

The Knowledge of God

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[0 : 00] Well, do have your Bibles open at 1 John and chapter 1, and we're going to be focusing in, as I said earlier, on verses 1 to 4.

Well, I wonder, do you ever wish that our knowledge of God depended on something other than the Bible? Do you wish that what we knew about Jesus and his teaching was somehow a little different?

You might not admit it here, but inside perhaps you kind of wish that. Or perhaps you wonder whether our knowledge of God ought to be based less on a 2,000 plus year old book and more on a sort of more immediate experience of God.

Well, for some people here, I guess maybe you haven't had those thoughts. But from time to time, you're going to come up against people who tell you that you need to update your Christianity, perhaps to something more inclusive, to a different understanding of Jesus, one set free from all of the historical baggage of the New Testament.

And when you do, how will you respond? You see, you won't have to search very far from here to find a church that will tell you that what we need to do is update the faith, that we should follow Jesus, sure, but we need to reinterpret the Bible's message for our more enlightened age.

[1 : 31] How can Jesus be the only way to God? Let everyone find God in their own way. Or they'll tell you Jesus was just a man, even though he was a very special one.

Or that we shouldn't believe in hell and judgment anymore. Those are outdated concepts from a different time. Or that we need to update Jesus' moral teaching on marriage or whatever.

And these things can seem very attractive. It's a message that's nice and kind and loving. And it can be tempting to us. On the other hand, you probably won't have to travel too far to find a church that will offer you an exciting and immediate experience.

A church that has special insights about God, so they say. Come and experience the tangible presence of God in our worship. If you're sick, come and be healed. Come and see the Holy Spirit through supernatural things.

See and feel and hear heaven brought down to earth. Come and hear God speak directly. We don't need a preacher. We've got something special. And if you come and join us, you can have it too. And we can teach you about it.

[2 : 44] Again, sounds attractive. Less doctrine, more displays of God's power. Less time reading this book and trying to understand what it says about Jesus. And more direct one-to-one experience of God.

Now, John writes his letter to churches who are being influenced by some teachers who have come along saying things that aren't too dissimilar to what we hear in our day.

These teachers, as we read 1 John, we see that they claim to have a special anointing from God and special insights that God's people need to hear.

They deny the apostles' teaching about Jesus at the same time and who he was. And they also have very different, very attractive, perhaps, standards of morality. Not so high.

The apostle John is very concerned that the church he's writing to will be enticed away by these new teachings, by these false teachers.

[3 : 44] And so he writes his letter. And in the first verses of his letter, he is reassuring them and encouraging them and urging them and showing them the need to remain faithful to what they've been taught.

So here's the question then. Why should we continue to trust what the New Testament teaches about Jesus when other teachers and churches would urge us to move with the times or get involved in the latest movement?

Why should we stick putting the Bible at the heart of all we do when others offer us a more up-to-date, more immediate way, when more exciting things are on offer?

Why should we stick with the apostles' writings of the New Testament? Well, we said that 1 John was written to reassure us. So what reassurance, what encouragement does he give us here?

Three things, three points that fit together to form one sentence, actually. And the first is this. Firstly, he tells us that the apostles' witness is reliable.

[4 : 55] The apostles' witness is reliable. And these verses are all about the witness of the apostles to the truth about Jesus. Look at verse 1.

It begins with that which is from the beginning. In verse 2, we have the word of life. And then in verse 3, we have the eternal life.

All of those refer to Jesus. And John wants us to know that the apostles' writing about this word of life, eternal life, this Jesus, are reliable.

And he wants us to know that the writers of the New Testament are trustworthy witnesses. Imagine for a moment that you were on a jury for a big murder case.

And here is the defendant standing in the dock. And the prosecuting lawyer calls out their first witness. And the witness is being questioned. Were you there on the night of the murder?

[6 : 01] Did you see it happen? I've no idea if prosecuting lawyers ask those kind of questions. They do on TV. But in all seriousness, were you there? Did you see it happen?

Witness number one. Well, no. I was at home. But I heard about it. Someone told me about it. I'm totally convinced this man is the murderer.

Have you got any evidence? Well, no. I'm sure it was him. He looks like a murderer. And the second witness comes up. Where were you on the night of the murder?

Oh, I was out of the country. But this man, well, he just looks the guilty type. Besides, I've heard all about him from one of my friends. And I'm sure he did it. Just got this strong impression that he's guilty.

