

4,2,26 1 Jn. 1:1-4, Introduction and Thematic Foundation of First John

As we've seen in many of our past studies, in order to avoid misinterpretation and to understand the primary message of any epistle we study, we have to keep in mind a couple of very important things; first, all of the epistles were written *to Christians* in order to either warn or encourage them- or both. There are *no* letters written to unbelievers.

I realize that in our time the word "church" usually brings to mind a building filled with people, some of which are believers and some are unbelievers (wheat among the tares), but that is not what the word "Church" meant 2000 years ago. Church is "ecclesia", the called-out ones, the elect. The best historical example of this would be the seven letters to seven churches in Rev. 2 & 3.

Most podcasters and commentators say that the "overcomers" in these letters are the genuine Christians and the non-overcomers are the impersonators – they are false Christians fellowshiping with true Christians. But the truth is that each of the letters in Revelation, and in the other writings of the apostles (like 1 John), were written to Christians to admonish, to encourage or to instruct. When we see contrasts in the New Testament epistles, those contrasts were distinguishing between spiritual and carnal, faithful and unfaithful believers, not between Christians and non-Christians.

Knowing all of this is going to be extremely important with John's letters because there are many verses that have been interpreted through the grid of believer/non-believer which completely misses both the point of the verses as well as creating a false sense of security to the warnings given to believers who are led to believe that the warnings can't apply to them.

This is another example of what Calvinism has done to distort the Word of God and create a legalistic system of spirituality identified by lifestyle instead of by relationship with God.

The Holy Spirit worked through the authors of the scriptures with the single purpose of educating the members of the Body of Christ about what the Christian life is meant to be. The New Testament epistles are not evangelistic outreaches to

unbelievers, nor are they intended to cause Christians to become fruit-inspectors in order to decide who is saved and who isn't. This will become clearer as we go through the letters.

This letter was written was for two primary purposes; the first was to increase the reader's understanding of the Life we've been brought into, specifically focused on the reality and implications of our fellowship and our union with the Father, Son and Spirit; and the second was to explain and warn John's readers against false teachers, who had become a problem at that time and were both confusing and deceiving many of God's children. Paul wrote about this also;

(Acts 20:29-31) I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also, from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking misleading things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

(1 Tim. 4:1 & 2 Tim. 3: 1,7,8) The Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons . . . know this, that in the last days perilous times will come; men will be lovers of themselves . . . always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth . . . Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith.

As a quick side-note; The "perilous times" spoken of in 2 Timothy 3:1 point to the rise of activities in the last days similar to that of Jannes and Jambres. These were the magicians of Pharaoh who "withstood Moses" (Exodus 7:8-13). It's important to notice the *nature* of their resistance to the truth. The *way* in which "Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses" was by imitating, as far as they were able, whatever he did. What Moses did, they could do, so from an objective observer's viewpoint, there was no significant difference. A miracle is a miracle. If Moses did miracles to get the people out of Egypt, they would work miracles to keep them in.

The most satanic and effective resistance to God’s testimony in the world in the last days is offered by those who imitate the effects of the truth; they have “a form of godliness,” but not “the power thereof”. People like this can do the same things, adopt the same forms, use the same doctrine and phraseology, and can profess the same convictions as others. If the true Christian feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, visits the sick, teaches the scriptures, witnesses to the lost, engages in prayer, and sings worship songs, then the imitator will also do these things. Again, this is the *special character* of the resistance offered to the truth in the last days. It describes the work of 21st century Jannes and Jambres.

This is a large part of what John was up against and the scriptures tell us that this mode of deception will increase immensely as the Church Age winds up. Just to give you a feel of what that might look like, I’ll share something that I shared a couple years ago in a different context. This is a true event that the writer captured on paper and passed to his readers;

The whole assembly stood there with the greatest reverence before this highest Majesty and most powerful Inspirer of awe, before which the greatest of souls becomes so little as to be almost nothing. And if we had not been witness to the movement of the body during this event, the raising of hands during the songs and prayers, and the expressions of humility – and if we had not heard the beating of the hearts before this immeasurable grandeur – we would have thought ourselves transferred to another life; to heaven. And, truly, we were at that hour in another world; the world of the Spirit. We were in the house of God, in God’s immediate Presence, and all with lowered heads and humble tongues and voices raised in prayer and praise, (were surrounded by) weeping eyes, awestruck hearts and pure thoughts of intercession.

