

## **1:1 *We Have Seen the Word of Life***

### **THE GENERATION OF THE SON HAS NO BEGINNING.**

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: When the elder wrote this, he was explaining that the principle of generation is not separate from the principle of creation. For when he says “which was from the beginning” he is referring to the generation of the Son which has no beginning, because he exists coeternally with the Father. Therefore the word was signifies eternity, just as the Word himself, that is, the Son, which is one with the Father in equality of substance, is eternal and unmade. When he says that “our hands touched the Word of life,” he means not merely the Son’s flesh but his power as well. One tradition has it that when the disciple touched Christ’s physical body he put his hand right inside and was not stopped by the hardness of the flesh from doing so, because the flesh made way for the disciple’s hand. ADUMBRATIONS.

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### **VARIOUS HYPOTHESES.**

DIDYMUS THE BLIND: Many think that these words apply to the postresurrection appearances of Jesus and say that John is speaking of himself and the other disciples who first of all heard that the Lord had risen and afterwards saw him with their own eyes, to the point where they touched his feet, his hands and his side and felt the imprint of the nails. For even if Thomas was the only one who actually made physical contact with him, he was representative of the others, for the Savior told them all to touch him and see for themselves. <sup>2</sup> But others take these words in a deeper sense, noting that they do not simply speak about touching but also about handling the “word of life which was from the beginning.” Who can this refer to, other than to the one who said: “I am that I am”? <sup>3</sup> Another interpretation is that we have now seen openly with our own eyes the one who was in the beginning, of whom the law and the prophets spoke, saying that he would come. He has indeed come and was seen in the flesh, and after much handling of the scriptural texts which bear witness to him, this is what we believe about the Word of life. COMMENTARY ON 1 JOHN.<sup>4</sup>

### **THE CENTRAL THEME—LOVE.**

AUGUSTINE: This book is very sweet to every healthy Christian heart that savors the bread of God, and it should constantly be in the mind of God’s holy church. But I choose it more particularly because what it specially commends to us is love. The person who possesses the thing which he hears about in this epistle must rejoice when he hears it. His reading will be like oil to a flame. For others, the epistle should be like

flame set to firewood; if it was not already burning, the touch of the word may kindle it. TEN HOMILIES ON 1 JOHN, PROLOGUE.<sup>5</sup>

#### **WHAT ALWAYS EXISTED.**

PETER CHRYSOLOGUS: How can you believe that what always existed took a beginning later on? SERMONS 57.<sup>6</sup>

#### **SEEN AND TOUCHED.**

SEVERUS OF ANTIOCH: Given that this same John also said, “No one has ever seen God,” <sup>7</sup> how can he assure us that the living Word of life has been seen and touched? It is clear that it was in his incarnate and human form that he was visible and touchable. What was not true of him by nature became true of him in that way, for he is one and the same indivisible Word, both visible and invisible, and without diminishing in either respect he became touchable in both his divine-human nature. For he worked his miracles in his divinity and suffered for us in his humanity. CATENA.<sup>8</sup>

#### **WHAT HAS BEEN FROM THE BEGINNING.**

OECUMENIUS: John writes this against both the Jews and the Greeks, because they were protesting that the mystery which has appeared among us is too new to be taken seriously. He therefore answers them by saying that in fact it is very old and has been there from the beginning. It is higher than the law and even higher than the creation itself, because while creation has a beginning this was there already.

COMMENTARY ON 1 JOHN.<sup>11</sup>

#### **WE HAVE TOUCHED THE WORD OF LIFE.**

THEOPHYLACT: When John talks about having seen this life, he means that the disciples understood its meaning, and when he says that they touched it, he means that they had investigated it thoroughly.

