

**Glory to God Publications**

**Life, Joy, and the Christian  
A Devotional Commentary on I John**

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This is the preface.

It seems a strange thing to start at the end, doesn't it? I John 5.21 tells us to stay away from idols. Why? Why place that phrase as the final sentence in such a great document as John's first epistle?

## **Purpose of First John**

I believe these questions are easily explained in the purpose of John's letter. He wanted his readers, whom he has not seen for some time, to experience life the way God had intended them too. He wanted them to have life and joy as the essential ingredients to their existence. His purpose is stated in I John 1.1-4: That we might have life and joy!

The intention of John in inserting the final verse was to remind us of the things which would take away that life and joy. Anything that takes the place of God in our lives has become our idol, our replacement for God. When this occurs, we no longer have life or joy. Therefore, John concludes his book most appropriately.

John was writing this letter to the people in his church. A church he had not seen for a while. He was exiled to Patmos by Rome because of his faith and belief that Jesus Christ is God and Saviour-that is both God and man. There were some men teaching a false Christianity in Ephesus (the city where John's church was). They were teaching against the very thing for which John was thrown into exile-Jesus Christ was not fully man but only appeared to be a man.

John received reports that people in his congregation were falling away from their faith. By John's day, the glory and splendor of Christianity had become a normal happening. It became a matter of tradition (Matthew 24.12). It would be easy to introduce idols (a chance

for sin) and most people would fall prey to such temptations.

## **What are Your Idols?**

Have you considered your Christianity in terms of life and joy? Can you honestly say that you have life, that you have joy? When people look into your heart do they see the life Jesus promised or the joy the Holy Spirit gives? Most of us would honestly answer that question with a “no”. If that is your honest answer, then we need to ask the implied question of I John 5.21: What idols are standing in the way of my having joy and life?

Take time, right now, to determine what they may be. What things do you value more than God? What things do you seek more than God? What is your heart longing for in life? Is God the central focus of your mind; if not, what is? Take some time right now to answer those questions.

As Christians we are searching out the complete life God has called us to. As was alluded in the first chapter, sin or idols cause us to leave behind that life. As we look throughout Scripture we can grasp the life we forfeit by our sin; that is, we can see the purpose and meaning of life.

## **Old Testament**

From the moment we were created, we had a purpose for being. All the world is a stage, as one sage stated, and we are the cast. It was for us that God had created all things that in those things we may bring glory to God and enjoy who He is throughout eternity. When this occurs we experience the life He desires for us. However, in Genesis we forfeited that life with meaning and purpose, choosing our own willful desires and choices in life.

Before the fall, in Genesis one and two, we see that we enjoyed God's presence and found meaning and joy in life. All life had purpose, all life had meaning, all life had joy. It was only when we believed the lie of Satan that we lost all that. The lie of Satan was in essence that we could do better than God. That we could create an existence better than the one God had provided for us is the essence of Satan's continual lie This is what he does in our lives today (remember, stay away from idols). He tempts us to create a better life for ourselves outside of God. This life can even appear to be religious and profitable but if it is without Jesus as the focus, we lose out on life. The good news of the Bible is that, while we chose to rebel against God and the life He would have for us, God still seeks to bring us back into a right relationship and fellowship with Him. This is the story of the Bible.

## **New Testament**

### **Gospels**

#### **John**

Throughout John's Gospel we can see an understanding of the life, meaning, and purpose that Jesus has for us.

#### **Acts**

#### **Epistles**

#### **Revelation**

To begin with, 1 John chapter one is the essence and meaning of Christianity. The chapters which follow merely enhance the first chapter.

Many times in our life as disciples of Christ we can get a little complacent. As humans, we have the tendency to forget much of what has gone on in our lives. When we forget, we merely don't leave the memory behind but tend to forsake the reality as-well. We see this clearly in our father's tales of fishing. The first weekend they come back from a fishing trip, the fish weren't biting and the time was miserable. When a year passes and the desire to go fishing again is introduced, they begin to reminisce about the big one that got away. After a few years of spot memory (thinking of something one or twice a year), the trip wasn't bad and the fish didn't get away. After twenty years pass, the fish they caught was at least thirty inches in length and was 35 pounds (and caught on a five pound test-line). Those who recorded the trip when it first happened, who recorded that no fish were caught and the time was miserable, would be hard pressed for the fish-tale creator to believe them. That is, the lie has become reality and the reality is forgotten in the memory. This type of thing happens quite often in our spiritual lives.

Many of us treasure those moments we had with God and His people. But, we don't write them down as treasured moments for some reason or other. After time escapes us, we forget that treasure and forget a moment with our Saviour. All too often, Christians come to me and complain that their lives aren't like they once were. Their spiritual passion is gone. Their fire to serve is smoldering. They quote Revelation 2.4 about losing their first love. I wish people would read that verse to truly understand what it means. The verse was written to the same people that John wrote this epistle to, the Ephesians.



It is of interest to note a few things about this church. Paul founded it and preached mightily in it (Acts 19.17f). Many came to know Jesus in a dramatic way. Paul would later be forced out of Ephesus. On his way to Rome (Acts 20), Paul was nearby Ephesus and called the elders of the church to meet him at the sea. They did. He warned them of the false teachers that would come from within their own church. He told them to be on guard lest they lose their memory of their first love. Timothy becomes her pastor and for years preaches in her midst and Paul wrote to them and Timothy during this time about the spiritual battles before them and the need to hold on to their first love (Ephesians, 1 & 2 Timothy). John becomes her caretaker and preaches that we must remember our love and Jesus who loves us. He warned them of the coming antichrists who would steal their devotion from God (1, 2, & 3 John). Finally, John writes one more letter to them, Revelation, and tells them they have lost their love, their passion. He doesn't stop there, he shows them how to regain their passion, their love, their fervor for Jesus.

Jesus tells the Ephesians and all others like them, to remember where they came from and to do the things that God requires (read also Romans 12). This is the remedy to spiritual lackluster. This is why John begins his letter with words of remembrance.

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, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all (1 John 1.1-4).

John calls Christians to remember that which he would never be able to forget: Jesus. Write it down, shout it out, tell your neighbor, tell yourself, over and over again who Jesus

is and what He has done for you. That is the message of verses 1-4. You want joy and life and meaning, tell what God has done for you. Give a testimony. Share your faith with someone who needs to hear about Jesus. Write down all things that God does for you: prayer requests, praises, temptations that He helps you through, etc. Speak to Him and others of Him and watch your faith and life grow. Watch your passion scream forth for others to see. Watch your Saviour be pleased with you.