It's not a great case, is it? It's not a great case. And then later in the day, it's time for the defence witness to be called. Where were you on the night of the murder? Well, I was with the defendant in a restaurant on the other side of town all evening.

[7 : 06] I can tell you what time we left home, how long we were there, what food we ordered. He couldn't have committed the murder. He was with me. And here's the second witness. Well, I was at the same restaurant, too, at the next table.

And I can tell you for a fact that he was there at the time of the murder. And then up comes the third witness. I'm the manager of the restaurant. He was definitely here. I've got his credit card details. I know what he ordered.

And I know what time he arrived. I know what time he left. I can prove it. He's not your man. Now, obviously, that's absurd. That case wouldn't come to court.

But the point is this. John's readers can either listen to these new teachers who weren't with Jesus, who didn't hear his words, and yet are teaching new things about him, as confident as if they were there.

They weren't. They were. Or they can stick with the teaching they knew from John and the apostles. So, why listen to John? Why is the biblical teaching so trustworthy?

[8 : 11] Let's have a look at what we've got in these verses, then. And we've got a number of things which we'll just go through very quickly here. Firstly, we'll listen to the apostles' witness and believe the apostles' witness, because it's backed up by multiple witnesses.

Notice that here, John is using the word we. That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched, etc., etc. When you read the rest of the book, this isn't a collective letter.

It's a letter from John, and he writes with the word I. Little children, I write to you so that you don't sin. He uses the word we here to underline this fact, that he doesn't speak alone, and he speaks collectively with the other apostles and their writings.

This is the truth. The truth about Jesus comes from multiple sources. We have them here in our hands. And they're written by different people in different styles, and there are the gospels, and then there are the letters, and they're written in different times and different places.

But they all come together. They all stand as a united testimony that doesn't have contradictions and differences and errors. And that makes very powerful evidence.

[9 : 26] They paint for us one coherent, consistent picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. Multiple witnesses.

Secondly, this is a physical witness. The apostles weren't writing what they thought Jesus was like. They weren't writing about something they imagined. They weren't reporting second-hand information, or giving an opinion, or an impression.

They were there with him. We have heard. We have seen with our eyes. We have touched with our hands. They were close by him for three years, and exurbing first-hand, living with him.

His Peter, his John, you know. And here they are touching and seeing and hearing from him, being his friends, talking to him. It couldn't be much closer than living with him for that time.

And the text we have either come directly from the hands of those men, or from those who they were working very closely with. Secondly, it's a physical witness. Thirdly, they saw.

[10 : 33] They saw. They saw what he did. They saw how he behaved. They were witnesses to how he treated people, and to the extraordinary things that he did.

Thirdly, they saw. Fourthly, they heard. They listened to his teaching. If you want to know what Jesus thinks about God the Father, or about you and me, and our state before God, about how we can know God, where do you go?

Some new teaching that's risen up 2,000 years later, or for these people, 30, 40 years later, from some people who were not there, and didn't know. No. We come to the New Testament.

We listen to the witnesses, the God-appointed witnesses. So there are multiple witnesses. There are physical witnesses. They were there, and they saw what he did, and they heard his teaching, and now they proclaim it to us, to God's people.

We have seen it, and we declare it, and testify to it. That which we have seen and heard in verse 2, we testify to you.

[11 : 41] In other words, they're not embellishing the truth. They aren't reinterpreting what they saw, or changing it to fit in with some doctrine that was devised later, or which serves their political agenda.

No. No. No. John says, We are reporting to you what we observed about Jesus, just the way he was. We are telling you about what he did, just the way he did it.

We are reporting his teaching to you, just as he taught it to us. So, how reliable is the Apostle's witness in the New Testament?

It's compellingly strong. Would it stand up in court? Absolutely. Should we choose to trust the Apostles and their writings over alternative teachings about Jesus which come along today?

Without a doubt we should. And friends, if you've been struggling with doubts about the truth of the Christian faith, seeking a new experience, it's not going to help you.

[12 : 54] Changing the truth to fit in with our culture, it's not going to help you. What will help you is this, realising how unshakably reliable and trustworthy and accurate the witness of the New Testament to Jesus really is.

