



Introduction

First John stands as one of the best known letters outside those of the apostle Paul. For beginning Greek students in both university and seminary studies it is their first experience directly with the Greek text of the New Testament. This grows out of an interesting paradox with the Greek text of this letter. The Koine Greek used in the composition of the document is about the simplest and easiest form of ancient Greek found in the entire New Testament. But paradoxically the ideas expressed by John through this rather simple Greek grammar are among the most profound and complex of any document inside the New Testament. This accounts for both its popularity and continuing challenge to understand. Historically, entire denominations have emerged primarily through this document in English translation. Out of the English translation of the first couple of chapters have come the perfectionist doctrines of Pentecostalism and to some degree of Methodism as well.

Thus the challenge before us this week is to probe the depths of the rather short document and glean from it the deep insights of Christian living and commitment. But at the same time we must avoid the pitfalls that have ensnared many down through the last several centuries by not properly understanding John's message.

Our strategy for the week is rather simple. The goal is to cover approximately one chapter each session since we have five sessions and five chapters.

Today then is chapter one, which divides itself into two natural units of material: vv. 1-4 and 5-10. Each text unit will be listed first with the original Greek text taken from the *Nestle-Aland Novum Testament Graece* (28th edition). This will be followed by the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) translation and finally by the *1984 Luther Bibel* (LB).

First John 1:1-4

Texts:

N-A 28th GNT:

1.1 Ὁ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ὃ ἀκηκόαμεν, ὃ ἐωράκαμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν, ὃ ἔθεασάμεθα καὶ αἱ χεῖρες

ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς — 2 καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη, καὶ ἐωράκαμεν καὶ μαρτυροῦμεν καὶ ἀπαγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον ἣτις ἦν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα καὶ ἐφανερώθη ἡμῖν — 3 ὃ ἐωράκαμεν καὶ ἀκηκόαμεν, ἀπαγγέλλομεν καὶ ὑμῖν, ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς κοινωνίαν ἔχητε μεθ' ἡμῶν. καὶ ἡ κοινωνία δὲ ἡ ἡμετέρα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. 4 καὶ ταῦτα γράφομεν ἡμεῖς, ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ἡμῶν ᾗ πεπληρωμένη.

NRSV:

1.1 We declare to you 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— 2 this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— 3 we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

LB 1984:

1.1 Was von Anfang an war, was wir gehört haben, was wir gesehen haben mit unsern Augen, was wir betrachtet haben und unsre Hände betastet haben, vom Wort des Lebens – 2 und das Leben ist erschienen, und wir haben gesehen und bezeugen und verkündigen euch das Leben, das ewig ist, das beim Vater war und uns erschienen ist –, 3 was wir gesehen und gehört haben, das verkündigen wir auch euch, damit auch ihr mit uns Gemeinschaft habt; und unsere Gemeinschaft ist mit dem Vater und mit seinem Sohn Jesus Christus. 4 Und das schreiben wir, damit unsere Freude vollkommen sei.

Comments:

The Prologue, vv. 1-4:

What one notices immediately is that this beginning affirmation in two Greek sentences (vv. 1-3, 4) does not start like all of the letters of Paul, James, nor Peter. These documents begin with the traditional letter Praescriptio introducing the sender(s) of the letter, those the letter was written to, and almost always a word of greeting.¹

¹Interestingly enough, had First John contained the traditional Praescriptio rather than the formal Prologue, many of the questions

Instead John 1:1-4 begins rather formally with a foundation assertion of Christian belief concern Christ. This sounds very similar to the beginning of Hebrews. Both of these documents begin with a formal Prologue rather than the traditional epistolary Praescriptio. Are these two documents then real letters? Not really! In the first century world philosophers sometimes would frame their 'tractates' in the general format of a letter. By this I mean their writings advocating some particular aspect of the philosophy they were committed to following. A couple hundreds years ago among NT scholars a careful distinction between a 'letter' and an 'epistle' was made in order to try to accurately distinguish among the varieties of letters found inside the NT. This philosophical background was utilized in this classification. To be sure over the past fifty years of NT study these categories have largely been discarded simply because they are very difficult to support with the data of the letters found in the NT. More recent scholarly studies have moved past such distinctions to other categories that can be supported with concrete evidence from the literary forms that existed in the first century world.²

What we discover in 1 John 1:1-4 is a writing strategy comparable to that in the Prologue of the Gospel about origin and destination would have been settled.

²Because this document only bears very limited appearance as an ancient letter, and more traits of an ancient philosophical tractate, I will use the term 'essay' in reference to First John. luding to.

1.1 ὃ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς,
 ὃ ἀκηκόαμεν,
 ὃ ἐώρακάμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν,
 ὃ ἐθεασάμεθα
 | καὶ
 | αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν
 | περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς
 1.2 | καὶ
 1 ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη,
 | καὶ
 2 ἐώρακάμεν
 | καὶ
 3 μαρτυροῦμεν
 | καὶ
 4 ἀπαγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν τὴν ζωὴν
 | τὴν αἰώνιον
 | ἣτις ἦν
 | πρὸς τὸν πατέρα
 | καὶ
 | ---- ἐφανερώθη ἡμῖν
 1.3 ὃ ἐώρακάμεν
 καὶ
 ἀκηκόαμεν,
 5 ἀπαγγέλλομεν καὶ ὑμῖν,
 ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς κοινωνίαν ἔχητε
 μεθ' ἡμῶν.

of John 1:1-18. In all likelihood this provided the model for John, while being aware of the literary role of a prologue to a formal writing in his day. Of course, one cannot be dogmatic about which came first, the letters or the gospel! Most likely -- in my estimation -- all of these writings attributed to John -- gospel, letters, apocalypse -- should be dated in the 90s of the first Christian century with their origin being in the Roman province of Asia, and perhaps more precisely the city of Ephesus. This is the assumed historical setting for First John in this study.

What was a Prologue in ancient literature? This literary introduction to a philosophical essay served to set the agenda for the essay. This could be done in a variety of ways. Inside the NT, for example, the Prologue of Luke 1:1-4 (a single sentence in the Greek) serves to inform the reader of Luke's background preparation for writing his gospel account. Another distinctive function which John utilizes in both John 1:1-18 and 1 John 1:1-4 is to set the agenda by putting on the table the foundational principle or principles which the following essay will support and amplify.

