

Introduction to 1 John

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Bible Text: 1 John 1:1-4
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Alright, let's all take our Bibles and let's look at 1 John tonight. 1 John. I actually have a Bible conference I'm to preach at three times in, ah, outside of Dallas, Fort Worth in about a month or so and, um, they want me to focus on 1 John and it's been, we're talking about decades since I studied through 1 John so I thought I would do that again and I was gonna kick that off tonight and that's what we're gonna do, stay on track and do what we were gonna do.

So 1 John 1:1-14 will serve as both an introduction and then immediate exposition, if you will. 1 John 1:1,

1 What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life-- 2 and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us-- 3 what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4 These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.

Now this is written by the Apostle John, the same apostle that wrote the Gospel of John. It's, ah, the Gospel that unveils and speaks strongly of Jesus' deity.

Now the purpose of this writing is not unlike the purpose of many of the apostles, first of all, foremost is to strengthen believers and build up local churches. Ah, you can't really put your finger anywhere in the New Testament where there's not a strong centeredness on the local church, and so that's John. He's writing to these scattered churches, ah, across the Asia, the province of Asia, I should say, in the ancient Roman Empire, and he's saying, "I want to strengthen you folks and build you up in the truth that's centered in Jesus Christ."

I think, a, a, a companion emphasis there is that he wants to strengthen and affirm the true pastors and leaders of these churches and that connects to the third aspect of, um, purpose and that is that he wants to expose and refute the heresies that have sneaked into these churches. So by affirming the leaders, the true leaders, he's telling the churches, "Follow

your true pastors. Do not listen to the, ah, false teachers who has, as Jude said, have crept in among you."

Now this is the, the false teaching is basically centered around Gnosticism. Now Gnosticism is like an octopus, it's got a lot of tentacles, there's a lot of aspects to it, but the, the Gnostics had, ah, an arrogance, an elitist spirit, an attitude of superiority about them and they would tell the folks, "You've gotta look to us and you've gotta follow us if you want to know the true Christ and embrace true Christianity and therefore be truly saved." And so what was happening, ah, the elder John the apostle had a good understanding that too many in the churches were being impressed by the, ah, the, the pseudo-intellectualism and elitism of these Gnostic heretics, heresies, rather, that were creeping in. We do know from church history by the second century Gnosticism was having, ah, a, a, a large and unfortunately effective inroad into the established churches.

Now let's talk about Gnosticism in, in its broadest sense. Now I know there's a lot of scholars who have done a lot of work and break it down into various parts of Gnosticism but we're gonna look at it as one broad octopus. Let's look at the head of the octopus and not examine all the tentacles so much. Again, ah, the basic premise of Gnosticism was an elitism but the doctrine that came out of their elitism was this concept that all physical material or matter was inherently hopelessly evil. Everything that was material was irredeemably evil, and so anything that was of physical nature and not of a spiritual nature was corrupt and had no virtue or value in it whatsoever.

Now, now when they talked about Jesus, therefore, the Gnostics would say, now, Jesus to be holy could have never had a physical body. Ah, he was a spirit being and in one branch of Gnosticism, they said the spirit just came into this body at Jesus' baptism and then when Jesus went to the cross, they'd say, well, the spirit that was the true Jesus left that body on the cross. So Jesus is just a, a spook that came into a body for a while and stayed for a while and then left for a while because, again, when you have false doctrine, the dominoes start falling and you've gotta come up with all kinds of conclusions that are unbiblical and erroneous, and so that's where they were.

Now when you believe that all matter is inherently evil, that is, from the get-go it's evil and it always will be evil, then usually one of two extremes happen, dominoes start falling in two directions. The first direction would be asceticism. Ah, that's where there's severe, ah, self-denial, a severe and rigid legalism, just an abundance of rules and everything's bad and, ah, a harsh heavy burden of legalism. You could say the, some of the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' days were leaning in that direction of asceticism, extreme self-denial.

