

# Series: The Confident, Loving Church – week 1

**CDOBC – beginning on 2/14/10**

Title: **“Eyewitness Testimony”**

*1 John 1:1-4 ~ February 14, 2010*

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**OBJECTIVE:** To help us gain confidence in Scripture which in part is the Apostle’s eyewitness testimony about Jesus.

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## **Announcements**

- Welcome / guests – communication cards
- AWANA Grand Prix – race day is 2/20
- Youth Babysitting – 2/14
- Creation Workshop – 2/15
- SWCBA Annual Celebration – March 13

## Opening Prayer

## Important things about John’s Epistles...

### *Who was John writing to?*

From the early church fathers and church historians, we know that out of all the disciples / Apostles, John lived the longest. It is believed that John wrote both his Gospel and His Epistles in the later years of his life – probably in his late 80’s or early 90’s. According to some of the early church fathers such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexander, and Eusebius, John was ministering in Ephesus and overseeing the churches founded by Paul in Asia Minor – modern-day Turkey.

He was writing to Christians – **5:13** – “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God...”

What *problems* was he addressing?

False teachers had led the believers away from the message they heard from the Apostles – from John’s teaching about Christ. They were being misled and were uncertain about their faith – uncertain about the things the Gospel they had originally heard.

One of the primary problems that had infiltrated the churches was Gnosticism.

Gnosticism comes from the Gr. Word *gnosis* = knowledge or to know – and in relation to Gnosticism, it has the idea of someone or some group that has secret knowledge – that they have a special word or spiritual insight.

**2 Cor. 10:5** “...every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God...” It’s the belief that places human knowledge in a superior position to Biblical revelation. Modern Day = New Age Movement – “enlightened” thoughts about God. Modern day Gnosticism is any mystical system of belief that denies the Word of God and elevates itself as advancement over and above Scripture. The New Age Movement is not the only modern day Gnostics, certain factions within the Christian Church who deny Scripture’s authority, and the deity and humanity of Christ should be seen by us as modern day Gnostics.

This false teaching was causing great uncertainty about their faith - their standing before God. They had lost the confidence they had in what John and others Apostles had originally taught.

The Gnostics tended to be a very intellectual group, and just like today, when those who are viewed as intellectual and smart, and their belief is in contrast or opposition to your belief, it can cause some uncertainty in your heart and mind.

In our culture today, it is taboo to say that you are certain about your faith. It's not tolerated if you claim with confidence that what you believe about Jesus is right and others are wrong.

But when you read 1 John, you realize that this is exactly what John says all throughout the book. He uses the word "know" thirty-six times. "I know", "we know", "you know". He is not apologetic – he states the truths about Christ in an absolute way. Another word you will see in this book is the word "confidence" (2:28; 3:21; 4:17; 5:14). "Confidence" is translated from the Gr. Word *parrhesia* – and it means confidence or boldness. The Apostle John is an eyewitness to Jesus – he knows what he says is the truth – he is confident in his belief and he is bold in his proclamation of the truth – so much so, that his writing will stand out in great contrast to the spirit in many churches today and the predominant spirit of timidity in our culture regarding Jesus Christ.

### Problems with Gnosticism & Christ

***Denial of Jesus' incarnation*** – They held (and still hold) to a dualistic theology / philosophy. Meaning, that they believed all material things were created by a "bad or evil" god – and that all spiritual things were created by the "good" god. In their view, all matter is

evil, spirit is good. Since they believed matter is evil, God would never become flesh – so Jesus was not really human, he only looked human – appeared as a human, etc.

***Denial of sin*** – For the Gnostic, true spirituality was what someone believed on the inside...in their heart – their body, their actions were of little / no consequence.

What was the purpose for his writing?

Three purposes we see directly in the text:

Joy – 1:4

Holiness – 2:1

Confidence in faith – 5:13

Gospel of John vs. Epistles of John

**Gospel** written to unbelievers to ignite faith.

**Epistles** written to believers to verify and/or solidify faith – to give assurance or confidence of faith.

**Gospel** was written to give life

**Epistles** were written to instruct how to live their new life.

**Gospel** – the enemies of the truth are the unbelieving Jews who refuse to give up their legalistic rules as a way to righteousness.