Thus from First John 1:1-4 we learn the central focus of this essay. In the first and primary sentence found in vv. 1-3a, the main clause verb in 3a is ἀπαγγέλλομεν καὶ ὑμῖν, *we also proclaim to you*. Immediately the question comes to mind, What? The answer to that question is complicated, although essentially clear. The diagram of this Greek sentence illustrates visually what I'm all-

Do you notice the vertical line going from verse one to verse three? These four relative clauses are added

to the pair at the beginning of verse three as the direct objects of the core verb ἀπαγγέλλομεν. Verse two is inserted by John as a footnote which affirms the validity of the “hands on” experiencing of Christ that the core sentence asserts.

Notice the six affirmations in the relative clauses:

1) Ὁ ἦν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς, [what was from the beginning](#).

This which John proclaims has existed from the beginning of time. It is not something new and untested. Too the contrary, it has been around since the creation of the world. Notice the parallel to the gospel prologue in 1:1a, Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, [in the beginning was the Word](#). The one difference is in the prepositions ἀπό and ἐν. Clearly the latter in John 1:1 affirms the existence at the time of creation while the form in 1 John 1:1 denotes from the time of creation.

The use of the neuter relative pronoun ὄ, what, has puzzled readers of this text for many centuries. At first glance the neuter ὄ seem peculiar. But with the succession of relative clauses introduced with this pronoun, we discover that the ὄ can be heard through making sounds, it can be seen and carefully observed, it can be touched. In fact, it is defined as ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη, [life manifested](#). What is beginning to emerge is that this “it” is in reality a “He.” But more than just a “He.” It is the Word incarnate who is the very essence of the Gospel message that John proclaims and teaches.³

Picking up from the fourth gospel Prologue, the ὄ of First John is ὁ λόγος of the fourth gospel.⁴ In the Prologue of First John the depiction is shorter and centers on the humanness of Christ, while the gospel Prologue stresses primarily the deity of Christ. And yet both documents have a long term objective of combating a developing trend in late first century Christianity that came decades later to be known as Gnosticism.

By the middle of the second century, its religious assertions became much more developed and names can be attached to most of its leading advocates such as [Valentinus](#), some of whom lived and worked in this

³This best accounts for the use of the neuter pronoun ὄ rather than the masculine accusative ὄν. John centers on the ‘flesh and blood’ Jesus but extends the idea toward τὸ εὐαγγέλιον αὐτοῦ, [his Gospel](#), which the apostle proclaimed to his audience at the end of the first century.

⁴The assumption here is that by the writing of First John, the fourth gospel was in finalized form and had most likely been sent out to its targeted readers. All of the Johannine writings -- Gospel, letters of John, Revelation -- targeted readers initially in the Roman province of Asia, which by the end of the first century had become one of the two centers of Christianity along with Alexandria in Egypt. It is also important to note that the emerging Judaism that developed after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple was also centered in both these regions of the ancient world, although it managed to maintain a significant presence in Palestine until the middle of the second century unlike Christianity. .

[same region of Asia where John was.](#)⁵

⁵“The term ‘gnosis,’ referring to a phenomenon from the early church and its religious and philosophical contexts, was introduced into a broad array of modern academic disciplines by church historians, especially those in the field of NT scholarship. Early Christian writers already used the term as a general name for various social groups which were not content with orthodox practices and beliefs otherwise widely accepted. The first certain early Christian reference to the term, and this in an orthodox text, is 1 Tim 6:20. In reflecting on the theological problem of the origin, development, and continued existence of evil, these gnostic groups were at odds with developing orthodoxy. Radical dualism was a prime factor in the gnostic conceptual framework. Dualistic views were already found, to varying degrees, in Platonism and in Iranian and Zoroastrian religious thought, and by the Hellenistic period had entered into early Judaism as is evidenced by various writings from Qumran and in a broad array of apocalyptic texts. Such polarizing concepts provided a philosophical and religious solution to the human predicament, including the experience of difficult political situations which were believed to have had their ultimate origin in pre-history (Urzeit) when the cosmos was first created. The experience of the conquered peoples of the Near East enabled them to perceive such ultimate issues behind the tumultuous political events from the time of Alexander the Great (d. 323 B.C.E.) and later with the political occupation of the East by the Romans.

“To be sure, such a dualistic view was not new, but it was conceived by the gnostics in a unique fashion. Beginning with the Genesis account of creation and the element of belief in an absolute, transcendent God, many strove to attain and develop the knowledge (gnōsis) that this world is the product of a foolish creator (demiurge) who set to work without the permission of the highest and therefore “Unknown” God. This foolish creator was assisted in the creation process by a lower angel or planetary being. In order to put an end to the monstrous process of physical (nonspiritual) creation, the highest God had only one choice: to avail himself of cunning counter moves which he initiated among human beings, understood to be the apex of the physical creation. Without the knowledge or consent of the foolish creator, the highest God provided humankind with an otherworldly, divine substance variously called “spirit,” “soul,” and “spark.” This substance enabled humanity (called the ideal Adam) to see through the monstrous physical work of the lower creator and to perceive as the true goal of humanity a return to the spiritual realm of the highest God, which was often depicted as the “Kingdom of Light.”

“In the gnostic view, the end (telos) of history was the ultimate dissolution of the cosmos and the return of the human ‘sparks of light’ to the Kingdom of Light. The knowledge (gnōsis) of these cosmological and anthropological connections is, of course, a special and supernatural knowledge which is mediated to the gnostics (‘the knowers’) through special revelation. This revelation was made available either through various messengers, who acted on the instructions of the highest God, or through the traditional form of the myth, the sacred narrative which recounted the events which occurred in the primitive period when the mistake of the physical creation first took place, events which were understood to be the ultimate causes for the problematic present state of humanity.

“The gnostics understood themselves to be the elite ‘chosen people’ who, in distinction from the ‘worldly-minded,’ were able to perceive the delicate connection between world (cosmology),

One should remember that Gnosticism emerged prior to Christianity in very primitive expression in the eastern Mediterranean world and existed for several centuries in non-Christian forms alongside of having penetrated into fringe elements of Christianity in the second and third centuries before dying out. Many of the Church Fathers of the second and third centuries vigorously fought its influence in Christian circles, e.g., Irenaeus in his *Against Heresies*, in [III.7.4](#). A primary source for understanding this way of thinking inside Christianity is found in most of the [New Testament Apocrypha](#) writings which were rejected as advocating heresy in early Christianity.

