

From Sin to Spirit – Part 3

Before getting started with today's lesson, let me share a fascinating observation.

The table of contents of any English Bible (and the Hebrew Bible as well) shows that Genesis is the first book of the Bible. The Hebrews, the Jews, sometimes characterized or named a book of the Scriptures by the first word of the book. In the case of Genesis (which means beginning), the first words are "In the beginning God created..." The first letter of the first word is "in" which in Hebrew is the letter Beth or "B," the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, not the first. The first three chapters of Genesis introduce man, *Adam*, who sins and is cursed. The land, named after him, is called *Adamah* is also cursed. We are descendants of Adam. We started out cursed and in need of salvation.

Genesis is the first book listed in the Bible. It deals with the "beginning."

There is another book that is older than Genesis. It is the book of Job. Even liberals defend the antiquity of the book of Job. Evidence for that is not given here. But look at the beginning of Job. It starts out by saying there is a man. This man did not sin in the narrative, was righteous and experienced undeserved suffering. The first letter of the first word in the book begins with Aleph, or "A" It uses the word "*aish*" for man, not *Adam*. This "*aish*" is a righteous man living in the land of Uz. The word for "land" in this verse is the Hebrew word *Aretz*. This word is associated with the promised Land. Sounds like our Savior: a perfectly righteous man who experienced undeserved suffering. God provides.

The haunting question then becomes, did the writer of Job understand that his book was the "first" book of the Bible? It starts with the letter "A." Genesis starts with the letter "B." Just food for thought.

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John 1:1-4

Last week I mentioned there are mp3 files on Spirituality by L.S. Chafer.

Here is a website that currently has L.S. Chafer's mp3 files:

<https://voicesforchrist.org/speakers/show/1739>

Last week we started a journey through a list of passages presented by L.S. Chafer that illuminated the transition from sin to spirituality.

First Christ Alone Can Cleanse From Sin (John 13:1-11)
We learned that there are two words for washing in that context. One is for bathing which represents salvation. The second word is for washing hands and feet. It represents cleansing from sins of the believer in time.

Second Confession is the one Condition of Fellowship, Forgiveness and Cleansing (1 John 1:1 To 2:2)

Third Self-Judgment Saves from Chastisement (1 Corinthians 11:31-32)

Fourth Chastisement is the Father's Correction and Training of his Sinning Child (Hebrews 12:3-15)

Fifth An Example of Christian Repentance (2 Corinthians 7:8-11)

Sixth The Repentance, Confession and Restoration of an Old Testament Saint (Psalm 51:1-19)

Seventh, The Three-Fold Illustrative Parable in the Gospels (Luke 15:1-32)

The second passage that L. S. Chafer discusses in his book *He That Is Spiritual*, is 1 John 1:1-2:2.

1 John Chapter 1 contains the 1 John 1:9 verse which needs to be examined carefully. In order to do that, it is advisable to start with the first verse in this book and work our way to the last verse of the chapter. This will aid in identifying the purpose of First John. But it will take time.

From Sin to Spirit – Part 3 John 1:1-4

John was a Jew, now a Christian. Remember that being a Jew, for most Jews, is a matter of genealogy, DNA. That did not change. He was considered to be a disciple of John the Baptist (John 1:35-39¹). Jesus personally called John to follow Him (Matthew 4:18-22) He had been appointed an apostle of Jesus. He was present at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-2). He was present at the crucifixion (John 19:25-27). Jesus Himself had asked John to care for His mother (John 19:25-27). John saw the resurrected Jesus (John 20:19-20; 21:1-2). He was present at the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20). He worked with Peter in Jerusalem (Acts 4). He spent time at Ephesus². Undoubtedly he was familiar with Paul³. Now, after the other apostles have died, after the writings of the other apostles had been gaining popular acceptance (Peter of Paul in 2 Peter 3:14-16) as Scripture; now approximately sixty years after the Crucifixion and Resurrection, now as an old man about to write what he might have thought of as the last book of Scripture, he carefully chooses his words to summarize and bring into focus not just all that Christ had taught in the flesh, but the thrust of ALL Scripture that had been written since the beginning. The purpose is to emphasize fellowship with God Himself.

Charles Ryrie said that one of the essential elements of dispensationalism is the glorification of God. That is done in the Church Age by the filling of the Holy Spirit. This empowers fellowship with God the Father & the Son.

¹ This passage does not specifically identify the second of the two disciples of John the Baptist. However, it is commonly agreed that the second disciple was the apostle John.

² This is only known from extra-Biblical sources like Iraneus.

