



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; (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;) 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. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. 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. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: 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. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:1-10)*

The Collect
Christmas

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin; Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit ever, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

Once again, God, in His Holy Word, makes reference to the beginning. The beginning is a popular perspective of that gracious and well-beloved disciple, John. He begins His Gospel with a discussion of the 'beginning' and he introduces his epistle here with a like reference. He knows that we must know our beginning before we can make provision for our ending. We have already discussed how God relates to the beginning: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. (John 1:1-4)* Please note that John closely associates the beginning with light for, without light, there could be no living

thing. Moreover, light was the first element God called into being in the earth. But Light was not physically created for the first moment at Creation, for God is Light and has existed from Eternity Past. He spoke light into being in our world as a prerequisite for His creation of life on earth. Christ was the executive Person of the Trinity at Creation and Light must exist wherever He walks (for Christ is the Light of the world).

John opens his epistle with a gracious greeting and invitation. Having known the grace of Christ, and the comfort and security to be had therein, he invites us, as well, to know that same grace and fellowship. It is the heart's desire of every man, woman, and child who belongs to Christ – that others come to Him as well for the Waters of Life and the Bread of Heaven.

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 would have us understand the depth of his testimony as an Apostle of Christ. He informs of the progressive revelation of Christ to himself and others during His earthly ministry. At the first, John sets forth the fact that Christ was 'from the beginning' but NOT the BEGINNING - for Christ precedes the beginning in Eternity. John tells us that first in revelation was the HEARING of Christ. The hearing of the Gospel is the beginning of faith: *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* (Romans 10:17) Next, John has witnessed the very face of Christ in a real way. Once Christ is looked upon in faith, there will be no forgetting His beautiful countenance. We have that very privilege in our labors and love to see the face of Christ in so many ways – the tender face of a child, the music that lifts our souls to higher heavens, and great art masterpieces that are created to replicate the beauty of God's Creation. An example would be Handel's Messiah. Handel was unsuccessful in his efforts to establish his career in music until age 54 at which time Jonathan Swift asked him to compose this wonderful work of musical praise to God. The proceeds were donated to charity as it debuted in 1742. It took Handel only twenty-four days of intense composition, locked away in his private study. On the 24th day, his servant broke into Handel's study believing that something was wrong. Handel had just added the last note to the Hallelujah chorus and stood with tears brimming his eyes. The servant asked him if he was ill to which Handel responded, I feel I have just looked upon the face of God! and perhaps he had!

Observe the building revelation of Christ that John recounts. Hearing came first. Perhaps John recalled that most precious moment of his memory when he labored on his father's ship by the coast of the Sea of Galilee and heard, while his ears were yet tender with age and able to hear clearly, that beckoning voice that never let him go: *And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.* (Matt 4:18-22)

Next, John tells us of his having SEEN Christ and all that He did. He saw the woman with an issue of blood healed by a touch, the little daughter of Jairus raised from the dead (as well as Lazarus), the lepers healed, and sight restored to the blind. He saw all of these things but, more importantly, he saw Christ. Next in the unfolding revelation is the touch of Christ which John has sensed. His old memory returns to the Upper Room where his young head rested on the bosom of Christ. I have no doubt that John's head rests there today. So, the revelation of Christ to a believer is progressive: hearing, seeing, feeling, touching. Have you had these experiences?

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. John tells us that Christ is

the Word of Life (the same Word made mention of in John 1:1). There was bodily life in Christ just as is in all men, but that Life which is in Christ is more than that – it is eternal life which He makes available to all who are called and chosen as was John. Christ was with the Father before the worlds were made. But He came down from glory to a dark and dying world to make known to us that eternal life available in Him.

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. Please note the gracious love expressed here by John. It is the same kind of all-embracing love that every believer should have for those who have not known – who have not heard – of the blessed Gospel of Christ. John desires our souls to be saved by the same Lord who has saved him. If we have believing fellowship with a fellow Christian, that fellowship will rise to that with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. If we are One with Christ and He is One with the Father, then we shall be One with all who believe. The One is existent in the Father Himself.

And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. The more we know of Christ, the greater is our joy. If we are unjoyful in Christ, it is because we have known little of Him. So we are counseled to study diligently from the Scriptures that testify of Him and prove all things thereby that we cannot be deceived by the cunning of false professors. My wife invited me to lunch at a local restaurant. So I took a break from writing and went with her. As I was eating my meal, my mind wondered back to this text of today. My heart was simply melted to suddenly reflect on John's words and how he must have felt when he remembered that first call of Christ in his youth by Galilee. My eyes moistened with tears to think of it. That is a consoling joy that no one at the other tables could have known at the moment.

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. I am quite sure that you have heard me speak enough already of light, but I must address the matter since it is at hand. If we have heard the truth of God, we must share that truth, for truth is light, too. *It is the function of a living Church to be a light in a dark world. In order that we may determine in what sense the disciples of Christ are lights, let us read two cognate scriptures, one in the Old Testament, and the other in the New: 'Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.'* (Isaiah 60:1,2) *That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the Word of Life.'* (Phil 2:15,16)

From these texts we learn clearly that renewed men are first receivers of light; and then givers. They are not the source whence the light springs, but channels through which it is distributed. The Lord alone is the Light of the World; but He has been pleased to arrange his covenant so that those who receive his beams also spread them. It is so arranged also in the material world. Not much of the light which guides us in life comes in direct lines from the sun: most of it reaches us at second hand, reflected from surrounding objects. Thus in the spiritual sphere, the glory of the Lord arises and shines on Israel; then and therefore Israel is expected to arise and reflect the light around to attract the Gentiles. The Philippian converts, walking in the Light of God, are expected to shine among the heathen as lights. They are not rays, but reflectors; they give out with more or less of the truth and fullness, the light they receive from the Sun of Righteousness after He has risen upon them. (Rev William Arnot, *Lesser Parables of our Lord*, 1884)

If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. We cannot truly have fellowship with Christ and continue in our old, dark ways. If we say we are Christians and walk after the manner of heathen, we are NOT Christians but hypocrites. Are Christians too sterile today to judge between apples and oranges of faith?

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. Where light is found, there can be no darkness for light and darkness are not compatible. Darkness is no force at all. It is simply the absence of light. If we walk in the Light of Christ, and have fellowship with one another of like minds, we cannot help but be truly washed clean from all sin by His blood. I have a wonderful adopted daughter named Soyeon. She is an excellent example of a young and pure virgin. She has excelled in her studies and lived a life commendable before God and man. Now she must go away to University. She is worried that she may make church friends that are Christians in name only. So, we chatted a few moments ago and I counseled her to know well those people whom she selects as friends before she ever calls them friends. They must first be brothers and sisters in Christ and walk in the light in order to be friends in fellowship. Amazingly, she agreed!

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. Have we heard the proud comment: Oh, I have no sin. I am holy and perfect since my sins were forgiven? Rubbish! Certainly a Christian should attempt to lead a Holy life and one satisfying to God; however, just as many prophets before us, and Apostles of Christ, have done, we may commit sins of un-intention. We are not perfect, but we ARE being PERFECTED through the process of sanctification.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. John is speaking to the choir here. He is writing to fellow believers. Naturally, he hopes his words may fall on believing ears of the heathen as well, but, primarily, his words are for us. We say the Confession at each service in our daily and weekly service. Those sins for which we seek forgiveness in the General Confession are both sins of commission as well as sins of omission. Regardless the earnest effort to the contrary, we shall sometimes sin for which we must seek forgiveness. Do not make God a liar by denying that you have sinned. *Let GOD be true and every man a liar!* (Romans 3:4b)