence of being in the family of God and being certain of his final destiny in heaven. One's faith should continue to grow even though at times there may be periods of severe doubt .. so that even this track does not remain at some static level.

2) TRACK #2 - Objective confirmation by the demonstration of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in one's changed life.

God has been extremely gracious to provide this other barometer of our spiritual standing. For there are times when our heart will condemn us and call into question the validity of our relationship with God. But "God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. (1 Jn 3:20)" At times like these when the introspective believer is wrestling with some specific area of trial, he can look to the types of general tests of life presented in 1 John and have his confidence renewed on Track #2 that he truly is a child of God.

With that introduction, let's go on to examine some of the arguments raised by Zane Hodges in Chapter 5 of his book -- "**1 John: Tests of Life?**"

A major stream in the commentary tradition on 1 John holds that the epistle ought to be viewed as offering "tests of life." That is, John confronts his readership with questions about the quality of their Christian experience from which they may draw the conclusion that they either are, or are not, true believers. Should they fail to measure up, they have no reason to think that they possess eternal life.

It would be hard to devise an approach to John's first epistle more hopelessly misguided or more completely self-defeating. If the premise on which this approach is based were true, it would be quite impossible for either the original audience of 1 John or any of its subsequent readers to possess the assurance of salvation. Since the writer repeatedly enjoins the "abiding" life marked by obedience to Christ's commands, one cannot really be certain until the end of his earthly experience whether he has abided or persevered in the requisite obedience. Meanwhile, one must entertain the possibility that he is a spurious Christian!

As noted above, the concept of dual tracks of assurance completely deflates this type of [straw man](#) approach. In addition, the Biblical concept of **abiding** needs to be investigated more thoroughly. Is John talking about remaining vitally connected to the life of Christ as a branch remains on the vine (as opposed to being cut off and dying so that the contrast is between believers and non-believers) or is he talking about some type of subjective quality of closeness to God that all believers will exhibit in varying degrees (so that the contrast is between good believers and carnal believers)? See the Appendix for a fuller treatment of this concept of abiding.

The concept of "**fellowship**" is another key word in the epistle. Hodges agrees that part of the overt purpose of 1 John is found in its prologue "and there the purpose is defined clearly as 'fellowship' with God." But he goes on to interpret this word in its common [colloquial](#) Christian usage today rather than in its historical context:

"It almost goes without saying that 'fellowship' is not to be defined as a virtual synonym for being a Christian. King David was surely a regenerate man when he committed adultery and murder, but he could not be said to have been in God's fellowship at the time! Even on a human plane, a son or daughter may lose fellowship with a parent even though they do not thereby lose the family relationship. The equation of 'fellowship' with 'being a Christian' (or something similar) is extremely far-fetched. Fellowship, like abiding, is a fully conditional relationship and this fact is sufficiently demonstrated by the statements found in 1:5-10. Fellowship, of course was precisely what was threatened by the advent of the antichrists. Since the readers had a divine promise about eternal life, nothing these false prophets could do or say could destroy the readers' fundamental relationship to God. But should the readership begin to listen to the doctrines of these men, their experience of fellowship with the Father and the Son would be in jeopardy. Up to now, the readers had apparently resisted the false teaching successfully (4:4). The Apostle wishes this resistance to continue (2:24-27)."

We Christians today talk about falling into and out of **fellowship** with our Heavenly Father with unconfessed sin being the main determining factor. But what we are really addressing is the enjoyment of that fellowship relationship. When you look at fellowship as the sharing of the eternal life provided by God (see Prologue to Epistle) it is evident that genuine believers have an eternal unchanging relationship of fellowship to both God the Father and other members of the family of God that is not affected by our experiential walk.

Hodges goes on to write:

"The principal source of confusion in much contemporary study of 1 John is to be found in the failure to

recognize the real danger against which the writer is warning. The eternal salvation of the readership is not imperilled. It is not even in doubt as far as the author is concerned. But seduction by the world and its antichristian representatives is a genuine threat which must be faced."

