

## 1 John 1:1-4 Answers Fellowship & Joy

**Introduction:** Unlike most New Testament letters, 1 John has no greeting or farewell. Some think it may actually be a transcript of a verbal message John gave when John was fairly old and living around Ephesus. It was to the church in Ephesus that Jesus said:

ESV **Revelation 2:4** . . . I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

Perhaps this sermon (1 John) is John's way of helping the Ephesian church in light of what Jesus said. This letter explains how we can have a closer relationship with God, just like the apostles had.

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**\*\*\*Why did John write this letter (1:1-4, two reasons)?** In short, John wrote for purposes of **1**) fellowship (1:3) and **2**) joy (1:4). These two purposes are indicated by the words "so that" before each stated purpose. This first paragraph is a prologue to the rest of the sermon. It sets the stage.

**What had John heard, seen, and touched (1:1)?** John heard, saw and touched something he called the "word (*logos*) of life".

**1. John described the word of life (1:1) as "that which" (neuter) instead of "he who" (masculine). Is John talking about a message or a messenger, a proclamation or a person (1:1-4)?** The word of life is both. As John wrote elsewhere:

ESV **John 1:14** . . . the Word [a message] became flesh [a person] . . .

Thus it refers not only to the word as a Person (Jesus) but also to the grace, the power and the salvation, that come through Jesus (Lenski, p 370). Thus it refers to both the Being and the Blessing He brings.

**2. In a typical sentence we have a subject, a verb and a direct object (in that order). In 1:1-3, the subject is we (1:3), the verb is proclaim (1:3); and the object is the word which (1:1). What is the significance of starting with the object of the sentence ("which"), and then repeating the object ("which") over and over again before finally arriving at the subject and verb (1:3)?** Arranging the words in this way stresses the nature of the object proclaimed rather than the activity of proclaiming it (Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, p 100). The significance is in what he proclaimed, not the fact that he proclaimed it.

**3. Why is it significant that the word of life is "from the beginning" (1:1)?** The word of life goes back to the very beginning of everything, back to the in the beginning when the heavens and the earth were created.

ESV **John 1:1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

**Parallels:** in the beginning/from the beginning, the Word/the word of life, with God/with the Father).

**Time Capsule:** In Greek, there is there no definite article (“the”) before “beginning” (1:1). The lack of an article emphasizes the preexistence and divine character (Rienecker, p 784). This would indicate a qualitative stress. Before the beginning began, Jesus was already there. Before any beginning, there was Jesus. Jesus has no beginning. The opening curtains of history part, and there the word of life already stood. He is the Ancient of Days, the great “I AM”. When time capsules are opened, people are eager to see what’s inside; it is a message from the past. The word of life is not only a message from the past, but it created time itself (past, present, future).

**John alone wrote this letter; to whom does the plural “we” refer (1:1)?** John was not alone in having known Jesus. It was John plus all the other apostles. The other apostles did not write this letter, but they were fellow witnesses with him.

KJV **Matthew 18:16** . . . in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

**A person with hearing loss must often read lips, using both ears and eyes. What else did John emphasize in 1:1 — not only had John heard Jesus — but what else?** He had also 1) seen Jesus 2) with his eyes and 3) looked upon Him.

**Why did John add “with our eyes” (1:1)?** It adds vividness and authority to what John experienced. It was not hear-say. “Looked upon” (1:1) is from a Greek word that is basis for the English word theater.

ESV **John 1:14** . . . the Word became flesh . . . and we have seen his glory . . .

**Application:** John was really hammering this fact: we saw Jesus. We “theatered” Jesus. Earlier, God the Father spoke out of a cloud and said, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him” (Mk 9:7). John knew Jesus personally. John was trained by Jesus. Now, listen to him (John)! What we are reading is true and it is important. It is life changing.

**Not only had they heard Jesus, not only had they seen Jesus, but was else had they done (1:1)?** They had touched Jesus. The idea behind “touched” (1:1) is really more the idea of handled. It was used of a blind man who touches something to “see” what it looks like, or a man feeling his way along in the dark (Rienecker, p. 784).