Well, also if you teach, well, if all physical matter's evil and the body is just basically evil, then there's nothing we can do about it. We can't fix the things so just give in and let go. Whatever you desire, whatever your lust may be, just unbridled sexual expression, and that's lasciviousness, the Bible's old word the King James uses where you just give in to unbridled, ah, passions and lust which is much of what our culture does today. Ah, now our culture puts a spin on it. They say this is basically good so they're calling good

evil and evil good which is a lie. It's not good, it's evil, it's sinful, it's, it's contrary to the, the Creator who made us to function in a certain way including in our sexuality.

So this was beginning to happen, asceticism, severe self-denial on one hand, and then licentiousness just unrestrained sexual expression on the other, and under, under all, or rather the, the arching theme over all of this was we have superior knowledge. We have special insight others do not have. Now this is truly what, um, the New Testament would call the doctrines of demons. If you were Satan and you wanted to trip up the church, wouldn't you want to get them off Christ into excessive legalism? And or wouldn't you want to get them off of Christ into self-indulgence and lustful pursuits? Well, that's exactly what the doctrines of demons did. They don't care which way they can take you as long as they can take you off of Christ and get you into these false, ah, philosophies and notions.

Now John didn't claim that these Gnostics were elitist, and John didn't teach that they had superior knowledge, John called them antichrist. That's the word he uses and we're gonna talk a lot about that as we look at 1 John on Sunday nights. So when it came to these Gnostic heresies and it came to these false teachings that taught an error about who Jesus was and what his nature was, and the resulting, ah, practices that came out of that, this apostle of love, as he is called and he's called that as you'll look in, as we'll know in 1 John how much he refers to the love of God that's in the church and among the brethren. Well, this apostle of love we find out turns into a strong son of thunder to refute and, ah, condemn these false teachings.

The date of the writing is roughly about 85 AD to 95 AD and the tone is, it's just an older even grandfather who is as a patriarch trying to guide the younger church into the truth. Now it's interesting if you compare the Gospel of John with the epistles of John, you find that, um, in the Gospel of John he's writing to prove Jesus' deity and assuming that everybody held to Jesus' humanity, but now things have changed and a new era, a Gnostic era has come in, so in 1 John he's writing to prove Jesus' humanity and assuming Jesus' deity. Ah, so here's my point and we, I pointed this out to you so very many times, the calling to the pastorate and, and, and one of the primary purposes and obligations of a faithful pastor is to constantly refute the error that is always unrelentingly trying to get into the church. Ah, I mean, John on one hand had, had folks denying the deity of Christ, a few decades passed, now they deny the humanity of Christ, and then, a, a, a, an assortment of errors in between. So we always have to do that as God's faithful pastors and I hope that wherever you are and whatever church you may attend if you're not a part of Grace Life Church, that you're sitting under a pastor that takes seriously, or takes serious and is diligent about defending the true faith and exposing the heresies that try to come creeping into the church.

Now let's try to unpack this just a little bit here doing something of a, a running exposition. I just have two main points here. I., would be the head of the church, the divine human Jesus. The head of the church, the divine human Jesus. Now I use that title because what John's actually gonna say here is the head of the true church and the one you ought to truly cling to is the Jesus who is fully human and fully God at the same

time. This so-called Jesus of Gnostic heresy is not the true church head. He's not the true Savior and you need to reject him.

Um, now he says there in, ah, verse 1 that simple phrase, "What was from the beginning." Now just looking at that, you would say, "Oh, that's talking about the eternality of Jesus." Could be. I'm not saying that it doesn't include that but I don't think that's the main purpose or the main meaning here. When he says in the beginning, I think he's talking about in the beginning of the church age. In other words, when God first began to reveal the truth of who Christ was and what salvation is, this was the teaching. At the very beginning when the truth came out, this is what it was and we need to get back to that is what he's saying. This evolution so-called of truth that the Gnostics talk about is in error. We need to go back to, as Jude would say, the faith once for all – listen to that – the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

Brothers and sisters, what was true in the first century is true in the 21st century. It's always been true and we need to go back to the beginning. That's why we hold to the absolute authority and full sufficiency of the word of God because it's been once for all delivered to the saints. Now a skeptic may say, "Well, that's just, that's just silly, ah, presupposition and silly faith." Call it what you want but the Spirit of God brings the child of God to the conviction that the word of God is fully authoritative and all-sufficient. We go to what was given in the beginning and the doctrines that we hold and stand on are penned and settled in the Canon of Scripture.