COMMENTARY ON 1 JOHN.<sup>12</sup>

### ***1:2 We Proclaim to You Eternal Life***

#### **WE SAW IT.**

DIDYMUS THE BLIND: Note that there is an important difference between seeing and contemplating. For what is seen can be told to others, which is not always possible with things which are contemplated. For

there are many things which may be perfectly well contemplated but which cannot be expressed in words because they are known by some ineffable understanding. In this verse it should be noticed that those who are bearing witness are not validating the life of Jesus but improving themselves by their confession. COMMENTARY ON 1 JOHN.<sup>14</sup>

**THE LIFE WAS MADE MANIFEST.**

AUGUSTINE: The life itself has been manifested in flesh, so that what can be seen by the heart alone might be seen also by the eyes, in order that hearts might be healed. TEN HOMILIES ON 1 JOHN 1.1.<sup>15</sup>

**THE SAME FLESH CRUCIFIED.**

ANDREAS: John says this with reference to the close union of the Word with the flesh. Or perhaps he says this with reference to the resurrection, considering the way in which it was made known to the apostles by the action of Thomas. That proved that Christ rose again with the same flesh in which he had been crucified. CATENA.<sup>16</sup>

**1:3 *We Also Proclaim to You***

**FELLOWSHIP WITH US.**

HILARY OF ARLES: Our fellowship is in the unity of our faith here on earth and in the eternal dwelling place of God in heaven. INTRODUCTORY COMMENTARY ON 1 JOHN.<sup>19</sup>

**WITH THE FATHER AND HIS SON.**

ANDREAS: What did they proclaim, but that eternal life has appeared to us and that we have become witnesses of it? What you gain from this proclamation is the right to share this experience with us. For the one who is in fellowship with us has fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ, and since you share in the same fellowship, we shall all have joy together, in that we have been united to God. CATENA.<sup>20</sup>

## **1:4 *Bringing Our Joy to Perfection***

### **SHARING IN THIS JOY.**

AUGUSTINE: The disciples saw the Lord in the flesh, and they heard his words, which they made known to us. We have also heard but have not seen. Are we less happy than they, who both saw and heard? No, for John goes on to say that the reason for his preaching is that we might share in their fellowship. TEN HOMILIES ON 1 JOHN 1.3.22

### **THAT OUR JOY MAY BE COMPLETE.**

HILARY OF ARLES: The fullness of joy comes when we are in fellowship with the apostles, as well as of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. INTRODUCTORY COMMENTARY ON 1 JOHN.23

### **THE SOWER IS HAPPY TO HAVE REAPERS.**

THEOPHYLACT: John says that having his hearers as fellow participants in the grace of eternal life will make him and the other disciples happy in the same way that a sower is happy to have the reapers alongside him on the day of harvest. COMMENTARY ON 1 JOHN.25

## **1:5 *God Is Light***

### **THE ESSENCE OF GOD.**

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: John is not defining the essence of God, but desiring to declare his majesty, God has adapted something belonging to divinity and used it to suit his purpose. Paul also calls God “unapproachable light.” 1 ADUMBRATIONS.2

### **THE SON IS THE BRIGHTNESS OF THAT LIGHT.**

ORIGEN: God is light, according to John. The only-begotten Son therefore is the brightness of that light, proceeding from God without separation, as brightness from light, and lightening the whole creation. ON FIRST PRINCIPLES 1.2.7.3

### **THIS MESSAGE PROCLAIMED TO YOU.**

DIDYMUS THE BLIND: John wrote that the proclamation, by which it was stated that God is light, with no shadows in him at all, was made by the Savior himself to his disciples. Now he is sharing it with his readers so that they too might believe the same thing about God. COMMENTARY ON 1 JOHN.4

### **IN HIM IS NO DARKNESS.**

JEROME: When John says that there is no darkness in the light of God, he proves that all the lights of others are stained by some blemish. AGAINST THE PELAGIANS 2.7.5

### **NOT SEEN BY BODILY EYES.**

AUGUSTINE: God is the light of purified minds, not of these bodily eyes. For then 6 the mind will be able to see that light, which right now it is not yet able to do. LETTERS 92.7

### **THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE.**

ANDREAS: What is this message.? It is that eternal life has appeared to us. For the Father so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, and this is what we proclaim to you—that the Word of God who has come into the world and become a man is both God and light. CATENA.8

### **IMPARTING BRIGHTNESS TO YOU.**

SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN: Let no one deceive you. God is light, and to those who have entered into union with him, he imparts of his own brightness to the extent that they have been purified. DISCOURSES 15.3.11

## ***1:6 Light and Darkness Do Not Mix***

### **WE LIE.**

IRENAEUS: A lie has no fellowship with the truth, any more than light with darkness. The presence of one excludes the other. AGAINST HERESIES 3.5.1.12

