

Alêtheia Christian Fellowship

June 6, 2021

“The Testimony”

Sunday school at 9:30, Service at 10:30 with King’s Kids.

NEWS

The New Building is a GO!

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I JOHN 1:1-3 ~ ¹What 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— ²and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us— ³what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Epistle from ἐπιστολή (ě-pēs-tō-lā)...

Catholic from καθολικός (kā-thō-lē-kōs)...

The leading heresy was a proto-Gnosticism called Docetism, from δοκέω (dō-kě-ō)... Docetism was a blending of Greek Dualism and Eastern Mysticism.

John wrote his Gospel and this book to combat Cerinthus’ teaching.

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

The opening is abrupt and complex, John was setting the tone. The first word is “What,” or in some translations, “Which,” rather than “Who.” Bad grammar?

Using the plural “We.”

“Have heard,” and “Have seen,” are both perfect tense verbs...

“With our eyes,” serves to drive home literally, physically, knowing Jesus.

“What we have looked at and touched,” are both aorist (past) tense verbs...

“Word of Life.” The Word is the mechanism through which God created (Psalm 33:6, Hebrews 11:3, etc.), and through Whom all life has its origin, its present, and future.

That “Life” was manifested physically and was personally experienced by John and so he could testify and proclaim that Truth (present tense verbs).

The first purpose is so people might have fellowship with John and his fellow eyewitnesses. By “Fellowship,” [κοινωνία (koy-nō-nē-ä) Acts 2:44], he meant membership.

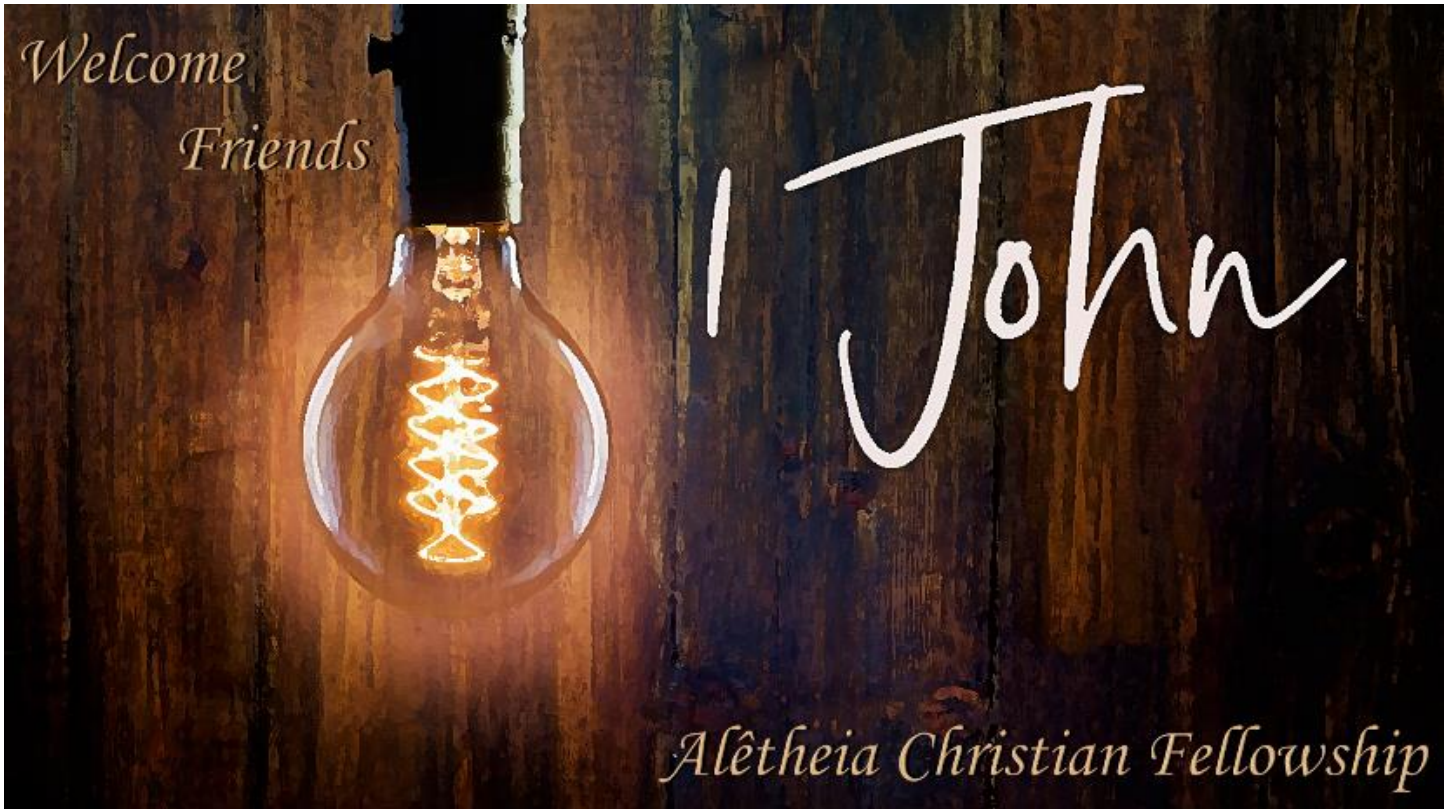
The inescapable essential core requirement for membership is...

If there is no vertical, there can be no true horizontal, and if there is no horizontal, it stands as proof that there is no true vertical.

Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon or Elder.

