



1 JOHN

THE JOY OF FELLOWSHIP

1 JOHN 1:1-4

MAIN IDEA

Those who are children of God declare and testify about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, all who are in Christ have a unique and special bond of fellowship. Christians are family in the truest, most eternal sense of the word.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

- **Have you ever attended a courtroom proceeding where a verdict was handed down by a judge?**

- **As is appropriate, share the circumstances surrounding the case. What was the verdict?**

Imagine a judge showing mercy to a criminal and pardoning him in the courtroom. The judge slams down the gavel, stands to his feet, and exits the bench in his black robes. This would be quite remarkable, but not unbelievable. Next, the pardoned criminal gathers his things in tears of relief, makes his way back to the exit, and pushes open the doors. As he opens the door he sees standing there before him the judge. But the robes are gone and the fierce gaze has turned to a joyful smile. The judge says, "Let's go home son. I didn't just pardon you. I adopted you. All I have is yours."

This is what God does for those who are in Christ Jesus. Those who are in Christ have complete joy because of the fellowship they now have with the Father and the fellowship they have with other pardoned criminals who have been made children. Let's consider how John explained this in his letter.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> Have someone in your group read 1 John 1:1.

God has revealed Himself to His creation. This may be the most fundamental of truths when it comes to a right understanding of who God is and who we are because it expresses the critical doctrine of revelation. God has made Himself known to His creation as opposed to the idea that creation has figured out who God is. This is important because many people today claim to know the truth about God and the world through sources other than those God has used to make Himself known—the Bible and His works.

God has revealed Himself through the works of creation and providence. When we look at the complexity and majesty of creation, we have evidence that there is a God and that He is worthy of worship. When we look at God's providence (His care for His creation), we see that He is a benevolent and kind being. But when we look at His Word, we see the desperate need of man due to sin and the tremendous love and kindness of God in sending the Son to rescue sinners.

- **The Bible records many ways God revealed Himself to His people. Why is the revelation of God through Jesus the most important of these?**

God revealed Himself to Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and many more. But nothing compares to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was God in flesh.

God the Son took on flesh, entered the womb of a virgin, was born under the law, and lived on earth among mere humans. The Scriptures say, “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors by the prophets at different times and in different ways. In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son” (Hebrews 1:1-2).

This is what John said in verse 1. He expressed to his listeners that he had received the truth of God first-hand. He was with Christ! The revelation of Jesus Christ is historical and was verified by many written witnesses. These witnesses are found both within in the Bible and outside of it. Christ’s coming was a perfect picture of both God’s transcendence and His immanence. Jesus’s transcendence is seen in His miracles, transfiguration, and baptism. His immanence is seen in His suffering, weeping, and humility. Jesus was fully God and fully man. It was necessary for Him to be both to be a true Mediator and Redeemer.

- **Why did God have to condescend and reveal Himself to us? What stopped us from making our way to Him?**

After the fall, all of humanity was corrupted with sin, blinded by evil, and resistant to God. If God had never come to us, we would have never ever found Him. The Psalmist summarized it like this: “The fool says in his heart, ‘There’s no God.’ They are corrupt, and they do vile deeds. There is no one who does good. God looks down from heaven on the human race to see if there is one who is wise, one who seeks God. All have turned away; all alike have become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one” (Psalm 53:1-3).

Like the wolf that has his paw caught in a trap, the sin-corrupted person would seek to attack the only one who can free them. People have been so deceived by the evil one, that they are unable to see that their salvation is found only in God. But God, in His great mercy and power, intervened. He revealed Himself to humanity and He has called people from every tribe, tongue, and nation to look upon the Son, Jesus Christ and be born again.

We must be careful to pay close attention to His Word which clearly reveals who Christ truly was. Many have been deceived even while they stood at the door of truth. Some have claimed that Christ was not truly divine but created. Others say He could not have truly been human—that it was only an illusion. The one who has been made alive by Christ rejects these teachings that contradict Scripture. Those who are in Christ love the Scriptures and cling to them. They feed on them. They know the Scriptures are sufficient for every question concerning their souls and the souls of their neighbors.

- **How important is God’s Word to your life? How do your habits give evidence of this?**

> Have someone in your group read 1 John 1:2.

John wasn’t content to simply receive revelation about Jesus Christ. He knew he must declare to the nations what he had received concerning Him. Jesus told him, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus also told Him: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

- **What was John’s motivation for sharing the truth about Christ? Why should ours be the same?**

John loved Jesus Christ and he knew Christ loved him, but they weren’t merely buddies. John submitted to Jesus as his authority. Jesus Christ was John’s Prophet, Priest, and King. There is a reason Paul referred to himself as a bondsman to Christ. While Jesus does love His people, we must keep in view the glorious King who will return with a sword to tread the winepress of the fury of God almighty.

John obeyed Christ, and Christians today should obey all the commandments of Jesus Christ that have been made clear and preserved in His Word. But obedience isn't the only reason Christians share the gospel with others. Christians obey Christ in all things, especially in sharing the gospel, because they are compelled by the love of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14). Those who are in Christ rejoice that Christ died for them and understand they have died to themselves. They no longer live for themselves but for the One who gave His life for them and was raised from the dead.

- **What are some other right motivations for sharing the gospel?**

Christians share the gospel with the world because they have compassion for them. Those who die without Christ go on to meet a second death, an eternal death. It is appointed for man to die once and then face judgment (Hebrews 9:27). Christians declare the good news of new life through Christ out of a love for the lost. This motivation must remain secondary, not primary. Those who set out to declare the gospel in the darkness primarily motivated by compassion and not the glory of God above all end up burned out and frustrated. The only thing that will keep Christians faithful in this often-arduous task is a passion for the glory of God.

