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Belief in Jesus Christ

Studies in the Writings of John the Apostle

Gary Henry

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Belief in Jesus Christ: Studies in the Writings of John the Apostle
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Contents

Essay

Belief in Jesus Christ 4

Study Outlines

Lesson 1 — *What Is This Thing Called “Faith”?* 12
Lesson 2 — *Faith in Jesus Christ, the Only Path to Eternal Life* 19
Lesson 3 — *Why Do Some Not Believe?* 22
Lesson 4 — *Faith in the Goodness of God* 25
Lesson 5 — *If We Have Faith, Then We Must Be Faithful* 28

Belief In Jesus Christ

A Study of “Faith” in the Writings of John

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HAVING IDENTIFIED JESUS OF NAZARETH AS THE MESSIAH, OR CHRIST, John the Baptist said, “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (Jn. 3:36). In His own teaching, Jesus furthered the claim that He was the Christ, and this affirmation has always been at the center of the gospel that is preached in His name. The “faith” spoken of in the gospel is the conviction that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He came into the world to bring salvation from sin. This is the faith asserted by Peter, for example, when he said to Jesus, “We have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Jn. 6:69). It is the faith also expressed by Martha, one of Jesus’ closest friends, who said, “Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world” (Jn. 11:27).

This belief that Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee, was God in the flesh is the central tenet of Christianity (Mt. 16:16; Rom. 10:8-10; Phil. 2:9-11; etc.). Consequently, nothing is more important for Christians themselves to understand than the nature of “belief.” And if we wish to understand how belief works and why it is so important, then the writings of John the Apostle must claim our attention. In none of the New Testament documents do we have a more elaborate treatment of faith than in work of John.

Where Does Faith Come From?

The Gospel of John tells us that by taking upon Himself fleshly form in the person of Jesus Christ, God “declared” or “interpreted” Himself to mankind in a way that would have been impossible otherwise: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (Jn. 1:14,18). Jesus is the “image” of God, the visible representation of the invisible God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15; Hb. 1:1-3). This should certainly not be taken to mean that Jesus “looked” like God, but rather that He was a perfect demonstration of God’s *character* (Jn. 8:19). When Philip asked Jesus to

show the Father to the disciples, Jesus answered, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (Jn. 14:7-9).

But Jesus did far more than simply live as an example of the character of God. He went so far as to claim that His words were the testimony that God wanted given concerning Himself to the human race (Mt. 11:27; Jn. 6:46; 7:16; 18:37). It is hardly a coincidence that the Gospel of John begins by identifying Jesus Christ as the “Word” of God (1:1,14). In John’s writings, Jesus is the ultimate means of communication through which God speaks of Himself to mankind. Going back to the declaration of John the Baptist concerning Jesus’ identity and mission, listen carefully to his words: “He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (Jn. 3:31-36).

To a world cut off by sin from direct contact with God, Jesus came to bear witness to the truth about God, truth that He had direct, personal, and even intimate, knowledge of (Jn. 6:46; 7:16,28,29; 8:25-27,38). His claim concerning His teaching was bold: “He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me. And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him; the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak” (Jn. 12:44-50). In the writings of John, then, this is what “faith” is: *it is knowledge of truths about God that we are not able to verify personally, but which we are asked to accept on the basis of testimony from a credible Witness, Jesus Christ, who has personally seen and heard the things of which He speaks.*

Jesus’ claim concerning His direct knowledge of God is the most astonishing thing anyone has ever been asked to believe. He claimed equality with God, going so far as to say, “I and My Father are one” (Jn. 10:30). Obviously, it would have been unreasonable to expect His hearers to take what He said on “blind” faith, without any evidence or authentication. So several lines of evidence were provided to support His claim to be speaking from God. These were (1) the audible testimony of God Himself that Jesus was His Son (Mt. 3:16,17; 17:5; Jn. 5:37; etc.), (2) the witness of John the Baptist (Jn. 1:6-8,19-28,29-34; 5:33-35), (3) Jesus’ perfect fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures (Jn. 1:45; 2:19-22; 5:39,45-47; 7:42; 13:18,19; etc.), and (4) the signs and miracles, or “works,” that Jesus performed, culminating in the great miracle of His resurrection (Jn. 2:11,18,19; 3:2; 5:20,36; 7:31; 9:16; 10:25,37,38; 11:47; 12:37; 14:11,12; 15:24; 20:30,31; etc.). Thus Jesus’ claim of identity with God is not only the most radical claim in history, it is also

the most well-supported. Hard-to-believe testimony concerning worldly matters is frequently accepted on far less evidence than was provided for the claims of Jesus. In his first epistle, John wrote, “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son. He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son” (1 Jn. 5:9,10).

But Jesus more than once emphasized that even without the other lines of evidence, His own testimony concerning Himself and God was true and credible (Jn. 3:11; 8:18). To the Pharisees, for whom no amount of evidence would have been convincing, He said, “Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going” (8:13,14). The signs and other evidence were only provided as a concession to our weakness and our failure to recognize truth when it confronts us. On one occasion He said, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe” (Jn. 4:48). However, those with honest “ears” had little difficulty figuring out whether to trust Jesus, and the Gospel of Mark says that “the common people heard Him gladly” (12:37). When Jesus spoke, His words simply had the ring of truth. Even officers sent to arrest Him came back and reported, “No man ever spoke like this Man” (Jn. 7:46).

