



Last week, I taught you a Latin word, and it seemed to go over well; so, I'll teach you a couple other Latin phrases. These phrases come out of what's been referred to as the Protestant Reformation – a time period 500 years ago when Christians began to see the immense corruption within the Roman Catholic church, and how the official doctrine wasn't in line with the Scripture's teaching. The major spark of the Reformation was Martin Luther's 95 thesis. He asked questions of the church through the form of statements. The first thesis was that he believed that the whole of the Christian life should be one of repentance. Meaning, we're always changing. Christians should always know that they're never perfect, but that they are also always turning to the Lord to grow them to be more like him.

This truth of always repenting is not only applicable for us individually, but also for local churches as well. And, this relates to a Latin phrase, "Semper Reformanda." The phrase means "always reforming." And, it means that churches are always to admit that we aren't perfect and yet God is committed to continually cleanse and change us. So, the Reformation isn't just something from 500 years ago. We should always be reforming to better reflect our Savior in this world.

Sadly, people in our day – in denominations in this town – take the phrase "Semper Reformanda" and twist it. They simply say that we should always be reforming in order to be applicable to the culture. And they'll neglect the Scriptures in favor of "always reforming." But what good is reformation if you're not being formed to the Bible? This leads to another phrase from the Reformation: Ad Fontes. It means to go back to the waters. In other words, go back to the source. The only way we can *reform* is if we're being formed to the source. So, yes, always be reforming. But always be reforming in accordance with the source. In other words, always keep the main thing the main thing – and live in light of the main thing!

It's sad to me how quickly we can forget the "main thing." Look at church history, and you discover that the church can move from treasuring God and his gospel to assuming to presuming to neglecting. Even when you go to the first century, you can read letters from the apostles going back to the basics to remind the Christians of the main thing. They take them back to the source so that they can grow in repentance. First John is one of those books. You see, there were people in that day who were kind of like churches in our day. They taught "new" concepts, but they weren't in line with the source. And John writes this letter to anchor the people back in the basics of the Christian faith.

So, whether you live in the first century or the 21st century, 1 John centers us. While very simple in its approach, it's straightforward. John doesn't mince words, and John is serious about the Christian's joy and obedience in the Lord. He writes this way because he wants the church to grow in assurance in Christ – not to leave the faith. In three places, **John tells us why he wrote this letter: so that our joy would be complete, so that we won't sin, so that we would have assurance (1:4; 2:1; 5:13)**. But you could read these reasons and just think, "That's nice of John. He wants me to be happy, not do bad

things, and then know I'm going to Heaven. That's it." That's not "it." If your focus is on these things, you're missing "it." Sadly, there are too many people who simply view God as a genie in a bottle or a cosmic therapist who is just supposed to make us feel better. But God made us for him, and throughout this letter, John ties assurance, joy, and obedience to a reconciled relationship with God. If you know God and his love, you will grow in joy, obedience and assurance. And the only way to know God and his love is through Jesus and what he has done for us. John emphasizes Jesus in this letter in a specific way. The false teachers back then denied Jesus' physicality. So, where the gospel of John seeks to reveal that Jesus is the Christ. This letter of first John reveals that Christ is Jesus. God's glory in Jesus is the source of everything! So, you see, God doesn't not want you to have these things apart from him – because that would be a lie! Relationship leads to reformation.

Before we get into the first few verses of 1 John today, I do want to emphasize that John not only emphasizes relationship with God, but also our relationship to fellow Christians and also the world. How we relate to Jesus affects how we relate to God, Christians and the world. Relationship, relationship, relationship. God isn't interested in giving sterile commands and just giving you feelings. We're not robots to be programmed. We are people created to commune with the Everlasting God. And that communion with him radically changes us – it leads to always reforming according to the Source – who is God himself through Jesus!

Now, we can enter into the first few verses of 1 John, and let me give you the main idea of the sermon today: **Jesus came in the flesh so that people would have fellowship together with God, in whom is fulness of joy.** We're simply going to break down this phrase as we go through the text, but let's read verses 1-4 together again: That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— ²the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— ³that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. ¹

These verses are all centering on Jesus and the gospel. So, we're going to start there:

1. Jesus came in the flesh. . .

You might be thinking, "How do you see Jesus came in the flesh" in these verses? Well, let's first establish that John is talking about Jesus. At the end of verse 1, John refers to the "word of life." Not surprisingly, there's debate over what this means? Is this referring to a message of life or is this referring to Jesus? The reason people think Jesus is because the word here for "word" is Logos, and if you're familiar with the gospel of John, he begins that letter with "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." Clearly, John referred to Jesus as the Word. But some doubt if that's what John intends here. They emphasize that this "word of life" seems to be a message that the people are proclaiming. So, maybe the "word of life" mentioned here is simply the gospel message.

