

# (1 John #1) Foundational Facts

by J. Glyn Owen

---

*J. Glyn Owen's sermon emphasizes the foundational facts of Christian faith, particularly the reality of the incarnation and the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ.*

**Duration:** 38:01

**Scripture:** 1 John 1:1

**Topics:** "Christian Life"

---

## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the foundational fact of Christianity. He reads from 1 John 1:1-2 and extracts two main thoughts from the passage. The first thought is that there has been a divine action or revelation by God, which the apostles have witnessed and experienced firsthand. The second thought is that Christianity is not just a belief system, but a belief in something that God has done. The speaker emphasizes the importance of both believing in the revelation of God and obeying His commandments in living out the Christian faith.

---

## Transcript

Something that was not given to anybody else, who was not initiated into their little group. So that the key to an understanding of the universe and its meaning of God and religious matters is to be found. Join our group.

Be initiated into our community and we will share with you this esoteric knowledge that we ourselves have. The other thread is this. They believed that matter was essentially evil.

The universe is evil, the world, all material things, the body is evil, essentially evil. Everything that is material is tinged and shot through with evil. Therefore, you can only be perfect, using that word perfection not in its absolute form now.

That you can only have a semblance of perfection in the mind, in the thought, in what you believe. And on that account they said that behavior doesn't matter, you can behave very much as you like, provided you believe the right things. You will see that in the body of his epistle, John tackles the whole thing positively.

He doesn't divulge, he doesn't dissect all this, but he answers the problems they raise. He says that if you're a Christian man, you will believe certain things that God has revealed. And among the things you will believe will be this, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

But not only will you believe, you will also obey the commandments. You will do, you will live as God requires of you. And what is more, says John, you will love, especially the people of God.

Now, I can summarize all that up by saying this, putting it in this way. Whatever this Gnosticism stood for, it had first of all attacked the basis of Christian belief. And then it had attacked the subjective experience of Christians.

The objective facts and the subjective experience. You can't shake the facts, or men's faith in the facts, without shaking their faith in due course. They attacked the facts, of course, primarily at this point.

If matter is essentially evil, then how could the eternal Son of God ever have come to live in a body? The thing is impossible. If that presupposition is right, that matter is altogether and essentially evil, it is incomprehensible that the eternal God, the God who is light and in whom is no darkness at all, that He or His co-equal Son, Jesus Christ, should come and live in, and tabernacle in, as John says in his Gospel, a body of human flesh. Therefore, you see, this Gnosticism attacked the main artery of our Christian faith.

It raised a question mark concerning the real incarnation of the unseen and invisible and eternal God. If this is right, we still don't know who God is or what He is. There could have been no incarnation.

And if there was no incarnation, there was no Calvary of any significance. And if there was no Calvary, there can be no forgiveness of sins for us. There can be no hope of the resurrection for us.

Our faith is vain. We are yet in our sins, as Paul, in a different context, tells the Corinthian people. Now, John faces all this.

And I trust that as we think some of the apostles' inspired thoughts after him, that the Lord will help us to see again how firm a foundation is laid for us in the Word of God and in what God has done in His Son, and made known to us by chosen witnesses of the life and death and resurrection of our Lord and by His inspired Word. Now, this morning, we can only take one strand of thought from the opening words of this delightful epistle. I want to speak this morning about the foundational fact.

Against the background which we have very briefly referred to now, I want to read verses 1 and 2 again, and then to extract two main thoughts, two very relevant points from here. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard. John is referring, of course, to the apostles now.

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 show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us. Now, I said I wanted to turn to two strands of thought there.

There are two counterparts, two sides of the one coin. It is evident from the reading of my text this morning that John doesn't think exactly as other writers of the New Testament think. That is, the process of thinking is not quite the same.

The apostle Paul, generally, not always, he has a lot of diversions, a lot of things said in parentheses. But Paul generally takes a subject and he proceeds to expound it logically, leading from one point to another. And if you are a logician and you are a Christian, you may almost know in advance which way Paul is going.

Because he is so logical, so reasonable, and when he has established his first principles, you know the way he is going. You don't know which way John is going. John's habit is quite different.