But John is not opposing a full blown Gnosticism. Instead, he sees real danger in some of the early patterns of interpretive thinking emerging in Christianity in the province of Asia that had the potential of robbing the Gospel of its content and thus of the blessing of God. The primary point of attack was the ‘de-humanization’ of Jesus as the Son of God. The Prologue then sets forth the foundational principle of who Jesus was during His earthly life as a true person, rather than some unapproachable spirit who appeared to be in human form. The ‘theological’ foundation in the Prologue becomes for John the basis for relating to the resurrected Christ and thus for the entire Christian experience.

humanity (anthropology), and salvation (soteriology). The goal of gnostic teaching was that with the help of insight (gnōsis), the elect could be freed from the fetters of this world (spirit from matter, light from darkness) and so return to their true home in the Kingdom of Light — for that alone is the meaning of ‘salvation.’ It is not a matter of deliverance from sin and guilt, as in orthodoxy, but of the freeing of the spirit from matter (hyle), in particular, the material human body. In the course of time, gnostics developed a coherent conceptual framework from both their myths and their practice in behavior and cultus. Their mythology consisted of an ‘exegetical protest’ against the older and widely accepted traditions. This involved a reinterpretation of the older traditions in a manner which was opposed to their original sense. The field of practice, on the other hand, included both their prevalent, world-rejecting ascetic ethos and a curtailment (at least an ideologically-demanded curtailment) of traditional sacramental ritual in favor of a salvation achieved only through insight (gnōsis). The supposed libertine traits, which arose from the ascetic desire to overcome the world, are as yet attested only in biased heresiological reports and not in the writings of actual gnostics. Their critical attitude towards traditional sacramental ritual may have included the continuation, reinterpretation, or reestablishing of even older cultic ceremonies. It is to be emphasized that Gnosis was not devoid of cult. That the gnostic ‘community’ was established in the loose social structure of a ‘school of doctrine’ or a ‘mystery club,’ with at most only a rudimentary hierarchical organization (the Manichaeans were exceptions) was formally derived from the ancient social mode of the philosophical or religious association.”

[Kurt Rudolph, “Gnosticism,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1033–1034.]

2) ὁ ἀκηκόαμεν, [what we have heard](#). The allusion here by John is to those days of walking over the countryside of Judea, Samaria, and Galilee listening to Jesus set forth His concepts in both His teaching and in His healing ministry to the poor and outcast.

3) ὁ ἐώρακάμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν, [what we have seen with our eyes](#). This emphasis stresses first hand observation of the deeds of Jesus. But even beyond is that John saw Jesus Himself and knew Him to be a man.

4) ὁ ἔθεασάμεθα καὶ αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν, [what we have observed and our hands have touched](#). The more intensive verb of visual action ἔθεασάμεθα stresses close examination which is then affirmed by physical touching. John did not merely see Jesus from a distance. To the contrary, it was a close observation that affirmed clearly the humanity of Jesus in John’s view.

Tucked on to these two verbs is a defining reference point: περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς, concerning the Word of life. The sense of τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς is the [life giving Word](#). Clearly John in this phrase is playing off the gospel Prologue statement in 1:12-13,

12 ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν, ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, 13 οἳ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ’ ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν.

12 [But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.](#)

The injection of τοῦ λόγου here establishes a link to ὁ λόγος in the gospel Prologue. The objective genitive function of τῆς ζωῆς, [the Word producing life](#), then prompts the interruption of the listing of relative clauses with the parenthetical insertion of verse two as an amplification of περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς.

In the essentially twofold complex sentence form of verse two (see above block [diagram](#)), the first declaration ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη lays the foundation for the subsequent three assertions of ‘gospelizing’ that revealed life. Notice how the verb ἐφανερώθη sets the boundaries for this insertion by coming at the beginning and ending of the sentence.

John first asserts ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη, [this life was made clear](#), and then ἐφανερώθη ἡμῖν, [it was made clear to us](#).⁶ In the second expression John stresses the dis-

⁶“In the NT the verb φανεροῦν (‘to manifest,’ ‘to reveal’) is used of Jesus in relation to his earthly ministry (1 John 3:5, 8; cf. John 1:31); his resurrection appearances (John 21:1, 14); and his parousia in glory (1 John 2:28; cf. Col 3:4; 1 Pet 5:4). Insofar as John is here speaking of Christ himself, he is obviously alluding to the Incarnation. The life which is God’s gift to man was revealed historically in Jesus. Significantly, the motif of revelation is central

closure of Jesus as the τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς to the apostles via the use of the plural ἡμῖν.⁷

Subsequently then come the actions of ἐωράκαμεν καὶ μαρτυροῦμεν καὶ ἀπαγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν τὴν ζωὴν, *we have seen* (perfect tense), *and are testifying* (present tense) *and are proclaiming* (present tense) *this life*. This sequence of completed past action with continuing impact (perfect tense) followed by two present tense verbs underscoring the nature of that continuing impact is a beautiful summation of the kind of effect that Jesus had on the apostles. They encountered him, he changed their lives, and they spent the rest of their lives getting out the message of who He is. And the heart of that message is ὁ λόγος τῆς ζωῆς. The close connection of μαρτυροῦμεν καὶ ἀπαγγέλλομεν underscores that Christian Gospel proclamation is linked inseparably to a witness coming out of person experience. The Gospel cannot be successfully proclaimed as a detached system of theology.

5) & 6) ὃ ἐωράκαμεν καὶ ἀκηκόαμεν, *what we have seen and heard*. The last two relative clauses pick up the first two clauses but in reverse order. These function to signal the resumption of the initial listing of clauses that serve then as the direct objects of the present tense verb ἀπαγγέλλομεν, as well as functioning as boundary markers to the series of relative clauses. This verb here repeats the occurrence of ἀπαγγέλλομεν in verse two, but is expanded to include an indirect object καὶ ὑμῖν, *also to you*. In this John indicates the inclusion of his readers in his proclamation of this Word of life.