That will make the difference. Hold on to that, even when you battle with doubts and uncertainty. Hold on to the trustworthiness of what we have in our hands. And how will you respond to those who tell you that you can't believe the Bible?

Or point to the evidence we've just looked at. This is a reliable book. It's God's Word brought to us by multiple witnesses.

Be reassured, friends. Be reassured that the New Testament can be trusted to give us the truth about Jesus as it really is. So that's the first thing. The Apostle's witness is reliable.

The Apostle's witness is reliable. Secondly, we continue our sentence, therefore, believe the truth about Jesus. The Apostle's witness is reliable, therefore, believe the truth about Jesus.

[14 : 09] So the false teachers in John's day were attacking what the Apostles had taught about Christ. Listen to John in chapter 2 and in verse 22. Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?

This is the Antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. False teaching attacks the truth about Jesus. It denies or it distorts or distracts us from the person and work of Jesus Christ, who he really was, what he said and what he did.

And it's worth us remembering, I think, as well. In fact, this is really important. Just because a church formally ascribes to an orthodox statement of faith, if all they ever teach you is to come and have some new experience or come and see miracles, et cetera, et cetera, and they never teach the biblical truth about Jesus, then that is every bit as dangerous as someone who stands up and denies the divinity of Christ.

Now, I'm not denying the faith of our charismatic brothers and sisters here, but what I'm saying is if Jesus is not preached, if the gospel is not preached, if the truth about our Saviour is not preached, then that is as good as denying the truth.

So what then does John want to teach us about Jesus in these verses? Three things. Firstly, he's the eternal Son of God, the eternal Son of God.

[15 : 47] Verse one tells us that he was from the beginning. Jesus was in existence before the world was made. He was first before anything else. Indeed, he's eternal.

Not only that, but look at verse two, he was with the Father. And then in verse three it says this, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. Christ.

So we're speaking here of the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God. In John chapter one, which we were looking at earlier, John puts it like this, in the beginning of, in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

But how, someone might ask, did John know this? Sure, by God's revelation. But as we think about the evidence, there's lots of evidence to support this.

We might wonder about it for a minute because he saw, well, Jesus as a man on earth. What evidence did John have that Jesus was the eternal Son of God? Again, John's Gospel's helpful.

[16 : 59] Chapter one, verse 14, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

The apostles saw his glory and that glory is the same glory that the Father has. Here's John and he's watching on as Jesus miraculously heals the sick.

Here he is watching on as he raises Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus, come forth! Here he is with Jesus on the mountain as Jesus is transformed, as he's transfigured and his face is shining like the sun and his clothes are white as light and a voice cries out from heaven, this is my beloved Son with whom I'm well pleased.

Listen to him. And here he is displaying the glory of God as he willingly chooses the cross and John stands and watches.

Here he is mightily risen from the dead and John sees him over and over again, the risen Lord Jesus Christ and here he is going up for the last time into heaven as the disciples watch on with wonder.

[18 : 13] Oh, the apostles saw Jesus' glory. They saw that he was the eternal Son of God and they've reported that faithfully to us. How much does it matter what you believe about Jesus' divinity?

Perhaps someone here isn't a Christian or is on the edges of faith and you're wondering how much it matters whether you can truly accept Jesus as God. 1 John, sorry, chapter 4, verse 15.

Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God. In other words, it couldn't be more important.

If we want to know God, we must confess that he, that Jesus is the Son of God. If we reject this, we reject the Apostle's witness and we reject God himself. And frankly, based on the evidence that we have presented for us by these witnesses, by these Apostles in the Word, why would we not accept it?

The evidence is powerful and clear. So firstly, he's the eternal Son of God. Secondly, he was revealed in the flesh.

[19 : 29] We believe the evidence about Jesus who was revealed in the flesh. Verse 2, the life was made manifest or revealed and we have seen it.

He was revealed to the Apostles. And remember verse 1 again, we touched with our hands. Jesus was revealed in the flesh.

In other words, he was made flesh and blood. He was human body and soul. You could reach out and touch him and many people did. He lived among those disciples for three years on this earth for 33.

He was a real man without ever ceasing in any way to be fully God. That's what's being pointed at here. And it's an amazing truth, isn't it?

The eternal Son of God takes on humanity and lives among us. Can it be true? The evidence says so. John saw him hungry and tired.

