

**Dear Aebi: "Are John 3:31-36
the words of John the Baptist,
of John the Apostle, or of Jesus?"**



Commentators and translators are divided in their views about this and it is not easy to decide, since the only guide we have in the original Greek text is the context (There were no quotation marks). The New King James Version, the New American Standard Version, and the New International Version all put verses 27-36 in quotation marks so as to ascribe all of it to John the Baptist, though the NIV says in a footnote that some end the quotation after verse 30. The Revised Standard Version and the New RSV end the quotation marks after verse 30, but include footnotes saying some interpreters continue the quotation through verse 36. The King James Version and the American Standard Version (1901) use no quotation marks, so they leave it up to the reader to decide.

Commentators are also divided, though a majority favor verses 31-36 being the words of John the Baptist. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown; Macleod, Dummelow, McGarvey, Barnes, Butler, and Hendriksen think verses 27-36 are all the words of John the Baptist. Pack, Meyer, Johnson, and Westcott think verses 31-36 are the words of John the Apostle.

It doesn't really matter since we hold it all to be inspired by God. When the apostle wrote the fourth Gospel, he was either reporting John's words or commenting on them. Both Johns were guided by the Holy Spirit in what they said, and the verses in question affirm that the words of Jesus were God's by the guidance of the Spirit without measure. Verse 31 contrasts Jesus and John: John is of earth, while Jesus is of heaven. Thus verse 31 is a continuation of the thought of verses 28-30.

What matters is the message of John 3:26-36, which falls into four points made by one or both Johns:

- (1) John the Baptist is but the one sent to prepare the way for Jesus; it is Jesus who is the bridegroom, the Son of God, and John must fade into the background while Jesus comes to the forefront [26-31].
- (2) Jesus came from heaven with a message which most will not receive a message that is God speaking. The words are God's words, guided by the Spirit, which Jesus has without measure.
- (3) God the Father loves Jesus the Son and has given Him authority over everything.
- (4) It is imperative to obey Jesus, for eternal life is the reward of believing and obeying Him, while refusing to obey Christ brings the wrath of God upon you.

Both the KJV and NKJV err in translating this verse He who believes. . .he who does not believe.

In the ASV, RSV, and NRSV, as in the Greek text, it is Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath--NRSV.

Charles Aebi