People can go back and forth and debate over this, but my question is, "Why can't it be both?" One of my favorite parts of our church's Core Belief's Statement is the section on the gospel. I want to read part of it: "We believe the gospel is not proclaimed if Jesus is not proclaimed, and we believe that the

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 1:1–4.

authentic Jesus has not been proclaimed if His substitutionary death and resurrection are not central to the message.” Why do we have to separate the gospel message from Jesus? We can’t! They go hand-in-hand. So, what is the word of life? I believe it’s Jesus as revealed in the good news of his life, death, and resurrection to bring forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God through faith alone in him! This is life! Do you remember Jesus’ words when he says, **“And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”**² Eternal life is knowing God and the One he sent. This isn’t merely “knowing about,” this is having a relationship with God. Do you have this? If not, I imagine you’re finding your life in all sorts of other things in this world. They may be good gifts, but they’re not God. They’re not eternal. They will all fail. Life is in God. And Jesus came to take the wrath that sinners like you and I deserve on himself, in our place! Judgment and justice are coming for every single person. Those who turn to Jesus are forgiven and reconciled to God – and given LIFE! Have you trusted in Jesus? If so, you have life! And you have the word of life to share with others!

John says that this is the word of life from the beginning and who was with the Father – which is essentially saying that Jesus, and the gospel message, were around before time began. The basic reality of the plan of God to restore creation and save humans, has been around since before Adam and Eve were created. Think about this statement in contrast to false teachers. Often, they claim something is “new,” as though new means better. John claims *old* because this is the basis of our beliefs! Believers, we should always be wary if someone says, “I discovered something new. Something no one has seen.” Back away and go back to the source. God’s glory in Jesus is our water! Ad Fontes! Without him, we won’t change for God’s glory.

Now that we see Jesus here in this text, you might add, “where do you see ‘came in the flesh.’” Well, knowing the arguments John makes in this letter, we know that the false teachers were teaching that Jesus came as a visible spirit. But he didn’t really come in the flesh. So, right at the start of this letter, John that Jesus was heard, seen, looked at, touched. He was made manifest. John fills these verses with sensory repetition that you get through these four verses and say, “I get the point. He was seen!”

Good. Get that point. The Divine One who is from the beginning came in the flesh to enter this sin-cursed world and to bring wholeness and forgiveness and reconciliation with God. He had to come in the flesh because humans needed a human representative. In addition, to know he came in the flesh shows the depths of his love. He didn’t stay in Heaven and cry at what’s going on in the world. He entered our suffering! This is utterly unique amongst all the religions in the world. There is no other religion where God suffers for his creation. Why would he? He wouldn’t if he didn’t love them dearly. And this letter from John seeks to reconvince his readers of the immeasurable love of God. Christian, listen, do you know that Jesus loves you? You can be convinced of this. John saw him, looked at him, touched him.

Interestingly, the word for saw and the word for “looked at” are different. One simply refers to seeing. Another at gazing. Then to touch emphasizes the physical reality. Before and after Jesus’ resurrection, he was physical. And so, John can say that he and others could testify. The word for “testify” is a courtroom word. He’s an eyewitness. He gives testimony. But then John also says he “proclaims.” This word, in how John uses it, emphasizes that he was commissioned by someone to proclaim this truth. He’s been given the privilege to emphasize the Word of Life in all he does. Who commissioned him? Jesus himself.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 17:3.

Think of John. He was always referred to as being close to Jesus – one of the closest friends, along with Peter and James. John leaned against Jesus at the Last Supper. John was the only disciple who didn't flee, but watched as Jesus was horrifically crucified. And in the gospel which he wrote, John referred to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. Now, I want to emphasize something here. I don't believe John said that to say that Jesus loved him more than the others. I think John used that phrase as his identity. He never got over the fact that Jesus loved him. Knowing the love of Jesus, seeing Jesus, hearing Jesus, watching Jesus – he saw the love of Jesus on display. This love of Jesus transcended all of his circumstances. Jesus dies, rises from the dead, ascends to Heaven – and John is commissioned to take care of Mary and also to preach the gospel. John seems to be the only apostle who doesn't die for his faith, but he does suffer. As church history records, he was boiled in water and sent to the Island of Patmos. Yet, John continued to proclaim the gospel. Why? Because Jesus loved him.

When I say that, do you know what that means? Clearly the love of Christ is greater than much of what people try to say love is today. It's deeper, wider, broader than we could imagine. And John is telling us all that he knows Jesus came in the flesh, and this all matters because the love of Jesus radically transforms those who receive his love. So, John's life has been radically transformed. And John says that all who trust him will be changed in specific ways. He'll share various ways throughout the letter, but today, he highlights one, and that leads us to the next point:

2. . . .so that people can fellowship together with God.

Let's look at verse 3 again: ³ that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.³

Relationship. But it's more than relationship. It's fellowship. The word for fellowship here refers to a sharing of life around a common idea or goal. We use this in modern terms. Physicians can speak of being part of a fellowship. This is when a doctor trains under a specialist for a subspecialty. There's a very specific reason they're together. It's not because they like the same food or they love the same sports. They're united together to grow in training in a certain specialty. From a biblical perspective then, what is fellowship? Does John just want friends to hang out with when he's bored? Is he using fellowship simply to refer to spending time together doing things we like, playing games, and feeling happy together?