The sense of ἀπαγγέλλω, from which ἀπαγγέλλομεν comes, is to give a report of something as an eye-witness. It is often translated as proclaim or preach but retains the sense of reporting. As such, it is but one of some thirty plus different verbs used in the NT to communicate the content of the Gospel in the sense of to inform or announce.⁸ And this does not include the concept of ‘teaching’ the Gospel (topics 33:224-33.250 in Louw-Nida), which includes over two dozen separate terms. Each of these terms carries its own distinctive nuance of meaning with the idea of communicating the

to the theology of the Fourth Gospel, and indeed forms the subject of its first ‘act’ (John 1-12; see 1:31; 2:11; but also 21:1-14). cf. further Smalley, John, 194-200.” [Stephen S. Smalley, *J, 2, 3 John*, vol. 51, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1989), 9.]

⁷The consistent use of the plural -- ἡμῶν (2x), all of the verbs -αμεν / -άμεθαν / -ομεν -- here in reference to John’s contact with the Word underscores his identification with the apostolic witness to the Gospel message about Jesus.

⁸For a detailed listing see the Louw-Nida Greek lexicon of the New Testament in semantic domains, topics 33.189-33.217 where occasion more than one verb is listed under each topic:

Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1996.

Gospel to others, most of which cannot be preserved in translation to a modern language.

Another expansion of the verb ἀπαγγέλλομεν is the adverbial purpose clause introduced by ἵνα. John’s reporting of what he has experienced in the Gospel to his readers is intended to establish a bond of fellowship with them: ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς κοινωνίαν ἔχητε μεθ’ ἡμῶν, *in order that you also might have fellowship with us*. Thus John’s objective in this essay is not to preach the Gospel to non-believers. They have already confessed faith commitment to Christ, perhaps through an earlier ministry by John to them. Rather his intention is to include his readers in a circle of friendship of believers that includes the apostles with a shared commitment to the Gospel that they proclaim.

This theme of κοινωνία, *fellowship*, is then expanded in verses three and four. One should note that κοινωνία is not a church social as is often meant by the English word ‘fellowship.’ The Greek word κοινωνία⁹ denotes the sharing of things held in common with others. In the collective orientation of Greco-Roman society in the first century, as well as of Jewish culture, the idea was to be a participant in some organized group that could be political, religious, economic etc. The philosophy of ‘what’s mine is yours and what’s yours is mine’ was the foundational principle.

What John seeks to enhance by this essay to his readers is the deepening¹⁰ of that κοινωνία between his readers and the apostles by means of instruction and clarifying information about the parameters of the Gospel as taught by the apostles, including himself. It already exists via the Christian commitment of his readers, but influences at work in the communities of his readers seek to weaken, if not destroy, this κοινωνία. This essay is seeking to expose this danger and also to point the way toward a healthy κοινωνία with John and the apostles. Remember that by this point in time, John is the only one of the twelve and Paul who is still living. All of these others have long since died. Thus he is the sole point of direct contact with the apostles in terms of a living person.

The reason for the importance of κοινωνία with John is καὶ ἡ κοινωνία δὲ ἡ ἡμετέρα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *and our own fellowship is with the Father and with His son Jesus Christ*. John and the apostles enjoy κοινωνία with God and Christ. This is the κοινωνία which they are participants

⁹Note that it is a part of a series of related words in ancient Greek: κοινός, κοινωνός, κοινωνέω, κοινωνία, συγκοινωνός, συγκοινωνέω, κοινωνικός, κοινόω. [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 3:789.

¹⁰The prepositional phrase μεθ’ ἡμῶν, *with us*, implies a close personal relationship.

in, and John seeks to deepen that κοινωνία of his readers with God and Christ. Note the use of the possessive adjective ἡ ἡμετέρα rather than ἡμῶν for emphasis -- something like saying **our fellowship** as opposed to **our fellowship**. Plus it carries the sense of 'ours' in opposition to 'others.' A subtle implication is the phony κοινωνία claims of the corrupting influences present in the communities of John's readers.

The consequence then of John's writing is stated in verse four: καὶ ταῦτα γράφομεν ἡμεῖς, ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ἡμῶν ἧ πεπληρωμένη, **and these things we ourselves write in order that our joy may be brought to fullness**. Note that later copyists of this document sought to shift the emphasis to John's readers with καὶ ταῦτα γράφομεν ὑμῖν,¹¹ ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ὑμῶν¹² ἧ πεπληρωμένη, **and these things we write to you in order that your joy may be brought to completion**. But textual evidence favors the first person pronouns over the second person pronouns in both instances.¹³

¹¹ {B} ἡμεῖς κ A*vid B P Ψ 33 it^z cop^{sams} // ὑμῖν A^c C 81 322 323 436 945 1067 1175 1241 1243 1292 1409 1505 1611 1735 1739 1844 1852 1881 2138 2298 2344 2464 Byz [K L] Lect it^{ar, t} vg syr^{p, h, pal} cop^{sams, bo} arm eth geo slav Augustine

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).

¹² {A} ἡμῶν κ B L Ψ 322 436 1067 1175 1241 1409 Lect it^{ar, z} vg^{ww, st} cop^{sa} geo // ὑμῶν A C 33 81 945 1243 1292 1505 1611 1735 1739 1844 1852 1881 2138 2298 2344 2464 Byz [K P] l 422 l 598 l 938 l 1021 vg^{cl} syr^{th, pal} cop^{bo} arm eth slav Augustine Bede // ἡμῶν ἐν ὑμῖν syr^p

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).

¹³ 1:4 ἡμεῖς {B}

Although the reading ὑμῖν is widely supported (Ac C K L almost all minuscules vg syr^{p, h, pal} cospa, bo arm eth), a majority of the Committee preferred ἡμεῖς because of the quality of its support (it is read by the Alexandrian text and one Old Latin manuscript: κ A* B P Ψ 33 it65 cospa ms), and because copyists were more likely to alter γράφομεν ἡμεῖς to the expected γράφομεν ὑμῖν (compare ὑμῖν after ἀπαγγέλλομεν in verses 2 and 3) than vice versa.

1:4 ἡμῶν {A}

Instead of ἡμῶν (read by κ B L Ψ 049 88 326 it65 vg cospa al), the Textus Receptus, following A C2vid K P 33 81 614 1739 most minuscules vgmss syr^{h, pal} cop^{bo} arm al, reads ὑμῶν. As regards transcriptional probability, copyists who recollected Jn 16:24 (ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ὑμῶν ἧ πεπληρωμένη) would have been likely to alter ἡμῶν to ὑμῶν. As regards intrinsic probability, ἡμῶν seems to suit best the generous solicitude of the author, whose own joy would be incomplete unless his readers shared it; whereas copyists, insensitive to such a nuance, would have been likely to alter ἡμῶν to the more expected second person ὑμῶν.