**Heresy:** The earliest heresies denied that Jesus was a real man. John knew that Jesus was not a phantom, He was not a ghost, He was not a spirit-being. He was a real flesh and blood man, God in the flesh

**4. What difference in feel is there between we heard and we have heard (1:1), between we saw versus and we have seen and we touched versus we have touched?** Have heard, have seen and have touched are all in the Greek perfect tense, a past action with presently abiding results: "We have heard Jesus speak, and his words are still ringing in our ears. We have seen with our eyes, and we can still envision him." It was vivid, real and unforgettable.

The sense of the perfect tense is expressed in Oliver Wendell Homes' famous speech about the Civil War: "We have shared the incommunicable experience of war, we have felt, we still feel, the passion of life to its top. In our youth our hearts were touched with fire."

In John's youth his heart was touched by fire. He shared life with Jesus, the word of life. He felt, he still felt even in old age, the passion for Jesus to its top.

**5. In Jewish thinking, what was God's "word" associated with (1:1)?** It's time for a "word" study! The Greek for word (1:1) is *logos* (basis for logo, logic). In Jewish thought, God's *logos*, God's word is **a)** how God creates and **b)** how He communicates with his creation (*ESV Study Bible*, p. 2019).

**a)** God spoke the universe into existence. God said, "Let there be light". God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation . . ." God said, "Let the waters swarm with . . . living creatures." God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures . . ." God said, "Let us make man in our image."

ESV **John 1:1-3** In the beginning was the Word . . . All things were made through him . . .

**b)** God also communicated to people through his word (spoken and embodied):

ESV **Genesis 15:1** . . . the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."

The word of the LORD, the word of life, is the none other than the Second Person of the Trinity: God the Son (Jesus). Jesus is the ultimate embodiment of God's communication with man.

**Why is God's word associated with life (1:1)?** God, through His spoken word, created life (Genesis 1) and Jesus makes possible eternal life (1:2).

ESV **John 1:1-5** In the beginning was the Word . . . In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

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**\*\*\*\*What can we learn about the word of life from 1:2?** The word of life **a)** was made manifest, **b)** has something to do with eternal life and **c)** was with God the Father.

**6. What does it mean to make something manifest (1:2)?** It means to make something readily perceived by the eye or the understanding; it is evident, obvious, apparent, plain.

In seminary sometimes a student would say, "I think God is trying to teach me something". A wise professor replied, "If God wants to teach you something, you will learn it. There is no trying to it." So too, God made manifest to the apostles the word of life. There was no doubt about it.

**7. John said twice they saw Him, once they looked upon him and twice that He was manifested (1:1-2). Why so much emphasis on actually having seen the word of life?** John wanted his readers to know he was an expert witness. His message is not hearsay. You are reading a letter from a man who saw Jesus, who touched Jesus, who heard Jesus, who knew Jesus in person, bodily, when He was here on earth.

ESV **John 1:14** . . . the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory . . .

**After seeing, hearing and touching the word of life, the apostles began to testify. What does it mean to testify to something (1:2)?** It is what a witness does on the witness stand in a court room. It is from *marturoumen* (basis for martyr), a very experiential word. Testify is in the present tense, which signifies an on-going action that happens over and over (it is constant). They could not be quiet about Jesus.

ESV **Acts 4:13** . . . when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished . . . they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

**Application:** If we, today, have been walking with Jesus, we too can't help but testify about Him.

**The apostles testified to Jesus and then what did they proclaim (1:2)?** In the Greek John literally wrote they proclaimed, "the life, the eternal" (in an emphatic way). The word of life is eternal life. Jesus Himself is Life, and naturally since Jesus is eternal, from the beginning, without a beginning, the life He gives is eternal.

ESV **John 3:16** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

**8. You'll notice there is a dash (hyphen) at the beginning and at the end of verse 2 (ESV), making it somewhat of a parenthetical remark. Why would John want to make a parenthetical remark at this point (1:2)?** It makes clear beyond all doubt that the Life which John was writing about was first-hand information about something that is eternal and from the Father.

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**\*\*\*\*In 1:3 John got back on track. What first reason for writing did John state in 1:3?** John wrote for purposes of fellowship (1:3). Note the words "so that" (*hina* with "have" in the subjunctive).

**What is fellowship (1:3)?** From *koinonion*, it literally means “to have in common” and thus “close relationship”. It was used of marriage relationships and business partnerships. It indicates the setting aside of private interests and the joining in with another for a common purpose (Rienecker, p. 785).

**9. John wrote so his readers would have fellowship with “us”; who was “us” (1:3)?** At first glance it might appear he simply meant himself and the other eye-witnesses of the word of life (the apostles). However, John added, “and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1:3b).

**Do you realize who is included in the word “us” (1:3)?** (*Rhetorical*). God Almighty Himself! John wrote so that his readers would have fellowship not only with John but also with the Father and Son, just as John and the apostles had fellowship with the Father and the Son.

**Wonderful Offer:** If anybody knew Jesus it was the apostles, and John said we can enter into the same fellowship that John had.

**Insight:** John wrote this to people who already believed in Jesus. Yet one of his goals in writing was to help them have fellowship with Jesus. That means it is possible to be a genuine Christian and not be in fellowship with God.

**10. Personal Assessment: Would you say you have fellowship with the Father and Jesus (1:3)?** (*Rhetorical*).

**Application: If you are not in fellowship with God now, when do you plan to start?** (*Rhetorical*). **Do you like eating dry toast with nothing on it?** (*Rhetorical*). That’s in essence what we’ve chosen when we fail to fellowship with God and other believers.

**ESV John 14:21** Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.

**Love Triangle:** It is important to observe that true fellowship is not merely vertical, between the lone person and God. Rather there is to be a love triangle between the person, God and other believers. It is not just about you as an individual. It is about us all together in community with each other and God.

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**What second goal in writing did John state in 1:4?** He also wrote “so that” there would be complete joy.

**11. What is joy (1:4)?** The Greek is *chara*, delight. It is profound gladness or satisfaction. In English joy is a feeling of great happiness. Synonyms include bliss, jubilation, triumph, elation, exhilaration, ecstasy and euphoria.

**12. Important: To whom does the word “our” refer?**

a) If it refers only to John and his fellow apostles, then John was writing to make his own joy complete, as in:

ESV **John 1:4** I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

Just as parents have joy when their children turn out well, John had joy in knowing other believers were in fellowship with the Father and Jesus.

b) It is quite possible the “our” refers to John together with his readers (that would, by extension, include us). He was writing to make both his joy and their joy complete. (In fact, some ancient Greek manuscripts have “your joy” rather than “our joy”).

**Application:** Our lives are to be characterized by complete joy.

ESV **John 15:11** [Jesus speaking] These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

John heard Jesus offer this joy (Jn 15:11) and now John is telling us about it.

**13. It should be fairly obvious to you and those around you if you have complete joy. Do others see you as a joyful person or one whose joy has been taken away (An old grump, a sourpuss, a Sad Sack, a Puddle glum, an Eeyore)? If complete joy does not describe you, why might that be? (Rhetorical)**

**14. What is the link between complete joy (1:4) and fellowship with God (1:3)?** Joy is the result of fellowship with God.

ESV **Galatians 5:22** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience . . .

ESV **Philippians 3:1** Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.

ESV **Philippians 4:4** Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

**Application:**

If you don't find your joy in Jesus, you'll never find it.

If you are miserable being single, you are not finding your joy in Jesus.

If you are miserable being married, you are not finding your joy in Jesus.

If you are miserable because of where you live, you are not finding your joy in Jesus.

If you are miserably in your job, you are not finding your joy in Jesus.

### So What?

**15. What does 1:1-4 reveal about the reliability of John's testimony concerning Jesus?** The information John gave his readers about Jesus is reliable. John saw, heard, touched, understood, and fellowshiped with Jesus Himself, *in person*. You can trust what you read. It is accurate. He knew what he was talking about. These are source documents.

**16. How might this paragraph (1:1-4) help us in our worship?** Jesus is the eternal, pre-existent word of life who was manifested in a way that could be seen, heard and touched. He is the embodiment of eternal life. Understanding the message and knowing the messenger brings joy, fellowship with God and eternal life.

**Small Group Discussion Questions:** Ask everyone to divide up by gender into groups of three and discuss the following two questions for 5-10 minutes:

***How can a believer have closer fellowship with God than he now has?***

***How can a believer who does not have complete joy get complete joy?***

\*\*\*\* = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.

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