### **WALKING ACCORDING TO TRUTH.**

HILARY OF ARLES: The truth is light, so if we do not walk according to it, we are in the dark. INTRODUCTORY COMMENTARY ON 1 JOHN.13

### **WHILE WE WALK IN DARKNESS.**

ANDREAS: John says that if we sin we have no fellowship with God, but if we do the works of light, then we have fellowship with one another. CATENA.<sup>14</sup>

### **SEEMING TO BE IN GOD.**

SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN: See to it, brothers, that while we seem to be in God and think that we have communion with him, we should not be found excluded and separated from him, since we do not now see his light. DISCOURSES 33.2.<sup>16</sup>

## ***1:7 Walking in the Light***

### **THE BLOOD OF JESUS CLEANSSES.**

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: God's teaching is here called blood. ADUMBRATIONS. <sup>17</sup> CLEANSING FROM ALL SIN. HILARY OF ARLES: The blood of animal sacrifices was enough to cleanse people from whatever particular sin they had committed, but the blood of Christ is sufficient to cleanse those who walk in love from all sin. INTRODUCTORY COMMENTARY ON 1 JOHN.<sup>18</sup>

## ***1:8 We Are All Sinners***

### **ENLIGHTENED BY GOD.**

DIDYMUS THE BLIND: Since God is light, there is no darkness in him at all, and he has nothing to do with darkness. The person who is enlightened by his light walks in the light, according to the words of the Savior himself: "While you have the light, walk in the light, lest the darkness take hold of you." <sup>20</sup> Anyone who walks in the darkness of sin but claims that his mind is not darkened and that he has a relationship with God is lying. COMMENTARY ON 1 JOHN.<sup>21</sup>

### **DECEIVING YOURSELF.**

HILARY OF ARLES: If you say that you are not a sinner but act otherwise, you are deceiving yourself. INTRODUCTORY COMMENTARY ON 1 JOHN.<sup>24</sup>

## **CRUCIFYING CHRIST.**

ANDREAS: This is how John describes the Jews who dared to say: “Let his blood be upon us and upon our children,”<sup>25</sup> as if they could crucify Christ without being sinners. If we say such things, we deceive ourselves. CATENA.<sup>26</sup>

## **1:9 *God Forgives Those Who Confess Their Sins***

### **IF WE CONFESS.**

CYPRIAN: In his epistle John has combined the fact that we should entreat God for our sins and that we should obtain mercy when we do so. THE LORD’S PRAYER 22.<sup>29</sup>

### **HE WILL FORGIVE AND CLEANSE US.**

ANDREAS: If we acknowledge our sin and confess it, he will forgive it, and not only that one but all our sins. For when a person repents and is baptized into the name of Jesus Christ, God forgives all his sins which he has committed both against himself and against heaven. CATENA.<sup>30</sup>

### **GOD IS FAITHFUL AND JUST.**

OECUMENIUS: To say that God is faithful means that he is reliable, for faithful is a word which is not just applied to those who believe but also to those who can be relied upon. It is in this second sense that it is applied to God. He is also just in that he does not refuse anyone who comes to him, however seriously they may have sinned. COMMENTARY ON 1 JOHN.<sup>33</sup>

## **1:10 *If We Say We Have Not Sinned***

### **DISTINGUISHING SMALL LAPSES FROM MORTAL SINS.**

JOHN CASSIAN: Among holy men it is impossible not to fall into those small lapses which occur because of something said, some thought, some surreptitious act. These sins are quite different from those which are called mortal, but they are not without blame or reproach. CONFERENCE 11.9.<sup>34</sup>

## **NONE SINLESS.**

AUGUSTINE: Who is there on earth without sin? Even a baby has contracted it from its parents. SERMONS 181.1.35

## **WE MAKE HIM A LIAR.**

ANDREAS: If we say that we have not sinned, we reject his word, which is spirit and life. <sup>36</sup> CATENA.<sup>37</sup>

## **2:1 *An Advocate with the Father***

### **SON AND SPIRIT.**

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: For just as the Lord is an advocate on our behalf before the Father, so also there is an advocate whom he deigned to send after his ascension. ADUMBRATIONS.<sup>1</sup>

### **GOD'S POWER FLOWS.**

ORIGEN: How could Jesus have become an advocate and propitiation without the power of God which completely destroys our weakness, a power furnished by Jesus which flows in the souls of believers? COMMENTARY ON JOHN 1.241.2