This was the author’s description of a worship experience which occurred in the early 1900’s and shows the spiritual impact on those who were there – the event was an Islamic worship service call a Ka’aba.

Now, what if an event like that was held in a Christian church on Sunday morning and instead of being saturated with the forms and words of Islam, was instead

saturated with Christian forms and words? Would we know whether we were dealing with the Holy Spirit or with the spirit of Jannes and Jambres which Paul prophesied would infiltrate the Church in the last days and offer a near perfect imitation of true Christianity? “. . . If it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matthew 24:24b).

So, while we study 1st. John, we have to keep John’s circumstances and the purpose of his letter in mind. If we do, then passages that may at first seem confusing will be much clearer in the light of the specific conditions in the Church at that time.

And we are all aware that the enemy’s ability to deceive believers has grown immensely over the last 2000 years as he continues to observe us, study us, and find increasingly effective ways to replace God’s original intent for us with alternate purposes that pull us off the path we are meant to be on.

This is Tozer’s warning;

If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and *everyone* would know the difference

Christians have to find a way to not be afraid to confront what they instinctively believe might be off in some way just because it looks good to the casual observer and appears, on the surface, to check all the boxes of true Christianity.

It’s amazing to think that these things were happening by the time John wrote his letters. The Church as a whole, had left it’s first love, they had abandoned Paul, and within that first century, apostasy had already gotten a stronghold on God’s people. It’s not surprising that now, 2000 years later, we see many of the same things being perpetuated now that were present then. When the enemy finds something that works, he not only keeps it; he continues to work hard to perfect it.

So, since our greatest danger at the end of the Age is deception, having clarity and discernment in this generation is one of the things we should be the most grateful for. God’s faithfulness in providing us what we need to *not* be afraid to warn about what we see is a life-saving act of grace and mercy to us.

Luke told us to be “Bereans” and that’s more important now than ever. Think again about what they were doing that caused the Lord to honor them. The apostle Paul had come to their city and he was performing miracles and teaching from the scriptures, but still the Holy Spirit called the Bereans noble because they reserved judgement about Paul until they had compared Paul’s interpretations and teaching with their own personal study and examination of what Paul taught. That level of skepticism is not only valuable; it’s needed now more than ever.

Ok, that’s the spiritual condition and immediate dangers being faced by John’s readers. And as I said earlier, reading his letter through that grid will help us avoid misinterpreting what John wrote. Sparks once said, “Anything that gets in the way of our understanding and attaining to God’s full thought must be ruthlessly dealt with.” John, Paul, Peter and Jude did so with great vigor. They understood, even more than we do, what’s at stake when it comes to the loss to ourselves and to the Name of Christ that results from unchallenged deception.

From the Garden of Eden in Genesis all the way to the end of the Book of Revelation, more damage has been done to the Lord’s people and to the furtherance of God’s purpose by the deception of the enemy than through anything else. Not to mention the *eternal* loss that is suffered by the lost;

(Matt. 7:22-23) Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And I will declare to them, “I never knew you, depart from me you workers of iniquity.

As we study John’s letters, we’ll see him bring up not only *the* Antichrist, but (quote) “*many* antichrists”, throughout his letter. And we’ll look at the reason and implications of that emphasis when we come to those verses.

Our calling in this regard, as disciples of Christ, is to hold to the Truth and expose everything that opposes it. W. D. Miller put it this way;

It is a serious mistake to presume that the Christian can maintain a neutral or passive attitude toward error. He must oppose error as definitely as he embraces truth. Error is never static or stagnant, but is always aggressive.

Error ceaselessly seeks to corrupt, efface, and neutralize the truth, and to destroy all those it captures. The grand reason for opposing error is to retrieve precious souls from its blight and to deliver them from bondage unto freedom and from darkness to light.

