

1 John Bible Study

Lesson 2 Notes/1 John 1:1-4

God has revealed Himself in creation (Rom. 1:20), but creation could never tell us the story of His love. He has also revealed Himself more fully in His Word, the Holy Scriptures. But His final and most complete revelation is in His son, Jesus Christ (Jn. 14:9). Because Jesus is God's revelation of Himself, He is called **The Word of Life** (1 Jn. 1:1). "Jesus reveals to us the mind and heart of God. He is the living means of communication between God and men." (Wiersbe, p. 474)

MacArthur notes that we live in an age that denies all absolutes, granting any and all ideas equal validity, while branding certainty about truth as bigoted, insensitive, unloving and anti-intellectual. Unfortunately, this inclusivism has spread to many of today's churches, where all beliefs are accepted except dogmatism, the belief that biblical doctrine is undeniably true. An emerging point of view among biblical "scholars" holds that the Bible is too obscure to be understood with any degree of certainty. This skepticism denies the Bible's teaching that Christians not only can but must know the truth. (Jn 8:32; Pss 19:8; 119:105; Luke 1:1-4; 2 Pet. 1:19-21) To claim that we cannot understand the Bible is to attack its divinely designed clarity, which is to actually "accuse God of being unable to clearly reveal Himself and His truth to humanity." This attitude is not only arrogant, but it erodes certainty and confidence about the doctrinal truths of the Christian faith. (1 Cor. 2:7-16)

The writers of Scripture, on the other hand, were absolutely certain of what they believed and of what they boldly wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Thus, for example, the message of salvation is fully understandable to the regenerated and illuminated mind. Denying Scripture's clarity is likely motivated by rebellion against its clear message of sin and righteousness. To deny its clarity is to give false comfort to those who don't like its truth, in contrast to those who love the truth and are quick to apply it to their lives. (Jn.3:20-21) "Such God-honoring adherence to divine, absolute truth is precisely what the apostle John exalts in his first epistle as the evidence of genuine salvation." (MacArthur, p. 14)

Though its structure is somewhat fluid, MacArthur teaches that this epistle can be divided into three certainties: theological certainty regarding the person and work of Jesus; moral certainty regarding the commandments of God; and relational certainty regarding love. Such was John's commitment to the certainty of the truth that he doesn't even begin his epistle with the usual introductory amenities, but launches directly into presenting five certainties

about the person and work of Christ: “The Word of Life is unchangeable, historical, communicable, relational, and joyful.”

1. The Word of Life is Unchangeable (1 Jn. 1:1a)

C. Hass and Wayne Grudem, among others, teach that the phrase “**from the beginning**” as used here, reaches from the beginning of creation, has existed and been active ever since, and points to Christ’s preexistence. Others agree with MacArthur that it refers to the beginning of the Gospel message with the incarnation of Jesus. However one understands the nuances of the phrase, it is clear, as MacArthur teaches, that the phrase “**What was from the beginning**” tells us that the message of redemption is unchanging. The proclamation of the Gospel has always been the same. Preachers of the Gospel have always commanded faith and repentance (Matt. 4:17; John 3:16-18; Acts 2:38; 17:30). It has always been declared that the kingdom of God is at hand (Matt. 3:2; Acts 19:8), announced that the mercy and grace of forgiveness are available (Acts 10:43; Eph. 1:7) and urged sinners to be reconciled to God through Jesus (2 Cor. 5:18-21).