[Bruce Manning Metzger, United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies,

By paying attention to the contents of John's essay his readers indeed would have benefited and been drawn deeper into the blessings of κοινωνία with the apostles. But John's focus here is the satisfaction of helping his readers recognize the importance of this κοινωνία in contrast to that claimed by the corrupting influences.

The meaning of ἡ χαρὰ ἡμῶν here is the sense of a deepening feeling of gladness that his readers have been spared the spiritual disaster of following false teaching which would have led them away from God and Christ. He knows well that his message to them will bring them into deeper κοινωνία with God and Christ.

First John 1:5-10 Texts

N-A 28th GNT:

5 Καὶ ἔστιν αὕτη ἡ ἀγγελία ἣν ἀκηκόαμεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀναγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν, ὅτι ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστὶν καὶ σκοτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδεμία. 6 Ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ σκότει περιπατῶμεν, ψευδόμεθα καὶ οὐ ποιοῦμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν· 7 ἐὰν ἐν τῷ φωτὶ περιπατῶμεν ὡς αὐτός ἐστιν ἐν τῷ φωτὶ, κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ' ἀλλήλων καὶ τὸ αἷμα Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ καθαρίζει ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἁμαρτίας. 8 ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ ἔχομεν, ἑαυτοὺς πλανῶμεν καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἡμῖν. 9 ἐὰν ὁμολογῶμεν τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν, πιστός ἐστιν καὶ δίκαιος, ἵνα ἀφῆ ἡμῖν τὰς ἁμαρτίας καὶ καθάρισεν ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἀδικίας. 10 ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι οὐχ ἡμαρτήκαμεν, ψεύσθην ποιοῦμεν αὐτὸν καὶ ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἡμῖν.

NRSV:

5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; 7 but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

LB 1984:

5 Und das ist die Botschaft, die wir von ihm gehört haben und euch verkündigen: Gott ist Licht, und in ihm ist keine Finsternis. 6 Wenn wir sagen, dass wir Gemeinschaft mit ihm haben, und wandeln in der Finsternis, so lügen wir und tun nicht die Wahrheit. 7 Wenn wir aber im Licht wandeln, wie er im Licht ist, so haben wir Gemeinschaft untereinander, und das Blut Jesu, seines Sohnes, macht uns rein von aller Sünde.

8 Wenn wir sagen, wir haben keine Sünde, so betrügen wir uns selbst, und die Wahrheit ist nicht in uns. 9 Wenn

wir aber unsre Sünden bekennen, so ist er treu und gerecht, dass er uns die Sünden vergibt und reinigt uns von aller Ungerechtigkeit.¹⁰ Wenn wir sagen, wir haben nicht gesündigt, so machen wir ihn zum Lügner, und sein Wort ist nicht in uns.

Comments

The Message, vv. 5-10:

In this first pericope after the Prologue, first of all the style of writing shifts to a less formal expression, giving signal of a move into the amplification of the contents of the Prologue. Second, the focus of this unit of text is stated as ἡ ἀγγελία, *the message*. As a play off the verb ἀναγγέλλομεν, John now begins his elaboration on this τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς (v. 2) that he put on the table in the Prologue. Remember his objective in this is to deepen the κοινωνία of his readers ultimately with God and Christ.

This (αὐτή) ὁ λόγος τῆς ζωῆς is now defined as ἡ ἀγγελία ἣν ἀκηκόαμεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀναγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν, *the message which we have heard from Him and report to you*. John's point is clear: it is not John's message being reported to his readers. Instead, it is Christ's message! That is, the life giving Word which John is reporting to his readers.

What is a starting foundational principle to that message? The ὅτι clause defines the starting foundation of that message as ὅτι ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστὶν καὶ σκοτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδεμία, *that God is light and darkness in Him absolutely does not exist*. Everything about Christian experience builds off this starting premise. Nothing can be legitimately constructed about being a Christian that ignores this foundational truth. The axiomatic nature of John's expression of this underscores its essential importance to understanding the nature of the Christian life. The phrase Καὶ ἔστιν αὕτη, *and this is...*, has a formula nature and is repeated several times in this essay: 1:5, 2:25; 3:23; 5:4, 11, 14.¹⁴

This it is essential to understand John's point that God is utterly pure light. Such a concept of deity being light has both a Hellenistic and a Jewish background, which are very different from one another. This difference may very well be the basis for the corrupting influences that John opposes.

In the Hellenistic background lay the philosophical and religious significance of φῶς as education/instruction as illumination that drove out ignorance which was σκοτία, *darkness*. In Greek philosophical tradition the dominant meaning of φῶς was education in the sense

¹⁴“Just as here ‘this is the message’ (cf. 3:11), so also the phrase is used of the promise, 2:25; the commandment, 3:23; the love of God, 5:3; the victory, 5:4; the witness of God, 5:9; the witness, 5:11; the confidence, 5:14; love, 2 John 6.” [John Painter, *I, 2, and 3 John*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, vol. 18, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 123.]

of expanding one's understanding of virtue and the nature of reality. It approaches γνῶσις, *knowledge*, in meaning. Its opposite is σκοτία, *darkness*, which signals ignorance. The possessing of φῶς was essential to the virtuous life that was critical to fulfilling one's assigned role in society. Occasional religious tones surface in the philosophical tradition where the acquiring of φῶς becomes penetrating through the mind into the mysterious world of the gods and goddesses. Gaining such knowledge gives one power that approaches that of the divine. Pure φῶς is found only in the invisible world of the eternal, while σκοτία is what permeates every aspect of the visible material world.

One can easily see how religious thinking, influenced by the Greek mindset, could quickly transfer the idea of possessing φῶς as equivalent to possessing salvation. The second century Gnostic perception of this saw the possessing of φῶς being equivalent to γνῶσις which is understood as salvation. But the acquiring of γνῶσις is not gradual and achieved through education, as in Greek philosophical tradition. Rather it is given suddenly as a divine gift to select individuals in a highly emotionally charged conversion experience. The proof of such possession was seen as glossolalia, i.e., speaking in tongues as the secretive language of heavenly γνῶσις. John's readers do not appear to have moved this far along in such thinking.

