

Sunday Morning Message

March 14, 2021

1 John 1:1 – 4 “That Your Joy May Be Full” (Overview of 1 John)

Series – 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John

Text – 1 John 1:1 - 4

Congregational Reading – 1 John 1 – 4

Introduction to the Series

We are beginning a series of messages through the Letters of John, which include 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John. These are epistles that I may have referred to often while considering other passages, but I have never taught them in an in-depth, verse-by-verse, study. These letters are among the last of the New Testament writings, with only the *Book of Revelation* coming later.

I agree with Wiersbe’s assessment of the theme of these letters. He said: this letter deals with a theme that is forever up-to-date: *the life that is real*.¹

Like, the two letters by Peter, John also wrote during a time of intense persecution. Because of his age, John had experienced all of the persecution of the entire first century.

Phillips writes:

He had lived through a turbulent century. Of the first twelve Caesars, only two had died a natural death—it being suspected that even the great Augustus had been poisoned. Tiberius had degenerated into a fierce and filthy old man; Caligula was a monster, who delighted to murder distinguished citizens by means of poisoned snuff; Claudius was poisoned; Nero launched the Roman Empire on a three-hundred-year persecution of the church, and in the end, he perished while fleeing from those who sought his life. Paralyzed with fear and horror and howling like a dog, he was killed by one of his own attendants. Galbo lasted only a few months and was murdered. Otho committed suicide. Vitellius did not last long. Vaspasian was fonder of money than murder so, as one cynic put it, his victims “rejoiced in having exchanged the agony of being murdered for the luxury of being fleeced.” Titus, who completed the siege and sack of Jerusalem, continued in the traditions of his predecessors on the throne in murder and rapine.

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 474.

Then came Domitian, who was both a savage and a coward, his crimes exceeding those of even Caligula and Nero. He launched the second official Roman persecution of the church—spies and informers lurked everywhere, and there stood “an executioner at every door.” Domitian’s appearance in the Coliseum was the signal for people to murder one another with sword and spear to heighten the blood lust of the mob.²

According to historical tradition, an attempt would be made on John’s life by the Roman emperor Domitian shortly after these letters were written. According to John *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*: he was ordered [by the emperor] to be sent to Rome, where it is affirmed he was cast into a cauldron of boiling oil. He escaped by miracle, without injury. Domitian afterwards banished him to the Isle of Patmos, where he wrote the Book of Revelation. Nerva, the successor of Domitian, recalled him. He was the only apostle who escaped a violent death.³ And, his escape, was only because God miraculously protected him.

The Apostle John, who also wrote *The Gospel of John* and *The Revelation*, wrote all three of the epistles attributed to the name “John.” The date of the letters is not certain, but it seems to have been after the Gospel account was written, and before the persecution by Emperor Domitian that landed John on the Isle of Patmos at around 95 AD (so late 80’s or early 90’s). At the time of the writing John was serving as the pastor of the church at Ephesus. The Apostle Paul had warned the leaders at Ephesus “*that after [his] departing shall grievous wolves enter in among [them], not sparing the flock.*” John was now dealing with the wolves’ doctrine that had evidently affected the church as Paul had warned.

This first letter, though written from Ephesus, was not written exclusively to any church or group, but was for all believers everywhere. Unlike Paul’s letters, this epistle is not at all personal. It is not written specifically to anyone, nor does it refer to anyone. It is interesting that there is not one Old Testament quote in this letter, which seems to indicate that the audience of this letter was predominately Gentile.

Facts about John the Apostle:

- 1 More is known about John than any of the other gospel writers.

² John Phillips, *Exploring the Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), 1 Jn 1:1–5:21.

³ Foxe, John. *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (Optimized For Kindle) (pp. 13-14). Kindle Edition.

- 2 He was the son of Zebedee and Salome; and the brother of James. He was very likely a first cousin of the Lord. He was called “a son of thunder” by the Lord (Mark 3:17).
- 3 He was a fisherman from Bethsaida in Galilee.
- 4 He was the “Beloved Disciple”. He was part of the inner circle (triumvirate), which also included James and Peter. He is the only disciple that was with him at the cross. He was the only disciple that knew he wouldn’t betray Christ. He was entrusted with the care of Mary. He was the only disciple that was not martyred, but tradition states that he was boiled in oil by Emperor Domitian and survived, only to be banished to the prison island of Patmos.
- 5 The churches of Smyrna, Pergamos, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and Thyatira, were founded by him.⁴
- 6 He writes in terms of black and white with no tones of gray. As John saw it, everything is true or false, right or wrong, light or darkness, love or hate, life or death. Things are either good or bad. He assumes that his readers have arrived at the same high spiritual plateau on which he himself lived.⁵

Topics Dealt With in 1st John

Gnosticism

Though not mentioned specifically in the letter, John appears to be defending a false doctrine that was taking root during this time-period known as Gnosticism, which taught that the body was evil, and the spirit was good; and therefore denied that Christ could have a physical body (Note – **Docetism** is the false idea that Jesus physical body only appeared physical). The very first verse of the letter boldly refutes any such nonsense. John states that he not only had seen the Lord with his eyes, but he also “handled” him. He also states in 1 John 4:3 that “every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ **is come in the flesh** is not of God”. The Gnostics also held that knowledge was superior to virtue, and they accepted only a non-literal interpretation of the Scriptures, which they claimed could only be understood by a select, enlightened few. They also denied the possibility of a bodily resurrection. John corrects these heresies by boldly presenting the truth.