When any witness gives testimony about matters that he has personal knowledge of, it is always important for the witness to accurately represent what he knows to be true. A faithful witness will never say anything that is not a “faithful saying” (1 Tim. 1:15; etc.), that is, something that can be counted on as being true. In Revelation, John repeatedly describes Jesus as “the Faithful and True Witness” (Rev. 3:14). Cf. 1:5; 19:11; 21:5; 22:6. Jesus was willing to die rather than alter even the slightest detail of the truth. On trial for His life, He was given an opportunity to change His testimony, but He refused to do so, for that would have been a betrayal of His very mission, which was to bear witness to the truth. “Pilate therefore said to Him, ‘Are You a king then?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice’” (Jn. 18:37). When Jesus bears witness to the truth, telling us what He knows about God, we must take seriously the fact that He claimed to be faithfully reporting God’s message to us. He said on one occasion, “Whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak” (Jn. 12:49,50). On our part, faith means that we *acknowledge* the “faithfulness” and “truth” of this Witness: *we are willing to take Him at His word in everything He says about the Father.*

It should be noted that we, as Jesus’ followers, are commanded to pass along His testimony to others. When we do, we must be careful to faithfully represent what Jesus said He knew about God. We must not change the message for any reason at all. Paul charged Timothy, “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). There are obviously times when we are tempted, for the sake of “safety,” to conceal, alter, or renounce what we know to be true. But if we are to be faithful to the Lord, who faithfully conveyed the truth to us at the cost of His own life, we must be willing to die rather than deviate from the truth. There must be great “fidelity” between what Jesus said and what we say that He said.

Faithfulness to the testimony of Jesus, at all costs, is the message of Revelation. As he began to write that book, John indicated that he himself was in dire straits on the island of Patmos “for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:9). The visions he recorded and sent to the churches in Asia were to encourage them as they faced their own trials. The church in Pergamos, for example, was commended by Christ because “you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells” (Rev. 2:13). The word “martyr” means “a witness,” and it refers to someone who is put to death for the testimony he has given. Antipas was one of many in those days who accepted death rather than back down on what they knew, and had confessed, to be true (Rev. 6:9; 12:11,17; 19:10; 20:4). The truths about God that Jesus brought to us must be kept faithfully — no matter what temporal consequences may threaten to silence us.

But this brings us to an important question: at this date, how can we be sure that we *have* the testimony of Christ concerning God? Not only are we, as sinful, earthbound creatures, removed from any direct knowledge of God ourselves, but living today, we are removed by two thousand years from Jesus’ witness to God. Since we were not present to hear Jesus, we have to rely on witnesses who did hear Him to tell us what He taught. The chain of testimony between God and us can appear to be somewhat complicated: if those who lived in Jesus’ day had to base their faith in God on what Jesus said He knew, then we have to base our faith on what those same individuals said they knew . . . concerning what Jesus said He knew! Fortunately, it is just this difficulty that is met by the work of the “apostles” commissioned by Jesus. It would be impossible to understand the nature of our faith today without an understanding of the role of these apostles, and the writings of John make up one of our prime sources of information on this aspect of our faith.

The apostles serve, for all time to come, as the appointed, authoritative witnesses to the witness of Jesus (Acts 1:8,21,22; 2:32; etc.). The role of the apostles was to testify to the world concerning the testimony that Jesus had given to them (Jn. 15:27; 1 Jn. 1:1-4; 4:14). They were endowed with the very authority of Christ Himself (Mt. 16:19; 18:18; etc.), the absolute accuracy of their testimony was guaranteed by the infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:16,17,25,26; 15:26,27; 16:12-15; etc.), and they were given miraculous “signs of an apostle” to confirm their authority (Mk. 16: 19,20; 2 Cor. 12:12). Having done what they were commissioned to do as the authoritative witnesses of Christ, and their testimony having been recorded in the documents of the New Testament, the testimony of Jesus concerning God is now available to all the world for all time to come, and not just to those who personally saw and heard Him (Mt. 28:18-20). Today, when one accepts the apostolic testimony contained in the New Testament, he is doing precisely the same thing as those who accepted Jesus’ words when they heard Him firsthand. Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me” (John 13:20).

It is important to know the chain of events by which faith comes to us. It does not come in some mystical, better-felt-than-told way. It comes by our accepting the truth of the apostles’ testimony concerning Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Faith consists of the conviction that Jesus was telling the truth when He claimed to have come from God, and it arises through the straightforward process of evaluating, first, the testimony of the apostles to Jesus, and second, the testimony of Jesus

to God. If we believe the apostles concerning Jesus, and we believe Jesus concerning God, then we believe the gospel. And the question then becomes whether we are going to obey the gospel which we believe (**Rom. 1:5; 2 Thess. 1:8**). But if, for whatever reason, we do not find either of these testimonies credible, then we do not believe and we do not obey (**Mk. 16:15,16; Jn. 3:36**). Faith in Christ, like every other kind of faith in the world, is based on testimony — testimony which one either finds believable or not.

On the night of His betrayal Jesus prayed concerning the apostles: “I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me” (**Jn. 17:6-8**). Then He prayed, “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (**Jn. 17:20,21**). Thus Jesus had in mind (1) the apostles, to whom He had directly given His testimony concerning God, and (2) those who would hear and believe that testimony indirectly, as the apostles faithfully relayed it to the world. It was to one of the apostles, Thomas, that Jesus said, “Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (**Jn. 20:29**). Cf. **2 Cor. 5:18-20; 1 Jn. 1:1-4**.

John himself, as one of the apostles, claimed to be giving believable testimony concerning the words and deeds of Jesus. He said, “And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe” (**Jn. 19:35**). “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (**Jn. 20:30,31**). The Gospel of John ends with these words: “This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen” (**Jn. 21:24,25**). So the chain of testimony goes like this: (1) Jesus bore witness to God (accompanied with miraculous signs), (2) the apostles bore witness to Jesus (accompanied with miraculous signs), and (3) we today either accept or reject the apostolic witness. Cf. **Hb. 2:1-4**.

Contrary to the popular opinion which distinguishes between “faith” and “knowledge,” we must argue that faith is simply one *kind* of knowledge. It is knowledge based upon *testimony*, but if the testimony is strong enough, faith can be sure and certain. Indeed, most of what any of us “know,” we know because we have accepted the testimony of someone who had direct knowledge of the facts. In the case of Jesus Christ, the apostolic testimony is so strong that we need have no hesitation in using the word “knowledge” to describe convictions about God that are based on that evidence. To his fellow Christians, John wrote, “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son

of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God” (1 Jn. 5:11-13).

