

Loved and Loving: John's Epistles **Confidence**

Lesson #10 for September 5, 2009

Scriptures: John 3:36; Acts 4:29; 1 Corinthians 9:27; Hebrews 4:16; 1 John 5:13-20; Revelation 12:9.

1. This lesson focuses on the final nine verses of 1 John. The theme is confidence and is based on the idea that we can approach God's throne with confidence because we have a "Friend in court." What does that mean, and what does it imply?
2. The word *confidence* which is present in some translations of 1 John 5:14 comes from the Greek word *parresia* which means "boldness," "freedom of speech," or "confidence." Where does such confidence come from? Is it that we can approach God because we have an "Advocate" that we can trust—Jesus—who will present our case before the Father—even though we are not so certain about the Father?
3. As we know, life is full of uncertainties. Benjamin Franklin is famous for saying, "There are only two things certain in this life: death and taxes."
4. But what about God? Are there some things about God that we can know "for certain"? Atheists are becoming "evangelistic" about their belief that God does not exist. We must admit that we cannot see Him, we cannot touch Him, and we cannot hear His voice audibly. So, what evidence for His existence can we cite? What should we say to atheists and agnostics?
5. Some are so "certain" about their standing before God that they believe that Christians can be "once saved, always saved." Is that presumption? Where is the line between presumption and faith, confidence, and assurance?
6. Read Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:14-16; 10:19. On what basis do you feel comfortable approaching God in prayer? Is it because Jesus "shed His blood" for you on the cross? Or is it more because He is now in heaven at the Father's right hand "pleading" for you? Or is there another reason? Does Jesus need to plead with the Father for us because He has been down here and understands how difficult it is to be good. Is it necessary for Him to constantly plead with the Father to have mercy on us? Is there something wrong with God's omniscience? Did God need to figure out how to save us, or did we need a fuller revelation of His character and government? Or is it that Jesus came down to help us to understand God better? When atheists pay to have signs put on the buses in London that say: "There's probably no God, Now stop worrying and enjoy your life," how should we respond? Do we understand who our real enemy is and who our real Friend is? Isn't God so sovereign that no one, not even the Devil, would dare to challenge Him? If we wish to "do our own thing," it is not fair to blame God for the outcome! But if we believe that God is completely sovereign, then shouldn't we absolutely obey His every command?

Is it fair—as some evangelicals state—that we have claimed that we can understand God better through the great controversy theme. How dare we claim that we understand God better? In fact, they make the whole gospel just about how God saves you and me! That is a very self-centered approach!

7. What do you think about these words from the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Sunday, August 30, 2009?

Christians are not afraid of judgment. They rely on what Jesus has done for them. Their confidence is not in themselves, or what they have done or could ever do. This confidence rests, instead, entirely on Jesus.

If our confidence and dependence is entirely on Jesus and He does it all, why doesn't He just do it all for everybody and save everybody? Why didn't He just do it for Satan back in the beginning?

8. What does John say elsewhere about the judgment? Read John 3:17-21 and John 12:47,48. These verses seem to suggest that we judge ourselves by our response to the truth. How does that fit with our discussion of confidence, courage, and boldness?
9. John went on to discuss several issues in 1 John 5:13-20. He introduced each of these points by

saying, "We may know," or "We know." He covers the following issues:

- 1) The assurance of salvation.
- 2) The assurance that our prayers are heard.
- 3) The assurance that we have divine protection.
- 4) The assurance that we belong to God.
- 5) The assurance that we can know God through Christ.

John was trying to summarize his presentation. He was drawing conclusions. And these are his conclusions.

10. There are several "absolutes" that face Christians as they live their lives each day:

- 1) God is perfectly true, righteous, and fair.
- 2) We are all sinners.
- 3) God's judgment is based on our response to the truth.

As you consider these three certainties, how does it make you feel? Are you scared? Or are you confident? Aren't we supposed to be like Jesus? Is the "gap" closing on a daily basis? Are we, in fact, becoming more and more like God? A careful study of Scripture will make it clear that we have no reason to fear God, but we have every reason to fear sin! We usually have these two things just backwards!

What really will happen in the judgment? Will it be a courtroom scene? Or will it be God just revealing the truth that we are living out?

