

Reality and Relationship

1 John 1:1-4

Introduction

I recently heard someone observe that in many places the American church has become so concerned about adapting to current cultural trends and theories that it has lost its faith in the faith.

We are awash with information, but at a loss to identify truth. Confusion, lies, distortions, intimidation all conspire to silence the gospel by shaming and intimidating those who dare to proclaim absolute truth in the face of the prevailing dogmas of the age.

This is not new. It is not progressive or modern. It is part of the battle between darkness and light, between the lies of Satan and the truth of God throughout human history from the Garden of Eden to this very time and place.

But we must remember that the light of the incarnate Son of God Jesus Christ has shone in the darkness of Satan's tyranny, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 3:19

And this is the judgment (crisis): light has come into the world, and people loved the

darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.”

The apostles, like John writing at the end of the first century, were keen to expose the lies and hold high the truth. Hence, his letter of 1 John. That you may know. Know you have eternal life in Christ. Know the difference between what is false and what is true.

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— 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. ⁴ And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

1. Reality Revealed (1-2)
2. Fellowship Created (3)
3. Joy Made Complete (4)

1. Reality Revealed (1-2)

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—

That which was from the beginning—“in the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1)
Takes us all the way back to creation. But it has broken into human history during the lifetime of John.

Heard—perfect tense; past action with continuing effect

Seen—perfect tense; past action with continuing effect

Looked upon—to closely observe, gaze upon, contemplate

Used in John 1:14

And 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.

Touched—as one feels something out in the dark, to grope; aorist used, pointing to a particular instance—like Thomas touching the wounds of the risen Lord to verify He was actually risen from the dead.

Seen, heard, touched point to Jesus Christ having come in physical form. Important for John to stress at time when some were denying that God could ever come in a physical body. The false teaching (Greek dualism; Gnosticism) that spirit is good but

physical matter is evil would become widespread in the second century, but it is already trending that way by the end of the first century and John pounces on it as a lie. This lie would lead false teachers to deny that Christ, the Son of God, came in human flesh, but that he only appeared to have done so. During the early centuries Christianity suffered from an effort by many to syncretize—to combine—this Greek dualism with Christianity. You see the same kind of pressure today to conform Christianity to whatever human ideas prevail, however contrary to clear Scripture.

What does it matter? A great deal. For one thing, that Jesus came in a real, physical human body and that His body was resurrected into a glorious body is the guarantee that our physical bodies will also be glorified, that we will be raised not just spiritually but physically and enter our inheritance complete, body and soul.

Philippians 3:21

Who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Concerning the Word of Life—the gospel word or the incarnate Word, a Person?—Yes. John begins his letter with “that which” because the Word of life that he’s talking

about is both the message of the gospel and the Hero of the gospel, Jesus Christ. There is no gospel apart from Jesus.

A word—makes it possible to pass a thought from one mind to another

Hebrews 1:1-2

¹ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,
² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

The word of the gospel, the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, has brought God's thoughts to us so that we can think His thoughts after Him. It's how you can become a man or woman after God's own heart. God has used human language to communicate life to us.

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—

The life was

Manifest—to shine, to shed light on, to make clear, to reveal

Agnosticism (don't know, not enough evidence to know) refuses to consider what has been plainly revealed.

John 1:4-5

⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Have seen—perfect tense; past action with continuing effect

Testify to it—to bear witness—first-hand experience; *martyr*

All these verbs point to real historical events. People often think of Christianity as a philosophy or a moral code of ethics or a set of therapeutic ideas. Biblical Christianity certainly does have philosophical implications as does any worldview. The Scriptures do define morality, distinguishing right from wrong. And there is no question regarding the profound beneficial effect true Christianity has on those who accept it. But never forget that *Biblical Christianity is not built on myths, moral codes, theories, or ceremonies. It is rooted in real life history, recorded by eyewitnesses with firsthand experience of the events they describe.*

The library of ancient documents we call the *Bible*, “the Book,” is a collection of written firsthand testimonies to what God actually said and what God actually did over the course of 1,500 years of history. And these ancient records promise that God will yet do more. It is fatal to leave Christianity merely in

the realm of ideas, philosophy, ethics, and therapy, divorced from everyday real life, whether considering the original biblical accounts or the current day application of the truths those divine events reveal.

Proclaim to you—as one authorized to do so as a messenger (word we get *angel* from)

Luke 2:10-11

10 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. **11** For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

The eternal life—the Word of Life
 Jesus the Word is the only one through whom God communicates eternal life to us.
It is not possible to have eternal life apart from God. It is not possible to have a relationship with God apart from Jesus Christ.

1 John 5:11-13

11 And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.
12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. **13** I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

If you have Jesus, you have eternal life. If you don't have Him, you don't have life. Nothing and no one else can take His place.

Burden of the apostle John that his readers have assurance that they have eternal life in the historical Jesus no matter who denies it, and that they not be deceived by anyone claiming to offer eternal life some other way.