Name _____ Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

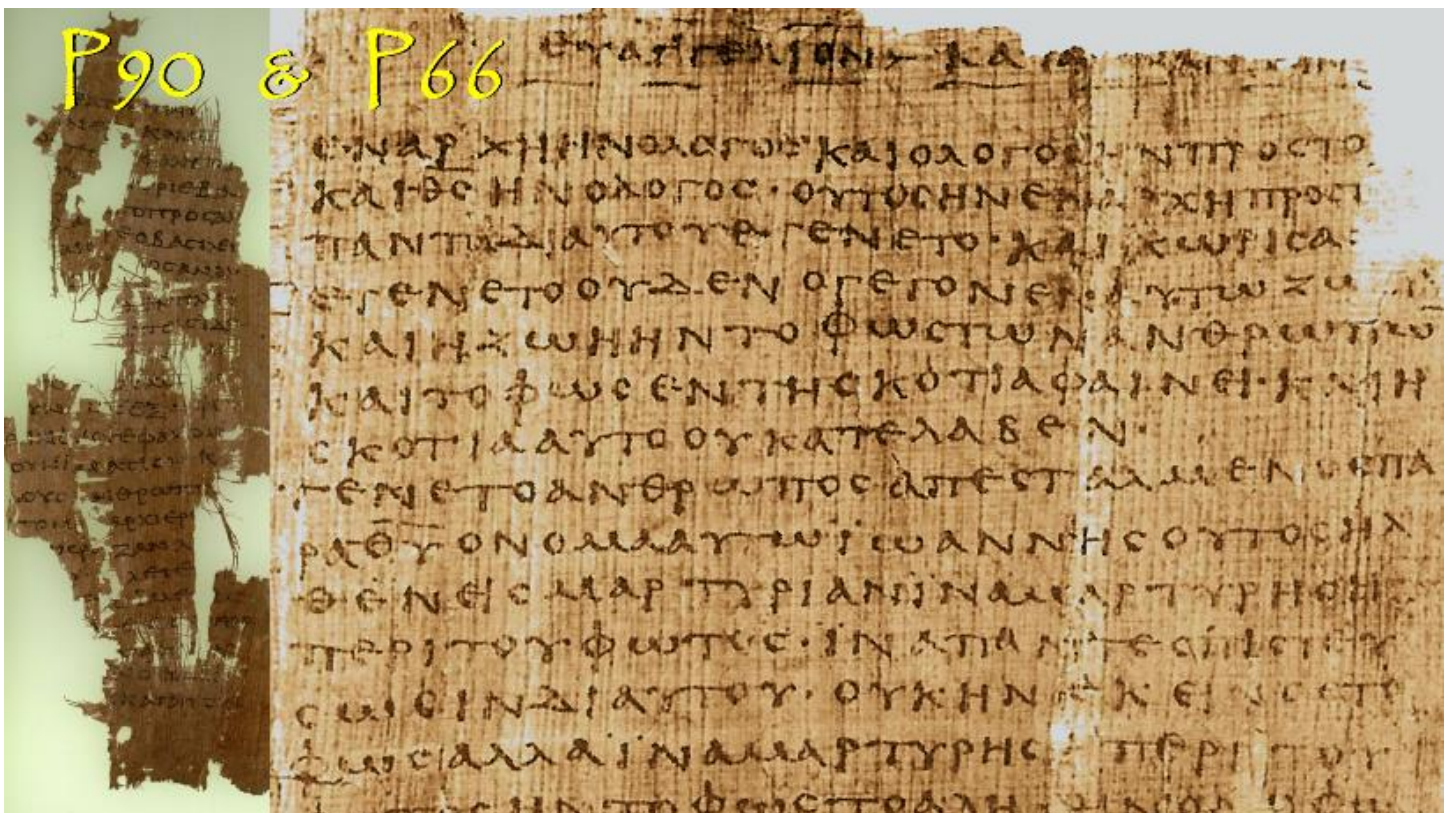


I John 1:1-3, 1What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life— 2and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us— 3what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Praise God for His Holy Word, Message, Revelation...
The communication we just read and the
Communication Himself, our Lord and Savior Jesus.

This is powerful stuff. For a moment, think about the reality that we just listened to inspired thoughts written down more than 19 centuries ago. It's like stripping away that huge stretch of time and being there as the words were first recorded.

I wanted to get us thinking about the text and what the text represents before we do the necessary overview when we're beginning a new Book of the Bible. Since context is king (and my friends, it really is king), it's important to start with some background information.



First John is First John because it's longer than 2nd and 3rd John. It is called an Epistle, which is just a

fancy word, derived from the Greek word ἐπιστολή (ě-pēs-tǒ-lā) that means a letter. For the younger crowd, a letter was similar to Tik Tok, well, no it was nothing like that, but it was like your parents' email, except you actually wrote out some words on a bit of physical material and then sent that off to someone far away.

More recently that was pen on paper mailed with a stamp. A stamp was this little square... Anyway, back nearly 2,000 years ago, one wrote a letter with a wooden stylus dipped in vegetable ink upon a scroll made from interweaving the fibers of a plant only found in the Nile River Delta of Egypt - it is called papyrus.

This particular letter is one of the Bible's Catholic Epistles. To tie up all the loose ends, the word Catholic is from the Greek καθολικός (kă-thǒ-lē-kǒs) meaning general, or universal. The Catholic Epistles are those letters in the Bible not addressed to a specific church. They are James, the three from John, the two from Peter, and Jude.

To add to the confusion, I John is not in the proper form to be called an epistle at all - not by the Greco-Roman standards. Our Bible Book is more like a homily, or treatise, or we could say a written sermon.

