

## Sermon Notes

Series on First John  
First John 1:1-4  
“Joy! Joy! Joy!”

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Introduction: Today begins a 15 week series on First John, a favorite Bible book of the majority of believers. This is not the gospel of John but the first epistle of John. The style of 1 John is more that of a sermon. Dr. J. Vernon McGee writes this about 1 John: “It bears all the marks of a message from a devoted pastor who had a love and concern for a definite group of believers.” [McGee, J. Vernon, Thru The Bible, Vol. 5, 1 Corinthians-Revelation, p. 753.] Since John's style seems to be somewhat rambling, some have accused him of being too senile when he wrote 1 John. 1 John does seem to be the exact opposite of the logically and orderly book of Romans. In comparison to the Gospel of John, Dr. C. I. Scofield wrote; “The gospel of John shows us the Father’s thoughts and ways with the Son; the *epistle* the Father’s thoughts and ways with the sons. The *gospel* leads us across the Father’s threshold; the *epistle* makes us at home in the Father’s house.” [See Scofield Bible notes or Van Gorder, Paul R., In The Family, Radio Bible Class, p.7]. The author: In all of Paul’s epistles, we find his name in the opening verses, but the Apostle John's name is not found in 1 John. But early church fathers, Irenaeus of Lyons (2<sup>nd</sup> century AD) and Clement of Alexandria (185-200 AD) and Tertullian (about 155-230 AD, lived in Carthage which is modern day Tunisia) identified the Apostle John as the author of 1 John. 1 John is known as the Apostle of love as demonstrated especially in this little love letter of 1 John. It was while John and his brother James were engaged in repairing their fishing nets that Jesus called him (Mark 1:19-20). The gospel accounts reveal that John and his brother James were capitalistic entrepreneurs and were business *partners* with Peter (read Luke 5:10). John was from an upper middle class home because Mark 1:20 states that when Jesus called them, *they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants....* They were from Bethsaida in Galilee and when Jesus called these two brothers, they were repairing their nets at the Sea of Galilee. John’s godly parents appear to be related to Jesus as Salome and Jesus’ mother Mary were sisters (compare the list of names in Matthew 27:56; John 19:25 & Mark 15:40). That would make John and James full cousins of Jesus. According to Mark 15:40, Salome would *follow Jesus and minister to Him* (read also Mark 16:1). Most Bible scholars believe that John was the youngest of the apostles when called by Jesus and lived to the time of Emperor Trajan. John and his brother James were spirited young men who earned an interesting epithet, *sons of Thunder*. Mark gives us the names and nicknames of Jesus’ cabinet in Mark 3:16-17. Jesus pegged John and James right on the money! Their fiery spirit is captured in Luke 9 where we read about Jesus’ last journey to Jerusalem. The direct route from Galilee to Jerusalem goes through Samaria and we know that the Jews weren’t especially fond of the Samaritans (John 4:9) nor were the Samaritans fond of Jews. The Jewish historian Josephus states that it was common for the Samaritans to show harsh treatment to pilgrims going to Jerusalem even to the extent of murdering them [Josephus, Bellum, ii, 232]. That explains John and James’ response in Luke 9:51-55; notice v.54: *When His disciples James and John saw*