John will take one little thought and then he'll say something about it, and then he'll leave it, and he'll go on to something else. But he'll take up that same thought again and he'll say something more about it, and then he'll drop it. And then he'll go on and say something again, something different, and he'll come back to the same original thought the third time, as he does with the tests of faith here.

And he will enlarge and he will have said different things about it in the first context, in the second context, in the third context. Now that's why coming to these first two verses is not easy, and we've got to extract the main threads for our prophet this morning. Two things here.

First of all, the fact in relation to the fact that lies at the basis of our Christian faith. The first is, there has been a divine action, which John calls a manifestation or a revelation, Secondly, what God has manifested or disclosed or revealed, John says, we have apprehended. We have seen, we have heard, we have touched.

Now this may sound very elementary, but I want to assure you this morning it is very fundamental. Our Christian faith is grounded upon the fact that God has done something. And the thing that John says God has done here is to manifest something that was eternal, and which we would never have known about had not God revealed it or disclosed it.

Now let me just take three threads out of this passage, and you'll see what John is referring to. He begins by saying, or rather by referring to, that which was from the beginning. Then later on he says, the life was manifested.

And then at the end of verse two he says, the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us, so and so. Now, what is he referring to? Well, he's referring to something very special. He speaks of it here as the eternal life, which was with the Father.

Now, what does he have in mind? John may have in mind, first of all, just life itself, but particularly as it was embodied in the person of God's Son, who said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. Who said that he had life in himself and is the author of life. The gospel starts by saying in him was life, and the life was the light of men.

The same gospel says that by him all things were made, and without him there was nothing made that was made. All things were made by him. You see, life was in him, and eternal life was in him.

Now, whether we think of the person of Jesus Christ, or the provision of eternal life that comes to us only through him, what John wants to say is this. It, or he, existed before time began. Now, this is challenging to our thoughts, but let's grasp it because it's so important.

That which was from the beginning, when creation came into existence, this was already there. When the sons of God danced and sang for joy at the creation of the universe, this was already there. What is it? The Son was in the bosom of the Father, and eternal life was in the Son, but no man, no creature knew about it.

Eternal life was in God, Father and Son, in eternity, but no man knew anything about it. We didn't know what the life of God was like. We couldn't see, we couldn't hear, we couldn't perish that, even if we were

there.

But now, says John, that which was from the very beginning of things has been manifested. It has been revealed. There has been a great apocalypse and a manifestation.

The unseen God and the unseen Son of God, the eternal, has come right into this scene of space and of time, and He has revealed to us the life which was in God from the very beginning, and the kind of life that the gospel offers to sinners. Now, John will go on, of course, later in this very chapter to talk about that. He will say that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all, and the kind of life that we must have if we are to have fellowship with God is a life that has a kinship with His.

And how do we know the life of God? Well, it's been manifested. It's been manifested. Now, the event, of course, to which John is referring here is the event of the incarnation.

There is no need to enlarge upon that. It is that which took place when, conceived of the Holy Ghost, Jesus became a babe of Bethlehem, or in Bethlehem. When Jesus of Nazareth was born, the unseen God assumed our humanity to His deity and became visible.

But He said, they that have seen Me have seen the Father. Have you ever pondered over that? They that have seen Me, says Jesus of Nazareth, they have seen the Father, for the Father is in Me. I and the Father are one.

Now, that then is the event. Paul puts his response in terms of a sense of wonder in these words. He corrects as far as the mystery of godliness.

One of the elements is this God manifest in the flesh. All right, there it is in principle. There is the dogmatic statement.

He's been revealed. The Word, the eternal life was manifest. And then, please don't miss this, the end of verse 2, and was manifested to us.

God was manifested generally to all those who were around, but very particularly, says the apostle John, to us. Who is he referring to? I believe he's referring very especially there to the apostles, the twelve who were called. What a privilege this was.

You know, we may treat it as commonplace. Jesus of Nazareth going to the Sea of Galilee and seeing two men about their boats and saying, come and follow me and I will make you to become fishers of men. A very simple thing.

Don't you believe it? When he summoned them to be with him, he was inviting them to become the chosen witnesses of what God would be like in the flesh. Of what he would say, and of what he would do, and of what he would be, and of what he would promise. He's asking them, and he's asking every other fellow that he's going to gather around himself in due course, to come and at close hand, to behold him, to see him, to listen to him, to hear him, and to feel the touch of his hand, and to know what it is for God to come near.