Why Do Some Not Believe?

It is an obvious fact that not everyone today who is confronted with the testimony of Jesus Christ accepts it as believable. Some do, but many do not. Yet it is equally obvious that the very same situation existed in Jesus’ day among those who heard Him with their own ears. In **John 7:12**, we are told, “And there was much complaining among the people concerning Him. Some said, ‘He is good’; others said, ‘No, on the contrary, He deceives the people.’” This division is illustrated later in the same chapter, in the account of Jesus’ visit to Jerusalem during Succoth, the Feast of Tabernacles. “On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’ . . . Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, ‘Truly this is the Prophet.’ Others said, ‘This is the Christ.’ But some said, ‘Will the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?’ So there was a division among the people because of Him” (**Jn. 7:37-43**). And not only was there a division concerning Jesus, it was an impassioned, vehement division. The reactions to Jesus ranged from the deepest love that humans can experience to the most intense hatred of which they are capable.

How do we account for this “division”? The objective credibility of the message itself was the same for all who heard it. Each heard exactly the same words. The only explanation is that there must have been subjective factors within the hearers themselves that caused them to “hear” Jesus differently. In the Gospel of John, we have numerous statements from Jesus indicating that only those with a certain kind of character, or “heart,” would find His words credible. Others, with a different predisposition, would find His words not only unconvincing, but ludicrous. To one group of disbelieving hearers, He said, “The Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (**Jn. 5:37-40**).

Faith in the gospel of Christ is not produced “automatically” or “mechanically” in the heart of every hearer. Much more is involved than simply the credibility of the message itself. When human beings are listening to testimony that purports to come from God, there is always the possibility that some will reject the testimony even though it truly does come from God (**Jn. 10:22-27**). Not only that, there is the corresponding possibility that testimony from some other source will be accepted even though it is *not* from God (**Jn. 5:41-44**). In each case, the difference is not in the message, but in the hearts of the hearers.

Some worry about the fact that the gospel of Christ does not compel universal assent. If the evidence for the truth of the gospel is so strong, how can there be those who fail to see it? But there

is no such thing as a proposition so evident that it is impossible to reject it. The human mind has never entertained a thought on any subject that is not disputable in some kind of way. There are, after all, some who still seriously maintain that the earth is flat, and if we must remain tentative about any proposition that does not compel universal assent, then we shall have to avoid being dogmatic about the rotundity of the earth. And if we have to put a question mark over anything that is not unanimously agreed upon, then we can hardly be sure even that we ourselves exist, since there are serious philosophers who deny that proposition.

The truth of a proposition cannot be determined by taking a popular vote, and it would be foolish for us to question the validity of Jesus' testimony to God simply because there are those who reject it. The nature of the gospel is not such as to overwhelm the will of those who do not wish to believe it. Instead, the gospel *invites* acceptance by those who are seeking God (**Mt. 11:28-30**). Those who are not seeking, those whose hearts are not inclined toward God, will see little sense in the words that Jesus said He brought from God.

Strong language is used in the Gospel of John to describe the heart that is closed to the truth of Jesus' testimony. In **John 12:37-41**, for example, we have these words: "But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: 'Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?' Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: 'He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.' These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him."

Jesus described those who were honestly seeking God as being "of" God. To a group of opponents who had challenged Him to tell them clearly whether He was the Messiah, He said, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you" (**Jn. 10:25,26**). And on another occasion, in some of the strongest language He ever used, Jesus said, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God" (**Jn. 8:42-47**).

Ultimately, our attitude toward obeying God is the thing that determines whether we find Jesus' testimony credible. And perhaps we can be even more specific than that: it comes down to our attitude toward repentance. Jesus said, "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that

they have been done in God” (Jn. 3:19-21). And in the classic text in **John 7:16,17**, He said simply, “My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.”

Faith in the Goodness of God

As the One sent from heaven to bring us the truth about God, everything Jesus ever said or did was meant to foster faith in God. But what we are encouraged to believe is not merely that God exists, or even that He is powerful. Much more than that, we are urged to believe, based on the sending of His own Son to us, that God is benevolently inclined toward us. Jesus prayed, “O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them” (Jn. 17:25,26).

The single text in the Gospel of John that most people have heard about is one which speaks of God’s goodness toward us: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (Jn. 3:16,17).

This faith is at the heart of Christianity. But if we truly believe that Jesus was sent from God, then we must accept God’s goodness as more than an intellectual theory. We must make a real, day-to-day commitment to that truth, and we must maintain it for the rest of our lives, even in the darkest hours of doubt and temptation. When John explains to us what “faith” is, no less in his Epistles and in Revelation than in the Gospel of John, it is primarily the goodness of God that he would have us to believe. “And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him” (1 Jn. 4:16). If we “believe” anything less than this, then our faith in Christ is not yet fully formed.

What Is This Thing Called “Faith”?

Introduction

- A. Text: **Jn. 3:36**.
- B. Jesus claimed to be the Christ, and this affirmation has always been at the center of the gospel.
- C. The “faith” spoken of in the gospel is the conviction that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He came into the world to bring salvation from sin - **Jn. 11:27**. Cf. **6:69**.
- D. This belief — that Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee, was God in the flesh — is the central tenet of Christianity - **Mt. 16:16**. Cf. **Rom. 10:8-10**; **Phil. 2:9-11**; etc.
- E. Nothing, then, is more important for Christians to understand than the nature of “belief.”
- F. And if we wish to understand how belief works and why it is so important, the writings of John the Apostle must claim our attention — in none of the New Testament documents do we have a better discussion of faith.