In history there have been three approaches to understanding God's rules:

- 1) God has given the rules, and we are judged on how we are keeping them.
- 2) God has given the rules, but we have finally recognized that we can never keep them so we turn to Jesus who takes care of it for us.
- 3) God has given us His rules not as a way of testing us but rather as a way of describing the best and happiest way to live even here and now. God's rules are like an owner's manual for a car. If we want to live healthy, happy, holy lives, we will pay attention to the "rules" in that manual.

11. Go back to 1 John 5:13. Are you confident that you have eternal life? What is the basis for that confidence? Does God always answer your prayers? Is that what gives you confidence? While John spoke very confidently in these final verses of his letter, we need to contrast his words with the other side of the coin. What is it that could keep us out of the kingdom of God? Is there anything that keeps us out of God's kingdom except our own wrong choices? Other Bible writers have spoken about the "assurance of salvation": Moses (Exodus 32:32), Peter (1 Peter 5:1), Paul (2 Timothy 4:7,8), even the believers in Ephesus (Ephesians 2:8,9), and the believers in Colossae (Colossians 1:12-14) were given that assurance. Are you assured of salvation if your name is written in the "book"? (Revelation 22:19, KJV) Does God sometimes have to remove a name from the "book"? Does that destroy your confidence? Ellen White described that judgment in considerable detail. (See GC 479-491, especially 483)
12. So, our confidence should come from one of two sources. Is your confidence based on the fact that Someone is pleading on your behalf before the Father's throne? Or, is your confidence based on what you know to be true about God's character and His love for all of His children?
13. **It is very interesting to note that the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Sunday, August 30, 2009, suggests that we can approach God with openness, (John 16:25,29) but apparently it does not want us to read verses 26 and 27 which contradict the general theme of this lesson. Why is it that in the series of lessons we had some years ago on the Gospel of John, those verses (John 16:26,27) were also skipped? If your confidence is based on the fact that Christ is pleading your case before the Father, how do you deal with verses that say He will not plead with the Father and that He does not need to because the Father**

Himself loves you? How should we handle the fact that Jesus said something that directly contradicts what we are trying to say?

14. Read 1 John 5:14,15. What does it mean to ask “according to His will”? Does God only *hear* prayers that are prayed according to His will? Or does He only *answer* prayers that are according to His will? Notice that 1 John 5:15 says, “He hears us whenever we ask him.” But all of us have offered prayers that have not been answered—at least not immediately. What happens to your confidence in God when your prayers are not “answered”? Didn’t God promise His followers before He left that He would give them whatever they asked for? Why is this such an issue in the Christian church? In the past, the church hierarchy lorded it over the members by claiming that they controlled the access to God. The “priests” had absolute control over the people and their salvation. They demanded money, etc. Why do we have such a problem with approaching God directly? Is the problem that God doesn’t answer our prayers? Or, is it that we don’t like the answers we get? Do Christian churches of today still have a “priest” but He has “moved upstairs”?
15. Is it an evidence of lack of faith to pray “thy will be done”? Isn’t that what Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane? Would we dare to say to God, “This is what I really would like, but I know that You know best. So, You do what You know is best”? What does that do for confidence? Is praying “Thy will be done” a tremendous act of bravery? Does it take real courage? **When we pray for something, do we really think that we know better than God what is good for us?** Consider what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said to Nebuchadnezzar. (Daniel 3:16-18)
16. One of the focuses in this series of lessons is that we should pray to have our sins forgiven. (1 John 1:9) That is a focus on our past behavior. Is it ever a good idea to focus on our past failures? Does God ask us to constantly approach Him asking for forgiveness?
17. Read 1 John 5:16,17. Biblical scholars have struggled with these verses for a long time. What is the difference between a fatal sin and a non-fatal sin? Roman Catholics have traditionally called the non-fatal sins, venial sins. Some have suggested that the only really fatal sin is a sin against the Holy Spirit. Is that what John was trying to tell us? Do you agree with the list of seven deadly sins? What was John trying to say in these verses? Or is all sin really deadly serious? Does this have something to do with “intentional sins” (Numbers 15:30,31) and unintentional sins? (Leviticus 4:13,22,27, etc.) How many of our sins are intentional? Was God talking about the second death? Was John talking about the unpardonable sin?
18. In our scientific age, confidence is established by evidence. If a certain hypothesis of a scientific nature is tested again and again and again and it seems to apply always in the same way, we begin to call it a “law.” Examples would be the “law of gravity” and “Boyle’s law.” Are there certainties in the Christian faith that can be tested again and again and we can provide solid evidence that God is true, righteous, and trustworthy? Can Christian realities be tested like that? Is God’s evidence only “soft” evidence? Does spiritual evidence have to be “spiritually discerned”?
19. There are some interesting examples in the New Testament of people who trusted their lives to the hands of God. Consider Peter (Matthew 14:27-29), John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-12), Jesus (Matthew 26:36-46), and even Stephen (Acts 6,7). Three of those four prayers were apparently not answered—the supplicants died. Do these examples help to establish your confidence?
20. Read 1 John 5:18,19. How does it make you feel that John wrote,