In a way which, of course, is wholly unique, for the incarnation is unrepeatable. So he was manifested generally, says John, but he was manifested particularly to us. That's why, you see, we've always got to go back to the writings of the apostles.

Oh, you read modern literature. I try to do it myself. Read everything that is good.

But ultimately, you and I have got to get back to the rock bottom of things. To the sources, the real, the ultimate sources of our Christian faith. Who are they? The men who were with the Master.

Those that walked with him. Those that talked with him. Those that lived with him.

Those that saw him. Those that were there. You can never dispense with the gospels.

If your faith is getting a little slack and a little weak, I suggest to you, my dear friend, put everything else aside for a couple of weeks and just read the gospels and hear what these witnesses are saying about their Master. The eternal life which was eternal in God and in his Son has been manifested and manifested unto us. We depend upon that manifestation or revelation.

But now, the other thread. Now let's turn the coin around. You will ask, I'm sure, as anybody else will ask, how could John be so sure? How could he be so sure that the Son of God was the person he claimed to be? How can you be so sure that the God who did these remarkable things to which you refer, the God who is holy, the God who is light and the God who is life and the God who is love, how can you be so sure that he lived? It's incomprehensible.

We can't believe it. Now John comes to it. Listen to what he says.

And now, this first verse has new meaning for us. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our own hands, the apostles' apprehension of that which God has done in the revelation of his own eternal life. Corresponding to the divine act and the manifestation of the word of life, then, we note this clear, unequivocal apprehension of that by John and his fellow apostles.

You see, Christianity is no bare philosophy. It isn't just a belief in mid-air. It isn't anything of that kind.

Not just a few threads of thought held together as an idea. Christianity says that God has done something. And it invites us to come and believe that and to rest upon that and then to know the fruit of it in our own lives.

Therefore, it is so important that what God has done should be seen by us to be full proof. That the witnesses bearing their testimony should be seen to be genuine. And the question that we want to pose to John is this.

Are you sure that this person who spoke as he did, who acted as he did, as Jesus did, are you sure that he was a real person? Was he no phantom? Some of the Gnostics said that Jesus was but an ordinary child of Joseph and Mary. And though it is true that the Logos came upon him for a little time and between his baptism and between his death made something out of him, he was not divine. He was not God incarnate.

The question we want to put to John is this. Having testified in your gospel to the Lord Jesus Christ and given the signs that point to his deity, the gospel was written that men may believe. Now, are you yourself sure that you were dealing with a real person in flesh? John assures us.

The incarnation was real and it was historical. He's not talking about a dream. He's not talking about a hallucination.

He's talking about a real event in history. And he says, I'm so sure of it, I want to tell you how I was listening to him or we were listening to him, how we saw him, and how we touched him. What John is doing here, you see, is this.

He is saying that the three cardinal senses, the sense of hearing, the sense of sight, and the sense of touch, were all involved in the assurance that he is now passing on. To quote a word from Peter, we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We were eyewitnesses.

We lived with him. Or, coming back to John, we heard, we saw, and we touched. Now let's look at this for a moment.

Let's look at the first. That which we have heard. It's so difficult for us from this vantage point in the 20th century to get the thrill of this.

All that you read in the Gospels and much else, John tells us that if everything was written that could be written, well, the libraries of the world would not be able to contain the whole. To hear what they heard was something of a stupendous order. And John says we actually heard him.

Disclaiming, therefore, any sort of dreamy hallucination or wishful thinking, he says that in a myriad life situations over a prolonged period of time for nearly three and a half years or so, we were listening to him. We heard him. And, of course, the disciples were not the only people to hear him.

In passing, can I only refer to one incident? Do you remember how soldiers were sent to arrest him on one occasion? When they listened to his teaching, they couldn't lay hands on him. They returned to their masters and they said, Never a man spake like this man. Who are we to arrest a man like this? There's no one that's ever spoken like this.

They heard him. The thing I want to get across is this. You see that Jesus spoke.

He talked. He taught as one having authority. And they heard him with these very ears.

They're not dreaming. That which we have heard, that which we have seen, which our eyes have looked upon. Now John is very keen to get this across.

Which we have seen, which our eyes have looked upon. And he uses two words here. Two words.