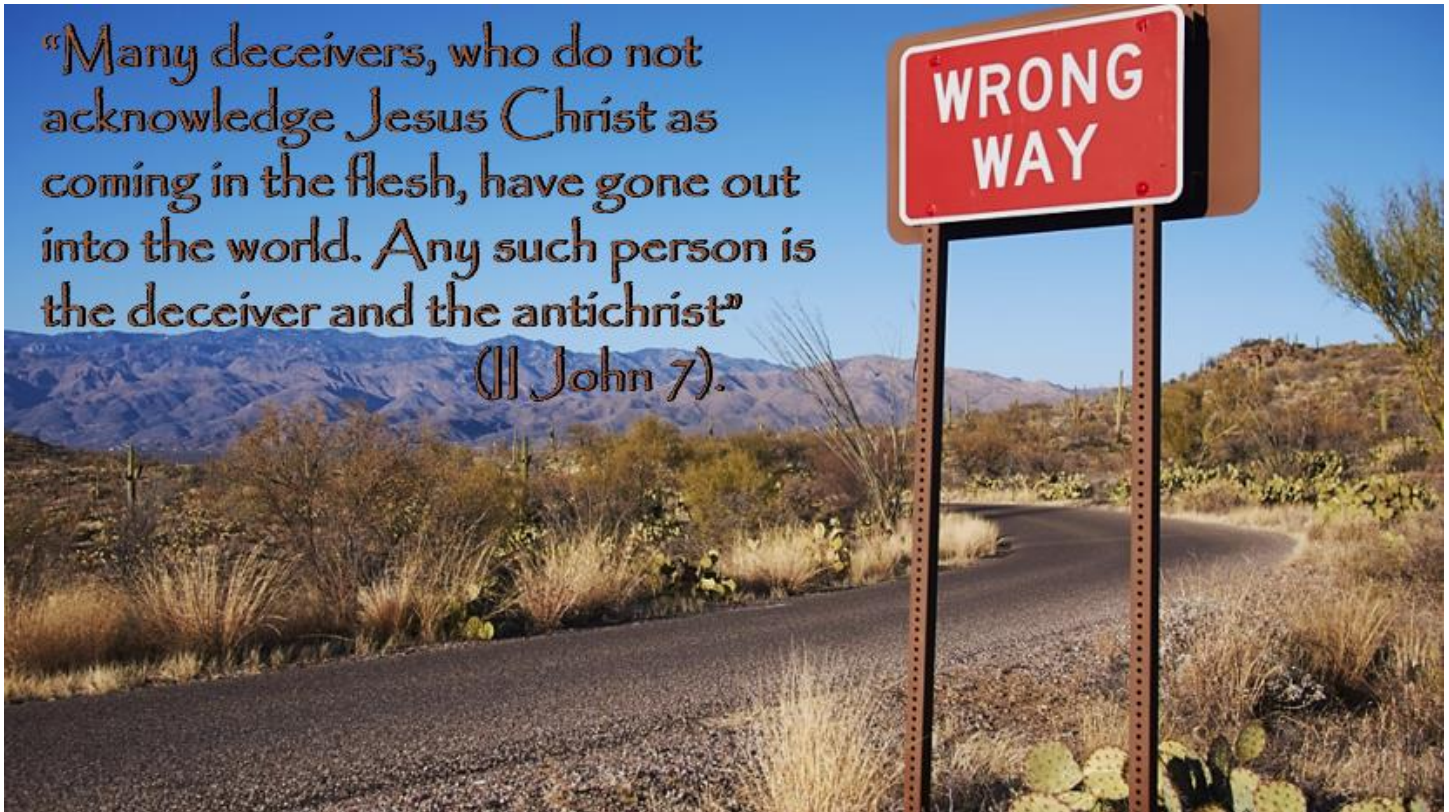
Nowhere in this sermon is the author named. Even so, every ancient manuscript we have, along with the consistent testimony of the early church, shows that it was universally and immediately accepted as coming from the Apostle John. The Disciple whom Jesus loved, son of Zebedee and Salome, brother of the Apostle James and cousin of Jesus.



That consistent early church testimony also indicated that John wrote while in the city of Ephesus. The sermon was probably originally intended for the same Seven Churches of Revelation and beyond. Those 7, including Ephesus itself, were all located in what is now

western Turkey (Izmir/Smyrna - Greece across the Aegean Sea, Athens east of the Isthmus of Corinth and the Peloponnesian Peninsula home of the original Spartans).

Most scholars agree that he wrote this sermon after 67 A.D., but before 92 A.D. A date in the 80's A.D. is commonly accepted. That date would put John himself in his 70's. Church history holds that John was exiled to the penal island of Patmos during the reign of Domitian in about 95 A.D., from where, he wrote the Book of Revelation. He was released in about 97 A.D. and died of natural causes back in Ephesus a bit later, during the reign of Trajan.



The leading heresy at that time was a shadow of the later full-blown Gnosticism that would plague the church in the next two centuries following John's time and is still seen today.

Gnosticism is all about knowing the secret, hidden, special knowledge that only a few can gain access to and possess. It's similar to the love affair people have with conspiracy theories.

This early form that John battled was called Docetism, from the Greek verb δοκέω (dō-kē-ō), to seem... Jesus merely seemed like both God and man. I don't want to wear you out with the technical details, but it's

important to have an idea of the situation John was addressing. Docetism derived from a blending of Greek Dualism and Eastern Mysticism.

The Greek bit is largely attributed to Plato and is the belief that everything physical is corrupt, but that there exists an unseen, untouchable ideal that is perfect. Thus, no part of the perfect divine could ever actually interact with the physical, let alone become physical, without being corrupted. Therefore, Jesus was a man, and the Spirit of the Christ came upon Him and influenced Him at His Baptism, but left Him prior to His arrest and death. The two only seemed like one.

