

# 1 JOHN

**A** ΤΝ The phrase “This is what we proclaim to you” is not in the Greek text, but has been supplied to clarify the English. The main verb which governs all of these relative clauses is ἀπαγγέλλομεν (*apangellomen*) in v. 3. This is important for the proper understanding of the relative clauses in v. 1, because the main verb ἀπαγγέλλομεν in v. 3 makes it clear

that all of the relative clauses in vv. 1 and 3 are the *objects* of the author’s proclamation to the readers rather than the *subjects*. To indicate this the phrase “This is what we proclaim to you” has been supplied at the beginning of v. 1.

**B** ΤΝ *Grk* “That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard...”

**C** ΤΝ Or “proclaim.”

**D** ΤΝ In the Greek text the prologue to 1 John (vv. 1–4) makes up a single sentence. This is awkward in Greek, and a literal translation produces almost impossible English. For this reason the present translation places a period at the end of v. 2 and another at the end of v. 3. The material in parentheses in v. 1 begins the first of *three* parenthetical interruptions in the grammatical sequence of the prologue (the second is the entirety of v. 2 and the third is the latter part of v. 3). This is because of the awkwardness of connecting the prepositional phrase with what precedes, an awkwardness not immediately obvious in most English translations: “what we beheld and our hands handled concerning the word of life...” As J. Bonsirven (*Épîtres de Saint Jean* [CNT], 67) noted, while one may *hear* about the word of life, it is more difficult to *see* about the word of life, and impossible to *feel* with one’s hands about the word of life. Rather than being the *object* of any of the verbs in v. 1, the prepositional phrase at the end of v. 1 (“concerning the word of life...”) is more likely a parenthetical clarification intended to specify the *subject* of the eyewitness testimony which the verbs in v. 1 describe. A parallel for such parenthetical explanation may be found in John 1:12 (τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ).

**E** ΤΝ Or “proclaim.”

**F** ΤΝ The ἵνα (*hina*) here indicates purpose. **G** ΤΝ Or “communion”; or “association” (a reality shared in common, so in this case,

## The Prologue to the Letter

**1** This is what we proclaim to you:<sup>A</sup> what was from the beginning,<sup>B</sup> what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and our hands have touched (concerning the word of life—<sup>2</sup>and the life was revealed, and we have seen and testify and announce<sup>C</sup> to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us).<sup>D</sup> <sup>3</sup> What we have seen and heard we announce<sup>E</sup> to you too, so that<sup>F</sup> you may have fellowship<sup>G</sup> with us (and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ).<sup>4</sup> Thus<sup>H</sup> we are writing these things so that<sup>I</sup> our<sup>J</sup> joy may be complete.<sup>K</sup>

## God Is Light, So We Must Walk in the Light

<sup>5</sup> Now<sup>L</sup> this is the gospel<sup>M</sup> message<sup>N</sup> we have

“genuine association”). This term also occurs in vv. 6, 7.

**H** ΤΝ “Thus” is supplied to indicate the resultative nature of the Greek conjunction *καί* (*kai*) at the beginning of v. 4.

**I** ΤΝ The ἵνα (*hina*) here indicates purpose.

**J** ΤΑ A number of MSS, some of them quite significant (A C K P 5 33 81 442 1243 1505 1611 1735 1739 1852 1881 2344 *pm sy*<sup>h</sup> bo), read ὑμῶν (*humōn*, “your”) rather than ἡμῶν (*hēmōn*, “our”), which is found in somewhat better witnesses (κ B L Ψ 049 436 1175 1241 *pm sy*<sup>p</sup> sa). Although the majority of Byzantine minuscules are split between the two readings, the *Textus Receptus* reads ὑμῶν. It is possible that ὑμῶν represents a scribal assimilation to John 16:24, where the Greek purpose clause is identical to the wording here with ὑμῶν (“so that your joy may be complete”). As far as the immediate context is concerned, either reading could possibly be original, since the recipients have already been mentioned in 1:2 (ὑμῖν, *humin*) and 1:3 (ὑμῖν), while it might seem more natural for the author to be concerned about the fulfillment of his own joy than his readers’ (cf. 2 John 4, 12; 3 John 3). Overall, the first person pronoun is preferred on both external and internal grounds. Although previous editions of the UBS text gave the first person pronoun reading an “A” rating, UBS<sup>5</sup> strips out any rating at all and, along with NA<sup>28</sup>, ranks ὑμῶν as an equally viable alternative initial reading by placing it in the apparatus with a diamond.