Which was with the Father—"and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1) Eternality of the God the Son, Jesus Christ—and unity of the Father and Son. Not like any other human being. Not just a prophet or a good man, but rather the great I Am, God with us (Immanuel).

And made manifest to us—not just that Christ came into our world at a particular point of history, but that He did so in a way that shone clear in plain view to eyewitnesses.

What we are looking for when we engage in science is to test, to verify, to ascertain some level of certainty, a solid foundation on which to build. The revelation of Jesus Christ provides observable, reliable reality that is absolute and does not change because it is without error. Jesus is real. Do you know Him as a real Person? Full human. Full God. The

unique Savior-King, Messiah, Immanuel. The one Mediator between God and man.

2. Fellowship Created (3)

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.

Fellowship—to have in common, to share, to partake

2 Peter 1:2-4

² May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

³ His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

Through reliance on the gospel the apostles proclaimed we share their firsthand experience of Jesus Christ, God the Son. And when we enter into relationship with God the Son, we enter into relationship with God the Father. That's why when we celebrate the Lord's table, we call it *communion*. It's not

just communion with each other. It's communion with Him.

John 17:20-23

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. **22** The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, **23** I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

This is the fellowship, the sharing, the partaking, that is so profound. It's one thing to be brought into the company of privileged human beings. It's far more astonishing to be brought into communion with God Himself. It's a stunning reversal of the curse of sin that drove a wedge between us and our Creator. Jesus restores us to fellowship with God. He reconciles us to the Father. He makes us part of God's family though we were by nature and deeds rebels and outcasts. Regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God.

John 15:15

No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

Human friends can be fickle in their love. But God's love for you is steadfast and constant. He is closer to you than anyone else. He knows you better and loves you more.

"Oh, the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person; having neither to weight thoughts nor measure words, but to pour them all out, just as they are, chaff and grain together, knowing that a faithful hand will take sift them, keep what is worth keeping, and then, with a breath of kindness, blow the rest away." Dinah Maria Mulock Craik, *A Life for a Life*, quoted by Morgan, *The Westminster Pulpit*, V, 63.

G. Campbell Morgan, V, 67: "Are you dreading tomorrow? Remember, God will be with you there, as profoundly interested in the piece of work your hands have to do, in the problem your mind has to face, as in the sanctuary at this hour."

This fellowship/communion/partaking/sharing is yours in Christ alone. Connects you to the apostles and prophets and all the saints. Connects you to God Himself in whose image

you are made. You do not walk alone. Christ is with you all the days, just as He promised. You can say with David, "The Lord is my shepherd."

3. Joy Made Complete (4)

And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

Throughout these opening verses, John uses the first-person plural. Later he will say, I write these things—first-person singular. But in these verses he uses the pronoun *we*—we saw, we heard, we touched, we testify, we proclaim, we write. Why? Because what John is teaching here is not unique to him. It is the testimony of all the apostles. It was their heartbeat to share their experience of Jesus Christ and the eternal life they received through Him. *The good news is not fake news.*

When you've had such an extraordinary first-hand experience, you have to share it. *Good news must be shared. You cannot be happy holding it to yourself. There is intrinsic joy in sharing such a priceless gift with others.*

That's why John says writing these things to his readers makes "our joy" complete. It fills it up. Some ancient manuscripts (handwritten copies) of 1 John read "your joy." As in English, there is only one letter difference.

But “our joy” can mean not only the joy of the apostles, but also the joy of those who read and believe their testimony. It’s a joy they share together. *There is joy in receiving the good news—the news that brings joy—and there is joy in sharing it.* This good news joy continues to this day for everyone who proclaims it and everyone who receives it.

C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 95: “I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed. It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not be able to tell anyone who good he is; to come suddenly, at the turn of the road, upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent because the people with you care for it no more than for a tin can in the ditch.”

Do you know the joy that Christ is real and that God is with you? Don’t let go of what you have received. Keep holding on to it. Keep proclaiming it. This is the pathway of joy. This week/month/year with whom can you share this news that brings joy?

Conclusion

Reality→Fellowship→Joy

Closing Song: Benediction

Discussion Questions

1. How is it helpful to your perseverance of faith in Christ to know that ever since the Garden of Eden there has been a battle between truth and falsehood, light and darkness?
2. What are some ways it is important that the coming of Jesus Christ and the proclamation of His gospel are rooted in verifiable eyewitness historical events?
3. What are some current popular solutions to the human condition (religious or secular) that sideline Jesus Christ as necessary to human rescue?
4. What common views of who Jesus is and what He did would the apostle John call out as false portrayals of reality?
5. What does John say is the connection point that brings us into fellowship (having in common, sharing, partaking) with the apostles and with God the Father and God the Son?
6. Given Christ's prayer in John 17:20-23, in what ways is it important for us to enjoy that commonality together?
7. What are some examples of times you felt great joy in receiving or sharing the

gospel of Jesus? How would you describe those experiences, and what did they do for you?