

# 1 JOHN

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## 1 John 1:1–4

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**1:1** *The Word of life existed from the beginning. We have heard it. We have seen it. We observed and touched it.*

John begins this letter in similar fashion to the opening of his gospel. He opens with a reference to the beginning and leads us directly to the Word. However, unlike the prologue to his gospel account, John moves quickly to the hard evidence of the reality of the “Word of life.” He makes it very clear that he is not talking about some philosophical concept. Contrary to the abstract conclusions of philosophers of his time, John affirmed that he had had the awesome privilege of walking with, listening to, learning from, and otherwise experiencing firsthand the one Who was the foundation of their faith. The Greek verbs have added emphasis that could be translated that John had actually heard, seen, and touched the Lord. This one fact, established by empirical evidence, sets John’s basis for the truth of his teaching, which would immediately refute the vain theologies and false teachings which were creeping into the churches of Asia

Minor. None of the heresies espoused by these false teachers could make such a claim.

Scholars are somewhat puzzled by the term *Word of life*. John, in his gospel, refers to Jesus Christ as the “Word became human” (*John 1:14*). Is John, therefore, speaking of Christ in this opening verse? Sixteenth-century Reformation theologian John Calvin concludes, “As its substance is Christ, and as it contains nothing other than that He, who had always been with the Father, at length appeared to us, the first view seems to me the simpler and more genuine.”<sup>1</sup> This conclusion would be affirmed by the evidence of John’s own gospel when Jesus said to Martha, “I am the one who brings people back to life, and I am life itself. Those who believe in me will live even if they die” (*John 11:25*).

**1:2** *This life was revealed to us. We have seen it, and we testify about it. We are reporting to you about this eternal life that was in the presence of the Father and was revealed to us.*

This “Word of life” was revealed to John and the other disciples. They did not seek Jesus. Rather, He sought them and revealed Himself to them. John acknowledged the human darkness under which all men labor, but Jesus came to them and chose them to be witnesses of His glory. Again, John affirmed this in his gospel. “*You didn’t choose me, but I chose you. I have appointed you to go, to produce fruit that will last, and to ask the Father in my name to give you whatever you ask for*” (*John 15:16*).

John affirmed that he had borne witness and continued to testify to the astounding revelation that the Father had given to the disciples. The most fundamental aspect of that revelation was that their lives were transformed when they saw, heard, touched, and experienced the eternal Word of life Who had been sent to earth from the Father.

**1:3** *This is the life we have seen and heard. We are reporting about it to you also so that you, too, can have a relationship with us. Our relationship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.*

As one who had personally seen and heard the eternal one, John wanted to assure everyone that his testimony was absolutely reliable. What John has declared from the beginning of the church is completely and unequivocally true. There is no error here, no vain hypothesizing, no dimly perceived philosophy. There is only the clear, infallible ring of verifiable evidence that John had personally seen and heard.

John emphasized that his readers could also share in this fellowship just as the apostles did as long as that fellowship is centered in a mutual relationship to Jesus Christ. John does not allow some misperception of the meaning of fellowship. Rather, it is centered in a relationship with the eternal God and made possible by His Son Jesus Christ, Who came into the world as the Lamb of God, the only acceptable sacrifice for the sins of the world.

**1:4** *We are writing this so that we can be completely filled with joy.*

Why is John so forceful in his opening statement? Because he wants believers to experience this same joy in Christ's salvation that he had.

*I will find joy in the Lord.*

*I will delight in my God.*

*He has dressed me in the clothes of salvation.*

*He has wrapped me in the robe of righteousness*

*like a bridegroom with a priest's turban,*

*like a bride with her jewels. (Isaiah 61:10)*

This is the only valid resource of genuine Christian fellowship. The Greek verb πληρωω (ple-ro-oh) is in the passive tense, which

would be better understood as meaning “that your joy may be made full.”<sup>2</sup> In English, we may assume that we are able to achieve some measure of joy on our own merits, but that is not the import of the Greek. The original language tells us in no uncertain terms that the joy that we have as Christians is a gift that is bestowed upon us as an integral part of our salvation through Jesus Christ.

### **Notes/Applications**

How desperately the church today needs this witness of the apostle John. For too many centuries we have allowed our Christian faith to wallow in the recesses of philosophical speculation. Today, many congregations are filled with men and women who mentally adhere to the vague tenets of a “Christian” worldview, but there is little joy or power in their living. They cling to a belief system that reflects a “cultural Christianity” though they have not truly experienced the life-changing power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us listen carefully to John, the apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ, and heed his warnings, measuring our faith against God’s standard of truth, which he firmly proclaims. If we fail the test, let us plead with our God to forgive the pride in our ill-fated theologies, our falsely held heresies. Let us weigh carefully the doctrine of today’s “Christian” thinking against the clearly defined testimony of one who has seen, heard, and touched the eternal Word of life, Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God.

*Bind us all as one together  
In Thy Church’s sacred fold,  
Weak and healthy, poor and wealthy,  
Sad and joyful, young and old.  
Is there want, or pain, or sorrow?  
Make us all the burden share.  
Are there spirits crushed and broken?  
Teach us, Lord, to soothe their care.<sup>3</sup>*