In the contrastive Jewish background, however, lay the idea of φῶς as a symbol of who God is as pure light.¹⁵ Playing off the pragmatic perspective of the sun as pure expression of φῶς, God as light signaled the purity of God's character as a source of life. It is close to a synonym for God as pure holiness. In Hebrew, this is שִׁטָּה (*qādōš*),¹⁶ In Greek it is the adjective ἅγιος (*ha-*

¹⁵In my estimation, John uses the image of φῶς as foundational in part as a counter measure against the perverting of the concept by the corrupting teachers in the communities of his readers. The best way to counteract heresy is to correct the use of significant terminology in their vocabulary. It was also a strategy commonly used by Paul in many of his letters. We see it in the Sermon on the Mount of Jesus in Matthew 5-7 and Luke 6.

¹⁶“The title ‘the Holy One of Israel’ (NIV and KJV) is applied to God numerous times in the OT, but is especially frequent (26x) in the prophecy of Isaiah (Isa 1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19; 30:11, 12, 15; 31:1; 37:23; etc.). qādōš casts the sinfulness of Isaiah's day in sharp contrast to God's moral perfection (Isa 30:11) and expresses God's absolute separation from evil (Isa 17:7). God is intrinsically holy and calls his people to be holy, providing himself as the standard of holiness (Lev 19:2). Because God is holy, he is free from the moral imperfections and frailties common to human beings (Hos 11:9) and, therefore, is faithful to his promises (Ps 22:3–5). This aspect of God's character forms the basis of Habakkuk's hope that his people will not perish (Hab 1:12).” [William D. Mounce, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, **Page 7**)]

gίos), which is often applied to God and especially to things and people closely associated with him.¹⁷ The OT prophetic heritage then links ὡς closely to behavior according to a set of values consistent to God as ἄορος (ἴρ), **pure light**. God's behavior flows out of His existence as ὡς, and as ἄορος He becomes the source of spiritual life that is consistent to who He is.¹⁸

Thus for John, the declaration ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστὶν καὶ σκοτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδέμια signals God as the exclusive source of spiritual life. And because this life comes from God it must be a life lived out in consistency to who God is as a holy God.

What this means for believers in Christ is spelled (2006), 337.]

¹⁷In general, two facts stand out in the NT regarding hagios ('holy, sacred'). First, God and what is associated with him is declared as 'holy.' God is specifically described as holy (Jn 17:11; 1 Pet. 1:15–16; Rev 4:8; 6:10), and Christ is called holy in the same sense as God (Rev 3:7; cf. 1 Jn. 2:20). God's name is holy (Lk 1:49), as is his covenant (Lk 1:72), his angels (Mk 8:38; Lk 9:26; Acts 10:22; Jude 14; Rev 14:10), his attendants (Eph 2:19; Col 1:12; 1 Thess. 3:13; Rev 18:20), the prophets (Lk 1:70), and the Scriptures (Rom 1:2; 7:12). Jesus is addressed as 'the Holy One of God' by an unclean spirit (Mk 1:24; Lk 4:34), by the angel Gabriel (Lk 1:35), and by Simon Peter (Jn 6:69). He is called God's 'holy servant' (Acts 4:27; cf. 3:14). Here reference to 'holy' means belonging to and authorized by God and thus, resisting Jesus is equivalent to resisting God.

"Second, the proper sphere of the holy in the NT is not the priestly or ritual but the prophetic. The sacred no longer belongs to things, places, or rites, but to manifestations of life produced by the Spirit. In Paul's letters those who name Jesus as their Lord are called hagioi, 'saints.' This is not primarily an ethical expression but is parallel to being 'called' (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2), 'chosen' (Rom 8:33; Col 3:12), and 'faithful' (Col 1:2). It implies association with the Holy Spirit. Christ is the one in whom believers become holy to the true God (see 1 Cor. 6:11). The power to do so comes from the risen Christ, who operates according to the Spirit of holiness (Rom 1:4). In these cases holiness refers to a relationship with God that is not mediated through ritual (ceremonial) observance but through the leading of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:14). Spiritual worship is the offering of oneself as a living, holy sacrifice, acceptable to God (Rom 12:1)." [William D. Mounce, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 338.]

¹⁸Talbert is wrong in positing a distance between light as reflecting God's character and God's behavior. He is correct in seeing the ethical aspect as dominant but ethics flow out of character. God's holy character is what requires holy living from those following Him. The image of light as a source of life stands as a major connecting link here.

"The expression refers not to God's essence but to how God relates to humans, as the later 'God is love' does. Light here has an ethical connotation. What the eyewitnesses heard about God's character is the basis for their ethical instruction." [Charles H. Talbert, *Reading John: a Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles*, Rev. ed., Reading the New Testament Series (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2005), 17.]

out initially in a pair of conditional declarations in verses six and seven. These are then expanded into three more conditional sentence statements in verses eight through ten. Thus verses six through ten stand as the first application of the spiritual axiom set forth in verse five.

First Set of Conditional Sentences, vv. 6-7. First, the initial pair of conditional Ἐὰν clause statements in verses six and seven. One should note the nature of the grammar construction in Greek since it plays an important role in understanding what John is seeking to express. The use of the conjunction ἔάν with a subjunctive mood verb in the dependent clause -- here labeled a protasis -- sets up a possible scenario. In ancient Greek four such possibilities existed. This one is the third class conditional protasis. In didactic texts such as this text is, this type sets up a hypothetical possibility that might take place on some occasions. John makes no accusations against his readers, as would be implied in the alternative first class conditional protasis.

What John does with the pair of third class protasis clauses is to set up two contrastive positions:

1) Negative (v. 6): Ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ σκότει περιπατῶμεν, **if we say that we possess fellowship with Him and are walking in the darkness...**

2) Positive (v. 7): ἐὰν ἐν τῷ φωτὶ περιπατῶμεν ὡς αὐτὸς ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ φωτί, **if in the light we are walking as He is in the light....**

Several points emerge in this comparison. **First,** John plays off the light / darkness image in the axiomatic statement of verse five. The meanings of φῶς and σκοτία established in verse five continue to be the same here. **Second,** the image of περιπατῶμεν, **we are waling**, from περιπατέω is a metaphor for living life and has a strong emphasis on behavior.