⁴ Foxe, pp. 13-14. Kindle Edition.

⁵ John Phillips, *Exploring the Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), 1 Jn 1:1–5:21.

McArthur states this regarding the purpose for the letter:

A lack of love for fellow believers characterizes false teachers, especially as they react against anyone rejecting their new way of thinking (3:10–18). They separated their deceived followers from the fellowship of those who remained faithful to apostolic teaching, leading John to reply that such separation outwardly manifested that those who followed false teachers lacked genuine salvation (2:19). Their departure left the other believers, who remained faithful to apostolic doctrine, shaken. Responding to this crisis, the aged apostle wrote to reassure those remaining faithful and to combat this grave threat to the church. Since the heresy was so acutely dangerous and the time period was so critical for the church in danger of being overwhelmed by false teaching, John gently, lovingly, but with unquestionable apostolic authority, sent this letter to churches in his sphere of influence to stem this spreading plague of false doctrine.⁶

Eternal Security

The phrase “we know” or “ye know” is found more than two dozen times in this letter.

In 1st John there are no generalities; everything is black and white. John paints the believer as either being completely saved, or totally lost. John will make several statements in this letter in order to challenge the reader to determine whether or not he has been genuinely converted. In 1:2 John states that he will “shew unto you that eternal life...which was manifested unto us”.

A genuine Christian:

- 1 Will not walk in darkness (1:6)
- 2 Will walk in the light (1:7)
- 3 Will confess his sin (1:8 – 10)
- 4 Will keep God’s commandments (2:3 – 4; 5:2 – 3)
- 5 Will keep His Word (2:4)
- 6 Will not hate his brother (2:9)
- 7 Will love his brother (2:10 – 11; 3:10 – 12, 14 – 15; 4:7 – 8, 11 – 12, 20 – 21; 5:1)
- 8 Will have “an unction” (2:20, 27 – χρῖσμα [*chrisma*] an anointing – and will know the truth)
- 9 Will not deny the Son (2:22 – 24)

⁶ John MacArthur Jr., ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 1962.

- 10 Will "purify himself" (3:3)
- 11 Will do righteousness (3:7)
- 12 "Doth not commit sin" (3:4 – 6, 8 – 10; 5:18)
- 13 Will not murder (3:15)
- 14 Will have the Holy Spirit dwelling within him (3:19 – 24; 4:13)
- 15 Will get his prayers answered (3:22; 5:14 – 15)
- 16 Will recognize truth from error (4:6)
- 17 Will confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (4:15; 5:1, 5)
- 18 Will dwell in love (4:16)
- 19 Will overcome the world (5:4 – 5)
- 20 Believes on the Son (5:8 – 13)
- 21 Will have eternal security (5:13)
- 22 Will have spiritual understanding (5:20)

Obviously, John is not teaching any kind of a "sinless perfection" of a genuine believer, but he is stating that a genuine believer will have the characteristics of the new nature. John 1:5 states that "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all". The true believer has God in him, and God cannot sin. This does not mean that the Christian will never sin, but as he yields to the indwelling Holy Spirit of God, he will sin a lot less. 1 John 2:1 clearly states that we will sin at times, but it also says that we have an advocate, a lawyer, who defends us to the Father. 1 John 2:2 and 4:1 tell us that he is also a propitiation (a mercy seat) for our sins. Though the Christian sins, the new man or new nature never sins. It is only as we yield to the old fleshly nature that sin becomes prevalent in our lives and we more closely resemble those that are lost.

*"For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace."
(Romans 6:14)*

*"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away;
behold, all things are become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17)*

The Trinity

This letter also contains a great verse teaching the trinity:

*"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost:
and these three are one." (1 John 5:7)*

Ryrie points out: “The letter shows John’s obvious affection for his “little children” and concern for their spiritual welfare. The book is filled with contrasts—light and darkness (1:6–7; 2:8–11); love of world and love of God (2:15–17); children of God and children of the devil (3:4–10); the Spirit of God and the spirit of Antichrist (4:1–3); love and hate (4:7–12, 16–21).”⁷

Transition Into the Text

This morning, as we examine these unique introductory verses to this epistle, we will find out John’s ultimate purpose in writing it:

I A Personal Acquaintance (v. 1)

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard (ἀκηκόαμεν = 2nd Perf. Ind. Act. 1st. Per. Plu), *which we have seen* (ἑώρακάμεν = Perf. Ind. Act. 1st. Per. Pl.) *with our eyes, which we have looked upon* (ἐθεασάμεθα = Aor. Mid. 1st. Per. Pl.), *and our hands have handled* (ἐψηλάφησαν = Aor. Act. Ind. 3rd.Per. Pl.), *of the Word of life;* (1 John 1:1)

Exegetical Notes - It is interesting that “beheld” and “felt” are punctiliar, but “hearing” and “seeing” are in the perfect tense indicating ongoing results. John and the readers had handled and felt (once), but continue to see and hear the word of life. The initial “handling” and “beholding” give the indication that this “word” was thoroughly examined, and can now still be seen and heard.

