

ST ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH  
SARASOTA, FLORIDA

**COME, JOIN THE CONVERSATION!**  
ON  
**THE EPISTLES OF JOHN**

Lesson Plan for Thursday – April 3, 2014

**CONVERSATION #9 – “I JOHN 5:1-12 “*FAITH and ASSURANCE*”**

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**Our objectives for this session:**

- to share ideas, attitudes, and experiences relating to the message proclaimed by John; and, in doing so, strengthen our SAKLC fellowship;
- to examine what a person must do to be saved;
- to look at the 3-fold witness about Jesus and be aware of textual differences in various translations of the Bible;
- to further explore John’s concept of eternal life.

**OPENING PASTORAL PRAYER and SHARING GOD’S PEACE**

**FACILITATOR’S COMMENT ON TODAY’S INITIAL SCRIPTURAL TEXT:**

In bringing this First Epistle of John to a conclusion, the Apostle writes of faith in Christ, loving God, and overcoming the world. He makes these points in the initial text printed below - the true Christian is one who:

- (a) believes that Jesus Christ is God made man;
- (b) loves God;
- (c) loves God’s children;
- (d) keeps God’s (*Christ’s*) commandments;
- (e) is victorious over the godless world in which he/she lives.

Thus, a Christian’s faith in Christ is very practical; it issues in the victorious life, gaining victory over the temptation to behave and think as godless people do.

**A) THE SCRIPTURAL RECORD – I JOHN 5:1-5 “*FAITH, LOVE & OBEDIENCE*”**

[COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE TRANSLATION]

***Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born from God. Whoever loves someone who is a parent loves the child born to the parent. 2 This is how we know that we love the children of God: when we love God and keep God’s commandments. 3 This is the love***

*of God: we keep God's commandments. God's commandments are not difficult, 4 because everyone who is born from God defeats the world. And this is the victory that has defeated the world: our faith. 5 Who defeats the world? Isn't it the one who believes that Jesus is God's Son?*

[THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE TRANSLATION]

**Everyone who believes** (adheres to, trusts, and relies on the fact) **that Jesus is the Christ** (the Messiah) **is a born-again child of God; and everyone who loves the Father also loves the one born of Him** (His offspring). <sup>2</sup> **By this we come to know** (recognize and understand) **that we love the children of God: when we love God and obey His commands** (orders, charges)—[when we keep His ordinances and are mindful of His precepts and His teaching]. <sup>3</sup> **For the** [true] **love of God is this: that we do His commands** [keep His ordinances and are mindful of His precepts and teaching]. **And these orders of His are not irksome** (burdensome, oppressive, or grievous). <sup>4</sup> **For whatever is born of God is victorious over the world; and this is the victory that conquers the world, even our faith.** <sup>5</sup> **Who is it that is victorious over** [that conquers] **the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God** [who adheres to, trusts in, and relies on that fact]?

#### A CLOSER LOOK AT THIS PORTION OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT:

- 1) The first part of this text is one of the clearest statements in Scripture of what a person has to do to be saved. There is no other way that John ever defined a Christian. We must believe that Jesus of Nazareth is "the Christ" (*i.e., the Anointed One whom God promised to provide as a substitute sacrifice for the sins of the world*). What defines a Christian is his/her faith in Jesus Christ; not lifestyle; not good works; not perfect obedience to God.
- 2) Belief in Jesus, His identity and His work, is also what tells us what love is and how we are to live as members of His family.
- 3) It is God alone who determines the other members of the family, not us! Christianity is a re-birth; in baptism, we undergo the experience of being re-born, not into a human family, but into the family of God. Therefore, we are simply called to accept and love them.
- 4) Obedience is the only proof of love. John is undoubtedly remembering how the Scribal and Pharisaic mass of rules and regulations could be an intolerable burden on the shoulders of any pious person. There is no promise given here that obeying God's commands will be easy; but, the work and self-discipline of serving Christ are no burden to those who love him. If that "*load*" starts to feel too heavy, we can trust Christ to help us bear it. (cf. Matthew 11:28-30 - "**Come to me, all you who are struggling hard and carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest.**" <sup>29</sup> **Put on my yoke, and learn from me.**