Actually the very real danger of [apostasy](#) (a departure from the truth on the part of those who had been professing the truth and outwardly in fellowship with the community of believers although never genuinely saved) in terms of caving in to these anti-Christian representatives is **exactly what John is addressing**. But those in Hodges' camp never seem to admit to the possibility of apostasy because of their "[Easy Believism](#)" approach to salvation.

They rightly want to maintain that the gospel message is one of by grace through faith alone without any works involved as a condition for salvation. That is where the title comes from: The Gospel Under Siege -- making the combatative charge that those who come from a more Calvinistic persuasion (where the perseverance of the saints is part of one's systematic theology and the possibility of apostasy as defined above exists) have committed the heinous error of perverting the gospel. **The distinction they fail to grasp is that the emphasis on a changed life as confirmation of genuine conversion** (on the second track of two complementary tracks) is not at all synonymous with making good works a prerequisite for entrance into salvation. What type of conversion or salvation is it where no fruit actually results?

Hodges' conclusion appropriately serves to reinforce what he has already stated ... once again revealing that he has completely overlooked the possibility of this "Two Track" approach to assurance:

"The assurance of the believer rests squarely on the direct promises in which this offer is made, and on nothing else. [i.e. [Track #1](#)] It follows from this that the assertion that a believer must find his assurance in his works, is a grave and fundamental theological error. It is an error that goes right to the heart of the nature of the Gospel proclamation. It seriously distorts that proclamation and creates in its place a new kind of message that would have been unrecognizable to the New Testament writers...Preachers and theologians cannot have it both ways. Either a man can be perfectly sure that he is born again and going to heaven at the moment he trusts Christ, or he cannot. If works must verify a man's faith, then he cannot."

The bottom line is that from an interpretation standpoint, **1 John truly is about "tests of life" with the emphasis on this [second track of assurance](#)**. From an application standpoint many of the pastoral concerns of Hodges (and others) are certainly helpful in terms of motivating believers to live in closer fellowship with the Father, abiding in a deeper sense, etc. Certainly we all benefit from applying to our lives those challenges that call us to love our brother, to separate from worldliness, to embrace the truth, to recognize error, to continue to confess our sin on an ongoing basis, etc. We can all improve in terms of drawing closer to God. But that is by way of application -- not interpretation. When you look at the contrasts presented in the epistle (between light and darkness, between life and death, between truth and error ... read through the book on your own and make a list of these contrasts ...) it is evident that these are black and white distinctions between believers and non-believers. John is presenting pass / fail tests that are designed to increase our level of assurance as believers. ([1 John - Tests of Eternal Life - A Devotional Commentary](#))

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.
- Fanny J. Crosby

Related Resources:

- [Does the Book of 1 John Present Tests of Fellowship or Signs of Life?](#)
- 1 John 3:10 [Children of God and Children of the Devil](#)
- [Loving the Brethren - Teachings of Zane Hodges](#)
- [The Unusual Teachings of Zane Hodges](#)
- Multipart discussion of [the unusual teachings of Zane Hodges](#), et al click [Index](#)
- [What is free grace? What is Free Grace Theology?](#)
- [What is the relationship of faith, works, and security in salvation?](#)
- [Why is faith without works dead?](#)
- [What is lordship salvation?](#)

"The Gospel Under Siege" **by Zane Hodges**

Book Review of The Gospel Under Siege by Johnny V. Miller, with the assistance of William Larkin and Paul D. Wright from Columbia Bible College and Graduate School of Bible and Missions, Columbia, SC that was published in Trinity Journal, Spring 1983, Volume 4 NS, NO. 1.

If eternal life is not the product of faith plus good works, then the only alternative is that it comes from a faith which does not produce good works. This is apparently the only alternative that Zane Hodges presents in *The Gospel Under Siege*.

Hodges, the chairman of the New Testament department at Dallas Theological Seminary, makes an important statement on the relationship of saving faith and works. His contention is clear: there is no necessary relationship at all between faith and works, either before or after salvation. If one believes that good works are the necessary outgrowth of salvation, then he also believes that one receives eternal life on the basis of good works, claims Hodges.