*this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"* These two brothers were firebombs, explosive characters! No wonder Jesus nicknamed them *sons of Thunder*! Child of the storm! They were ready to burn up the whole town because someone refused their Master hospitality. (Also read John's attitude in Mark 9:38 & Luke 9:49—John's way or the highway!) But being around Jesus and so close to Him must have caused a heart change. Many passages note that John was part of Jesus' inner circle of apostles, comprised of Peter, James and John (Matthew 17:1; Mark 5:37; 9:2; 13:3; 14:33; Luke 8:51 & 9:28). And, of all the apostles, John seems the closest to Jesus especially shown by his position of honor at Jesus' right hand at that last supper in the Upper Room (read John 13:23). The name John means *loved by God*. Four times in his own gospel, John makes that statement, *whom Jesus loved* (13:23; 20; 20:2; 21:7 & 21:20). But, think about this; do you find it strange that in his gospel that he never once states that 'I'm the apostle who loved Jesus?'—think about that. Some critics suggest that there was something sexual between Jesus and John but the Bible simply reveals a truly close bond of friendship between the two. Because of this relationship, Jesus entrusted the care of his mother to John (John 19:26-27). Owned a house and took Jesus' mother after the crucifixion. In addition, it was John who arrived first at the tomb on Easter morning (John 20:1-10). Here is a lengthy quote from an English Bible scholar of the last century who is known for eloquently capturing the essence of Bible persons. He writes this about the person of John: "In John 18:15, 16, another unnamed disciple appears in the gospel narrative. When Jesus was arrested, Peter and this unnamed disciple followed to see what would happen; and they were able to gain an entry to the courtyard of the high priest's house, because this unnamed disciple was known to the high priest. John's acquaintance with the high priest may be explained in one of two ways. 1. There is extant a letter written by Polycrates who was Bishop of Ephesus about A.D. 190. In it he describes John as 'a witness and a teacher, who reclined upon the bosom of the Lord, and who was a priest and wore the priestly diadem.' (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History*, 3, 31). If Polycrates is right, then John had high-priestly connections, and entrance to the high priest's house would be easy. 2. It may be that the second explanation is the more probable. H. V. Morton in *In The Steps of the Master* gives us some very interesting information: There is in the back streets of Jerusalem a dark little hovel, now, I believe, an Arab coffee-house, which contains stones and arches that were once part of an early Christian church. The Franciscan tradition is that this church was erected on the site of a house which had belonged to Zebedee, the father of St. John. This family, said the Franciscan were fish merchants of Galilee, with a branch office in Jerusalem, from which they used to supply, among others, the family of the High Priest. . This would explain how John was known to the door-keeper of the high priest's house, and it would also explain how Zebedee's fishing business was prosperous enough to enable him to employ hired servants in addition to his sons (Mark 1:20). [Barclay, William, The Master's Men, Abingdon Press, Pp.33-34.] In Dr. Luke's account of the early church in the book of Acts we discover that John is still prominent in the story but he never speaks! (1) He's always in the company of Peter who serves as spokesperson for both; (2) He's there when the

lame man is healed at the Beautiful Gate of the temple (Acts 3:1-10); (3) He was with Peter when they were both imprisoned and when Peter made his bold speech before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:1-22). That same Sanhedrin Council *recognized* that they *had been with Jesus!* (4) Then Paul names him as one of the great leaders of the Jerusalem church in Galatians 2:9. As to John's ministry and **date** for writing 1 John, while rather difficult to date, I believe (along with the distinguished Bible teacher Dr. Charles Ryrie and others) that the very first book that the Apostle John authored was the Gospel of John, followed by three little very personal letters, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> John, perhaps sometime between 90-95 AD. Some scholars like the Greek scholar A. T. Robertson and also the Lutheran scholar, R. C. H. Lenski, held that John's epistles precede his gospel. Finally, just prior to his death he penned the book of Revelation written while imprisoned on the Island of Patmos for his faith and witness for Christ (Revelation 1:9). The book of Revelation seems to be God's final word to mankind which would indicate that John composed his epistles prior to Revelation. Early church tradition teaches that John pastored in Ephesus, the capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor, for many years. From Revelation 2 & 3 we learn that John is well acquainted with the Christians and churches in that region. John died in Ephesus and was buried there. The Basilica of St. John was built over the grave of John by Justinian in the fifth century. Dr. Baker notes that John wrote this epistle 'at Ephesus which is confirmed by Irenaeus in Against Heresies, 3:1.1., as well as the fact that the earliest known references to the epistle are by church leaders from Asia. Apparently John labored there for some time before writing his epistle. [Baker, Glenn W., The Expositor's Bible Commentary, New Testament, p.294]. **Recipients:** The early church leader Augustine (c. 300AD) claimed that John's three epistles were mailed to the Parthians. Many scholars believe that they were mailed to the churches of Revelation 1:11 and chapters 2 & 3. Whoever were the intended recipients; John knew their spiritual status and felt a personal affection for them. He calls them *my little children* (2:1); *children* (2:18), *little children* (2:28); *beloved* (3:21; 4:1; & 7). Absolutely, his recipients were Christians (1 John 5:13). John's **reason for writing:** There are two primary thoughts on John's purpose in writing. (1) **The test of life view:** John wrote to promote the assurance of believers as evident in the key verse of 1 John 5:13: *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.* Compare also the gospel of John 20:30. Accordingly, John's purpose in writing was to encourage believers to assure themselves of their salvation by verifying the validity of their Christian faith through tests of their spiritual life. The tests would include doctrinal agreement with John's teachings which would also involve love for other believers and living righteously. Behind the scene of the local church of John's day were groups of unsaved people who were agitators. They had been part of the church but had left (read 1 John 2:19). There were three main groups: (1) Gnostics (meaning "knowing ones" with a variety of non-biblical views); One writer states that Gnostics were 'knowists' (in contrast to an agnostic who doesn't know whether there is a God); insinuating that the Christians of John's day really didn't know all that they needed to know because they didn't have the depth of spiritual experiences that the Gnostics had. For Gnostics, salvation came through