### **COMFORTER AND INTERCESSOR.**

ORIGEN: Let us consider whether the title advocate (“paraclete”) means one thing when applied to the Savior and another when applied to the Holy Spirit. <sup>3</sup> In regard to the Savior “paraclete” seems to mean intercessor, for in Greek it bears both meanings, comforter and intercessor, but according to the phrase which follows, in which it is said that he is the propitiation for our sins, it seems that it must mean intercessor, because he intercedes with the Father for our sins. When used of the Holy Spirit, however, the word paraclete ought to be understood as comforter, because he provides comfort for the souls to whom he opens and reveals a consciousness of spiritual knowledge. ON FIRST PRINCIPLES 2.7.4.4

### **THE MEANING OF HIS ADVOCACY.**

GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS: We have an advocate, Jesus Christ, not indeed someone who prostrates himself before the Father on our behalf—such an idea is slavish and unworthy of the Spirit! It would be unworthy of the Father to require this, as also for the Son to submit to it, nor is it right to think such things of God.



But by what he suffered as man, he as the Word and counselor persuades the Father to be patient with us. I think this is the meaning of his advocacy. THEOLOGICAL ORATIONS 30.14.<sup>5</sup>

#### **GLORY IN HIS ADVOCACY.**

AMBROSE OF MILAN: I will not glory because I have been redeemed. I will not glory because I am free of sins but because sins have been forgiven me. I will not glory because I am profitable or because anyone is profitable to me but because Christ is an advocate on my behalf before the Father, because the blood of Christ has been poured out on my behalf. ON JACOB AND THE HAPPY LIFE 6.21.<sup>6</sup>

#### **YOUR ADVOCATE BECOMES THE JUDGE.**

AUGUSTINE: If you should have a case to be tried before a judge and should procure an advocate, you would be accepted by the lawyer and he would plead your case to the best of his ability. If, before he has finished his plea, you should hear that he is to be the judge, how you would rejoice, because he could be your judge, who shortly before was your lawyer. SERMONS 213.5.<sup>7</sup>

#### **JUDGE AND ADVOCATE.**

MAXIMUS OF TURIN: Christ is a judge when he sits and an advocate when he rises. It is clear that he was a judge to Jews <sup>8</sup> but arises as an advocate for Christians. On the one hand, standing before the Father of the Christians, even though they are sinners, he pleads their cause, while on the other he sits with the Father of the Pharisees, who are persecutors, condemning their sins. Angry with the ones, he wreaks harsh vengeance on them, while he gently has mercy on the others, interceding on their behalf. SERMONS 40.3.<sup>9</sup>

#### **THAT YOU MAY NOT SIN.**

ANDREAS: John knows that those who have been enlightened have not been given an impassible nature, but neither have they been let out of prison in order that they might sin. CATENA.<sup>12</sup>

#### **THE POWER TO FORGIVE SINS.**

OECUMENIUS: John calls Jesus our advocate because it is he who prays to the Father for us. In saying this he is speaking in a human way and within a human context, just as elsewhere he says: "The Son can do nothing by himself."<sup>14</sup> He puts it this way so that the Son will not appear to be the Father's opponent. For that the Son has the power to forgive sins is clear from the case of the paralytic,<sup>15</sup> and by giving his disciples the power to forgive sins, he shows that he can also share his power with others.<sup>16</sup> COMMENTARY ON 1 JOHN.<sup>17</sup>

## **2:2 *The Expiation for Our Sins***

### **NOT FOR OURS ONLY.**

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: Christ saves from all sin. He converts some by punishing them and others by their own free will and with the dignity of honor. ADUMBRATIONS.<sup>18</sup>

### **FOR THE WHOLE WORLD.**

HILARY OF ARLES: When John says that Christ died for the sins of the “whole world,” what he means is that he died for the whole church. INTRODUCTORY COMMENTARY ON 1 JOHN.<sup>19</sup>

### **DO NOT REMAIN IN SIN.**

ANDREAS: John is saying: “I am writing these things to you, not so that you may say that you no longer sin at all, but so that when you do sin, you will not remain in that state, for Jesus propitiates your sins in the Father’s presence” CATENA.<sup>20</sup>