I. JESUS CHRIST, GOD’S REVELATION OF HIMSELF TO MANKIND

- A. The Gospel of John tells us that by taking upon Himself fleshly form in the person of Jesus Christ, God “declared” or “interpreted” Himself to mankind in the clearest way possible - **Jn. 1:14,18**.
- A. Jesus is the “image” of God, the visible representation of the invisible God - **Hb. 1:1-3**. Cf. **2 Cor. 4:4**; **Col. 1:15**. (This should not be taken to mean that Jesus looked like God, but rather that He was a perfect demonstration of God’s *character* - **Jn. 8:19**.)
- B. When Philip asked Jesus to show the Father to the disciples, Jesus answered, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (**Jn. 14:7-11**). Cf. **12:44,45**.

II. JESUS' TESTIMONY TO THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD

- A. But Jesus did far more than simply live as an example of the character of God. He went so far as to claim that His words were the testimony that God wanted given concerning Himself to the human race - **Jn. 7:16**. Cf. **Mt. 11:27; Jn. 3:12; 5:38; 6:29,46; 11:42; 14:10,11; 16:27,30; 18:37**.
- B. The Gospel of John begins by identifying Jesus Christ as the "Word" of God - **Jn. 1:1,14**.
- C. Jesus is the ultimate means of communication through which God speaks of Himself to mankind - **Jn. 3:31-36**. Cf. **1:6,7**.
1. To a world cut off by sin from direct contact with God, Jesus came to bear witness to the truth about God, truth that He had direct, personal, and even intimate, knowledge of - **Jn. 8:25-27,38**. Cf. **6:46; 7:16,28,29**.
 2. His claim concerning His teaching was very bold - **Jn. 12:44-50**.
- D. In the writings of John, then, this is what "faith" is: *knowledge of truths about God that we are not able to verify personally, but which we are asked to accept on the basis of testimony from a credible Witness, Jesus Christ, who has personally seen and heard the things of which He speaks*.
- E. Jesus' claim concerning His direct knowledge of God is the most astonishing thing anyone has ever been asked to believe. He claimed nothing less than equality with God: "I and My Father are one" (**Jn. 10:30**).
- F. Obviously, it would have been unreasonable to expect His hearers to take what He said on blind faith, without any evidence or authentication. So several lines of evidence were provided to support His claim to be speaking from God:
1. The witness of John the Baptist - **Jn. 1:29-34**. Cf. **Jn. 1:6-8,19-28; 5:33-35**.
 2. The audible testimony of God Himself that Jesus was His Son - **Mt. 3:16,17**. Cf. **Mt. 17:5; Jn. 5:37**.
 3. Jesus' perfect fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures - **Jn. 5:39,45-47**. Cf. **Jn. 1:45; 2:19-22; 7:42; 13:18,19**.
 4. The signs and miracles, or "works," that Jesus performed, culminating in the great miracle of His resurrection - **Jn.20:30,31**. Cf. **Jn. 2:11,18,19; 3:2; 5:20,36; 7:31; 9:16; 10:25,37,38; 11:47; 12:37; 14:11,12; 15:24**.
- G. Thus Jesus' claim of identity with God is not only the most radical claim in history, it is also the most well-supported. Hard-to-believe testimony concerning worldly matters is frequently accepted on far less evidence than was provided for the claims of Jesus - **1 Jn. 5:9-11**.
- H. But Jesus more than once emphasized that even without the other lines of evidence, His own testimony concerning Himself and God was true and credible - **Jn. 3:11; 8:18**.

1. To the Pharisees, for whom no amount of evidence would have been convincing, He said, “Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going” (8:13,14).
2. The signs and other evidence were only provided as a concession to our weakness and our failure to recognize truth when it confronts us.
3. On one occasion He said, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe” (Jn. 4:48).
4. However, those with honest “ears” had little difficulty figuring out whether to trust Jesus, and “the common people heard Him gladly” (Mk. 12:37).
5. When Jesus spoke, His words simply had the ring of truth — even officers sent to arrest Him came back and reported, “No man ever spoke like this Man” (Jn. 7:46).

III. THE “FAITHFUL AND TRUE WITNESS”

- A. When any witness gives testimony about matters that he has personal knowledge of, it is always important for the witness to accurately represent what he knows to be true. A faithful witness will never say anything that is not a “faithful saying” (1 Tim. 1:15; etc.), that is, something that can be counted on as being true.
- B. In Revelation, John describes Jesus as “the Faithful and True Witness” (Rev. 3:14). Cf. 1:5; 19:11; 21:5; 22:6.
 1. Jesus was willing to die rather than alter even the slightest detail of the truth.
 2. On trial for His life, He was given an opportunity to change His testimony, but He refused to do so, for that would have been a betrayal of His very mission, which was to bear witness to the truth - Jn. 18:37.
- C. When Jesus bears witness to the truth, telling us what He knows about God, we must take seriously the fact that He claimed to be faithfully reporting God’s message to us.
 1. He said on one occasion, “Whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak” (Jn. 12:49,50). Cf. 17:8.
 2. Jesus accurately represents everything about which He gives testimony — He truthfully relays God’s word to us without alteration.
- D. On our part, faith means that we *acknowledge* the “faithfulness” and “truth” of this Witness: *we are willing to take Jesus Christ at His word in everything He says about the Father.*
- E. It should be noted that we, as Jesus’ followers, are commanded to pass along His testimony to others.
 1. When we do, we must be careful to faithfully represent what Jesus said He knew about God — we must not change the message for any reason at all.

