

## Structure of First John 1:1 to 1:4

### Chiasmus Focus: the Eternal Life

1:1 What was from the beginning, [main direct object]

what we have heard,

what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked at intently and our hands touched,  
concerning the Word, the source of life – 1:2 This Life

was revealed. We have seen it. And so, we testify to it and proclaim to you this Life,

the Eternal Life, which was in the presence of the Father and

was revealed to us.

1:3 – what we have seen and

what we have heard we proclaim [main subject and verb] also to you [indirect object]

### Purpose Statement

so that you too may have fellowship with us. And indeed, this fellowship of ours is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. 1:4 We are writing these things so that our joy may be full.

Built around a chiasmus.

The prologue of First John (1:1 to 1:4) is a dramatic and elegant opening that is built around a chiasmus - a literary device that uses a sequence of words or ideas that are later repeated in reverse order. Sometimes the point where the chiasmus reverses is the focus of the chiasmus. The chiasmus in John's prologue is built around identical Greek verb forms and has as its focus **the Eternal Life**, Jesus Christ. Disruptive teachers were spreading a false teaching where Jesus Christ was not central to knowing God. John starts his letter with a chiasmus that makes Jesus Christ the central focus - He is central to Christianity.

A we have heard / ἀκηκόαμεν (1:1)  
B we have seen / ἐωράκαμεν (1:1)  
C was revealed / ἐφανερώθη (1:2)  
Focus: the Eternal Life / τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον (1:2)  
C' was revealed / ἐφανερώθη (1:2)  
B' we have seen / ἐωράκαμεν (1:3)  
A' we have heard / ἀκηκόαμεν (1:3)

One long sentence in Greek.

Verses 1:1 to 1:3 are one long, complex sentence in Greek that the ancient Greek listeners would have considered dramatic and elegant, not only because it is built around a chiasmus, but because it draws the listeners into the narrative by stringing them along.

The main object of the verb is introduced right at the beginning of verse 1:1 - "*what was from the beginning*". However, the main verb is held until verse 3 at the completion of the chiasmus – "*we proclaim*" (ἀπαγγέλλομεν / apangellomen). The main subject, verb, and object in verses 1:1 to 1:3 are simply: "*we proclaim what was from the beginning*". Everything else develops this idea and drives the narrative along.

The four relative clauses in verse 1:1 that begin with "what":

1. Have been placed at the front by John for emphasis. They highlight John's authority to speak about the issues because he and others were actual witnesses to the life of Jesus Christ, unlike the disruptors.
2. Function as direct objects of the main verb "*we proclaim*" in verse 3.
3. The first "what" clause is the main direct object ("*what was from the beginning*").
4. The three "what" clauses that follow are in apposition providing additional information.

The Greek could be rearranged into English in a more typical order of subject/verb/indirect object/direct objects to read:

*We proclaim to you what was from the beginning - what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked at intently and our hands touched...*

Verse 1:2 is parenthetical information that further explains the "*source of life*" introduced at the end of verse 1:1. Verse 1:2 includes the focus of the chiasmus "*the Eternal Life*".