**K** ΤΝ *Grk* “be fulfilled.”

sn *This is what we proclaim to you... so that our joy may be complete.* The prologue to 1 John (1:1–4) has many similarities to the prologue to the Gospel of John (1:1–18). Like the prologue to the Fourth Gospel, the prologue to 1 John introduces the reader to important themes which will be more fully developed later in the

body of the work. In the case of 1 John, three of these are: (1) the importance of eyewitness testimony to who Jesus is (cf. 4:14; 5:6–12), (2) the importance of the earthly ministry of Jesus as a part of God’s revelation of himself in Jesus Christ (cf. 4:2; 5:6), and (3) the eternal life available to believers in Jesus Christ (5:11–12; 5:20). Like the rest of the letter, the pro-

logue to 1 John does not contain any of the usual features associated with a letter in NT times, such as an opening formula, the name of the author or sender, the name(s) of the addressee(s), a formal greeting, or a health wish or expression of remembrance. The author of 1 John begins the prologue with an emphasis on the eyewitness nature of his testimony. He then transitions to a focus on the readers of the letter by emphasizing the proclamation of this eyewitness (apostolic) testimony to them. The purpose of this proclamation is so that the readers might share in fellowship with the author, a true fellowship which is with the Father and the Son as well. To guarantee this maintenance of fellowship the author is writing the letter itself (line 4a). Thus, in spite of the convoluted structure of the prologue in which the author’s thought turns back on itself several times, there is a discernible progression in his thought which ultimately expresses itself in the reason for the writing of the letter (later expressed again in slightly different form in the purpose statement of 5:13).

**L** ΤΝ The *καί* (*kai*) at the beginning of 1:5 takes on a resumptive force, indicated by the phrase “heard from him and announce to you,” which echoes similar phrases in 1:2 and 1:3.

**M** ΤΝ The word “gospel” is not in the Greek text but is supplied to clarify the meaning. See the note on the following word “message.”

**N** ΤΝ The word ἀγγελία (*angelia*) occurs only twice in the NT, here and in 1 John 3:11. It is a cognate of ἐπαγγελία (*epangelia*) which occurs much more frequently (some 52 times in the NT) including 1 John 2:25. BDAG 8 s.v. ἀγγελία 1 offers the meaning “message” which suggests some overlap with the semantic range of λόγος (*logos*), although in the specific

context of 1:5 BDAG suggests a reference to the gospel. (The precise “content” of this “good news” is given by the ὅτι [*hoti*] clause which follows in 1:5b.) The word ἀγγελία here is closely equivalent to εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion*): (1) it refers to the proclamation of the eyewitness testimony about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ as proclaimed

by the author and the rest of the apostolic witnesses (prologue, esp. 1:3–4), and (2) it relates to the salvation of the hearers/readers, since the purpose of this proclamation is to bring them into fellowship with God and with the apostolic witnesses (1:3). Because of this the adjective “gospel” is included in the English translation.

**A** ΤΝ The referent of the pronoun “him” is not entirely clear in the Greek text; it could be either (1) God the Father, or (2) Jesus Christ, both of whom are mentioned at the end of v. 3. A reference to Jesus Christ is more likely because this is the nearest possible antecedent, and because God (the Father) is specifically mentioned in the following clause in v. 5.

**B** ΤΝ The key to understanding the first major section of 1 John, 1:5–3:10, is found in the statement in v. 5: “*God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.*” The idea of “proclamation”—the apostolic proclamation of eyewitness testimony which the prologue introduces (1:2, 3)—is picked up in 1:5 by the use of the noun ἀγγελία (*angelia*) and the verb ἀναγγέλλομεν (*anangellomen*), cognate to the verb in 1:3. The content of this proclamation is given by the ὅτι (*hoti*) clause in 1:5 as the assertion that God is light, so this statement should be understood as the author’s formulation of the apostolic eyewitness testimony introduced in the prologue. (This corresponds to the apostolic preaching elsewhere referred to as κήρυγμα [*kērygma*], although the term the Apostle John uses here is ἀγγελία.)

sn Following the theme statement in 1:5, *God is light and in him there is no darkness at all*, the author presents a series of three claims and counterclaims that make up the first unit of 1 John (1:5–2:2). The three claims begin with “if” (1:6, 8, 10) and the three counterclaims begin with “but if” (1:7, 9; 2:1) in the English translation.

**C** ΤΝ The context of this statement in 1:6 indicates clearly that the progressive (continuative or durative) aspect of the present tense must be in view here.

sn The relationship of the phrase *keep on walking to if we say* is very important for understanding the problem expressed in 1:6. If one should say (ἐπιωμεν, *eipōmen*) that he has fellowship with God, and yet continues walking (περιπατῶμεν, *peripatōmen*) in the darkness, then it follows (in the apodosis, the “then” clause) that he is lying and not practicing the truth.

heard from him<sup>A</sup> and announce to you: God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.<sup>B</sup> <sup>6</sup> If we say we have fellowship with him and yet keep on walking<sup>C</sup> in the darkness, we are lying and not practicing<sup>D</sup> the truth. <sup>7</sup> 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<sup>E</sup> us from all sin.<sup>F</sup> <sup>8</sup> If we say we do not bear the guilt of sin,<sup>G</sup> we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous,<sup>H</sup> forgiving<sup>I</sup> us our sins and cleansing<sup>J</sup> us from all unrighteousness.<sup>10</sup> If we say we have not sinned, we

