

1 John Chapter 1A 2018

This wonderful letter that we will endeavor to study throughout the coming months, that bears the Title, “1 John” is unique among all the other Epistles.

You see, it was customary in the first century for the author of a letter to introduce himself by placing his signature within the first few lines of the document. Example:

- 2 Corinthians 1:1 **Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,**
- Philippians 1:1 **Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi,**
- BUT this letter known as 1 John bears no signature and contains no destination

As a matter of fact, the only book of the Bible in which John actually identifies himself is the book of Revelation.

- In the Gospel that bears his name, John calls himself, “**The Disciple Whom Jesus loved.**” (*Friends I wish we could all identified ourselves in this way*)
- In 2 and 3 John he identifies himself simply as “**The Elder.**” Which rightly describes both His age and His divinely appointed office.
- So we have to ask, how do we know that the Apostle John wrote this letter?

Well, the early church Fathers, men like: Polycarp, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian and many more affirm the fact that John the Son of Zebedee wrote this letter and they date his writing somewhere between the years 85 -95 AD.

- As you can see from the dating of the book, John didn’t actually begin writing until he was very old, decades after the resurrection.
- To put his writing into perspective, the Apostle Paul had already been dead for 20 years before John began this writing.
- Today as we seek to understand this the first epistle of John, I think it may be helpful for us to know something of the times and circumstances surrounding his letter.

In his introduction to this first epistle of John, Donald W. Burdick writes:

“Apart from the Judeo-Christian sphere, the world was religiously inclusivistic. There was always room for a new religion, provided of course that it was not of an exclusive nature.”

- When you think about it, that same description would be fitting for our own generation where people are encouraged to do and believe whatever is right in their own eyes, and the only absolute truth is that there is no such thing as absolute truth.
- So long as you are willing to add your beliefs into the melting pot of pantheistic pluralism you’ll be fine. (*Many people tell me, “we all serve the same God. Some call him Buddha, some Muhamad and some Jesus, but there is only one God”*)

And just like in John’s day, As soon as you make a statement that sounds exclusive, like the one recorded in John 14:6 where Jesus said: **“I am the way the truth and the life, no**

one comes to the Father except through me.” You are immediately categorized as a narrow minded fundamentalist, and regardless of the loving way that you share the truth you will most likely be maligned as one who is Hateful.

Burdick continues his introduction of 1 John with these words:

“Syncretism, however did not merely express itself in a mood of tolerance toward other faiths. Its characteristic expression was in the combination of various ideas and beliefs from different sources to form new or aberrant religions. This was the age of developing mystery religions, the age of the occult, the age of the proliferation of Gnostic sects.”

Well Friends: In John’s day as it is in our day the aberrant philosophies of the world continually seek to permeate the church and corrupt the Gospel.

- Nothing has really changed.
- As we saw in 2 Peter, when false teachers arrive in the church bringing their destructive heireses the shepherds of the flock, who serve as watchmen on the wall begin to sound the alarm. Well John loved his sheep and wanted them to know that there were predators knocking at the door.

Toward the end of the First Century certain aspects of Greek philosophy, especially the Philosophy of Plato began to influence the church and distort the truth.

Why am I telling you all of this? Well because understanding the time and the issues that John was facing will help us to understand the words that he has written.

The dangerous philosophy that threatened the church in John’s day, arising from Plato’s work, proposed that all physical matter (anything that is material including your physical body) is inherently evil and only that which is immaterial or spirit is essentially good.

- This thinking created a false dichotomy between the inner and outer man.
- This was the beginnings of what would eventually be called Gnosticism.
- That Word Gnosticism comes from a Greek word for knowledge – Gnosis.
- It was promoted by those who thought they has some sort of secret knowledge.

Well the Gnostics rejected the doctrine of the incarnation saying that Jesus couldn’t possibly have possessed a real physical body because everything material was evil. So they came up with all kinds of crazy ideas:

- Some who were called “Docetists” (the Greek word dokein, “Seem or Appear”) Taught because Christ was divine he only appeared to have a human form.
- SO when He walked the shores of Galilee he didn’t leave any footprints in the sand because he only seemed or appeared to have a physical body. (Well that idea ruins one of our favorite poems “Footprints in the sand.”)

One false teacher named Cerinthus taught the heresy known as “Adoptionism” which stated that Jesus was born a mere human being. He became divine later on in his life.

Jesus was just a man on whom the Christ Spirit came at his baptism and left before the cross.

Of course, all of these false ideas opposed the orthodox teaching of the Trinity which states that Jesus is, was and always will be the eternal Son of God.