[20 : 30] He saw him crying tears at the tomb of Lazarus. He saw him arrested and mocked and beaten and bleeding and collapsing under the weight of the cross. He saw him hanging on a cross dying, crying out, Father forgive them for they don't know what they're doing.

And as he saw him dying, he understood or perhaps began to understand that he was offering himself in our place. He was the propitiation for our sins, the one who turns away God's wrath.

Is it crucial as well that we believe that Jesus truly came in the flesh and lived and died and rose? Well it is and I think that was under attack too.

Chapter 4 verse 2 of this same letter. By this you know the spirit of God. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.

This is the spirit of Antichrist which you've heard was coming and now is in the world already. We must confess and believe that Jesus came in the flesh and once again what we believe about Jesus does matter hugely and once again the apostles they're witness to the truth they see it and they have explained it and described it faithfully to us and we can and we must believe what they say.

[21 : 59] He was revealed in the flesh isn't it a glorious truth? Don't you hold on to that? Thirdly the evidence that we believe about Jesus is this the truth we believe about Jesus is this he's the word of life and the eternal life.

In verse 1 Jesus is described as the word of life and in verse 2 as the eternal life. This describes who Jesus is first of all that he's the eternal son of God he is the one who has life eternal life in himself.

He was there in the beginning with God and he was God he is the eternal word the word of life. And at the same time he's the one who gives life.

He's the one who gives eternal life. Perhaps you're not a believer here. Do you want to have God's gift of eternal life? Jesus says I am the way the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father but by me. And he says I am the resurrection and the life. God's eternal gift of eternal life is freely offered to all but comes only by faith in Jesus.

[23 : 15] Not any other way. And how do we know Jesus, this word of life? Through and only through the written word, the Bible, the Apostles, Witness and the Old Testament that comes before it.

If you're here today and you struggle to accept the truth about Jesus as it's recorded in the Bible, Jesus calls you today to accept him. He's the glorious eternal son of God who became a man who lived and died and rose.

The Apostles saw him and touched him and heard him and knew him and they have passed on these truths to us reliably. If you sometimes feel like people look down on you because of your belief in the historic teaching of the Bible, friends don't be discouraged.

The things you believe are both glorious and true and reliable and the evidence is strong. So we started, the Apostles, Witnesses, Reliable, Therefore, Believe the Truth about Jesus.

Thirdly and finally, which brings fellowship with God. The Apostles Witnesses Reliable, Therefore, Believe the Truth about Jesus, which brings fellowship with God.

[24 : 43] Why is it that John is so concerned that we should believe the Apostles Witness? That we should continue to hold on to the truth about Jesus? Why is he so keen to reassure his readers in the first century and now that we have to stay close to the Jesus presented in these pages?

The answer is here. Verse 3. That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us, the Apostles, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

In other words, because believing the Apostles Witness to Jesus is the only way we can have fellowship with God, it's not available anywhere else. What does fellowship mean?

The Greek word refers to participation in something and its exact translation varies somewhat according to the context. I think here the best way to understand it is that it refers to relationship and John's great concern for his readers is that they have this fellowship, this personal relationship with God, with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

and actually knowing the Father and the Son is what eternal life is all about. Back in John's Gospel, Jesus is imminently, he's on the way to his arrest and trial and he's spending the last few hours with his disciples and he prays this great prayer, this great high priestly prayer in John 17 and at the beginning of that prayer he's praying about the cross and all it's going to achieve and these are his words.

[26 : 29] Father, the hour has come, the hour of the cross, glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you since you've given him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. Isn't that interesting?

Jesus was dying to bring glory to God, that's what he's praying for here. How does his death bring glory to God? Because it gives eternal life to his people.

That's at the very heart of the purpose of the cross. And what is eternal life fundamentally all about? That they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Now of course it's true that eternal life is life that goes on forever. Of course it's true that eternal life is the opposite of perishing or eternal death. Of course it's true that it's the satisfaction of living water and the filling of the bread of life, that it's life in all its fullness, that it's resurrection at the last day.

[27 : 38] Eternal life is wonderfully and gloriously all of those things. But at the point of the coming to the cross, Jesus prays and in that great prayer, he lifts this up above everything else.

At its heart, eternal life is knowing the Father and the Son. It's relationship, it's fellowship, it's what coming to Jesus who himself is the eternal life, it's what that brings.

