

Quality of Life

1 John 1:1-4

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When we think about what it means to have good quality of life, what usually comes to mind are things like our environment, health, comfort, success, wealth, and leisure. But these all merely pertain to the temporal and physical. The quality of our spiritual lives should be even more important to us because this is what God cares about the most. What then does it mean to have a quality spiritual life? From today's passage we will see that two signs of a healthy spiritual life are Christian fellowship and Christian joy.

First, our spiritual lives are defined by Christian fellowship, which is a genuine and experiential relationship with Jesus, in whom we also gain a relationship with the Father and a deep connection with each other. This relationship is not just conceptual but is experienced in our lives. We see this in 1 John 1:1, which states that He who was from the beginning was experienced by us. We know from John 1:1 that John is referring to Jesus, who existed before creation, being fully God. And by mentioning how they saw, heard, and touched Jesus, John is emphasizing that the divine Word became flesh, fully man. To understand why John emphasizes these Christological points, we must look at the historical context. John wrote this epistle to churches in Asia Minor at a time when Christians were experiencing persecution from the outside and the rise of false teachers from the inside. Some of the prominent false teachers were Gnostics, who held beliefs influenced by Greek philosophy and pagan mysticism. They thought that salvation came from secret knowledge rather than Jesus, and that all matter was evil while only the spiritual was good. In terms of practical living, this either led to licentiousness among those who believed it was pointless to deny a body that by nature was evil and could not be improved, or asceticism among those who believed that the body needed to be punished and denied completely because it was evil. Doctrinally, Gnosticism led either to Docetism, a belief that Jesus could not have taken on corrupt flesh and therefore must have been a phantom, or Cerinthianism, which held that Jesus was only a man who became the Christ after receiving the Holy Spirit, and reverted to being human having lost the Holy Spirit before death. It is to combat these heresies and the kinds of living they produced that John felt the need to emphasize Jesus' divinity and humanity. The readers had to know deeply the truth of Jesus' identity so they could recognize and guard against false teaching about Jesus, just like bank tellers are trained on the

detailed appearance, feel, and sound of real money to recognize counterfeits. Those who really saw, heard, and touched the real Jesus can easily recognize falsehoods about Jesus. In addition, it is because of the truth that Jesus is fully God and fully man that we can have fellowship with Him. Through the Holy Spirit we are intimately connected with Jesus. The Spirit unites us all in Christ. Fellowship (*koinonia*) is more than just socializing, friendship, or even Bible study. We have in common a deep relationship with Jesus through faith, by which we are made into the body of Christ, united in thought and purpose to do the will of God, ever conforming to the mind of Christ, sharing His love, desires, goals, and mission.

Second, a quality spiritual life entails having the Christian joy that comes from fellowship with Jesus. The “our” in v. 4 is inclusive of John, the church leaders, the readers, and all believers. The idea of joy being complete is that it is made permanently full. But this joy is not the same as worldly happiness, which is a reaction to physical circumstances. It is a deeper joy that comes from our spiritual circumstances, the presence of Jesus in our lives and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is the satisfaction in knowing that our relationship with God is secure, that our names are graven on His heart, and that we can lean on Him for strength. We rejoice because God has given us eternity in His presence (Psalm 16:11), and this joy is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10). And with this joy we can live drastically changed lives. This radical lifestyle is what helped the early Church grow so fast. The firm adherence to their faith even under the threat of persecution and death made unbelievers take note of them. But just as important was how they lived so differently than those around them. While Romans were abandoning baby girls to die, Christians adopted them. Furthermore, during the two plagues that devastated the Roman Empire, while the Romans abandoned the cities and all the sick within their walls, the Christians stayed to care for the sick. This radical lifestyle could not go unadmired. Yet in today’s society we have fallen short. Our culture tells you to be true to yourself and that you can do anything. But God knows that our true selves are broken and weak, so He fixes us through union with Jesus, by which we all gain a new identity in Him. We live new lives so that the world can see Him in us. So let us keep walking together in true fellowship, encouraging one another to be conformed to the image of Christ.