2. Paul charged Timothy, “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2).
- F. There are obviously times when we are tempted, for the sake of “safety,” to conceal, alter, or renounce what we know to be true.
1. But if we are to be faithful to the Lord, who faithfully conveyed the truth to us at the cost of His own life, we must be willing to die rather than deviate from the truth.
 2. There must be great “fidelity” between what Jesus said and what we say that He said.
- G. Faithfulness to the testimony of Jesus, at all costs, is the message of Revelation.
1. As he began to write that book, John indicated that he himself was in dire straits on the island of Patmos “for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:9).
 2. The visions he recorded and sent to the churches in Asia were to encourage them as they faced their own trials.
 3. The church in Pergamos, for example, was commended by Christ because “you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells” (Rev. 2:13).
 - a. The word “martyr” means “a witness,” and it refers to someone who is put to death for the testimony he has given.
 - b. Antipas was one of many in those days who accepted death rather than back down on what they knew, and had confessed, to be true - Rev. 6:9; Cf. 12:11,17; 19:10; 20:4.
- H. The truths about God that Jesus brought to us must be kept faithfully and faithfully represented to others, no matter what temporal consequences may threaten to silence us.

IV. THE APOSTOLIC WITNESS TO THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS CHRIST

- A. But this brings us to an important question: at this date, how can we be sure that we *have* the testimony of Christ concerning God?
1. Not only are we, as sinful, earthbound creatures, removed from any direct knowledge of God ourselves, but living today, we are removed by two thousand years from Jesus’ witness to God.
 2. Since we were not present to hear Jesus, we have to rely on witnesses who did hear Him to tell us what He taught.
 3. The chain of testimony between God and us can appear to be somewhat complicated: if those who lived in Jesus’ day had to base their faith in God on what Jesus said He knew, then we have to base our faith on what those same individuals said they knew . . . concerning what Jesus said He knew!

- B. Fortunately, it is just this difficulty that is met by the work of the “apostles” commissioned by Jesus.
- C. It would be impossible to understand the nature of our faith today without an understanding of the role of these apostles, and the writings of John make up one of our prime sources of information on this aspect of our faith.
- D. The apostles serve, for all time to come, as the appointed, authoritative witnesses to the witness of Jesus - **Acts 1:8,21,22; 2:32**; etc.
1. The role of the apostles was to testify to the world concerning the testimony that Jesus had given to them - **Jn. 15:27**. Cf. **1 Jn. 1:1-4; 4:14**.
 - a. They were endowed with the very authority of Christ Himself - **Mt. 16:19; 18:18**.
 - b. The absolute accuracy of their testimony was guaranteed by the infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit - **Jn. 15:26,27**. Cf. **14:16,17,25,26; 16:12-15**.
 - c. They were given miraculous powers to confirm their authority: the “signs of an apostle” (**Mk. 16: 19,20; 2 Cor. 12:12**).
 2. Having done what they were commissioned to do as the authoritative witnesses of Christ, and their testimony having been recorded in the documents of the New Testament, the testimony of Jesus concerning God is now available to all the world for all time to come, and not just to those who personally saw and heard Him - **Mt. 28:18-20**.
 3. Today, when one accepts the apostolic testimony contained in the New Testament, he is doing precisely the same thing as those who accepted Jesus’ words when they heard Him firsthand. Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me” (**John 13:20**).
- E. It is important to know the chain of events by which faith comes to us.
1. It does not come in some mystical, better-felt-than-told way — it comes by our accepting the truth of the apostles’ testimony concerning Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
 2. Faith consists of the conviction that Jesus was telling the truth when He claimed to have come from God, and it arises through the straightforward process of evaluating, first, the testimony of the apostles to Jesus, and second, the testimony of Jesus to God.
 3. If we believe the apostles concerning Jesus, and we believe Jesus concerning God, then we believe the gospel.
 - a. The question then becomes whether we are going to obey the gospel which we believe - **2 Thess. 1:8**. Cf. **Rom. 1:5**.
 - b. If, for whatever reason, we do not find either Jesus’ or the apostles’ testimonies credible, then we do not believe and we do not obey - **Mk. 16:15,16; Jn. 3:36**.
 4. Faith in Christ, like every other kind of faith in the world, is based on testimony — testimony which one either finds believable or not.
- F. On the night of His betrayal Jesus prayed concerning the apostles to whom He had given the words of God - **Jn. 17:6-8**.

1. Then He prayed, “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (**Jn. 17:20,21**).
 2. Thus Jesus had in mind:
 - a. The apostles, to whom He had directly given His testimony concerning God.
 - b. Those who would hear and believe that testimony indirectly, as the apostles faithfully relayed it to the world.
- G. It was to one of the apostles, Thomas, that Jesus said, “Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (**Jn. 20:29**). Cf. **2 Cor. 5:18-20; 1 Jn. 1:1-4**.
- H. John himself, as one of the apostles, claimed to be giving believable testimony concerning the words and deeds of Jesus. He said, “And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe” (**Jn. 19:35**).
- I. “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (**Jn. 20:30,31**). Cf. **20:1-8**.
- J. The Gospel of John ends with these words: “This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen” (**Jn. 21:24,25**).
- K. So the chain of testimony goes like this:
 1. Jesus bore witness to God (accompanied with miraculous signs).
 2. The apostles bore witness to Jesus (accompanied with miraculous signs).
 3. We today either accept or reject the apostolic witness. Cf. **Hb. 2:1-4**.

V. FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE

- A. Contrary to the popular opinion which distinguishes between “faith” and “knowledge,” faith should be considered as a particular *kind* of knowledge.
- B. Faith is knowledge based upon *testimony*, but if the testimony is strong enough, faith can be sure and certain. Cf. **Jn. 4:39-42**.
- C. Even in regard to temporal realities, most of what any of us “know,” we know because we have accepted the testimony of someone who had direct knowledge of the facts.

- D. In the case of Jesus Christ, the apostolic testimony is so strong that we need have no hesitation in using the word “knowledge” to describe convictions about God that are based on that evidence.
- E. We can have trustworthy knowledge of God because of the credibility of the *testimony* upon which our faith rests.

Conclusion

- A. Concerning the apostles, Jesus prayed to God, “For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me” (Jn. 17:8).
- B. Many years later, one of these apostles would write: “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God” (1 Jn. 5:11-13).
- C. We can know that the gospel is true!

Faith in Jesus Christ, the Only Path to Eternal Life

Introduction

- A. Text: **Jn. 3:14-18**.
- B. To say that the gospel of Christ is a matter of life and death is no exaggeration.
- C. To men and women doomed to die, Christ didn't just say that life was possible in Him — He said it was *only* possible in Him.
- D. Of all the claims of Christ, this is the one that is most offensive to modern ears.
- E. Let's look more closely into this exclusive claim, especially in the writings of John.

I. SPIRITUAL LIFE AND DEATH

- A. We were created to enjoy life in spiritual union with God.
- B. But the “wages of sin is death” (**Rom. 6:23**), and so, as those who have sinned, we are spiritually dead — cut off from the life that we were created to have in God.
- C. Jesus came to *give back the life* that was lost by our sin: “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (**Jn. 10:10**). Cf. **Jn. 6:35-40,47,63,68**.
- D. The “gospel” is the good news of life in Christ. Cf. “all the words of this life” (**Ac. 5:20**).
- E. But the gospel is good news that must be *accepted*.
 - 1. The gospel must be obeyed - **2 Thess. 1:8**.
 - 2. We are implored not to reject salvation but to be reconciled to God - **2 Cor. 5:20**.
- F. If we don't accept the truth of Jesus' testimony about Himself and about God, we will die in our sins: “. . . if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” (**Jn. 8:24**). Cf. **Jn. 3:14-18,36**.

II. THE TRUTHFUL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

- A. One way to look at what we have lost in sin is to see that we have *lost the knowledge of God* — His character, His wisdom, His will, etc.
- B. Having had perfect fellowship in a face-to-face relationship with God, Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden, and with every day that passed, they would have forgotten more of what God was really like.
- C. Today, the rebellion of mankind has been going on for a long time, and we are far removed from the true knowledge of God.
- D. But the gospel offers to *bring us back to the knowledge of God*.
- E. Surely, there could be no *eternal life* for us without coming to *know God* again, and there is a sense in which *that is what eternal life really is*: “Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: ‘Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. *And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent*’” (**Jn. 17:1-3**).

III. THE HISTORICAL RECORD OF JESUS’ LIFE

- A. When God took upon Himself fleshly form and lived in the world in the person of Jesus Christ, He revealed Himself in a more perfect way than He had ever done before - **Hb. 1:1-3**. Cf. **Jn. 14:7-11**.
- B. But since we weren’t there to see and hear Jesus, we depend on the testimony of those who *did* see and hear Him. Jesus’ revelation of God would mean nothing to us today if the historical records of His ministry were not accurate.
- C. *The biblical records are a trustworthy record of the eyewitness testimony of the apostles.*
 - 1. Jesus commanded His apostles to teach the world what He had taught them - **Mt. 28:19,20**.
 - 2. Jesus promised that the apostles would be miraculously guided in remembering what He had taught - **Jn. 14:26**.
 - 3. After the apostles began their work, they claimed to be speaking the truth - **Jn. 19:35**.
 - 4. They were fully aware of the implications if they didn’t tell the truth - **1 Cor. 15:15**.
 - 5. They called down the curse of God upon themselves if they deviated from the truth - **Gal. 1:8**.
 - 6. The apostles knew that their spoken witness to Christ needed to be preserved in a written record so that it would be available after their deaths - **2 Pt. 1:12-15**.
 - 7. As erroneous reports of Jesus’ life and teaching began to circulate, strenuous efforts were made to keep the historical record clear - **Lk. 1:1-4**.

- D. Thus the apostolic writings must be taken very seriously: they contain *eyewitness testimony* to the *resurrection* of a man who claimed to be *God's equal* — in fact to be *God Himself*. Cf. **Jn. 5:18; 8:58; 10:30**.
- E. *Knowing God* requires that we *accept* the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ - **Jn. 20:30,31**.
- F. And on the practical level, knowing God through the apostolic witness to Christ requires *the hard work of Bible study* — there is no shortcut.

IV. JESUS CHRIST, THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

- A. The truth about Jesus Christ and what He accomplished on our behalf makes possible *a life that physical death cannot destroy* - **Jn. 11:23-27**. Cf. **Rev. 2:11**.
- B. Atoning for our sins by His death and then being raised to an immortal life on the third day, Jesus became the “firstfruits” of the resurrection - **1 Cor. 15:20**.
- C. In Him, our hope is one of life rather than death - **1 Pt. 1:3-5**. Cf. **Hb. 2:14,15**.

V. JESUS CHRIST, THE ONLY PATH TO GOD

- A. But according to testimony of the apostles, Jesus Christ is not merely *one among many* paths to life in God — He is the *only* path - **Jn. 14:1-6**. Cf. **Jn. 8:24; 1 Tim. 2:5,6**.
- B. The exclusive claims of Christ were no more “politically incorrect” in the first century than they are now, but the apostles *would not back down from what they knew to be true* - **Ac. 4:5-12**.
- C. The truth of the gospel can't be determined by whether it respects “diversity.” The question is not how *radical* or *unreasonable* the gospel sounds to us today, but simply . . . *is it true?*
- D. In a nutshell, Jesus' claim to be the Son of God stands or falls with the *resurrection*.
- E. So the only issue is this: *How strong is the testimony? How trustworthy are the witnesses?*

Conclusion

- A. Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life” (**Jn. 5:24**).
- B. It is in Christ that God is reconciling the world to Himself - **2 Cor. 5:18-21**. Have you been reconciled to Him?

Why Do Some Not Believe?

Introduction

- A. Text: **Jn. 7:16,17**.
- B. It is an obvious fact that not everyone today who is confronted with the testimony of Jesus Christ accepts it as believable. Some do, but many do not.
- C. It is worthwhile to ask: why do some not believe?

I. DIFFERENT RESPONSES TO JESUS' MESSAGE

- A. If many today do not believe, it is equally obvious that the same situation existed in Jesus' day among those who heard Him with their own ears - **Jn. 7:12,40-43**.
- B. Not only was there a division concerning Jesus, it was an impassioned, vehement division. The reactions to Jesus ranged from the deepest love that humans can experience to the most intense hatred of which they are capable - **Jn. 6:63,64; 7:5**.
- C. How are we to explain the fact that although Jesus' message was identical, it met with such radically different responses from the various individuals who heard it?

II. SUBJECTIVE FACTORS IN FAITH

- A. The objective credibility of Jesus' message itself was the same for all — the different responses were produced by subjective factors within the listeners themselves that caused them to “hear” Jesus differently.
- B. In the Gospel of John, we have numerous statements from Jesus indicating that only those with a certain kind of character, or “heart,” would find His words credible - **Jn. 10:2-4,27**.
- C. Others, with a different predisposition, would find His words not only unconvincing, but ludicrous - **Jn. 5:37-44**. Cf. **8:42-48**.

- D. The gospel does not “automatically” or “mechanically” produce faith in the heart of every hearer!

III. REJECTING TRUE TESTIMONY AND ACCEPTING FALSE

- A. In the reception of the gospel, more is involved than simply the strength of the message.
- B. When human beings are listening to testimony that purports to come from God, there is always the possibility that some will reject the testimony even though it truly does come from God - **Jn. 10:22-26**. Cf. **Jn. 8:45**.
- C. Not only that, there is the corresponding possibility that testimony from some other source will be accepted even though it is NOT from God - **Jn. 5:41-44**.
- D. In each case, the hearts of the hearers influence the outcome as well as the message itself.
- E. In the Scriptures, therefore, we are frequently urged to be careful in drawing our conclusions - **1 Jn. 4:1**.

IV. MUST WE BE DOUBTFUL ABOUT EVERY IDEA THAT IS DISPUTED?

- A. Some worry about the fact that the gospel of Christ does not compel universal assent. If the evidence for the gospel is so strong, how can there be those who fail to see it?
- B. But there is no such thing as a proposition so evident that no one can reject it.
 - 1. The human mind has never held a thought on any subject that is not disputable in some kind of way.
 - 2. There are, after all, some who still seriously maintain that the earth is flat, and if we must remain tentative about any proposition that does not compel universal assent, then we shall have to avoid being dogmatic about the rotundity of the earth.
 - 3. And if we have to put a question mark over anything that is not unanimously agreed upon, then we can hardly be sure even that we ourselves exist, since there are serious philosophers who deny that.
- C. The truth of a proposition can't be determined by majority vote, and it would be foolish to question Jesus' testimony to God simply because there are many who reject it.
- D. The evidence for the gospel does not overwhelm the will of those who don't wish to believe it - **Mt. 23:37**.
- E. Instead, the gospel *invites* acceptance by those who are seeking God - **Mt. 11:28-30**.

V. THE DIFFERENCE IS IN THE HEART OF THE HEARER

- A. Those who are not seeking and whose hearts are not inclined toward God will see little sense in the words that Jesus said He brought from God.
- B. Strong language is used in the Gospel of John to describe the heart that is closed to the truth of Jesus' testimony - **Jn. 12:37-41**.
- C. Jesus described those who were honestly seeking God as being "of" God - **Jn. 8:42-47; 10:25-27**.
- D. Ultimately, our attitude toward obeying God is the thing that determines whether we find Jesus' testimony credible. It is the honest *intent to obey God* that opens our eyes to see the truth of the gospel - **Jn. 7:16,17**. Cf. **Lk. 8:15; Jn. 5:44**.
- E. And perhaps we can be even more specific: it comes down to our attitude toward *repentance* - **Jn. 3:19-21**. Cf. **2 Thess. 2:11,12**.
- F. In applying this principle to other people, however, there is a need for extreme caution.
 - 1. It would be arrogant to dismiss anyone who disagrees with us as not loving the truth.
 - 2. The fact is, the attitude of our neighbor may be better than our own.
 - 3. Have we honestly considered that our neighbor may be right and we wrong!
 - 4. But even if we are right and our neighbor wrong, the "lead" we have in understanding the truth may be the result not of our having a better attitude, but of our having had a "head start" in being exposed to the truth earlier in life.
 - 5. Rather than dismissing our neighbors as having poor attitudes, we need to keep asking ourselves, "Have we made the case for the gospel as strong as it *can* be made?"
- G. But *attitude does affect our "hearing,"* so we *each* need to ask ourselves whether we are:
 - 1. Honestly seeking God.
 - 2. Willing to be obedient to God.
 - 3. Willing to repent.
- H. The honesty of our intent to obey God is measured not by our words, but by the promptness with which we have obeyed the truths of God that we have already encountered.

Conclusion

- A. God's testimony produces saving faith only in the hearts of those willing to repent and obey Him - **Jn. 7:17**.
- B. The gospel of Christ is the great "watershed" of humanity: our destiny is determined by our response to it - **Jn. 12:47,48**.

Faith in the Goodness of God

Introduction

- A. Text: **Jn. 17:25,26.**
- B. If the evidence tells us that there is a God, then God is an objective reality that must be accepted — regardless of what kind of God He is.
- C. If God was all-knowing and all-powerful but neither loving nor just, we would still have to deal with the reality of His existence — but dealing with Him would be a fearful necessity.
- D. The wonder of the gospel of Christ, however, is that it gives us reason to believe that the God who truly exists — the God who created us — is benevolently inclined toward us!
- E. Our faith, then, can be not only in the *reality of God's existence*, but also in the *goodness of His character* - **Hb. 11:6.**

I. WHAT THE INCARNATION TEACHES US

- A. As the One sent from heaven to bring us the truth about God, everything Jesus ever said or did was meant to foster faith in God - **Jn. 12:44.**
- B. But what we are encouraged to believe is not merely that God exists, or even that He is powerful. Much more than that, we are urged to believe, based on the sending of His own Son to us, that God's intention toward toward us is kind and loving - **Jn. 17:25,26.**
- C. The gospel of Christ presents Jesus' coming into the world as an act of *grace* - **Jn. 1:14-18.**
- D. To accept the truth that Jesus was sent into the world by a loving God is to be moved to love God in return.

II. WHAT THE MIRACLES TEACH US

- A. The amazing thing about Jesus Christ is not just the *fact* of the miracles — it is what those

- miracles imply as to the character and will of God - **Jn. 7:21-24**.
- B. The miracles manifested Jesus' glory and honor - **Jn. 2:11; 5:19-23**.
 - C. But they also demonstrated that God can be depended on to *care for us* and *act in our best interests* - **Mk. 8:13-21**.

III. WHAT THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS TEACH US

- A. The single text in the Gospel of John that most people are familiar with, is one which speaks of God's love in giving His Son for us - **Jn. 3:16,17**.
- B. The death and resurrection of His Son demonstrated not only God's power, but His character, His willingness to help us - **Rom. 5:6-8; 8:32**.
- C. Also, in the death and resurrection of Jesus, God demonstrated that His power over us is subservient to His love for us - **Jn. 15:9-13**.

IV. FAITH AND LOVE

- A. Faith in Jesus' testimony to the goodness of God is at the heart of Christianity.
- B. But if we truly believe that Jesus was sent from God, then we must accept God's goodness as *more than an intellectual theory*. We must make a real, day-to-day *commitment* to that truth, and we must maintain it for the rest of our lives, *even in the darkest hours of doubt and temptation*.
- C. When John explains to us what "faith" is, no less in his Epistles and in Revelation than in the Gospel of John, it is primarily the goodness of God that he would have us believe.
 - 1. "And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him" (**1 Jn. 4:16**).
 - 2. If we "believe" anything less than this, then our faith in Christ is not yet fully formed.
- D. The ultimate result of "faith" is not merely that we *believe* in God, but that we *love* Him - **Jn. 17:25,26**.

V. "FEED MY SHEEP"

- A. Real love for God and His Son will show up in the care we give to God's people - **Jn. 21:15-17**. Cf. **13:12-15; 1 Jn. 4:20-5:1**.

- B. Jesus demonstrated the *self-sacrificial* nature of God's love for us, and we show gratitude for that by loving others with *the same kind of love* - **Jn. 15:12,13**.
- C. The love that Christians have for one another is to be one of their *distinguishing characteristics* - **Jn. 13:34,35**.

Conclusion

- A. Everything Jesus did was intended to prove that God is *real* and that He *wants to save us*.
- B. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (**Jn. 3:16,17**).
- C. “And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him” (**1 Jn. 4:16**).

If We Have Faith, Then We Must Be Faithful

Introduction

- A. Text: **Jn. 8:31,32.**
- B. The faith that leads to eternal life is that which produces a lifelong faithfulness to God.
- C. We will not continue to be numbered among the disciples if we do not “abide in” Jesus’ word, and the truth, as powerful as it is, will not set us free if we don’t maintain our grasp of it - **Jn. 8:31,32.**

I. A FAITH THAT RESPONDS FAITHFULLY

- A. Is the quality of our faith such that Jesus can have faith in our faith? Cf. **Jn. 2:23-25.**
- B. Saving faith is a faith that steadfastly “confesses” Christ - **Jn. 12:42,43.**
- C. We must not only acknowledge or “accept” the truth, we must make a penitent, obedient, faithful response to it - **Col. 2:6.**
- D. The love produced by our faith must be a love in deed as well as word - **1 Jn. 3:18.**

II. “KEEPING” THE WORD OF CHRIST

- A. In Revelation, a blessing is pronounced on the person “who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it” (**Rev. 1:3**).
- B. If we love Christ, we will “keep” His word - **Jn. 14:15,23,24.**
- C. It takes “patience” (endurance) to “keep the faith”: “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (**Rev. 14:12**). Cf. **2 Tim. 4:7.**

III. “ABIDING” IN CHRIST

- A. We are commanded to “abide” in Christ - **Jn. 15:4-8**.
- B. As the “Faithful and True Witness” (**Rev. 3:14**), Jesus could say, “I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (**Jn. 15:10**).
- C. Similarly, He said, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love” (**Jn. 15:10**).

IV. WHAT BEING A “MARTYR” MEANS

- A. We are called upon to risk death rather than deny what we have said is true about Jesus Christ - **Rev. 2:13**.
- B. Even when it was dangerous to verbally acknowledge who He was, Jesus did not back down from the truth - **Jn. 18:3-6,37**.
- C. Like Him, we are to confess the truth — we are to openly admit who He is and what our relationship to Him is, even if this should mean our death - **Rev. 6:9; 12:11**.
- D. To unashamedly confess the truth about Christ is to make the same “good confession” that He did - **1 Tim. 6:12,13**.
- E. If we know the truth about Jesus Christ, we ought to be “unable” to hide it - **Ac. 4:20**. Cf. **Jer. 20:9**.

V. LIFELONG FAITHFULNESS

- A. Many accept the evidence for the truth about Jesus Christ and begin living as Christians, but at some point suffer “shipwreck” concerning the faith - **1 Tim. 1:19**.
- B. Such is the most tragic thing that can befall a human being - **2 Pt. 2:20-22**.
- C. As important as faith is, it must be “added to”: “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (**2 Pt. 1:5-11**).

- D. We are called upon to be faithful until (or, unto) death - **Rev. 2:10**.
- E. It is necessary for each of us periodically to “examine” ourselves as to whether we are “in the faith” (**2 Cor. 13:5**).

Conclusion

- A. The message of the Gospel of John is “faith” — the message of Revelation is “faithfulness.”
- B. “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (**Jn. 8:31,32**).