secretive, advanced theological knowledge and experience. (2) Docetics (that Christ had only a human body but His supposed humanity was a phantom). Docetics were ‘seemests’ as the Greek word “dokeo” (δοκεω) means “to seem” or “to appear;” therefore, to them everything material or physical was bad and everything spiritual or invisible was good. In order to bridge the gap between this bad world and a good God, they created a series of intermediaries between a God who is Spirit and a world of matter; intermediaries called aeons or emanations. Therefore, we can see why John wrote, given the view of the Docetics: for if matter is evil to them, how could Jesus have a real physical body and be God? Also, if matter is evil, why would Christ and believers experience a bodily resurrection? (3) and Cerinthians (Cerinthus was a prominent Gnostic). One more comment concerning John's purpose (5:13); Dr. Hiebert writes that it is “John's desire to ground his readers in the personal assurance of salvation. Related is his desire for their victory over sin (2:1), assuring fullness of joy in Christian fellowship (1:4). He also sought to alert them against increasing susceptibility toward the world and its views (2:15-17), and to arrest any proneness to reinterpret their faith in terms of prevailing ‘modern thought’ by exposing them to the errors of false teachers (2:26). [Hiebert, D. Edmond, An Introduction to the New Testament, Moody Press, p.257]. (2) The test of fellowship view: John wrote so that his readers would enjoy the fellowship with God known only to those who have seen Jesus. In 1 John 1:1-4, John explains that this fellowship rests on knowing the truth of Christ's incarnation which results in full joy to those who experience it.

Sermon exposition: As to life, one man commented that ‘the object of this whole life is to see who can endure to the end.’ But for the believer, John writes that life isn’t like that; it’s possible to have joy and not just mediocre joy but complete joy. This isn’t the cheap, momentary thrill that one experiences just on weekends only to have a hangover going into Monday. Instead, it’s possible to have an enduring joy through the routine of life. First John 1:1-4 addresses this much sought after joy, the key concept of the concluding verse in this section. By understanding verses 1-3 we will grasp how it is possible for believers to have the *complete joy*. **First** John writes that *complete joy* begins when we:

### **#1 EXPERIENCE THE LIVING WORD, 1 John 1:1**

**Verse 1**: John opens his letter, without a salutation, by telling his readers about the One he calls *the Word of life*. John may have used the editorial *we* to represent himself and all the apostles and other eye witnesses. By his choice of unique words, John addresses the false teaching concerning the person of Jesus Christ and declares aloud Christ's deity. The English relative clause begins with the word *what* and is repeated four times in this verse. In the Greek *what* is the letter “o” [ὄ, a neuter in the Greek]. John uses these four opening clauses, each beginning with “o” to declare the reality of Christ's deity. All four of these are the direct objects of the verb *proclaim*, Greek—απαγγελομεν, which is not actually expressed until verse 3. The first *what* clause relates to the incarnation itself and with the remaining three *what* clauses dealing with John's experiences with the incarnate Christ. There are many differing interpretations of this very first clause, *what was from the beginning*. Some say it refers to *the beginning* of creation; or to Jesus’ eternality; others to the birth of Christ; still others to Jesus’ baptism and subsequent ministry. All these

different views revolve around how we understand the verb *was* and the word *beginning*. I believe it relates specifically to the incarnation itself because of its use in the context. In keeping with the remaining three *what* clauses, it seems best to understand that the Apostle John is directing our attention to the actual incarnation, the birth of Jesus in the manger (Luke 2), which he is *proclaiming*. John is telling us to start where He starts, at Bethlehem! Used with the definite article in the Greek, the word *beginning* [Greek is αρχη] focuses our attention on the new way in which God the Father will speak to mankind, through His Son Jesus. That same thought is expressed in Hebrews 1:1-2—a must read! One of the false teachers of John’s day was Cerinthus who taught that the manifestation of Christ did not begin until His baptism and John was seeking to offset that heresy as well as other heresies that taught that Jesus did not come in the flesh. John’s teaching parallels what he wrote about Jesus in his gospel account, such as in John 1:14. John is speaking *concerning the Word of life* which he mentions at the end of verse one. The Greek preposition for *concerning* is “peri” from which we derive our English word perimeter meaning “measuring around” as well as other words like pericardial meaning “around the heart,” and periscope meaning “to look around.” Etc. By way of application, let me state that the little word “peri” causes us to think in circular terms. By that I mean Jesus Christ is to be the center and circumference of our lives as believers. Everything! Using the remaining *what* clauses, John relates various aspects of his personal experiences with the incarnate Christ. What John reveals is hard empirical evidences that revolves around the person of Christ; hearing, seeing and touching (notice the progression here). (1) Hearing—*what we have heard*. Because of the Greek perfect tense of the verb, one Greek scholar has translated it; “we heard Him in the past and what He said is still ringing in our ears.” An incredible statement in light of the fact that Jesus died in 30-33 AD and 1 John was written around 90-95 AD. John wants his readers to know that this message came from an historical Person. (2) Seeing—*what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at* expresses the visual encounter of Christ’s apostles with the incarnate Christ. John employs two different Greek words to express His eye gate experience. The Greek word for *have seen* means “to catch a fleeting glance” [Greek is εωρακαμεν τοις οφθαλμοις, eorakamen tois ophthalmois (from which we get ophthalmology) whereas the different Greek word that is translated *have looked at* [εθεασαμεθα] means “to stop and take a really close look” at something. You ladies know the difference between those two words every time you go shopping! John is saying that they *heard* Jesus Christ, caught a momentary glance of Him and then stopped and stared. That was also John’s experience. (3) Touching—*and touched with our hands* is the culminating evidence for the reality of the incarnate Christ. The Greek verb used for *have touched* is in the aorist tense and emphasizes a deliberate purposeful *touching* of Christ’s body and not just an accidental brushing. John is declaring that Jesus had flesh and bones—a real man in the flesh!

**Second** John continues by stating that *complete joy* begins when we:

## **#2 EXPERIENCE ETERNAL LIFE, John 1:2**

**Verse 2:** It must be stated that this verse is structurally parenthetical in John's complicated opening sentence. We today cannot have the same spiritual experience with Christ that