So he's saying here, "Let's go back to the original truth of Christ." Now to show you that I think, um, why I think this is the meaning of the phrase "from the beginning" here, look at 1 John 2:7. Would you turn over there? 1 John 2:7, he says, "Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard." He said, "I'm trying to get you back to the original teaching of the church which is the true teaching for the church."

Now verse 24 of 1 John 2. He says, "As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning." Remember those doctrines that we apostles first taught you? Go back to that. He said, "If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father." If you're holding to the original doctrines we gave you, then you are, you are abiding in the true Son who is the Son of the true heavenly Father.

And then chapter 3, verse 11. So we see he's repeating this concept all through here. "For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." So I think that's the idea here, the original truth before the false teachers came in and misled you.

Now he goes on and back to our original text here in 1 John, ah, chapter 1, and we see the phrase at the end of verse 1, "concerning the word of life," and, ah, I, I, I want to go here because this is the original truth that you need to grab hold of. He is the word of God, in

other words, he is God's message to man. He's God manifested to man. Just as our words when we speak to others express what we think and how we feel, so Christ reveals to man God's mind and God's heart. John 14:9 tells us, "He that has seen Me has seen the Father. I am the true expression of God."

Now so he's saying to the believers he's writing to, he's saying to us today, "When you know this Jesus, the one that was originally taught to you, the one I originally revealed to you in my original back in the beginning when the church age was starting or when you first began to hear the truth, that Jesus, if you hold Him, if you know Him, then you know God." By consequence and in contrast of what he's getting at here, if you're not holding to him, if you're holding to this Jesus of Gnostic heresy which is a false Jesus, then you don't know God the Father and you don't have true salvation.

Now next we notice that God chose to reveal his message to man through a literal actual person. Notice what he says there in verse 1, actually says it in verse 2, then he says it again in verse 3, notice how he words it, "What was from the beginning," here we go, "what we have heard," he was literally human, he could speak, "what we have seen with our eyes," he was literally human, we saw him, "what we have looked at," he just reemphasizes, notice how he then just amplifies this and repeats this, what we have "touched with our hands," he was a literal human, and then again in verse 2, what "we have seen we testify to you," verse 3, "what we have seen and heard." He wasn't just a spirit emanating, he was fully human at the same time he was fully God and he was fully God's revelation or God's message to mankind.

Um, so we have the, what the theologians would call Jesus is the God-man. He's 100% man as if he were not God at all. He's 100% God as if he were not man at all. How do you explain that? We can't explain it. It's a, it's a mystery. We just sang about that a moment ago. But aren't you glad we have a faith that resides in one that's bigger than human logic, that's bigger than human notions? Only God could have done this.

Well, he talks about his eternality in verse 2, "and the life was manifested," again the word "manifested" even emphasis his physical body. He was there "and we have seen and testified and proclaim to you," now here's the phrase, "the eternal life." So John gives us what to our natural minds would appear to be a paradox: he's God, he's eternal, he's God's revelation to man, he's fully human, we could see him, we could touch him, we could look at him, he's manifested, right there he is, but he's also eternal life. Wow, this is just a lot. I mean, apart from the Spirit just giving you a rest and settledness about this, it's mindblowing, it really is. He's the, not a, he's the eternal life. He's, Jesus is the life that has no beginning and he's the life that has no end. Jesus is the life, if you will, that all other life began from and he's the life that all other life depends on.

Was it Colossians where Paul wrote, "All things are held together by him." I've said it many times that, ah, if, if, everything that sticks together in the universe. Right now the scientists would tell us, "You're, you're sitting where you are in your homes or wherever you are and it's the law of gravity that holds everything together like this." Well, that's one way to describe it but the Bible would say, "No, that's the personal, present,

persistent power of Jesus Christ." If for one moment Jesus removed his hold, things would fly apart into chaos. He is, everything depends on him. He sustains everything. In him, Jesus, is an infinite quality and an infinite quantity of life. He, in effect, is the God-life. Now man has a biological existence naturally but since man's born into sin, he knows nothing of this eternal life, this God-life. We might even say that this is the kind of life Adam and Eve had before they sinned and fell in the garden of Eden.