Third, in the negative protasis in v. 6 an impossible contrast is set up between a profession (εἴπωμεν) and a pattern of living (περιπατῶμεν). The profession claimed as any point of time is stated as κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ' αὐτοῦ, **we have fellowship with Him**. As implied in the Prologue and the axiom in v. 5 fellowship with God is one of John's image for salvation in Pauline language. To possess κοινωνία with God is to possess a relationship with God. With no relationship there is no salvation. Gradually John will make this clear in his essay. **Fourth,** the verb tenses with εἴπωμεν (aorist) and ἔχομεν (present) are important. The proposed scenario is that these individuals at some point in time are questioned about their religious orientation. Their response is to assert **we are Christians**, not **have been** or **will become**. The present tense ἔχομεν asserts an ongoing κοινωνία with God. **Fifth,** the present tense ἔχομεν

matches the present tense περιπατῶμεν, *walking*. The impossibility of this scenario is the claim to be in ongoing κοινωνία with the God who is pure φῶς without a shred of σκοτία while at the same time living ἐν τῷ σκότει. John asserts that no one can do this. Thus the claim of κοινωνία is utterly false.

Sixth, in the positive protasis (v. 7), no claim to κοινωνία needs to be made. The proof of this is seen in ἐν τῷ φωτὶ περιπατῶμεν, *walking in the light*. Again note the present tense περιπατῶμεν stressing an ongoing pattern of behavior, not a momentary one or superficial one. Now to walk ἐν τῷ φωτὶ is not the same as behaving oneself morally. Instead, it is walking in the light ὡς αὐτός ἐστιν ἐν τῷ φωτὶ, *as He Himself is in the light*. That is, our behavior must reflect the very character of God.

No self produced behavior can ever come close to that! As Jesus declared in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:16): οὕτως λαμψάτω τὸ φῶς ὑμῶν ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ὅπως ἴδωσιν ὑμῶν τὰ καλὰ ἔργα καὶ δοξάσωσιν τὸν πατέρα ὑμῶν τὸν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, *thus let your light shine before men so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven*. The φῶς that guides our behavior is God Himself reproducing Himself in our life. Thus when others recognize the good in us they see it as the presence of God in our life. This is the inevitable consequence of authentically being in κοινωνία with the God who is φῶς.

Seventh, note the consistent use of the first person plural 'we' through these two sentences. What John does is add a tone of politeness to the assertions, especially the negative ones, by casting them in the first plural form. He could have used a third person singular with τις, *someone*, to have achieved the same effect. But he chose the first person plural for this.

Second, the other part of a conditional sentence is called an apodosis and functions as the main clause of such complex form sentences. In both main clauses of these two conditional powerful assertions are made regarding each possible scenario.

1) Negative (v. 6): ψευδόμεθα καὶ οὐ ποιοῦμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν, *we are lying and not producing truth*.

2) Positive (v. 7): κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ' ἀλλήλων καὶ τὸ αἷμα Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ καθαρίζει ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἁμαρτίας, *fellowship we possess with one another and the blood of Jesus His Son is cleansing us from all sin*.

John here asserts the difference between non-salvation and salvation -- to use Paul's terms. In the negative apodosis John doesn't mince words. Anyone claiming fellowship with God while living in darkness is simply a liar. His claim is completely false. If ἀλήθεια, truth, is God, then a ψεύδης, *lie*, is the opposite of God. To claim something contrary to God is to be a ψεύστης, *a liar*. This is the first point.

The second one extends the idea to stress a point difficult for westerners to understand. In the Bible truth is in no way defined as logical consistency as it has been defined in the western world for the past three hundred years. To impose such a definition of truth on this statement of John is to miserably fail to understand what John is contending. The definition of truth in apostolic Christianity is set forth clearly in John 14:6 where Jesus declared "I am truth." In so doing He reflected the Hebrew / Jewish understanding of truth in place for many centuries in that world. God is Truth! His very being expresses Truth and His behavior echoes Truth. Thus for early Christians and Jews truth is God and what is true in a person's life is exclusively behavior and words reflecting the presence of God in their life.

This is what lays behind John's profound second declaration καὶ οὐ ποιοῦμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν, *and we do not produce truth*. Not only is the profession an outright lie, the lifestyle of ἐν τῷ σκότει περιπατῶμεν is clearly not leading to the implementation of God's presence in one's life. For a profession to be genuine it must lead to God's taking up residence in one's life. Such will transform the way we live and behavior ourselves. If such doesn't happen, then the claim of relationship with God is completely false.

Second Set of Conditional Sentences, vv. 8-10.

In verses eight through ten John comes back to the first protasis for amplification. In the first protasis (v. 6) we noticed: Ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι, *if we say that....* Notice the three protasis clauses in vv. 8-10:

- 1) ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι... (v. 8)
- 2) ἐὰν ὁμολογῶμεν... (v. 9)
- 3) ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι... (v. 10)

Note several aspects present here. **First**, when the protasis begins with ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι it has a negative thrust as it is completed. This is the case with 1) and 3) above. But if it is ἐὰν ὁμολογῶμεν, then it is positive. This becomes John's way of distinguishing between legitimate professions and false ones.

Second, the two negative protasis clauses specify false profession in terms of ὅτι ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ ἔχομεν, *we possess no sin* (v. 8), and ὅτι οὐχ ἡμαρτήκαμεν, *we have not committed a sin* (v. 10). Both of these play off the initial protasis ὅτι κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ σκότει περιπατῶμεν, *that we have fellowship with him and in the darkness are walking* (v. 6). Thus, such a claim of κοινωνία with God while living ἐν τῷ σκότει becomes a lie because it has no understanding of ἁμαρτία, *sin*.¹⁹

The scenario that John paints in these three negative protasis clauses is of a religious viewpoint that

¹⁹In most of chapter two of First John, the primary focus will shift to John's exposition of the genuine meaning of ἁμαρτία. His treatment of it here serves to get the topic on the table for subsequent detailed critique and correction of false understanding.

ignored human sinfulness in terms of moral behavior and inherent depravity reaching back to Adam. Instead, it evidently adopted the classical Greek perspective where ἀμαρτία is essentially failure to acquire the necessary γνώσις to become a virtuous person. That is, ἀμαρτία is essentially ignorance, not moral failure. But if κοινωνία with God is perceived based on having acquired salvational γνώσις, then what one does in his mortal body is irrelevant. He is no longer a ἀμαρτωλός, sinner, since he possesses saving γνώσις.²⁰

The difference between the two negative protasis clauses in vv. 8 and 10 is between denying the presence of sin in one's life (v. 8) and the denial of having committed an act of sin (v. 10).²¹ What was being advocated by the false teachers that John opposes in this essay was an early form of perfectionism that believed it could rise above any aspect of sinfulness through acquiring the secretive salvational γνώσις.²² This perfectionism evolves into a full blown belief in the various forms of Gnosticism that emerges in the second century AD. John tackles this perverted thinking full force in these statements in chapter one of First John, although he retains the respectful third class conditional protasis construction and the first person plural verb pattern.

