

## Introduction to First John

**Text:** 1 John 1:1-4 HCSB What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed, and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life--2 that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us--3 what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may have fellowship along with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.4 We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

### 1. When Jesus came to earth, He came not only to LIVE a life, but to GIVE life:

- John 10:10 HCSB I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance.

### 2. The GOSPEL OF JOHN was designed to produce faith so that we might have life –

- John 20:30-31 HCSB Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples that are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His name.

### 3. However, it is the FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN which discusses the nature of that life in greater detail - e.g.,

- 1 John 3:14 HCSB We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers. The one who does not love remains in death.

### 4. A careful study of First John is in order that we might be sure to live the sort of life God offers through His Son Jesus Christ.

In this lesson, the first of several on First John, let's begin with some...

## I. Background information

### A. The author...

1. It will be assumed in the course of this study that the author is **John, the beloved disciple of Jesus**
2. Similarities between this epistle and the Gospel of John certainly suggests INTERNAL evidence for this conclusion
3. There is also EXTERNAL evidence that this John is the author:
  - a. Polycarp, a close associate of John, appears to make reference to this epistle at the beginning of the second century, in a letter to the Philippians
  - b. Irenaeus, a student of Polycarp, quoted from it and attributed it to John

### B. The recipients...

1. **No one is specifically mentioned.**
2. **John may have been in Ephesus at the time and this was a general epistle to the Christians throughout Asia Minor.**
3. **However, John's comments in 1 John 2:20, 27 suggests that John may have been addressing a particular group of Christians possessing certain spiritual gifts.**
  - 1 John 2:20-21, 27 HCSB But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. 21 I have not written to you because you don't know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie comes from the truth. 27 The anointing

you received from Him remains in you, and you don't need anyone to teach you. Instead, His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie; just as it has taught you, remain in Him.

### C. Date...

1. **Estimations range from 60 A.D. to 100 A.D.**
2. **Most modern scholarship places it around 95 A.D., but there are also good reasons for believing it was written prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.**

### D. Purpose...

1. As declared by John throughout his epistle, he wrote it...
  - a. **"that your joy may be full" –**
    - [1 John 1:4 HCSB](#) We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.
  - b. **"that you may not sin" –**
    - [1 John 2:1 HCSB](#) My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father--Jesus Christ the righteous One.
  - c. **"that you may know that you have eternal life" –**
    - [1 John 5:13 HCSB](#) I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.
  - d. **"that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God" –**
    - [1 John 5:13 HCSB](#) I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.
2. **On the negative side it appears he was also responding to errors that were prevalent at the time –**
  - [1 John 2:26 HCSB](#) I have written these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you.
    - a. If not fully developed in John's day, there was at least a precursor to "Gnosticism"
    - b. Those who came to be called "Gnostics"...
      - 1) Claimed to have a superior knowledge (Greek word for knowledge is "gnosis")
      - 2) Believed all matter was evil
        - a) Therefore God did not create or have anything to do with the material universe
        - b) Therefore Christ could not have come in the flesh -
  - [1 John 4:1-3 HCSB](#) Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to determine if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. But every spirit who does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist; you have heard that he is coming, and he is already in the world now.
    - I. One branch of Gnosticism, DOCETISM (dokein, "to seem"), said that Jesus only "seemed" to be physical –
  - [1 John 1:1 HCSB](#) What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed, and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life--

II. CERINTHUS taught that "Jesus" was physical, but that the "Christ" came upon him at his baptism, and left before his death, so that the "Christ-spirit" never suffered –

- **1 John 5:6 HCSB** Jesus Christ--He is the One who came by water and blood; not by water only, but by water and by blood. And the Spirit is the One who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.
- c. Their application to everyday living took two different directions; since all matter was thought to be evil...
- 1) Some thought one should abstain altogether from anything that would satisfy the flesh
  - 2) Others claimed it did not matter what one did in the flesh (it was evil anyway), and to have full knowledge it was proper to explore everything. Many of John's comments in this epistle appear to address these false teachings.