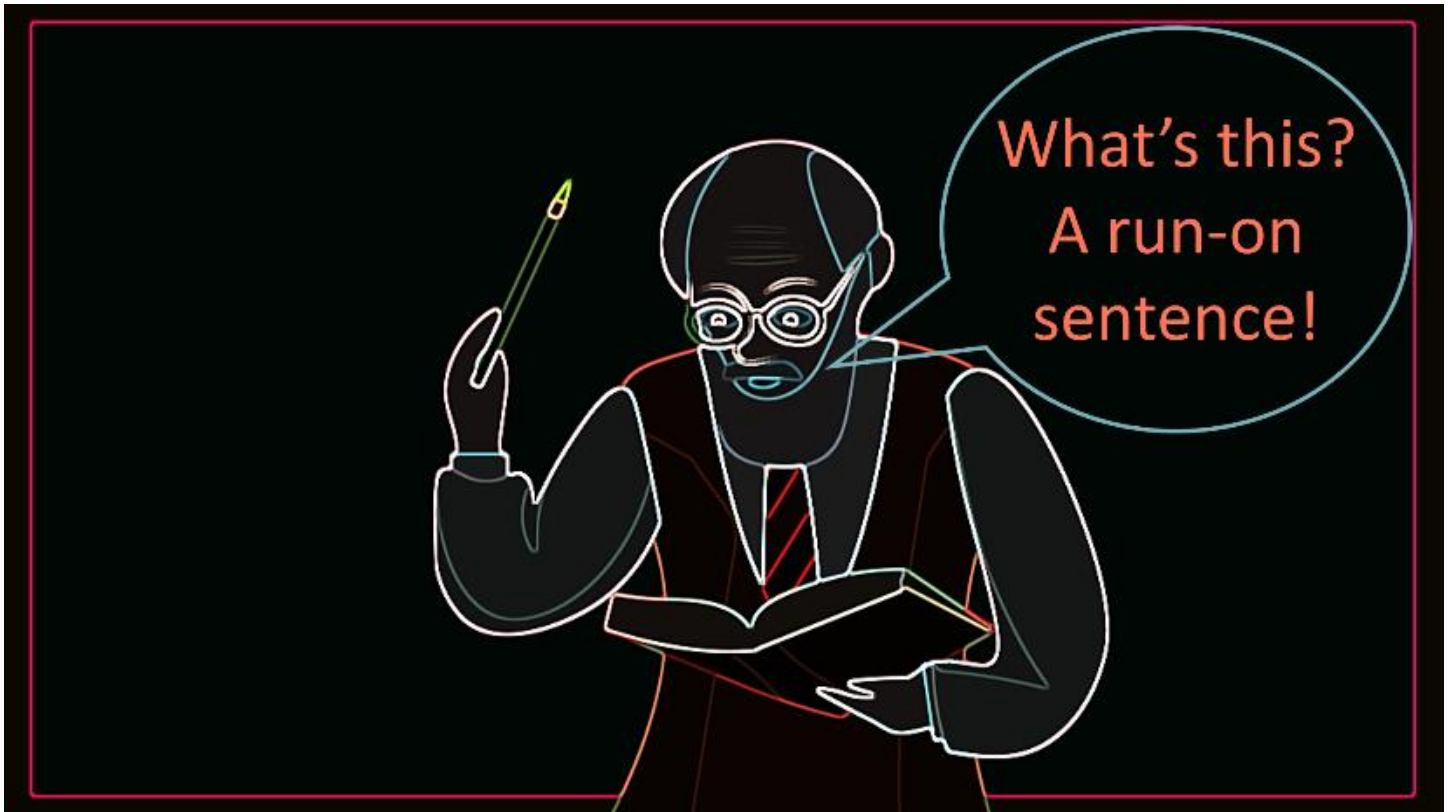
There were several variations on that theme - bottom line, they all reject the idea that the Christ was human, and that Jesus was God.

The Eastern Mysticism part is the belief that a cryptic secret knowledge exists that can be learned and when it is it will unlock the world underlying the world the sheeple believe is real.

A contemporary of John's was a dude named Cerinthus. He was educated in Egypt and indoctrinated in their brand of mysticism. He founded a Christian cult

based upon an early Gnostic Gospel he wrote. He is generally credited as the founder of Docetism.

You might remember that Polycarp the Bishop of Smyrna was John's student. Irenaeus Bishop of Lyon was Polycarp's student, and he wrote that Polycarp told him that John wrote his Gospel and this book we're studying now to combat the growing influence of Cerinthus. My friends, doctrine matters and historically, one of Satan's most successful weapons against Christianity is a twisting of Biblical doctrine causing all kinds of error and misguided emphases that then serve to not only distort Christianity, but also to divide the church. So many Christians today choose a church based on all kinds of things that are so much less important than the teaching offered. What good is having the best programs, the coolest facilities, the greatest music, the finest entertainment, and the slickest preacher, if the doctrine is bad?



In the original Greek, these 3 verses that I read to start us off, constitute an incredibly complex, or chaotic, single sentence. For a long time, scholars, probably out of reverence, didn't really comment on the incredibly unusual Greek structure of this sentence.

Over the last 200 years liberal scholars, without such reverence, have attacked it as extremely poor writing. One such scholar called it, a passage "More remarkable for its energy than for its clarity." Most liberal scholars are not that polite.