And then again in verse 2, he uses that phrase "was manifested." He has been revealed openly to us. It's as if, ah, grandpa John, he's an old man and he writes with that kind of tone actually, it's as if grandpa Apostle John is saying, "Guys, do you not understand it? The, the truth is not in the Gnostic heresies, the people who would diminish the nature of Jesus and say he never had a real body, do you not understand he physically, bodily was manifested to us and he was the life of God, the God-life?"

Here's a question for us: if you were God, how would you have manifested yourself to man? I can guarantee you none of us would have chose the way God did it. Would you have picked through a lowly virgin? Would you have picked him to be a carpenter's son? Would you have chosen that he would come from an insignificant family? From an unimportant city? And on and on we could go. But he was God and eternal life manifested to man.

So again, John shows that he himself knows this Jesus and he's wanting them to continue clinging to and holding to this Jesus. Matter of fact, six times in this epistle John uses the phrase "born of God." I think one or two others, he uses the phrase "born of Him." So he's saying he's, he's, he's the salvation. Not this false Jesus of Gnostic heresy but the true Jesus that was in the doctrines we originally taught and preached to you. His point in talking about, um, being, being born of God is that there has to be a spiritual experience whereby you have the life that Jesus came to give and Jesus came to manifest.

Now the second thing, not only the head of the church, the divine human Jesus, but let's talk about the health of the church which is fellowship with God. Now think about it, that's the health of a church. If we want to have a healthy church, we need church members who fellowship with God. Now first of all, that means they have truly been born again. They know him but it means also they're holding to him. And by the way, John's pointing out here they're holding to the sound doctrine about him which is essential to hold to him. Now did you hear that? You hold to the sound doctrine and sound teaching about him which is holding to him.

Um, two subpoints I put under this main title of the health of the church, fellowship with God is: a full fellowship; enjoying all that you have in this Christ we preach to you. In verse 3 he says, "what we have seen and heard and we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." Now this kind of fellowshiping with God, and by the way, ah, the local church is so prominent here, my fellowship with God is inseparably linked with my fellowship with other believers. So John says, "I, I want you to know, I want you to be

connected to Me in fellowship with Me in this, and in fellowship with one another, and altogether we're in fellowship with Jesus and God the Father."

You've heard it probably many times, I don't know, I probably wasn't a Christian a, a year or so when I heard somebody say, "Well, Christian fellowship is all the fellows in the same ship rowing in the same direction." That's good in that, but what about this: Christian fellowship is all the fellows resting in the ship, Jesus, as the word guides the course and the wind of the Holy Spirit fills the sails. That's the full kind of fellowship we need to have with our God and with one another.

Now the false teachers would contradict John here. The false teacher would say, "No, no, no, that's not enough. If you're embracing Jesus Christ, the one John taught you and the one your apostles taught you from the beginning, then, then you're missing something. Things have evolved and we now have a, a higher knowledge and a deeper understanding and you have to, you have to sit at our feet and be submissive to our teaching if you're gonna really know God." And John say, "No way. If you know the Jesus we taught, then you have full fellowship with God and we can have full fellowship one with another."

Actually there's an important, a, a, a point to be made in the tense of the verb here. Look at, if you will, at, ah, verse 3 again, and the life was manifested and we have seen and testified and proclaimed to you the eternal life. I'm sorry, I'm in verse 2, down to verse 3, "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you may," it's a present tense, "so that you may keep on having fellowship with us," and the emphasis would just carry on through, "and we keep on having fellowship with the Father together with you and with His Son Jesus Christ."