*I'm gentle and humble. And you will find rest for yourselves. <sup>30</sup> My yoke is easy to bear, and my burden is light.”)*

- 5) This faith gives us supernatural power to overcome the world and its version of love, and choose instead to love as we have been loved by Jesus. That's Christian faith worked out in Christian community.
- 6) It's the only way faith works; it is not difficult because Christian love is empowered by the Holy Spirit. God desires love; Jesus defines love; the Holy Spirit empowers love. John insists that if we believe in the life, the Incarnation, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus, then we have with us forever Christ the Victor to give us the victory!

### FOR GROUP CONVERSATION:

- a) Consider verse 3: How is the love of God displayed in the life of contemporary believers?
- b) Do you think that keeping the commandments of God are/are not a burden? Why?
- c) Who alone has the power to overcome the world? What do you think the Apostle, John, means by “*overcoming*” the world?
- d) What equipment, weapon or thing in our lives do we use to overcome the world, or any obstacle? Is the Apostle John the only one to make this claim? Where else is the claim made scripturally?

### B) THE SCRIPTURAL RECORD –I JOHN 5:6-8 – “The Triple Witness about Jesus”

[COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE VERSION]

***This is the one who came by water and blood: Jesus Christ. Not by water only but by water and blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. <sup>7</sup> The three are testifying— <sup>8</sup> the Spirit, the water, and the blood—and the three are united in agreement.***

[THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE VERSION]

***This is He Who came by (with) water and blood [His baptism and His death], Jesus Christ (the Messiah)—not by (in) the water only, but by (in) the water and the blood. And it is the [Holy] Spirit Who bears witness, because the [Holy] Spirit is the Truth. <sup>7</sup> So there are three witnesses in heaven: the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, and these three are One; <sup>8</sup> and there are three witnesses on the earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree [are in unison; their testimony coincides].***

[THE KING JAMES VERSION]

***<sup>6</sup> This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is***

**truth.** <sup>7</sup> *For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.* <sup>8</sup> *And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.*

[NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION]

*This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.* <sup>7</sup> *There are three that testify:* <sup>8</sup> *the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree.*

**AN IMPORTANT NOTE about these translations:** It is important to note that **verse 7** in the King James and Amplified Versions, shown above, is not present in the Common English and New Revised Standard versions. That verse is omitted because in the earliest Greek manuscripts of the New Testament the verse does not appear anywhere. Nor did any of the early church fathers know of it; even St. Jerome's original version of The Vulgate does not include it. How then did it get into some texts? It seems that it was, in origin, a scribal comment which over the centuries found its way into the actual text of I John. Obviously, it seemed to offer good scriptural evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity. Bit by bit it became part of chapter five. Modern scholarship has made it quite certain that John did not write it, and that it is a much later commentary and addition. Therefore, in most modern translations the verse is omitted.

#### **A CLOSER LOOK AT THIS PORTION OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT:**

- 1) This brief passage represents one of the most perplexing texts in the N.T. If we knew all the circumstances that John was addressing; if we had full knowledge of all the heresies against which he was defending his people; then, the meaning would surely become clear.
- 2) For John, the words **WATER** and **BLOOD**, in connection with Jesus, had a very special and symbolic meaning. In John's story of the Cross there is a curious pair of verses: (cf. John 19:34-35 - *However, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.* <sup>35</sup> *The one who saw this has testified, and his testimony is true. He knows that he speaks the truth, and he has testified so that you also can believe.*
- 3) **WATER** and **BLOOD** refer to two events in Jesus life:
  - a) Water must refer to Jesus' baptism
  - b) Blood must refer to His Cross.
- 4) John makes the claim that it was not by water only that Jesus came; but, it was by water **and** by blood; meaning that while His baptism was an essential part of His Messiahship, so also was His Cross! Martin Luther makes the same claim in his explanation to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Article of the Apostles' Creed.