What's good about that is it has set more devout scholars to work examining the passage more

thoroughly and we can now see that the passage isn't bad Greek, it's unbelievably unusual and complex Greek to describe what is indescribable.

Similar to the opening in the Gospel of John, this is a passage with very simple words, formatted in a way to give profound meaning. It was done by pushing and even breaking the rules of Greek grammar. I think you'll be impressed as we look closer.

John was clearly not a native Greek speaker. He obviously thought in Aramaic and then with his limited Greek vocabulary and his lack of formal education he had to bend the language to fit his needs. Skeptics only see confusion; you will see compelling complexity as pronouns go from singular to plural and first person to second person to third person and as verb tenses bounce all over the place. John wasn't Greek, he was Jewish, and John wasn't trying to win a grammar contest, he was trying to convey information about the most complicated and impossible to fully understand Being in all existence.



I 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—

This is the opening statement. The things I will say from here on, liberal scholars count as bad writing and with that mindset, cannot see the Truth of what it actually conveys. Never let your bias keep you from the Truth.

The opening is abrupt and complex, and John meant it to be abrupt and complex. He was setting the tone for his sermon. John was saying, “We’re not talking about

some great guy, or some fancy religion, we're talking about the Creator, Almighty God, the Author and Sustainer of life and His interaction with mankind - pay attention!"

The first word is "What," or in some translations, "Which," rather than "Who." Bad grammar? No, it highlights the totality of God's interaction through Jesus. It is God the Word, it is Jesus in the flesh, it is His teaching, His sacrifice, and His church, it is the entirety of what Christianity is and it is personified in a Who, but to convey all that it is better stated as a "What."

That word is not feminine or masculine, but neuter. All Greek words have gender. If you've studied other languages, like Spanish for example, you understand. John could have matched the gender to the word "Life" a feminine noun, or to the word "Word" a masculine noun, but not both. Doing it the way he did, as a neutral gender, he violated good Greek, but preserved the idea that both the "Word" and the "Life" are one.

"Was from the beginning," means that which already existed before anything was created and therefore had no beginning Himself. It obviously connects to the

opening of John's Gospel, which, in turn, refers to the opening of Genesis. In the beginning before anything created existed, God spoke the universe into being.

Beyond the allusion to that beginning there is also the more specific beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry.



John then violated all the rules and gave several short choppy statements that are quite unusual. Don't worry, I won't explore them all with you. He starts off using the plural "We." when we would expect the singular "I." What does that mean? It's not the royal we, or the authorial we, or the, we who are writing this letter. Contextually, it means the band of people like John

himself who were eyewitnesses to, and personal participants in, the actual ministry of Jesus.

Moving in tighter it is the disciples who followed Jesus, including the women we talked about last week. Tighter still it is the Apostles that Jesus hand-selected and moving in beyond that it is the inner-circle to which John belonged together with his brother James along with Peter. The three guys who saw Jesus Transfigured as well as Resurrected and then Ascended. That's the "We."



They had completed the fence when the horses arrived.

John was saying "We," "Have heard," and "Have seen." Both of those verbs are perfect tense indicated in

English with the word “Have.” The perfect tense stresses the present result of a past activity. John and his contemporaries heard and saw Jesus in the past and that’s why he can speak with authority about it in the present. His testimony now is valid because of his past experience.

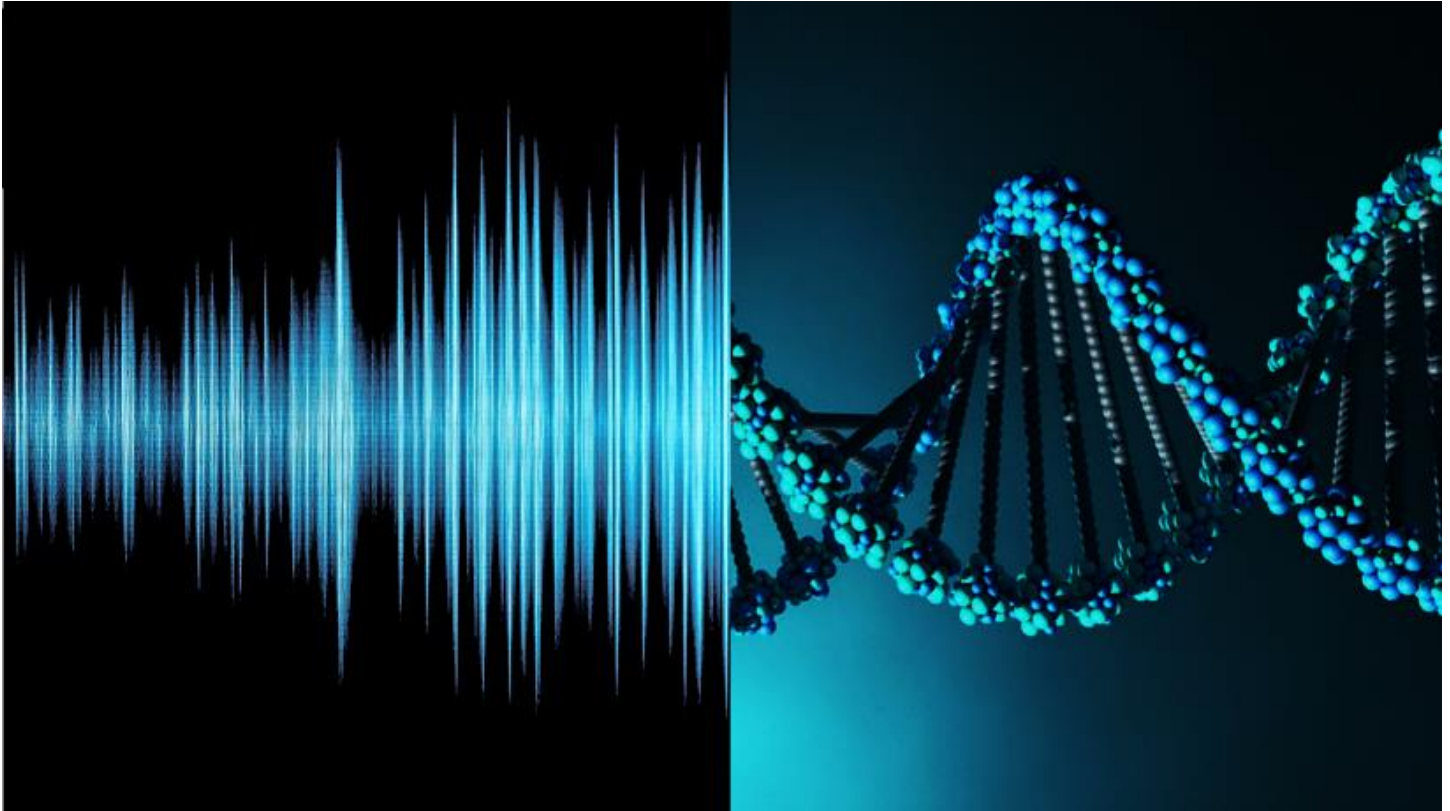
He added “With our eyes,” which might seem redundant, but it serves to drive home that they actually looked intently at Jesus with their own eyes. Unlike Cerinthus and others like him, John and his associates actually knew Jesus well.