Luke's comments in Act 26:16-18 reinforce that calling when he recorded Paul's commission;

Rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.

We finished studying 1 & 2 Corinthians last week and Paul addressed things like Satan's servants disguising themselves as angles of light and as messengers of righteousness and truth, but most of what Paul was doing in those letters was dealing the personal attacks and temptations we all face. In other words, all the thoughts, accusations, discouragement, fear, etc. that attack our minds and emotions.

Here's a description of Charles Spurgeon's battles in this area;

Mr. Spurgeon openly and frequently described his lifelong struggles with depression (which he often called "depression of spirit," "melancholy," "fainting fits," or "causeless depression"). He experienced it as a recurring, deeply painful reality that affected him physically, emotionally, and spiritually, sometimes leaving him unable to preach or function normally. Spurgeon did not view it merely as a spiritual failing but as something tied to overwork, illness (especially gout and other physical ailments), brain-weariness, and traumatic events.

John touches on our internal struggles, but the big difference is that John is focused more on teachings and movements (like Gnosticism) that were deceiving large groups of Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor.

If we brought all of this up to the present time, we could say that much of what Paul addressed to the Corinthians definitely applies to us now too, but Gnosticism (as one example) is not as big a problem now as it was then. As I mentioned before, after 2000 years of watching us and determining what works best in deceiving us, the enemy has teachings and movements in play now that are much more effective than Gnosticism. Satan is not omniscient; he's a created being, so he learns over time. His goal remains the same (Steal, Kill, Destroy), but his methods keep advancing in effectiveness as he learns more about us.

There are a number of verses in 1 Jn. that have been used by present day pastors and authors to support their theological position. If we can avoid treating those verses as if they were isolated from the context of the letter and its purpose, we'll be able to not only see what is really being said, but we'll be able to avoid being drawn into a false position that could form an unfortunate grid in our attempts at interpretation. No verses should be interpreted in isolation from the principles and the message surrounding them.

For now, I'm just saying this as an introductory comment, but when we get to those kinds of verses, you'll see why holding everything in an immediate as well as a general context, is a huge safeguard against misinterpretation.

I can honestly say that with the extreme (and growing) intelligence and subtlety of the enemy twisting and reshaping the meaning of scripture, the most important classes I took and books I read in seminary were the ones what focused on Hermeneutics (the science of literary interpretation). What those authors and professors gave us is the one thing that for the last 50 plus years is *always* needed in any study of God's Word. For me that has been indispensable.

It's also the one thing that is *least* used among those who don't realize it's value. The old phrase, "he took that out of context", is so common now, I can't count the

number of theological movements and schools of thought that have been founded on one or two isolated, misunderstood, verses.

Ok, end of soapbox; it's just that letters like 1 Jn. require a great deal of time to secure a solid grasp of the context and purpose of its writing. Skipping that step before diving in can cause a hermeneutical disaster. It's just another reason Satan has done all he can to create a generation of people who are practically devoid of the ability of what's called "critical thinking". Subjectivism (that which is based on emotion and done as quickly as possible) has replaced objective research and prayer.

One of the A.I.'s I use has an excellent definition of "Critical Thinking". Since he's just a machine, his insight doesn't include the most important ingredient of all, which is spiritual illumination, but from the human side, what a person needs to make sure to include in his approach to learning, along with a great deal of prayer and listening to the Spirit of God, is the following;

Critical thinking is the disciplined, intellectual process of actively analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information to guide belief and action, rather than accepting information at face value. It involves using objectivity, and questioning to overcome biases, solve problems, and make informed, rational decisions.

Along with prayer and supplication, without which nothing of real value will happen anyway, what I just read is a learning style adopted by the Bereans and considered absolutely necessary in determining whether Paul was really communicating God's Word to them or not.

So, as we move into 1 Jn. we'll see scattered warnings about deception consistently brought up, and we'll see the underlying theme of "fellowship" and "spiritual life" governing everything we study, because as important as the warnings are, John's ultimate goal was to bring his readers into a living and very real relational intimacy with God as our Father.