We know that none of God’s children keep on sinning, for God keeps them safe, and the Evil One cannot harm them. We know that we belong to God even though the whole world is under the rule of the Evil One. (*GNB*)

When you read these verses, do you encourage yourself because you are no longer sinning? Or are you still “under the rule of the Evil One”? There is plenty of evidence in Scripture that we are fighting a battle against Satan himself. (Revelation 12:7-12; Ephesians 6:12; 1 John 2:13,14; 3:12) Certainly, we must all recognize that without God’s help, we would be helpless before Satan’s temptations. So, where does the confidence come from?

Is there discord in Satan’s camp?—Satan tempted man to sin, as he had caused angels to rebel, that he might thus secure cooperation in his warfare against heaven.

There was no dissension between himself and the fallen angels as regards their hatred of Christ; while on all other points there was discord, they were firmly united in opposing the authority of the Ruler of the universe. But when Satan heard the declaration that enmity should exist between himself and the woman, and between his seed and her seed, he knew that his efforts to deprave human nature would be interrupted; that by some means man was to be enabled to resist his power. {ST, February 17, 1909 par. 5}

21. In your day-to-day battle with the Devil and his associates, do you find confidence and power to say, "No" to his temptations? Do the promises in 1 John give you confidence? Have you made them your own?
22. Ellen White was often asked to offer prayer for people who were sick or hurting. In her younger years, she prayed with confidence; and in some cases people were healed and went back to a "life of sin." She asked God why He allowed that, and she was told that her prayer did not give God any choice when she prayed that way. So, later in her life she always prayed, "According to God's will." She "resolved not to engage in prayer for anyone unless the Spirit of the Lord should dictate in the matter."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 349,350.
23. Would you have more confidence in your prayers if you had seen or had an experience like that of Elijah on Mount Carmel? Imagine praying and having lightning from God appear out of a cloudless sky and the offering, the wood, the stones, and the water all being consumed and leaving a black hole in the ground! A short time later, he prayed again and rain clouds appeared out of the Mediterranean Sea. After these two tremendous responses from God, why do you suppose Elijah so quickly lost his confidence? (1 Kings 18,19)
24. The book of Esther does not specifically speak of prayer. But we have come to believe that she was praying fervently. (Esther 4) Did the results give her confidence? What about the three young men in the burning fiery furnace? (Daniel 3).
25. John concluded his first letter with 1 John 5:20,21. Do you feel comfortable that you have a clear knowledge of the Father through Jesus Christ? Does that knowledge give you confidence? Do we need to be kept safe from false "gods"?
26. Ellen White told us, "Multitudes have a wrong conception of God and His attributes, and are as truly serving a false god as were the worshipers of Baal." *Prophets and Kings* p. 177.1 How can we be confident that our picture of God is correct?
27. For those who believe in the "great controversy, trust, healing" model of the plan of salvation, the character of God is the central issue. His character determines how He runs His government. It is the truth about God that is our core belief. We can approach the Father in heaven through prayer with confidence because of what we have learned throughout Scripture about His response to the needs of sinners. We do not need to fear Him for any reason. We accept Jesus' own testimony that the Father is just like Him. (John 14:9)
28. Seventh-day Adventists have claimed that in addition to keeping the commandments, they are the true Church of God because they have "the testimony of Jesus." (Revelation 14:12) Isn't that true testimony of Jesus His revelation of the truth about His Father? Has the Seventh-day Adventist Church made it a central theme of their teachings to correctly represent the Father? Have we done so personally? Are we correctly representing Him in our church and in our Sabbath Schools?

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