So if you are holding to the true doctrine of Christ, he's the God-man, he accomplished salvation, in him is eternal life, in him is forgiveness of sins, then if you keep on holding to him, then you are having the full fellowship God intends for you to have. One scholar named Killinger said, "What you believe doctrinally determines whether you have full fellowship practically." Ah, doctrine matters. Sound teaching matters greatly in the church.

I, I, I think unfortunately in, in a lot of Baptist and evangelical circles today, um, there's such, sometimes it's not false doctrine it's just sort of atheological, there's not much taught at all, and people believe all kinds of things and people join the church under a false premise of a, a hoop jump type of approach to church membership or to salvation and church membership, and so very often people are gathered together in what's called a church and they have cooperation maybe in some ways, they have toleration together in some ways, they have an operation, mechanization, but they don't have full fellowship. They don't have that life. Folks, you must be born again. John's gonna say it three times. You must be born of God and then you have Christ, you have him who was manifested in the flesh. He's fully human. He's fully divine. But he has the eternal life and as he lives in us, then we have fellowship with God and we have full fellowship one with the other. There's no other way to have it. In effect, the false teachers are trying to rob you of this full fellowship and I'm trying to save you from that.

Well, lastly, not only under the health of the church, fellowship with God, do we see him talking about a full and, I might even add, a true fellowship, also he talks about a complete joy. Verse 4, "These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete." Now this is talking about a pastoral joy. John is saying, "If, if you guys will hold to sound truth and love the Christ we preached to you from the beginning, this divine human Christ who has eternal life, then when we hear that and we hear the sweet love and fellowship you have for one another and for this Christ, then as your apostle, i.e. as your pastor, it makes my joy full." John actually uses the plural pronoun, our joy. He's talking about himself and his associate leaders and teachers that are with him, and I can tell you as a pastor of a local church there's nothing, there's nothing to compare with the joy of watching your people not come out of sentimental purposes or, or emotionalism, but that there's a real indication that they are grasping true doctrine, biblical doctrine, centered in Christ, they give full evidence of knowing him and having the true eternal life only he can give them, and there we all have it together, we all connect, ah, we're one, we love each other, we need each other. It's just, it's just, it just brings a joy. It just brings a joy and I think probably all of us to one extent or another, maybe in your own families, who knows where, at school, ah, a thousand different places, you have folks who, who call themselves Christians, I'm not necessarily saying they are or are not, but they don't hold to sound doctrine, they don't hold to the, the great truths of Scripture, and you love them but it, it diminishes the joy of the fellowship. Doctrine matters. Holding to the truth matters and it certainly matters about the joy we have one with the other.

If these believers remained sound, then they can have the kind of fellowship God intends for the church to have and then it will bring the great fullness of joy that John said would give him, but it doesn't just, John's not the only one that's gonna have joy in this, they certainly are gonna have joy in it too. Joy is the wonderful byproduct of fellowshiping with God – now listen – and fellowshiping with one another. Ah, that Lone Ranger Christian, that man that thinks he's an island in himself, he can study his Bible, he can teach his Bible to his family and he doesn't really need a local church, he misses everything John is talking about. He does not have the fellowship with like-minded believers that breeds the kind of wonderful joy – now listen – joy the world knows nothing of, joy the world cannot even comprehend.

Psalm 16:11, the Bible says, "In thy presence is fullness of joy." Sin promises joy but it's actually a lie. Satan and his, ah, provisions of sin know nothing of true joy. They know the passing pleasures of sin but it's not true joy. John 16:22 says your joy, no man taketh from you. That's Jesus. No man can take our joy and, and, and in application of where we are right now, can I say this? No crashing economy can take away your joy. No coronavirus can take away your joy. That's what's wonderful about it. Ah, now I, I want you to know out there in, ah, live stream land, we have our Sunday night crowd here tonight. We had about 8 or 9 this morning, we've got about 4 or 5 here tonight. That's about, that's about our Sunday night crowd, alright? But, ah, even in these situations and, and, and when, when we're, there's some anxiety and there's some stress about that. I understand that but I'm telling you when I get around my wife, when I get around my family, when I get around Brother Matt, Brother Tom, they're here, Brother Bill and these

other brothers here, when we get around one another, we hold to this Christ and this truth about Christ, there's a joy in that. I can't explain it. I, I can't verbalize it. I want to but my vocabulary, if I had Brother Matt's vocabulary I could do it, but I just can't do it. Um, it's, it's just a fullness of joy and that's what John's getting at. But Brother Matt, I think we gotta teach them the sound doctrine so they can know him and then know this joy. It gives me chill bumps. Good stuff.