This contention stems from Hodges's desire to clarify the basis for assurance of salvation. As he sees it, if works are the necessary result of salvation, then one cannot be sure he is saved until he is producing good works. And if one must persevere in good works to know he is saved, then he can never know for sure in this life whether he is saved. So, if anyone is ever to have assurance in this life that he is truly a child of God, he must base it on the nature of the Gospel offer, uncoupled from any necessary Gospel effects. Or to put it another way, salvation does not necessarily produce any degree of sanctification.

Hodges is not arguing for a life of lawlessness on the part of Christians; neither his own life nor his teaching would countenance ungodly living. Instead he is seeking to combat an extreme position on assurance—"You'll probably have to wait until the end of your life before you can be sure if you are a true Christian." He wants to show that assurance is possible the moment one believes. But he goes to another extreme and tries to prove much more than is necessary to win his case. And in our opinion he misstates the position of those who are not of the Reformed extreme he caricaturizes in his prologue, and yet who still see a necessary cause-effect relationship between salvation and sanctification taught in Scripture.

Hodges equates three positions on the relation of faith and works which are to him equally erroneous:

1. "Unless you are baptized according to Biblical custom, you cannot be saved."
2. "Unless you persevere in good works, you cannot be saved."
3. "Unless you yield your life to the Lordship of Christ, you cannot be saved."

Now either Hodges is deliberately using the word cannot with different connotations in these three statements, or else he does not understand the different content in the three views. The first statement may in fact represent a position which adds a work to faith as a condition of salvation. But the second statement represents a subjective evaluation by someone from the Reformed position who reflects upon the fruitless life of a professing Christian—the same as saying you have not been saved. And the third statement reflects on the very content of the Gospel itself—what is necessary to believe in order to be saved?

But when Hodges gives his own statement of the Gospel, it is very vague, almost without content. He appeals to Rev 22:17 ("And whoever desires, let him take of the water of life freely") and John 5:24 ("Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life"). He treats John 5:24 virtually as if it were all that Jesus had to say on the subject of soteriology, and does not attempt to identify what "word" the hearers were to respond to, or what the content of their belief was to be. And he treats the Lord's visit with the woman at the well as the sole paradigm of all Gospel encounters, but does not deal at all with the apostle Paul's post-calvary preaching of the atonement and his demand that all men everywhere should repent.

A further problem in the way Hodges deals with the Gospel is that he considers salvation only from man's side. He never attempts to distinguish professions of faith from true saving faith; in fact, one gets the impression that he sees no distinction. And he never considers the work of the Holy Spirit in calling men to salvation, in convicting them of their sinfulness and need of a Savior, or of making a man a new creation upon regeneration. Those who see a necessary connection between saving faith and good works appeal to the divine elements which are part of the salvation process as the source of the subsequent fruits of salvation.

The real heart of Hodges's work is his exegetical attempt to show that certain key passages which are normally interpreted to prove a necessary relationship between faith and works do not, in fact, show that at all. He masterfully exegetes many of the problem passages that seem to make salvation itself depend upon conditions other than true faith, and for that the book is to be commended. But it seems that the author's argument that there is never any necessary relationship between faith and works snags at three major points: (1) James 2:18–19, (2) 1 John 3:6, 9 and (3) Matt 7:15–23.

Hodges builds his exegesis of James 2:18–19 (ED: [SEE ON SITE COMMENTARY ON THESE VERSES](#)) on a highly dubious variant reading of James 2:18 which has by (κ) in place of without (χωρίς). Hodges claims that the former is the majority reading, and that both verses are the words of the objector. By taking verse 19 out of the mouth of James and putting it into the mouth of the objector, Hodges hopes to support his contention that the kind of faith referred to in this passage has nothing to do with getting to heaven, but relates only to living a productive spiritual life here below. It is the objector who brings up the issue of profession without reality, not James. This interpretation completely reverses the normal understanding of the passage. However, it is highly questionable whether κ is in fact the majority reading (see the 26th ed. of Nestle-Aland Greek text; Hodges' article in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Oct. 1963, p. 347). **No translation adopts it—not even the New King James, which is based on the Textus Receptus.** But even if it were the majority reading, that would not prove it were the better reading. And the traditional interpretation of these two verses is not so easy to dislodge; **a faith which produces no works is not different from the kind of “faith” which demons have.**

