

Trusting the Right Source | Reading: 1 John 1:1-4

John is writing as an old man. The other apostles have been dead a number of years, martyred for their commitment to Christ & the truth entrusted to them. It is sometime between AD85 – AD95 & John has set up his base in Ephesus & is overseeing a number of churches in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). John writes tenderly like a Father to children. For example he writes in 2:1 **“My dear children”** & we hear this tone continued throughout the letter. So we should have in our minds the picture of a warm-hearted & concerned old man writing with authority to multiple age-groups younger than him. John himself is reckoned to have lived to over 100, 109 in some estimations.

As John writes he is doing so to address a real problem. Last week we looked at how John was most likely writing to combat the early seeds of Gnosticism... Therefore in his letter he writes things like 2:26; **“I am writing these things about those who are trying to lead you astray.”** 4:1; **“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.”** He is addressing a real problem; he is concerned about false prophets. He also writes in 2:19; **“They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.”** The threat then is not persecution outside the church but seduction within it. John is not writing about those who are out & out against Christianity, he is writing about those who are trying to improve it with their ‘superior knowledge’. The problem is their ‘superior knowledge’ took issue with the fact that Jesus was fully God & fully man for the reasons noted last week. John is writing to affirm the truth of the Incarnation! The opponents in John’s Gospel are unbelieving Jews, the opponents in John’s first letter are professing Christians who are promoting error.

John then in these first four verses launches into this confusion with authoritative clarity which is always what a confused church needs most – authoritative clarity about who Christ was & is! In these four verses he lays the foundation for the rest of the letter & in doing so he lays down some foundational principles for us. Look at how he opens this letter in verse 1; **“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.”** We can hear echoes of the opening to his gospel here. So in his opening statement John underlines both the eternity of Christ & the truth of the Incarnation. That in Jesus the eternal God stepped into time. One who was fully God became fully human. John along with the other apostles was there; he heard Jesus talk, he seen him in action, he thoughtfully watched his life & perhaps most importantly his hands had touched his physical body. This one verse undermines everything the false teachers were saying.

What we have here then is the words of an eyewitness. He is not passing on a story he heard about Jesus second or third hand he is writing from his personal experience with the physical Jesus. When John says he heard & seen Jesus he is not talking about some kind of spiritual hearing & seeing like we talk about today. No John heard, seen & touched the physical Jesus. The truth we find here then is not dependant on a mystical experience a person had in which they gained superior revelation to others. No the truth we find here is the actual words of an eyewitness who physically seen, knew, walking & interacted with Jesus. Note also that John uses the word **“we”**. John is referencing that he witnessed the life of Jesus with the other apostles. *Authentic Christianity* is based on the testimony & teaching of eyewitness of Jesus Christ who physically walked with him & knew him. What we have here & in the rest of the NT is the testimony & teaching of these eyewitnesses or those verified by them. This is why it is so important to Authentic Christianity that it never goes beyond what is written.

1. Authentic Witnesses Produce Authentic Christianity

John continues by reemphasising what he has said; V2 **“The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, & we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.”** Again he underlines the eternality & Incarnation of Jesus as well as his own credential as an eyewitness along with the other apostles. He also underlines that the purpose of an eyewitness is to testify. John is an authentic witness of Christ! Eugene Peterson writes; “A witness is never the centre but only the person who points to or names what is going on at the centre.” John is fulfilling his role well then. The NKJV puts it; “the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness.” Authentic Christianity is based on the testimony & teaching of Authentic Witnesses to the Authentic Jesus. It follows then that an *Authentic Christian* will base his or her life on the testimony of the authentic witnesses to Jesus & not on the latest secular thinking or latest spiritual revelation.

2. Authentic Proclamation Produces Authentic Fellowship

John writes in verse 1; **“we proclaim to you concerning the Word of life.”** In verse 2 he writes; **“we proclaim to you the eternal life.”** Then in verse 3 he writes; **“We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”** Note that John underlines again that he is talking about what he has seen & heard. Note also his stated purpose: **“so that you may have fellowship with us...”** Then he adds; **“And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son.”** Implication being that to in order to have fellowship with the Father & the Son you need to stick with the testimony & teaching of the eyewitnesses. John is giving them their options. You can have fellowship with us or you can have fellowship with them – meaning the false prophets – but you can’t have both. But before you decide & in light of what I’ve been pointing out; **“our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”** In others words to leave our solid revelation

for this new spiritual revelation is to walk away from Authentic Christianity. For Authentic Christianity is rooted in the testimony of the Authentic Witnesses.