False teachers threatened the church in John’s time by denying Jesus’ full deity and humanity, and claiming superior spiritual enlightenment unavailable to common believers. Jesus warned that false teachers, like these early Gnostics, have threatened the church from the beginning, and will do so until the end of the age, trying to undermine the church by luring it away from apostolic truth. Any alteration of God’s truth, whether by adding to it or taking from it to make it more acceptable or marketable, is to defy God Himself and be accursed! (Gal. 1:6-9) Thus John establishes with his opening statement that the gospel message is permanent and absolutely unalterable. (Rev. 22:18-19)

2. The Word of Life is Historical (1 Jn. 1:1b-2a)

John testifies to his readers that the experience of Jesus’ life and ministry was not some mystical, secret elite insight. The **Word of Life**, Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the Gospel, was an actual physical presence of the incarnate God-man (John 10:30), fully divine (Phil. 2:6. Col. 2:9) and fully human (Luke 1:31; Phil. 2:7-8). John had experienced that reality through his natural senses and was a true witness to the incarnation. Haas further elaborates that the term “the **Word of Life**” refers to “the divine Word, by which the world has been created and exists, which reveals God’s being and expresses his will, wisdom and power, and has become man in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:14). Accordingly, it functions here as a descriptive name or a title,” hence is often capitalized as a name.

As Daniel Akin notes, “The object of eyewitness proclamation is one and the same: ‘**That which was from the beginning,**’ who is ‘**the Word of life,**’ is also ‘**the eternal life, which was with the Father**’. The first phrase emphasizes Jesus’ deity, while the second phrase focuses on Jesus’ revelation of eternal life in the Gospel. Thus the beginning and the conclusion of 1 John

assert the same fact: the eternal Son of God, who is the true God and eternal life, has been revealed in history.” The heresy that Jesus was not the Christ “was a direct assault on the person of Jesus (a denial of his deity) and one that would call into question his work of atonement as well.”

In order to emphasize the undeniable reality of the actual presence of the incarnate Christ, John describes and repeats four ways he experienced the Word of Life with his senses. Firstly, he **heard** the Lord speak, teaching parables (Matt. 13:3-33), sermons (Matt. 4:23; 5-7), and private instruction (Matt. 10:5-42). John was present throughout Jesus’ earthly ministry (Jn. 20:30-31), and writing this letter some 60 years later still had a vivid memory of what he heard first hand.

Secondly, he had also **seen** Him **with his eyes**, clearly referring to a physical experience, not some kind of spiritual vision. John makes it clear he saw a physical man, not a mystical, phantom image. Thirdly, John adds the term **looked at**, which indicates a long, searching gaze (Matt. 11:7; Luke 23:55). This is the verb *theomai* which the New King James Version translates “beheld” in John 1:14. John and the other apostles watched Him intently for several years and saw the unmistakable realities of who He is (Matt. 13:16-17): Lord and God, Messiah and Savior (Luke 2:25-32) with supernatural power over demons, disease, nature, and death, the power to forgive sins and grant eternal life. As eye witnesses to His earthly ministry, they had proof that Jesus Christ was God in human flesh (Jn. 14:8-11).

Finally, John told his readers that he had **touched with his hands** the Word of Life. The word **touched** (*pselaphao*) means to feel after or grope like a blind man. The apostles would have touched Jesus frequently in their daily companionship with Him. In the incarnation of Jesus **the life was manifested** (*phaneroo*) meaning to reveal or make visible what was hidden. God revealed Himself in human flesh with Christ’s earthly ministry, when eternal divine **life** became visible to mankind.

3. The Word of Life is Communicable (1 Jn. 1:2b-3a)

What was manifested to John, he then proclaimed. The privilege of living in the presence of the Lord Christ was not a private experience to elevate him as one of God’s favorites, but rather his privilege became his responsibility, as an apostle and eyewitness, to **testify** of the truth (Jn. 20:30-31) and **proclaim** the gift of **eternal life** in Him to those who had never seen Jesus. John was a true and credible witness because of his widespread reputation as one who had been with Jesus as an apostle. Other New Testament books written by apostles or their associates also present eyewitness accounts of Jesus and the truth of the gospel. Like them, John knew that communicating the Word of life was not an option, but a command. Jesus manifested Himself to the disciples not only to qualify them as eyewitnesses, but also to appoint them as

apostles, which gave them an “authoritative commission” to preach the Gospel. Thus John is very bold and proclaims the gospel with authority. The Christian message is not a speculation, but an unequivocal affirmation by qualified witnesses.