Nor does Hodges prove his point very well from 1 John. One common view of this epistle is that the apostle John is writing certain tests to show whether an individual has exercised saving faith. The writer of the epistle suggests that there were some men who had companied with the believers and professed to be believers who have now been unmasked as unbelievers (1 John 2:19). Hodges does not understand 1 John that way. He says that John is merely giving **tests of fellowship, not of real spiritual life.** Incredibly, Hodges even says that John “does not suggest that any of his readers are not Christians” (p. 54), although he is willing to acknowledge that “no doubt the antichrists were unsaved.” Yet he does not see that as a necessary conclusion.

So he approaches 1 John 3:6 (ED: [SEE ON SITE COMMENTARY](#)) and 1 John 3:9 (ED: [SEE ON SITE COMMENTARY](#)) with the goal of showing that they have nothing to do with eternal life, but only with a life of intimacy with God after salvation. Usually the present tense *μὰρτάνει* (“Whoever abides in him does not sin”) in 3:6 is interpreted iteratively that is, the abiding person does not repeatedly or habitually sin. This is in contrast to the aorist *μάρτυ* in 1 Jn 2:1, a concession that any Christian is going to commit individual acts of sin. Hodges claims that such an interpretation of 1 Jn 3:6 is an illegitimate use of the present tense: “No other text can be cited where the Greek present tense, unaided by qualifying words, can carry this significance”(p. 59). Instead, he says, the terms “to see him” and “to know him” in verse 6 refer not to being saved, but to being in intimate fellowship with Christ. The person in fellowship with God does not sin.

The claims of 3:6 and 9 pertain to the believer when he is viewed only as “abiding” or as one who is “born of God.” That is, sin is never the product of our abiding experience. It is never the act of the regenerate self per se. On the contrary, sin is the product of ignorance and blindness toward God ... When a believer sins, he is acting out of darkness, not out of knowledge. He is acting as a man of flesh, not as a regenerate person. (p. 60) (ED NOTE - THIS IS FROM ZANE HODGES' BOOK)

This treatment of the text leaves much doubt. In the first place, John uses *μὰρτάνει* in the iterative sense in 1 John 3:8 to describe the habitually sinful condition of the devil, so it would be natural to see John contrasting the devil and the believer by using the same tense. Further, A. T. Robertson cites *ποδεκα* in Luke 18:12 as an interactive present, a verb with no qualifying words. Secondly, the verbs *has seen* (*ώρακεν*) and *has known* (*γινωκεν*) in 3:6 are in the perfect tense, so **John is saying that the person who sins has never seen or has never known him.** If these verses refer to a life of fellowship, not to initial conversion, then John is saying that once a believer has entered into fellowship he will never sin again. And if the regenerate nature (3:9) cannot sin anyway, as Hodges says, is it the unregenerate nature which is supposed to enter into fellowship so that it does not sin? **The view does not make sense.** The options seem to be that either the Christian sins because he has never entered into fellowship with God, or else the unregenerate nature is supposed to enter into fellowship so it does not sin.

Nor does Hodges make more sense when he says that the use of the word “brother” (1 Jn 3:10, 15) proves John is speaking of Christians alone in this passage: “An unsaved man cannot hate his Christian brother since

a true Christian is not really his brother" (p. 62). Therefore, concludes Hodges, the man who is hating must be a Christian. But in the context, the example is used of Cain slaying his brother Abel, and John says Cain was from the evil one (1 Jn 3:12), so he and Abel were related as *humans* but not *spiritually*. In fact, it is love of the brothers which John says is a touchstone of one's having "passed from death to life," a phrase which the Lord Jesus used to mean "genuinely converted" in John 5:24, but which Hodges inconsistently would apply simply to experience here in 1 John, "and not with reference to conversion as such" (p. 63).