And what a privilege it is, isn't it, to know the eternal God. And if we are a believer here tonight, that's where you are. To belong to him, to hear his voice, to see his beauty in the scriptures, to adore him in prayer, to see more and more of him every day.

That's the glory of eternal life, the wonder of fellowship with God. And all of this comes, how? Through Jesus, who is the eternal life.

And how do we know this Jesus? How do we understand the truth about him? We come to the word of God, to the witness about him written down by the apostles and the prophets before them.

[28 : 57] Some teachers try to drive a wedge between fellowship with God and the Bible. I remember a long time ago hearing a talk where the speaker was talking about his direct relationship with God.

He said, the Bible is like a certificate of marriage. I don't spend my time looking at my marriage certificate and neither do I spend my time looking at the Bible. I talk to God and he talks back. But he got it totally wrong, hadn't he?

Totally wrong. We only come to the person of Jesus through the Bible. Imagine if you got married to someone but you had no interest in the truth about them.

I'm not interested in where you're from. I don't really want to get to know your family. I don't really care what you think about stuff, what you like, what you don't like. And, you know, let's just be married.

It's not going to go well, is it? That marriage is not going to be a successful one. It's not really interested in any of the truth about you. And the Bible's how God speaks.

[29 : 58] We come to Jesus through the Word. and we know Jesus through the Word. We relate to God through the Word. And it's a glorious and a rich knowledge.

So do you sometimes wish for an apparently more immediate, seemingly more miraculous experience of God? Are you tempted to feel that our Christianity is somehow weaker than some of these new things that are coming out?

Somehow less spirit-filled, less substantial? Well, that's not right. If we want to have fellowship with God, we must have fellowship with the apostles and their teaching.

That's what John is saying here. The false teachers were outside of that fellowship and they were seeking to entice people away, out of this fellowship with the apostles and thus a fellowship with the Father and the Son, out into the world of Antichrist, Antichrist, if you like.

They went out from us, but they were not of us. That's what John says about them. For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us, but they went out, that it might become plain that they are not of us.

[31 : 16] These false teachers claimed to have fellowship with God, but they departed from the two church. They were out of relationship, out of partnership with the apostles and the truth about Jesus, and therefore they had no true fellowship with God.

Because having fellowship with God comes through the knowledge of Jesus Christ, the Jesus Christ of the Bible, through the Bible, not through some reinvented Jesus or the special knowledge of a particular group of teachers or some mystical experience.

But the apostles have given us the truth about Jesus. We have it. We have fellowship with God only by being in fellowship. with this truth. In verse 4, John says, we are writing these things to you so that our joy may be complete.

So that our joy, John's joy, the apostles' joy may be complete. John's joy comes through knowing that these people that he loves so dearly, his little children, are trusting in Jesus and are in fellowship with the Father and the Son.

And it goes without saying that it will bring joy to your minister and elders' heart too if they know that you are in fellowship with God and in relationship with him. It will bring joy to all God's people here, particularly if never before have you come and trusted in Jesus and you trust him today.

[32 : 39] To enter into that relationship will bring joy to all of us here and it will bring joy to God in heaven too. So as we close then, do you find yourself wishing that the New Testament's teaching could be updated?

Do you wish for some more exciting experience? Do you find it hard to defend the Christian faith of your non-Christian friends and family? You can have great confidence to be assured that you have eternal life in Jesus and that you can trust in the witness of God's word.

in this book is knowledge of God. Fellowship with God comes simply through trusting in Jesus Christ who is the eternal God, who became a man, who lived and died and rose for you and the truth about him is found in what the apostles wrote.

You can trust their witness. Don't go looking in other places. They're no good. Come to what the apostles wrote. Come to what the witnesses wrote and trust in Jesus.

Keep on trusting in Jesus and keep on finding joy in relationship with him that goes on forever through these pages. So the apostles witness is reliable therefore believe the truth about Jesus which brings fellowship with God.

[34 : 01] Amen. Let's sing now and we're going to sing Psalm 130 which is on page 173.

Psalm 130 and we'll sing the whole psalm. Page 173 Lord from the depths I call to you Lord hear me from on high and give attention to my voice when I for mercy cry.

Lord in your presence who can stand if you are sins record but yet forgiveness is with you that we may fear you Lord. Let's stand and sing Psalm 130 in your joy.

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