

## The Reality of Eternal Life      1 John 1:1-4

### 1 John 1:1-4 Introduction

- In a 1945 essay entitled Christian Apologetics, C.S. Lewis said it so well it's worth repeating:
  - "One of the great difficulties is to keep before the audience's mind the question of truth. They always think you are recommending Christianity not because it is true but because it is good. And in the discussion they will at every moment try to escape from the issue "true--false" into stuff about a good society, ... or the Spanish Inquisition ... or anything whatever. You have to keep forcing them back, and again back, to the real point ... One must keep on pointing out that Christianity is a statement which, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance."
- John wants us to see that Christianity is true and, therefore, of infinite importance.
- When they first met Jesus, John and those earliest disciples were confronted with the reality of eternal life in Him. All their ideas of religion were either fulfilled in or shattered by Jesus – the Word of Life. And they were forever changed – deeply, devastatingly and eternally changed.
- John got to know Jesus as the Truth – reality itself in the flesh.
- He knew Him, touched Him, walked alongside Him and spoke with Him day after day.
- From the moment he left his fishing boat, his life was never the same – and he made it his life's ambition to encourage others in that same eternal life that he had found in Jesus.
- That's why he wrote this letter.
- And that's why we're going to study it through in some depth.
- We want it to reinforce our faith in Christ and the reality of the eternal life that we now possess through our faith in Him.

**Jesus, the real Son of God, really appeared in the real world to give real people like us real eternal life.**

### 1 John 1:1-4 Outline

- **Four Verses:    Four Key Words:**
- Verse 1:        Life
- Verse 2:        Witness
- Verse 3:        Fellowship
- Verse 4:        Joy

#### Verse 1: Life

- This prologue is a lot like the one we find at the beginning John's Gospel.
- Read John 1:1-5, 14
- F.F. Bruce pointed out the relationship:
  - "If the Gospel speaks of the incarnation of the Eternal Word, the Epistle speaks of the manifestation of the Eternal Life. 'The Word was God', says the Gospel; 'this is the true God and eternal life', says the Epistle (5:20)."

- John uses very concrete terms to describe the connection he and his fellow apostles had with Jesus. He describes Him as that which:
  - We have heard
  - We have seen with our eyes
  - We have looked upon
  - Our hands have handled
- These are the words of someone who knew Jesus in a very real way.
- The phrase “which we have looked upon” can further be expressed as follows:
  - “Attentively considered on various occasions” (John Wesley)
  - “Something which we had an opportunity to observe closely” (J.B. Phillips)
  - “The calm, intent, continuous contemplation of an object which remains before the spectator” (Westcott)
- The expression “our hands handled” is used in reference to the risen Christ, not by John but by Luke. See Luke 24:39
- Think for a moment of the person who has had the biggest lifelong influence upon you.
- Sitting here right now, it would be difficult to prove to the person next to you the exact impact that person has had. The best you could do is try to describe your relationship and its result.
- John’s experience of Jesus was real, personal and objective – and it made a bigger difference in his life than that person has made on you.
- When we put all of these together:
  - We have heard
  - We have seen with our eyes
  - We have looked upon
  - Our hands have handled
- John is stressing their personal, objective experience of Deity revealing Himself in humanity. John isn’t making this up.

## **Verse 2: Witness**

- John emphasizes Jesus as “the life” even more in v.2 than in v.1 where we first observed it.
- He is the living one who has life in himself.
  - See John 11:25, 14:6
- For “eternal life” throughout this letter:
  - 1:2
  - 2:25
  - 3:15
  - 5:11, 13, 20
- John bore witness and declared that eternal life to others.
- He had this all-consuming passion to reinforce our faith.
- There were other teachings around that theorized from a creative, philosophical base, but they were not witnesses. They had not seen or heard or touched Jesus.
- John understands what’s at stake when it comes to what we believe about Jesus.
- As the source of all life, we want to follow Him as closely as we possibly can.
- John records a time when the difficulty of Christ’s teaching caused many to turn away.
  - John 6:66-69

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**Verse 3: Fellowship**

- So the message John declared was the person and work of Christ, the real Son of God.
- Jesus is both the source and the substance of the eternal life which John wants us to know that we have.
- He now defines that life in terms of fellowship, or relationship, with the Father and the Son.
  
- Here John is simply going along with the words of Jesus that he recorded in his Gospel.
- We can read them in the Lord's high-priestly prayer in John 17:3.
- Eternal life is nothing more than, less than or other than know God the Father through knowing Jesus Christ. To know the Source of Life itself by faith is to receive eternal life.
  
- There is an extremely significant point John makes that we don't want to miss:
- John's readers did not know Jesus is the same personal, concrete way that he did.
- Yet John says they can enjoy the same kind of fellowship with God and Jesus that he does.
- Remember too, that Jesus had long since risen from the dead and ascended into heaven.
  
- David Jackman explains,
  - "Our blessings are none the less real because they rest on faith rather than sight. As Jesus told Thomas: 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed' (Jn. 20:29). Faith is the door to fellowship."
- We enjoy the same quality of fellowship with Christ that John and those early Christians did.
  
- Warren Wiersbe comments further,
  - "It was not the Apostles' physical nearness to Jesus Christ that made them what they were. It was their spiritual nearness. They had committed themselves to Him as their Savior and their Lord. Jesus Christ was real and exciting to John and his colleagues because they had trusted Him. By trusting Christ, they had experienced eternal life!"
  
- Our fellowship is not vague or sentimental.
- The word which we believe and obey has been communicated to us through His apostles.
- In John's day, some already abandoned the apostolic teaching.
- In so doing, they severed themselves from fellowship with the Father and the Son.
  
- On the other hand, if we abide in Christ and maintain those apostolic teachings, then the fellowship we have with the Father and the Son is every bit as real as John's.
- Again, John's first readers did not know Jesus personally the way John did.
- His goal of encouraging them in their faith can also be accomplished in us.

#### **Verse 4: Joy**

- The fellowship that we enjoy with the Father and with Jesus is based upon eternal life.
- Eternal life, besides being eternal can make the hugest difference in our lives right now.
- John got excited about seeing others walking in the truth that he shared.
- In 3 John 4, he expresses it about as well as it can be expressed.
  
- “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature,” wrote Karl Marx.
- He said further, “The first requisite for the people’s happiness is the abolition of religion.”
- Marx’s theories utterly failed when tried on a large scale. No one was happy.
- John wrote this letter to us because he wanted our “joy to be full,” just as his was.
  
- Let’s read what Jesus said in John 15:11.
- When Paul listed the qualities of the fruit of the Spirit, joy was high on the list.
  - See Galatians 5:22
- John’s joy was made complete as he could see for a fact that his readers shared his true knowledge of Christ.
  - See 2 John 12.
  
- C.S. Lewis described joy as “the serious business of Heaven.”
- This world is so full of difficulties that our capacity for joy may be blocked.
- But John’s joy reminds us that as our priorities get closer to his own, our joy will increase.
- In other words, the more intimate our fellowship with Jesus and His people, the greater our joy will be.

#### **1 John 1:1-4: Conclusions**

- This letter is sometimes called “the epistle of eternal life.”
- It shows how that life was uniquely and perfectly manifested in Jesus Christ.
- John’s own experience of that life gives him the ability to speak of it with confidence – and communicate his confidence to us.
- He speaks as an eye-witness and personal friend of Jesus.
  
- One of the truths John makes clear deals with the reality of Christ’s humanity.
- His humanity is important to us because that is what allows Him to be our true substitute on the cross.
- We needed a real human to die for our human sin – and become, as John calls it, the “propitiation” or “atoning sacrifice” for us.
  
- John wrote this letter to reinforce our faith in Christ and the reality of the eternal life that we now possess through our faith in Him.
- Through this letter he bears witness, declares and writes to us about his personal experience of Deity revealing Himself in humanity.
- Our very real fellowship with the Father, the Son and with other Christians is the result.

- The fellowship is intended to grow.
- If we are out of fellowship with God, it is usually for one of three reasons:
  - We have somehow disobeyed God's will.
  - We have broken fellowship with fellow believers.
  - We are believing a lie rather than the truth.
- Broken fellowship with God will also lead to a shortage of joy.
- There are a few things we can intentionally cultivate in response to these first few verses of 1 John.
  - Allow this letter to reinforce your faith.
  - Consider the reality of the eternal life that you possess as a result of that faith.
  - Consider your own witness – and the opportunities you have to reinforce the faith of others.
  - Take steps to increase your fellowship with the Lord and with other Christians.
  - As you do all of these things, see whether or not joy comes as a byproduct.
- One last time, those four key words:
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