Polycarp who was a disciple of John passed on a story saying, “One day John went to a bathhouse in the city of Ephesus, finding Cerinthus in the same bathhouse, John rushed out without bathing exclaiming, ‘Let us fly lest even the bath house fall down because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth is within.’”

We will discover today that the focus of John’s letter is on the Christian Community more specifically, John shows us how our fellowship and our joy are significantly damaged by erroneous ideas and false teachings about Jesus.

- He helps us understand that intimate fellowship within the Body of Christ can only be possible when there is consensus about the true identity and the abiding presence of Christ.

The theological issue that John addresses throughout this letter is the humanity of Christ. The False teachers didn’t question the deity of Christ but they totally rejected His humanity. John responds strongly in Chapter 4 saying:

1 John 4: 2 **By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.**

- You may wonder what do WE believe about the deity and humanity of Jesus?

The BFC Doctrinal Statement says:

4-1, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the Word, the eternal and true God who is of one substance with the Father. He took on Himself man’s nature, with all of its essential properties except sin: Being conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, He embodied two perfect and distinct natures in one person. He is truly God and truly man, the only mediator between God and man.

This morning we are going to examine the first 4 verses in 1 John 1

1. The Incarnate Word
2. The Word of Life
3. The Word and Fellowship

1 The Incarnate Word

- 1 John 1:1 **That which was from the beginning,**

As someone who faithfully reads and treasures the Word of God, you can’t read the introduction to 1 John without immediately being reminded of the opening verses of John’s Gospel.

- Both writings refer to a time that John calls “**The Beginning.**” And both portray Jesus as the Word.

In his Gospel, John carries us back in time before the creation of the universe in order to display the eternal nature and divine essence of the one who he calls “The Word.” John 1:1-2, “**In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.**”

- Right there at the opening of John’s Gospel he plainly states that, “**The Word** (the Lord Jesus) **was God.**”
- There is no question that the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us, the one who revealed his glory through the incarnation was the eternal Son of God.
- Throughout His Gospel John clearly shows the eternal nature of Christ.

John recorded the words of Jesus when he said, “**Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.**” John 8:58,

It was John who recorded the prayer of Jesus when he asked the Father: **And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.** John 17: 5

- John affirms the truth, Father, Son and Holy Spirit existed together as one God, three persons in perfect, loving union throughout all of eternity.

BUT we need to remember that here in this Epistle, John is not seeking to prove the Deity of Christ, because the false teachers believed that Jesus was God, the problem was that they rejected his humanity. Entertaining the philosophy of the day, they were saying that Jesus could not possess a truly human body and remain holy.

- Well that may be true about you and me but Jesus, who was born of a virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit was both human and holy, he was the God, man.

Now here in the first 4 verses of his epistle, John masterfully stacks up a series of statements that are designed to affirm the humanity of Christ and clarify the truth of the Gospel that was passed on by the Apostles. John writes,

1 John 1:1 **That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life —**

- Understand at this point John is the only surviving Apostle, the only one who could speak with authority about what he literally heard and saw and touched
John bore witness to the humanity of Christ saying:

I testify that I heard with my own ears, the voice of Christ when he commanded the wind and the waves on the Sea of Galilee saying, “**Peace be still!**” I watched in amazement

with my own eyes as the creation obeyed HIS voice. (I said, “**Who is This that even the wind obeys him?**”)

- I heard the compassion in his voice and saw the look in his eyes when he released the woman who was caught in the sin of adultery gently saying to her, “**Go and sin no more.**”

I watched with eager anticipation as he broke the bread and separated the fish by the sea. With my own hands I Labored by his side as he fed that great multitude.

- I saw him touch the hand of Jairus’ daughter and I heard him say, “**Child arise.**” I watched with tears in my eyes as he handed her back to her joyful parents.

Times without number He held on to my hand as we climbed the rugged terrain around the hills of Galilee.

- I will never forget that night when he held me in his arms as I laid my head on his chest, reclining at the table. I felt his warmth and heard his heart beating.

DON’T tell me he wasn’t human!

- I saw him sweat drops of real blood that night in the garden.
- I watched as his flesh was ripped from his back by that Roman scourge.
- I stood by in helpless, paralyzed in disbelief as they nailed him to the cross.
- I saw him bleed, I watched as he took his final breath and I heard with my own ears that victorious cry that I will never forget, “**It is finished.**”
- And I proclaim to you what I saw, what I heard, what I touched concerning the Word of Life.

