

## ***Loved and Loving: John's Epistles*** ***Believing in the Son of God***

Lesson #9 for August 29, 2009

Scriptures: Matthew 16:24,25; John 1:1-3; 3:36; 5:24; Romans 6:1-6; Acts 16:31; Hebrews 12:4; 1 John 5:1-12.

1. The focus of this lesson is on having faith in the Son of God. Paul suggested that faith is the only requirement for salvation. (Acts 16:31) What if someone we had never seen before walked into our Sabbath School class and stood up and stated that he was God. How would we respond? Isn't that a preposterous claim? Why do we—or why should we—believe that Jesus was not only human but divine? What kind of evidence is there to prove that? How much evidence is needed? What testimony do we have to confirm that “truth”? What evidence would you accept? (Maybe we should be a little more considerate of the disciples and even the Jews because they had a hard time with it! After He had spent thirty years in Nazareth, the people there were sure that He wasn't the Messiah let alone God! [Luke 4:16-30]) Who is capable of “bearing testimony” to that “fact”? Does it make a difference if we believe it or not? Do we have to believe it? How are we to participate in His life, death, and resurrection?

Shouldn't the Jews have been able to figure out that Jesus was the true Messiah from the prophecies of the Old Testament? Will we be able to clearly identify the Devil when he comes claiming to be Jesus?

2. Down through the years, people have struggled with the story of Jesus. The “Jesus Seminar” has set as a goal for themselves to go through the gospels and decide what is genuine and what was “added” later? Of course, in their view anything that is miraculous in nature must have been made up. In their view a miracle could not really have happened. Some of them have tried to convince Christians that the Jesus that is presented in Scriptures is quite different from the true historical Jesus. Was Jesus merely a revolutionary figure trying in a subtle way to overthrow the Roman Empire? Was Jesus just an exceptionally good human being? Or, was Jesus, in fact, God come down from heaven? How are we supposed to answer those questions?
3. In our passage for this week (1 John 5:1-12), John identified certain witnesses (the Spirit, the water, and the blood) to the truth about Jesus and provided certain evidence. We will take a careful look at the witnesses, their testimony, and at the evidence.

How would we react if at someone's baptism the heavens opened up and a white dove descended and a booming voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased”? Would that be adequate evidence? Or would we think it was some kind of audio-visual special effect created by Hollywood?

4. Why did John start out by saying that anyone who believes in the Father and loves the Father will also love the Son? If we are discussing the divinity of the Son, why is John talking about the Father? What is the relationship between *believing* in Jesus and *loving* Him? John went so far as to describe our love/belief/faith/trust as a victory in a spiritual battle. We overcome our spiritual enemies by faith, not by some kind of physical force. What does it mean to overcome by faith? How do we “overcome by faith”? Is that a case of believing “strongly enough”? Is it a case of overcoming our natural selfish motives and being motivated by God's love?

5. In his gospel, in these letters, and also in the book of Revelation, John wrote repeatedly about defeating and overcoming the world. He began by quoting Christ as saying that He Himself had defeated the world. (John 16:33) He assured us that if we belong to God and if we have “trust and love,” the Spirit—who is on our side—is more powerful than the spirits on the side of “the world.” (1 John 4:4) Was John talking about the great controversy there? Who is it that the Devil would like to conquer and defeat most of all? Wouldn't it be those who are making real progress in their Christian walk? Morris Venden once preached a sermon entitled, “Doing Worse When We Pray.” The basic idea was that people who are really trying to be Christians will be the special targets of the Devil!
6. In Revelation 2 and 3, John repeatedly wrote of those who overcome and gain the victory. They will have right to the tree of life, they will not be subject to the second death, they will wear white as an indication of their victory, and their names will be written in the book of the living—allowing them to sit down with Him on His throne. (Revelation 2:7,11; 3:5,21) He went on to say in Revelation 12:11 that our victory comes through the “blood of the Lamb.” How does the blood of the Lamb give us victory? Romans 6:1-6 suggests that we used to be slaves of sin, but by baptism we become victorious over sin. Is it clear in your mind how we overcome by baptism and by the blood of the Lamb? What do we mean when we sing, “There is power, power, wonder-working power in the precious blood of the Lamb”? Compare Hebrews 9:22 and *Desire of Ages* 157.
7. John went on to describe the real pieces of evidence that we need to look at. What does it mean when John said that Jesus came “by water and blood”? (1 John 5:6) There is considerable evidence to suggest that “the water” is a reference to Jesus's baptism at the beginning of His ministry. After being baptized by John and then coming up out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him as a dove. (Matthew 3:16,17; John 1:26,31,33; 3:5,23) God also spoke to Him. In trying to determine if Jesus was, in fact, a divine-human being, does that provide some evidence? When the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus at His baptism, God was giving His proof of the fact that Jesus had lived a perfect life up to that point. Such a life was clearly beyond the capacity of any ordinary human being.  
 Isaiah 40-55 suggests that there are three criteria to determine if a “god” is real or not. 1) The ability to create (especially if one can create life) out of nothing. 2) The ability to predict the future far in advance. And a lesser evidence, 3) The ability to perform supernatural acts. Should we be surprised that these evidences that God has provided are being mightily attacked by the Devil. He will do everything possible to discredit any of those evidences. The unequivocal evidence that Jesus was divine came when He came forth from the grave in His own power! (John 10:18; *DA* 785.2)
8. There were three times in the life of Jesus at which the Bible describes a voice speaking from heaven to or about Him. At His baptism, (Matthew 3:16,17) on the mount of transfiguration, (Matthew 17:1-5) and during the final week of His life when the Greeks came to ask about Him and to see Him. That happened in the temple itself! (John 12:20-36) What do these events tell us about Jesus' humanity and divinity?
9. What does “the blood” refer to? Repeatedly in the gospels and in the New Testament, “the blood” is used to refer to Christ's death. Is that what it refers to in 1 John? What similarities or relationships can you see between baptism and the crucifixion? Notice that there were witnesses who stated on each occasion that Jesus was, in fact, divine. (Matthew 3:17; 27:50-54) What significance should we place in the testimony of the Roman centurion?

