

The Word of Life – 1 John 1:1-4

Introduction – From the beginning of John’s letter, his concerns are at once both theological and practical. That which he is proclaiming is not only true, it is essential for true fellowship with the church and with the Father and the Son. Right doctrine is not a separate issue from fulfilling life, peace, and joy. It is not enough to have “faith” as our culture may claim; the object of one’s faith is critical.

Historical Manifestation – Immediately we are brought face to face with the reality of the Incarnation and its implications for life. He was “*from the beginning*,” alluding to Gen 1:1 and to John’s gospel, he is writing about the new creation, the new life, the new way in which we now find, experience, and remain in life. Using the neuter in the Greek, John is not simply referring to the flesh and blood reality of Jesus, but to His entire life and ministry. John speaks graphically of sensory experiences that he had refuting any possibility that he is speaking mythologically. They heard Him, they saw Him, and their hands handled Him (Luke 24:39, John 20:27). And so, preaching the Word of Life, the gospel, is not preaching a series of detached propositions; it is preaching Christ, the Word of Life, a Person, the One who was from the beginning. This is the scandal of the Incarnation; it is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks (1 Cor 1:22-23).

Witness and Proclamation – John’s experience is personal and so he is bearing witness (v2), but as an apostle, he also declares his authority to declare or proclaim based upon his commissioning. The apostles were those to whom Jesus said, “*Blessed are your eyes for they see...*” (Matt 13:16-17, Acts 4:20). Evangelicals are good about giving personal testimony, but have downplayed the importance of the preached Word under the authority of the apostles who then commissioned others within the church to proclaim this gospel (2 Tim 2:2, Eph 2:19-22, 4:11-16). Scripture does not allow for modern day apostles or prophets as existed during the establishment of the first-generation church. Neither does it allow for a flattened egalitarianism where a man’s ordination into the ministry means virtually nothing.

Mediated Communion – This all becomes very important as we consider the entire Prologue (vv1-4). John’s focus is on the Christian community and not simply having the correct doctrine. John assumes that intimate fellowship in the Christian community is only possible when there is unity concerning the identity, presence, purpose, and Person of Jesus, the Word who became flesh (John 1:1, 14). John declares Jesus Who not only gives eternal life but is eternal life. He is Life and this Life was “*toward the Father*” (v2) but was turned inside out so that we might have fellowship with the Father as well. This is the fellowship (*koinonia*) which we enjoy with one another. Our fellowship with one another is John’s goal, but that fellowship only comes when we have fellowship through the Son and with the Father. And that fellowship only comes when we are abiding in the community of which John and the apostles are the foundation stones (Eph 2:20). True communion with Jesus Christ comes through the testimony of the Word of God and communion in and with the church.

Fullness of Joy – This fellowship is the fellowship which the Son shared with the Father and is now offered to us. This eternal life should be understood in the fullest sense. God has all abundance, joy, delight, and fellowship in Himself and His Word, but He has chosen to give this liveliness to us. Therefore correct doctrine and fullness of joy are intertwined. This is so important as we consider some hard words later in this letter and may be why John ends with his curt “*Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen*” (1 John 5:21). One terrible idol is a joyless, stoic Christianity. The Bible teaches us that there will be persecutions, afflictions, trials and difficulties. It teaches that we must weep with those who weep. But that which should generally characterize a community of saints is cheerfulness, pleasantness and joy – which is built upon a foundation of truth that cannot be moved. Our relationship with God defines our relationship with one another (see 1:7) and that relationship must be based, by faith, upon the scandal of the Incarnation and all that Jesus has given us – eternal life, joy inexpressible and full of glory (1 Pet 1:6-8).

The Connections: Truth and Experience – One important application is to note that John is preaching an experiential, relational religion. True community among real people is to be experienced because that is the overflow of true community which existed among real Persons eternally and has been mediated to us through a real Person, a real man, a real Son of God who was heard and seen and handled – a real man who died upon a cross and rose again from the dead. Anything less than this (truth and experience) is less than true Christianity. He is the Word of Life.