

"It is not Christ walking on the sea, but His ordinary walk, that we are called on here to imitate."

—Martin Luther

Author and Time Frame- John the Apostle (A.D. 80–95)

Introduction

John's First Epistle is like a family photograph album. It describes those who are members of the family of God. Just as children resemble their parents, so God's children have His likeness too.

This Letter describes the similarities. When a person becomes a child of God, he receives the life of God—eternal life. All who have this life show it in very definite ways.

For instance, they acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, they love God, they love the children of God, they obey His commandments, and they do not go on sinning.

These, then, are some of the hallmarks of eternal life. John wrote this Epistle so that all who have these family traits may *know* that they have eternal life (1 Jn. 5:13).

Background and Theme

At the time John was writing, a false sect had arisen which became known as Gnosticism (Gk. *gnōsis* = knowledge). These Gnostics professed to be Christians but claimed to have *additional knowledge*, superior to what the apostles taught. They claimed that a person could not be completely fulfilled until he had been initiated into their deeper "truths." Some taught that matter was evil, and that therefore the Man Jesus could not be God. They made a distinction between Jesus and the Christ. John realized that these people were not true Christians, and so he warned his readers against them by showing that the Gnostics did not have the marks of true children of God.

According to John, a person either is a child of God or he is not; there is no in-between ground.

That is why this Epistle is filled with such extreme opposites as light and darkness, love and hatred, truth and lie, death and life, God and the devil. At the same time, it should be noted that the apostle likes to describe people by their habitual behavior. In discerning between Christians and non-Christians, for instance, he does not base his conclusion on a single act of sin, but rather on what characterizes the person.

Even a broken clock tells the correct time twice in every twenty-four hours! But a good clock tells the correct time regularly. So the general, day-by-day behavior of a Christian is holy and righteous, and by this he is known as a child of God.

While John does use simple *words*, the *thoughts* he expresses are often deep, and sometimes difficult to understand. As we study this book, therefore, we should pray that the Lord will help us to grasp the meaning of His word and to obey the truth as He reveals it to us.

THE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

1 John 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—

The doctrinal foundation of all true fellowship is the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There can be no true fellowship with those who hold false views concerning Him.

The same One who existed from all eternity with God the Father came down into this world as a real Man. The reality of His Incarnation is indicated by the fact that the apostles **heard** Him, saw Him with their **eyes**, gazed upon Him with deep meditation, and actually **handled** Him. How can we apply this to our lives?

The **Word of life** was not a mere passing illusion, but was a real Person in a body of flesh.

1 John 1:2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—

Verse two confirms that the One who **was with the Father**, and whom John calls **that eternal life**, became flesh and dwelt among us and was **seen** by the apostles.

I am glad that my knowledge of eternal life is not built on the speculations of philosophers or even theologians but on the unimpeachable testimony of those who heard, saw, gazed at, and handled Him in whom it was incarnate. It is not merely a lovely dream, but solid fact, carefully observed and an accurately recorded fact. Anonymous

1 John 1:3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

The apostles did not keep this wonderful news as a secret, and neither should we. They realized that the basis of all fellowship is found here and so they declared it freely and fully.

All who receive the testimony of the apostles have **fellowship with the Father, with His Son Jesus Christ**, and also with the apostles and all other believers. How