**2** make him a liar and his word is not in us. <sup>1</sup> (My little children,<sup>K</sup> I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.<sup>L</sup>) But if anyone does sin, we have an

**D** ΤΝ Or “living according to...”

**E** ΤΝ Or “purifies.”

**F** ΤΝ BDAG 50 s.v. ἀμαρτία 1 defines this term as “a departure fr. either human or divine standards of uprightness” (see 1 John 5:17 where ἀμαρτία [*hamartia*] and ἀδικία [*adikia*] are related). This word occurs 17 times in 1 John, of which 11 are singular and 6 are plural.

sn *From all sin.* Sometimes a distinction between singular “sin” and plural “sins” has been suggested: Some would see the singular *all sin* of 1:7 as a reference to sinfulness before conversion and the plural *sins* of 1:9 as a reference to sins committed after one became a Christian. This amounts to making 1:7 refer to initial justification and 1:9 to sanctification. But the phrase *all sin* in 1:7 is so comprehensive that it can hardly be limited to preconversion sins, and the emphasis on “walking” in 1:7 strongly suggests that the Christian life is in view (not one’s life before conversion). In 1 John 1:8 sin appears as a condition or characteristic quality, which in 1:10 is regarded as universal. Apart from forgiveness in Christ it results in alienation from God (2:15) and spiritual death (3:14). But according to 1 John 1:7, cleansing from sin is possible by the blood (representing the sacrificial death) of Jesus.

**G** ΤΝ *Grk* “say we do not have sin.” The use of ἔχω + ἀμαρτία (*echō* + *hamartia*) is an expression limited to John and 1 John in the NT. On the analogy with other constructions where ἔχω governs an abstract noun (e.g., 1 John 1:3, 6, 7; 2:28; 3:3, 15, 21; 4:16, 17; 5:12–13), it indicates that a state is involved, which in the case of ἀμαρτία would refer to a state of sin. The four times the expression ἔχω + ἀμαρτία occurs in the Gospel of John (9:41; 15:22, 24; 19:11) all refer to situations where a wrong action has been committed or a wrong attitude has already existed, resulting in a state of sin, and then something else happens which further emphasizes the evil of that action or attitude. Here in 1 John 1:8 the sense is the same. The author is addressing people who have sinned (resulting in a state of sin), warning them that they cannot claim to be free from the guilt of that sin. The context of 1 John does not imply libertarianism (where sins are flaunted as a way of demonstrating one’s “liberty”) on the part of the opponents, since the author makes no explicit charges of immoral behavior against his opponents. The worst the author explicitly says is that they

have failed to love the brethren (1 John 3:17). It seems more likely that the opponents were saying that things a believer did after conversion were not significant enough to be “sins” that could challenge one’s intimate relationship with God (a relationship the author denies that the opponents have to begin with).

**H** ΤΝ Or “just.”

**I** ΤΝ The ἵνα (*hina*)

followed by the subjunctive is here equivalent to the infinitive of result, an “ecbatic” or consecutive use of ἵνα according to BDAG 477 s.v. 3 where 1 John 1:9 is listed as a specific example. The translation with participles (“forgiving... cleansing”) conveys this idea of result.

**J** ΤΝ Or “purifying.”

**K** SN *My little children.* The direct address by the author to his readers at the beginning of 2:1 marks a break in the pattern of the opponents’ claims (indicated by the phrase *if we say* followed by a negative statement in the apodosis, the “then” clause) and the author’s counterclaims (represented by *if* with a positive statement in the apodosis) made so far in 1:6–10. The seriousness of this last claim (in 1:10) causes the author to interrupt himself to address the readers as his faithful children and to explain to them that while he wants them not to sin, they may be assured that if they do, they can look to Jesus Christ, as their advocate with the Father, to intercede for them. After this, the last of the author’s three counter-claims in 1:5–2:2 is found in the *if* clause in 2:1b.

**L** ΤΝ There is some dispute over the significance of the aorist tense of ἀμαρτήτε (*hamartēte*): (1) F. Stagg (“Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy in the Johannine Epistles,” *RevExp* 67 [1970]:423–32, esp. 428) holds that the aorist is nondescriptive, saying nothing about the nature of the action itself, but only that the action has happened. This is indeed the normal aspectual value of the aorist tense in general, but there is some disagreement over whether with this particular verb there are more specific nuances of meaning. (2) M. Zerwick (*Biblical Greek* §251) and N. Turner (MHT 3:72) agree that the present tense of ἀμαρτάνω (*hamartanō*) means “to be in a state of sin” (i.e., a sinner) while the aorist refers to specific acts of sin. Without attempting to sort out this particular dispute, it should be noted that certain verbs do have different nuances of meaning in different tenses, nuances which do not derive solely from the aspectual value of the tense per se, but from a combination of semantic factors which vary from word to word.

sn *So that you may not sin.* It is clear the author is *not* simply exhorting the readers not to be habitual or repetitive sinners, as if to imply that occasional acts of sin would be acceptable. The purpose of the author here is that the readers not sin *at all*, just as Jesus told the man he