John describes in this verse but everyone can have a spiritual experience with Christ. The Word of God invites us to trust Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin and Christ comes into our lives. When that happens we know Christ just as well as John did. Do you know Him as your Savior? If not, I exhort you to know Him because that's where joy begins. *The life* is a title for Jesus Christ who appeared on this earth, not as an abstract principle but as a real Person. One scholar states that this verb, *manifested*, denotes more than just a mere appearance as it focuses on one's true character. [Vine, W. E. An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words with Their Precise Meanings for English Readers, p. 1:65.] This verse goes one step beyond having an experience with Jesus Christ as John's key words, two present tense verbs, *testify and proclaim*, conveying the same activity. *Testify* reminds us of a courtroom scene where *testimony* is given. The focus on that first word, *testify*, is the communication of **truth** with **truth** as the emphasis whereas the emphasis of the second verb *proclaim* is on the **communication** of truth with **communication** the primary emphasis. A witness is one who *saw, heard and touched* the living Christ as verse one states that John and the other apostles did. So, what were John and the other apostles *testifying and proclaiming*? They were talking about *the eternal life*; the object of their authoritative proclamation; literally *the life, the eternal*. This verse really stresses the *eternality* of *the life* in Jesus Christ. The word *eternal* speaks of the quality of this *life*. *Eternal life* is a prominent theme in this little letter and in John's writings it is synonymous with salvation. *Eternal life* is so prominent in this epistle that one writer titled his commentary on 1 John, The Epistle of Eternal Life. (Dr. G. Goodman). Note: don't miss the order in this passage; first is the experience followed by the witness of that experience to someone else. When we have an experience the most natural thing is to tell someone about it. That's just what God wants us to do; having experienced *eternal life* in Jesus Christ, we just have to tell someone—*proclaim* what God has done in our lives. In the book of Acts there is an account of Peter and John having been arrested for *proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead* (Acts 4:2). As they were about to be released, the priests and leaders of the Jews commanded Peter and John *not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus* (4:16 & 18) lest Christianity might *spread any further among the people* (4:17). Peter and John responded, *we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard!* (Acts 4:20) That's how knowing Jesus should affect us! The coming holidays provide a golden opportunity for all believers to share the good news with the lost; family, friends, coworkers, neighbors. I'm convinced that people want to hear about Jesus and that He can meet their every need. G. G. Findlay captured this contagious Christianity; the pass it along kind and the hand me down type of communication when he wrote:

- The Father told it to Jesus.
- Jesus to them,
- They to us, and
- We to others!

**Third** John continues by stating that *complete joy* begins when we:

### **#3 EXPERIENCE THE CONSEQUENCES OF ETERNAL LIFE, John 1:3-4**

In these two verses John resumes the sentence begun in verse 1 that was separated by the parenthesis of verse 2 and expresses how Christ's incarnation personally affects believers. The emphasis of these two verses is on the resulting benefit of *fellowship*—the consequences