³ Adolf Deissmann said "John is the oldest and the greatest interpreter of Paul (Paul A Study in Social and Religious History, translated by William E. Wilson, Peter Smith, 1972). Deissmann emphasizes this statement in a footnote "In these lines is indicated the result of a great and important piece of research, which has busied me for decades. Critics who think they can set aside my thesis with a superior wave of the hand, would be better advised to test it by carefully working over the material themselves."

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John 1:1-4

Let me provide an outline of this first chapter as I see it. As we know, outlines generally are dependent upon the person generating them. So this is my view of this great chapter.

- Verse 1: Topic – Concerning the Word of Life
- Verse 2: Authentic Authority
- Verse 3: Purpose #1 Fellowship
- Verse 4: Purpose #2 Fellowship to Joy
- Verse 5: God is Absolute
- Verse 6: IF: First “If” Dark Walk
- Verse 7: IF: Second “If” Light Walk
- Verse 8: IF: Third “If” Say No Sin
- Verse 9: IF: Fourth “If” Confess Sin
- Verse 10: IF: Fifth “If” Say Have Not Sinned

The first four verses are, for some, difficult or impossible to understand. This is particularly so for those who reject the authorship of John and reject divine inspiration. My view is that these four verses present a divine logic puzzle. We must answer two questions: What is “that which,” and who is “we?”

John’s writing style uses simple words. The Gospel has been said to be so simple it is like a child walking across a shallow puddle, but at the same time so difficult that experts cannot cross it like a huge ocean.

I like to compare First John, especially the first four verses, to Euclid’s *Elements*. Euclid uses simple terms to set forth the concepts of geometry. Embedded in John’s simple words are profound statements relating to not just salvation/justification but to the spiritual life or sanctification. The purpose of our sanctification is to live a life in fellowship with The Father and The Son.

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John has used special words to help us understand parallel statements. He uses “that which” to emphasize his experiential knowledge of the “Word of Life” or Jesus Christ. He uses a series of “if” statements to characterize different spiritual states that are either in fellowship or out of fellowship. Below I have formatted the verses of chapter one such that certain words are highlighted.

In a reformat of the first verse, it is easy to see the parallelism

That which was from the beginning,

That which we have heard,

That which we have seen with our eyes,

That which we have looked at and touched with our hands,

concerning the Word of Life—

The “that which” helps to identify what it is but also to put it in terms of being witnessed.

2 and 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—

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.

4 These things we write, **so that** our joy may be made complete.

5 This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.

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6 **If** we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;

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 are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

9 **If** we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to 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.

Let us start by going through this chapter one word at a time.

Authentic Credentials

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—

Assume for this discussion that John's letter was just received in the city of Ephesus. A group of believers are attending a gathering. A man with the letter in hand runs into the gathering and shouts, "I have a letter from the elder, the apostle John!" This message which does not have the typical style of a letter was from perhaps the last living witness to the life of Jesus Christ. Typically, letters of this kind were read to the congregation. So he begins by saying each word carefully and forcefully so all can hear.

That which. The first word might have been said almost like a command, "HO." This can mean "the" or "that which." There is

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ambiguity. But because of the way it is said, it grabs everyone's attention.

People who think of the Bible as simply Christian literature written only by men suggest that John's Greek is rough and not well written⁴. Each and every book of the Bible is highly crafted. And, if looked at from a logical perspective, we must pause after each word and ask ourselves, what do I know at this point? The narrative proceeds with a forceful logic. Initially we would agree, there is ambiguity. We don't know much. But each word is like a variable in an equation. It is not until we get to the end of verse 4 that we can propose an answer to the questions, Who is "we?" and What is "that which?" John wants us to pay attention to each and every word.

Was. The the sounds of the second word can mean "in" or "was." The spoken word has some ambiguity. The written word is clear. It means "was." But remember, this letter is being read to a congregation.

From the beginning. This is a single word in the Greek. There is no definite article. Thieme would say, "a beginning that is not the beginning." At this point we can suggest "That which was from *the* beginning." The italics means there is no definite article. There is an emphasis on both the manifestation and the witness. We know this happened because of the witness of John and others.

Please note that in the Greek the first sentence extends from verse one to the middle of verse 3.

Now John uses the word which we translated as "that which" multiple times in parallel. He is explaining that he is a witness. As suggested, he might have been the last living witness to the life of Jesus Christ. He was certainly the last living apostle. Peter understood that an apostle of Jesus Christ had to have certain qualifications.

⁴ Some of course say that First John was not written by the apostle John but by a Johannine school.

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Acts 1:21 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

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Acts 1:22 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.”

Witness. This is an important word for John, both in the gospel of John but also here in 1 John. He doesn't say witness in verse 1. He explains that witness through the “that which” statements. He is giving evidence that he is a valid qualified witness. He is saying “we” have experiential knowledge. This is an important point for Jews. John must document his qualifications to provide this message of witness.