We can see this introduced in the first 4 verses;

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

So, the underlying theme of John's letter is to explain the implications of eternal life as a *present possession* and fellowship in Christ as the *intended expression* of that Life. In John's message, Life and Fellowship are inseparable as cause and effect. When we are able to see that connection and sense it's reality in our lives as Christians, we will be walking in relationship with the Lord and with His followers in the same way Jesus walked with His Father and His disciples.

In vs. 1 we see *two* things that are foundational to this letter, rather than just one thing. The first is that Jesus is the Word of Life. We know that from this verse, but also from John's introduction to His Gospel;

(John 1:1,14) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

The other thing we see that John wants his readers to understand are the personal and practical realities that come from having Eternal Life. As we know, the phrase "eternal life" doesn't just mean living forever, it's referring to a specific kind of life that only God possesses, which He has chosen to share with us. It includes immortality; but it involves a great deal more than that.

We can't lose this Life, but we can be very sporadic in our experience of it. This is another reason fellowship is attached to eternal life. We are one body in Christ; that will always be true, but whether we experience the realities or implications of that truth depends on how far we go in our spiritual growth and in our

understanding of what *God means* by fellowship as being that which happens only when we are abiding in Christ – abiding in Life.

In vs. 2, John talks about this Life being manifest to him and the other apostles in a way that allowed them to “see”, “hear”, “touch” and know true fellowship with each other and with the Father and the Son. That is way more than just ‘social interaction’ between like-minded people. That’s part of the mystical and spiritual reality that happens when the Eternal Life we each possess in Christ becomes an experience.

We’re also going to see an immense stress in John’s letters on “Truth”. John, of course, never forgot that Jesus said He was “the Way, the Truth, and the Life”. It’s just that now, decades later, John had come to empirically realize that revealed Truth is the basis for all fellowship with God and for true fellowship with one another. When we depart from the original truths that the Lord revealed to us, we are moving away from “*the Way*”; we are departing from the Truth that binds us together and we are losing our experience of the Life we possess. As I mentioned earlier, John knew that the Way, the Truth, and the Life are not just components of Christ’s character to be considered, they are essential in combination with each other if we are going to experience both the manifestation (the ‘seeing’, ‘hearing’, and ‘touching’) of eternal Life and the fellowship that springs from that experience.

What’s offered to us in Christ, which John says can bring our joy to fullness, is as far above worldly attempts at fellowship and relationships, as heaven is above earth. We are being offered something tied directly into our new creation identity in Christ that no one outside of Christ could ever even understand, let alone enter into.

(These things are written) that you may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

The rest of John’s letter will be his attempt to both explain all of this as well as warn us about the things that can keep us from experiencing what we’ve been given in Christ. So, he starts with the foundation of making sure that our search for true fellowship with the Lord and one another is based on the connection between our

possession of Eternal Life (by virtue of our new creation union with the Lord) and a determined pursuit on our part of making sure that we don't compromise the truths that have been communicated to us through the scriptures.

As we'll see several times in this letter, there no true fellowship in darkness, only in light; and there is no light outside of the Bible, no matter how good the fruit on the tree looks, only the Truth can make us free. Only light and Life can give us fellowship in Christ. The early Church was "of one mind, and one heart". That's where the Lord desires to take us.

At this point, John is just laying the foundation for where he plans to take us so we won't misinterpret verses throughout his epistle by forgetting the themes that tie them all together. He'll clear things up more as he goes along. He has given us the grid to look through as we study the pieces of the puzzle. Without that grid, we would spin off into multiple rabbit trails and build both doctrines as well as applications John never intended for us to have.

Here's another point John makes that will be extremely helpful as we go through 1st John. He uses the word "manifest" or "manifested" nine times in what is a very short letter.

This is good news, because sometimes doctrines and principles, as important as they are, can be learned but detached from life experiences. Since 1st John was written between 85 and 95 A.D. (50 plus years after Christ had ascended) John knows that most, if not all, of his readers did not have the experience John talked about in vs's 1 & 2;

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you.