Sometimes I think that's what many people think about when it comes to fellowship. Even Christians. They gather at churches and they evaluate based on felt experience: did the music give me feels? Did the people make me feel encouraged? Other times, it's intriguing to me how I've spoken some people within local church contexts where they'll tell me that they don't really know anybody in their church and don't have friends, and when I ask if they're proactive in hospitality or serving or purposefully getting together with people, they say "no." That's a warning! People who evaluate things like this don't understand fellowship. We shouldn't simply be asking if people are friendly (which, by the way, is important). But we should be asking, "Is Jesus central here? Is the gospel central here?" If the answer is yes, then you know you can grow in fellowship with these people because our fellowship isn't based on whether or not we were nice on any given day. Our fellowship is based in the love of God in Christ Jesus. Our fellowship is not evaluated on whether or not people reach out to us, but instead, we remember that Jesus came to us first, and that's why we love him; so, we reach out to others and love them and see how the relationships and grow and flourish together.

³ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 1:3.

It's interesting to me that at the beginning of this letter, John emphasizes fellowship with one another. And, I can't help but think one of the reasons why is because since Jesus came in the flesh, then being in the flesh with one another is important. And, John says that their fellowship is with him. Why does that matter? Well, they don't really have fellowship with the false teachers. They don't love them like John does! John wants to know them, grow with them, follow the Lord together with them!

Ventura, that's another wonderful reality in a Christ-centered community – you actually care about each other. Listen, I don't primarily know you or love you because we share all the same likes and dislikes. God has given you to me as family. In his great love, he placed you in my life, and I can honestly say that I love you! And that's all because of Jesus' grace and love towards me. Now, I know this sounds nice, but that doesn't mean it's easy. Are we always lovable? Do we sometimes passionately disagree? Yes. But not over Christ! He's our unity! He's our anchor! Can you say this of one another? Can you say you *love* each other and can you rejoice that Jesus came in the flesh so that you can fellowship with these real people here who are in the flesh? Listen, if you have more passion for Christians that you don't know personally than the ones right here, you are missing the gift of fellowship and you may be deceiving yourself.

But, just let me emphasize this point again. The fellowship doesn't stop with one another. The fellowship is centered around God's glory in Christ – and our fellowship together is with God. How are we united with each other? Jesus. How are we united to God? Jesus. He's the mediator between God and man. And now because we fellowship together under God, we truly are united. The basis for all reconciled with relationships with God and man is Jesus and the gospel message.

Recently, I was talking with a family who has been going to some events at a church. We were talking about what it was like and then the messages that were given, and I said to them, "Just ask this one question when you hear the sermon: Did Jesus have to die for that?" We should listen to every person who states they're proclaiming Jesus and ask if Jesus had to die for that message. If the gospel is not necessary for the message to make sense, then Oprah, Dr. Phil, the Buddha, or whoever else could have preached it. That means it's not distinctly Christian and we don't really have our unity around the center.

See, John is concerned for these Christians – not only are they being taught lies, but these lies are leading them away from Jesus, and because they're led away from the real Jesus, they're losing the joyous fellowship God has given in Jesus. As a result, if they don't repent, they'd show through their actions, a message contrary to Jesus. So we see that Jesus came in the flesh so that people might have fellowship together with God. And why is that so great?

3. . . .in whom is fulness of joy.

Look at verse 4 again: And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.⁴ The "and" connects with what he previously said. So, it piggy-backs off of the glorious fellowship with God and each other.

John wants the people, and even us, to know that he cares for us. John isn't writing so that we can feel oppressed and burdened under the weight of condemnation. No. He wants our joy to be full.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 1:4.

This past week, I was talking to someone who grew up in what I would consider an extremely legalistic Protestant church. Many people who grow up in these churches don't even partake of communion because you don't want to be presumptuous that you actually have received grace. I've talked to a few people who grew up in this denomination, and the idea is almost that the more spiritual you are, the more somber and maybe even fearful you are. Now, this is an extreme example, but do you ever think that about your relationship with God? That if you take God seriously that means your joy has to go out the window?

Right here, some might say, "Well, joy is not the same as happiness." And my response is that "Joy is not the same as always being somber." Joy seems to be a state that God gives to people where they can even have joy in the midst of sorrow. It's a settled satisfaction, hope and happiness in God himself – despite circumstances. Listen, if someone has joy, they will express that. In the psalms, David calls people to shout, clap, sing, lift hands! How can you not when you know that God has reconciled you to himself, given you eternal life and then wills for you to have increasing joy? And even this joy is found in God himself. When John says that he writes that our joy may be full, he is essentially saying that our fellowship would overflow in leading to full joy. After all, as we read in Psalm 16:11, "**You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**"⁵

Jesus came in the flesh so that people could have fellowship together with God, in whom is fulness of joy. This reality shapes the entire letter. Our union with God, who is Joy, sent his Son to reconcile us to God and to grant fellowship with others who are finding joy and satisfaction in God. As we share in that joy, our confidence, fellowship and assurance increase! So, what a glorious letter 1 John is! And may we all grow in joy as we are reminded to go back to the source: Ad Fontes. And, in doing so, may we always be reforming: Semper Reformada!

Now let's move into communion and celebrate visually what Christ has done for us.

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 16:11.