John 15:11, "These things I have spoken to you that joy may remain in you," it actually says that "My joy should remain in you, and that your joy then may be made full." I guess that's a great place to ask the question: do you have his joy in you? Now sometimes you can be a child of God and you've focused too much on worldly happiness and not all that's evil, but you rob yourself of true joy. You took a weak substitute for the real thing, is what you did.

So here John's joy over them if they'll keep holding to the true Jesus that he preached to them from the beginning, is the same as our joy that we have as fellowshiping together as brothers and sisters in our local churches together.

Let me conclude with just a couple of thoughts about Christian joy, could I do that? First of all, again, joy is unique to believers. Um, it just is and, um, I know and I say this a lot because I experienced it. You, you can go into a professing congregation and there's almost always some real and genuine, dear saints of God there but unfortunately too often the majority don't look like saints of God and you fellowship with them and you don't feel this fellowship I'm talking about, and you don't sense this communion, you don't sense this oneness, and you don't experience this fullness of joy with them, and so you, so you get kind of, ah, actually you don't really know what it feels like, and then if God lets you get in a fellowship where there is a strong majority of people who are truly regenerate, certainly, certainly not perfect but they're humbled faithful repenters as they live their lives and they're walking in these truths, then you begin to experience this joy and that is unique. It does not exist in the earth but in Christians – now don't stop there – in Christians in fellowship together. It takes both. If you want full joy, you need to know Christ, the true Christ, Paul, John rather preached to these believers, the Christ, the Christ of true sound doctrine, and you must have brothers and sisters in Christ to fellowship with, to serve together, to minister together, to minister to each other, to evangelize together, and there's great joy in it. It's unique to believers.

Happiness, you see, is something that is a part of common grace. Happiness depends on circumstances. Joy depends on Christ. Think about it. Joy depends on, your joy, my joy in Christ depends on the immovable, unshakable, unchanging, victorious, ever-faithful, soon coming center of all pleasures, Jesus Christ. That's what our joy depends on. Now who's gonna take that away from me? Who's gonna take that away from us? He is the core of Christian contentment and Christian joy.

Now again, happiness is not necessarily sin, happiness is not necessarily evil. As I said, it's, it's a part of the common grace. You may have been happy about the coming of spring. I was. I was looking forward to the trees budding and the flowers blooming and

the weather getting warmer and turkey hunting and all the things that spring brings, and then all of a sudden the coronavirus comes in and my happiness in spring's been diminished. It just has. It's just kind of, there's kinda like a fog over spring now. But it can't diminish my joy. It can't remove the joy that I have because Jesus lives in my heart.

So happiness is not necessarily evil. Now it can be evil. People can have happiness in sin and rebel, all the other things, we know that, but there's lots of happinesses that are a part of common grace, it's just they're not necessarily evil, but happiness is just greatly overrated. Did you hear that? It's not necessarily wrong, it's just greatly overrated. It, it, it...when we watch social media or we watch the world and we watch our televisions or whatever we watch, and you see what the world values, what they're living for, and they're trying to squeeze out of every molecule of temporal happiness everything they can get and it's like it's just never, never, never, never enough. You know why that it's never never never enough? Because it's never never never enough. But I'm telling you, Jesus said, "If you'll drink this water, you'll never thirst again." He has a fountain of joy that's as infinite as his person is infinite and brothers and sisters in Christ, making application to our present day, there are times that our God out of love for us may remove temporal things that make us happy so that we might more deeply find in him a far greater and far deeper joy that's found only in him.

So as the things of this world have grown strangely dim in the present environment, may your joy in him increase exponentially. John's writing and says, "I want you folks to make my joy full," and all of our joy full.