10. Remember that John had not forgotten about the antichrists. What do those references say to them and their arguments? If Jesus is, in fact, not who He claimed to be, then the entire Christian message is false.
11. Why was Jesus baptized? Why did Jesus have to die as He did? How do those two events impact your life in 2009? (See Matthew 16:24,25; Hebrews 12:4) What was Jesus asking us to do when He said we must be willing to “carry our cross”? What did the Jews think of when Jesus mentioned a “cross”? Crosses were for traitors? What is implied by resisting to the point of death?
12. On what is your assurance of salvation based? Is it based solely and completely on what Jesus has done on your behalf? Does your response to what He has done have any implications for your salvation? What does faith have to do with either of those questions? Is it essential that we have a good relationship with God (faith) in order to be saved?
13. So far, we have seen that John called “the baptism” and “the death” of Christ “witnesses.” The third witness he mentioned was the Spirit. (1 John 5:6,8) How does the Holy Spirit witness to the gospel? What does the Holy Spirit tell us about Jesus Christ? Why was it necessary to have those three witnesses? Why did John suggest that those who do not believe in these three witnesses are calling God a liar?
14. There are many people who categorically deny the divinity of Christ. But many people—even who did not know Jesus but who came in contact with Him only briefly—testified to His divinity. Notice some of the following examples:
  - 1) The testimony of John the Baptist. (John 1:6,7)
  - 2) The testimony of Jesus Himself. (John 3:32)
  - 3) The testimony of the Samaritan woman. (John 4:39)
  - 4) The testimony of Jesus’ works. (John 5:36)
  - 5) The testimony of Scripture. (John 5:39)
  - 6) The testimony of God the Father. (John 8:18)
  - 7) The testimony of the people who watched the resurrection of Lazarus. (John 12:17)
  - 8) The testimony of the Holy Spirit. (John 15:26)
  - 9) The testimony of the apostle John himself. (John 21:24)
  - 10) The testimony of the centurion at the cross. (Matthew 27:54)
15. Is that sufficient evidence on which to base your faith? Are all of those testimonies of equal weight? Or is God’s testimony more important? How would you weigh God’s testimony versus the testimony of human witnesses? What should be the relationship between someone’s testimony and “evidence”? People can say almost anything!
16. Remember that testimony and evidence are supposed to lead to trust. Why do you trust in God? In Jesus? In the Advent message? In the SDA Church? What is the ultimate basis for faith/trust? Is there a progression here?
17. In this lesson we notice that Jesus fulfilled many prophecies from the Old Testament. Did Jesus read those prophecies and make a list of things He needed to do to fulfill them? Or, did the Old Testament prophets receive instructions from God in advance about what Jesus would

do? Which of those is the truth? Remember that the one essential characteristic of truth is that it cannot be inconsistent with any other truth. If we know all the details, every truth can be shown to be consistent with every other truth.