Because he just wants it to be known that they're not talking about something dreamy, something that happened in the imagination. Jesus is no pigment of the imagination. He's historical.

We have seen him, he says, and we've looked upon him. We've seen him. Now this is a simple word.

I saw an airplane flying through the sky and making towards the airport and coming down. And I knew that it was a 747. I saw it.

I could tell you the color. I can't tell you anything about the engine. I can't tell you how many were in it.

I wasn't able to penetrate everything. But I saw the thing in the air and I saw it coming down in the airport. Then the next word that John uses is a different one.

Notice. That which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon. Which we've examined.

Which we've beheld with intelligence. Which we've perceived. Which we've scrutinized.

Now there's a history behind this. I can't tell you what it is, but I can guess. It's the disciples, almost bewildered by the character and the grace and the power and the wisdom of their master.

Just looking at him. Gazing intently at him. Asking themselves, can all this be real? We've looked.

We've gazed at him, says John. We've looked into this matter. We've perceived.

We've intelligently scrutinized. We haven't just come to tell you we saw something which might have been with the eye of the imagination. No, no, no.

With these physical eyes, we've watched him. And then, says John, and we've touched him with our hands. The eternal word of life, the gospel, the eternal life, which was hid in God from all eternity and was manifested.

Now, we have touched him in whom that life was embodied. We've touched him. Without going into the details, there is good reason to believe that this language is reminiscent of what happened in the upper room just after the resurrection of our Lord.

There can be no doubt, says Bishop Westcott in his commentary, that the exact word is used with a distinct reference to the invitation of the Lord after his resurrection. Now, you remember that invitation? That was an unforgettable occasion when the risen Lord said to Doubting Thomas, when Thomas said, I simply can't believe that he's risen, says the Lord to Thomas, behold, my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Handle me.

And see. For a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when Thomas had put his hand into the wounded hand of his Lord and thrust it into his side, he said, my Lord and my God, the unseen has come before the eyes of men and has been handled in the flesh.

Men and women, we're dealing with realities here. There is no event of history which is substantiated in this way. I can't prove that Julius Caesar lived in this way.

But our Lord Jesus was seen, he was heard, he was handled in a myriad of situations over and over again. This is the testimony of men who are known to be reputable and trustworthy and obedient. What then does this mean? It means that our faith is built upon the revelation of the unseen God in the person of his Son.

I want to close this morning doing something which I don't often do, but I think it's so important to do it. I have found reading literature that comes out of the press nowadays, and there's a glut of it, which suggests in a somewhat sinister way that really the life of the Lord Jesus is not all that historical. And therefore, if we can't be sure of that, we can't be sure of anything.

Now, they're right, of course, in that. If we can't be sure of that, we can't be sure of anything. And I want you good people to know that our Lord Jesus did come in the flesh.

We do not build our faith upon a fable. And I want to turn now not to the New Testament, but outside of the New Testament. And I want to read to you very quickly, but I trust that the Lord will enable us to do so in a manner that will help confirm your faith and mine in this basic, this cardinal fact of history upon which the whole superstructure of our Christian faith rests, that God the Unseen has come into this world and lived

and tabernacled among men in Jesus of Nazareth.

Now, let me read first of all from the testimony of Pliny, who was a Roman proconsul in Bithynia, in Asia Minor. Now, he was a pagan. He's not a Christian.

And he's writing to the Emperor Trajan in A.D. 110. And he's writing about the way in which he had been reacting to the Christians in his province. Now, all this is pagan.

But I want you to notice the testimony to the historicity of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. There is the course, sorry, this is the course that I have adopted in the case of those brought before me as Christians. I ask them if they are Christians.

If they admit it, I repeat the question a second time and a third time, threatening capital punishment. If they persist, I sentence them to death. For I do not doubt that whatever kind of crime it may be to which they have confessed, their pertinacity and inflexible obstinacy should certainly be punished.

There were others who displayed the like madness and whom I reserved to be sent to Rome since they were Roman citizens. Thereupon, the usual result followed. The very fact of my dealing with the question led to a wider spread of the charge.

And a great variety of cases were brought before me. An anonymous pamphlet was issued containing many names. All who denied that they were or had been Christians I considered should be discharged because they called upon the names of the gods at my dictation and they did reverence with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought forward for this purpose, together with the statutes of the deities, and especially because they cursed Christ, a thing which, it is said, genuine Christians cannot be induced to do.