**In the Epistles**, the enemies of the truth are professing Christians who have denied the testimony of the Apostles about Jesus and have begun to lead others in

the church astray saying that there were no laws to govern behavior.

**Gospel** is evangelistic in purpose

**Epistles** are pastoral in purpose

**Gospel** tries to reach those outside of the church

**Epistles** are written to those inside the church

Three forms of observation that the eyewitnesses of Christ testify about: Their ears, their eyes, their touch

**New is not always better.** vs 1

“from the beginning” – reminds us of John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word” and Genesis 1:1 “In the beginning God created...” However, the first phrase of John’s epistle refers not to the beginning of time, but to the beginning of the Gospel – to the point in time that Jesus entered the scene – the beginning of His ministry. This opening phrase that John uses is a direct shot at the false teachers and the Gnostics who had been teaching that they had new, secret knowledge about God.

In our day, John’s opening phrase is targeted at Mormonism and their Book of Mormon, Pearl of Great Price and Doctrine and Covenants. It’s targeted at Jehovah Witnesses’ who claim they are the only true followers of Jehovah God, and that they have received a new document called The Harps of God. It’s targeted at Mary Baker Eddy (Christian Science) and her followers who claim new revelation to her. Run from these groups! They do not have new truth from God – they

have lies and falsehoods that are nothing new than an updated form of Gnosticism and a denial of Scripture and a denial of the person, character, and work of Jesus Christ. The truth of God is still the message John and the other Apostle's heard "From the beginning" – the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **First hand knowledge of Jesus vs. 1**

Notice the plurality of John's witness here – he doesn't speak only of his experience, but speaks of the experience of the Apostles by using terms "we" and "our" – not "I" or "my" or "me".

"we have heard" -

This term is in the perfect tense – indication a past reality that is still affecting present time...the lasting impact of what he heard Jesus say. In the Greek, it also has the idea that John and the other Apostles didn't just hear Jesus once, but many times. He didn't just hear Jesus one day, but he heard Jesus countless times – over three years in all kinds of situations – he heard what Jesus said.

"we have seen with our eyes" –

*horaō* – normal word for seeing. It's again in the perfect tense, just like what he heard. This doesn't refer to seeing a vision – he didn't see a ghost or a phantom – it's not a mystical sense of seeing something. He adds "with our eyes" to drive home the point he is talking about physical sight – not mystical, spiritual insight.

"which we have looked at" -

He's not repeating himself here – he uses a different Gr. word - *theōreō* – **John 20:6** – a very similar word used to

describe Peter looking at the grave clothes left in Jesus' grave. This term implies a gaze – a look that studies the object – that looks intently upon it. This is no passing glance.

**Illus.** - It's Valentines Day today men and women – and if you look upon your spouse like the first word used here – *horaō* – then you might be in trouble. But, if you look upon your spouse according to the second word – *theōreō* – then you're getting a better sense of the word. My illustration is not linguistically correct – but I think you get the idea. A passing glance – simple observation is one thing – but a penetrating, intentional gaze in which you truly understand the object you are looking at is much better.

John not only saw Jesus, but he understood who Jesus was. He saw what Jesus did, but he also understood the meaning behind the miracles – the meaning behind the parables – his sight went beyond the surface and he saw who Jesus truly was – he saw the deity of Jesus.

“our hands have touched” -

The term John uses here is a term that refers to feeling – to grope at something. Jesus used this word when He told his disciples to “...handle Me and realize that a spirit doesn't have flesh and bones as you see Me have.” **Luke 24:39** This is what Jesus told Thomas to do when He told Thomas to touch his wounds. John is testifying against the false teaching of the Gnostics – that Jesus was no ghost, phantom, or apparition – He was a real person – a man with flesh and bones – and John touched Him with his own hands.

“we proclaim” -

*This phrase is not in the original Gr. – the NIV adds it for a smoother English translation.*

“word of life” –

NIV capitalizes ‘word’ – indicating they are interpreting the Gr. Text to refer to Jesus – but most other translations translate ‘word’ with a lower case ‘w’ because they interpret the Gr. Text and the phrase “word of life” to refer to the actual words or the actual message of the Gospel about Christ. Now it’s true that it’s difficult to separate the two – Jesus from the Gospel about Jesus – but the emphasis here in 1 John 1:1 is on the message that has been passed down from the Apostles who have first hand, eyewitness testimony about Christ.

