

Loved and Loving: John's Epistles ***Experiencing the Word of Life***

Lesson #2 for July 11, 2009

Scriptures: Deuteronomy 4:1-4; 1 Corinthians 15:4-8; 1 John 1:1-5; Revelation 19:13.

1. This lesson focuses on the nature of the humanity and the divinity of Jesus Christ as witnessed personally by one of His closest human friends.
2. Why did John believe that it was necessary to give his personal testimony at that point in his life? Were there people at the time who were questioning the nature of Christ? There were certainly questions being raised about the humanity and divinity of Christ!
3. At what time in the ministry of Jesus here on this earth do you think His disciples first fully recognized His divinity? Was it at His baptism when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him? (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10,11; Luke 3:21,22) Did anyone realize the significance of what was happening? Was it at the time of Peter's confession in Caesarea Philippi? (Matthew 16:15-19) Who do men say the "Son of man" is? Jewish tradition had suggested Moses, Elijah, or even Jeremiah. Was it a short time later at the time of the transfiguration? (Matthew 17:1-7) There, they were looking at the shining glory of God! When Jesus died on Calvary, did His disciples believe in His divinity? They were hiding in the upper room, afraid they would be next to be crucified. Or was it only after He had risen from the dead that they began to comprehend something of His divinity? Have we fully comprehended the implications of Christ's divinity?
4. Jesus was the greatest teacher this world has ever seen. Why was it almost impossible for Him to convince even His closest associates of the truth of His mission, the truth about His kingdom, and the truth about His divinity until after He was raised from the dead? (Luke 18:31-34) Notice that those words were spoken as Jesus and His disciples—amidst a huge Passover crowd—were traveling from Jericho to Jerusalem on their last journey before the crucifixion! Was God hiding the meaning of those words from them? Or is it possible that they were so convinced that Jesus would be crowned king that they could not even entertain any conflicting idea? They needed to overcome everything that they had been taught since they were children—they needed a paradigm shift. The Jewish rabbis had interpreted as referring to the first coming all the passages from the Old Testament that today we believe apply to Christ's second coming. There is nothing in the Old Testament about a second coming or a third coming.
5. Is it important for us as Christians today to believe that Jesus was fully God? Why is that important? Is it important for us as Christians today to believe that Jesus was fully human? Why is that important? The Gnostics of John's day believed that spirit and matter were always at war with each other. So, it seemed impossible to them that the ultimate God (who is the ultimate Spirit) could come to this earth and become a human being, or even dwell in a human body (which was matter, and thus, evil).
Atheists around the world are becoming "evangelistic" about their views. They are laughing at Christianity, saying that it is out of date and obsolete. How should we respond. Is the truth about God still an issue in our day? You bet!
6. When a case is being tried in court, why are personal eyewitness accounts so powerful? Are personal eyewitness accounts sometimes incorrect? How could that happen? Why don't personal eyewitness accounts always agree? What do you think about 1 John 1:1-5? Does

that sound like an appropriate appeal by an eyewitness?

7. If being an eyewitness is so compelling, why doesn't God give us the opportunity to be eyewitnesses to some of His miracles today? Wouldn't our testimony be more compelling if we were "eyewitnesses"? Is it possible to be an eyewitness in our day? Think back to the months of the O. J. Simpson trial. A case like that would be over in a few minutes in the heavenly courts! God would simply put on the screen a full-color, 3-D video of exactly what happened that night, and everyone would be convinced of the truth in a matter of minutes. In God's final judgment, everyone will be an "eyewitness."
8. Why do so many people tend to doubt what they have not seen for themselves? Is it important for us to "see for ourselves"? When the disciples finally comprehended the idea of Christ's full humanity-divinity and when they realized that God had been among them, they could not stop witnessing! (Acts 4:18-22; John 17:20-23) If we are able to comprehend the miracle of the life and death of Jesus, how can we keep quiet?
9. Others in the Bible have spoken about the implications of being an eyewitness. What do the following verses teach us? Deuteronomy 4:1-9; Acts 4:20; 1 Corinthians 15:4-8. John seemed to suggest that those who had seen something so startling, so unexpected, and so compelling could not stop talking about it. So what about us? Have we been so moved by the message that we cannot stop talking about it?
10. Could that sort of experience happen to us today even though we are not "eyewitnesses" of the events of the personal life of Jesus here on this earth?
11. Have we experienced the reality of Jesus in our own lives? Is your life a witness to the reality of the gospel?
12. Compare 1 John 1:1-5 with John 1:1-5. What immediate similarities do you see?
13. John 1:1-5 emphasizes the divinity of Christ and that He created all things. It speaks to us of Jesus as God and as Creator.
14. By contrast, 1 John 1:1-5 focuses on a very personal relationship with Jesus Christ. John assures us that he was an eyewitness—a personal friend of the human Jesus.
15. John wrote of Jesus as the "Word of life." (1 John 1:1,2, *GNB*) What does that phrase imply to you? What do you think that symbolism was meant to convey? John's testimony was that Jesus Christ was truly God. He entered into humanity as the "Word of life." Remember that words have a "pointing" function. John suggested that having God before our eyes and being an eyewitness makes it possible to share God's experience and that as a result, we will have fellowship and joy. Do you find that your Christian experience has brought you fellowship and joy? The expression "Word of life" appears also in Philippians 2:16. Jesus spoke of Himself as "the way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6, *GNB*). What was Jesus trying to tell us?
16. John repeatedly referred to Jesus as the "Word." What does that imply? Jesus is also the Source of life. So we should not be surprised to see Him referred to as the "Word of life."
17. When John used the expression "Word of life," was he writing just about the gospel—a set of ideas—or can we be certain that He was writing about Jesus Himself?
18. Read Genesis 1:14; Daniel 5:23; Matthew 8:8; John 1:1-4; Acts 17:28. Do these verses help us to understand the expression, "the Word of life"? These verses suggest that Jesus is not only God, but He is the Creator, He is the Author of time, He gives us life, He has the power