- 5) Repeatedly in this epistle, we have seen lurking in the background **the heresy of Gnosticism**. Proponents of that philosophy believed and taught that **Spirit was altogether good** and that **matter was altogether evil**. This teaching made Gnostics reject any teaching of the Incarnation, and it made them deny that God came in the flesh.
  
- 6) Irenaeus, among the earliest of the ‘church fathers’, writes about a belief connected to **Cerinthus**, a contemporary of John, and a member of the early Church in Ephesus. **Cerinthus taught** that at Jesus’ baptism, from the power which is above all things, the divine Christ descended and came into the man Jesus in the form of a dove. Jesus, then being allied with the Christ who had descended upon Him, brought the message of God to people and lived a life of perfect obedience to the Law of God. At the end of his earthly ministry, that same Christ departed from the man Jesus and returned to glory. The false teaching continues by pointing out that it was only the man Jesus who was crucified on Calvary and who was afterward resurrected. Put in the simplest of terms: **Jesus became divine at his baptism; divinity left him before the cross; he died simply as a man.**
  
- 7) Such a false teaching robs the life and death of Jesus of all value for us. By seeking to protect God from all contact with human form and our human situation, it removes God from the act of redemption and empties the Cross of any value. Christianity would be an “empty” religion.
  
- 8) The mission of Jesus was to baptize with the Spirit. This began on the day of Pentecost after his resurrection (Acts 2). The **SPIRIT**, the **WATER** and the **BLOOD** all point to the fact that Jesus was truly God’s Messiah, anointed with the Spirit at his water baptism and dying for the sins of the world on the cross.
  
- 9) In accordance with ancient Hebrew practice, providing a “triple” human witness was considered all-important by John. (cf. **Deuteronomy 19:15 - A solitary witness against someone in any crime, wrongdoing, or in any sort of misdeed that might be done is not sufficient. The decision must stand by two or three witnesses.**) For John, providing testimony or being a “witness” is an important word/concept, as illustrated below:
  - a. **John 1:15 - John testified about him, crying out, “This is the one of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is greater than me because he existed before me.’”**
  
  - b. **John 1:32-34 - John testified, “I saw the Spirit coming down from heaven like a dove, and it rested on him. <sup>33</sup> Even I didn’t recognize him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘The one on whom you see the Spirit coming down and resting is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ <sup>34</sup> I have seen and testified that this one is God’s Son.”**

- c. John 5:30-32 - *I can't do anything by myself. Whatever I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just. I don't seek my own will but the will of the one who sent me.*  
<sup>31</sup> *"If I testify about myself, my testimony isn't true.* <sup>32</sup> *There is someone else who testifies about me, and I know his testimony about me is true.*
- d. John 5:36 - *"I have a witness greater than John's testimony. The Father has given me works to do so that I might complete them. These works I do testify about me that the Father sent me.*
- e. John 5:39 - *Examine the scriptures, since you think that in them you have eternal life. They also testify about me*
- f. John 8:18 - *I am one witness concerning myself, and the Father who sent me is the other."*
- g. John 15:26- *When the Companion comes, whom I will send from the Father—the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father—he will testify about me.*

C) THE SCRIPTURAL RECORD –JOHN 5:8-12 *"The Undeniable Witness – The Essence of Faith"*

[COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE TRANSLATION]

*If we receive human testimony, God's testimony is greater, because this is what God testified: he has testified about his Son. 10 The one who believes in God's Son has the testimony within; the one who doesn't believe God has made God a liar, because that one has not believed the testimony that God gave about his Son. 11 And this is the testimony: God gave eternal life to us, and this life is in his Son. 12 The one who has the Son has life. The one who doesn't have God's Son does not have life.*

[THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE TRANSLATION]

