

The Epistle of First John

Lesson Three

The Prologue (1 John 1:1-4)

Introduction:

- I. Times of unprecedented challenges to our faith.
 - A. Living in a world that's lost its way.
 1. A world that listens to "wrong voices," and is impressed with "wrong things."
 2. Truth has become compromised – almost impossible to separate truth from lies.
 3. People believe they have a right to their own "truth."
 - a. Claiming there is no absolute standard of truth.
 - b. Jesus identified that standard over two-thousand years ago (Jn 17:17).
 - B. However, there's hope.
 1. We can choose to live right in a world of wrong.
 2. We can know and experience God's saving grace – His unmerited, undeserved love and compassion toward sinners like ourselves.
- II. When John wrote this letter, he was probably about 90 years old.
 - A. But he was in touch with his time – full of wisdom and insight.
 1. John saw serious problems that needed to be addressed.
 2. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Lord's words became John's words.
 - B. The church was in the hands of second-generation and third-generation Christians.
 1. The church was drifting away from truth and toward error.
 2. The cause?
 - a. Complacency and indifference.
 - b. A perfect breeding ground for the cults – like Gnosticism.
 3. John's mission was to stop the downward spiral toward apostasy.

III. John's method: Remind all believers of four things.

A. Four preparatory clauses.

1. 1 Jn 1:4a.
2. 1 Jn 2:1a.
3. 1 Jn 2:26a.
4. 1 Jn 5:13a.

B. Four purpose clauses.

1. 1 Jn 1:4 – A joyful life (1 Jn 1:1-10).
 - a. We are to be a beacon in darkness (Matt 5:14-16).
2. 1 Jn 2:1 – A clean life (1 Jn 2:1-17).
 - a. We can defeat temptation (1 Cor 10:13).
 - b. We have an Advocate (1 Jn 2:1-2)
3. 1 Jn 2:26 – A discerning life (1 Jn 2:18-4:6).
 - a. Be aware of antichrists (2:18).
 - b. Test the spirits (4:1; cf. Acts 17:11).
 - c. Remember the anointing of the Spirit (2:20, 27).
4. 1 Jn 5:13 – A confident life (1 Jn 4:7-5:21).
 - a. Conditional on our faithfulness (1:7, 9).
 - b. Repentance implied (Lk 13:3, 5; Rev 2:5).

Discussion:

I. First three verses (1:1-3) – a single sentence in the Greek.

A. The main verb "we declare" appears in verse 3.

1. Subject is the "Word of Life" (1:1).
2. Similar opening to John's Gospel.
 - a. Called "the Word" (Jn 1:1) – "Word of Life" (1 Jn 1:1).
 - (1). Referring to Jesus: "heard," "seen," "looked upon," and "handled" the "Word of Life" (1 Tim 2:5).
 - b. "In the beginning" (Gen 1:1; Jn 1:1) – "from the beginning" (1 Jn 1:1).
 - c. Word was "made flesh" (Jn 1:14, 17-18).

- B. The "Word" (Jn 1:1) and the "Word of life" (1 Jn 1:1) is not some ethereal otherworldly being.
1. John experienced the "Word" firsthand – the Word that became flesh.
 - a. Jn 19:35; 20:8, 25-27.
 2. John and other apostles had "looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life" (1 Jn 1:1).
 - a. The term "looked upon" literally means, "to look upon intently," or to perceive "above and beyond what is merely seen with the eye."
 - b. John and his fellow apostles "handled" the Word of life with their own hands – they touched Him.
 - (1). You can't touch and handle a vision or hallucination.
 3. The "life" – the very wellspring of eternal life itself – was "manifested."
 - a. The verb "manifested" refers to the entire course of Jesus' earthly existence – His earthly ministry (Jn 1:31), His resurrection (Jn 21:1), and even His future coming (His second coming at the final judgment) (1 Jn 2:28).
 - b. The life that was manifested is not the "biological life" (Greek: *bios*), but His eternal, heavenly, divine life (Greek: *zeo*).
- C. After the parenthetical statement (1 Jn 1:2), John returns to original thought and arrives at the main verb (1 Jn 1:3).
1. The verb "declare" (*apangello*) related to "gospel" (*evangelion*) – the "good news."
 - a. Didn't simply declare "the man" Jesus – but His eternal, divine nature and character.
 - b. The apostle Paul defines the gospel – the good news about Jesus Christ – in these same terms (Rom 1:1-4, 16).
- II. The two-fold purpose behind John's declaration and proclamation of the "Word of Life" (1 Jn 1:3-4).
- A. Fellowship (1:3): a unique one-of-a-kind intimate relationship, communion, and association with God.

1. Fellowship (Greek: *koinonia*) is an intimate, mutual participation in a life shared with one another (communion, or common union).
 2. Believers have this intimate communion or oneness "with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 1:9; 1 John 1:3).
- B. Lasting joy (1:4).
1. Joy from blessings we have in Christ produces full and complete satisfaction.
- III. Fellowship (1:3) and joy (1:4):
- A. Inseparably linked together.
1. Some versions read, "And these things we write to you that your joy may be full," while other versions read, "that our joy may be complete."
 2. Message is still the same.
 - a. John's joy would be full and complete when he knew his readers experienced the same fullness and completeness of joy by having a true, intimate fellowship with God the Father.
 - b. This is what would make his joy complete – knowing that their joy was complete as well.

The Summary:

- I. 1 Jn 1:1-4 – a lifetime worth of practical principles.
 - A. The heart of the message is the "Word of Life" – Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
 1. He came to provide us eternal life with the Father in heaven.
 2. But first, we had to be cleansed from sin – God cannot have fellowship with sin.
 - a. Jesus sacrificed Himself to free us from the penalty of our sins.
 - b. He came as the spotless, sinless, Lamb of God – the only one who could die in our place by sacrificing Himself to free us from the penalty of death.
 - c. Now we can have fellowship with God – both in this life, and forever in heaven.

Review Questions:

1. What prompted John to write this letter?

2. What are the four themes (purpose clauses) of 1 John?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.

3. Who is "the Word" (Jn 1:1) and the "Word of Life" (1 Jn 1:1)?

4. What proof does John offer (in 1 John) that the Word became flesh?

5. What is the "life" that John said was manifested to the apostles and declared to us?

6. We identified two main reasons for John's declaration and proclamation of the "Word of Life." What are they?
 - a.
 - b.

7. What did Jesus do to make it possible for us to have fellowship with God?