

## ***Loved and Loving: John's Epistles*** ***Important Themes in 1 John***

Lesson #11 for September 12, 2009

Scriptures: Matthew 5:13; John 14:6; Ephesians 4:25-5:21; 1 Timothy 3:15; 1 John.

1. This lesson is about what we have learned in our study of 1 John. John wrote with great confidence and boldness about the truths that he believed. In this lesson we will review some of the themes he returned to again and again.
2. The main issues we will discuss include God Himself, some facts about the church, what is involved in salvation, and what John taught about "truth."
3. Before September 11, 2001, many groups were leaning toward the belief that almost everything is "relative"—you believe one thing, I believe another thing, each person has a right to his own beliefs. They said, what one believes is a result of his/her culture; no one should try to convince anyone else about his/her beliefs based on any absolutes. But, the horror of what happened that day made people ask a lot of questions. Are there some absolute truths? Is there an objective nature to morality? Or, is any set of beliefs just as valid as any other set?
4. What do we mean when we say that Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life"? (John 14:6) Does He provide an absolute moral standard by which the world will be judged? What do we mean when we say that Jesus is "the truth"? Are Islamic, Hindu, or Buddhist beliefs just as "truth full" as Christian beliefs?
5. John tells us in 1 John 3:2 that "when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is." (NASB) There are not a lot of different standards of truth in the kingdom of heaven; there is just one. When Jesus returns will He say, "It doesn't matter what set of beliefs you had just so long as you were faithful to that set of beliefs"?
6. John spoke about the Godhead itself—writing briefly about the Holy Spirit and at some length about the Father and the Son. He suggested that God is light and truth and no darkness or evil is found in Him at all. "God is love" is one of the key statements in this book. But he also discussed in some detail the things which God is doing for us. Which do you think is more important to you: 1) The truth about God Himself? Or 2) What God through Jesus Christ has done for us?
7. What is it that God has done for us? According to the texts referred to in the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Sunday, September 6, He has made provisions so that when we confess our sins, He forgives us. (1 John 1:9) The Son is the means by which our sins are forgiven. (1 John 4:8-10) (Isn't this a "retro" approach to Christianity? Instead of focusing on our past sins, shouldn't we be focusing on Jesus Christ and how we can move forward?) He "pleads" on our behalf before the throne of God in heaven. He Himself is the means for accomplishing our forgiveness. (1 John 2:1,2) He gives us the Holy Spirit to teach us everything we need to know. (1 John 2:27) He came to this earth to destroy the evil that the Devil has "created." (1 John 3:8) He came to this earth so that we might have life through Him. (1 John 4:9) He gives us eternal life which has its source in His Son. (1 John 2:25; 5:11) We can have courage because we are sure that He hears us if we ask Him. (1 John 5:14) Do any of us have questions about God's ability to hear us? Isn't God omnipresent and omniscient?
8. The lesson for Sunday, September 6 concludes by saying, "The bottom line is that it is the Cross and the blood of Jesus alone that saves us, nothing else." What do you think is implied

by those words? The blood of Jesus is not some kind of “magic potion.” It is a code word for His death. What matters is why He died.

9. Even though God has provided salvation for us, we are expected to obey His commandments; and that, on occasion, requires making some hard choices. Is this suggesting that we cannot really be saved by faith alone. Do we need some works in order to be saved? Do we have to keep the commandments to be saved? Or, do we keep the commandments because we are saved? By looking to Jesus and being attracted to Him, our faith takes hold of Him, and we gradually become more like Him. We cannot continue to do things that we know are evil or wrong and still claim to be a part of God’s family or even the church family. God invites us to be a part of His family and to be a part of the church family. But that impacts how we behave.

How differently would you live if there was no hope of heaven? Dr. Richard Nies was a clinical and experimental psychologist who completed his degrees at UCLA. He knew when he went there that he would be harassed about his religion as soon as people found out that he was a conservative Christian. One day he said something in class that gave his orientation away, and one of his classmates began to harass him mercilessly. Some time later they happened to meet in the library, and the classmate accosted him. So, Dr. Nies said, “Let us suppose that there is a fifty percent chance that you are right and a fifty percent chance that I am right. When we both die, if you are right, we will both be dead for a long time. But if I am right, you will be dead a long time, and I will go to heaven.” Whereupon, his classmate immediately said, “But think of all the good times that you are missing out on here and now!” Dr. Nies responded, “I grew up in east LA, and I have experienced virtually all those ‘exciting things.’ I wouldn’t live my life one bit differently even if there were no afterlife.” The classmate’s jaw dropped and he had nothing more to say!

The angels were perfectly happy living in heaven before the great controversy began. They were surprised when God decided it was necessary to spell out the requirements of the law; keeping the law was just natural for them.

The life and death of Christ are meant to be topics for eternal study. By looking at what He did and said, we are to learn more about what God is like. The process of salvation is not some legal transaction taking place behind a cloud somewhere that has no direct impact on me. By beholding Jesus I am changed here and now. God can eventually judge me righteous because a real change has taken place in me. But it happens only by the power of the Holy Spirit working in me as I take the necessary time to study the life of Christ. What happened to the disciples between the ascension and the day of Pentecost? It wasn’t that their legal status had been adjusted. They were really changed by what they had learned about Jesus when they finally realized who He was.