As we talked about last week, John had met Jesus.



He then switched tenses for his next two verbs, "What we have looked at and touched." These verbs stress that while John and his colleagues were in close physical association with Jesus, they were not anymore. Oftentimes people claim visits from Jesus to bolster their brand of belief. Many cult leaders appeal to some special new revelation of insight granted them by a mysterious meeting. John was saying that while He and his associates actually knew the physical Jesus, He wasn't returning to earth anymore to alter His teaching. What Jesus gave was given and nothing was to be added, taken away, or changed in any way. Precisely why we teach Biblical Christianity.

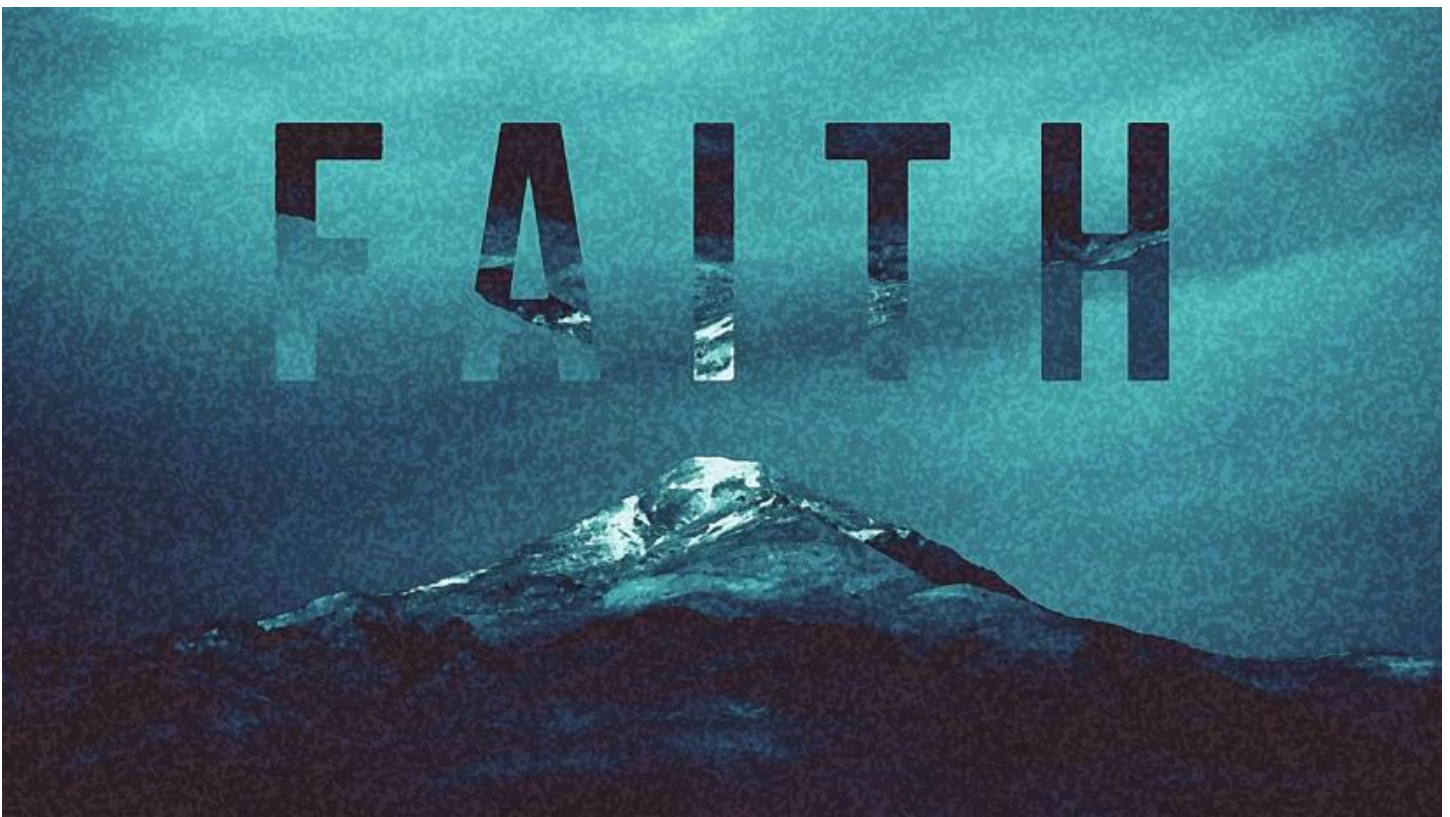
The “With our hands,” adds symmetry with the earlier “With our eyes,” functioning in the same way.