Others, named by the informer, first said they were Christians and then denied it, declaring that they had been, but were so no longer, some having recanted three years or more before and one or two as long ago as twenty years. They all worshipped your image and the statutes of the gods and they cursed Christ. But they declared that the sum of their guilt or error amounted only to this, that on an appointed day they had been accustomed to meet before daybreak and recite a hymn antiphonally to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves to an oath, not for the commission of any crime, but to abstain from theft, robbery, adultery and breach of faith, and not to deny a deposit when it was claimed.

Now the point I want you to get across, my friends, is this. Here is a pagan man writing to the emperor, asking for advice. What can I do with these people? Because the more I discipline them and the more I persecute them on account of their faith, the thing is growing more and more.

And it's all because of Christ. We're dealing with real history now. Let me give you another one.

Tacitus, the Roman historian who wrote about A.D. 115, concerning Nero's persecution of Christians in Rome in the year A.D. 64, following the great fire of Rome. But all the endeavors of men, all the emperor's largesse and the propitiations of the gods, did not suffice to allay the scandal or banish the belief that the fire had been ordered. In other words, it was alleged that Nero himself was the cause of that fire, but he's trying to get out of it and pin the blame on someone else.

I go on with the quote. And so, to get rid of this rumor, Nero set up as the culprits and punished with the utmost refinement of cruelty a class hated by their abominations who are commonly called Christians.

Christus, Christ, from whom their name is derived, was executed at the hand of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius.

Checked for the moment, the pernicious superstition again broke out, not only in Judea, a source of the evil, but even in Rome. We're dealing with Roman history as well as biblical history. Can I give you another one or two? Suetonius, the Roman historian, writing somewhere around A.D. 120, in his book entitled The Life of Claudius, Emperor from 41 to 54, he says this very simply.

It's a short one. Since the Jews were continually making disturbances at the instigation of Christus, Christ, he, that is Claudius, expelled them from Rome. Now, I could go on and quote to you.

I have them here from Lucian and Josephus and Tertullian and Thallus and many others, all of which say this. They're referring to the man Christ Jesus. So that the testimony is clear.

When we say that Jesus of Nazareth lived, we are not simply talking about a name which appears in the New Testament. We're talking about one who came into history and who, whether we are believers or unbelievers, whether we like it or not, has divided time into B.C. and A.D. This is what John says. To those of you in Asia, to those of you around Ephesus or to those of you here in Knox this morning, you have a quasi-doubt as to whether the incarnate God ever became visible in human flesh.

I want to say that we saw him in whom he appeared, manifesting his deity as well as humanity. We saw him. We scrutinized.

We heard him. We touched him. Now, we shall proceed, God willing, next Sunday morning on the basis of this, to speak of the fellowship that can be based and has been based upon it.

John says, I'm writing to you, that on the basis of the fact that he has come and lived and taught and died and is risen again and ascended on the basis of what he, the historical Christ, has done, I bid you and I urge you to live and to believe and to act in such a manner that you may have the fellowship which we have not only with one another and with the Son, but with the Father. How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, except for your faith in his excellent Word. God grant us today, as never before, to feel the rock beneath our feet in a day when so much is crumbling to the glory of our ever-blessed Savior.

Amen. Let us pray. Father in heaven, we bow adoringly, gratefully, rejoicingly now, as we have been thinking this morning of the fact that the testimony borne by these chosen witnesses to thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, is also confirmed even by secular historians who unwittingly are thine instruments for our benefit.

We bless thee that thou hast caused the very wrath of man to praise thee. We thank thee that some of the very Roman emperors who persecuted the saints of old have some facts written into their histories that can feed the abiding faith of those who rest in Christ crucified, risen and reigning. Bless each one of us according to our need this morning.

Make us strong, perhaps in order to believe. Give to us a realization of the firm foundation that is laid for our faith. Then to others of us who are finding our faith weak or in the process of being weakened by circumstances, come, our God, come and feed the flame within our hearts and quench the yearnings of our intellect.

We ask it in the name of thy Son, our Savior. Amen.

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/4/SID4802.mp3>  
Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/j-glyn-owen/1-john-1-foundational-facts/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**