10. Theologians sometimes say, “Theology informs ethics.” What does that mean? Does what we believe always impact how we behave? Does our belief in a certain kind of God determine how we behave on a day-by-day basis? Do we have a clear picture in our minds of the kind of Person God is, what He requires in His government, and how that might impact our behavior? How do we relate to those people who suggest that God’s commandments and laws have been abolished by the cross, and all we need to focus on is God’s love?
11. Although the word *church* does not appear in this short letter, John clearly addressed a group of Christians and referred to them as fathers, children, etc. In other parts of Scripture, the church is referred to as salt (Matthew 5:13), a pillar (1 Timothy 3:15), a house or building (Ephesians 2:21,22), a temple (1 Corinthians 3:16,17), a mother (Revelation 12:1,2), a bride

(Revelation 21:2), and even Christ's body (Ephesians 1:22,23). In this book church members are referred to as brothers and sisters (1 John 2:9-11); church leaders are referred to as fathers (1 John 2:13,14); the youth of the church are referred to as young people or even children (1 John 2:13-14; 1 John 2:12,18); and we are all called the children of God (1 John 3:1).

12. How close do you feel to the members of your church? Would it be accurate to describe your church group as a family? With God as the head of this family, each individual should recognize a vertical and horizontal aspect to this family. God—as our spiritual Father and Creator—being characterized by love requires us to love.
13. In the lesson for Tuesday, September 8, 2009, we read: “In short, the Bible is about salvation, and that’s a key theme in 1 John, as well.” Is salvation and how God saves you and me the principal theme of Scripture? What can we learn about salvation from Judges, 2 Kings, Esther, etc. What do those books tell us about how God saves us. No wonder so many people are not sure what to do with the Old Testament! Would it be more accurate to say that the Bible is about God—about His character and how He runs His government. That section for September 8 goes on to say, “The means of our salvation is Christ’s blood.” (1 John 1:7; 2:2; 4:10; 5:6,8) Try to image how you would respond if you had been there when Jesus was baptized—the heavens opened and a dove descended and a voice declared, “This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased.” (Matthew 3:17, *GNB*)
14. What is John telling us when he talks about Christ coming by water and blood? (1 John 5:6) Notice these additional words in the lesson for Tuesday, September 8, “*It is not the example of Jesus that saves us, as important as that is. It is His death. And yet, His example calls us to walk as He did (1 John 2:6).*”
15. Notice how John described the experience of believers: they know God if they are obedient (1 John 2:2,3), they are in union with Him if they obey (1 John 2:5; 5:20), their sins have been forgiven (1 John 2:12), they have overcome the Evil One (1 John 2:13), they have even passed from death to life (1 John 3:14), and thus have entered into the experience of eternal life (1 John 5:12,13). Does this brief summary capture the essence of salvation? Is this the message that we need to be carrying to all those around us?
16. After mentioning the Godhead and the church, the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* goes on to quote Ellen White:

We need to keep ever before us the efficacy of the blood of Jesus. That life-cleansing, life-sustaining blood, appropriated by living faith, is our hope. We need to grow in appreciation of its inestimable value, for it speaks for us only as we by faith claim its virtue, keeping the conscience clean and at peace with God.—Ellen G. White comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 948.
17. Does salvation require more than just the forgiveness of our sins? What do we mean when we say people are saved by “justification alone”?
18. Is it only important to have a correct understanding of God in order to have salvation? Or, do we also need to turn that correct knowledge of God into “correct behavior”? John went on to discuss that in some detail. (1 John 1:7; 2:1,15,16; 3:4,7,15,17,18; 4:7; 5:2,3) He wrote about what God expects of us. The goal seems to be for us to learn to live just as Jesus did. Is that possible for ordinary human beings?
19. But, we must recognize that those who are making an honest attempt to become more and more like Jesus will find themselves attacked by the Devil since that is the last thing that the

Devil wants to see happen. So, we are warned by John to test the spirits, (1 John 4:1) and to check out those who claim to be teaching the truth. Do as the noble Bereans did and search the Scriptures to make sure that what our teachers are teaching us is correct. Are you sure that what you hear in Sabbath School class is correct?

20. In all of this confusion, what is our only hope? By “beholding” Jesus we can learn to be more and more like Him. When we learn to know Him, obedience will come naturally. And eternal life will be the final result.
21. But, are there some things that are not absolute, but rather, are relative? Can we clearly distinguish between what is absolute and what is only relative? Think of people in the Bible who maintained allegiance to absolutes—Joseph, Moses, Daniel, etc. Did it make a difference in their lives? Couldn’t Daniel have prayed with his window closed?
22. Finally, in our lesson for September 11, we are told that the marks of Christianity are summarized as follows: “1) Belief in Jesus as the Son of God, who has come in the flesh; 2) observance of the commandments of God; and 3) love toward God and others.”
23. How would you summarize the “marks of Christianity”? How would you summarize the teachings of 1 John?
24. There are three levels of obedience in the Christian faith:

1) I do what I do because God has told me to, and I want to obey Him because He has the power to reward or destroy. How much of our behavior is impacted by that kind of thinking. Maybe 95% of the people in the Bible seemed to think like that.

2) I do what I do because I love God and want to please Him. But what happens if you don’t please Him? What is wrong with that? It is not really different from #1.

3) I do what I do because I realize that God never asks me to do anything that is not for my best good in the long run. The more I study God and His will for my life, the more I see that by choosing to do things His way, I am choosing what is best for me and the only way to be consistently happy. At this level people ask a lot of questions. They want to understand the principles of God’s character and government.

Dr. Maxwell used to talk about a person arriving in heaven and feeling quite comfortable with the Son but not being too sure about the Father. After being there for some time and gaining a much greater understanding of God and His requirements, that person might one day walk up to the Father and say, “I used to be afraid of you, and I did what I did for that reason. But now I realize that everything you asked me to do is for my best good and I would do them even if you never asked me to.” God might at the point say, “Now you know the truth, and the truth has set you free.” (See John 8:31,32)

Which of these three levels best describes your Christian life?

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