<sup>9</sup> ***If we accept*** [as we do] ***the testimony of men*** [if we are willing to take human authority], ***the testimony of God is greater*** (of stronger authority), ***for this is the testimony of God, even the witness which He has borne regarding His Son.*** <sup>10</sup> ***He who believes in the Son of God*** [who adheres to, trusts in, and relies on Him] ***has the testimony*** [possesses this divine attestation] ***within himself.*** ***He who does not believe God*** [in this way] ***has made Him out to be and represented Him as a liar, because he has not believed*** (put his faith in, adhered to, and relied on) ***the evidence*** (the testimony) ***that God has borne regarding His Son.*** <sup>11</sup> ***And this is that testimony*** (that evidence): ***God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.*** <sup>12</sup> ***He who possesses***

***the Son has that life; he who does not possess the Son of God does not have that life.***

**A CLOSER LOOK AT THIS PORTION OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT:**

- 1) John here uses a phrase which is a favorite of his in the Gospel, speaking of ***“He who believes in the Son of God.”*** There is a significant difference between ***believing a man*** and ***believing in a man!***
  - a. If we believe a man/woman we do no more than accept the fact that whatever statement he/she may be making at the moment is true.
  - b. If we believe ***“in”*** a man/woman, we accept the whole person and all that person stands for in complete confidence and trust. We would not only be prepared to trust his/her spoken word, we would also be prepared to trust the totality of our life to him/her.
- 2) To believe in Jesus Christ is not to simply accept what he says as true; it is to commit all of life into His hands for time and eternity.
- 3) When a person does that, the Holy Spirit within him/her testifies that he/she is acting correctly. It is the Spirit which gives the conviction of ultimate worth.
- 4) Conversely, one who refuses to do that is denying the promptings of the Spirit; such a person is refusing to listen to the messenger of God.
- 5) John’s message is that the person who rejects the evidence with which life and God confronts him/her is treating God as a liar – and that is blasphemy
- 6) In verse 11, the word used for “eternal” is ***“AIONION”*** (Greek: αἰώνιον). It means far more than simply *lasting forever*. There is only one person to whom the root word ***“AIONIOS”*** may be properly applied and that one person is God. In the real sense of the term, it is God alone who possesses and who inhabits eternity. Eternal Life is, therefore, nothing other than the life of God Himself. What is promised to us is that here and now there can be given to us a share in the very life of God.
  - a. In God there is *peace*, and therefore, *eternal life means perfect serenity*.
  - b. It means a life *liberated from all the fears* which haunt us as humans.
  - c. In God there is *power*; *eternal life means the absence of frustration*; a life filled with the power of God is *a life victorious over all circumstances*.

- d. In God there is *holiness*; *eternal life* means *the defeat of sin*; a life with a *purity that is the purity of God Himself*.
  - e. In God there is *love*; eternal life means *the end of all bitterness and hatred*.
  - f. In God there is *life*; eternal life means *the defeat of death*; a life that is *indestructible*, because it has within it the indestructible life of God Himself!
- 7) One biblical scholar, consulted by your facilitator for this study presentation, has described “**ETERNAL LIFE**” as being ***qualitative*** in nature, ***not quantitative***; ***“it is the highest kind of spiritual and moral life, irrespective of time, which God enables the believer to share in relationship with Jesus.”***
- 8) Clearly, it is the Apostle John’s conviction that *such a life comes through Jesus Christ and in no other way!* We can only possess that life when we know God through Jesus Christ.

#### **FURTHER QUESTIONS FOR GROUP CONVERSATION:**

- 1) How best can a believer in 2014 C.E. be a witness to Jesus Christ?
- 2) Whose witness is the greatest according to John?
- 3) Look at Romans 8:16 and Galatians 4:6. Do the views of St. Paul and the Apostle John differ? Who has the witness or testimony with himself/herself, and why?
- 4) What gift has God given to the believer? (Romans 6:23; John 3:16; I John 5:11)
- 5) In what ways does eternal life, which believers have now, reveal itself in their lives?
- 6) What is the difference between the believer and non-believer? (John 3:18; 36)

#### **THE FOCUS OF NEXT WEEK’S STUDY: I JOHN 5:13-21 “EPILOGUE”**