The positive protasis in verse nine tucked between the two negative ones sets up a scenario in which sin is approached in a spiritually healthy manner: ἐὰν ὁμολογῶμεν τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν, *if we confess our sins*. It is important to understand that to confess one's sins, ὁμολογεῖν τὰς ἀμαρτίας, involves much more than simply saying either to God or to others, "I have sinned." The verb ὁμολογέω signals an open declaration of agreement with the viewpoint of another. In this kind of religious context it is linked closely to μετανοέω, *to repent*, which stresses the inward mental shift of thinking about God and sin. A parallel term ἐπιστρέφω stresses repentance as an outward turning of one's life away from sin and to God. The ὁμολογέω, *confess*, comes into the picture as the formal, open verbal acknowledge

²⁰The modern evangelical version of this is to 'join the church through a public profession of faith' and then continue living a worldly life with little or no change in lifestyle. Both the ancient and the modern versions are heresy and completely false.

²¹The use of the perfect tense οὐχ ἡμαρτήκαμεν, *we have not sinned*, rather than the aorist tense ἀμαρτήσωμεν, highlights, in ways untranslatable into English, the committing of acts of sin which contain lingering negative consequences. Those doing this were denying that any action of theirs that might be considered sinful would impact their spiritual life negatively.

²²Perhaps the most grotesque expression of this kind of thinking took place at Corinth about half way through the first Christian century. In First Corinthians 5 Paul mentions the actions of a church member living in open immorality with his birth mother while considering such actions as a badge of superior spirituality. And others in the church took a similar view. Such was soundly condemned by Paul.

of sin and of commitment to God that begins the life long process of turning around our life from inside to outside. Such confession is also linked in the New Testament to being baptized as one's formal public confession of sin and God. In all of the NT terms linked to conversion the common theme of a life changing commitment to God is central and essential.

When John sets up the scenario ἐὰν ὁμολογῶμεν τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν (v. 9), the action gathers up these streams of emphasis on turning around one's life away from sin and pointing it toward. In the two negative scenarios before and after this one, this turning around of one's life had not taken place. And consequently such verbal denials of sin signaled a completely false religious claim as the foundational scenario in verse six had established.

In the three apodosis main clauses in verses eight through ten, the conclusions are drawn by John for each of the three scenarios, the two negative and the one positive. These are negative, positive, negative. They also contain very blunt language.

1) ἐαυτοὺς πλανῶμεν καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἡμῖν, *we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us*.

2) πιστός ἐστιν καὶ δίκαιος, ἵνα ἀφῆ ἡμῖν τὰς ἀμαρτίας καὶ καθάρσῃ ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἀδικίας, *dependable is He and just, so that He will grant forgiveness to us of our sins and will cleanse us from every unrighteousness*.

3) ψεύστην ποιοῦμεν αὐτὸν καὶ ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἡμῖν, *a liar we make Him and His Word is not in us*.

CONCLUSION

Just a quick summary reading of these sentences brings to the surface John's strong condemnation of anyone who is not willing to face up to sin in their life while claiming to be a Christian. Notice several patterns here in these three apodosis clauses.

First, the consequences of the two negative clauses is presented in pairs, and is structurally different from the positive second apodosis in v. 9. This continues the dual conclusion pattern in the foundational negative apodosis in v. 6: ψευδόμεθα καὶ οὐ ποιοῦμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν, *we are lying and not producing truth*.

To deny that sin is present in our lives means simply that we are deceiving ourselves. We are not facing reality in such a denial! Even worse is the reality that God as Truth is not present in our life! This has echoes of Jesus' scorching denunciation of the Pharisees in Matthew 23 whom Jesus labeled as hypocrites and blind guides in the six woes pronounced upon them. They felt themselves to be at the top of the list of folks devoted to God, but Jesus denounced them as having

no knowledge of God whatsoever. John comes down on the false teachers at work in the communities of his readers in similar fashion.

In the third apodosis, also negative in its thrust in v. 10, even stronger language is used: *ψεύστην ποιοῦμεν αὐτὸν καὶ ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἡμῖν*, a liar we make Him and His Word is not in us. Again the twin assertions surface and play off the twin assertion in the foundational apodosis of v. 6: *ψευδόμεθα καὶ οὐ ποιοῦμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν*, *we are lying and not producing truth*. In the first assertion John contends that anyone denying having committed sin not is himself a liar. But rather he is asserting that God is a liar. Carried in this is the assumption that God has declared every person to have committed sin. For a professing Christian to deny that he has committed sin as a Christian is far more than self delusion. He is claiming something as false that God has declared to be reality. Now that is serious!

In the second assertion, John denies the presence of Christ as the Word in the life of the denier. Above John asserted the denier to have no fellowship, i.e., relationship, with God. Here John reaches back to the Prologue where *κοινωνία* included both the Father and the Son. And the Son is the *λόγου τῆς ζωῆς*, *life giving Word*. To deny having committed sin as a Christian means no presence of this life giving Word in the denier's life.

In this series of conditional sentences in vv. 5-10, John has begun the amplification of the core principles expressed in the Prologue (vv. 1-4). God as pure *φῶς* with absolutely no hint of *σκοτία* has profound implications for those claiming to be Christian. The conditional sentences utterly deny the saving presence of God and Christ in the life of the professing Christian who denies the serious impact of sin in his life. A healthy spirituality means both walking in the light who is God (v. 7) and coming to grips with acts of sin that crop up in his life (v. 9). In the next series of pericopes in chapter two John will address how the healthy believer deals with sins that happen in his walk with God.

Is there something for us today in this? I am convinced there is a vitally important message here for twenty-first century believers. We don't appreciate enough that Christianity is fundamentally a walk through life whereby God incorporates His character of *φῶς* in us. Also behavior is critically important for believers. Central to this is coming to grips with sin that happens to us while in this walk through life. Denial is spiritual death. Confession means cleansing and a deepening of our *κοινωνία* with God, Christ, and other believers. This is God's recipe for a healthy spiritual life!