In the Middle East, this concept is still important. While learning Arabic at a Department of Defense school in California, the first teacher I had was a native of Egypt. He spent the first hour of the first class documenting verbally his qualifications. He explained that he had a PhD, two masters degrees and 12 articles listed in an index of a prestigious American university. He had been a minister in Gamal Abdel Nasser's regime⁵. From his perspective, he was highly qualified. But the students asked silently, “Can he teach?” The answer to that was a negative. There was another teacher we had from Egypt who had been a gym teacher. No advanced degrees. Yet, he was the best teacher we ever had. Cultural perspective. The emphasis is on the qualification of the witnesses. They saw, they heard and they touched. All these senses were exercised in witnessing. John and his “we” were qualified to write about his witness.

⁵ Gamal Abdel Nasser was president of Egypt from 1956-1970. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gamal_Abdel_Nasser

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So here in 1 John, the author is documenting that he is qualified to provide this message. But, he does not say “I” at this point. No he says “we.” This becomes another point of ambiguity. Who is “we?” Bad English perhaps but on point. Many commentators immediately speculate on who the “we” is. But if we are patient, the logic will guide us to an answer. Let me say that again because it is important. If we are patient, the logic will guide us to an answer. Let the Bible speak to us. We do not want to make the Bible say what we want. It must speak to us.

Understand that “we” can be inclusive or exclusive. Inclusive would include the reader. Exclusive excludes the reader. It includes the author and perhaps others. Here in 1 John, “we” is obviously exclusive. It includes John and unnamed others but not the readers.

We have heard. This is the usual word for “to hear.” It is in the perfect tense. We heard in the past with the present result that we remember the words spoken.

We have seen with our eyes. This is emphatic compared to “we heard.” The word is from a word to see with understanding. Again, a perfect tense. We saw with the present result that we continue to see what happened in our minds eye. But it is emphasized by including “with our eyes.” This was not a dream or apparition. We actually saw the Word of Life. With physical eyes. The perfect tense says we will never forget.

We looked at. John is piling up words to explain the witness of “we.” This is another word for to see. But this is not just “looked at.” No! This has the sense of looking at something with awe. What John’s “we” saw was not something you could look at and forget. It was something that was engraved into their minds. They would NEVER forget what they witnessed.

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And touched with our hands. This was not something we heard and saw from afar. No! We were ear and eye witnesses of this and then we touched Him. This is an up close familiar witness.

Concerning the Word of Life. The Greek is literally “the Word of the Life.” Some commentators say this is not Jesus Christ but things concerning Him as if those are peripheral. I would like to suggest that this is Jesus Christ and everything about Him. This preposition is used in Matthew’s gospel.

Matthew 22:41 Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question:

Matthew 22:42 “What do you think about (this is the same preposition used in 1 John 1:1 “concerning) the Christ (Hebrew would be Messiah), whose son is He?” They *said to Him, “*The son of David.*”

Word. John already identified the Word as God who became flesh (John 1:1-4, 1:14). John is talking about the Incarnate Jesus. Previous lessons in previous years made the point that the Word of the Lord is the Lord in the Old Testament.

Life. John emphasizes life in his writings. Previous lessons suggested that Paul’s book of Romans emphasized righteousness whereas John’s gospel emphasized life. So here, the incarnate second person of the Trinity is associated with Life. The Greek has “the” life. Eternal life.

John 14:6 Jesus *said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

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While the gospel of John was written to convince unbelievers of the saving work of Jesus, this epistle is addressed to believers. As such, John is extending the point of salvation, the imputation of life, continuing through the believer's time on earth, temporal life. He states this as "fellowship" in verse 3.

1 John 5:13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

1 John 1:2 and 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—

The life. The definite article identifies something. So here it could be translated as "this" life referring back to the Word of Life in verse 1.

Manifested. This word is used twice in this single verse. John is emphasizing the reality of the manifestation. He has two things he is emphasizing: The fact of the manifestation and the fact that "we" witnessed this manifestation.

Are you familiar with the logic question: "If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?"⁶ What John is saying is that Jesus was manifested and there were many who not just heard Him, but saw and touched Him.

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/If_a_tree_falls_in_a_forest_and_no_one_is_around_to_hear_it%2C_does_it_make_a_sound%3F

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In verse 1, John provided specific ways in which the Word of Life was manifested. Now he states that “we” did not just witness passively, “we” saw, testify and actively proclaim this eternal life.

1 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.

1 John 1:4 These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.

1 John 1:5 This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.

1 John 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;

1 John 1:7 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.

1 John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

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1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.