to take away our life, and He has the power to control things at a distance throughout the universe. He is the Author and Restorer of life. He is the Giver of eternal life. (John 3:16) "In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 530. "Whoever has the Son has this life." (1 John 5:12, *GNB*)

19. Read John 3:16; Romans 6:23; 8:3; Hebrews 2:9; 1 John 1:7; 2:2. Is it clear from these verses that if Jesus had not come and died, it would be impossible for God to save human beings? Why? Or, why not? Read 1 Timothy 3:16. Does this verse add anything to our understanding?
20. If God could have found another way to accomplish our salvation, wouldn't He have done so? (Ephesians 1:3-10; 3:7-10; Colossians 1:19,20). Was He accomplishing more than our salvation? (*PP* 68,69) Did He live and die on this earth for the benefit of the angels? John went so far as to write that those who deny that Jesus became fully human in order to save us are from the Devil. (1 John 4:1-3).
21. Could you personally explain to a nonbeliever why it was necessary for the divine Jesus to become human and do the things which He did here on earth in order for us to be saved?
22. In 1 John 1:1-4, John mentioned several things that he gave witness to about the life of Jesus:
1) His life was from "the very beginning." [What do you think John meant by "the very beginning"?]
2) What he had heard;
3) What he had seen with his eyes;
4) What he had looked at;
and 5) "Our hands have touched it." Then he concluded, "We announce to you also, so that you will join with us in the fellowship that we have with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:3, *GNB*) What process do you think is involved in all of that? Is it possible for John to involve us in his personal experience with Jesus Christ? Can we experience joy in the Lord ourselves?
23. Jesus has been described as a man of sorrows. (Isaiah 53:4,5) Do you think Jesus smiled on a regular basis? Did He ever laugh? Would the children have been attracted to Him if He had been not been pleasant?
24. Hebrews 2:14-18 and Hebrews 4:14-16 suggest that Jesus had to come down to earth and experience humanity. Why was that necessary? Is it hard for God to understand what it is like to be a human being? Does He find it difficult to understand how challenging it is to be tempted by the Devil? If so, where is His omniscience? Does Jesus understand us better than the Father does? Or, is it hard for human beings to understand what God is like? Or both? Jesus was sent down to this sinful earth to assure us that God does understand!
25. John wrote also about fellowship. What do you think he was thinking about when he mentioned "fellowship"? (1 John 1:3; John 17:20-23) Do we have true Christian fellowship available to us today? Where can it be found? Is there a significant difference between the joy that comes from service and fellowship with God and the joy which comes from other sources here on this earth?
26. In the Seventh-day Adventist Church in our day, what is the appropriate context for true fellowship? Do we need to take vows of silence as some monks or nuns do? If I am quiet, can God speak more clearly to my soul? The Bible suggests that this relationship is supposed to be like a bride with her groom. Silence would hardly be appropriate in that setting! How large a group can you really have fellowship with? How can we make God more real to us? Can you have fellowship with a church that has thousands of members?
27. Martin Luther described 1 John as an "outstanding epistle. It can buoy up

afflicted hearts... so beautifully and gently does it picture Christ to us.”—*Luther’s Works: The Catholic Epistles* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), vol. 30, p. 219.