As Akin notes, “John presented a process that moves from the abstract spiritual presence of the Word of life in heaven to the earthly experience of Christ’s life. The ‘eternal life’ was manifested to the world in the incarnation of God in Jesus. Christ was proclaimed by the apostles. The link between the Father and his people is the apostolic proclamation now recorded in Scripture. This section describes how the Word was manifested and the resultant unique authority of the eyewitnesses.”

4. The Word of Life is Relational

John proclaims the Word of life **so that** (*hina*) in order that all believers would realize they have **fellowship** (*koinonia*), with Jesus and fellow believers. This term refers not simply to social interaction, but refers to an authentic partnership, sharing the mutual life and love of those who are one in spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). The aim of preaching the Gospel is to produce saving faith in Jesus, thus bringing believers into genuine union with **the Father, His Son Jesus Christ**, and the Holy Spirit. Even sinning Christians who lose the joy of their fellowship with God never lose the reality of that eternal life from Him given them through their union with Christ. (1 Cor. 1:9, Rom. 6:3-5). The new birth produces new life, so that believers are regenerated into everlasting fellowship with the triune God (Jn. 3:5-8).

Akin emphasizes that fellowship is the thrust of the entire letter. There is no true fellowship with God apart from fellowship with the eyewitness community (1:3). Their fellowship was with **the Father** and **with His Son Jesus Christ**. Perhaps, as Akin suggests, Christ was noted second because the opponents claimed to have fellowship with God and yet totally disagreed with John’s testimony about Christ. Or perhaps, as Haas notes, “this construction simply puts the Father and the Son side by side, but it probably means to say the fellowship with the Father is the ultimate goal (mentioned first, therefore), and that this goal is to be reached through fellowship with the Son.” In either interpretation, fellowship is sharing or participating in the life of God through the Son and with the family of believers, resulting in **joy**. Those who depart from the visible fellowship of the church were never truly part of the fellowship, which means that they never truly believed into Christ Jesus and never had eternal life... Believers are sustained in their faith by a fresh proclamation of Christ Jesus and his teachings, applied, in this context, in specific ways to combat the Christological heresy that threatened the health and life of the church by denying that the Christ is Jesus, the incarnate Son of God.

5. The Word of Life is Joyful

Joy (1:4) was John's pastoral intent in writing the letter, and it will come when the contents of this letter result in true fellowship. The transforming truth of John's message brings perfect **joy**, satisfaction and **complete** fulfillment that can never be lost. (John 10:10:28-29; Rom. 8:35-39) Jesus told the apostles in the upper room, "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full" (John 15:11). The apostle Paul explained that "the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). The secular dictionary definition of joy as "the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires" is totally inadequate to explain Christian joy. Only the New Testament can explain the unique quality of **joy** that belongs to the Christian life. The Christian's joy can only come from true fellowship with the Triune God and with fellow believers. Then our joy may be made full (Jn. 17:13).

This joy (*chara*) "is nothing less than the joy that comes from abiding in Christ's love, just as Christ's joy came from abiding in the Father's love (John 15:9-11). Some interpreters question whether John is referring here to only the joy of the apostles, or if he means to include the joy of their readers who come to saving faith and fellowship with them, the Triune God and other believers. Some translations answer this dilemma by translating **our** as **your**, or by adding a footnote indicating an alternate reading. In effect, however, John's purpose to achieve the fulfillment of his and his reader's joy is one and the same as his purpose to keep his readers in fellowship with him and the other apostolic eyewitnesses. It is, then, impossible to take this joy away from the true believer. (Jn16:22, 17:12-13).

REFERENCES

Daniel L. Akin, Vol. 38, 1, 2, 3, John, The New American Commentary, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001)

C. Haas, .M. de Jonge, and J.L. Swellengrebel. 1 John A translator's Handbook on the Letters of John (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994).

John MacArthur, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary 1-3 John (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007).

Warren W. Wiersbe, Vol. 2, The Bible Exposition Commentary (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press, 1989).

Wayne Grudem, et al. ESV Study Bible (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2008).