It's also important to go back to that word **"proclaim"** which appears in verses 1, 2 & 3. It is authentic proclamation which produces Authentic Christianity, meaning authentic fellowship with God & authentic Christian fellowship with others. If the proclamation is wrong, if the message is wrong, then everything else will be. This is why proclaiming the truth of the gospel as revealed in the NT is so vital.

As the last of Christ's Apostles, John sees dangers on the horizon. The false prophets are trying to lead the churches astray with new ideas. These new ideas included denying the doctrine of the Incarnation & therefore destroying the truth of Christ's substitutionary atonement. John affirms both the incarnation & the atoning death of Christ (2:2). We'll learn more about their ideas as we go on through. However this new teaching started essentially because a group of people thought they had gained some kind of higher knowledge beyond the teaching of the apostles. The teaching which we know today as the New Testament! I want us to see that the heresy noted by John was the fruit but the root was this seeking of higher knowledge or new revelation. Essentially John wants his readers to trust the only reliable source of revelation concerning Christ & Christianity, that of himself & the other apostles.

John wants them to know & remain in the truth. The word 'know' appears 36 times in 1 John & the word 'abide' or 'remain' appears 23 times. It's unlikely that people in the churches of Asia Minor had seen Jesus in the flesh. He never went that far when he walked this earth. John as an eyewitness is writing to give them confidence in Christ. In many ways these Christians are not unlike us. They depended on the apostles teaching just like we do. John is also writing to tell them & therefore us that even though we have not physically seen & touched Jesus like him & the other apostles; we can still share fellowship with the Word of Life & know the reality of the eternal life found in him. However we will only know that fellowship with the Father & the Son if we stick with the eyewitnesses & their teaching.

What we have in the NT is authoritative eyewitness accounts of people who actually walked with Jesus & authoritative explanation about his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension, sending of the Spirit & return, as well as authoritative record of his apostolic teaching, commands, promises, warnings & instructions to Christians & churches either by those same eyewitness apostles themselves or those authenticated by them. In other words what we have in our NT.

We can have confidence in the written revelation of the NT. What we cannot have confidence in is any addition or extra revelation beyond this apostolic teaching or any thinking which tries to take away anything from or add anything to the Person & Work of Christ. We can trust the sufficiency of the apostles teaching. This is Authentic Christianity. So John writes in 2:24; **"As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son & in the Father."**

The devotion we see in Acts 2:42 is the devotion we need to have today. It is not a characteristic of Authentic Christianity to look for higher knowledge or extra revelation beyond what the apostles taught. No it is the DNA of Authentic Christianity to be devoted to the apostles teaching & John clearly teaches us that this devotion includes remaining in what has been taught from the beginning!

So hear the challenge which John lays down in these verses: Are you with him & the other NT apostles or are you with the false prophets? Are you abiding in Christ by trusting the sufficiency of the apostles teaching or are you with those seeking new & higher revelation? Who are you fellowshiping with? Is it built around the apostles teaching given once for all or is it built around extra revelation & mystical experiences? Without faith & practice growing from the right source there can be no Authentic Christianity. One of the problems John is addressing is that there are competing sources of revelation. Is what they heard from the beginning sufficient (2:24) or do they need this higher knowledge which is being offered to them.

This is why John so emphatically starts with the truth about Jesus... John wants his recipients to know Jesus Christ was fully human & fully divine. He emphasises how he & the other apostles heard, seen & touch Christ. This is an obvious correction to the seeds of error sown by the false teaching. However at the same time he is writing to assure those who didn't physically hear, see & touch Jesus that they too can know this Word of Life & eternal life that comes from him. He then finishes his introduction by saying; **"We write this to make our joy complete."** John's joy would be made complete by them making the right choice & abiding in Christ by abiding in the authoritative testimony of him & the other apostles. John wrote in his third letter in verse 3-4; **"It gave me great joy when some believers came & testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth."** This was the purpose for which he wrote this first letter. This was the purpose of the all the writing we have in the NT to help us abide in Christ by continuing to walk in the truth. For this to happen we have to trust in the sufficiency of the apostles testimony & teaching for this is the only way we can know for sure, and we can know for sure, that we are trusting the right source.