

2. Experiencing the Word of Life (3Q 2009—Loved and Loving: John’s Epistles)

Biblical material: Deut. 4:1–4; 1 Cor. 15:4–8; 1 John 1:1–4, 5; Rev. 19:13.

Quotes

- I believe in God as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else. *C. S. Lewis*
- “Belief” is not something you can turn on and off like a spigot. No person can truly “believe in God” unless the evidence convinces his or her mind. *Dave Matson*
- If there be a God and one has never sought him, it will be small consolation to remember that one could not get proof of his existence. *George MacDonald*
- We find the most terrible form of atheism, not in the militant and passionate struggle against the idea of God himself, but in the practical atheism of everyday living, in indifference and torpor. We often encounter these forms of atheism among those who are formally Christians. *Nicolai A. Berdyaev*
- According to the teaching of our Lord, what is wrong with the world is precisely that it does not believe in God. Yet it is clear that the unbelief which he so bitterly deplored was not an intellectual persuasion of God’s non-existence. Those whom he rebuked for their lack of faith were not men who denied God with the top of their minds, but men who, while apparently incapable of doubting him with the top of their minds, lived as though he did not exist. *John Baillie*
- The turning point in our lives is when we stop seeking the God we want and start seeking the God who is. *Patrick Morley*

Questions

Why is personal experience regarded as so important? What gives a witness credibility? In what way does John make it clear that his message is vitally important? What would we miss if we did not have this testimony of John? What reason does John give for sharing his message? What are the implications for us and the universe?

Bible discussion

“It was there from the beginning; we have heard it; we have seen it with our own eyes; we looked upon it, and felt it with our own hands; and it is of this we tell. Our theme is the word of life.” (1 John 1:1 NEB). What a great mission statement, slogan, motto—call it what you will. This is an amazing summary of the message—based on personal experience and conviction. We would do well to use it ourselves!

This first verse echoes Genesis 1:1, as does John’s gospel. God is the beginning—and he is the word of life, who was in the beginning with God, and was God. Only as we believe the evidence of God and his character can we proceed—for belief must be based on what we have examined and determined to be true.

This is the testimony of John, the eye-witness: “We must write and tell you about it, because the more that fellowship extends the greater the joy it brings to us who are already in it.” (1 John 1:4 Phillips). Here is the reason why—not just for writing this letter, but for sharing the truth as it is in Jesus.

In Deut 4 God makes it clear that his people are to follow his decrees: “Obey them so that you may live.” Not as some arbitrary command, but as the only way in which we can truly live, for God’s commandments express the truth of what is inherently right.

Paul points to Jesus’ death and resurrection in terms of his own personal conviction as to the meaning and purpose of life (1 Cor. 15:4-8). This is God’s life-giving word. Similarly the “Faithful and True” rider of Rev. 19 is identified as the Word of God—the Word that brings life to all who will accept.

Comment 1

In this introduction to his letter, John uses some interesting concepts. The central idea is “the Word of life.” Clearly this is part of his whole idea of the pre-existing Word (John 1). This is also “the Life the eternal” (verse 2). So what are we to understand by this “Word of life.” Surely it is the Word *that brings* life, the same source of life as the One who breathed into Adam the breath of life. He is the same life-giving power, the Alpha and Omega who is the resurrection and the life. This is what John announces: the truth about the Life-source of the universe, in contrast to all the lies that the Accuser has told against God as part of his campaign of defamation. With absolute conviction and breathless enthusiasm that has not dimmed over the years since Jesus ascended, John witnesses to the fact that Jesus, the Word of Life, became one like us so that we could know God, believe in Him, and be saved to eternal life.

Comment 2

“...*the Word of life*, the gospel of Christ, is concerned with the historical incarnation of the Eternal Son. He who is from the beginning is He whom the apostles heard and touched. It is impossible to distinguish between Jesus’ and the Christ, the historical and the eternal. They are the same Person, God and man. Such an emphasis on the historical revelation of the invisible and the intangible is still needed today...” John R. W. Stott, The Epistles of John (London: Tyndale Press, 1964), 61.

Ellen White Comments

[1 John 1:1-3 quoted.] Thus John bears testimony that he had seen Christ, had been with Christ. In the early history of the Christian church, the enemy tried to bring in questions that would lead to doubt and dissension. At this time the testimony of John was invaluable in establishing the faith of the believers. He could say with assurance, I know that Christ lived on this earth; and I can bear testimony regarding His words and works. {7BC 947}

We need to educate and train the mind so that we shall have an intelligent faith, and have an understanding friendship with Jesus. Unless we continually cherish friendship between God and our souls, we shall separate from Him, and walk apart from Him. We shall make friends of those around us, and place our trust in humanity, and our affections will be diverted from the true object of worship. We must not allow coldness to chill our love for our Redeemer. If we have fellowship with Him, we must ever set the Lord before us, and treat Him as an honored Friend, giving Him the first place in our affections. We should speak of His matchless charms, and constantly cultivate the desire to have a better knowledge of Jesus Christ. Then His Spirit will have a controlling power upon life and character. . . . If ever there was a time when men needed the presence of Christ at their right hand, it is now. . . . {SD 27}

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