What is this that John experienced that “Already existed from the beginning”? The “Word of Life.” Both terms are loaded with meaning. It wasn’t simply a way to say the Author of Life, or the Living Word. It is two profound concepts rolled up into one being.

The Word is the mechanism through which God created the entire physical universe and all that it contains. In an imperfect human way of thinking about it the Father can be thought of as the Mind of God desiring to create and He did so by speaking. That act

is the intelligible Words carried by the divine Breath. That's precisely what the psalmist was trying to convey in Psalm 33:6, "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host." The Word is Jesus, and the Breath is the Holy Spirit. Another example is Hebrews 11:3, "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible."



A key to Christianity is hidden there. No person knows how the universe began. Please trust me when I tell you that there is not a person that knows how the universe began, not one. All people, therefore, base

their belief of the universe's beginning on faith. Faith that the eternal being God created from nothing. Faith that the physical laws then were completely different than now. Faith that the answer is still out there yet to be discovered. Faith that we will never know, and it doesn't matter. Faith. It is faith. Please appreciate the fact that the belief you hold in faith, affects every other belief that you hold, whether you realize it or not.

The primary thing that holds people back from Christ is their own arrogant assertion that they know things, rather than admitting that they just have faith in something other than God.



From there, the Word is the physical manifestation of God to that which He created. The Father interacts with, and reveals Himself to, us through His Holy Word. Jesus was the ultimate expression of the Father communicating with us. As John made clear from his verb tenses, the Word is no longer interacting in that way - not until He returns in force.

The Holy Spirit is the still small voice we often ignore and the part of the Godhead Who inspired the Word in written form and illuminates that Biblical Word this morning moving people along during the Word's present delay that is due to the Father's nearly tireless patience. There will come a time though when time runs out. Then it will be too late.

Why too late? Because the Word is also the One through which all life has its origin, has its present actuality, and has its future potentiality. It is the life generating and sustaining force not just in this existence but in any future existence to come. And that lifeforce is not an impersonal force, it is the Word of God Jesus Himself.

As one scholar said, "Jesus is not simply the One who gives life. He is life itself."

John now makes another Greek language faux pas. A large parenthetical passage that interrupts the flow. The end of verse one connects to the beginning of verse 3. But we have verse 2 in-between.



I John 1:2, 2and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—

Why did John interrupt his flow? For the same reason that the Apostle Paul often wrote extremely long sentences and I find myself doing the same as well. There is so much that needs to be conveyed when

we're talking about God that it's difficult to get it all in there in a nice tidy grammatically approved way. Even though John does it as an aside, it's still vital information.

The "Life" aspect is now the focus, because the Word part, in this context, is about the "Life" part. The Word was made alive in our reality, and in doing so He created a path to new life through His death."

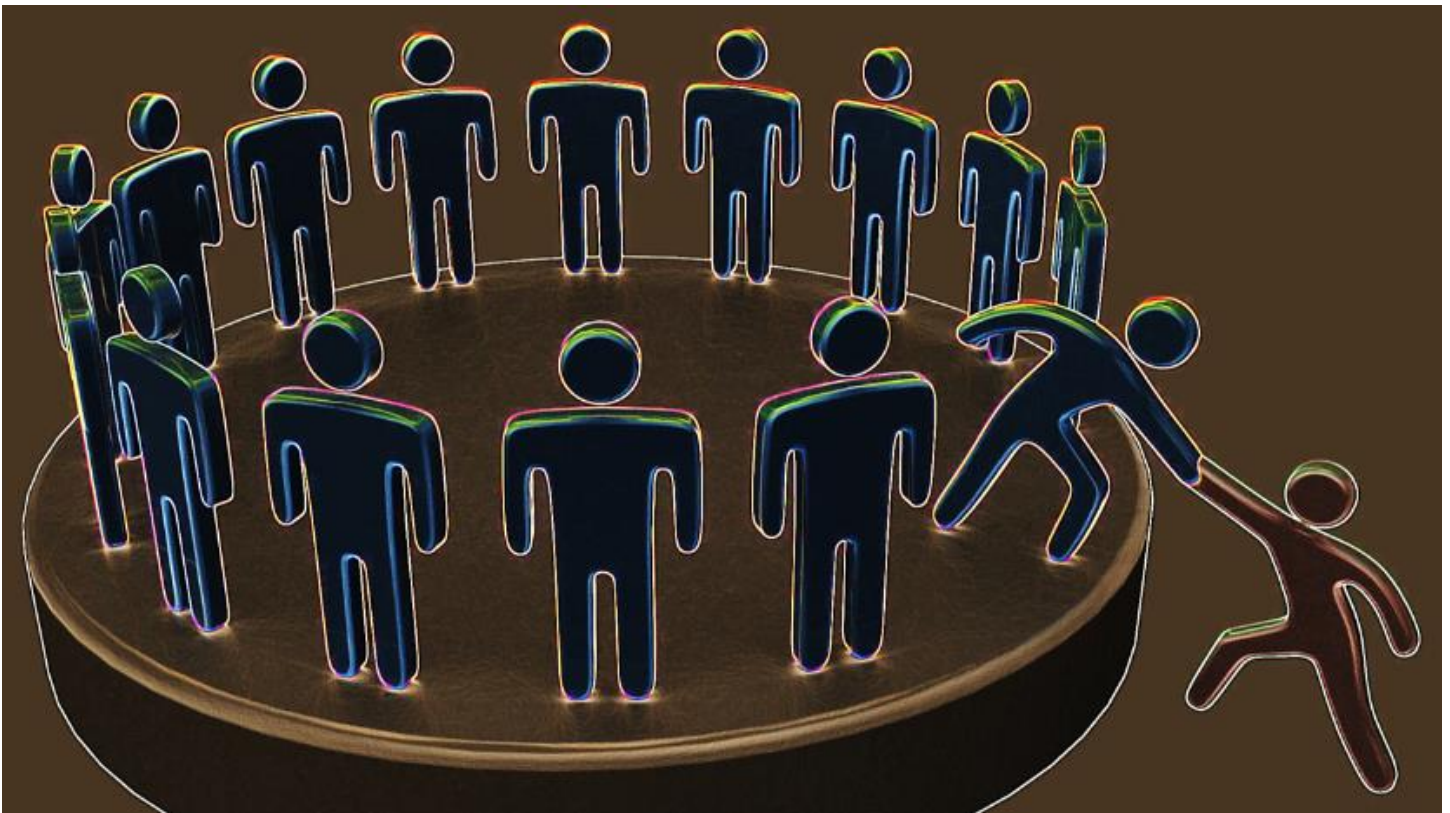
The "Life" was manifested physically, corporeally, tangibly. Life itself became a real boy. I put it that way to show the absurdly demeaning nature of God taking on humanity. The Word of Life did that so that you might "Have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

