

THE WORD OF LIFE, THAT ETERNAL LIFE
1Jno.1:1-4
Ed Dye

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In the Epistle of 1st John, he immediately enters into the great subject he is obligated to cover due to the destructive, deadly heresy plaguing the churches of his day, especially in the latter days of the 1st century.
 - a. There is no greeting and no salutation, as if the situation were urgent.
 - b. What he has to say and needs to say to his readers is of unparalleled importance; he must get to the point posthaste.
2. In these introductory verses of vv.1-3 he introduces us to and opens up his theme, his subject to be discussed and defended throughout the Epistle, which has to do with “the Word of life,” “that eternal life,” i.e. the Life and its self-revelation.
3. Herein he declares unto us “the Word of life” who is the Father’s Son, Jesus Christ, the revelation of God in the flesh.
4. In essence, as we shall see, vv.1-3 affirm that the Christ, while on earth, was not a mere influence, nor yet a shadowy phantom, as the heresy claimed, but a living, vibrant, tangible, real personality whose voice John has heard, whose body he has seen, and whom he had handled with his own hands.
5. Truly, Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, who had come in the flesh.
6. Thus, in vv.1-3 of our text, John begins his exposure and refutation of the Gnostic heresy then troubling the churches, especially in Asia Minor.
7. In these four verses, we are able to trace John’s revelations “concerning the Word of life” in five stages, or five steps, which are as follows:

II. DISCUSSION

A. 1st STAGE: THE LIFE ETERNALLY EXISTENT: “That which was from the beginning”; “the Word of life”; “the life”; “that eternal life”, V. 1a,c; V.2a,c.

1. What is meant by this beginning? How far back does it go? Ans: Back before the creation! For “the Word of life”...”that which was from the beginning” does not imply that “the Word of life” was originated, or had a beginning, or came to be; for it was “that eternal life”.

- a. John is declaring his eternal pre-existence as possessed of Deity. Cf. Jno.1:1-4,10; Col.1:16,17; Jno.8:58; Heb.1:1-3,8-12; See also Gen.1:1,26.
 - b. Wherever a beginning was in view there Christ was, having been pre-existent to it. He did not “begin to be”; he essentially “was”.
 - c. Before creation he was “with God” and “was God”.
 - d. Here in 1Jno.1:1 the same thought attaches to the phrase “the beginning”.
 - e. With God or Deity there is no beginning. With him there shall be no end. The same is true with “the Word of life”.
 - f. It is not said in either Jno.1:1-3 or 1Jno.1:1,2 that “the life” then came to be, but was. Cf. Prov.8:22-31; Phil.2:6,7.
 - g. There is here no thought of life apart from a Living One – a personal being. There can be none.
 - h. That Living One was before all creation – its ground, its medium, its reason, its center of support.
 - i. In him who “was from the beginning” all things hold together. Cf. Col.1:17; Heb.1:2,3.
 - j. The created word and all that is in it is temporal, but the Word is eternal; the world came to be, had a beginning, by creation, the Word created it; the Word gives existence, past and present, to the world.
2. “Of (“concerning”, ASV) the Word of life”
- a. This does not mean the gospel of Christ, the word of God’s grace, which when preached, heard, believed and obeyed produces life. Cf. Jno.6:63; 20:30,31; Mk.16:15,16; Ac.2:36-38.
 - b. It is referring to Him who is its source, the *logos* (Jno.1:1,4,14), the complete expression of deity. Cf. Heb.1:3; Jno.1:18.
 - c. John is referring to the Word in the flesh, who is the Word of life, the 2nd person in the Godhead, the Lord himself, God’s Son, Jesus Christ.
 - d. “Of life” is in apposition to “word” and is descriptive of the Word thus designated. The prepositional phrase “of life” is frequently used by Jesus to describe his various characteristics. For instance, he is:
 - (1) “The life,” Jno.11:25; 14:6.
 - (2) “The bread of life,” Jno.6:35,48.
 - (3) “The light of life,” Jno.8:12.
 - e. He is “the Word of life” – the One in whom we have life by means of his word, the gospel of Christ, Jno.1:4; 1Jno.5:11,12,20; Jno.20:30,31; Rom.1:16,17; Jno.6:63; 1:11,12; 1Jno.2:23-25; Mk.16:15,16.

- (1) A man's word is nothing apart from him. To believe a man's word is to believe him. To doubt his word is to doubt him. To dispute his word is to insult him.
 - (2) It is even more important that we recognize this with Jesus, who is and who claimed to be God's Son, and God's authorized spokesman in this age, whose word must be believed and obeyed, Jno.1:17; Heb.1:1,2; Deut.18:18,19; Ac.3:19-23; Jno.17:8,18,20,21; 12:48-50; Heb.2:1-3; 5:8,9; 12:25.
3. "That which", the neuter relative, points to the matters concerning, pertaining to, and descriptive of Christ as the Word (the full expression) of life.

B. 2ND STAGE: THE LIFE WAS MANIFESTED IN TIME: "For the life was manifested...that eternal life, which was with the Father...was manifested unto us," V.2. Cf. Jno.1:14,18.

1. John here boldly and plainly sets forth Christ as having come into human existence and experience from the eternity of the past.
2. Having been pre-existent as "with God" and as "God", he became manifested unto us in the flesh – the Incarnate Christ – God in the flesh – both God and man.
3. From what else is said in vv.1-3, and in the rest of the Epistle, there can be no reasonable doubt that John here refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, born of the virgin Mary, overshadowed by the Holy Spirit.
4. The Divine Life was manifested – manifested to man in the only way it can be manifested – manifested to man by taking the form of man. Cf. Jno.1:14; Phil.2:5-8; Heb.2:9-18.
5. See Rom.1:1-4.

C. 3RD STAGE: THE LIFE MANIFESTED WAS PERSONALLY VERIFIED BY THE APOSTLE JOHN, ONE WHO FELLOWSHIP WAS WITH THE FATHER, AND WITH HIS SON JESUS CHRIST, VV. 1,2.

1. "That which was from the beginning...the Word of life...that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us...which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled...and bear witness," vv.1,2. Cf. Ac.1:1-8; 5:29-32; 9:15; Jno.1:14. See also Jno.1:29-34; Ac.2:32.
2. In Jno.1:14 John declared that the "Word became flesh, and dwelt among us;" here in 1Jno.1:1,2, he declares that he, himself, personally, is in

- possession of tangible, definite evidence of his reality. Thus his existence in the flesh is verified by the apostle John, the Ambassador of Jesus Christ.
3. V.2 is parenthetical and repeats the sense of V.1, revealing why John, as well as the other apostles of Christ, were able to bear witness of Jesus as “the Word of life,” as “the life,” “that eternal life,” which had been “with the Father,” but now is “manifested unto us”: They had heard, seen, looked upon, handled with their own hands.
 4. “To manifest” is to make visible in the sense of revelation; to make known matters formerly concealed.
 5. To say “the Word of life” “was with the Father” is to say he “was God” and he “was with God” in intimate, face to face (Greek, *pros*) communion with the Father.
 - a. “With,” as in Jno.1:1,2 signifies not merely an accompaniment, but a living, active relation to, and communion with the Father.
 - b. It was the intimate communion of the Son with the Father that qualified and enabled him to reveal the Father.
 - c. Jno.1:18 says: “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son (the Word that was made flesh), which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.”
 - d. This Word of life who was with the Father and then manifested to man as the Incarnate Christ is the very Son of God who revealed the Father as no impersonal word or work or mere man could do!
 - e. He did and does express the ultimate nature and will of the Father
 6. Thus John by the means specified in vv.1,2 verified the earthly existence, the reality of, “the eternal life, which was with the Father,” and then manifested unto man as the Incarnate Christ.
 - a. This at once combats one of the great errors of the Gnostics who regarded Christ as impersonal, a mere emanation.
 - b. On the contrary, John had been in a deep, intimate, personal contact with his person, which would have been an impossibility if it were as the Gnostics claimed.
 - c. One may hear a person without seeing him with his own eyes or without looking upon him, may see a person without close contemplation of his person, may behold him without handling or touching him.
 - d. But the apostle John heard him, saw him, and handled him. His testimony will stand the test!
 - e. All the apostles definitely had personal contact with; they had many infallible or positive proofs of his personal existence in the flesh as a

man both before and after his death, burial and resurrection from the dead.

- f. His resurrection from the dead of which they had positive, infallible proof, was the final, ultimate, absolute proof that Jesus of Nazareth was who he claimed to be: the Christ, the Son of God, Rom.1:1-4.

D. 4TH STATE: THE LIFE THUS PERSONALLY VERIFIED IS AUTHORITATIVELY DECLARED TO MAN BY JOHN THE INSPIRED APOSTLE AND AMBASSADOR OF JESUS CHRIST, Vv.2,3.

1. Vv.2,3: “For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and **SHOW** unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.” “That which we have seen and heard **DECLARE** we unto you.”
 - a. Here are, as Westcott eloquently remarked, “in due sequence the ideas of personal experience, responsible affirmation, and authoritative announcement.”
 - b. The latter is involved in the words, “we declare,” or “declare we unto you.”
 - c. John was one of Jesus’ chosen Ambassadors with authority to “bind and to loose,” having been given “the ministry of reconciliation,” as well as “the word of reconciliation” committed unto them – the ministry and means with which to effect it, Mt.16:19; 18:18; 2Cor.5:18-20; Jno.20:19-23; Ac.2:36-38.
 - (1) As one of these, John was fulfilling his responsibility to the saints by showing to them, declaring unto them, this vital information about “the life,” “that eternal life, which was with the Father,” and was then manifested to man as the Incarnate Christ.
2. A progression of ideas is to be noted here, each of which, in ascending order, indicates the care which John exercised in leading all readers of this Epistle to the conclusion for which the Epistle was designed – the truth concerning Jesus having come in the flesh as the Son of God.
 - a. The life was manifested (in the incarnation).
 - b. John had heard, seen and handled that life.
 - c. He was, therefore, competent to testify (bear witness) regarding it
 - d. This he was doing in showing unto them or declaring “the life, that eternal life,” which, before his advent into the world, had been, or “was with the Father.”

3. This “life” had been “with the Father” before being “manifested unto us” or prior to the incarnation, and is thus “eternal,” or “the life...that eternal life.” This stage of his existence is the 1st of four stages indicated in the Bible regarding the 2nd Person of the Godhead and points irresistibly to his deity.
 - a. The four stages are as follows:
 - (1) His pre-existence in eternity as the Word prior to creation.
 - (2) His foreshadowing in the O.T. period as the angel of Jehovah, the anticipated Messiah, as evidenced on many occasions.
 - (3) His incarnate life on earth as Jesus Christ.
 - (4) His present glorified state in heaven at the right hand of God, the Father, on the throne of David, Lk.1:30-33; Ac.2:25-36; Heb.1:1-3; Rev.3:7.

E. 5TH STAGE: THE PRE-EXISTENT LIFE MANIFESTED IN TIME, PERSONALLY VERIFIED AND AUTHORITATIVELY DECLARED TO MAN, WAS SO DECLARED WITH A DEFINITE AIM, OR TO BRING ABOUT CERTAIN RESULTS, Vv.3,4.

1. V.1 states the subject; V.2, facts about the subject; Vv.3,4, the purposes in view.
2. According to vv.3,4, the purpose of his declaring and writing was twofold.
 - a. While v.3 recalls the evidences afforded to sight and hearing as to the incarnation and manifestation of Him who is the Word of life; it also adds that “the life” was manifested not merely to reveal God in the flesh, but to provide man with the means of having fellowship with the apostles and with the Father and with the Son, in whom you have life (1Jno.5:11,12), and the promise of eternal life (1Jno.2:24,25), and or to bring the redeemed into fellowship with the Father and with the Son, through the preaching of the apostles of Christ. Cf. Jno.17:8,18,20,21; 20:19-23; Ac.2:21,36-41,47.
 - (1) This fellowship is “with the Father, and with the Son Jesus Christ.”
 - (2) This marks a distinction between the two; there are two persons or two personalities involved.
 - (3) But it also shows that the two are one in deity, or one in Godhead, not two Gods.
 - (4) Here the personal name “Jesus” is now introduced, identifying “the Word of life,” “the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us,” with the well-known person who is the Son of the Father.

- b. Then v.4 expresses the 2nd object John has for writing: “that your (“our”, ASV) joy may be full.”
 - (1) “These things were written” – they were the matters immediately referred to in vv.1-3 and, in a secondary sense, in all of the Epistle.
 - (2) “Your joy,” KJV; “Our joy,” ASV. In view of the ASV cf. 2Jno.12; 3Jno.3,4.
 - (3) Through the testimony regarding “the Word of life” (v.1) fellowship could obtain (v.3), and the effect of this fellowship was joy (v.4).

III. CONCLUSION

1. What John briefly affirms in these first three verses, he argues at length in the rest of the Epistle, and utterly destroys the Gnostic heresy from its foundation up to its superstructure.
2. His introduction leaves no doubt that the Christ was real, a genuine man of flesh and blood. He was God incarnate.
 - a. He came in the form of a brother-man. Cf. Heb.2:9-18.
 - b. In this brother-man God made himself accessible to us. He brought himself down into our lives to lift us up in fellowship with himself, 1Jno.1:2,3; Cf. Jno.6:44-47; 3:14-18,36; 5:24-26; 14:6; 2Jno.9; 1Jno.5-7; 2:22-25.
3. John, no doubt because of the heresy he is exposing and refuting in this entire Epistle, in his introduction to the Epistle (vv.1-3), put great emphasis on the concrete manifestation of “the Word of life” in the form of a human being, a human life, a man in the flesh.
 - a. Here we have set forth in clear, unmistakable terms the eye-witnessed incarnation of Christ as the basis for fellowship with the Godhead through apostolic proclamation of the Word of life manifested to us.
 - b. It was no accident that John did this. It was his desire necessitated by the need to expose and refute the Gnostic errors which were denying:
 - (1) The reality of the Incarnation of Christ.
 - (2) That God, being innately holy, could come into contact with matter, including a fleshly, material body, which the heresy claimed is essentially evil.
 - (3) Therefore, that since Christ is divine or deity, he cannot be really human and have a human body.
 - (4) That the body of Jesus was real; it was only apparent.

- (5) That Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.
- (6) That Jesus is the Son of God.

- 4. Thus John declares in his introduction and defends throughout the Epistle both the Deity and the humanity of Jesus; that he was both God and man in the flesh.
- 5. As a result of such evidence revealed and the power of the gospel by which we are saved why by faith we are baptized into Jesus Christ, and or into the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, our joy is made full, and or the apostle's joy is made full.