

John's purpose in this letter is to help give us assurance of our salvation by describing various characteristics and evidences that distinguish the children of God from the children of Satan. In this first chapter John gives us the first evidences that a person belongs to God: walking in the light and confession of sin.

John the apostle is the author the gospel of John as well as this letter, which is why both use similar language throughout. John's purpose in this letter is help us with the assurance of our salvation, as he writes towards the end of the letter: **1 John 5:13** *"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."* One key to understanding 1 John is recognizing how John repeatedly gives us evidences of how to recognize children of God and children of Satan, often using the phrase "by this we know" or similar language.

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, of the Word of life;

John begins his letter expressing his desire that we join with him and the other apostles in fellowship with God. He describes this fellowship in these first three verses.

"That which was from the beginning" - Describing the eternal nature of Christ as being God.

"which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes," - John and the other apostles interacted with Jesus, both hearing and seeing Him with their own ears and eyes.

"which we have looked upon [to look attentively], and our hands have handled" - They did not just hear and see Him from a distance as many did who gathered to hear Jesus teach, but John is describing the fellowship they had with Jesus because they "looked upon" Him and even handled Him with their hands. It is like the difference between knowing of someone and knowing them personally.

"of the Word of life" - This phrasing mirrors John's description of Jesus in his gospel: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* (John 1:1); *"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us..."* (John 1:14a). John is saying they had firsthand knowledge of Jesus Christ, recognizing Him as the Word of life. There is no eternal life outside of Christ.

² (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)

"For the life was manifested, and we have seen it" - John is stressing the validity of their fellowship because the Word of life "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14a) and John and the other apostles were witnesses of that fact.

"and bear witness, and shew unto you" - They are now bearing witness of what they saw because they want to share it with us.

"that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us" - This world is full of death, the result of sin, but Christ, the source of eternal life Who was with the Father, came to earth and was manifested so that we could have eternal life.

³ That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us" - John expresses their desire to share what they have seen and heard with us so that we may join in with the fellowship that they have been having with God.

"and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" - This fellowship is not just with the apostles, but also with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. John doesn't want to keep all this to himself but he wants others to share in it as well.

"And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full" - John knows the joy of fellowship with God through Jesus Christ and so he has written this letter so that we may also share in that joy to its fullest extent.

⁵ This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

"This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you" - Through fellowship with God, John has received a message from Him and He wants to pass it along to us. This message seems to encompass the rest of the letter as John gives us various signs or evidences that we belong to God, which all fall under the umbrella of this truth he now gives.

"that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" - John is about to give us the first evidence that a person belongs to God by establishing the truth that God is light. Since darkness is the absence of light and God is light, there can be no darkness within Him. Light symbolically refers to truth and purity while darkness refers to error and sin.

"If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth" - To walk in darkness is to walk in error (contrary to the truth of God's word) and/or in sin. Since God is light, it is a contradiction for someone claiming to be in fellowship with God to be walking in darkness. If we do so then we are lying and are in contradiction to the truth.

⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light” - In contrast to someone walking in darkness, the true Christian walks in the light because that is where God is and is illuminated by God’s truth and righteousness. The fact that we are walking in the light is evidence of the things John mentions next.

“we have fellowship one with another” - To understand this verse we have to remember the context of verse 6: “If we say we have fellowship with Him...” In this verse John is describing someone who does have fellowship with God, in contrast to the one mentioned in verse 6 who doesn’t. “Fellowship one with another” refers to God having fellowship with us and us having fellowship with Him. John is not saying that walking in the light grants us fellowship with God, but that the fact that we do have fellowship with God means that we will be walking in the light, just as God is in the light.

“and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” - This phrase confirms that John is contrasting a true believer vs. an unbeliever and not just a backslider. Walking in the light is an evidence that the blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed us from all sin. Walking in the light does not save us – it is an evidence that we have been saved.

⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

Another evidence that we belong to God is the admission and confession of sin.

“If we say that we have no sin” - John could either be talking about a belief that we have attained a state of sinless perfection or a refusal to admit that we have committed a sin.

“we deceive ourselves” - Anyone who thinks they have attained a state of sinless perfection is instead in a state of self-deception and is in denial of the truth. Until we have been set free from our sinful bodies, we will always have to deal with sin. After describing his struggle with the sinfulness of his flesh, the apostle Paul says in **Rom. 7:22-24** *“²² For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: ²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”*

On the other hand, if we are refusing to admit that we have sinned then we are deceiving ourselves if we think that we will succeed in covering them up. **Prov. 28:13** *“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”*

“and the truth is not in us” - A belief in sinful perfection is a denial of the truth. A refusal to admit that we sin is to embrace a lie.

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Thankfully God doesn’t cast us away when we sin after we have been saved. If we come clean with God about our sin, He will forgive. Confession of our sin is an evidence that we belong to God, for it means that we hate our sin just like He does and want to be rid of it. The word “confess” means “to say the same thing” and so confession means that we agree with God about our sin. John says that if we confess our sins, God is:

- **faithful to forgive** – He will not turn away from us but will always forgive.
- **just to forgive** – God does not sweep our sins “under the rug” or deal “under the table” to remove our sins. God’s holiness requires Him to deal with sin and He would be unjust to ignore our sin. However He is just to forgive our sins because they have already been paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ. Thus He is able to both forgive us and to cleanse us from all our unrighteousness while maintaining His own righteousness.

¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

To hold to the idea that we’ve attained a state of sinful perfection or to refuse to confess our sin is to make God a liar because He testifies that we do sin. Claiming that we have not sinned demonstrates that God’s word is not in us, for His word testifies to our sinfulness. Denying what God’s word says about them is evidence that a person is not saved.

Psalm 14:2-3 *“² The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. ³ They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”*

Psalm 51:5 *“Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.”*

Psalm 130:3 *“If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?”*

Isa. 53:6 *“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”*

Rom. 3:23 *“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;”*

John’s discussion on the topic of sin continues through chapter 2, verse 2. After saying that we all sin, in 1 John 2:1 he tells us that the goal is to not sin, but if we do sin then God has provided a solution. That solution is Jesus Christ, Who is our advocate and the propitiation [to appease; to satisfy] for our sins.