What do you think it was about the epistle of 1 John that so impressed Martin Luther? What was it that “buoyed up” Martin Luther? Was it that “Someone” is up there in heaven “pleading” with the Father on our behalf? How has the epistle of 1 John affected your life?

28. John was dealing with heresies arising in the church. Because of Greek philosophy, many people had come to believe that physical matter was inherently evil. They believed that God and even human “souls” were essentially non-material. In that light they believed that whatever seemed for the benefit of the material world—like eating, or anything that would bring pleasure to the body—was necessarily opposed to the spiritual world. And anything that was of benefit to the spiritual world would necessarily be in opposition to anything in the physical world. With that philosophical background, it was impossible for them to believe that the ultimate God could become a literal and physical human being. Thus, they developed what came to be known as Gnostic docetism. They believed that Jesus was, in fact, an apparition or an illusion of the mind. They taught that He descended to earth and inhabited a human body at the time of His baptism and then departed the earth once again just before His crucifixion. That heresy denies the true humanity of Jesus Christ.
29. Later, another heresy arose, known as Cerinthianism, which taught that, in essence, Jesus was a very good person that was so much appreciated by God that He was “adopted” into the family of God. From the time of His baptism until His crucifixion, “Christ” lived in Him. That heresy taught that “Jesus” was fully human but never fully God.
30. Do we have any heresies that we tend to believe today that prevent us from accepting the full humanity and full divinity of Christ? Could there be any active heresies in a church that has “the truth”?
31. Near the end of his life, John “got it”! He no longer had any questions about the full humanity and the full divinity of Jesus. Not only had he heard and touched the human Jesus, but also he had seen and beheld Him by intensely, reflectively, thoughtfully experiencing the God-man.
32. Given all of this explanation from Scripture, how would you describe the nature of Christ today. Is He spirit? Is He human? Is He still both? How can we have a personal experience with someone that we cannot see or touch or hear in our day? What happened to the divinity of Christ when His humanity died on the cross? Remember that we will be studying these things for the rest of eternity! We should not expect to understand everything fully at this point in history.
33. A number of preachers have emphasized the point that “God has no grandchildren!” Each of us needs to have a personal relationship with Him—not just a relationship through someone else. Christian experience is not hereditary.
34. But John went beyond the aspect of an individual personal experience and suggested that if we have that kind of experience with Jesus, we become a part of a larger fellowship. Furthermore, we are compelled to share it with others. If we do not feel a compulsion to share it with others, does that mean we do not have the “fellowship”?
35. God has established His church on earth. Jesus is the chief cornerstone, but each of us is to be a building block in that church. (Ephesians 2:20) By “fellowshipping” together with other

Christians, we *can* experience more of the reality of our relationship as children of God.

36. In what ways is that fellowship represented in the New Testament? (Acts 2:42-47; Romans 12:3-17). Immediately after Pentecost the early church formed a sort of communal fellowship. They were so excited about the news that had impacted their lives that they spent their time together; they ate together; they worshiped together; they traveled together; they did almost everything together. Later, Paul described the ideal Christian fellowship as being similar to a body with different parts but all functioning together. Would we agree that such a relationship would produce real joy? What could we do in our day to enhance the experience of Christian fellowship?
37. Many modern mega-churches have developed ways of making people feel a part of a group, and thus, those churches have grown to enormous sizes. That always takes place through forming small subunits that work together and fellowship together as small groups.
38. Do we belong to meaningful small groups that are part of our Christian fellowship? Are those the most meaningful things in our lives? Why? Or, why not?
39. This world is not our home. We are on a journey to prepare for eternal life in a perfect place with the fully-human and fully-divine Jesus. Can we make this journey more heaven-like?
40. We like to emphasize the great controversy aspect of the plan of salvation. Following the example of Ellen White, Seventh-day Adventists have spoken of that conflict again and again. But today, many seem to have almost forgotten the main issues in that conflict—the truth about God’s character, His government, and how He exercises His power. Does a correct understanding of the issues in the great controversy give you a clearer picture of why it was necessary for Jesus to be fully human as well as fully divine to accomplish His mission? Does an understanding of the great controversy theme make you appreciate the mission of Christ even more? Why are some people attracted to the “great-controversy, trust, healing” model of salvation while others are not? Does having that perspective enhance our fellowship with others of like belief? What can we do in our local church to share what we believe about our wonderful Savior?

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