

The Word of Life

1 John 1:1-4

From the Beginning

The apostle John begins this letter with the reality of the incarnation and its saving importance. The first four verses of 1 John form an introduction and thesis to the whole letter. This introduction has a familiar sound to the beginning of the author's gospel. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1 ESV) In John's gospel his focus was on showing that Jesus is the eternal God. The Son was in the beginning and created all things and his name is Jesus who came to the earth. John's introduction to his letter does not focus on Jesus' divinity but his humanity.

Robert Yarbrough in the Baker Exegetical Commentary states that **"What was from the beginning" is a phrase which "occurs frequently in the LXX to refer to what extends back to the dawn or even predawn of time"** (Isa. 43:13; Hab. 1:12). Therefore, John is speaking about what was from the beginning of time as we know it. Rather than building an argument that Jesus is from eternity, John teaches that God walked with humanity. It is an amazing thought. In Christ, God walked with humanity. He who existed from limitless eternity has entered time and space and taken up residence on earth. God did not come as some sort of immaterial spirit. God was fully flesh. John says that we heard him, saw him with our own eyes, observed him, and touched him with our own hands. This was not imagined. God coming to the earth in the form of humanity is not a story. He was not hallucinated or imagined. The "we" is an apostolic "we," which is made clear in verse 3. The apostles have sensory confirmation. They heard him. They saw him. They observed his actions. They touched him. John's emphasis is to declare the reality of the personhood of Christ. The Eternal Word of Life, the Son of God, became flesh. This is not mythology. This really happened.

The Word of Life

When John writes, *“We have seen it and we testify and declare to you,”* he is essentially taking an oath as if for a deposition. This is the legal testimony of the apostles. The apostles make a guarantee to us. They heard, saw, and touched God in the flesh. This message of God becoming flesh has been offensive and a stumbling block from the moment Jesus was born. There is a strong reason why the world has rejected that God came in the flesh. So many want to make Jesus just a good man, **but not God**. Many want to make Jesus a good teacher, but not God. The reason people reject that God came in the flesh is because it means that every human being on the face of the earth must obey him. If it is true, then Jesus’ words are authoritative and must be obeyed. If it is true, then Jesus’ life is the example for all creation to follow. It is a stumbling block because he is the Word of Life. Life is only found in him. Life is not found in ourselves. Life is not found in our actions. Life is not found in good works. Life is not found in spirituality. Life is not found in other teachings or religions. Life is found in only one person, Jesus. If God came in the flesh then we no longer are the measure of truth or of anything in this world. This one man, Jesus, becomes the measure of truth and the measure of righteousness. He becomes the measure for all things in this world. Therefore, many have rejected that God came in the flesh as seen in the life of Jesus. John gives his valid testimony. The life was revealed. God has been seen. God has been touched. God has been heard. The life has come into this world.

Notice that John not only calls Jesus, “The Word of Life,” but also calls him “Eternal Life.” John says in verse 2, *“We have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us.”* The Eternal Life was with the Father. Life was lost when Adam sinned. The apostle Paul wrote that death reigned from Adam to Moses (Romans 5:14). Even after the giving of the Law of Moses death continued to reign because no one was obedient to that law.

The apostle Paul taught, *“Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law.”*

Paul said it another way, *“The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.”* (Romans 7:10 ESV) Paul even called the Law of Moses, *“The ministry of death”* (2 Corinthians 3:7). The Word came and he is eternal life. Life is only found in Jesus. There is no life in any other person or philosophy. John said it like this in his gospel, *“In him was life”* (John 1:4). Eternal life is anchored in the historical event of God becoming human.

So That You May Have Fellowship

John gives his testimony along with the apostles for one very important reason. John says his purpose is, *“So that you may have fellowship along with us”* (1:3). This is where we clearly see that the “we” and the “us” in this letter are referring to the apostles. John writes so that these Christians can be in fellowship with the apostles.

What is fellowship? Today the term is usually used improperly to speak of social gatherings. Fellowship is often described as eating a meal together. John is obviously not saying that he writes these things so that we can share a common meal. John is not asking for the Christians to have social interaction with the apostles. Fellowship is not merely socialization or social interaction. Some people treat the church like a Christian academy or university. Just come here and learn about the Bible like you were taking a college course. That idea is not the fellowship John is speaking about and is not the concept of the church. Fellowship is pictured as a partnership, working together as believers. Fellowship is a picture of union together. We have meals with all kinds of people whom I am not in Christian fellowship. Meals and fellowship halls are not the activities of fellowship. Fellowship is our common bond and union in Christ. Our union in Christ is what binds us together. Our beliefs, our faith, and our activities in Christ define the fellowship and partnership we have with one another as a church.

Fellowship is not that your name is on the church directory. Fellowship is not that you come to worship services every week. Fellowship in the scriptures is each of us being joined together and working together in the faith. Fellowship is having our lives joined together in Christ.

John's concern is that we are in fellowship with the apostles. The reason this is so important is because the apostles have fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We must be in fellowship with the apostles to be in fellowship with God. The false teachers that John is fighting against were trying to discredit the apostles and turn them away from their teachings. John is telling us that there is a problem with rejecting apostolic teaching. If you are not in fellowship with the apostles, you cannot be in fellowship with God and his Son. Christ is eternal life and we only can be in fellowship with the Eternal Life and with the Father when we have fellowship with the apostles' teaching. Do we see why the first century church continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42)? It is critical to know and have our lives joined to the apostles so that we can know and have our lives joined to the Father and the Son. Fellowship with God requires fellowship with the apostles.

John is making yet another important point with this teaching. Unity comes from right doctrine and right theology. More to the point of John's letter, unity comes from right Christology. Fellowship and unity come from believing and acting upon the right teachings about Christ. Too often we try to maintain unity through the lowest theological common denominator. We try to find the bare minimum teaching we can agree on and call it unity and fellowship. We try to be so minimal so as to not exclude anyone. But this is not New Testament Christianity. True fellowship and unity only comes through genuine Christ-centered fellowship. We cannot shy away from teaching the tough scriptures and divisive teachings. This is one reason I enjoy preaching through a book of the Bible because it ensures that we cover every word, every teaching, and every topic in God's word.

We must know the word of God and obey the word of God if we are going to be in fellowship with the apostles and thus be in fellowship with the Father and the Son. Today people want Christianity to be an emotional experience. Music is played to try to manipulate a spiritual feeling or emotional outpouring. Services are ordered to try to give you a feeling, not to give you the truth of God's word. The scriptures tell us that Christianity about what you know, what you believe, and how you act. By knowing God's word, then you will be led to a spiritual response and will have a scriptural emotional outpouring toward our Lord. The word is what brings us into fellowship with God, not feelings.

The Result

John concludes his introduction by describing the result. Our joy will be complete. Full, complete joy is the result of fellowship with the apostles. This is not a temporal joy. This is true, lasting joy. There is not complete joy when fellow believers are in danger of departing from the truth. This is John's concern as he writes this letter. He wants to make sure that his readers do not listen to the false teachers and turn away from the teachings of the apostles. Our joy is complete when we know that we are walking in the truth together.

Conclusion

God coming in the flesh is everything to the gospel message. The apostles affirm through their eyewitness testimony that Jesus was God in the flesh. Jesus is the Word of Life. Jesus is the Eternal Life. Life is only found by being in a relationship with him. We have fellowship with God and the Son by being in fellowship with the apostles.