That "Life" was personally experienced by John and because it was, John can now and forevermore testify and proclaim that Truth. That which co-existed with the Father from eternity was made flesh and blood and dwelt among us, and the us, was literally with John and his friends.

"Testify and proclaim," unlike "Word of Life," is not two things, but one. It is a hendiadys. Here it is reasonable

to translate as either testifying proclamation, or proclaiming testimony. The main idea is to emphasize the nature and force of the report. It is to publicly proclaim a Truth personally experienced.

Back to the flow of verse 3, we get the first purpose of John's testimony and proclamation...



I John 1:3, what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

The first purpose is so those receiving it might have fellowship with John and his fellow eyewitnesses. By “Fellowship,” he meant membership.

Get that. This is not merely hanging out together, this is joining a group in solidarity and fellowship. This is family. As in any family, new members don’t need to have been there from the first generation to be fully accepted. Likewise, a person doesn’t need to be an eyewitness themselves to be in full fellowship with those who were, they just need to believe in faith that the “Testimony and proclamation” are true. Well, that’s a tall order. Why would they back then, or we here today believe John’s report? Again, as I tried to say last week, the evidence is compelling, the arguments are convincing, but unless you meet Jesus yourself, your faith is no different than the faith of someone else believing in something else.

You must meet Jesus yourself in order to fully trust this “Testimony and proclamation.” John said that Jesus wasn’t meeting with people anymore, but what is going on is the Holy Spirit can very powerfully manifest Jesus for you in an immaterial way if you are sensitive enough to such a manifestation.

How can you be that sensitive? Again, like I said last week, only when you have come to an end of you. As long as there's even a hint of self, it cannot happen. Most people experience it through the worst hardship, struggle, trial of their life to that point. They've tried everything and are at the end of their rope.

At the point that we are finished living life in our own wisdom, strength and resources, are ready to fall in a heap and beg God's merciful forgiveness and to follow Christ's commands, that when we can meet the Risen Christ and take our place among the saints in Christian fellowship - that's when we can trust John's report. Becoming a Christian isn't an intellectual endeavor. It's being moved by the Holy Spirit to believe - to trust - to accept by faith.



“Fellowship” is κοινωμία (koy-nō-nē-ä). The root means “common.” The Greek of the New Testament is called Koiné meaning common, every day, simplified Greek. This particular construction means to have all things in common together, just as it is described in Acts 2:44, “And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common.” We’ll talk more about that concept, but for now, realize that that “Fellowship” is a membership in a family that is defined by that joint identity.



The inescapable essential core requirement for membership is the personal relationship with Jesus. It can be seen as a reliance upon and devotion to Christ. It is proven true by an indwelling deposit of the Holy Spirit. While we judge not, such a person will bear unmistakable fruit that such is the case. As James wrote and Paul would agree, no external evidence, no internal Spirit.

Because the “Fellowship” with John and his friends was a “Fellowship” with the Heavenly Father and with the Word of God, Jesus Who makes it all possible, the result must be a change in worldview. A genuine

change in worldview, how you see life, will change your attitude and so your words and so your deeds.

By definition, if you want fellowship with the one true God, the Heavenly Father, it will only come through fellowship with His Son Jesus the Christ, who is the very Word of Life made flesh. If you have such fellowship, you are by extension in fellowship with John and with all those people that are likewise in fellowship together. The vertical connects to the horizontal.

If there is no vertical, there can be no true horizontal and if there is no horizontal, it stands as proof that there is no true vertical. That's how Jesus can say that people will know to Whom you belong by your love for other Christians and how the Apostle Paul can boil down the entirety of what it means to be Christian to the single command "Love one another." If we love others, it is because God's Love has invaded our heart and that is because the "Word of Life" has given us new birth...