**Verse 3:** Since verse 2 is parenthetical, here John repeats the two verbs, *seen and heard*, used in verse 1; however here in reverse order and united under one relative pronoun *what*. Notice that John again writes, *we proclaim to you*, as if he's saying 'we make it our business to tell you about Jesus.' John's *proclamation* has an intended result according to verse 3—*fellowship with us!* The recipients of John's letter (those two little words, *you also* implies that) though they didn't have the privilege of knowing the incarnate Christ, Christ in the flesh as John had, nevertheless, they could enter into the same intimate *fellowship* as John and the other apostles experienced. How can they and we enter into this same intimate *fellowship* as John—this horizontal *fellowship*? I believe that this horizontal *fellowship* is the result of knowing Him who is *life* and who brings *eternal life*, which brings us back to the purpose for this book found in 1 John 5:13. John did not want his readers, including us, to fall victim to the false teachers who would disrupt their mutual fellowship—*fellowship with us*. When John writes, *that you too may have fellowship with us*, he employs a present tense verb, *may have* [Greek is εχητε, exate] to indicate that by continuing to adhere to the correct doctrine of Christ, they could continue to enjoy such intimacies of *fellowship* with Christ. The Greek noun for *fellowship* (κοινωνια, koinonia, based on the Greek adjective κοινος, koinos) means "common" and denotes the active participation or sharing in what others have. *Fellowship* is not limited to coffee and donuts or the fantastic pot-luck dinner we had earlier this month and the Christmas in October dinner at Grace Community Church! Biblical *fellowship* should be understood from a salvation (soteriological) perspective, so that to be in *fellowship* is equivalent to having eternal life, or being saved. *Fellowship* is a specifically Christian word and means participating and having partnership in the common possession of *eternal life*, not relationships as one would expect in a family. This Greek word for *fellowship* is translated three other ways in the New Testament. First koinonia is translated *sharing* in 1 Corinthians 10:16 where Paul speaks about the communion service, the Lord's Supper in which we are partakers with Jesus Christ. Second, koinonia is used to illustrate effective *faith* as in Philemon 6. We participate in the third aspect of *fellowship* when we give financially as this word koinonia (*contribution*) is used in Romans 15:26. We have *fellowship* with other believers when we give, or share with others. Having promoted this horizontal *fellowship*, John now mentions the vertical aspect of *fellowship* in verse 3, that *indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ*. This vertical fellowship is vital for true horizontal *fellowship* with other believers. (Read 1 Corinthians 1:9). For believers, this Godward *fellowship* is a fact—we've got it! But a call to deepen our *fellowship* with God is welcomed. Just a quick grammar lesson about this phrase, *with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ*, as the Godhead is taught by this phrase. In the English, the repetition of both the preposition (μετα, meta) and the definite article in the Greek (μετα του πατρος και μετα του υιου αυτου Ιησου Χριστου), emphatically marks

the distinction and equality of the Father and the Son. One of the reasons John wrote this little letter was to deal with those who had a false view of the person of Jesus Christ. By using this full designation *His Son Jesus Christ*, John is uniting both His deity and humanity. The words *His Son* declare the divinity of *Christ. Jesus* which means “the Lord is salvation,” is the name associated with His humanity while *Christ* (meaning Anointed One) focuses on His messianic identity. John's use of those specific names should shut down the false teachers, the Gnostics. I hope we're all excited that we can *have fellowship* with deity! Practically speaking we can *fellowship with* deity in many ways: **(1)** We *fellowship* with Him when we pray, talk to Him and tell Him everything. He wants to hear us; **(2)** We *fellowship* with Him when we confess our sins as 1 John 1:9 states. Some people think we have to be perfect to *fellowship* with Him but that's not true. If that were the case we'd never *fellowship* with Him. Instead, we need to admit that we are sinners and cannot hide our sin from Him or cover it up! He knows all! If we want to have *fellowship* with Him, we must share it with Him by confession; **(3)** We *fellowship* with Him when we give our problems to Him—*cast all our cares on Him for He cares for you* (1 Peter 5:7). God then shares with us His power for dealing with any hill or mountain we have; **(4)** We *fellowship* when we share with Him about our successes too! Since *fellowship* is mutual sharing, then He begins to tell us how He was involved in making that happen for He is sovereign and our successes are a result of His making it possible.

**Verse 4:** Here John reveals what its like to experience the consequences of new life in Christ, notice the key word *joy*! Some translations state *your joy* while others *our joy*. Dr. Hiebert writes; ‘*Our joy* can be understood in an inclusive sense to include both writer and readers. This inclusive meaning seems natural in view of the possessive plural pronoun “our fellowship” in verse 3 above.’ [Hiebert, D. Edmond, An Introduction to the New Testament, Moody Press, p.] John's goal for his letter is that his readers will have full *joy*. John's words *these things* refer to our experience with *Jesus Christ*, our *testifying* and witnessing for Him, and our *fellowship*. All this brings full *joy, complete joy*, which in the Greek is a perfect subjunctive, setting forth John's final goal for his ministry. For all too many believers, this serene happiness might be just a dream, whereas John writes of its potential certainty.

**Note:** It is my prayer that these printed notes will encourage serious Bible students to do further study on this passage. If you find any typos, errors or have any questions, please contact me. Thank you. Pastor John A. Eastman