Finally, remember that the work of salvation is God's work. No person can save a soul. The work of grace wrought in the soul of man is accomplished by the power of God for the glory of God. At the same time God uses means to do this. Usually, it is the ministry of the Word by a humble Christian that God uses to save souls. Christians are a secondary means God has chosen to use to rescue poor sinners. These truths should help shape the way Christians understand their role in evangelism.

- **How often do you share the gospel? What causes you to sometimes shrink back from declaring the good news of Jesus Christ?**

> Have someone in your group read 1 John 1:3-4.

- **What purpose did John give for testifying of the good news in these verses?**

John proclaimed the truth about Christ “so that you may also have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son.” Notice what John did not say. He didn’t mention forgiveness of sin or eternal life. Rather, he said he was telling them these things so that they might have fellowship.

The Scriptures teach that a believer’s relationship with a non-believer can never be as meaningful as the relationship between two believers. This is because they disagree on the fundamentals of life itself. Paul wrote, “Do not be yoked together with those who do not believe. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship does light have with darkness? What agreement does Christ have with Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? And what agreement does the temple of God have with idols?” (2 Corinthians 6:14-16). Those who are in Christ have a unique fellowship with one another.

- **According to these verses, what other fellowship do people who come to Christ enjoy?**

When a person is born again, they enter a new family and are made brothers and sisters with other believers. But this isn’t all. They are also made to be children of God. They are reconciled to God: “For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. And not only that, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received this reconciliation” (Romans 5:10-11).

New life through the atoning sacrifice of Christ provides the basis and framework for true meaningful relationships with others and reconciliation to God the Father. This means Christians relate to others and God in a new way. They now look to God as Father. They love and revere Him. They seek to obey and glorify Him in all things. Their lives are no longer self-oriented but have a Godward bent in every area.

Similarly, redeemed sinners participate in a local church and interact with their brothers and sisters in Christ in accordance with the Scriptures. They love one another, forgive one another, bear one another's burdens, serve one another, and submit to one another. They labor to build one another up using the talents and gifts that they Lord has given them. God uses these means to preserve the souls and nourish the faith of His people.

- **How would you describe your fellowship with your brothers and sisters in Christ? In what ways are you committed to them?**

APPLICATION

- **If God has given you a clear revelation of Himself, what should you do in response?**
- **What practical steps can you take to allow God's Word to have more space in your heart and mind?**
- **What are some ways you can nourish your relationships with fellow church members? What is the benefit of having close relationships with church members?**

PRAY

Give thanks to the Lord for His mercy and kindness in revealing Himself to you. Praise Him for saving you and loving you when you were sinful and unlovely. Ask Him for the courage and opportunity to declare Christ to others. Finally, ask the Lord to help you value the fellowship you have with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Ask Him to give you a deep love for them.

1 JOHN 1:1-4

1:1. Verses 1–4 form a prologue for 1 John, telling us that throughout the rest of the book John will proclaim to us what he has observed about Jesus, the Word of life. It begins in an odd way. He said he had heard, seen, and touched the Word of life. Why would John talk about hearing, seeing, and touching Jesus? The answer seems to be related to false teaching that his readers were hearing. More than likely, false teachers were suggesting that Jesus' physical body was not a normal body; or that he was an angel, not a man; or that his physical body was an illusion; or some other erroneous speculation. John met this false teaching head-on by saying that he had firsthand experience with Jesus, and based on that experience, he is telling us what he knows about Jesus.

Notes:

That which was from the beginning might refer to Jesus' eternal coexistence with the Father, or to the beginning of creation (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1), but in light of the context, John was probably referring to the beginning of Jesus' ministry. It seems that false teachers had spread bad information about Jesus. However, John was with Jesus from the very beginning of his ministry on earth. Based on that firsthand experience, John determined to set the record straight. The false teachers, whom John called "antichrists," brought new ideas about Jesus, not ideas that could be verified, firsthand, from the beginning of Jesus' ministry. These false teachers apparently denied the incarnation (God's taking on human flesh in the person of Jesus), a fact that could easily be refuted by eyewitnesses, of whom John was one.

The Word of life might be a name or title for Jesus, as the translators of the NIV decided (since they capitalized Word), or it might mean "the message about life." Either interpretation is possible.

1:2. This life is eternal, was originally with the Father, and now has appeared on earth. This supports the historic Christian teaching that Jesus is coequal and coeternal with God the Father (as well as the Holy Spirit, who is not mentioned in this passage).

Notes:

1:3. John proclaimed what he knew about Jesus so that you also may have fellowship with us. Since John made it clear in 2:12–14 that the readers of this letter were already believers, he was not referring to the fellowship with other Christians that begins at salvation. Rather, he was referring to the ongoing fellowship of people who are already believers. They needed to be sure of who Jesus was and of their salvation. If they doubted their salvation, their fellowship with the Father and Son would be limited. If Christians are not in fellowship with God, they cannot be in full fellowship with other devout Christians. Christian-with-Christian fellowship is rooted in fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. Apparently, the false teachers had called into question the salvation of the readers, so John was reaffirming their faith.

1:4. The prologue concludes by linking John's own joy with the spiritual welfare of his readers. He reaffirmed these truths so that their joy could be made complete. John was so concerned about their welfare that he could not experience complete joy himself as long as they were struggling with doubt created by these false teachers. If the readers had their salvation reaffirmed, their joy would be made full, and in their joy, John's joy would be made full.¹