It wasn't that John worried they wouldn't believe him, it was more that he wanted them to know that he was an eye-witness of what he was writing to them about, and that those experiences were very powerful confirmations of everything he would say. He knew his readers would be accepting his words by faith. He also

knew that Christ would give them their own experiences as they walked with Him, but John also realistically knew that his reader's confidence in all John wrote could be strengthened to some extent by John's testimony.

The Eternal Life in Christ, as well as the spiritual fellowship which that Life offers to us, was "manifested" overwhelmingly and convincingly to John and the others who spent 3 ½ years with the Lord. John is always keeping his personal goal for his readers in mind;

Vs. 3,4; That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

We've seen the "what" - *these* verses show us the "why" of John's letter. It was a communication of various doctrines, but it wasn't *only* that. It was also a desire, based on love in *John's* heart, that those he wrote to (and us) would know what true fellowship is and how that experience can increase our joy in this very difficult life.

In the original, the word "fellowship" is *koinonia*, which basically means "sharing". A lexical definition adds: "A joint participation with someone else in things held in common by both."

We saw what that meant in Acts 4 as related to material things and how it went much further than what happens in worldly "fellowship".

(Acts 4:32-35) The multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

The mindset of “. . . neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own” is a perfect example of what we mean when we talk of “Life” being the source of all spiritual action. And the action itself, fits into the “manifestation” outwardly of those who have that Life and express it this way in fellowship. Acts 4 is an historical example of the outworking of 1 Jn. 1.

We could also say that Acts 4 is the outward expression of a *new* life, a *new* way of thinking, seen in the fellowship of believers. And Rom. 12:1 is the inward expression of Life seen in the fellowship of a child of God and that child’s Father;

By the mercies of God, present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God.

In both cases, just like Christ Who is the Life within us, we see the loss of self for the sake of others. (Gal. 2:20) “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.”

Next week we’ll move into the main content of 1 Jn. and see the conditions John sets forth on how Life and Fellowship are attained, endangered, and protected.

To wrap up tonight, I want to share some insights by Ironside from his comments on 1 Jn. 1:2 which said; “For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.” Here’s what he wrote;

Think of it! Eternal life appeared on earth! Do you want to know what eternal life really is in all its fullness, in all its purity? Study the life of Jesus in the four Gospels. John wrote, “The Word was made flesh, and lived among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Although you and I do not see Him now with our natural eyes, yet through the testimony of John and his fellow apostles we are enabled to see Jesus-to see the manifestation of eternal life.

Fellowship is a distinctly New Testament word. Not that you won’t find the English word in our translation of the Old Testament, but there it has the thought of companionship. In Christianity fellowship is far more. When you hear the benediction pronounced, “The love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit, and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you,” do you

stop and think of what that means? People of different heredity, environment, and cultural standards, are saved by the same grace, indwelt by the same Holy Spirit, and brought into marvelous union and fellowship one with another.

I remember a number of years ago sitting at a table eating with two Christian workers, one a colored man, the other a Japanese. Suddenly my Japanese friend said to us in his quiet oriental way, "What a wonderful thing is the grace of God! Just look at this, a black man, a yellow man, and a white man, all one in Christ Jesus! By nature, each one filled with suspicion of the other, or even with a possible feeling of repugnance toward each other, but by grace- all one in Christ." This is not something artificially pumped up or produced by any effort of your own. It is the effect of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God.

The Christian's object of fellowship is occupation with Christ. The apostle John said, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." In 1 Corinthians 1:9 we read, "God is faithful, by whom you were called unto the fellowship of *his Son*." Men try to start fellowships, but they are poor things at best. The only fellowship I know anything about is the fellowship of God's dear Son. Men may create their own fellowships, but thank God every believer has been called into the fellowship of God's Son.

So, John designed his epistles to educate us on what true fellowship is; on what causes and makes it possible, and on what could potentially sabotage it. If we can pray that the Lord will reveal the spiritual realities in all this, as well as any personal applications we could consider, then ultimately, our relationship with our Father and with one another will be deepened and matured; which I'm sure is something we all desire to see happen.