The Word of Life (τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς) is that which John and others had handled and looked upon, and as a result they still see and hear. The Word of life could obviously be a reference to the Bible, but here it is most certainly a reference to Christ:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. (John 1:1, 14)

For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. (1 John 5:7)

Notice throughout these introductory verses to the letter that John emphasizes the God that He personally knew: he had seen Him, heard Him, touched Him, and experienced the life that He offered. The false prophets that were spewing their false doctrines had not known the Lord. John did know the Lord personally.

II A Principle Applied (v. 2)

(For the life was manifested (ἐφανερώθη = Aor. Pas. 3rd Per. Sin.), *and we have seen it* (ἑώρακάμεν = Perf. Ind. Act. 1st. Per. Pl.), *and bear witness* (μαρτυροῦμεν = Perf. Ind. Act.

⁷ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible: King James Version*, Expanded ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 1896.

1st. Per. Pl.), *and shew* (ἀπαγγέλλομεν = Perf. Ind. Act. 1st. Per. Pl.) *unto you that eternal life* (ζωὴν αἰώνιον), *which was with the Father, and was manifested* (ἐφανερώθη = Aor. Pas. 3rd Per. Sin) *unto us;* (1 John 1:2)

Exegetical Notes - ἐφανερώθη (was manifested) is repeated indicating emphasis. The first part of the verse indicates the revelation, but the repeating word clarifies that the revelation was personal to the writer and readers (to us).

ἐωράκαμεν – “Have seen” – become acquainted with by experience; to receive.

John is saying that He received the Word of God, which means he had received Jesus Christ as the Word and as the means of eternal life.

Jesus Christ is not only the Word of God, but he is eternal life:

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (ζωὴν αἰώνιον). (John 3:16)

Note – the everlasting life (John 3:16) and eternal life (1 John 1:2) are derived from the same phrase. They mean basically the same thing in English, but everlasting speaks more of duration, where eternal includes the concept of quality.

And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life (ζωὴν αἰώνιον), and this life is in his Son. (1 John 5:11)

III A Person Accepted (v. 3)

That which we have seen (ἐωράκαμεν = Perf. Ind. Act. 1st. Per. Pl.) *and heard* (ἀκηκόαμεν = 2nd Perf. Ind. Act. 1st Per. Plu.) *declare we* (ἀπαγγέλλομεν = Perf. Act. Ind. 1st Per. Pl.) *unto you, that ye also may have* (ἔχητε = 2nd Per. Pl. Pres. Act. Sub.) *fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:3)*

This same person – the same Word, and the same eternal and everlasting life that John had seen, received and known himself, he was now declaring unto the recipients of this letter, so that they could accept or receive Him as well.

And, by receiving Jesus, they would have “fellowship” (κοινωνίαν – Accusative) with Him, the Father, and with other believers.

Thayer’s defines fellowship () as:

fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse;

1. *the share which one has in anything, participation;*
2. *intercourse, fellowship, intimacy:*

3. a benefaction jointly contributed, a collection, a contribution,⁸

IV. A Purpose Announced (v. 4)

And these things write we (γράφομεν = 1st Per. Plu. Pres. Act. Ind.) *unto you, that your joy may be* (ἵ = subjunctive 3rd. Per. Sing) *full* (πεπληρωμένη = Part. Perf. Pas. Sing. Fem. Nom.). (1 John 1:4)

John reveals his purpose for writing this letter. “that your joy may be full.”

Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore. (Psalm 16:11)

These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. (John 15:11)

And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you. (John 16:22)

It is interesting that the word, “joy” (χαρὰ), is only used once in this letter; but, it is a constant theme throughout.

Conclusion

There is great joy in knowing Jesus, and being secure in that knowledge of Him. Truly knowing Jesus means that you have an intimate relationship with Him. If you are secure in that knowledge, then you will not be easily swayed by the many false teachers that are out there trying to promote some other concept of God.

There is also great joy – full joy – in being in fellowship with other believers who have had the same experience that you have. Your joy is mutual, shared; and your fellowship allows you to share many other things as well, all surrounding your fellowship with Christ Himself, and these things will also add to your joy.

Do you have that full joy today?

Do you truly know Jesus who is the giver of that joy?

By the way, there is great joy and peace in knowing for sure that you have that eternal and everlasting life that John wrote about in these verses and only comes through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ:

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 (ζωὴν ἔχετε αἰώνιον), *and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.* (1 John 5:13)

⁸ Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti* (New York: Harper & Brothers., 1889), 352.