One additional piece of **curious interpretation** which shows the author's **strained attempts to divorce salvation and works is his treatment of Acts 2:38**. His purpose is commendably to divorce baptism and regeneration. But to do so, he proposes that the listeners to Peter's Pentecostal sermon were born-again by the time they asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37, p. 101). So Peter's response was meant to tell them how to get forgiveness and enter into fellowship with God, but not how to be justified. Hodges says that the Acts 2 situation is exceptional: "It is probably related to the special guilt of those who had been implicated in the crucifixion" (p. 102). But if this is wherein its specialness lies, one wonders how Peter could continue with the claim that "the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off." Paul is given as another example of one who was regenerated at one point, on the road to Damascus, and forgiven three days later when he was baptized (p. 103). Hodges asserts that Paul gave evidence of salvation en route to Damascus because he called Jesus Lord (Acts 22:10), but he fails to point out that when Paul had called him Lord in Acts 22:8, he did not even know to whom he was speaking.

In place of the "old" view that genuine salvation produces fruit in a person's life, Hodges enunciates a new principle: "Morality is not the grounds for assurance, but the fruit of it" (emphasis his, p. 49). Good works in a Christian's life are the product of a subjective phenomenon—assurance—not the necessary result of spiritual transformation. It would be well to repeat that the author of the Gospel Under Siege is not arguing for a lawless life. He instead wants to clarify the Gospel, and divorce it from works. But is that a necessary divorce? We believe not; in fact, just the opposite is true—it is a necessary wedding. For one thing, Jesus Himself taught that there is **profession of life** without **possession of life**—the crucial distinction is obedience to the Father's will (Matt. 7:21). In that same context the Lord said a good tree cannot produce bad fruit (Matt. 7:18), and that consistently bad fruit evidences a false prophet. If there is no good fruit, Jesus seems to be saying, then an individual is a false prophet.

Further, a change of life was seen as a necessary evidence of salvation throughout the New Testament. John the Baptist refused to baptize the Pharisees because their lives did not evidence repentance (Matt 3:8). The Lord Jesus preached repentance, (Matt 3:17) which the Jews most certainly understood in their spiritual tradition as a turning from sin to God (Hebrew - shub). The apostle Paul preached repentance, a repentance that resulted in changed lives and appropriate deeds (Acts 26:20). And the apostles saw that this repentance which produced changed lives was not a work of the flesh, but was itself a gift of God, the evidence of God's grace in the lives of the redeemed (Acts 11:18).

The Bible does not present the repentance that leads to changed lives as a work of man, but a work of God. Therefore it is not necessary to categorize the good works which result from salvation as the work of men; they also are the work of God, although obviously not done apart from the redeemed man. Hodges has presented only two potions: Either faith without any works saves, or else it is faith plus works which saves. These options are neither logically nor biblically contradictory. In fact, it is the classical presentation of a straw-man which collapses at a sneeze. To say that saving faith is a faith which produces evidence is not saying that the evidence saves. If someone gave this writer \$1,000,000, there'd be evidence somewhere—my bank account, my giving, my lifestyle—but the evidence could not be said to be prerequisite to the gift.

On what grounds should a person be given assurance of his salvation? On the basis of genuine saving faith, of course, the kind of saving faith that results in new life. And if a person makes a profession of faith and never shows any evidence of spiritual life thereafter, does one continue to assure him that on the basis of a hasty prayer, or a contentless profession, or an emotional walk down an aisle, that he has indeed passed from death to life? Does one ignore the remorseless acts of immorality, the practical blasphemies, the godless existence? The question at issue is not faith plus works, but rather what kind of "faith" is it that one is proclaiming that does not (or may not) work at all. (ED: THE SAD IRONY IS THAT YES, THE GOSPEL IS "UNDER SIEGE" BUT BY WHOM?!)