With this brief background to the epistle, let's get right into the text by considering the first four verses. They appear to serve as a PROLOGUE, and reveal...

## II. John's aim in writing this epistle (1:1-4)

### A. Concerns the Word of Life (1) He wished to direct our eyes towards the Master.

- **1 John 1:1 HCSB** What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed, and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life--
  1. Which was "from the beginning"
    - a. John may have reference to the creation of the world -
  - **John 1:1 HCSB** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
  - **1 John 2:13 HCSB** I am writing to you, fathers, because you have come to know the One who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have had victory over the evil one.
    - b. Or he may have reference to the beginning of the gospel –
  - **1 John 2:7, 24 HCSB** Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command, but an old command that you have had from the beginning. The old command is the message you have heard. **24** What you have heard from the beginning must remain in you. If what you have heard from the beginning remains in you, then you will remain in the Son and in the Father.
  - **1 John 3:11 HCSB** For this is the message you have heard from the beginning: we should love one another,
- 2. This "Word of life" was...
  - a. "heard"
  - b. "seen with our eyes"
  - c. "looked upon"
  - d. "handled"-- all emphasizing that this "Word" was "real, in the flesh"; an obvious reference to Jesus –
- **John 1:1, 14 HCSB** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **14** **If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.**

## **B. To declare the eternal life. (2) He wished to clarify how we may possess eternal life.**

- **1 John 1:2 HCSB** that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us--
  1. This eternal life John described as being...
    - a. With the Father
    - b. And then manifested to the apostles, who had seen and were bearing witness
  2. Again, this is an obvious reference to Jesus Christ
  3. But notice the use of the NEUTER gender throughout this passage
    - a. The emphasis appears to be on the "life" which Jesus had, especially that which is "eternal" ("that eternal life")
    - b. It is this same "life" which we can possess if we truly believe in the name of the Son of God –
- **1 John 5:11-13 HCSB** And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. **12** The one who has the Son has life. The one who doesn't have the Son of God does not have life. **13** I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.
  4. Thus John is focusing on the "eternal life" which Jesus offers and made possible by His coming in the flesh

## **C. That you may have fellowship with us (3)**

- **1 John 1:3 HCSB** what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may have fellowship along with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.
  1. Here is the reason for declaring the "Word of life", the "eternal life"
  2. By declaring this "life" (revealed by Jesus and through Jesus), "fellowship" is possible
    - a. Fellowship involves the idea of "sharing, communion"
    - b. The "sharing, communion" that the apostles have is with the Father and His Son
  3. John wanted his readers to participate in this same sharing...
    - a. "that you also may have fellowship with us"
    - b. I.e., that you can experience what we are experiencing!
  4. Why does John desire this? Read on...

## **D. That your joy may be full (4)**

- **1 John 1:4 HCSB** We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.
  1. It is "fellowship" with the Trinity and with other Christians that makes the "life" of a Christian so full of joy!
  2. And just as Jesus came to give us "abundant life"
- **John 10:10 HCSB** **A thief comes only to steal and to kill and to destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance.**

so, John now writes...

- a. That we may be sure to have fellowship with the Father and His Son, in Whom is "eternal life" –
- **John 17:3 HCSB** **This is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and the One You have sent--Jesus Christ.**
    - b. In order to know complete joy, we must know God. And in order to know God we must know His Son Jesus Christ of Nazareth!

## **Conclusion**

1. From 1 John 1:1-4, then, we learn that fullness of joy comes only when we are in fellowship with the Father and the Son
2. Only then do we have that "eternal life", which was first manifested in the flesh by Jesus Himself, and now given only through Jesus - cf. 1 John 5:11-13
3. In our next lesson, we shall see what John says is essential if we are to truly have fellowship with God (1 John 1:5-2:2)

But if you are not a Christian, let me explain how such fellowship with God can begin...

- [Galatians 3:26 HCSB](#) for you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.