

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF FIRST JOHN

WALKING IN THE LIGHT!

Read 1 John 1:1-4

Introduction

Most people understand that the important things in life are not things at all — they are the relationships we have. God has put a desire for relationship in every one of us, a desire He intended to be met with relationships with other people, but most of all, to be met by a relationship with Him. In this remarkable letter, John tells us the truth about relationships — and shows us how to have relationships that are real, for both now and eternity.

The Word of Life

“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, concerning the Word of life— the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us” (vv1-2)

The beginning John wrote of is not the beginning of this world; nor is it the beginning of creation. It is the beginning of Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1, the beginning there was before there was anything, when all there existed was God.

The beginning of Genesis 1:1 is simple: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The beginning of John 1:1 is profound: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John takes us back to this time in eternity past, to meet this One which was from the beginning. Whoever, or whatever, John wrote of, he said his subject was eternal and therefore was God because the subject existed before all else and was the source and basis of the existence of all things.

Jesus Christ was with God in the beginning. Before the beginning of the universe, Jesus was with God. He pre-dates everything! He is pre-existent.

Jesus the Logos

Jesus' name and title, Jesus the Christ, aren't mentioned until verse 4. Rather, John refers to him in verse 1 as the “Word of Life.” In his writings, John sometimes uses the term logos or “Word” in a special way, as “the independent personified expression of God, the Logos.” (John 1:1-2, 14; Revelation 19:13). Jesus is the exact expression of God's word and will, thus he is God's word personified. In Jesus, God expresses himself with complete clarity.

An Eyewitness

“... which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled...”

This indicates that this eternal being — the One from the beginning — came to earth, and John (among others) personally experienced this eternal One. The idea is that this eternal subject of John has been audibly heard, physically seen, intently studied (have looked upon), and tangibly touched (hands have handled). This idea would have enormous implications for his readers.

The implications were enormous firstly because they said that this eternal God became accessible to man in the most basic way, a way that anyone could relate to. This eternal One can be known, and He has

revealed Himself to us. The implications were enormous secondly because they proved that John's words have the weight of eyewitness evidence. He did not speak of a myth or of a matter of clever storytelling. He carefully studied this eternal One and he knew whom he spoke about. Thirdly, enormous because it debunked dangerous teachings that were creeping into the church, known as Gnosticism. Part of the teaching of Gnosticism was that though Jesus was God, He was not actually a physical man, but instead some kind of pseudo-physical phantom. Yet John declared, "I heard Him! I saw Him! I studied Him! I touched Him!"

The Manifested Life

This life was manifested, meaning that it was made actually and physically real. John solemnly testified as an eyewitness (we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you) that this was the case. This was no fairy tale, no "Once upon a time" story. This was real, and John tells us about it as an eyewitness.

Eternal Life with the Father.

In calling Jesus, eternal life, John remembered the words of Jesus (John 5:26, 6:48, and 11:25). He also repeated the idea expressed in his first words of this letter: that Jesus Himself is eternal, and therefore God. We can say that people are eternal, but we say this with the understanding that we mean they are eternal in the future sense — they will never perish, being immortal (John 5:29). Yet people are not eternal in the past sense; to say that something is eternal in the past sense is the same as saying it is equal to God or God's Word.

The eternal existence of Jesus is also declared in Micah 5:2 — *"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting"*. The word everlasting here literally means, "beyond the vanishing point." *"With the Father"* refers to the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son. There was an eternal relationship of love and fellowship between the Father and the Son. Jesus referred to this in John 17:24: *"For You loved Me before the foundation of the world."*

Invitation to Fellowship

"... that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full." (vv3-4)

The purpose of John's declaration about this eternally existent, physically present, Word of life who is God, yet is a person distinct from the Father, is to bring his readers into fellowship with both God's people and God Himself. You can enjoy this fellowship even though you do not understand all the intricacies of the trinity. You can use your eyes even though you don't know every detail of how your vision works. You can know God and believe in Him as He has revealed Himself, even though you can't understand everything about His person or nature.

The idea of fellowship is one of the most important ideas in this letter of John's. It is the ancient Greek word *koinonia*, which speaks of a sharing, a communion, a common bond, and common life. It speaks of a living, breathing, sharing, loving relationship with another person. The use of the word in Acts 2:44 is very helpful: *Now all who believed were together and had all things in common.* The word *common* is the ancient Greek word *koinonia*.

"Fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" is a simple and bold statement that means one can have a relationship with God. This idea would surprise many of John's readers, and it should be astounding to us. The Greek mind-set highly prized the idea of fellowship but restricted to men among

men — the idea of such an intimate relationship with God was revolutionary. Jesus started the same kind of revolution among the Jews when He invited men to address God as Father (Matthew 6:9). We really can have a living, breathing relationship with God the Father, and with Jesus Christ. He can be not only our Saviour, but also our friend and our closest relationship.

The kind of relationship John described is only possible because Jesus is who John says He is in 1 John 1:1-2. If someone invited you to have a “personal relationship” with Napoleon, or Alexander the Great, or Abraham Lincoln — or even Moses or the Apostle Paul — you would think them foolish. One cannot even have a genuine “spiritual” relationship with a dead man. But with the eternal God who became man, we can have a relationship.

The word fellowship has in it not only the idea of relationship, but also of sharing a common life. When we have fellowship with Jesus, we will become more like Him. The disciples did not have this close fellowship with Jesus when He walked this earth with them. As Jesus said to Philip at the very end of His earthly ministry, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip?” (John 14:9) Their true fellowship was not created by material closeness to the material Jesus, but by a work of the Holy Spirit after the finished work of Jesus on the cross. Therefore, we can enter into the same fellowship with God that the Apostles could enter.

The Result of Fellowship

The result of fellowship is fullness of joy. This joy is an abiding sense of optimism and cheerfulness based on God, as opposed to *happiness*, which is a sense of optimism and cheerfulness based on *circumstances*.

John clearly echoed an idea Jesus brought before His disciples the night before His crucifixion. He wanted fullness of joy for them — even knowing that the cross was directly in front of them.

- *These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full* (John 15:11).
- *Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full* (John 16:24).
- *But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves* (John 17:13).

Fullness of joy is certainly *possible* for the Christian, but it is by no means *certain*. John wrote with the desire that believers would have fullness of joy — and if it were inevitable or very easy to have, he would not have written this.

Conclusion

Observations on this first portion of the book, which is one long sentence in the original manuscript.

- a. John began with the *beginning* — the eternal God, who was before all things.
- b. He told us that this God was physically manifested, and that he and others could testify to this as eyewitnesses.
- c. He told us that this God is the *Word of life*, the *Logos*.
- d. He told us that this God is distinct from the person of God the Father.
- e. He told us that we may have fellowship with this God, and that we are often introduced into this fellowship with God by the fellowship of God’s people.
- f. He told us that this eternally existent God, the *Word of Life*, who was physically present with the disciples and others (and present for fellowship), is God the Son, named Jesus Christ.

- g. He told us that fellowship with Jesus leads to a life lived in fullness of joy.
- h. We could say that in these four verses, John gave us enough to live our whole Christian life on. No wonder one commentator wrote, “Observe the note of wonder in the Apostle’s language. Speech fails him. He labours for expression, adding definition to definition.” (Expositor’s)