

First John is written as a sermon and lacks the opening, greeting, thanksgiving and closing greeting that mark most New Testament Epistles (or pastoral letters). The author's key purpose is to defend Christian communities against false prophets and to remind them that as children of God they are to live in the light and love one another. The "enemies of Christ" against whom the author warns have apparently left the Church, and have persuaded many members to join them. We don't hear from them directly, nor do we know exactly what they taught and did (as we only hear one side in this letter, as in all letters) but we can deduce that the division they created is related to the incarnation of Christ, recognizing Jesus as fully human and fully divine, and the consequences of such hope in terms of our own humanity: the way in which live apart and together. In order to warn members of the church community, Christians, against the teachings of these false prophets, the author explains that it means to be a child of God. True Christians live in the truth of God's light, have faith in God's son Jesus Christ, believe that Jesus had a human body, obey God, and love others with the kind of love that comes from God. While the language and theology of this spiritual tract directly relate to that of the gospel of John, it's thought that this was an elder of the Church, and not the apostle, written much later, as it has different literary and preaching goals. The letter addresses pastoral, or church, issues, more than providing a theological gospel explanation of who Christ is.⁸

the beginning: ἀρχῆς : Arche Greek word "beginning", "origin" or "source of action." This beginning is the cosmic beginning, the same as in Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth..." This first phrase of the letter echoes the first words of the gospel of John : "In the beginning [Ἐν ἀρχῇ] was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1:1

THE WORD OF LIFE: In Greek the expression is Λόγου τῆς ζωῆς. Λόγος or LOGOS is the Greek word "Word", "Discourse", or "Reason." In ancient Greek philosophy it was used to talk of the beginning point of creation from which all life, reason and thought proceeds. The gospel incorporates this heavily laden philosophical word to convey the eschatological movement of God in Jesus. Using the word LOGOS here harkens directly back to the prologue of the gospel of John 1:1-14:

¹In the beginning was the **WORD** [λόγος or logos], and the **WORD** was with God, and the **WORD** was God. ² The **WORD** was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through the **WORD**, and without the **WORD** not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in the **WORD** was life, and the life was the light of all people.... ¹⁴ And the **WORD** became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen the **WORD**'s glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

In the letter of 1st John, the author associates the words word and life as the way to refer to Jesus. As the letter unfolds, the author uses **LIFE** [ζωῆς or zoé], more than word, to refer to Jesus, under which we can hear the words of the gospel of John in 14:6-7: "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the **LIFE**. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

The first words of the letter intentionally evoke a wealth of theology and Christology.

January 13, 2019

1 John 1:1-4

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

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.

John 15:5-10

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

[Jesus continued saying, "] ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who *abide* in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do

nothing.⁶ Whoever does not *abide* in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.⁷ If you *abide* in me, and my words *abide* in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; *abide* in my love.¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will *abide* in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and *abide* in his love.¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my **joy** may be in you, and that your **joy** may be complete."

QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- What shimmers in your attention in this reading?
- How does God in Christ give you life?; joy?
- How does living in the fellowship of that life bring you life?; joy?
- How does the admonition to abide in Christ and abide in the fellowship of the Church shape your life?; the way you make meaning in life?; your definition of a meaningful life?
- Is this word about life and fellowship a new or disturbing word for our culture today? How so?; Why not?
- How do you hear the Spirit of God inviting you to act, speak, be, or live relationally today through the word of this scripture?

fellowship | *abide* : "Fellowship is a term often used in the New Testament to mean sharing or partnership. Here, it suggests that those who are in community with the author and his fellow witnesses to the revelation of life are also in community with God and with God's human Son, in whom that revelation took place. This implies that those who do not share in this community of testimony, that is, those who do not accept the testimony, are missing out on community with God as well."*

joy: "The outcome of living in fellowship, abiding in Christ, accepting the author's written declaration will be joy, which is not simply happiness or pleasure in the New Testament, but a blessing that comes with the arrival of the Messiah, and thus of God's salvation. The author can only fully rejoice when the readers are part of the community of testimony and belief; and this joy includes the entire witnessing group. Not only do the hearers believe as part of a community, rather than simply as individuals, but even the witnesses' fellowship with God is really satisfactory only when the readers are included as well. Relationship with God involves relationship with human beings. No one can be in fellowship with God, or "abide in God" as the author will say later (in 2:23-24), without also being in fellowship with other people. The relationship with God that brings eternal life is simply not valid, is really not even possible, without love for one another."*

† This introduction to 1st John is taken in large part from that of *Seek. Find.: The Bible for All People* (The Contemporary English Version) ABS 2006.

* *The Epistles of John*. David Resenberg. Westminster John Knox Press, 2001. p. 17

THE MEANING OF LIFE: Throughout our history different thinkers have been famous for their definition of the meaning of life:

Socrates at his trial for impiety and corrupting youth, for which he was subsequently sentenced to death, is said to have uttered the dictum that "The unexamined life is not worth living."

Schopenhauer: "the meaning of life is to deny it"

Kierkegaard: "the meaning of life is to obey God passionately"

Nietzsche: "the meaning of life is the will to power",

Tolstoy: "the meaning of life lies in a kind of irrational knowledge called 'faith.'"

Heidegger: "the meaning of life is to live authentically or (alternatively) to be a guardian of the earth."

Sartre: "espoused the view that life is meaningless but urged us nonetheless to make a free choice that would give our lives meaning and responsibility."

Our own **American constitution** seems to define the meaning of life as the realization of "unalienable rights" which have been given to all humans by their creator. These include "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."