

The Basis of Christian Fellowship

1 John 1:1-4

1 John 1:1-4 - *“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— ² 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— ³ 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. ⁴ And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.”*

Background Notes

We believe that our Lord’s “beloved disciple,” John, was the author of this epistle of 1 John. Although John did not give his name at the beginning of the letter, as Paul did in his letters, there is a lot of evidence – both internal and external evidence. This evidence includes the strong Christian tradition that the apostle John wrote all three epistles – 1st, 2nd and 3rd John. In 2 and 3 John, the apostle referred to himself as “the Elder.”

So we believe that the apostle John wrote five books of the New Testament: the Gospel of John, the three Epistles of John, and Revelation.

After the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, tradition indicates that the apostle John moved to Ephesus. In Ephesus he wrote the Gospel of John between AD 85-90, and the three epistles of John between AD 90-95. Then, because of his Christian faith, John was exiled to Patmos, a small island in the Aegean Sea off the coast of Asia Minor. The Roman persecutions of the Church were going on at this time. While on Patmos, John wrote the book of Revelation, between AD 95-100.

When John wrote his first epistle, false teaching and false teachers had already infiltrated the early Christian Church, and a number of people had followed these false teachings. 1John 2:19 - *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.”*

What was this false teaching? It was insipient Gnosticism. Gnosticism, which comes from the Greek word for “knowledge,” was an early Christian heresy. The heresy was stronger and more widespread in the 2nd century AD, but the seeds of Gnostic thinking were already around when John wrote this epistle from Ephesus.

Here are three brief points about the false teaching of Gnosticism:

1. Gnosticism wrongly taught that Christ was not fully God. Gnostics believed that Christ was only an “emanation from God” that came upon the man Jesus.
2. Gnosticism wrongly taught that the material world was intrinsically evil. They believed that only the “world of the spirit” was good.
3. Gnosticism wrongly taught that salvation was only for the “enlightened ones” - those who had gained certain mystical knowledge, or *gnosis* (thus the name of this heresy).

In 1 John, all three of these points (and more) of the false teaching of Gnosticism were refuted, as we’ll see. The apostle Paul’s epistle to the Colossians also directly refutes many of the false teachings of Gnosticism.

As a result of this false teaching of Gnosticism, many true believers were disturbed and had doubts concerning their salvation. So although the apostle John wrote this letter to refute the errors of Gnosticism, his primary goal was to give true believers assurance of their salvation (both then and today). So if you need assurance of your salvation, read 1 John!

Doctrinal Points

1. Christ is the basis of Christian fellowship.

Verse 3: *“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.”*

What is the “*that which*” of this verse? What is the basis of Christian fellowship? Verses 1-2 are very clear. The basis of Christian fellowship is Jesus Christ Himself! The Lord Jesus Christ alone is the basis and foundation of Christian fellowship.

The basis of Christian fellowship is not certain mystical teachings (as the Gnostics said), and it is not belonging to a certain denomination or church. Christian fellowship is not based on undergoing a particular ritual or sacrament (as some people teach today). No! The basis of Christian fellowship is Jesus Christ Himself - with no add-ons. There can be no Christian fellowship apart from Christ, and apart from acknowledging the truth about Christ.

For example, there can be no *true Christian fellowship* with those who call themselves Christian, but who deny the full deity of Jesus Christ. Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, and Unitarians all claim to be Christians - but all these groups deny

the full deity of Christ. There can be no Christian fellowship with these folks! We can be neighbors, we can work for the same company, we can go to the same schools, but by definition there can't be **Christian** fellowship - because they deny the truth about Jesus Christ.

Two truths about Jesus Christ as the Son of God are quite evident in verses 1-2:

a. The Son of God was pre-existent.

"...that which was from the beginning" (v1).

"That which was" means that which was **already in existence** at the beginning - not that which came into existence. The Son of God existed before there was any part of creation.

"...that eternal life was with the Father" (v2).

"Eternal" means that the Son of God did not have a beginning. The Son of God was pre-existent. The same thought is found in the Gospel of John 1:1-2, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God."* The Son of God was pre-existent.

b. The Son of God became incarnate.

"...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" (v1).

The eternal Son of God **became Man without ceasing to be God.**

"...that life was manifested to us" (v2).

The eternal Son of God did not take on some phantom-like, mere appearance of a human being. The eternal Son of God became a real Man. He had a real tangible body. He had a body that could die. That's what the incarnation is all about.

The Gnostic idea that the "Spirit of Christ" came upon "the man Jesus" at His baptism and left at His death is **unbiblical**. The eternal Son of God took on human flesh. He became incarnate. The Lord Jesus Christ was - and is - **fully God and fully Man**. And He is the basis of Christian fellowship.

2. Joy is the result of Christian fellowship.

Verse 4: *"And these things we write to you that your joy may be full."* Some translations have *"our joy."* In either case, joy is the result of Christian fellowship!

Apart from Christian fellowship there can be no *true* joy, because apart from Jesus Christ there can be no true joy. Apart from Christ, you may have temporary happiness - but no real lasting joy. And He is the basis for joy in Christian fellowship.

Note verse 3 again: *“Truly our joy is with the Father and with the Son, Jesus Christ.”* The essence of Christian fellowship is not Christians drinking coffee together. The essence of Christian fellowship is not having church suppers, or Christians playing golf together. The essence of Christian fellowship is intimate communion together with the Father and with His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what brings us together and unites us. No wonder the result is joy!

Notice the horizontal scope of fellowship in verse 3: *“that you may have fellowship with us.”* Christian fellowship is not for some special group of elite Christians (as the Gnostics taught). Christian fellowship should embrace ***all believers***. Last week we were in Israel, and what a joy it was to join in fellowship with both Jewish and Arab believers there! I trust ***all true believers*** are welcomed with joy into your church or fellowship.

But remember - to experience the joy of Christian fellowship, you must meet with other believers! So don't be a Christian hermit! Hebrews 10:25 says, *“Don't neglect to meet together.”* Joy is the result of Christian fellowship.

Practical Application

Let's worship the Lord, who became Man forever!

In the first half of 1 John 1, we've been talking about the Incarnation of the Son of God. The Incarnation did not take place at His birth in Bethlehem – no, it took place at the moment of His conception in Nazareth.

Do you fully understand the implications of the Incarnation? Before conception, the eternal Son of God was 100% God, 0% Man. After conception, the eternal Son of God was 100% God and 100% Man – ***not*** 50-50!

What about after our Lord's death, resurrection and ascension? Did He revert to 100% God and 0% Man? No! Our Lord Jesus Christ remains 100% God and 100% Man. He is Human forever! Yes, His body is now glorified (and our bodies will be some day), but He is still as fully Man as He is fully God. We will see the God/Man ***Jesus*** someday! Praise the Lord!

For our sakes, the eternal Son of God became Man – forever! He did this for you and for me. How wonderful!

Our response should be worship. Let's worship the Lord who became Man forever!