18. Only the beauty of heavenly truth must draw those who would follow Him. The character of the Messiah had long been foretold in prophecy, and He desired men to accept Him upon the testimony of the word of God.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 43.

It is impossible for ordinary mortals to arrange for their lives to be predicted in advance!

19. Read Daniel 9:24-27. We interpret this passage to mean that Jesus' anointing happened at His baptism—at the beginning of His public ministry. Daniel went on to say that the prince would be cut off in the middle of the week. That, we believe, is a reference to His crucifixion on Calvary. That would be a reference to "the testimony of His blood." In his first letter, was John referring to the fulfillment of that prophecy from Daniel? If so, what does that say to us?
20. Are baptism and death/crucifixion related in any way? What does the symbolism of baptism mean? (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12)
21. In your mind, what is the most convincing evidence for the divinity of Christ? Would you rather look at the evidence for yourself and make up your own mind, or are you convinced by the testimony of others?
22. What evidence do you think the centurion saw on Calvary that caused him to call Jesus the Son of God? (Matthew 27:54)
23. Read 1 John 5:7,8 in the *King James Version* and then in a modern version. Why is there a significant difference? Are modern translators trying to get rid of the teaching about the Trinity? Those extra words—"in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit"—are found only in Greek documents after the 1500s. When Erasmus was preparing his third edition of the Greek New Testament, he was accosted by a Roman Catholic bishop from Spain who asked him why he had left out those important words which are found in the Latin Vulgate. Erasmus stated, "Because they are not found in any Greek manuscript." He then promised the Catholic Bishop that if a Greek manuscript could be found which had those words, he would include them in his next Greek printing. The Roman Catholic bishop went home and produced a Greek manuscript translating the Latin back into Greek with those words included. Later, he took that manuscript to Erasmus, and Erasmus—although probably suspecting some foul play—included them in his third edition of the Greek New Testament. It was from that third edition that the committee translated the *King James Version*. After further research and realizing what had happened, Erasmus removed those words from his fourth and fifth editions. No one knows for sure why these words were originally included in the Latin by Jerome (c. 345-c. 419) in the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century.
24. John spoke very strongly about the divinity of Jesus. There was no question in his mind, none whatsoever. (John 1:1-3,14; 8:58,59; 10:30,31; 20:28; 1 John 2:23; 5:20) By including words not only from Jesus Himself but from several different disciples, John did his very best to seal his argument about the divinity of Christ.
25. At what point in their experience did the disciples recognize that Jesus was, in fact, God? How were their lives affected when they finally realized that truth?

26. John was not asking us to be gullible. (1 John 4:1-3; 5:10-20) John was telling us to test everyone who attempts to speak with authority.
27. Why is the story of the cross such an essential part of the Christian's foundation of faith?
28. The disciple John not only spoke of the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ, he also spoke at length about eternal life. What is the basis upon which we can receive eternal life? (John 3:16,36; 5:24; 6:54)
29. Read 1 John 5:11,12. John made it very clear that, in his opinion, if we do not accept the divinity of Christ and what He has done for us, we have no chance for eternal life. Do you agree with that conclusion?
30. How does that impact the salvation or potential for salvation for those who have never heard of Jesus? Is *Jesus* the only way to have salvation? (Acts 4:12; Romans 1:20)
31. We are absolutely certain that the Devil will do everything possible to shake our faith in the final days of this earth's history. Is there anything you can think of that would shake your faith in the divinity or humanity of Jesus Christ or in your understanding of why He had to die?
32. "In him [Christ] was life; and the life was the light of men." It is not physical life that is here specified, but immortality, the life which is exclusively the property of God. The Word, who was with God, and who was God, had this life. Physical life is something which each individual receives. It is not eternal or immortal; for God, the Life-giver, takes it again. Man has no control over his life. But the life of Christ was unborrowed. No one can take this life from Him. "I lay it down of myself," He said. **In Him was life, original, unborrowed, underived.** This life is not inherent in man. He can possess it only through Christ.
- While bearing human nature, He [Christ] was dependent upon the Omnipotent for His life. In His humanity, He laid hold of the divinity of God; and this every member of the human family has the privilege of doing. . . . —Ellen G. White, *Maranatha* 302.4; compare *1SM* 296,297; *ST* Feb. 13, 1912; *5BC* 1130.3; *7aBC* 438.5)
33. How has your life been affected by the truths we have discussed in this lesson? How different would your life be if Jesus had not come and lived and died here on planet Earth? Do the people you work with believe that you are a true Christian? What evidence have they seen? Will God provide any additional evidence to support the humanity and divinity of Christ in our day? Or, do we have all the evidence that we need?

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