### **Sharing the truth about Jesus** vs. 2

“The life appeared” – speaks to the incarnation of Jesus – the reality of his physical life. Jesus was a real person, someone that John and the other Apostles saw. In Jesus God revealed what was previously unseen – Jesus said “Anyone who has seen Me, you have seen the Father.” **John 14:9**

“we have seen it” – Speaks not to seeing Jesus in the physical sense, but understanding who Jesus was – that John and other had beheld His glory. Jesus was a man, but He was not an ordinary man! He was much more than just a man – He was also God – and John saw the evidence of that. He’s not referring here to mystical sight – his spiritual insight is not based on mysticism – but on what he saw and observed in Jesus. Not only did He see the full Jesus through the various

miracles that Jesus performed, but specifically at Jesus transfiguration, John saw the unveiled, glorified Jesus.

“and testify to it” – Gr. *martureō* – used when describing courtroom testimony – testimony from an eyewitness.

“we proclaim to you the eternal life” – Gr. *apangellō* – similar to the previous term, but also carries with it the authority to share what they observed. Jesus “...not only manifested Himself to the disciples to qualify them as *eyewitnesses*, but gave them an authoritative commission as *apostles* to preach the gospel.” (The Epistles of John, by James Montgomery Boice, p. 25, quoting John R. W. Stott, The Epistles

of John, 6.)

“the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us” – a good example of how the person of Christ and the message of Christ is inseparable.

### **Our partnership in the truth vs. 3**

“we proclaim to you” – same Gr. Word as in vs. 2 – *apangellō* – authoritative eyewitness testimony.

“so that you also may have fellowship with us” – *koinōnia* – two aspects of fellowship – vertical fellowship with God – horizontal fellowship with people / believers.

**The idea that fellowship is a partnership – much more than a social relationship – it is primarily a joint venture – a team – a partnership with a purpose.**

Christian fellowship is centered in on one’s relationship to Christ. It is true that a believer can have fellowship with a

non-believer, but only in a generic or general sense – or only in a limited, human sense where they may share a common interest in sports, woodworking, antiques, music, etc. However, there is a greater form of fellowship available to believers who not only have a common bond in their faith, but a common bond and fellowship with the Heavenly Father and with Jesus! This type of fellowship is what John is referring to. He wants his readers to have faith in Jesus Christ, so that they will not only have the fullest extent of human fellowship, but also the ultimate form of fellowship which extends heavenward!

“That the words "fellowship with us" precede in the text the words "fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" may be significant. Westcott (in loc.) sees here a reminder that there can be no fellowship with the Father or with the Son that is not based on apostolic witness.” *Expositor's Bible Commentary*

### **The fallout of faith in Christ** vs. 4

<sup>4</sup> We write this to make our joy complete.

Textual variant here –

“our joy” NIV, ESV, NASB, RSV, ASV or

“your joy” – KJV, NKJV

“our joy” speaks to the joy of the Apostles – or the joy of the writer. If the readers have faith in Christ and don't follow the Gnostics, then the faith and faithfulness of the readers to the Gospel of Christ will bring the Apostles great joy. You can understand this as Pastoral joy – the joy of the pastor when he sees and hears of people in his flock clinging to the truth of God's Word.

If it's “your joy”, this speaks to their joy in Christ and the fellowship they have with one another as a result of their common faith. This would of course also result in the joy of the Apostle, so in practice there is not much difference between the two.

## **Application**

Your theology matters.

The believers that John wrote these letters to had been taught by false teachers, and the theology they were being taught was more than an intellectual challenge. The false theology about God, about Christ, about sin, caused great uncertainty and confusion in their life. Your theology does make a difference in how you live your life and how you feel about life.

Have confidence in Christ and His Word.

Many Christians today are timid and apologetic for their faith in Jesus – for their belief in God’s Word. The first 4 verses of 1 John should help build confidence in who Christ was and in the reliability and authority of Scripture. What the Apostle John wrote was because he was there! He and many other authors of Scripture were eyewitnesses of Jesus – and they wrote without apology of the truth they observed and experienced. This reality should help us to live and proclaim our faith boldly and confidently.

### **2 Peter 1:20-21**

“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophets own interpretation. For prophecy

never had it's origin in the will of man, but men spoke from  
God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

Close in prayer