In his Gospel John faithfully bore witness to the incarnation saying:

John 1:14 **the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

- The faithful proclamation announced by the Apostles From the very Beginning was that the Word became flesh and revealed himself to us as the Word of Life.
- That brings us to our second point:

2. The Word of Life

1 John 1:1 **That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life 2 the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us**

In 1 John 1:1-4, the Apostle clarifies the content of the true Gospel, the authoritative, apostolic proclamation of Good News is wrapped up in a person, who is called “**The Word of Life**” Jesus Christ and he is the one who gives eternal life to those who are dead in sin and transgressions.

The eternal, preexistent, fully divine Son came into the world, taking upon himself the nature of a servant as the definitive, final and complete revelation of God.

- He is the voice, the image and the embodiment of the invisible God.
- Through Him, God is made audible (**Hebrews 1:2-3**) Through Him God is made Visible (**Colossians 1:15**) and through Him God became Touchable (**Mark 3:10**)
- Because Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life in the flesh, because offered himself as a man in our place on the cross and because he rose victorious from the dead we who believe can now have the assurance of eternal life.
- It is through faith in HIS finished work that we have been set free from slavery to sin and filled with the Holy Spirit to live a brand new life.

John 3: 14 **As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,** 15 **that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.** 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.**

John 5:21 **For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.**

- So we see that Jesus Christ is the Incarnate Word who came to dwell among us and give his life, a ransom for many. For those who believe He is the Word of Life, Giving life to those whom he will.
- NOW we move on to see the fruit of the Word in the Lives of the Redeemed.

3 The Word and Fellowship

1 John 1:3 **That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.**

- The Apostolic proclamation of Christ works powerfully in the lives of those who believe restoring them to fellowship with God.
- And The goal of this Gospel is to call men and women who have been separated from God through sin to repentance and faith in Christ so that they might be restored to a right relationship with God.
- This fellowship with God is not merely an idea or a religious concept; it is the real life experience of those who have been born again by the Spirit of God.

Gary M Burge writes: "This is the crux of John's thought and the purpose of his writing. Christian community is not some passing association of people who share common sympathies for a cause. Nor is it an academy where an intellectual consensus about God is discovered. It cannot be so superficial. Christian community is a partnership in experience; it is the common living of people who have a shared experience of Jesus Christ."

Embracing the Word of Christ by faith, experiencing the life giving power of Christ that comes through the Gospel and the regenerating work of the Spirit, these are prerequisites for our fellowship with God and fellowship with God is a prerequisite for our fellowship with one another. (Repeat that)

The word fellowship in this context speaks of the things that WE share in common by virtue of our living union with Christ.

- We share a common experience of spiritual brokenness and humility that led us to the repentance of sin and the casting of our whole lives on the mercy of God.
- We share in the joy of knowing that our sins have been removed as far as the east is from the west through the atoning sacrifice of Christ.
- We share a common calling and adoption into the family of God. We share a common baptism into the Body of Christ.
- We share a common Master who is good, gentle and patient with us; We share a common Lord who is righteous and true.
- We share the glorious hope of eternal life where there will be no more pain, no more suffering and no more death.

The wonderful union that We who believe enjoy with Christ IS the substance that binds us, as believers together in love.

- In John 15, Jesus uses the illustration of a vine and its branches to help us understand the essence and the fruitfulness of our fellowship with Him.

John 15:4 **Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.**

- The very essence of life that abides in the vine flows into each and every branch enabling it to blossom and bear good fruit.
- This holy fellowship, this living union was at the heart of Jesus' passionate prayer that he offered up to the Father on the night that He was betrayed.

John 17: 20 **"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.**

FINALLY John ends verse 4 describing the sweet fruit of our union with Christ.

- The revelation of Jesus Christ in the heart of man is the source of immeasurable JOY. John writes:

1 John 1:4b, **And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.**

- Filled with the Joy of the Lord Himself, John seeks to pass that joy on to his readers.
- You see my friends, when the weight of guilt is lifted, when sins are forgiven, and all of our iniquity is cleansed. We are released like calves from the stall to go running and leaping and praising God.
- This is the testimony of the Scripture from beginning to the end.

Ps 20:5 **May we shout for joy over your salvation, and in the name of our God set up our banners!**

Ps 35:27 **Let those who delight in my righteousness shout for joy and be glad and say evermore, "Great is the LORD, who delights in the welfare of his servant!"**

Ps 16:11 **You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**

Ps 4:7 **You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.**

Isaiah 12: 2 **"Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation."**

3 With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

Friend, What is the source of your joy? Is it your possessions? Your hobbies? Your family?

- Certainly all of these things bring pleasure to our lives, BUT the only unchanging source of pure joy is the great salvation that comes by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone.