

# South American DIVISION

## ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

July • Aug • Sept 2009

ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Loved and Loving:

# John's Epistles

Unions	Churches	Members	Population*
Austral Union Conference	578	120,875	48,809,000
Bolivia Union Mission	278	205,950	9,815,200
Central Brazil Union Conference	908	193,897	4,804,000
Chile Union Mission	555	123,168	16,598,000
East Brazil Union Conference	971	157,870	37,813,000
Ecuador Union Mission	149	76,846	13,473,000
North Brazil Union Mission	1,608	351,376	20,753,000
North Peru Union Mission	936	313,022	5,157,000
Northeast Brazil Union Mission	1,237	290,492	44,830,000
South Brazil Union Conference	761	158,400	28,507,000
South Peru Union Mission	896	329,392	14,150,000
West Central Brazil Union Mission	461	95,003	14,379,000
<b>Totals</b>	<b>9,338</b>	<b>2,416,291</b>	<b>259,088,000</b>

\*2007 Figures



### Mission Projects

Our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help the South American Division with these projects:

- 1 Dormitory, Adventist Amazonia College, a new school in northern Brazil.
- 2 Upgrade classrooms, dormitories, and cafeteria at Adventist Technical Institute, Santo Domingo, Ecuador.
- 3 Network and upgrade Radio Nuevo Tiempo, Ecuador.

For more information, visit [www.adventistmission.org](http://www.adventistmission.org)

Map not drawn to scale

Where legally possible, offerings will go to these projects; otherwise special arrangement will be made with the General Conference for distribution of funds based on the laws of the countries where these offerings are collected.



\*EAQ090701\*

LOVED AND LOVING: JOHN'S EPISTLES

July • Aug • Sept 2009



SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST CHURCH



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# The Johannine

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In 2007 a popular science magazine (*Wired*) had a cover article titled “What We Don’t Know About . . .” The article then ran short pieces on such unanswered mysteries as “Why Do We Sleep?” “Is Time an Illusion?” “What’s at the Earth’s Core?” “What Is the Universe Made Of?” and “Why Can’t We Predict the Weather?”

Even after hundreds of years of scientific advancement, on such basics, *we’re still in the dark!*

Fortunately, on the most basic of all questions (and by far more important than “What’s at the earth’s core?”)—questions such as “How did we get here?” “Why are we here?” and “Where are we going?”—we haven’t been left to grope in darkness. Instead, God has revealed to us, in the Bible, the answers to these fundamental concerns. And among those revelations given to us in Scripture, we have the writings of John the evangelist.

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*“In Jesus we find the answers to the most important questions.”*

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This quarter, instead of studying John’s Gospel (his own inspired eyewitness account of Jesus) or the book of Revelation (which he also wrote), we’re going to study his three letters. Though addressed to certain churches and individuals in his time, they deal with issues relevant to us today, issues such as false doctrine, sin, love, apostasy, and obedience. But most important of all, they deal with Jesus Christ, the One through whom we were created (“How did we get here?”), the One who gives our existence meaning and purpose (“Why are we here?”), and the One who promises to come again and raise us to eternal life (“Where are we going?”). In short, in Jesus we find the

# Epistles

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answers to the most important questions.

As with many of the letters of the New Testament, John's don't occur in a vacuum. On the contrary, they were written to deal with issues facing some churches at that time, including the nature of Christ, which for John wasn't mere abstract theology but a topic that impacted the Christian's view of truth. For John, to deny that Jesus Christ "has come in the flesh" would ultimately lead to a view of sin and redemption that radically differs from the Bible's teaching. It would lead to a different dynamic within the community of believers and to a different relationship to the "world." Finally, it would lead to apostasy and ruin. Hence, the importance of this theme.

Indeed, while discussing the passages and themes of these epistles, we need to keep in mind that they are all related to Jesus. Whenever we discuss them, we also discuss who Jesus is, what He has done for us, and what He promises to do for us.

Thus, the three epistles of John speak to issues relevant for the church today. We would do well to listen to them, because we believe that ultimately it is God who is speaking to us through John's words, the God who—though not revealing to us answers to such questions as "What's at the earth's core?"—has revealed to us truths about a greater and firmer foundation upon which we can rest: our Creator and Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

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Disheartened and unsure of her relationship with God, Mariana turned on the radio to listen to music and forget her troubles. But instead of music, she heard a man speaking to her of God's love.

When Edwin lost his sight, he fell into a deep, angry depression that drove his family away. Alone, he turned on his radio to forget his loneliness and heard a man tell him, "God loves you and wants to help you."



Elena ran to her room and turned on the radio. Her favorite children's program was coming on, and she didn't want to miss it. The stories of Bible characters and everyday heroes help her deal with growing up.



Last year almost 1,000 people in Ecuador asked for Bible studies after listening to the Adventist radio, Nuevo Tiempo. More than 150 were baptized as a direct result of this ministry. To reach even more people in Ecuador with the good news of salvation, they need to upgrade and network their stations. I'm glad I can help improve the ministry of radio Nuevo Tiempo this Thirteenth Sabbath. For me, it's personal.

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# Jesus *and the* Johannine Letters



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Skim over the three Epistles of John.*

**Memory Text:** “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14, NKJV).

False teachers spreading error among the saints? Deviant views on the nature of Christ? Power struggles in the church? Theological errors spreading in the pews? Folk needing assurance of salvation? Others needing to know that faith must lead to obedience to the law?

Sounds like our church today, right?

These, however, were some of the issues that John dealt with almost two thousand years ago in his three short epistles in the New Testament.

How true were Solomon's words, “There is nothing new under the sun” (*Eccles. 1:9, NKJV*)!

John, though, does not concentrate on the problems only. He points to God the Father and the Son; he portrays who They are and what They have done for us, and thus what we must do in response.

**The Week at a Glance:** Why do we believe that John wrote these epistles? To whom was he writing? What were his concerns? How does he address those concerns? What does John tell us about Jesus? What promises can we take away from these books?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 4.*

## From Whom and to Whom—Author and Recipients

The first epistle of John begins without formal introduction. For whatever reason, the author does not introduce himself. The second and third letters mention as the author a person called only “the elder.” They also inform us to whom they are addressed—an elect lady and also someone named Gaius. This information is not extensive and leaves open a number of questions; nevertheless, from the letters themselves, we can learn about the one who wrote them.

**Common** style and vocabulary seem to indicate that the author of 1, 2, and 3 John is the same. What do these three letters tell us about him? As you read, focus on, among other things, some of the terms that he uses for those he addressed in the letters (*1 John 1:1–3; 2:1, 18; 4:4; 2 John 1, 12; 3 John 1, 13, 14*).

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Obviously the author had been an eyewitness to Jesus. He also seemed to have had an intimate relationship with the church members to whom he wrote, because he called them “little children,” an expression of endearment. He maintained a leadership position in the church and more than once said that he eventually hoped to visit those to whom he was writing. The close resemblance of phrases and themes to the Gospel of John, as well as the testimony of church fathers, reveal that he was the apostle John.

All this brings up a very important point: How important that we seek to develop a kind, caring, loving relationship with those around us. It’s very clear from these letters that John loved and cared about these people and that He wanted to see them strong in the Lord. There can be little doubt that the love he expressed for them only strengthened, greatly, the power of his words. What an important lesson for all who seek to be witnesses for Jesus and the truths He has given us as a church.

**It’s one thing to have a knowledge about the nature of God, the plan of salvation, the Second Coming, and the right Sabbath day. But what happens to our witness if our lives don’t reflect the love and character of the God who created these truths? Maybe you have propositional truth? That’s good, but how much love and concern for others come with your expression of that truth?**



## What—The Content of the Epistles

In the first letter of John we find a number of important topics, even if the apostle does not seem to move forward in any kind of linear progression. This observation has led some scholars to conclude that John presents his arguments in a cyclic way; that is, he revisits his topics but from different angles. Thus, the same things are being discussed but from various perspectives.

**Read 2 John 1–13. Follow his line of thought:**

2 John 1–3 \_\_\_\_\_

2 John 4 \_\_\_\_\_

2 John 5, 6 \_\_\_\_\_

2 John 7–11 \_\_\_\_\_

2 John 12, 13 \_\_\_\_\_

In 2 John the apostle expresses his thankfulness that the lady’s children walk in the truth. He also talks about love and obedience and then focuses on the false teachers that he already mentioned in his first letter. He employs again the term *antichrist*. In his conclusion John expresses the desire to visit his audience. He also transmits greetings.

How does 3 John relate to the previous two letters, which deal with false teachers who are not mentioned in John’s last epistle? It is conceivable that all three letters deal with a similar situation but from different perspectives. While 1 John and 2 John warn against false teachers, 3 John may show how in one particular instance church leadership tried to control the problem.

**In many parts of the world, the idea of doctrinal orthodoxy sounds so medieval; it reminds people of such things as the Inquisition, when folk were tortured and killed because they weren’t orthodox enough in their theology. Hence, many shy away from the idea of orthodoxy altogether, arguing instead that all you need is love, regardless of teaching. John, though, whatever his strong emphasis on love, didn’t shy away from dealing with theological error. What should this tell us regarding how we should act in the face of theological error in our own church?**

## Why—The Purpose of Writing These Letters

**Repeatedly,** John tells us why he wrote his first letter. What is he saying?

1 John 1:4 \_\_\_\_\_

1 John 2:12–14 \_\_\_\_\_

1 John 5:13 \_\_\_\_\_

All these statements are positive and reaffirming. However, the context shows that they must be understood within the context of serious problems in the churches to which 1 John was addressed. This letter makes strong statements about false teachers. They are called *antichrists*. The term is found four times in 1 John and once in 2 John. Otherwise, it is not used anywhere else in the Bible.

These antichrists had erroneous ideas about Jesus Christ, ideas that also affected their Christian lifestyle. John, obviously, felt the need to deal with these teachings, and he did so in a powerful and uncompromising manner.

Nevertheless, the author portrays a positive picture of true Christianity and focuses on its positive nature. In countering the theological error and the ethical error of the false teachers, John argues in favor of the unity of Father and Son, acceptance of divine forgiveness, and a life governed by the principle of love.

While he encourages church members and warns against inadequate views of Christ and Christian behavior, he may even hope to win back some of those who have left the church.

In 2 John and 3 John, the reasons he wrote the letters are not mentioned, but those reasons are discernible. The purpose of 2 John is to warn church members against the erroneous teachings and ethics of the false teachers mentioned in 1 John.

According to 3 John a power struggle was going on. Diotrephes was attempting to usurp all authority. Apparently by using the problem of heresy, he was trying to establish his own power base.

**Though not downplaying the seriousness of these false teachings, John deals with them by emphasizing the positive. There is an important principle here for us. How easy it is to get so caught up in fighting error that we focus on it instead of truth. What's your own way of dealing with what you deem wrong: Do you focus on the error at the expense of truth? How can you start training yourself to deal with problems in a more positive manner?**

## Jesus in the Johannine Epistles

Jesus is found throughout 1 John. He is at the center of this book. Who is He according to this epistle?

1 John 1:1 \_\_\_\_\_

1 John 1:2, 5:20 \_\_\_\_\_

1 John 1:3, 4:15 \_\_\_\_\_

1 John 2:1 \_\_\_\_\_

1 John 2:8 \_\_\_\_\_

1 John 2:22 \_\_\_\_\_

1 John 4:14 \_\_\_\_\_

1 John 5:20 \_\_\_\_\_

Although in 1 John God the Father is mentioned more frequently than Jesus, the problem of former and maybe active church members is with the Son. Church members and false teachers may have agreed largely on the nature of the Father. They disagreed, however, when it came to Jesus, as to His humanity and His divinity. The issue was whether or not Jesus “has come in the flesh” (1 John 4:2, NKJV) and “is the Christ” (1 John 2:22, NKJV).

In the midst of all this, John clearly maintains that it is impossible to separate Father and Son. Even in our days some people, including some Christians, think they can have a relationship with God the Father without caring about Jesus. For them Jesus is just a wonderful human being. John, however, is clear: If you know about Jesus but do not accept Him as the Messiah and the Son of God, you cannot have a saving relationship with God the Father.

**First John contains 105 verses. Jesus is mentioned in about 45 of them. What does that tell me about the place Jesus has in this letter? How central is Jesus in your own understanding of truth? That is, might you be too occupied with dates, charts, and doctrines as opposed to knowing Jesus and His forgiveness and grace for you? If so, how can you change? Why must you change? See John 17:3.**

## Jesus' Ministry in John's Epistles

The Johannine letters not only portray Jesus from different perspectives, telling us that He is from the beginning (*1 John 1:1*), has come in the flesh (*1 John 4:2*), and remained righteous, pure, and without sin (*1 John 2:1; 3:3, 5*); they also emphasize His ministry and work.

Who Jesus is and what He has done are deeply related. To deny His divinity or humanity also means to deny His ministry as Savior, as example, and as Lord. Salvation through Jesus depends on Jesus' divine-human nature. Without a proper understanding of Jesus' divine-human nature, you can end up with a different understanding of the plan of salvation and the problem of sin. Sin may be taken lightly or even denied (*1 John 1:6-10*), an attitude that will surely, one way or another, influence Christian behavior and ethics.

**What** does John tell us about Jesus' ministry and work? That is, what promises are made to us because of what Jesus has done or is doing for us now?

*1 John 1:7* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 2:25* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 2:28* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 3:8* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 3:16* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 5:18* \_\_\_\_\_

*2 John 3* \_\_\_\_\_

What Jesus has done for us as our Savior and what He is doing for us as our Advocate require a response on our part. Forgiveness of sin, the assurance of salvation, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the hope of the Second Coming, and the promise that we will be like Him and see Him as He is cannot leave our hearts cold. We believe in Him, love Him, follow Him, obey Him, and abide in Him and in His teachings.

**Look at some of the promises listed above. Which ones mean the most to you, and why? Which ones, perhaps, are you not experiencing in your life as you should? Why might that be, and what can you do in order to realize, even better, the richness of these promises?**

**Further Study:** Read 1 John in one sitting to get an overview of this important epistle.

“As the years went by and the number of believers grew, John labored with increasing fidelity and earnestness for his brethren. The times were full of peril for the church. Satanic delusions existed everywhere. . . . Some who professed Christ claimed that His love released them from obedience to the law of God. On the other hand, many taught that it was necessary to observe the Jewish customs and ceremonies; that a mere observance of the law, without faith in the blood of Christ, was sufficient for salvation. Some held that Christ was a good man, but denied His divinity. Some who pretended to be true to the cause of God were deceivers, and in practice they denied Christ and His gospel. Living themselves in transgression, they were bringing heresies into the church. Thus many were being led into the mazes of skepticism and delusion.

“John was filled with sadness as he saw these poisonous errors creeping into the church. He saw the dangers to which the church was exposed, and he met the emergency with promptness and decision. The epistles of John breathe the spirit of love. It seems as if he wrote with a pen dipped in love. But when he came in contact with those who were breaking the law of God, yet claiming that they were living without sin, he did not hesitate to warn them of their fearful deception.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 553, 554.

### Discussion Questions:

**1** Read the Ellen G. White quote listed above. Suppose she were writing for the church today. What might she write? That is, what are the theological challenges that the church is facing today? In what ways are they similar to the ones John was dealing with? What can we learn from John that could help us as we deal with these errors?

**2** As Adventists, we believe we have been given a great deal of truth, truth that many other churches do not have. (After all, if they had these truths, then what purpose would we as Adventists serve?) At the same time, how could we, as a church, better reflect the love and kindness that must go along with our witness? How can you, either as a class or as an individual, help your local church better manifest the love of God? It’s frightening to think of how many people who, attracted to our message, have never accepted it because of the lack of kindness, grace, and love expressed by the church. We can and must do better.



# A God to Love: Part 1

by CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN

Tolga lives in Turkey. From his youth he sensed that God was so much more than the rules that religious leaders had imposed or the cruel and punishing god mothers used to threaten their children. He yearned to find God, to really know Him. But he knew no one who could teach him.

Tolga worked in the tourist industry, where he could use his language ability to talk with visitors to his country. He hoped that one of them would tell him more about the God of the universe.

One day a German man stayed in Tolga's hotel. Tolga noticed that he was different from other tourists. He was gentle and humble and made no demands on people. *What makes him so different?* Tolga wondered. He talked with the man who seemed genuinely interested in Tolga. The two became friends. When Tolga asked about his religion, the man told him he was a Seventh-day Adventist Christian.

Tolga had never heard of Adventists, but he wanted to learn. The hotel guest told him that Adventists accept Jesus as their Savior and Lord; that they follow the Ten Commandments, including keeping the Sabbath as God's holy day; and that they look forward to Jesus' second coming. Tolga had heard of Jesus, but not the Sabbath. He asked the man to explain.

This hotel guest spent the rest of his vacation introducing Tolga to Jesus. When the man left Turkey, he gave Tolga a Turkish Bible. Tolga promised to read it. The two men corresponded several times over the next several months. Then the German man told Tolga of a friend who lived in the same city. He gave Tolga his friend's phone number, and Tolga promised to call him.

The German man's friend, Berk, was humble, just like Tolga's friend! Berk told Tolga that he was an Adventist pastor. *So that's why he is like his friend!* Tolga thought. *This must be what most Adventist people are like.* Pastor Berk offered to teach Tolga the Bible.

When Tolga left his job over problems with his boss, Pastor Berk asked him if he would like to translate some German Bible lessons into Turkish. Tolga accepted the offer, which gave him work and taught him more about the Bible. Pastor Berk invited Tolga to join fellow believers on Sabbath. Tolga went when he could.

For two years Tolga attended worship and studied with the pastor. His desire to be like these Christians—humble, strong, honest—grew. One day he told the pastor that he had accepted Jesus as his Savior and wanted to be baptized. But what would his family say?

(continued next week)

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CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN is editor of Adventist Mission. All names have been changed.

# Experiencing *the Word of Life*



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Deut. 4:1–4; 1 Cor. 15:4–8; 1 John 1:1–5; Rev. 19:13.*

**Memory Text:** “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ” (*1 John 1:3, NIV*).

In court a man stands charged with murder. He swears, vociferously, that he is innocent, that he didn't do it, and that he wasn't even at the scene when the crime occurred. He sounds very convincing too. From his words alone, one could be tempted to believe him.

Then, however, witnesses appear. One after another, the eyewitnesses say the same thing: They saw the accused at the scene of the crime, and they saw him (and even in some cases heard him) commit the crime. Though individual details differ, depending on where they were at the time of the incident, their eyewitness accounts are overwhelming, and the man's guilt becomes obvious.

In a similar way John introduces his first letter by claiming that he belongs to the circle of eyewitnesses who, having seen and personally experienced Jesus, are able to share this life-transforming information with others.

**The Week at a Glance:** Why is Jesus the “Word of life”? What does John hope to accomplish by writing this introduction? How can we, even today, be eyewitnesses to Jesus? What role does community have in the life of a Christian?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 11.*

## The Introduction to John's First Letter *(1 John 1:1-4)*

**Read** 1 John 1:1-4. What is John saying to us with those words? What hope can you take from them for yourself? Also, why do you believe him?

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John begins by pointing out that he, together with others, is an eyewitness of “the Word of life.” Verse 2 further explains this “life,” and together with the first part of verse 3, stresses its proclamation.

**What** two things does John say will come as a result of his declaration about “the Word of life”?

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In verses 1 and 3, John makes seven statements before he finishes the sentence: (1) What was from the beginning, (2) what we have heard, (3) what we have seen, (4) what we have looked at, (5) what we have touched, (6) what we have seen, and (7) what we have heard. Then he ends: “We proclaim to you . . . , so that you also may have fellowship” (*vs. 3, NIV*). In verse 2, which is an insertion and clarification, a fourfold enumeration ends with the phrase “and we proclaim to you the eternal life” (*NIV*).

The point in all this seems to be that John wants us to know, for ourselves, the reality of God that he himself had experienced through Jesus. He wants us to know, for ourselves, the eternal life, the fellowship, and the joy that we can have through Jesus, the same Jesus he himself had heard, seen, and touched.

**What is your own understanding, and experience, of what it means to have “joy” in the Lord? Have you ever known any Christian who is always joyous? How do we understand the promises of joy when so often, even as Christians, our lives are filled with pain and suffering?**

## First John 1 and John 1

Those who know the Gospel of John are intrigued when they begin reading the first letter of John and find an introduction similar to the introduction of John's Gospel.

**Read** 1 John 1:1–5 and compare it to John 1:1–5. What are some things that they have in common?

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Both passages begin almost identically. Both point back to a time in the past, using “the beginning,” an apparent reference to Genesis 1:1, the Creation. Both distinguish between God the Father and the Word, and both place them next to each other in close connection. Both sections also use the image of “life” and “light.” No question, there's much in common between the two sections.

But there are also differences, as well.

**What** emphases do we find in John 1:1–5 that are not seen in 1 John 1:1–5?

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John's Gospel strongly stresses Jesus as God and Jesus as Creator. Although the full title “his Son, Jesus Christ” (*NIV*) in 1 John 1:3 points to both Jesus' humanity and His divinity, the term *God* is not directly applied to Jesus in the introduction to 1 John as it is in the introduction to John's Gospel. The Gospel of John is also very clear regarding Jesus in His role as Creator. Nothing that was made—that is, nothing created—was created apart from Him. It's hard to see how John could have been more clear, not only about Christ's divinity but His creatorship, as well.

Also, 1 John emphasizes the role of eyewitnesses and their proclamation (and, hence, their authority), an emphasis not found in John's Gospel, which speaks from a more detached and less “personal” perspective.

Taken together, both sections reveal truths about Jesus that are central to the plan of salvation.

**Think about all you know about the life of Jesus. What were the things He did, said, and suffered? Also, ask yourself, Why did He do these things? As you do so, dwell on the fact that this Man was also God, the Creator. What hope and encouragement do these truths offer you? How can they help you cope with the stresses and strains of life?**

## The Word of Life (1 John 1:1, 2)

**What** do you think the phrase “Word of life” means? Why is that such an accurate term for Jesus?

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First John 1:1 mentions the “Word of life.” The term *word* is also found in John 1:1–3 and refers specifically to Jesus. In Revelation 19 the rider on the white horse is called “The Word of God” (*Rev. 19:13*) and refers to Jesus too. Because in the Johannine literature the term *word* may in certain contexts designate Jesus, in 1 John 1:1 it most likely stands for Jesus, as well.

The same is true for the term *life*. Jesus called Himself “the way, the truth, and the life” (*John 14:6*). Thus the *life* in 1 John 1:2 surely refers to Christ, as well. No wonder, then, He is the “Word of life.”

**What** other evidence from those verses shows that John was referring to Jesus when He used the phrase “Word of life”?

Though some people have argued that the phrase “Word of life” means the proclamation of the gospel, the evidence points instead to Jesus Himself. Although it is possible to hear the gospel of Jesus with one’s ears, it is more difficult to see it with the eyes. Meanwhile, it is impossible to touch with one’s hands “the Word of life,” if that phrase were referring to the gospel proclamation. To hear, see, and touch a person makes more sense than to hear, see, and touch the gospel. Furthermore, the phrase “the . . . life . . . was with the Father and has appeared to us” (*1 John 1:2, NIV*) also suggests that John had a person in mind when he mentioned the Word and the life.

**If we accept that Jesus is the “Word of life,” what does that mean for us? Look at each part of the phrase, “Word of life”. How do the following texts help us better understand what this phrase means in and of itself, and more important, what it means to us personally? Gen. 1:14, Dan. 5:23, Matt. 8:8, John 1:1–4, Acts 17:28.**

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## Eyewitnesses

Many people like to go to a soccer game, a concert, a political meeting, whatever. They want to see for themselves what is going on and want to experience the event for themselves. Afterward they are able to share what they have seen and heard. Others are involuntary eyewitnesses, for instance, of an accident or a crime, and may be called to witness in court.

The apostles were eyewitnesses of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. This "Christ event" influenced them to such an extent that they could not refrain from communicating it to others.

This is what we have with John. In 1 John 1:1–4, John claims to have been an eyewitness to Jesus. He buttresses his claims by saying that he not only saw Jesus but touched Him and heard Him, as well. John repeats those claims in the verses, trying to emphasize the reality of his personal experience with Jesus.

**John** isn't the only biblical writer to make some powerful claims about eyewitness events. What do the following verses have in common with 1 John 1:1–3? Who is speaking, and what was the background for their claims?

*Deut. 4:1–9* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Acts 4:20* \_\_\_\_\_

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*1 Cor. 15:4–8* \_\_\_\_\_

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Today we cannot be direct eyewitnesses, at least not to the events of Jesus' life or to the historical events of biblical history. But that doesn't mean we still can't be eyewitnesses to the reality of Christ and what He has done for us. In some ways, especially in a postmodern world, our own personal story, our own personal "eyewitness" account, can be a more powerful witness to the reality and goodness of God than can the historical events depicted in the Bible.

**What is your own "eyewitness" account of Jesus? Write it up and bring it to class.**

## Fellowship of the Saints

Someone has stated that God has no grandchildren, only children. A Christian experience is not a hereditary experience. We need to make a decision, in our own hearts, to give ourselves to Jesus. Someone else can no more do that for us than someone else can sneeze for us. We have to make the choice ourselves, and it has to be a complete surrender to Him. In this sense, being a Christian is a very personal and solitary experience.

At the same time, in those first few verses John adds another dimension to what it means to be a Christian. John invites us to accept his testimony about Jesus and thereby experience fellowship with Jesus and other Christians. In other words, the proclamation of Jesus is community building. To accept Jesus as Savior and Lord, as Giver of eternal life, means to be added to the family of believers.

### **According** to 1 John 1:3, what are the dimensions of this fellowship?

Jesus Himself has established His community or church (*Matt. 16:18*), and He cares for it the way a shepherd would care for a flock (*John 10:14–16*). Jesus and His church belong together. The proclamation of Jesus and the gospel bring people into fellowship not only with the Father and the Son but also with other believers. There is not only an unseen heavenly connection but also a very real visible connection among these believers. Christians are blessed by the fact that they do not have to master their lives alone and in isolation from others, but have become part of Christ's community and family on earth.

### **How** is this Christian fellowship in its ideal form portrayed in the New Testament? See *Acts 2:42–47, Rom. 12:3–17*.

Our passage in 1 John ends with verse 4. John's goal is not only that people enjoy fellowship with God and with believers but also that they have their joy completed.

Verse 4 is, perhaps, looking back at the preceding verses. Our joy is complete because Jesus, "that eternal life," has appeared. The verse also may look forward to the rest of John's first epistle, in which Jesus and salvation through Him, as well as a life with God (which is a life of love), are unfolded. It finally may envision the future appearance of our Lord. Thus, 1 John 1:1–4 could encompass the time from the pre-existent Christ to the final consummation at Christ's second coming.

**What has been your own experience regarding Christian fellowship? What can you do differently? How can you better enjoy, and help others enjoy, the community of fellowship that's our privilege as Christians to have?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Peace, Be Still,” p. 340, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“John, who has personally known Christ, desires to share his knowledge with his readers in order that they may enjoy the same fellowship he is already enjoying with the Father and the Son. In the course of expressing this loving desire, he asserts the divinity, the eternity, and the incarnation—and consequent humanity—of the Son. This wondrous knowledge he conveys in simple but emphatic language so that readers, in his own day and in ours, may have no doubt concerning the foundation of the Christian faith and the nature and work of Jesus Christ.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 629.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, go over together your own “eyewitness” accounts of Jesus. What did they have in common? In what ways did they differ? What can you learn from the experience of others that can help you better know the Lord? At the same time, what have you witnessed that, in sharing, could benefit others?
- 2 What is it about eyewitness testimonies that can be so powerful? At the same time, why should we not believe every eyewitness account? After all, people do lie, or they simply don’t see things accurately. Have you ever thought you saw something, only to realize later that you were wrong? If so, share your experience with the class. At the same time, what is it about the eyewitness accounts depicted in the Bible that give them so much credibility? Do we believe that they’re true because they are in the Bible? Or are they in the Bible because they are true? Or is it both?
- 3 Go over this whole question of fellowship. Why is fellowship so important to all believers? What happens to those who tend to strike out on their own, apart from any body of Christ? At the same time, what potential dangers arise from being too dependent on others or on the church? How do we strike the right balance?
- 4 What can you do to help your local church be more receptive to the needs of its members, thus helping it fulfill some of the ideals of fellowship, as seen in aspects of the early church? In what areas can your church do better?

## A God to Love: Part 2

by CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN

Tolga yearned to know God, but he couldn't find anyone in his homeland who could teach him. When a Christian tourist introduced him to Jesus, Tolga realized that Jesus was the true God, whom he could love and serve.

Tolga's family pressured him to marry, but he didn't know any Christian girls. His family arranged for him to marry Esin. Tolga and Esin had little chance to get acquainted before their marriage, but Tolga prayed that God would lead. He felt he dare not tell her that he was a Christian.

One day church members planned a trip to the mountains. Tolga's wife had just given birth, and he was afraid she wouldn't want to go. But she agreed to go. They boarded the bus and sat down. She found a paper and began reading it. "What book is this from?" she asked him, showing him the paper. He read the paper and began to sweat. "It's—it's from a holy book," he stammered, "the Bible."

She continued reading. "This is good," she said. "I want to read more. Where can I get a Bible?"

Tolga was astounded. Before he could answer, the church leader said, "I can give you a Bible."

Tolga realized that God was saying it was time to tell his wife that he was a Christian.

He had prayed for a way to tell her, and now God had opened the door with a piece of paper!

The next day was Sabbath, Esin's first Sabbath. He prayed that God would open her heart to receive the truth. In Sabbath School he watched Esin as she listened carefully to the leader's remarks and even asked questions. The sermon seemed prepared just for her. The speaker spoke about common points between her religion and Christianity. He even read from her holy book about Christ's second coming.

Esin reads the Bible whenever she has time, and she shares what she's learning with customers in her shop. "She puts me to shame!" Tolga says. "I didn't dare share my faith with my wife, but she shares Jesus with everyone! Recently she asked for two Bibles to give to friends!"

Esin attends church when she can and is progressing on her journey to Jesus. Tolga is learning from her to be brave in sharing the gospel.

The church in Turkey has fewer than 100 members. Part of a recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering went to help the church in Turkey reach out to the millions who don't know Christ. Thank you for your part in sharing the gospel in this great land.

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CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN is editor of *Adventist Mission*. All names have been changed.

# Walking *in the Light*: Turning Away From Sin



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *John 3:19, 8:12, Rom. 3:10–20, 1 Tim. 1:15, 1 John 1:5–2:2.*

**Memory Text:** “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, NASB).

In 1982 an unusual work of modern art went on display. It was a shotgun affixed to a chair. The artwork could be viewed by sitting in the chair and looking directly into the gun barrel. The problem was that the gun was loaded and set on a timer to fire at an undetermined moment within the next hundred years. Amazingly enough, people waited in lines to sit and stare into the shell's path, although they knew that the gun could go off at any moment.

Talk about tempting fate!

Unfortunately, people do the same thing with sin, thinking that they can stare it in the face and still get away unharmed. Unlike the gun, however, sin—unless dealt with—definitely will kill them.

This week John looks at the problem of sin and its solution in Jesus Christ.

**The Week at a Glance:** What does the Bible mean when it calls God “light”? What kind of errors regarding the reality of sin did John seek to deal with in these early verses? What promises does John present to us as the remedy for the sin in our lives? Why do we need those promises?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 18.*



## The Light (1 John 1:5)

**Read** 1 John 1:5. What does John mean that “God is light”? After all, light is merely a physical phenomenon, a form of energy made up of photons. What point is John making? See Pss. 27:1, 36:9, Matt. 4:16, John 3:19, 8:12, 12:46, 1 Tim. 6:16.

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Light is used in reference to both Jesus and the Father. Light is God’s glory, and it points to Him as the One who brings salvation. The image also emphasizes the concept of truth and revelation. And, especially in our immediate context, it stresses His moral qualities of righteousness, holiness, and perfection (*see also 1 John 2:9*).

**Why** is John not content to say that God is “light” but adds that “in him there is no darkness at all”?

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By adding this phrase, the apostle underlines in strongest possible terms God’s perfection and His separation from sin. He is not comparable to the Greek or Roman gods, in whom one supposedly would find virtues and vices combined. God is pure holiness, pure goodness, pure righteousness. He is, in a sense, as opposite to sin as darkness is to light.

John’s mention of darkness, meanwhile, introduces a new element, one that sets the stage for what follows. As fallen beings, steeped in sin, humans belong by nature to the sphere of darkness rather than to the realm of light. If God is light and we are in darkness, the contrast between us and God, especially in terms of holiness and righteousness, couldn’t be greater.

**Think about darkness. What kind of emotions, images, and thoughts does it evoke in you? Write down what you come up with about darkness, about what it represents, and about how it makes you feel. Why is it such an appropriate image for sin and unholiness? Bring your responses to class.**

## The Sin Problem *(1 John 1:6, 8, 10)*

First John 1:6–10 forms a unit. After his principal statement about God’s character, John deals with some beliefs apparently circulating among the believers. It is these beliefs that he criticizes.

All five verses begin more or less in the same way, namely, with the phrase “If we.” However, we notice a marked difference among them.

**What** are some of the claims that John, in verses 6, 8, and 10, is dealing with? What false statements are being made, and what do they have in common?

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The first statement discusses fellowship with God. People claim to have fellowship with God, but in reality they walk in darkness, which means that they really aren’t walking with God.

In contrast (*vs.* 7), walking in the light results in true fellowship. Those who do that are cleansed from their sins. Therefore, to walk in darkness has to do with living in sin. Living in sin and claiming to have fellowship with God is, according to John, a lie.

The next two claims, in verses 8 and 10, also are linked with sin. Though John speaks against the practice of sin, he’s very clear about the reality of it in our lives. In verse 8 he seems to be dealing with the belief that humans are not sinful, a teaching that goes against the most basic Christian doctrine.

**Why** is John’s declaration in verse 10 so important? What are the implications of the idea that “we have not sinned”?

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Notice the progression in these verses. In verse 6, the folk are lying. In verse 8, they deceive themselves. In verse 10, they make God a liar. Obviously, John understands the reality and seriousness of the sin problem for humanity.

**How open and honest are you with yourself regarding the reality of sin in your own life? Do you tend to ignore it, justify it, or berate yourself over it? What should be your attitude toward your own struggles with sin, and what can you do in order to cultivate the right attitude? What is the right attitude?**

## Responses to the Sin Problem *(1 John 1:7, 9; 2:2)*

It's clear that in these verses John is dealing with the seriousness of sin. How does he understand sin? In 1 John 3:4 he equates sin with lawlessness. According to 1 John 5:17, sin is wrongdoing or unrighteousness. It is a departure from the will of God as revealed to us in Scripture. Sin also is opposed to truth. It alienates from God the person who commits sin, and this alienation leads to spiritual death. *Sin*, in the singular, may point to the separation of the sinner from God; in the plural, *sins*, it may point to sinful acts. However we view it, one thing is certain: Sin is real, and unless dealt with, it will destroy us.

**First** John 1:7 and 9 contain divine promises regarding the solution to the sin problem. What are those promises, and how can we make them real in our own lives? How can we experience for ourselves what God is promising us here?

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Forgiveness of sins has become possible because of Christ's death on the cross, the shedding of His blood as the sacrifice. Because we have transgressed the law and therefore deserve death, He died in our place and has set us free from the eternal condemnation that our transgression otherwise will bring us. More so, His blood purifies us from every sin.

However, from our side, confession of sins is necessary. The term *to confess* in 1 John 1:9 also can mean "to admit," "to acknowledge." The text does not mention to whom sins have to be confessed. God is certainly implied, because in the next part of the verse we hear that if sins are confessed, God is faithful and just and will forgive our sins. It may be that confession of sins includes also public confession before those who were hurt through our sins; even so, the forgiveness of sin comes only from God.

First John 1:9 also has the force of a command. We should lay our sins before God, and He will forgive us and purify us. Sinning makes us guilty; we need forgiveness. Sin makes us unclean; we need purification. Through Jesus, God has made a way for us to have both.

**What areas of your life might you need to change in order to better avail yourself of these wonderful promises? What holds you back from choosing to surrender all your sinful ways to God?**

## The Christians' Goal *(1 John 2:1)*

**In 1 John 2:1** John calls us not to sin. How should we understand this admonition?

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The context of the call here not to sin comes in the context of walking in the light, which was introduced with the statement that God is light. If we want to live in fellowship with Him and His children, we must walk in the light, and to walk in the light means to renounce sin (*1 John 2:1*).

John addresses the believers in a caring and intimate way, calling them “little children” and telling them one reason for writing his letter: They must renounce sin completely. By doing this, he is not suggesting that a completely sinless existence is possible, but he is pleading that Christians stay away from any definite act of sin.

**Why** does John balance his admonition not to sin with the phrase “and if anyone sins” (*NKJV*)? See also *1 Kings 8:46*, *Rom. 3:10–20*, *1 Tim. 1:15*.

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The discussion of sin here could have been misunderstood in the sense that someone might think that sin does not matter: “Do not claim to be without sin; you are a sinner anyway. Therefore, just live your life and do not worry about sin.”

John therefore has to balance his statements about sin, and he does this with *1 John 2:1*. The goal of a disciple of Christ is not to sin. Christians must admit that they are sinners, yet, they must seek to live without sin.

At the same time, John doesn't want to give the idea that we can be perfectly sinless. Therefore, along with his admonition against sinning, he says: “If anyone sins, we have an Advocate . . .” (*NKJV*). This is a clear acknowledgment of the reality of sin in the lives of Christians. Even consecrated and sincere Christians may commit sins. Unfortunately, sinning is always a real possibility for church members. Therefore they need help. They need someone to help them resist temptation, but they also need someone who intervenes for them after they have sinned.

**How can we learn to live with the tension of being sinners, and yet being admonished—very strongly in the Bible—not to sin?**

## The Christians' Comfort *(1 John 2:1, 2)*

First John 2:1, 2 contain wonderful statements that comfort repentant sinners and fill them with hope and courage. In spite of sin and guilt and horrible consequences that often arise from our sins, there is a solution. John has already mentioned forgiveness, or purification of sins. Now he comes back to this topic again, saying that this forgiveness has become possible through Jesus.

How? First, He is our Advocate, and He intervenes in our behalf. This Advocate is identified as the Messiah (“Christ”), and it is said that He is righteous. Righteousness was attributed to God the Father in 1 John 1:9. It is attributed to the Son in 1 John 2:1, and it’s because of His righteous character that He can intercede for us.

Second, our forgiveness is secured because, through His sacrificial death, Jesus brought about propitiation, or atonement; this means that He paid the penalty for our sins. The debt that we owed, which we could never pay, Jesus paid for us.

John therefore portrays Jesus as Sacrifice and Intercessor. In the context of the New Testament witness, this implies that Jesus lived a sinless life among us, died on the cross, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven, where He intercedes in our behalf.

The term *paraklētos*, translated “advocate” in 1 John 2, has been translated differently; for example, “comforter,” “helper,” “advocate,” “mediator,” or “intercessor” (see *John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; 1 John 2:1*). It is a person who is called to the side of someone else and who stands up for someone else. A *paraklētos* can be a person who helps a friend. In the Gospel of John the Holy Spirit is the helper. In the first Epistle of John, Jesus is the helper and intercessor (*1 John 2:1*).

When we talk about Jesus as our Advocate and take great comfort in the fact that He is instrumental in providing forgiveness for our sins, we must be careful not to give the impression that the Father is mean and harsh and must be persuaded by a go-between to forgive us. Such a picture of God is unwarranted. He is the One who sent Jesus in our behalf (*John 3:16*). Also, a few verses earlier we were told that He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us (*1 John 1:9*). Jesus does not have to pacify the Father. On the contrary, the Father is the One who has revealed, through Jesus, His desire for our salvation.

**Based on what we have just read, how do you understand the wonderful promises given us in 1 John 2:1, 2? What do they mean in terms of our daily walk with the Lord? How can you make those promises more real in your own life? What changes should those promises bring to our experience?**



**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Confession,” pp. 37–41, in *Steps to Christ*.

“ ‘If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’ The conditions of obtaining mercy from God are simple and reasonable. The Lord does not require us to do some grievous thing in order to gain forgiveness. We need not make long and wearisome pilgrimages, or perform painful penances, to commend our souls to the God of heaven or to expiate our transgression. He that ‘confesseth and forsaketh’ his sin ‘shall have mercy.’ Proverbs 28:13. In the courts above, Christ is pleading for His church—pleading for those for whom He has paid the redemption price of His blood. Centuries, ages, can never lessen the efficacy of His atoning sacrifice. Neither life nor death, height nor depth, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus; not because we hold Him so firmly, but because He holds us so fast. If our salvation depended on our own efforts, we could not be saved; but it depends on the One who is behind all the promises.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 552, 553.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, read what you wrote about the thoughts and emotions and images that the idea of “darkness” brought to you. How does that help you better understand not only what it means to be unrighteous and in sin but also what it means to walk in the light of God?
- 2 How could you help those who are so burdened with their sins and guilt that they are ready to give up on God completely? What promises and encouragement can you offer them? What examples from the Bible can you find of God forgiving some very heinous sin?
- 3 Some people believe that we have to be utterly free of all sin before we can be saved. How do you deal with this belief without, at the same time, giving the impression that sin doesn’t matter?
- 4 Someone killed most of a family of people who were not Christians and who never professed faith in Jesus. Years later, on his deathbed, the murderer confessed his deeds and accepted Christ as His Savior. How would you respond to this comment by a surviving member of the family: “So, according to you Christians, my whole family is destined for final punishment, while the person who murdered them now has the promise of heaven? Is that what your religion teaches?”

# A Better Tomorrow

by E. KIKOMEKO

Eric is 20 years old and a student at Bugema Secondary School in Uganda. His father left the family several years ago, and his mother tries to support her four children by selling vegetables and snacks she makes. But it's difficult. She managed to build a four-room mud-brick building that she rents to provide a small monthly allowance for her children.

Eric is the eldest, and the man of the house. His siblings are 15, 13, and 12. The four live in a single room, and Eric supports them by working during his school breaks. He cuts grass with a machete, fetches water for people, and does whatever he can to earn a little money. The other children keep the house clean, wash clothes, and cook their daily porridge of beans and cornmeal. Sometimes—when they can afford them—they eat a few potatoes.

Eric has been caring for his siblings since he was 17. He studies hard, and his grades are OK. Classes begin at 5:00 A.M., and except for dinner, he stays at school to study until lights out at 10:00 P.M. Life is difficult at best, and almost impossible at other times. The school helps him financially by letting him continue his studies, even if he owes on his bill. The headmaster gives him work whenever he can, and sometimes he gets a little financial help. During holidays he makes bricks.

In spite of his almost impossible schedule and responsibilities, Eric insists that his brothers and sister do their best. He encourages them to keep moving forward and assures them that life in the future will be easier than it is now. He dreams of becoming an engineer, but he knows that it will take many years to finish his education.

Eric isn't the only student on campus who's struggling; many others must work to pay their school fees too.

"I have faith that God will see us through," he says. "We cannot see the end from the beginning, but we know God sees our needs and cares for us. I try to tell my siblings that it's up to them to make the right decisions and to work hard. If they choose the wrong path, it will affect their entire lives.

"As I care for my brothers and sister, I'm learning what it's like to be a father, to teach them and to care for them and to discipline them. That will help me in the future."

Eric is grateful for the Adventist school that has opened its doors to him and his siblings. "Without this school, what would we have?" he asks. He looks around him, at textbooks and papers. "Nothing. Thank God for a Christian school in which to study." And thank you for making Adventist education possible through your mission offerings.

E. KIKOMEKO lives in Bugema, Uganda.

# Walking *in the Light*: Keeping His Commandments



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Lev. 19:18; Luke 14:26; John 3:20; 13; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:18; 1 John 2:3–11.*

**Memory Text:** “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments” (*1 John 2:3, NKJV*).

A pastor had been counseling a husband and wife. The problem? The husband had been having extramarital affairs. That’s not *an* extramarital affair but, in fact, many of them. The husband tried to calm the situation by telling the wife that although he had been with other women, it didn’t mean that he didn’t love her. In fact, he said, he loved her more than any of the others.

As could be expected, his words—far from solving the problem—only made it worse. Why? Because if you love someone, you show it by your actions, by your deeds, *not* just by what you say.

This week, John talks about what it means to know and to love God. Anyone can say that he or she loves the Lord. The question is, According to the Bible, how are we to reveal that love?

**The Week at a Glance:** What does it mean to know God, as opposed to just knowing *about* Him? What role does obedience to God’s law have in our relationship with God? What does John say about Jesus as a role model for behavior? What is the “new commandment” that John gives and how “new” is it really?

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 25.*

## What Do We Know? (1 John 2:3–5)

The phrase “by this we know” (*NKJV*) appears twice in the above passages. Just what is it, according to John, that Christians know?

First, that they have come to know God (*vs. 3*) and, second, that they “are in Him” (*vs. 5, NKJV*). Considering what’s at stake—our eternal life or our eternal destruction (*see John 5:29*)—these are important things to know, are they not?

At the same time, we have to be careful that we don’t turn knowledge itself into the means of salvation. In fact, that’s the exact kind of heresy John was dealing with here and in other places, the idea that knowledge alone brings redemption.

*Knowledge (gnosis)* was a crucial term in ancient religion, and it was an important concept in the religious world of the first centuries after Christ. Probably by the second century it had developed into a full-fledged heresy among Christians called Gnosticism. In Gnosticism, there was little concern for moral behavior. The emphasis was on mystical experience and fancy myths about God and the nature of humanity. Salvation was gained through this secret knowledge rather than through a faith relationship with the Lord.

**What** do the following texts tell us about how the New Testament uses the idea of knowledge? *Matt. 13:11; Luke 1:34, 77; John 17:3; Rom. 3:20; 1 Cor. 8:1; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:18; 1 John 4:8.*

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In the New Testament *to know/knowledge* has a theoretical and theological meaning. However, it also describes relationships. To know God means to have an intimate relationship with Him. Obedience, love, and staying away from sin all point to the existence of such a relationship. The theoretical and the experiential side of knowledge must go together.

Although the verb *to know* is used frequently by John, he stays away from the noun *knowledge*. He may have decided to avoid the more technical term so that confusion with Gnosticism could be avoided.

**Do you know the Lord, or do you just know about Him? What’s the crucial difference between these two concepts? Most important, if it’s only the latter, how can you change, and why is it important to do so?**

## Keeping the Commandments *(1 John 2:3–5)*

Anyone can say that they know God. In fact, a lot of people have done that, even people in John’s day. Many do today, as well. Talk, though, is cheap.

**For** John, what was the outward evidence, the outward proof, that a person knows God? What else does John say about this topic? *John 14:15, 21; John 15:10; 1 John 3:22, 24; 5:3; Rev. 12:17; 14:12.* How do these verses tie in with each other? How do they affirm us, as Adventists, in our position about the law?

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Keeping the commandments is very important to John and to Jesus. The phrase occurs quite often in John’s writings. Keeping the commandments is a sign that we know God/Jesus and love Him. Love and obedience are connected here. The term *Him* can refer to either God the Father or Jesus and is somewhat ambiguous—probably on purpose too. First John 2:4 states the same truth in negative terms and may refer to a false claim made by those who say that you can come to know God and yet neglect keeping the commandments. John attacks this idea in very strong language, calling anyone who teaches it a liar.

**Why** would keeping the law reveal our knowledge of God? How does our *act* of keeping the law reveal the reality of our *knowledge* of God? How is one related to the other?

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The kind of knowledge of God that the Bible talks about isn’t merely a cognizance of facts. It’s a knowledge that forms the basis of a love relationship. You can’t truly love someone you don’t know. And if you love someone, you are going to act a certain way. A man who truly loves his wife isn’t going to cheat on her. He can profess his love day and night, and yet if his actions don’t reveal that love, then he is, to use John’s term, “a liar.”

**What other analogies can you think of that are helpful in understanding why our obedience, our deeds, form an inseparable part of what it means to know God?**

## What Would Jesus Do? *(1 John 2:6–8)*

While back there was a fad during which young Christian people would wear bracelets with the English letters WWJD inscribed on them, standing for “What would Jesus do?” Though some derided the whole idea as childish, at least the idea behind it was good, and the idea was that when confronted with a situation, we should think about what Jesus would do and try to do likewise.

This fits in nicely with what John has been saying here. The first part of our passage has stressed that walking in the light and knowing God means to be obedient. The second part now calls Christians who want to abide in Him and walk in the light to follow Christ’s example in living their lives. How can they do this? They have to find out how Jesus lived, and on a daily basis they must compare their conduct to His.

In other words, “What would Jesus do?”

**Skim** through the Gospels. What are some of your favorite stories of Jesus; that is, what stories really speak to your heart about the kind of person Jesus was? How similar are you to Him in these areas?

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Although the death of Jesus and His resurrection are the climax of the Gospels, sufficient information on Jesus’ teachings and His life are recorded so that we can understand how a human being, ideally, should live.

This is important to remember, because sometimes people want to focus only on Jesus as Savior, Jesus as their Substitute, and not on Jesus as their Lord and Example. John accepted Jesus both as Savior and as an example. In 1 John 1:7 he had mentioned the cleansing blood of Christ, which points to His death on the cross in our place. According to 1 John 2:2, Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. He was our substitute. But in our verses this week the other aspect shows up. Jesus lived an exemplary life. We should follow His footsteps.

**Most of us, no matter who we are, are facing some sort of difficulties in life. Think about your greatest challenge, your greatest struggle. Then ask yourself the question, “What would Jesus do?” After you have what you deem your best answer, ask yourself, “What’s stopping me from doing the same?”**

## The New Commandment *(1 John 2:7, 8)*

After stressing the importance of obeying the commandments (*1 John 2:3, 4*), John in verses 7 and 8 introduces the idea of a “new commandment.” What is this “new commandment”? The answer is found in John 13:34, where the same expression, “new commandment,” appears.

**Read** John 13. What is the context that helps us understand what this “new commandment” is?

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After having shown His disciples what it means to serve, namely, even to step down and perform the lowly task of washing someone’s feet, Jesus issued His “new commandment.” His disciples should love each other just as Jesus loved them.

A similar situation occurs in 1 John 2:6–8. After having talked about walking as Jesus did, John pointed to Jesus’ commandment in John 13. It is this literary connection with John 13:34, 35 that helps us unlock the meaning of 1 John 2:7, 8. The commandment John is talking about is the commandment about brotherly and sisterly love.

But why does he state that he is writing not a new commandment but an old one? That’s because the commandment of neighborly love was already present in the Old Testament (*Lev. 19:18*). When John wrote his letter, Jesus’ “new commandment” of John 13:34 had already been a commandment for many years.

Yet in a sense, this commandment was new in that it was continuously realized in the life of Jesus (“in Him” [*1 John 2:6, NKJV*]) and was to be seen in His followers (“and in you” [*vs. 8, NKJV*]) in an unprecedented way because of the new age inaugurated with Jesus’ first advent (“the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining” [*vs. 8, NKJV*]).

Finally, the concept of God’s law connects the first part of our passage (*1 John 2:3–6*) with the second (*1 John 2:7, 8*). The commandments are summarized in the commandment to love each other. To walk in the Light and to walk as Jesus did means to keep the commandments and love each other.

**When was the last time you “washed someone’s feet,” figuratively speaking? If it has been a long time, what does that tell you about yourself and about how you relate to others? Why is the kind of death to self that leads to the service of others so hard to realize in our own lives?**



## Loving Others (1 John 2:9–11)

**Summarize** what John is saying to us in the above verses.

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Love was mentioned briefly in 1 John 2:5. Obviously that love refers to our love toward God, which is manifested when we keep His commandments. Love was indirectly dealt with in the second part of our passage, the new commandment (vss. 6–9). Love toward fellow Christians is, however, clearly spelled out in the last section of our paragraph (vss. 9–11). It also begins with the phrase “he who says” (see vss. 4, 6, 9, *NKJV*).

Verse 9 makes a statement about the church member who hates his brother. This person is in darkness. Verse 10 shows the positive side, namely, a person who loves his brother. Verse 11 returns to hating one’s brother. Not only is such a person in darkness, but his or her eyes have been blinded.

In his letter John is interested primarily in the Christian community. That does not mean he would deny the fact that Christians are called to love their neighbors and even their enemies, but this is not his concern here. He has other problems at hand.

**Hating** one’s brother is a strong statement, and we may not like applying it to us and our behavior. We may prefer to say that we are irritated or offended, but Scripture oftentimes uses the term *hate* in ways that we don’t commonly use today. How is the term *hate* used, and how is it to be understood in the following texts? *Matt. 6:24; 24:9, 10; Luke 14:26; John 3:20.*

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In Scripture *hate* stands not only for what we may call hate today but also for preferring one person over another or neglecting somebody. In other words, you don’t have to despise someone to reveal “hate” as it’s sometimes understood in the Bible.

**Is there someone you hate, and maybe with good reason, too? If so, ask yourself the question, What would Jesus do?**

**Further Study:** Read Genesis 39:7–12, Daniel 3:8–18, Revelation 13:16, 14:5.

Walking in the light, which includes keeping the commandments, living like Jesus, and exercising love, is especially important at the end of the world's history. God's law is being challenged, and the issue of true worship and obedience to the Creator will come even more to the front. In Scripture, examples are mentioned, people who remained faithful even under the most challenging circumstances: Joseph, Daniel's friends, Daniel, and many others. The prime example is Jesus. We must make the decision to follow His lead, no matter what.

“John tells us that true love for God will be revealed in obedience to all His commandments. It is not enough to believe the theory of truth, to make a profession of faith in Christ, to believe that Jesus is no impostor, and that the religion of the Bible is no cunningly devised fable. . . . John did not teach that salvation was to be earned by obedience; but that obedience was the fruit of faith and love.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 563.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ It's one thing to keep the Ten Commandments; it's another thing to love other people. What's the difference? Which is easier to do, and why?
- ❷ French philosopher Michael Foucault once differentiated between two kinds of knowledge: the kind that changed the one who acquired that knowledge and the kind of knowledge that brought no change at all. What could be some examples of these two types of knowledge? More important, what kind of knowledge is the knowledge of God, and what kind of changes should it bring to the ones knowing it?
- ❸ How can we avoid falling into the trap of trying to earn our salvation by keeping the commandments, while at the same time avoiding the trap of believing that we can be saved in disobedience to the law?
- ❹ What can you, as a class, do to help your local church as a whole better understand what it means to manifest love? Is there even such a thing as corporate love? Picture what the ideal and perfectly loving local church would be like. How well does your local church match up?

# Instant Answer to Prayer

by SAMUEL LABAG

When we pray we know that sometimes God answers Yes, sometimes No, and sometimes Wait. Recently God's answer to my urgent prayer was an instant Yes!

I work in Zamboanga, on the western edge of Mindanao, Philippines. One day I took a boat to a nearby island to deliver health magazines to students at a parochial high school. I visit schools, talk about the dangers of drugs, how to stop smoking, and other health-related topics; then I take orders for magazines that talk about these topics.

My visit to the school completed, I rushed to catch the last boat of the day. I hailed a tricycle taxi for the 10-minute ride to the dock, praying that the boat would not leave without me. But we arrived at the pier only to watch the boat sail away. The porters were sympathetic, but they suggested I find a place to stay overnight.

*I can't stay overnight, I thought. I promised some money to another colporteur who must leave tonight for a distant island. He can't go without the money, and his next boat doesn't leave for a week. How will I get the money to him? And where will I stay tonight?* As I stood on the pier and prayed fervently for a solution to my problems, I felt a calm assurance.

I opened my eyes to see the boat veer from its course. It made a huge U-turn and returned to the pier. The crew threw a rope down and called to me to grab onto the old tire tied to the end. I clutched the rope in one hand and my case in the other while the sailors pulled me onto the boat. Safely aboard, I realized that God had turned the boat around—for me. The engine roared, and we started out into the open sea just as another tricycle taxi loaded with passengers arrived at the pier. The occupants jumped out shouting and waving for the boat to stop. But the boat kept going.

As we sped toward the mainland, I thanked God for helping me keep my promise to my friend and for allowing me to be a part of His army, bringing truth to searching hearts.

I told my friend what had happened, and we rejoiced together in God's providence. Then I saw him off for his trip to the distant island to take God's word to another needy part of His kingdom.

Your mission offerings help support the literature work, bringing God's message of love to every corner of the world. Thank you for giving so that others can find Jesus.

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# Walking in the Light: Renouncing Worldliness



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Dan. 5:13; John 15:19; Col. 1:14; 2:8, 13; 2 Pet. 3:10–12; 1 John 2:12–17.*

**Memory Text:** “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15, NIV).

In 1933, French author Andre Malraux published *Man's Fate*, a story about an ill-fated Marxist uprising in Shanghai, China, in the 1920s. In the story, a Marxist terrorist, Ch'en, is walking down the street when his first teacher, a Christian minister, approaches him and starts a conversation about Ch'en's loss of faith. Little does the teacher know that Ch'en, at the moment, is carrying a bomb and is on his way to a political assassination! Ch'en replies that he hasn't lost his faith; he has simply put it in politics, that's all.

“What political faith,” his former teacher asks with sadness, “will destroy death?”

In other words, no matter your political ideas, no matter the utopia you hope to create, it will never defeat humanity's great scourge: death.

While continuing to show us what it means to “walk in the light,” this week's texts point us to the temporality of our world in contrast to the eternal life found only in God.

**The Week at a Glance:** On what basis can we know that our sins are forgiven? What does it mean to know God? What does it mean not to love the things of the world? What's the ultimate fate of the world?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 1.*

## “For His Name’s Sake”

“I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake” (1 John 2:12).

In 1 John 2:12–15, John addresses “little children” and “fathers” and “young men.” Though various suggestions have been made about what he meant by this division, we suggest that the “children” refers to all church members, because John uses the expression *children* in this sense in his epistle (1 John 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7; 4:4; 5:21). The “fathers” would represent older church members, and the “young men” younger members. In short, he’s writing to everyone.

**In 1 John 2:12, he tells them all that their sins are forgiven. On what basis is that forgiveness found? Why is it so important for Christians to know that their sins are forgiven? See also Acts 5:31, Rom. 4:7, Eph. 4:32, Col. 1:14, 2:13.**

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John wants his hearers, that is, faithful church members, to have absolute assurance of their salvation. He is referring back to his discussion of the topic of sin as found in 1 John 1:9 and 2:1, 2, stressing that to be a Christian means to have this forgiveness. Christians do not deny their sinfulness but have accepted salvation through Jesus Christ and, therefore, live with the assurance of being forgiven.

The crucial point is for Christians to understand that the basis of their salvation is found only in Jesus and in what Jesus has done for them. That’s why John says they have been forgiven—not on the basis of their good deeds, not on the basis of their beliefs, and not even on the basis of their knowledge of God, but rather for “his name’s sake,” that is, on the basis of Jesus and what He has done for them. Thus, in the midst of all John’s talk about overcoming, about obedience, he keeps the emphasis before them that salvation comes only because of Jesus.

**How important is it to you to know that you have forgiveness of sins? Where would you be today if you were to doubt that forgiveness? Also, why must you always remember that the basis of forgiveness is found in Jesus, not in yourself?**

## Overcoming the Wicked One

**Read** 1 John 2:13, 14. What do these verses say to us? What positive message is coming from them, and how can we apply them to our lives?

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The children are reminded that they know the Father, while the fathers are reminded that they know Him who is from the beginning. Obviously this person is Jesus. “In the beginning” is attributed to Jesus in 1 John 1:1. It seems to make more sense when, in our verses here, the Father and He who is from the beginning (Jesus) are two different persons.

When the young men are addressed a second time, the phrase “you have overcome the evil one” (*NIV*) is repeated, but the statement is expanded. The young men have overcome not just the evil but Satan himself, because they belong to Christ and claim His victory. The original language indicates that the overcoming has been achieved in the past but the consequences are an ongoing reality. The young men are also spiritually strong, and the “word of God” dwells in them.

The Word of God points to its author, the Holy Spirit (*Eph. 6:17, 2 Pet. 1:21*). Therefore, some expositors have suggested that in these verses an implicit reference to the Trinity is found: God the Father, Jesus as the One who is from the beginning, and the Holy Spirit represented through the Word of God. In the end, true believers have come to know God and continue to know Him; that is, they have an intimate relationship with Him.

Thus, in these verses we’re given the essence of the Christian life: forgiveness of sins, knowing the Godhead, victory over sin, and the Word of God living in us.

Because believers know that God and His Word live in them, they are ready for the challenge issued in verses 15 through 17. While verses 12 through 14 contain affirmative statements, verse 15 begins with an imperative, a call or command: “Do not love the world” (*NKJV*).

**Write a paragraph in which you answer the question, *What does it mean to know God?* What does your answer tell you about yourself and your relationship to God? Work on your answer through the week and be prepared (if you are willing) to share it in class on Sabbath.**

## Renouncing Any Love of the World *(1 John 2:15)*

**Christians** are admonished not to love the world. How does Scripture define the term *world*? *John 12:19, 15:19, Acts 17:24, Rom. 1:20, Col. 2:8, 1 Tim. 6:7, James 4:4, Rev. 11:15.*

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The term *kosmos* (translated “world”) designates the universe, the earth, humankind, the realm of existence, and the way of life opposed to God. The term occurs more than twenty times in 1 John and 2 John. The world needs salvation (*1 John 4:14*), yet it is hostile to God and His people (*1 John 3:13*). It lies in the power of the evil one (*1 John 5:19*), and false prophets, antichrists, and deceivers are in the world (*1 John 4:1, 3; 2 John 7*). It is not wrong to possess the world’s goods, but they should be shared with the needy (*1 John 3:17*). Finally, the world needs to be overcome (*1 John 5:4, 5*). In the Johannine epistles the term *world* is predominantly a negative term, because the world is in rebellion against God.

An interesting tension arises in Scripture regarding our relationship to the world. On the one hand, we are told not to love the world, but then on the other hand, the Bible is clear that God loves the world (*John 3:16*). Meanwhile we are told not to love the things in the world, yet we are admonished, again and again in Scripture, to love people, and people are certainly in the world.

**How** do you understand the tension here? How are we to love people and yet not love the world, when the world is, primarily, people? Are there some things in the world, other than people, that we can love too? If so, what?

The end of verse 15, and the next verse, help us to understand what John has in mind. He does not say we should hate humans or despise planet Earth; rather, we should hate the things of the world that, if cherished by us, will keep us from knowing and experiencing for ourselves the love of God. That is, we need to stay away from the things of the world that will keep us from having a saving relationship with God.

**Be painfully honest with yourself. What are some of the things of the world that you love and you know are wrong? Or are there things in the world that, of themselves, aren’t bad but that you love more than God? What will it take to make you give them up?**



## Problems With the World

**“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:16).**

While verse 15 is quite a broad warning against loving the world, verse 16 now spells out some details. What does it mean to love the world? John mentions three things: (1) the lust of the flesh, (2) the lust of the eyes, and (3) the boastful pride of life. John says that these three things are not of the Father but of the world; yet, our flesh, our eyes, and our life all come from God. What, then, is the problem? What is John warning us against?

Lust of the flesh, obviously, deals with passions, though it does not have to be limited to that alone (*see Gal. 5:19–21*).

Lust of the eyes, though certainly linked to the flesh, takes it deeper, takes it to our thoughts, our desires, to the things that we see and want for ourselves (*see Exod. 20:17*).

**What** does John mean about “the pride of life”? **What is this, and why is it so bad?** *See Job 12:10, Acts 17:28.*

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The idea of “the pride of life” implies independence from God. It’s as if we created our lives, and hence the glory and honor of any of our accomplishments should belong to us. “Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves” (*Ps. 100:3*). In contrast, when we realize that every breath, every heartbeat, everything that we could ever have or be comes only from God, upon whom we’re utterly dependent, pride will be the last thing in our hearts. As sinful, fallen beings whose very existence depends totally on the grace and beneficence of our God, as beings utterly incapable of saving ourselves from eternal death and destruction, we should be humble and meek regarding our lives, not full of pride about them. It was pride that brought the fall of Lucifer in a perfect world; as beings in an imperfect one, we should flee it like the plague.

**Which is it for you? Lust of the flesh? Lust of the eyes? The pride of life? Or any combination thereof? What’s your only hope? What are you waiting for to make the changes that must come?**

## The Transient Nature of the World *(1 John 2:17)*

In verse 16 the apostle presents the first reason that we should not love the world: the love of the world and the love of the Father are incompatible. In verse 17 John adds a second reason: It does not make sense to love the world, because the world is impermanent. It is better and wiser to choose that which lasts. By doing so, we ourselves also will last—that is, we will live forever.

Humanity is tempted to live by the moment, to be captivated by the material world, and to treasure only what can be seen. Therefore, Paul joins John by saying, “Keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory” (*Col. 3:1–4, NASB*), and, “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (*2 Cor. 4:18, NIV*).

**What** does the Bible teach in other places about the transitory nature of the world and planet Earth? *Dan. 2:35, 1 Cor. 7:31, 2 Pet. 3:10–12.*

In 1 John 2:8, John had already stated that the darkness was passing away. Now he uses the same verb and says that the world is passing away, including its lust. A new era has come with the incarnation of Jesus, the Light. The things of this world are passing away; that should be obvious to everyone. Political solutions never can be the ultimate solution, not in a world that’s passing away and we along with it.

If the world is passing away, how can we survive? John answers: by doing the will of God. Although correct theology is important and John tries to refute the false teachers with their misguided understanding of Jesus and sin, it also is important to live a life of obedience. Ethics cannot be separated from theology. Pious words and correct doctrines are not enough. Our theology must be lived.

Let us not get so comfortable here that we forget our eternal goal; let us not compromise our love for God by being attracted to those things and attitudes that are hostile to Him.

**What examples of the transient nature of things on earth do you see every day? What do they say to you? Why—when it’s so obvious that things here don’t last—do we find it so easy to live our lives as if they do?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Worldliness in the Church,” pp. 196, 197, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2.

“Professed Christians yearly expend an immense sum upon useless and pernicious indulgences, while souls are perishing for the word of life. God is robbed in tithes and offerings, while they consume upon the altar of destroying lust more than they give to relieve the poor or for the support of the gospel. . . . The world is given up to self-indulgence. ‘The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life’ control the masses of the people. But Christ’s followers have a holier calling. . . . In the light of God’s word we are justified in declaring that sanctification cannot be genuine which does not work this utter renunciation of the sinful pursuits and gratifications of the world.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 475.

Positively speaking, our passage tells us that genuine Christians have an intimate relationship with the Godhead, manifest loving obedience, have received strength to conquer evil, and have God’s Word dwelling in them. Their sins have been forgiven. Negatively, they do not love the world but reject it where it is hostile to God and His cause.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Our world is purely transitory. It won’t last forever; even science—with all its weaknesses—tells us that. What hope, however, does the Bible offer us that science doesn’t?
- 2 Some people, heeding the call against loving the world, isolate themselves from the world as much as they can, moving into monasteries or communities that are radically separate from the norm. Is this a good idea? Bad idea? Might it be good in some cases? Discuss.
- 3 In class, discuss your answer to Monday’s question about what it means to know God.
- 4 What are some things in the world that, in and of themselves, might not be bad, might not work against the knowledge of God, yet are often made that way because of how people use them?
- 5 Why is victory over sin such an important part of what it means to “walk in the light”? How can you have this victory?

# Trouble in the Village: Part 1

by JUAN IGNACIO

“How much are those people paying to use your meeting hall,” the angry man asked. “I’ll pay twice that amount to have you kick them out of town! They’re a bad influence, and there’s going to be trouble if they stay!”

I own a meeting hall in a small village in central Mexico. When some Adventist people asked to rent my hall, I agreed, though I hadn’t been to any of their meetings. I never expected my friend’s angry response to the Adventists’ presence in our village.

My family, like most in the village, considered ourselves Christians. I held an important position in the village church. But religion was more a tradition than a guiding faith. We didn’t read the Bible or pray at home—unless we had an emergency.

And when an emergency hit, my wife and I began reading the Bible together and praying for God’s guidance. As we studied the Bible, we found the Ten Commandments and read them with amazement. Here, plainly written, was God’s command not to bow down to idols, and another to keep the Sabbath, *Sabado* in Spanish. I asked our priest about these commandments, and he said simply, “You know what is right; do it.” Perhaps he meant we must follow our church’s tradition, but I understood he meant we should follow the Bible.

We decided to find a church that taught according to the Bible, but we didn’t know which church that was. So we prayed that God would send someone to us. That’s when the Adventists asked to rent my hall to hold Bible studies and evangelistic meetings.

And when my friend came with such strong accusations, I decided to attend the meeting and see if these people spoke the truth. If they did, they could stay; but if they spoke lies, I’d ask them to leave. At the meeting we saw people reading the Bible and talking about what they read. And what they said made sense. We continued attending the meetings. There I learned that these people keep Sabbath, as the Bible commands.

Then a police officer summoned me to appear in court to explain why I was allowing these meetings in my hall. I went to court and explained that I had found nothing in what they were teaching that went against the Bible, that even the Sabbath they teach is in the Bible. Satisfied, the judge allowed me to go. But that was just the beginning of the trouble in our village over these Adventists.

*(Continued next week)*

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JUAN IGNACIO lives in a village south of Mexico City, Mexico.

# Walking *in the Light*: Rejecting Antichrists



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Lesson:** *John 15:4–10; Acts 2:15–17; 2 Thess. 2:3, 4; Heb. 1:1, 2; 1 John 2:18–29; 4:1–6.*

**Memory Text:** “Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also” (1 John 2:23, NKJV).

From the earliest day, the church had to deal with false teachings and heresy. Paul had warned the leaders of the church in Ephesus against “savage wolves” who would attack “the flock” and against false teachers from among themselves who would draw away church members (*Acts 20:29, 30, NKJV*). Jesus, too, had warned of false christs and false prophets (*Matt. 24:5, 11, 24*). Today, the church faces the same thing.

In Revelation 13 the sea beast is depicted as an imitation of Jesus. Therefore, commentators have called this beast the antichrist (*anti* in Greek meaning “in place of”). Interestingly enough, John in his first letter also talks about the antichrist(s). Who are these people? What do they teach?

This week we look at what John was dealing with and seek to draw lessons from it for ourselves today.

**The Week at a Glance:** What is the “last hour” (1 John 2:18, NIV)? What threat is John warning his readers about? Is there a difference between the antichrist and antichrists? What does John mean about our abiding in Christ? How are Christians to test the spirit?

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 8.

## “The Last Hour” *(1 John 2:18, NIV)*

**“Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour”** *(1 John 2:18, NIV)*.

At the end of 1 John 2, John starts to speak in somewhat greater detail about the group or groups that had been causing problems to his church members. In their activity he recognizes that “the last hour” has come.

**John** talks about “the last hour” around the end of the first century A.D. How are we, almost two thousand years later, to understand what he means? *“The last days” in Acts 2:15–17 (NIV); Heb. 1:1, 2; 1 Pet. 1:20; 1 John 2:18.*

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The expression “the last hour” occurs only here. In contrast, in the New Testament other writers have used the phrase “the last days” to refer to the time since Jesus’ first coming.

With Jesus a new era had arrived. The entire period between Christ’s first and second comings is considered “the last days.” Given the context of his writing, John’s “last hour” may simply be his way of meaning the same thing as “the last days,” the period between the first and second comings of Jesus.

Jesus Himself had used the expression *hour* in John 4:23 and 16:2 (in some versions it’s translated “time”), and He’s pointing to a specific period of time in the future but prior to His return. John seems to use the phrase “the last hour” in this same sense, as well.

What’s important to notice, however, is that John does not set a date, nor does he describe a precise chronology of detailed events that must take place before the Lord would come. That’s not his point. His point, instead, has to do most likely with the need to be diligent and careful, because false teachers are out there, just as Jesus Himself had warned about.

**If John was impressed back then to warn about the perils of “the last hour,” what about us today? What kinds of teachings are we daily confronted with, both within and without the church, that if accepted would lead us astray? How can we protect ourselves from these deceptions?**

## The Coming of Antichrists *(1 John 2:18, 19, 22, 23)*

**Who** is antichrist? *1 John 2:18, 19, 22.*

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The term *antichrist* is used in 1 and 2 John only. An antichrist tries to take the place of Christ and is opposed to Christ. Scholars of different denominations have, for example, called the sea beast of Revelation 13 and the man of lawlessness of 2 Thessalonians 2 “antichrist.” This is a correct designation, because the language used in Revelation 13:2–4 shows that this sea beast is an imitation and parody of Christ, the Lamb; in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 the antichrist, the man of lawlessness, seeks to take the place of the Lord. Although not using the very term, Scripture in various places talks about this concept, and obviously John is familiar with it. Indeed, in Revelation he himself uses this concept, if not the term itself.

In 1 John 2:18 John employs *antichrist* in the singular, as well as in the plural: The antichrist is supposed to come; many antichrists have already appeared. Does John give up the idea of one specific antichrist by calling other people antichrists? Most likely not! First John 4:3 is helpful. The text talks about the spirit of the antichrist: These people reveal the spirit of the antichrist, but the real antichrist was still to come.

**Why** would John call those people antichrists who have some problems with the correct understanding of the nature of Christ? *1 John 4:3, 2 John 7.*

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John may not deem as “antichrists” those members of his church who were simply wrestling with a correct understanding of Jesus or who were momentarily wavering, buffeted by the false teachings. They had to make a decision between the teaching of Christianity and the view of the antichrists with regard to Jesus as the Messiah and/or the nature of Christ.

However, there were people who had left the church and successfully proclaimed false doctrines (*1 John 4:5*). These were the antichrists.

**In a real sense, anything that takes the place of the true God in our lives can be an “antichrist.” What are some of the “antichrists” that we confront in our lives today? How can we recognize them and, more important, neutralize their power against us?**



## Testing Spirits *(1 John 4:1–6)*

In 1 John 4:1–6, John picks up again on the theme that he was dealing with in 1 John 2:18–27, the erroneous teachings being promulgated among them. How interesting that so soon among the church the enemy was working, seeking to divide the believers through the introduction of false teaching. Even today, do we as Adventists not struggle with the same thing, false teachings that divide us?

**Read** 1 John 2:19. What relevance does that have for us, today, as Adventists?

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Though we don't know all the details, John seems to be struggling with various heretical views about Jesus that many of these former members were promoting. One may have taught that Christ only seemingly had been a human being but actually was not. Another may have stressed that Christ entered the human being Jesus at baptism and left Him before crucifixion. Still others may have rejected Jesus as the Messiah.

Maybe these false teachers claimed to be inspired, which is why he in 1 John 4:1 warned about false prophets. Their erroneous views proved, however, that they were influenced by the spirit of the antichrist.

**Compare** 1 John 2:18–27 with 1 John 4:1–6. Even amid the warnings about the antichrist and their false teachings, what positive assurances and hope does John give to his readers? What hope can we, for ourselves, take away from these passages, as well?

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Notice the parallel between 1 John 2:21 and 1 John 4:6. In both cases, a great defense against these errors is a knowledge of God, a knowledge of the truth. John is stressing the importance of having a correct understanding of the teaching, especially about Jesus. Here's very clear biblical evidence for the importance of correct doctrine.

## The Anointing *(1 John 2:20, 21, 27)*

**The** “anointing” of 1 John 2:20 has been understood by many as the Holy Spirit. How do the following texts help validate that conclusion? 1 Sam. 16:13; John 14:17; 15:26; 16:7; 1 John 2:20, 21, 27.

True believers have received the anointing, which remains in them, teaches them, and is without falsehood. What is said about the anointing and its functions may remind readers of Jesus’ statements about the Holy Spirit in His farewell speeches (*John 13–16*). Already Isaiah 61:1 links being anointed and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is very likely that the anointing stands for the Holy Spirit.

However, there is also another dimension. To some extent 1 John 2:24 is parallel to verse 27:

“As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning” (*1 John 2:24, NASB, emphasis supplied*).

“As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you” (*vs. 27, NASB; emphasis supplied*).

What the true believers have heard from the beginning is the gospel of Jesus. Furthermore, the Word of God (*1 John 2:14*) and the truth (*2 John 2*) abide in the Christian. In 2 Corinthians 1:21, 22, the divine anointing is linked to the sealing by the Holy Spirit, while in Ephesians 1:13 hearing the word of truth and believing leads to the sealing by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the anointing may also point to Scripture.

The antidote to the messages of the antichrists is God’s Word as communicated by the Holy Spirit. It is the objective standard by which doctrines can be evaluated. True believers rely on the Holy Spirit as He manifests Himself in Scripture. The Bible has to be the final authority on all our teachings. The moment believers start to doubt the authority of the Bible, its reliability, and its inspiration, they start opening themselves up to all sorts of delusions and errors. The world is filled with folk who, once staunch Christians, have abandoned their faith because—coming across things they didn’t understand or didn’t necessarily like—they started questioning the validity and inspiration of the Bible. It’s one thing to admit that there are things in the Bible we don’t understand, or that even seem questionable to us; it’s another to doubt the authority of the Scripture because of them.

**What’s your attitude toward things in the Word that you don’t understand or even necessarily like? Have you, over time, found yourself doubting more and more in the Word? Are you on that path, and if so, how can you get off it?**

## Abiding in Him

**What's** the one common theme found in these verses? Why is this message so important to us? *John 5:38; 6:56; 8:31; 15:4–10; 1 John 2:14, 28; 2 John 9.*

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The word rendered “to abide” has also been translated as “to remain,” “to live in,” “to dwell in.” It is an important concept in John’s Gospel and in his letters. It occurs more than 20 times in 1 John and twice in 2 John.

The concept stresses that it is important to remain in the Son, the Father, and the Holy Spirit. A right relationship with the Godhead is crucial. It also is important to remain in correct doctrine and in the Word, because that will affect our relationship with God. Indeed, that seems to be a crucial aspect of John’s letter, because he’s afraid of what these false teachers and their false views could do to the faith of the believer.

**One** of the promises made to those who remain in Him is the promise of eternal life. Why is the promise of eternal life so important to us? What would our faith offer us if we didn’t have that promise? Why bother even being a Christian at all? *See 1 Cor. 15:1–19.*

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No question, for John a crucial aspect of the Christian faith was abiding in the Lord. This is simply another way of stating that we need to “walk in the light,” we need to live in a close relationship with Jesus, which means a daily surrender of our wills to His, as revealed through the Word and through the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. As soon as we start disobeying the Lord, as soon as we start thinking we can figure things out apart from God, as soon as we start passing negative judgments on whatever parts of the Bible we don’t like, we’re moving in a direction that, if not stopped, will separate us from a saving relationship with Jesus.

**How do you “abide” in Christ? What were the things you did in the past 24 hours that enabled you to “abide” in Him? Make a list of the things that we can do that are part of what it means “to abide” in Christ, and share your list with members on Sabbath.**

**Further Study:** Read 2 Peter 2 and Ellen G. White, “Worldliness in the Church,” pp. 196, 197, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2.

One could raise the question why 1 John 2:29 is important in this discussion about false teachers. Obviously with the false teaching about Jesus, a false lifestyle went along. This is oftentimes the case even today. Attacking one doctrine of Christianity leads to calling in question others, and sooner or later not only is a theoretical construct affected, but it plays itself out in practical terms. People no longer live righteous lives. A disastrous vicious cycle begins, a downward spiral that can be stopped only by returning to the Lord, His teachings, and His exemplary life.

“The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the Word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. Says the apostle John, ‘Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.’ 1 John 4:1.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 9.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 How do we as Adventists, who have long been anticipating the return of Jesus, deal with the question of what it means to be living in “the last hour”? If “the last hour” has lasted almost two thousand years, what is it supposed to mean to us and how we live our lives today?
- 2 What is the list that you made from Thursday’s lesson showing about the practical ways in which we can abide in Christ? What can you learn from each other?
- 3 What are ways that we can manifest the spirit of antichrist toward others?
- 4 What are some of the difficult things in the Bible that church members sometimes struggle with? How can we learn to trust the Bible despite these difficulties? How can we help those who are struggling with their faith because of things in the Bible they don’t understand or like?
- 5 How should we, as a church, relate to those former members who now openly attack us? What should our attitudes be toward them?

## Trouble in the Village: Part 2

by JUAN IGNACIO

When people in my village complained about the bad things the Adventists were saying at their meetings, I attended just to find out. I discovered people studying God's Word. My wife and I continued attending.

After I was called into court to defend my decision to rent the hall to these people, the Adventist pastor offered to leave town. "No," I said. "Stay. What you are teaching is the truth."

We began attending the Seventh-day Adventist Church and studying the Bible with them. We realized that we'd found God's truth and were determined to follow truth wherever it led.

When the church decided to hold evangelistic meetings in our village, I again rented them my hall. But the angry townspeople again tried to close down the meetings.

And when word spread that my wife and I and our children wanted to be baptized, we received more threats. I challenged the troublemakers to show me what Adventists taught that was wrong, but they couldn't show me.

On the Sabbath of the baptism, mobs of villagers carrying signs and shouting slogans closed the roads leading into town so the Adventists couldn't enter. But the pastor had stayed overnight in the village and conducted the baptism in a portable pool in the meeting hall.

At another time the villagers became riled up, and I was forced to defend the church. "You're dividing our town!" they shouted. "Return to our church, and let the village be at peace again."

I prayed for wisdom and spoke, "I used to smoke and drink and do many bad things. But God cleansed me. How can I return to my old ways when God has done so much for my family and me?"

Some people carried cans of gasoline and threatened to set me on fire if I refused to renounce my faith. For five hours they shouted and threatened while we prayed that God would intervene. Finally the crowd dispersed.

Eventually the government stepped in to settle the problem. Villagers marched with signs saying "No more churches in our village!" The officials decided that the Adventists could worship in the village, but we couldn't hold public meetings. We don't have a church, and we can't hold public meetings, but we can share our faith with family and friends. Today 60 people in our village worship God with us.

Thank you for your mission offerings, which made possible the small group evangelistic meetings that introduced my family to God's truths. Please keep giving and praying so that others may hear as well.

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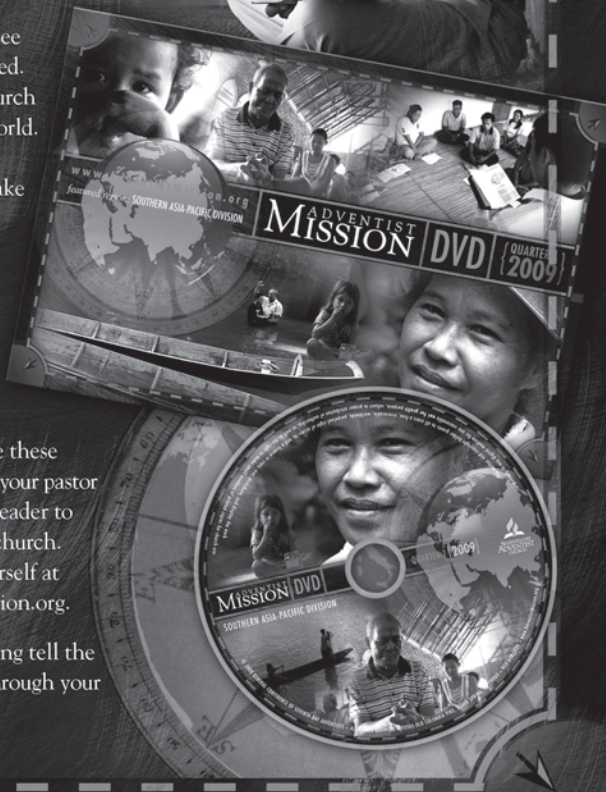
JUAN IGNACIO *lives in a village south of Mexico City, Mexico.*

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# Living *as* Children of God



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 3:5; Ps. 51:4; Isa. 1:2; John 1:12; Heb. 9:26, 28; 1 John 3:1–10.*

**Memory Text:** “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him” (1 John 3:1, NIV).

A new convert came to see the preacher and said, “No matter how much I pray, no matter how hard I try, I simply cannot seem to be faithful to my Lord. I think I’m losing my salvation.” The preacher responded, “Do you see this dog here? He is my dog. He is house-trained; he never makes a mess; he is obedient; he is a pure delight to me. Out in the kitchen I have a son, a baby son. He makes a mess, he throws his food around, he fouls his clothes, he is a total mess. But who is going to inherit my legacy? Not my dog; my son is my heir. You are Jesus Christ’s heir because it is for you that He died.” We are children of God and heirs of His kingdom, not through our perfection but by His grace.

This week we look more at what this promise entails.

**The Week at a Glance:** What does it mean to be a “son of God”? In what ways should we want to be “like God”? How does John define “sin”? What did Jesus do about sin at His first coming? How are we to understand John’s words that the one who is born of God “does not sin” (1 John 3:9, NKJV)?

\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 15.



## Sons of God *(1 John 3:1)*

**Read** 1 John 3:1. What wonderful promise is found there? What does that promise entail? What hope should it give us? *See also John 1:12, 1 John 2:29, 3:9.*

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First John 3:1 points to a spiritual birth; John 1:12 stresses the faith in Christ by which we become children of God. First John 3:1 stresses that believers are already God's children. God has taken the initiative to do this for us. The new birth is His work, not ours. We can bring about neither our own birth nor our adoption as God's children. Also, we do not need to worry about our status as children of God as long as we maintain our relationship with Him. This relationship is described as one between a father and a child; thus, it is very close. The ideal father takes care of us, loves us, and would give his life for us.

Stop and dwell on the implications of the promise that we are the children of God. At last count there are more than four hundred billion *visible* galaxies in the universe, each one containing billions of stars. Who knows how many planets are among those stars and how many are inhabited with intelligent life? Given the size of the universe in contrast to our planet, much less to each of us individually, how can we not be astonished that the God who created all this loves us and has made us His children? What a wonderful perspective this should give us on what our lives mean! What hope, what assurance, what confidence we should have for the future, regardless of whatever difficult circumstances we now face. God, the Creator of all that is, loves us, cares for us, and calls us His children. The New International Version translates 1 John 3:1 freely but catches its meaning well when it says that the Father lavished His great love on us.

**Dwell on the implications of the notion that not only does God exist but He loves us, cares for us, and even died for us. How should this reality impact how we live? Why should it impact it?**



## Results and Responsibilities *(1 John 3:2, 3)*

First John 3:1 is an introduction to the thoughts developed in the remainder of the passage for this week. It deals with results of this Father/child relationship, including subsequent responsibilities. As a consequence of their relationship with God, believers live pure lives not under the dominion of sin (*vss. 3–10*). However, first it is stressed that we will see Him and will be like Him.

Because we know about our present state as children of God, we also know that the future will be even more fantastic, even though we may not yet fully understand it. That we will see the Lord and be like Him should fill us with joy and confidence and not a little bit of awe and wonder.

**What** is the difference between Satan’s and Eve’s wish to be like God (*Gen. 3:5, Isa. 14:14, Ezek. 28:2*) and the promise of 1 John 3:2 that we will be like Him?

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Satan wanted to be like God in power and may have craved the adoration of all created beings. However, it seems that he was not interested in being like God in character. His desire to be like God in power did not deepen his relationship with God but, to the contrary, has disrupted and ruined it.

Although Christians will be like God, they do not desire to take God’s place. They want to be like Him in loving others, in selfless service, in exhibiting purity of thought and righteousness of action. They respect the basic difference between Creator and creature and do not want to do away with it. For them the issue is love, not power. As Jesus showed us, to be like God is to give of oneself totally and unselfishly for the good of others. Jesus came to show us what the Father is like. “Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?” (*John 14:9*).

**Think of the incredible contrast between the character of Jesus and the character of Satan. A created being, Satan sought a position higher than he had but for a purely personal and selfish motive, while Jesus—the Creator—chose to make Himself “of no reputation” (*Phil. 2:7*) for the good of others. What’s your natural tendency, to be more like Christ or more like Satan? If the latter, how can you change?**

## A Definition of Sin (1 John 3:4)

The false teachings that John confronted in these letters may have stressed the present blessing of salvation but may have ignored the importance of living pure lives. The false teachers may not have worried about the problem of sin or its consequences. Therefore, John emphasizes that our future depends on how we live now. This has nothing to do with righteousness by works. We are saved by grace alone, but our lives must reflect that we are saved. So, John, after having called Christians to purify themselves, goes on to show what that means.

**What** do the following texts tell us about the nature of sin? *Exod. 9:27; Pss. 36:3; 51:4; Isa. 1:2; Jer. 3:13; Matt. 7:23; Rom. 6:17, 20; 1 John 1:8; 3:4; 5:17.*

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In Scripture sin is described as missing the mark, falsehood, deliberate violation of God's standard of truth, revolt, wickedness, disobedience, transgression, trespass, lawlessness, and unrighteousness.

In 1 John 3:4 sin is defined as "lawlessness" (*NIV*). Later in 1 John 3:11–20, John relates the story of Cain, who murdered his brother, a clear example of "lawlessness." Then in verses 22 and 24 of the same chapter, he refers to the commandments and the necessity to keep them.

Besides the legal implications of the term, *lawlessness* reminds us of the "man of lawlessness" in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 (*NIV*), the antichrist par excellence, and the climax of his activity just prior to the Second Coming. This lawlessness is exhibited by the antichrists in 1 John, who flagrantly rebel against God and align themselves with Satan. Church members are indirectly warned in 1 John 3:4 to renounce such an attitude and all sin. It's one of the great ironies of the Christian world today that many of the same preachers who rail against sin continue to make the claim that God's law has been abolished because we are now under grace. What a horrible distortion of what grace is all about!

**What's your favorite sin? That is, what sin do you find yourself continually indulging in? What are the ways in which you justify it in your mind? How much less sinful does it seem with each passing year? When are you going to wake up and realize that sooner or later, unless you claim God's power to overcome it, it will destroy you?**

## The Appearance of Jesus (*1 John 3:5, 8*)

**What** do the following texts tell us about Jesus and what happened at His first coming? *1 John 1:2; 3:5, 8.*

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Jesus, at His first coming, appeared in human flesh. He came to solve the sin problem, and He came to destroy the works of the devil. If so, believers cannot have anything to do with sin or the originator of sin, the devil. By making common cause with sin, or by aligning ourselves with it, we are making common cause with Satan and are rejecting Jesus.

**According** to *1 John 3:5*, Jesus takes away sins. This statement seems to be an allusion to *John 1:29*. How did Jesus accomplish this task? *Heb. 9:26, 28; 1 John 2:2; 4:10; Rev. 1:5, 6.*

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First *John 3:5* does not directly tell us how Jesus took away sins. However, the context of *1 John* and of the Gospel of John makes it clear that Jesus did this by dying on the cross. Whereas Hebrews clearly states that Jesus did away with sin by His self-sacrifice, Revelation teaches that Jesus freed us from our sins by His blood.

While the first part of *1 John 3:5* may indirectly point to the Cross, the second part stresses the absolute sinlessness of Jesus, which was needed in order for His death on the cross to save us.

The antichrists of *1 John* may not have fully comprehended the true value of the Cross and the substitutionary death there in our stead. How foolish; for Christ's death in our behalf, in which He suffered the penalty for all our sins, forms the foundation of the plan of salvation. Christ's death was the only way possible for humans to be saved and have the promise of eternal life. To miss that is to miss the point of the entire gospel.

**In your own struggles with sin, guilt, fear, and lack of assurance, how does the Cross answer these challenges for you? How can you better avail yourself of the hope and promises we have through Jesus, not just for forgiveness but for power to overcome?**

## No Sin! (1 John 3:6, 9)

**How** can 1 John 3:6, 8, 9 be reconciled with 1 John 1:6–2:2?

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First John 3:6 and 9 contain strong and perplexing statements, asserting that no one who lives in Jesus and no one who is born by God sins. This sounds quite absolute. Christians have wrestled with these statements and have tried to find explanations. After all, what true Christians haven't wrestled with the reality of sin in their lives?

What we—in any case—can safely assume is that the apostle John does not contradict himself. In chapter 1 he says that people who claim to be without sin deceive themselves. In chapter 2 he points to our goal, which is not to sin, but he adds that if we do, then we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ. Our present passage must be understood in the light of the previous discussion on the topic of sin: Christians stay away from sin, but if they sin, they confess their wrongdoing and accept divine forgiveness.

Expositors have come up with different attempts to solve these difficult verses. Two are briefly mentioned:

1. John portrays the ideal in 1 John 3:6, 8, 9—which he also mentions in 1 John 2:1. The difference is that in 1 John 3 no qualifiers are added. A reason may be that John wants his hearers and readers to be clear about the issue of sin. Sin cannot be taken lightly. Followers of Christ cannot play with sin.

2. The verbs *to sin* and *to do (sin)* are found in the present tense, which oftentimes points to continuous actions. The meaning would be that disciples of Christ cannot *continuously* sin. They may fall in sin here and there, but they have separated from sin and do not practice a life of sin. They are not dominated by sin. The New International Version follows this view by translating the verbs with “to continue to sin.”

No matter which interpretation is accepted, chapter 3 must be understood in the light of chapters 1 and 2. Though sin is real, Christians have no choice but to put it away from their lives, no matter the cost.

**OK, you're a sinner. No one is going to debate that. The question is, How much blood, sweat, and tears do you expend in the battle against sin in your life? In what ways does your answer help explain your lifestyle?**

**Further Study:** Read Rom. 8:12–17, Phil. 2:14–16.

“Let none deceive themselves with the belief that they can become holy while willfully violating one of God’s requirements. The commission of a known sin silences the witnessing voice of the Spirit and separates the soul from God. ‘Sin is the transgression of the law.’ And ‘whosoever sinneth [transgresseth the law] hath not seen Him, neither known Him.’ 1 John 3:6. Though John in his epistles dwells so fully upon love, yet he does not hesitate to reveal the true character of that class who claim to be sanctified while living in transgression of the law of God. . . . And the claim to be without sin is, in itself, evidence that he who makes this claim is far from holy.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 472, 473.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 What does it mean in practical terms to be “like God”? In what ways can we be “like God” in a positive manner and in a negative one?
- 2 Some people are afraid of the idea that we are saved only by what Jesus has done for us. They say, if our salvation rests in Christ’s righteousness and not in our own, what’s to stop us from continuing in sin? How would you respond to that concern?
- 3 Someone once explained his or her understanding of the Cross this way: “I don’t use the Cross as an excuse or a cover for sin. What the Cross does for me is keep me from giving up altogether on God when I do sin.” Discuss the reasoning in that line of thought.
- 4 It’s virtually impossible not to be impacted by whatever society and culture you live in. In your particular society, what sins are deemed really bad that perhaps in another culture might not be deemed that bad, or even bad at all? How much should we let society influence our understanding of what sin is? What sins does your society not frown on that the Bible is explicit about?
- 5 We all know the promises we are given for victory over sin. At the same time, under what conditions, if any, should someone struggling with a sin, perhaps some kind of addiction, seek professional help and counseling? What do you say to the person who thinks that those who seek professional help are showing a lack of faith in God’s power?

## The Family Business

by CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN

Kwon Young-Soo inhaled deeply as he entered the bakery. Fragrant whole-grain bread cooled on trays near the ovens. *This bread will bless so many*, he thought, *and the money will help spread God's love so far!*

Kwon's passion is mission. A pastor by training, he wanted to reach beyond the pew to those who wouldn't hear that Jesus is their Savior unless he stepped outside his comfort zone and told them. His wife shared his passion, and the couple journeyed down a path that led to mission service and later to supporting those willing to go to unreached areas. God has blessed their efforts. The bakery is just one of several industries that Kwon and his family have started in order to share the gospel. The sanitarium they founded now has 60 beds and runs 10 NEWSTART\* health programs every year. In one year alone 135 were baptized as a result of this program.

Recently Kwon opened a training institute to prepare young people for mission work. One of the first 20 trainees sent to the mission field was his own daughter, who is serving in a predominantly nonchristian country in Asia. They work much like Global Mission pioneers, often establishing a small business or teaching a foreign language as a means of supporting themselves and meeting people with whom to share the gospel. Their term of service is undefined, and missionaries can stay as long as they wish. Some are in their sixth year of service.

Through his ministry Kwon can share his passion with others while he trains and sends them to the mission field. And because God has blessed so abundantly, Kwon has been able to expand his work and ministry far beyond his initial dreams.

Kwon's wife, Kim Suk-Woon, is a partner in the mission outreach her husband envisioned. "From the beginning these enterprises have always been God's work," she says. "We pray that we will never be tempted to consider it ours. It's God's; we only use the money to further the gospel." For the Kwons, mission is the family business. Mission is our business, too, one we support with our mission offerings every week.



\*NEWSTART is a health-education program operated by the Adventist Church.

KWON YOUNG-SOO (left). Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of Adventist Mission.

# Loving Brothers *and* Sisters



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Mark 12:28–31; John 14:15; James 2:15, 16; 1 John 3:11–24; 4:7–5:4.*

**Memory Text:** “And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also” (1 John 4:21, NKJV).

A pastor was visited by a woman full of hatred toward her husband. Not only did she want to divorce him, she wanted to cause him as much pain as possible. The pastor suggested that she go home and act as if she really loved him. She was to tell him how much he meant to her and to be as kind as she could. After having convinced him of her undying love, she would then inform him about wanting a divorce. That would all but guarantee hurting him as much as possible.

With revenge in her eyes, she did just that, lavishing love on him for a few months as she never had done before. Then the pastor called her and asked about her divorce.

“No way!” she replied. “I discovered I really do love him.”

Love is able to change our world, our churches, our families, and our marriages. This week we'll see a little of what John says about this crucial topic and how love is to be manifested by those who claim to be followers of Jesus.

**The Week at a Glance:** What does John teach about the importance of love? How is Christian love manifested? How does the plan of salvation reveal the true meaning of love? How can we, as sinners, have the assurance of salvation? How are Christians to manifest love?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 22.*

## The Two Passages on Love (*1 John 3:11–24, 4:7–5:4*)

The passage we investigated last week ended with saying that children of God are recognizable by doing what is right and by loving their brothers and sisters in the Lord (*1 John 3:10*). That verse builds a bridge to the discussion of love that appears in the rest of the epistle.

**What** are some of the similarities between **1 John 3:11–24** and **1 John 4:7–5:4**?

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The two passages are remarkably similar. Both contain the phrase “love one another” repeatedly (*1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12*). Both stress that the objects of love are primarily other believers, and both warn us against hating our brothers and sisters. Both passages also emphasize God’s love for us.

First John 3:11–24 focuses on love to one another and uses the variants of the phrase “to love” eight times; the second passage employs it more than thirty times and enlarges the topic: We are called to love not only the children of God but also God Himself. On the other hand, God loved us first and still loves us.

First John 4:7–5:4 must also be understood in the context of the antichrists, who were wrong in their ideas about Jesus. The passage says that Jesus is the Son of God (*1 John 4:15*) and the Christ (*1 John 5:1*) and became the atoning sacrifice for our sins and the Savior of the world. Only through Him and what He did for us can the love of God be understood in a deeper sense. That is, only as we understand what happened at the cross and how Christ bore in Himself the punishment for our sins can we come to love God as we should.

**Read again the passages for today’s lesson. What specific point, or points, jump out at you, talk to you, convict you the most? How well are you doing in regard to what John says here? How well do you reflect toward others the love that God has toward you? What changes do you need to make in order to better show that love?**



## The Definition of Love (*1 John 3:11–16, 4:7–16*)

**Though** John talks a lot about love in these verses, how does he define and explain love? *1 John 3:12–16; 1 John 4:7–10, 16.*

Interestingly enough, John does not set out to give a lexical definition of love. Rather, he starts out using the example of Cain as showing what love is not.

**How** does that example help make John's point?

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The negative example is followed by a positive one. Jesus laid down His life for us. The Father sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice. He sent Him to be the Savior of the world. This is the deepest meaning of love. Love means to do whatever is necessary to help others, even if it includes self-sacrifice. Hence, what a contrast to what Cain did to his brother. Love also means to forgive and to forget the past. In Jesus' case, it meant complete self-denial for the good of others.

But love is not a mere spectacle to be observed. It must have an impact on others' lives. If someone would jump in the water and drown just to prove his or her love, it would mean nothing. But if the person who jumped in lost his life in order to save someone else, that is love.

The best definition of *love* is the character and work of the Godhead as revealed in the plan of salvation, with Jesus giving Himself for us.

Christian love has its source in the love of God. To abide in love means to enjoy an intimate relationship with God. There is no love in the biblical sense that ultimately does not come from God (*1 John 4:7*). However, the statement that "everyone who loves is born of God and knows God" (*NKJV*) in the same verse could be misunderstood. It has to be interpreted in the context of 1 John. According to 1 John 3:23, faith (true belief) and love belong together; according to 1 John 5:2, love and keeping the commandments do too. Anyone can say that he or she loves God; John shows us how that love is to be revealed.

**What are some examples of this kind of love that you have seen manifested among others? Who manifested this love, what did they do, and what did you learn from them about the true meaning of love?**

## A Crisis of Assurance

**Read** 1 John 3:19–21. What point is John making? What is he saying to us? Who hasn't at some point experienced the feelings that John is talking about here?

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**Read** also 1 John 4:17, 18. What problem is he addressing here, as well? Again, who hasn't experienced this concern?

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What Christians at some point, looking at themselves, at their weaknesses, at their lack of love, at their shortcomings, have not felt condemned, guilty, even lost? How important to remember that God is greater than we are, greater than our guilt, greater than our hearts. How crucial that we realize, day by day, that our hope of salvation must rest on Jesus and His work in our behalf. Only by leaning on Him, on His merits and not our own, can we have confidence and assurance.

Confidence is emphasized several times in 1 John. John wants believers to be confident when they approach God in prayer (*1 John 3:21, 22*), confident before the reality of Christ's coming (*1 John 2:28*), and confident about the divine judgment (*1 John 4:17*). God means well for us, His children. Being grounded in His love drives away all fear.

"Satan knows that those who ask God for pardon and grace will obtain it; therefore he presents their sins before them to discourage them. Against those who are trying to obey God, he is constantly seeking occasion for complaint. Even their best and most acceptable service he seeks to make appear corrupt. By countless devices, the most subtle and the most cruel, he endeavors to secure their condemnation.

"In his own strength, man cannot meet the charges of the enemy. In sin-stained garments, confessing his guilt, he stands before God. But Jesus, our Advocate, presents an effectual plea in behalf of all who by repentance and faith have committed the keeping of their souls to Him. He pleads their cause, and by the mighty arguments of Calvary, vanquishes their accuser. His perfect obedience to God's law has given Him all power in heaven and in earth, and He claims from His Father mercy and reconciliation for guilty man."—Ellen G. White, *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 316.

**What hope can you take for yourself from these inspired words?**

## Love in Practice *(1 John 3:17, 18; 4:19–21)*

John is not content to theorize about love. He lets us know that God wants us to put love into practice. Therefore he states that hate is incompatible with a loving attitude, and it is even a form of murder (*1 John 3:15*). He says, too, that we should not love with words alone but with actions (*vs. 18*).

John, of course, isn't against us speaking kind and encouraging words to each other. Words are an important part of sharing love. How would spouses, children, relatives, and friends feel if they never received verbal affirmations from us? Even John himself used words to share God's love with others.

However, John is opposed to a superficial declaration of love with no strings attached. In *1 John 3:17* he describes a situation similar to the one found in *James 2:15, 16*. A church member is in need. Others have the means to help him or her but do not do anything other than say some nice things to that person. That's not enough. God not only informed us that He loves us, He sent His Son to die in our place. People who love much do much, because real love is active.

**Read** *1 John 3:16 and 17*. Which command is the harder one to follow, and why?

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It's not likely that any of us will be called to die for another believer. But we most likely will be called to demonstrate love for someone in need. We may have the means to provide jobs, food, clothes, a Christian education, a place of refuge, whatever. Instead, though, we prefer to live our own comfortable lives. Early Christians shared their financial means. To love others is a challenge, especially because it demands sacrifice on our part.

Of all the places that love must be manifested, no place is more important than in the home. There are endless ways we can show our love to family members. Sometimes even the littlest things can send a powerful message of love and acceptance: extra help around the house, a nice dinner, a special family outing together, whatever. There are many ways we can manifest love. Love thinks first about others; more so, it will act on those thoughts.

**Imagine what it would be like living in a home in which true love was manifested. What changes should you make that can help bring that ideal closer to reality in your home?**

## Love and the Commandments *(1 John 3:22–24, 4:21–5:4)*

Both passages that we have studied this week end with a reference to the commandments. The term is used four times each in both sections. First John 5:2 (*NIV*) talks about carrying out the commandments. First John 3:22, 24, and 5:3 (*NIV*) emphasize obeying, or keeping (*KJV*), the commandments.

**What** do the passages teach about the commandments apart from that they should be kept?

1 John 3:22 \_\_\_\_\_

1 John 3:23 \_\_\_\_\_

1 John 3:24 \_\_\_\_\_

1 John 4:21 \_\_\_\_\_

1 John 5:2 \_\_\_\_\_

1 John 5:3 \_\_\_\_\_

John says that keeping God’s commandments and doing what pleases Him (*1 John 3:22*) give Christians confidence that God hears their prayers. God’s command is to believe in Jesus and to love one another. Keeping the commandments allows for mutual abiding—we in God and God in us. To love God includes keeping the commandments, and indeed, *they can be kept* because they are not burdensome.

When John talks about *commandment* in the singular, he mentions the commandment to believe in Jesus as the Messiah and to love one another. In chapter 4 the *commandment* is that we who love God should also love our brothers and sisters.

When Jesus was asked which of the commandments was the most important, He responded by pointing to the commandment to love God with all one’s heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love one’s neighbor as oneself (*Mark 12:28–31*). Yet, He stressed that those who love Him keep His commandments (*John 14:15*), and in the Sermon on the Mount He referred to a number of different commandments.

By switching from *the commandment* (singular) to *the commandments* (plural), John may have indicated that the one commandment of love expresses itself in a multiplicity of commandments.

**How can we experience God’s commandments as something more than a set of rules? Is that all they are? Or are they something more?**

**Further Study:** Read 1 Corinthians 13; Ellen G. White, “A Faithful Witness,” p. 548, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“Never should we pass by one suffering soul without seeking to impart to him of the comfort wherewith we are comforted of God. All this is but a fulfillment of the principle of the law,—the principle that is illustrated in the story of the good Samaritan, and made manifest in the life of Jesus. His character reveals the true significance of the law, and shows what is meant by loving our neighbor as ourselves. And when the children of God manifest mercy, kindness, and love toward all men, they also are witnessing to the character of the statutes of heaven. . . . The love of God in the heart is the only spring of love toward our neighbor.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 505.

“You should get rid of your cold, frozen formality as soon as possible. You need to cultivate feelings of tenderness and friendliness in your everyday life. You should exhibit true courtesy and Christian politeness. The heart that really loves Jesus loves those for whom He died. Just as truly as the needle points to the pole, so will the true follower of Christ, with a spirit of earnest labor, seek to save souls for whom Christ has given His life. Working for the salvation of sinners will keep the love of Christ warm in the heart and will give that love a proper growth and development.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 466.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ We tend to think of all the admonitions to love as a personal issue, one between God and ourselves. And though that is true, it certainly isn’t limited to just us as individuals, is it? That is, what can your local church do, as a church body, to show love in ways that you as an individual can’t? How well is your local church revealing the love of God to the community? What can you do to help it along in this important area?
- ❷ In class, talk about various individuals who have displayed the kind of love talked about this week. What did they do? What kind of self-sacrifice was involved? What did their actions have in common that can help us better understand what true love is?
- ❸ The Bible says that love is from God. Why must that be so? Think about it—where else could love come from? It’s hard to imagine how pure matter and energy alone, the stuff of physics and atoms, could ever of itself create something like love. How does the reality of love help us better understand the reality of God? How does our expression of love reveal to others the existence of God? In what ways might the manifestation of love be the best evidence yet for God’s existence?

# The Persistent Porter

by INNOCE CHAPAMBA

A few years ago my family was returning home from Malawi to Zambia. At the border we had to wait several hours for the bus that would take us home. When the bus arrived, we stowed our luggage and found a seat. But just as we were about to leave, a porter told our family to get off the bus and wait for the next one. Mother argued, for the next bus wouldn't leave until the next day. But the porter politely but firmly insisted. Reluctantly we obeyed.

As he retrieved our luggage from the roof rack, my mother started crying. "Why us?" she said. "We have no place to sleep except out in the open." Other passengers tried to convince the porter to allow us back on the bus, but he politely refused. Finally we accepted the situation and sat down to wait until the next bus the following morning.

During the night the loudspeaker at the bus terminal crackled, awaking us. "The bus that left for the capital city yesterday afternoon was involved in a fiery crash. Everyone aboard that bus is dead."

Mother sat up and started crying. "My dears," she said through her tears as she gathered us close to her. "We should have been on that bus. The porter who forced us off the bus saved our lives. God saved us."

We sat stunned, trying to comprehend that God had saved us from death. We were Christians but not Adventists at the time. We recalled that although the porter had insisted that we get off the bus, he was never rude. "Is it possible that he was an angel?" we whispered among ourselves. When we arrived home, Mother told Father what had happened, and we all rejoiced in God's salvation.

Later I met some Adventist students who impressed me with their diligence and commitment to God. When told to help clean the campus on Sabbath, these students refused but politely offered to do their share of work on Sunday. One day I asked one of them about his faith, and he explained that Saturday is God's true Sabbath, the day God set aside for us to spend with Him. When I learned this, I wondered, Could they be right about the Sabbath?

I visited the Adventist church and eventually was baptized. I shared my faith with my family, and they, too, became Adventists.

I don't know why God sometimes intervenes and other times He doesn't. I'm sure many of us have been protected from harm without realizing it. I was blessed to have seen God's hand in a marvelous way.

Your mission offerings help spread God's love from person to person. Soon the whole world will know, and Jesus can come. Thank you for hastening that day.

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INNOCE CHAPAMBA *shares his faith from Blantyre, Malawi.*

# Believing *in the Son of God*



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 16:24, 25; John 1:1–3; 3:36; 5:24; Rom. 6:1–6; Heb. 12:4; 1 John 5:1–12.*

**Memory Text:** “Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (*1 John 5:5, ESV*).

Ideas about who Jesus is have varied not only in antiquity but also today. Some separate the biblical Jesus from the so-called historical Jesus and claim that the two may not have had much in common. The historical Jesus was, supposedly, a common man with a strong sensitivity to the divine, that's all. And He certainly was not the Son of God raised from the dead! Others believe that Jesus was a mere political revolutionary who, in a subtle way, tried to overthrow the Roman Empire.

We may be tempted to consider these topics as mere academic and philosophical exercises. But who Jesus is and what He claimed about Himself impact every human being. The way we think about Jesus influences dramatically how we relate to God, how we understand the plan of salvation, and how we can have assurance of salvation.

That's why John deals with the topic in his letters.

**The Week at a Glance:** What promises of victory are we given? What does John mean when he talks about “by water and blood”? What reasons are we given for faith? What does John say about the divinity of Christ? What does John teach about the promise of eternal life?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 29.*

## Believing in Jesus and Victory *(1 John 5:1-5)*

**“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him”** *(1 John 5:1).*

After having studied John’s teaching about brotherly love, we now turn to the subject of faith in Jesus as the Christ/Messiah, the Son of God. In fact, the two topics, belief and love, overlap in the first verses of chapter 5.

John wants his audience to believe in Jesus as the Christ. Those who do are, he says, born of God. They love God, love one another, and keep the commandments. Believers in Jesus as the Son of God also overcome the world *(1 John 5:1-5)*.

Throughout history some people have understood the battle that Christians have to fight in overcoming the world as some kind of literal military conflict. Yet, that is wrong. Nowhere in Scripture are Christians called to set out as crusaders and force others to convert. Nowhere in the New Testament is a nation equated with the kingdom of God and, as such, to be defended or expanded by violence. The battle that Christians have to fight is a spiritual battle. In the Johannine literature, the way to overcome is not by the use of violence and physical force. The way to overcome is by faith, and faith is exhibited by the kind of life one lives.

**In the following texts, John is talking about conquering and overcoming. What can we learn about these promises from the following texts?**

*John 16:33* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 4:4* \_\_\_\_\_

*Rev. 2:7, 11; 3:5, 21* \_\_\_\_\_

*Rev. 12:11* \_\_\_\_\_

The conqueror par excellence is Jesus Christ. Because He has won the victory, His followers are able to overcome too. To some extent, they already have the victory, His victory in their behalf. The overcomers receive wonderful promises from God that we no longer have to be slaves to sin *(Rom. 6:1-6)* but that in Jesus and in the new life we have in Him, we serve the Lord, not Satan, our old master.

**In what areas of your life have you experienced the promise of victory and overcoming? In what areas have you fallen short, and why? How can you have the victory that is promised you? What is holding you back?**



## The Jesus in Whom We Believe (1 John 5:6–8)

After having pointed to the importance of having faith in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, John goes on to show his audience who this Son of God was, and one of the things he says about Jesus is that He came “by water and blood” (1 John 5:6).

What does that mean?

In 1 John, water is mentioned only in these verses for today. However, it appears quite frequently in the Gospel of John and also in Revelation. The water that John mentions in 1 John 5:6, 8 must be—according to the passage—somehow related to Jesus and His first coming, and it must be one of the three elements that testify that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God.

The phrase “blood and water” is used in John 19:34 in connection with Jesus’ death but does not seem to be the water that John mentions in 1 John 5:6–8. Rather, in the beginning of John’s Gospel, water is associated with baptism (*John 1:26, 31, 33; 3:5, 23*). This seems to be the setting for 1 John. Jesus came as incarnate Lord and began His public ministry by being baptized with water. He ended His earthly ministry on the cross, when He shed His blood. Apparently, *water* points to Jesus’ baptism and *blood* to His death on the cross (1 John 1:7).

Baptism and crucifixion, then, point to who Jesus was and what He was to accomplish for us. In both cases divine manifestations and human reactions showed that indeed He was the Son of God (*Matt. 3:17, 27:50–54*).

In these verses John was still dealing with the false teaching of these antichrists. These concepts were impacting the minds of believers. If Jesus was neither the Messiah nor the Son of God, their message would be, *The atoning death of the Son of God is not necessary for our salvation. The Son of God did not die on the cross in our place in order to redeem us.* Such a concept would lead to a completely different understanding of salvation and of the Godhead. Redemption would be through knowledge (*gnosis*), not through the Cross. Hence, John wanted the people to know exactly who Jesus was and what He had done for them through His life and death. He didn’t want people to be deceived by these false teachings.

**Water and blood. Think on those two images and how they apply to Jesus. In what ways are we to experience the reality of water and blood in our own lives? In other words, what did your baptism mean to you? What does it say about you, and what changes have come in your life? The same with blood: What does the concept of shed blood mean, at least in terms of being a Christian? See Matt. 16:24, 25; Heb. 12:4.**

## Jesus and the Testimony of God *(1 John 5:9, 10)*

The first and second witnesses to the divine Sonship of Jesus are water and blood. The third witness is the Holy Spirit (*1 John 5:6, 8*). According to John's Gospel, Jesus had announced that the Holy Spirit would testify about Him (*John 15:26*).

Why are these witnesses needed? Two to three witnesses were required in the Old Testament to confirm a matter (*Deut. 19:15*). John, apparently, wants to make clear that the case of Jesus has a sound foundation. He wants to show that we have good reasons for believing.

**What** is John saying to us in 1 John 5:9, 10? What does He want us to believe?

For John, the idea of witnesses or various testimonies about Jesus is quite important. In his Gospel he mentions several others: John the Baptist's testimony (*John 1:6, 7*), Jesus' own testimony (*John 3:32*), the testimony of the Samaritan woman (*John 4:39*), the testimony of Jesus' works (*John 5:36*), the testimony of Scripture (*vs. 39*), the testimony of God the Father (*John 8:18*), the testimony of the people who watched the resurrection of Lazarus (*John 12:17*), the testimony of the Holy Spirit (*John 15:26*), and the testimony of the apostle John himself (*John 21:24*). This is very impressive. John wants to establish that belief in Jesus rests on powerful testimonies.

The testimony of the Father in our text has been understood differently. It seems to make the most sense if connected with the threefold testimony mentioned in the preceding verses. That is, this threefold testimony is, basically, God's testimony.

John says that if we are willing to accept the witness of humans, how much more so the witness of God Himself? Indeed, often we take at face value what people tell us, whether in print or television media, even if we have no good grounds for believing what we hear. How much more should we accept God's own witness and believe in Jesus as portrayed in the New Testament!

God is reliable and true (*1 John 5:20*). If we do not accept His testimony, we claim that God is a liar, a serious accusation indeed.

**What are all the reasons you have for believing in God, in Jesus, in the hope that the Adventist message presents to us? Go back over those reasons, write them down, pray over them, and bring them to class to share with others.**

## The Issue of the Trinity (1 John 5:7, 8)

In some versions of the Bible the words “in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth” appear in 1 John 5:7, 8 (*NKJV*). The only problem is they are a later addition, not found in the original manuscripts.

Among biblical scholars there is agreement that this statement is not genuine and has been added, probably to support the doctrine of the Trinity. Of course, biblical texts should never be tampered with, for many reasons (*Rev. 22:18*), one of the most important being that people may start having doubts about the reliability of Scripture as a whole and start to mistrust God’s Word.

The fact is, even without these words the doctrine of the Trinity is firmly established in Johannine literature. Although the authors of the New Testament believe that God is one, they portray Jesus and the Holy Spirit as God. To reconcile the oneness of God with the divinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the concept of the Trinity is crucial.

**John** has powerful statements about the divinity of Jesus. What does he teach about Jesus Christ in the following texts?

*John 1:1–3, 14* \_\_\_\_\_

*John 8:58, 59* \_\_\_\_\_

*John 10:30, 31* \_\_\_\_\_

*John 20:28* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 2:23* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 5:20* \_\_\_\_\_

Though there’s no question about the divinity of Jesus as established by these texts (and many others), the passage that we are studying this week does not try to establish the doctrine of the Trinity. That wasn’t the point. It is, instead, a passage about faith in Jesus as the Son of God and the witness given to the world about Him.

**Keeping in mind the divinity of Jesus, go back over the final scenes of His life, right up through the Cross. As you do, remember that this person was also God the Creator. Dwell on the implications of these truths. Why should this reality change our lives?**

## The Result of Believing in Jesus *(1 John 5:11, 12)*

God has provided a wonderful gift for humanity. This gift is eternal life *(1 John 5:11, 12)*. However, it is available in Jesus Christ only. How can we receive this gift? By accepting God’s testimony about His Son, for instance, by believing in and accepting Jesus.

**What** does the apostle John in his Gospel teach about eternal life?

*John 3:16* \_\_\_\_\_

*John 3:36* \_\_\_\_\_

*John 5:24* \_\_\_\_\_

*John 6:54* \_\_\_\_\_

John’s discussion on faith in Jesus and who Jesus is and why we can accept God’s testimony is not an academic exercise. It has a clear, practical goal, namely, finding eternal life in the Son of God. John’s opponents—who questioned the true divinity of Christ, or who questioned the true humanity of Christ, or who wanted to separate the divine from the human—had a different view of Jesus and did not believe in Him in the biblical sense. Because they did not have the Jesus of Scripture, they did not have eternal life. Even if they would claim to have eternal life, even if they had *superior knowledge* and a good feeling about possessing eternal life, their claims would not be true.

**“Eternal life is possible through Jesus Christ only.”** What are the implications of such a statement? *1 John 5:11, 12.*

John clearly states that those who do not have the Son of God do not have life, while those who have Jesus have everlasting life. These are very strong words, full of incredible implications for the entire human race. No wonder the issues of salvation are so important. They are, literally, a question not just of life or death but of *eternal* life or *eternal* death. You can’t get much more serious than this.

**What about folk who have never had the opportunity to hear the gospel presented in a clear manner? Are they all automatically lost? As you think about your answer, don’t forget to take into account God’s universal love for all humanity. How can you learn to better trust the Lord on this difficult question?**

**Further Study:** Read Matt. 16:13–17, John 12:37–46.

“In him was life; and the life was the light of men’ (John 1:4). 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’ (John 10:18), He said. In Him was life, original, unborrowed, underived. This life is not inherent in man. He can possess it only through Christ. He cannot earn it; it is given him as a free gift if he will believe in Christ as His personal Saviour. ‘This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent’ (John 17:3). This is the open fountain of life for the world.”  
—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 296, 297.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1** In class, go over your answer to Tuesday’s final question. How can you draw strength and encouragement from each other’s answers?
- 2** John talks about the witnesses we have been given regarding Jesus. What about the witness that we ourselves present to the world? If someone had viewed every aspect of your life during the past 24 hours, what kind of witness would you have presented? If you had known someone was going to be watching, what would you have done differently? After you give your answer, ask yourself, Why would I have done it differently? Also, don’t you know that Someone is watching anyway?
- 3** OK, so you have the promise of eternal life. But what does that mean? How should it impact how you live here, now? What do you do differently now, knowing that you have this promise?
- 4** Go back over the Ellen G. White quote given above. What stands out and especially speaks to you? What hope and encouragement can you get from it?
- 5** With so much at stake, eternal life or eternal destruction, why is it still so easy for us to get caught up in the things of the world, things that we know cannot satisfy us and that cannot last or give us eternal life? What is the secret of being able to break the hold of the world on us? How can you help someone who truly wants to be a Christian, who wants these promises for himself or herself, and yet can’t seem to break away from the world?

# The Angel's Visit

by HADJILYN PRECIADO

SULADS, student missionaries from Mountain View College, are assigned to teach and minister throughout southern Philippines. My assignment as a student missionary was to teach in a Manobo village in northeastern Mindanao. The village is a challenging climb up mountains and through thick jungle. Life is difficult in these places, but God encourages us as we spend a year serving Him.

At first teaching was difficult because many of our students were bigger and stronger than we were. But soon they realized that we meant business and cared about them. Soon the once-empty church came alive with young people who had strayed during the time that no teacher worked here. Many agreed to take Bible studies.

Datu Daging, the chief, wanted his people to learn to read, but he wanted nothing to do with God. Often he jeered as we studied the Bible with people. "This is nonsense!" he would say. "I have an *abyan* (a spirit who the people believe gives power to heal or protection from enemies). My *abyan* gives me all the help I need, so I don't need God in my life!" While others worshiped with us, the datu scoffed and boasted that his *abyan*, his god, was more powerful than God.

Then one night the datu told us he had a dream. A big man in white appeared to him. His face radiated calm and love. But the datu couldn't understand him and was about to talk to the being when he awoke. When he opened his eyes, he saw that the being stood before him. He pinched himself to wake up, and still the stranger stood looking at him.

Then the stranger spoke. "If you want to be saved in God's kingdom, you must worship God with the Sabbath keepers. They're God's true people who worship on His Sabbath. God is coming soon to take His children to heaven. So hurry! Your soul is precious to God."

Datu Daging bowed his head and considered the message he had heard. When he looked up, the stranger was gone.

That Sabbath Datu Daging was in church with his wife and children. He asked for Bible studies and was baptized recently in a regional rally. Datu Daging now is an active member of our little village church. Though we SULADS don't often see them, we know that angels have appeared to many who live in the mountains of the Philippines, assisting the SULADS missionaries in their work.

Your mission offerings support Adventist colleges and universities in the Philippines, which send missionaries throughout the Philippines and beyond to share God's love with those who have never heard. Thank you.

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HADJILYN PRECIADO was a SULADS teacher at Agasan Mission School in Mindanao, Philippines, when she wrote this.

# Confidence



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *John 3:36, Acts 4:29, 1 Cor. 9:27, Heb. 4:16, 1 John 5:13–21, Rev. 12:9.*

**Memory Text:** “And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us” (*1 John 5:14, RSV*).

**B**en Franklin once said that only two things are certain in this life: death and taxes. There's a third certain thing, as well: life is full of uncertainty!

We do not know how secure our jobs are. Nothing guarantees our protection from sickness, terrorism, war, and natural disaster. We have no guarantee that when we go to bed we will wake up the next day.

Facing this, we do our best, trying to protect ourselves from these troubles the best we can, and yet, in the end our best efforts can guarantee us nothing.

But what about God? And God's promises to us? Are they not certain? How can we live without confidence and assurance when it comes to God? Our relationship with God and living with Him forever are more important than anything else. What does John have to say to us about this, the most important thing in our lives?

**The Week at a Glance:** What can we have confidence in? How do we not turn our confidence into presumption? What confidence can we have that our prayers will be answered? What protection are we offered against Satan? How can we come to a knowledge of God?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 5.*

## Having Confidence *(1 John 5:13–21)*

First John 5:14 contains the word *confidence*, which also has the meaning of “assurance,” “boldness,” or in other contexts “frankness” (*Acts 4:29, 31*) and “openness” (*John 16:25, 29*).

According to Hebrews 4:16 and 10:19, Christians can draw near to the throne of God with confidence. Why? First, because Jesus shed His blood for them on the cross. And second, because Jesus has ascended to heaven to serve there as High Priest on their behalf.

The same term is used by John in 1 John 4:17 talking about “confidence” or “boldness” in the day of judgment. Christians are not afraid of judgment. They rely on what Jesus has done for them. Their confidence is not in themselves, or what they have done or could ever do. This confidence rests, instead, entirely on Jesus.

Another way that John expresses this idea of confidence is by the repeated use of the phrase “we know” at the end of 1 John. While this phrase is found throughout the letter only twice (*1 John 3:2, 14*), it occurs five times in the conclusion of the epistle and additionally stresses the topic of “confidence.”

### **According** to the following texts, what can we be confident about?

*1 John 5:13* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 5:15* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 5:18* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 5:19* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 5:20* \_\_\_\_\_

In 1 John 5:13 the apostle says “you may know” and talks about assurance of salvation. From 1 John 5:15 onward he uses “we know.” In 1 John 5:15 he emphasizes that our prayers are heard. We can be confident. In 1 John 5:18 “we know” is followed by the promise of divine protection. In 1 John 5:19 the same phrase “we know” introduces the wonderful concept of belonging to God, and 1 John 5:20 stresses that we know Jesus and thereby, through Jesus, we know God and are in Him. Therefore, Christians have confidence with regard to their relationship to God, their prayer life, and their present state and future destiny.

**How many times have you disappointed yourself in the last month, week, or even *day*? We would say, “Keep a record of those disappointments,” but that might be too discouraging. How does the reality of your own foibles bring home the need to make sure that your confidence rests in Jesus and not in yourself?**



## Having Eternal Life *(1 John 5:13)*

**Read** 1 John 5:13. What can we be sure of, according to this text?

Verse 13 provides an important reason John wrote his letter. He wanted his audience to have assurance of salvation. His hearers and readers should know that they already have eternal life. Everlasting life is a present reality. John made a similar statement at the end of his Gospel (*John 20:30, 31*).

First John 5:13 surpasses the other texts in the New Testament that deal with everlasting life. They mention a condition and contain a promise (e.g., *John 3:36*), but 1 John 5:13 states that children of God should know that they have eternal life. It is not an option, something that can be added to a Christian life or can be left out. God wants us to have assurance of salvation. Moses (*Exod. 32:32*), Peter (*1 Pet. 5:1*), Paul (*2 Tim. 4:7, 8*), the Christians in Ephesus (*Eph. 2:8*), and the believers in Colossae (*Col. 1:12–14*) had this certainty.

**How,** though, can we be protected from taking assurance and turning it into presumption? See *Matt. 10:22, 1 Cor. 9:27, Rev. 3:11*.

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Some folk have taken this “confidence” of salvation and turned it into an “unconditional guarantee,” the idea of “once saved, always saved.” If this were true, what would stop us from forgetting all about God and living an immoral and unethical life—one that would, according to the Bible, bar us from heaven (*Gal. 5:21, Rev. 21:8*)? After all, it’s hard enough, even knowing that we can fall away from God, to keep ourselves pure. Imagine if we thought it didn’t matter at all how we lived!

The Bible teaches that there is assurance of salvation, but this certainty can be lost through our own choices. We need to hold on to the crown of life by keeping ourselves daily surrendered to the Lord in obedience and in repentance and faith. We must, always, watch and pray, for Satan is seeking whom he may devour (*1 Pet. 5:8*). And if that’s not us, then who?

**Look at yourself closely (we know, it’s painful!). Are you struggling with assurance of salvation? If so, isn’t it because of the things that you are doing? If so, then you must first claim the forgiveness that is yours and then claim the power to overcome that is promised you. What’s holding you back but your own choices?**

**According to His Will** (*1 John 5:14–17*)

**Read** 1 John 5:14, 15. What promise do we have there? Most important, what should it mean to us?

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We can come to God with all our joys, burdens, and requests. We can tell Him that we need money. We can tell Him that we have problems with our kids and need His intervention. We can tell Him that we are seriously ill and need healing. Do we know that He will send us a check, straighten out our kids, or heal us from a vicious disease? Not necessarily. When Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, He added to His prayer “Your will be done” (*Matt. 26:42, NKJV*); and God did not deliver Him from the cross.

However, if we confess our sins and ask for forgiveness, God does not put us on a waiting list; rather, we can have confidence that, as we end our prayer, forgiveness has become a reality. If I ask Him to make me His child because I accept Jesus as Savior and Lord, God will answer such a prayer right away. Whenever the will of God is revealed in Scripture—whether in a commandment or a promise—and we claim that expression of His will, we know that the prayer is answered. In cases in which we are not sure how God will lead us, we should add “Your will be done” to our prayers and in confidence trust that the Lord will do what is best.

First John 5:16, 17 is not easy to understand. Scholars are divided on what it means (some say it’s the sin against the Holy Spirit). We do know, however, that all sin is unrighteousness and cannot be justified or tolerated. But what is the distinction of sins that John has made in these verses? This is not easy to answer. Whatever John is saying, we can be sure that he’s not downplaying the seriousness of sin.

**We’ve all had prayers that have not come to pass in any way, shape, or form. A loved one dies despite prayer. A job is lost despite prayer. And so forth. In some cases, later on we can see how things really did turn out better when the prayer wasn’t answered as we had wanted. In others, all we see is disappointment, heartache, and sorrow. How are we to deal with the latter? How are we to continue to live by faith and trust God when seemingly unanswered prayers leave us filled with sorrow, disappointment, and, yes, even doubt?**

## Confident of Being Protected (1 John 5:18, 19)

In 1 John 5:18, 19, John twice states that “we know.” Both verses begin with this statement. However, John is not concerned with knowledge only.

### **What** indirect challenges do verses 18 and 19 contain?

In verse 18 (*NKJV*), the phrase “born of God” is used twice. However, the first phrase refers to every true believer, while the second phrase refers to Jesus. In Greek there is a difference of tenses that may be quite important. “Anyone born of God” (the first phrase) occurs in the perfect tense and may describe the lasting effect of regeneration. The second phrase occurs in a tense that refers to one specific event in the past only. The second phrase describes Jesus’ incarnation. Jesus was born of Mary in Bethlehem. The first phrase refers to the experience of humans who are born again (*John 3:3, 5; 1 John 3:9*). The usage of the same term for Jesus may point to the fact that Jesus has come close to us, even became one of us. On the other hand, Jesus is different from us. He is the Son of God in a sense that we never will be.

### **What** comfort do these verses contain? 1 John 5:18, 19.

Both verses mention “the evil one.” The term is also used in 1 John 2:13, 14; 3:12. It describes Satan. Additionally John calls him “devil” (*1 John 3:8, 10*). According to Revelation 12:9 he is the old serpent, the devil. First John 5:18, 19 provides a short glimpse of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. This controversy is revealed in the book of Revelation, especially chapter 12. However, the different parties are already pointed to in 1 John.

In verses 18 and 19 John refers to the world as the arena of the evil one. On the other side of the conflict, the disciples of Jesus are found together with God the Father and Jesus. These believers are protected by Him. Jesus keeps them and does not allow Satan to touch them. Therefore, they are able to say No to sin and to withstand temptations.

Verse 19 states that we *are* of God. We can be confident because we have a direct and intimate relationship with God and are separate from the world. As children of God we can claim His promises.

**How are you experiencing the reality of the great controversy in your own life? How can you make these promises of victory and protection your own? That is, what are you doing that might make it impossible for those promises to be realized for you now? At the same time, what hope can you draw from the fact that Jesus has already won the war against Satan for us and offers us His victory?**

## Having True Knowledge of the Godhead

(1 John 5:20, 21)

Again John states that “we know.” We know Him who is true. The Son of God, Jesus, has come into this world and has revealed to us God the Father. This knowledge is not merely head knowledge but knowledge that leads us to a close connection with God.

### **According** to 1 John 5:20, who is the One who is true?

Throughout his first letter we have seen that John switches easily from the Father to Jesus. In some cases the personal pronouns *He* and *Him* may even refer to both Father and Son. This is no surprise, because he “who confesses the Son has the Father also” (1 John 2:23, *RSV*). First John 5:20 includes the word *true* three times. The first reference clearly points to God the Father: Jesus has come and has given us insight so that we understand the Father, at least to some extent.

The second reference may refer to Jesus: “We are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ” (*NKJV*). The last part of this clause seems to explain the first: The Son of God is the one who is true. The word *true* is found in 1 John 2:8, describing Jesus (*see also Rev. 3:7, 14*), but it also is an attribute of the Father (*John 7:28*).

The last reference in 1 John mentioning the word *true* occurs in the sentence, “This is the true God, and eternal life” (*NKJV*). This sentence may refer to God the Father, to Jesus, or to both. Expositors are divided on this issue. In any case, it makes perfect sense if it relates to Jesus.

### **What** does 1 John 5:21 say, and how could we apply the principle to ourselves?

So far in the entire Epistle, John has not mentioned idolatry. Instead, he has wrestled with false conceptions of Jesus and their influence on those church members who had not left the church. Why would he at the end of his letter, as a final admonition, introduce a topic not found before? Perhaps John considers the false views of Christ as idolatry, and so idolatry is associated with the teachings of the antichrists about God and Jesus. Their understanding of the Godhead could be seen as worshiping false gods instead of the Father, who in Jesus gives eternal life and confidence to all true believers.

**Write a paragraph expressing what you “know” about the nature and character of God and bring it to class on Sabbath. What are some things about God that you do not know? What are the things that you don’t know but would like to know?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Asking to Give,” pp. 147, 148, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “From Jezreel to Horeb,” p. 157, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“When we pray for earthly blessings, the answer to our prayer may be delayed, or God may give us something other than we ask, but not so when we ask for deliverance from sin. It is His will to cleanse us from sin, to make us His children, and to enable us to live a holy life. Christ ‘gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.’ Gal. 1:4. And ‘this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.’ 1 John 5:14, 15. ‘If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’ 1 John 1:9.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 266.

“If the life of the sick can glorify Him, we pray that they may live; nevertheless, not as we will but as He will. Our faith can be just as firm, and more reliable, by committing the desire to the all-wise God, and, without feverish anxiety, in perfect confidence, trusting all to Him. We have the promise. We know that He hears us if we ask according to His will. Our petitions must not take the form of a command, but of intercession for Him to do the things we desire of Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 149.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, discuss what you wrote at the end of Thursday’s lesson. What can you learn from each other?
- ❷ Many have struggled with the question of “assurance of salvation.” What usually is the reason for this problem? How can you help those who are struggling here?
- ❸ Considering all the wonderful promises in the Bible for victory over sin, why do so many of us still fall into the same sins again and again?
- ❹ How are we seeing the reality of the great controversy being manifested in our world today? How is it being played out in our own communities, or even our own homes? What are we doing, in the controversy, for the cause of Christ? What can we as individuals, or together with our church, do for the cause of Christ in His battle with Satan?

# God Chose a Child

by VIJAYANANDA AND GEETARANI PARICHHA

When 3-year-old Vigee greeted the woman walking by his home, she stopped and chatted with him. The next day Vigee greeted her again, and soon the two became friends. He called her Auntie. Sometimes Auntie's husband joined her, and they both stopped and talked with Vigee.

The child's parents noticed their son speaking with this couple and greeted them as well. When Viju, the boy's father, learned that Auntie and Uncle were Christians, he began debating the Bible with them. "No Christian church has the truth!" Viju challenged.

Auntie and Uncle told their Adventist pastor about the strong-willed neighbor and invited the pastor to accompany them to visit Viju.

Viju welcomed the men into his home. "Do you have some questions to ask about God or the Bible?" the pastor asked. Viju had plenty of questions! He asked about rebirth, and the pastor explained what the Bible means when it talks of being born again. Viju believed in reincarnation and refused to agree with the pastor.

After talking for hours, the pastor promised to return the next day to continue their discussion. He returned almost every evening for several months to talk about the Bible. Sometimes Viju listened, and other times he argued.

One evening when Viju asked a question, the pastor simply prayed and left, saying that God would answer his question. That night Viju dreamed that a man in a white robe told him to throw three jackfruit seeds into a fire. He obeyed and watched as the outer fruit burned away but the seed was unharmed. Then the man said that his sins must be burned like the jackfruit flesh in order to have a new birth experience. Viju realized that God had sent this dream.

Viju's wife, Geeta, had longed to be a Christian and was disappointed when Viju chose to follow other gods. Now she rejoiced that her husband was surrendering his life to the Savior.

The couple prepared for baptism, but their relatives were unhappy about their decision. Many held high positions in their own churches, and they hoped that the couple would join their denomination. But as the couple's relatives learned the Bible truths Viju and his wife embraced, some accepted the Adventist message.

"When no pastor could convince me, God used my own son and a kind woman to lead us to the Lord," Viju says. Now we seek to lead others to Him. Your mission offerings help make one-to-one evangelism possible around the world.

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*VIJAYANANDA PARICHHA and his wife, GEETARANI, are teachers in Bhubaneswar, Orissa, India.*

# Important Themes in 1 John



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 5:13, John 14:6, Eph. 4:25–5:21, 1 Tim. 3:15, 1 John.*

**Memory Text:** “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is” (*1 John 3:2, NASB*).

Of all the tragedy that came out of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., there was one positive development: for many people it sounded the death knell for moral relativism. The cold-blooded slaughter of thousands, in broad daylight, right on our TV sets, brought home for many people in real time the horror involved in such mass murder. It was suddenly obvious that evil like this could never be justified on the basis of culture. On September 11, people saw the face of a moral evil, an evil that transcended all culture, all traditions, all epochs; and suddenly for many the objective nature of morality, particularly of evil, finally hit home as never before.

Of course, for John, moral relativity was never an issue. He knew that there was absolute truth, and it was centered in Christ. This week we'll review some of the major themes of 1 John, including His understanding of the nature of truth, which always forms the foundation of morality.

**The Week at a Glance:** What does John teach us about the work of the Godhead? What images does he use to convey the idea of what the church should be like? What is the only basis of our salvation? What does John teach about truth?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 12.*

## The Godhead

In 1 John, we are given a glimpse of the Godhead: the Father (*1 John 2:16*), the Son (*vs. 23*), and the Holy Spirit (*1 John 5:6*). The main emphasis, however, is on Jesus and the Father. The letter tells us that God is light and that darkness (evil) is not found in Him. It tells us that God is righteous and that He is love. Indeed, our ability to love is dependent on the God who is love. God's relationship to the believers is expressed with the term *children*, which itself reveals the love and care He has for us. In short, 1 John paints for us a very positive and hopeful picture of what our God is like.

But the chapter also tells us something else. It tells us what the Lord is doing for us. Here's where our real hope and encouragement should lie.

**According to 1 John, what has God done for us, and what is being done now for us?**

*1 John 1:9* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 2:1, 2* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 2:27* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 3:8* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 4:8–10* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 5:11* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 5:14* \_\_\_\_\_

The letter refers to Christ's coming in human flesh, as well as His death for us, which offers us the opportunity to have eternal life. At the same time, His death defeated the works of the devil, our enemy. According to 1 John, God forgives our sins, cleanses us, intercedes for us, and gives us eternal life. He offers us assurance and makes us His children. The bottom line is that it is the Cross and the blood of Jesus alone that saves us, nothing else.

**Are there any areas of your life that you have not fully surrendered to the Lord? That is, are you doing things that you know, deep down, are wrong and yet haven't given up? If so, in the end only you can make the choice to give it up. If the Spirit is touching you, why not make the choice now? The longer you wait, the harder it gets.**



## The Church

In the New Testament the church is presented with a number of images such as salt (*Matt. 5:13*), a pillar (*1 Tim. 3:15*), a building or house (*Eph. 2:21, 22*), a temple (*1 Cor. 3:16, 17*), a mother (*Rev. 12:1, 2*), a bride (*Rev. 21:2*), and Christ's body (*Eph. 1:22, 23*).

**In 1 John, though the word *church* itself does not appear, the concept does. What imagery is found in the book that better helps us understand what the church should be all about?**

*1 John 2:9–11* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 2:13, 14* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 2:12, 18* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 3:1* \_\_\_\_\_

In 1 John it seems that the church primarily is portrayed as a family. There is the heavenly Father (12 times). In addition, John himself is a father figure of sorts, calling the church members “little children” (*1 John 2:18*). The church members are “children” (13 times), “fathers and young men” (each twice), and “brothers” (13 times).

These terms imply a certain kind of intimacy, a close relationship and love for each other, and contain the notion of belonging together. Everyone is needed, and everyone has a place in God's family. In addition, this family includes the Godhead. Consequently, this community has a horizontal and a vertical dimension. As members of the church, we are literally part of the family of God.

**“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God”** (*1 John 4:7*). **How does this text reflect the key to what it means to be part of God's church?**

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\_\_\_\_\_

**How would you describe your relationship to the church family? Are you a wayward child? Domineering father? Loving mother? Helpless babe? What changes do you need to make in order to be a more productive part of this special family?**

## Salvation

The Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is all about Jesus. But not about Jesus in a vacuum. It's about Jesus and Redemption. It's about what God has done in behalf of the fallen race. It's about the amazing self-sacrifice of God Himself in order to restore us to what we were originally given, and even more.

In short, the Bible is about salvation, and that's a key theme in 1 John, as well.

**According** to the following texts, how are we given salvation?

1 John 1:9 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

1 John 2:2 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

1 John 4:9, 10 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The means of our salvation is Christ's blood (1 John 1:7; 5:6, 8); that is, His atoning sacrifice (1 John 2:2, 4:10). The Cross is not mentioned in 1 John directly. However, blood and atoning sacrifice point to the Cross. *It is not the example of Jesus that saves us, as important as that is. It is His death.* And yet, His example calls us to walk as He did (1 John 2:6).

For John, the salvation of the believers is a present reality. He describes it in various ways:

- They have come to know Him (1 John 2:2, 3).
- They are in Him (1 John 2:5, 5:20).
- Their sins have been forgiven (1 John 2:12).
- They have overcome the evil one (vs. 13).
- They have passed from death to life (1 John 3:14).
- They have eternal life (1 John 5:12, 13).

This is a wonderful portrayal of what salvation is all about.

**Considering the great promises and hope that we have in Jesus, what more could you do in order to reach more people with the good news? What sacrifices are you willing to make in order to give others the opportunity to know Jesus and His salvation?**

## Christian Behavior

Although John in his first letter deals with erroneous theology, he again and again deals with ethics. John clearly sees that theology informs ethics and that a wrong theology can lead to wrong actions. Hence, it's important to be as correct in our theology as possible. A wrong understanding, for instance, of the law and grace has caused untold millions to trample on God's Sabbath day. Thus, we must make sure that our theological understanding of God and Scripture is mature, growing, and correct.

We also must make sure that our theology correctly translates into practice. It is sad to see someone, a great defender of orthodox theology, run away with his neighbor's spouse. It is tragic for theology majors and seminarians to cheat on their exams. It is lamentable when Sabbath keepers who know the truth about salvation, the heavenly sanctuary, and the state of the dead nevertheless lie to each other.

**Review** the following texts and on the lines below summarize what they teach us about ethical behavior. *1 John 1:7; 2:1, 15, 16; 3:4, 7, 15, 17, 18; 4:7; 5:2, 3.*

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John stresses ethical behavior with direct and indirect appeals. He calls for Christians not to lie, not to sin, not to hate brother or sister, not to love the world with its lusts and boastful pride, and not to practice lawlessness. Instead, he says that we must be obedient, do what is right, and love each other in a tangible way. Although Paul is more detailed than John (*see, for example, Eph. 4:25–5:21*), John has summarized all of this when he points to keeping God's commandments and walking as Jesus walked and lived (*1 John 2:6*).

John makes it clear that to be born of God, to know God, to love God, is something that will change our lives. For John, truth isn't just something believed; it is something lived out. Perhaps no verse says it clearer than *1 John 3:7*: "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous."

**How are we to walk and live as Jesus lived? What does that mean on a practical and daily basis? Are you facing something right now, perhaps, that will require a lot of grace and strength to act as Christ would act?**

## Truth and Lies

From the time of the ancient Greeks through even today, there has been the notion that truth is relative, that there are no absolutes, and that human beings, far from having some transcendent absolute standard to guide them and their actions, pretty much have to decide for themselves what is truth and what is error, what is good and what is bad, what is moral and what is immoral. It's known basically as relativism, and though it comes in various guises, the basic point is the same: There is no absolute standard of truth, goodness, or morality. In this view, we have to come up with these things ourselves—doing the best we can according to our own culture, community, and traditions.

**Read** John 14:6. What is Jesus saying here about the nature of absolute truth?

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Jesus doesn't accept the idea that truth is relative. In words as clear and unambiguous as possible, Jesus shows us the reality of absolute truth, and in Him we see it manifested in the form of a person!

**What** does John teach about truth? *1 John 2:4, 21; 3:19; 4:6; 5:20.*

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John knows that there are absolutes; more so, he makes it very clear that there is a sharp distinction between truth and lies, a contrast that tends to be blurred in relativistic worldviews. There is absolute truth. God is true. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are truth. On the other hand, a liar is a person who makes unsubstantiated claims, who confesses to love and does not keep the commandments, and who denies that Jesus is the Christ. In contrast, sincere Christians know the truth, love the truth, and belong to the truth. Thus, truth is both what we intellectually grasp and what we practice.

**No question: according to the Bible, absolute truth exists. But is everything absolute? Are there not things that are not so firm, but rather contingent, personal, cultural, and changing? How can we learn to differentiate between what must be absolute and unchanging and what can change and be relative, depending on circumstances?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “A Faithful Witness,” pp. 546–554, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

Today, 1 John is very much needed, because all sorts of false ideas are being promoted. John calls his audience, and us, not to believe everyone and not to accept uncritically new doctrines, but to test whether or not a teaching is truly biblical. Discernment to distinguish truth from error is needed.

According to John, authentic Christianity has these marks: (1) belief in Jesus as the Son of God, who has come in the flesh; (2) observance of the commandments of God; and (3) love toward God and others. John wants to lay a solid foundation and help his audience have assurance of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ as proclaimed in Scripture.

### **Discussion Questions:**

**1** However hard for those who believe in moral absolutes to understand, the idea of moral relativism makes a certain amount of logical sense. If there is no God or Creator and we are purely the results of random forces, where else should morality come from other than from ourselves? And if we change our minds about what is moral . . . well, so what? From a purely practical level, what is wrong with that kind of thinking?

**2** Years ago, when asked what the British government could do to help citizens be more moral, Prime Minister Harold McMillan responded, “I’m only the prime minister. Go talk to the archbishop.” How could what we have studied this week help church members be more moral? Or is it even the purpose of the gospel to make us more moral?

**3** Fiorello Enrico La Guardia was a judge during the hard years of the Depression in America. One day, a father was brought into his courtroom, having stolen bread. When asked by Judge La Guardia why he did it, the man, sobbing, said that it was to feed his hungry children. La Guardia told the man, “You have committed a crime, you know that?” The man, penitent, barely raising his eyes, nodded and said, “Yes, sir.” La Guardia then said, sternly, that “the law makes no exceptions.” The man nodded. Judge La Guardia then put his hand into his pocket, took out \$10.00, and said, “Here’s the payment for your fine. I pay it myself. Though guilty, you will not face the penalty.” How does this story help us understand not only the gospel but also what it means to live like Jesus?

# Stranger in the Village

by BENJAMIN SCHOUN

The man watched in horror as his companion's body floated past him on the river. He had been killed while trying to enter a restricted region without government permission. Though not a Christian missionary, this man's death underscores the difficulty of entering some areas of the world where the government restricts access to outsiders. One such place is an isolated area in Asia that is home to tribal people who worship nature and their ancestors.

Despite the restrictions against outsiders, the church has learned that a large number of people living in this area are worshiping God and keeping the Sabbath. A contact person was able to confirm these reports. He sneaked into the restricted area and entered a large village. The chief confirmed the reports that villagers were keeping the Sabbath. "How can that be?" the informer asked.

"One day a tall stranger entered my village," the chief said. "He had an aura of bright light about him and asked to see the chief. In his hand he held a radio. He showed me how to tune the radio dial to hear the Adventist World Radio (AWR) programs. He told me the time of day that programming is broadcast in our language. Then he told me to share this information with the village, as it would be a great blessing to them.

"I picked up the radio and turned to show it to the person on my right. We turned back to the stranger, but he was gone. We never saw him again. But we took this as a special sign that we should do what he said.

"We called the villagers to gather around and listen to the radio programs. People listened and began changing their lives as they learned about a new way of living from the broadcasts. Today most of the people in this village keep the Sabbath."

The contact person verified that these villagers are indeed devout believers who are worshiping while listening to the radio programs. He also learned that several different tribal groups lived in remote regions of this mountainous area. The villagers have no contact with one another, for they are geographically isolated. Yet when the contact person visited six areas, he found that every chief told the same story. "One day a tall stranger entered the village carrying a radio. He asked for the chief..."

God has a thousand ways to bring the gospel light to those whom governments would seek to keep in darkness. Your mission offerings help make the work of Adventist World Radio possible. Thank you.

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DR. BENJAMIN SCHOUN is *president of Adventist World Radio.*

# John's Letter *to the Chosen Lady*



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Exod. 20:1–17; Rom. 6:17; 2 Thess. 2:10; Heb. 13:2; 2 John; Rev. 2:14, 15; 14:12.*

**Memory Text:** “Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9, NASB).

John's second letter resembles the first one in many respects. Although shorter, the same vocabulary is used, the same themes occur, and the same concern for believers prevails. A personal touch is also found in both.

However, in contrast to the first letter, the second is clearly cast in a letter form, with both a formal introduction and conclusion. The main body contains praise, an exhortation to love and to walk according to the commandments, and a section dealing with the antichrists.

The shortness of 2 John, as well as 3 John, may have been dictated by the size of a papyrus sheet. If this is true, the apostle must have weighed his words carefully as the Holy Spirit moved upon Him to write.

**The Week at a Glance:** What is John's basic message, and how is it like his first one? How does he relate the concept of “love” to the concept of “truth”? What is the link between love and keeping the commandments? Why does John take the issue of false teachings so seriously? Why does John tell members not to be hospitable to false teachers?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 19.*

## In Love and Truth

**Read 2 John.** What similarities to 1 John do you find in it? What's the essential message?

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A cursory reading of 2 John suggests that the letter is addressed to a group of believers (as opposed to a single woman). This makes good sense, because in other places in the New Testament the church is portrayed as a woman (*Eph. 5:22–32, Rev. 12:1–6*). These believers, then, are mature Christians, not literal children.

**Read 2 John 1–4.** What word appears again and again, and how is John using it? See also 2 Thess. 2:10.

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Notice, too, that John's use of the word *truth* is combined with *love* in verses 1 and 3. To understand the nature of true love among Christians, a qualifier is needed, namely *truth*. Love can be interpreted in a purely emotional, even sensual and superficial way. Christian love is “true” love, love expressed in the context of truth.

If we talk about truth, we are reminded of God; of Jesus, who is the truth (*John 14:6*); and of the Holy Spirit. As the Holy Spirit is with the believers forever (*John 14:16*), so truth is with them forever (*2 John 2*). Both truth and love ultimately point back to God and belong together in Christian faith and experience.

At the same time, truth and love seem to form the main theme of 2 John. Love is further discussed in verses 5 and 6. Truth is necessary to discern deceptions and their results (*vss. 7, 8*) and to abide in the teaching of Christ (*vss. 9, 10*).

**We often look at the concept of “love” as something good in and of itself, regardless of the context. When, however, can love be very destructive? Have you ever experienced the reality of how love, outside of truth, can be so terrible? How does that experience help you better understand the importance of love in the context of truth, as opposed to outside it?**



## Walking According to the Commandments *(2 John 4–6)*

Verse 4 is an encouragement for both the church and John. It is stimulating and encouraging for church members to hear that the elder rejoices greatly that they are “walking in the truth” (*NIV*). It motivates them to continue their Christian life “in the truth, just as the Father has commanded” (*NIV*) them. The commandment to walk in the truth may be found in 1 John 3:23, where he is calling us to believe in Jesus and to love one another.

**How** are love and the commandments related to each other? See 2 John 5, 6. Why is this especially important to us as Seventh-day Adventists? See also Rev. 14:12.

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After the rejoicing (*vs.* 4) comes a request that at the same time is an exhortation (*vss.* 5, 6). John again talks about a commandment (*vs.* 5). It is the commandment (singular) to love one another. So, he moves from the concept of “commandment” to the concept of “love,” and indeed this commandment has love as its content.

In verse 6 he continues the other way around, namely, with love, and moves on to commandments (plural). Love is shown by keeping God’s commandments. In other words, we have this commandment, and this commandment is to love one another, and we reveal this love by keeping the commandments.

**How** does keeping the commandments (*Exod. 20:1–17*) reveal love for one another?

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How interesting that something such as keeping the law, the rules, and the dos and the don’ts would be so closely linked with love. And yet, it makes perfect sense. Love isn’t just what we feel; love is what we do; it’s how we act; it’s how we relate to others. Though it is more than just obeying the Ten Commandments, true love cannot be separated from the principles found in them.

**Think about someone you love. How do you treat that person? What things do you say and do that reveal your love? In what ways could you even better show your love to that person? How does your own selfishness sometimes get in the way of showing this love as you know you should?**

## Going Beyond the Teaching of Christ

(2 John 7–9)

**Read 2 John 7–9.** What is John warning about here? What can be the results of falling for the deceptions he’s warning about?

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With verses 7 through 9 we are back to the deceivers and their false understanding of Jesus. It seems to be the same situation that we have already encountered in 1 John. It is so bad that many people have left the church and even have become “deceivers” themselves. Sure, there are those who are still walking in the truth (*vs. 4*), but a shepherd mourns for everyone who has left God and His church.

The antichrists’ views of Jesus differ from the apostles’ teaching. Church members have to watch out in order not to be affected by them and their false views. John is very clear here, too, that believers can lose their way, and that there’s no such thing as “once saved, always saved.”

**Read 2 John 9.** What is he saying about the importance of having correct “doctrine”? See also *Matt. 16:12; Acts 2:42; Rom. 6:17; Rev. 2:14, 15.*

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John is under no illusion that doctrine does not matter. For him, false teaching can lead to the loss of one’s eternal life. Thus, doctrine matters!

In our passage it is obviously the apostles’ teaching about Jesus that is being challenged. Those who accept this biblical teaching and faithfully remain in it have the Father and the Son. God the Father and Jesus are placed on the same level. The rejection of the teaching about Jesus leads to a loss of the relationship with the Father.

**What has been your own experience with false teachers and false doctrines? Were you able to see, especially in the beginning, where these teachings could have led you? What have you learned from these experiences that could help others struggling with something similar?**

## Refraining From Hospitality? (2 John 10, 11)

**The Bible sees great value in hospitality** (*Heb. 13:2, 1 Pet. 4:9*). **Jesus mingled with tax collectors, Pharisees, and others who may not always have had their theology or their lifestyle straight. How does such a call fit with what John is saying in 2 John 10, 11? See also *Matt. 10:14, 15; 18:15–17*.**

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Although hospitality is a Christian virtue, there are limitations. If hospitality leads to directly or indirectly supporting false doctrines, it must be abandoned. In the first century A.D., teachers were traveling around, preaching in various places, and staying with church members who would provide food and lodging.

If such a teacher would propagate false doctrines, hospitality would be understood as an encouragement of his position and would actually help his work. Furthermore, church members who were wavering between the apostolic teaching and the false ideas could be puzzled or could even make a wrong decision if they saw a prominent church member letting a deceiver stay with him or her.

John is not proposing to hate these people or to avoid any contact with them, but we must be aware of the fact that our behavior could be understood as endorsement of ideas opposed to truth. If this is the case, we must be very careful.

It has been suggested that in verses 10 and 11 John is concerned not so much with the behavior of an individual believer as with that of the entire church, and that the “house” mentioned in verse 10 is not a private dwelling place but the place where the church meets for worship. The church should not encourage a teacher who preaches heresy.

In short, to welcome a false teacher would be perceived as encouragement of what he or she presents. Today we may have lost the sense of how problematic heresies can be. It is considered by some as judgmental or arrogant even to talk about “heresy” at all, although Scripture addresses this topic frequently. John reminds us that there is a basic difference between truth and error.

**Think about how your actions impact others. Think about how easily your example can influence others for good or for evil. What kind of example of Christ do you present? In what ways could you do better?**

## Communicating With One Another

(2 John 12, 13)

With verses 12 and 13 we have reached the end of 2 John. These verses form the conclusion of the letter, and they allow us to see John's personal interest in his audience and his desire to meet with these believers personally.

**Look** at what John has written in 2 John 12, 13. What advantages are there to speaking face to face, as opposed to a written letter? What hint can you find from his expression "that our joy may be full" as to why he wanted to meet with them? See also Acts 2:42–47.

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The message that John communicates is quite strong. When it comes to the antichrists, John leaves no room for negotiation or a compromise. We are reminded of Paul's attitude when he wrote to the Galatians (*Gal. 1:6–9*).

John may have been able to share his message orally, but there also are advantages to a written form of communication:

- Letters by the apostles were regarded to have special importance and authority and were taken seriously.
- The letter may have reached the audience earlier than a personal visit would have. The urgency of the situation demanded a quick response.
- The message was preserved for other churches and later generations that found themselves in similar situations.
- A letter can be drafted very carefully and often can be more precise than an oral presentation.
- The Holy Spirit prompted him to record his message in writing.

Despite all this, John still wanted to meet with them face-to-face.

**Why is face-to-face contact often so important for developing good relationships? What are the advantages of this kind of personal contact? What kind of example of personal contact did Jesus leave us? How can you improve your face-to-face dealings with others?**

**Further Study:** Read the following passages: *Gal. 2:11–16; 1 Tim. 4:1–7; 2 Tim. 2:14–19; Rev. 2:1–3, 12–16, 18–25.*

“The apostle teaches that while we should manifest Christian courtesy, we are authorized to call sin and sinners by their right names—that this is consistent with true charity. While we are to love the souls for whom Christ died, and labor for their salvation, we should not make a compromise with sin. We are not to unite with the rebellious, and call this charity. God requires His people in this age of the world to stand, as did John in his time, unflinchingly for the right, in opposition to soul-destroying errors.”—Ellen G. White, *The Sanctified Life*, p. 65.

“The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 57.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Discuss the idea that doctrine, or teaching, is not that important, that what matters is how kind and loving and accepting we are. What should we think of this idea?
- 2 Go back over the idea of how obedience to the Ten Commandments is an expression of love. Try to imagine what it would be like expressing love while in violation of the principles of the Ten Commandments. How well would that work?
- 3 In class, ask the question “What is truth?” Make sure that the members don’t merely give examples of truth but look for a working definition, one simple expression that covers the whole concept. What can you learn from this exercise?
- 4 What do you do with the question of “calling sin by its right name”? How can we deal with wayward members without being judgmental or condemnatory? At the same time, are we not shirking our Christian duty if we don’t confront brothers or sisters in the church who are doing wrong? How do we deal with this difficult subject?
- 5 How well does your local church do in the area of hospitality in general? How can you help the church do better in that area, if need be?

## The Red Bible

by KINGSLEY SABENG AMOATENG

I was born in Ghana and moved to the Netherlands several years ago. I was a Christian, but I sensed that there must be something more to worshipping God than I was experiencing. I asked God to show me His truth.

My close friend, who was an Adventist, often invited me to visit his church. But I was busy on Saturdays. One day while visiting his house, I found a Bible with a red cover. I opened it and found a section that contained questions and answers. I asked him where he bought the Bible, but he said he'd gotten it during a series of meetings he'd attended. He offered to tell me the next time the church held evangelistic meetings so I could get one.

I wasn't interested in attending Adventist meetings, for I thought the church was strange to worship on Saturdays. But a few months later my friend told me that the church was planning evangelistic meetings. I agreed to go, but only to get the Bible. The meetings were shown via video and satellite. I learned about many different subjects that I'd never thought about before, such as the state of the dead. And when we studied the Sabbath, I realized that it wasn't strange at all. In fact, this was the very truth I had been praying about for two years. I didn't get my red Bible, but I got something so much better—God's truth and a new church. I asked to be baptized.

However, my wife and daughter still attended our former church. My wife asked me why I refused to attend with them, and I told her that I had found the church that teaches only the Bible. She attended my baptism, and the next week she came to church with me. On the way home she told me that maybe this new church did have truth that her church had missed. However, she continued to attend her church on Sunday and worship with me on Sabbaths. Then one Sunday morning she didn't get dressed for church. "Aren't you going to church this morning?" I asked. "No," she said, "I've decided that your church has the truth."



God is so wonderful. When the pastor learned that I had wanted one of the red Bibles, he asked his mother to give hers to me. I treasure that Bible, but I treasure my Lord even more.

Your mission offerings have helped grow the church in the Netherlands. Thank you! My wife and I are the fruits of your gifts.

KINGSLEY SABENG AMOATENG (left) lives in the Netherlands.

# Power Struggle



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Isa. 14:13, 14; Mark 9:35; 1 Cor. 12:7–31; 1 Corinthians 13; Phil. 2:3; 3 John; Rev. 14:6.*

**Memory Text:** “Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God” (3 John 11, NKJV).

Power struggles come in various forms. Whether over the rulership of empires, over companies, or even over religious position and authority, the fight for control can be ugly, even violent. In a real sense, the great controversy in heaven began with a power struggle—Satan seeking the position and authority that belonged only to Jesus, the Creator, and not to a creature. Unfortunately, even in the church that same spirit can be manifested.

Third John, the final letter in this series, deals with a power struggle in one of the early churches. On one side are the apostle John, Gaius, and Demetrius. On the other side is Diotrephes, who is trying to establish his supremacy. A power struggle in a local church? Certainly as Christians today, we don't face anything similar, do we?

**The Week at a Glance:** To whom did John write this letter? What do we know about Gaius and his character that could be of value for ourselves? What kind of power struggle was going on in the church?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 26.*

## The Elder and Gaius (3 John 1–4, 13–15)

This is one of the few letters in the New Testament (along with Philemon, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus) that are addressed to an individual person, not to a congregation.

Interestingly enough, John refers to himself here as an elder (*3 John 1*). But John was an apostle, not a local church elder, so why did he do that? There are a number of possible reasons, some of which do not necessarily exclude each other: (1) The title *elder* may refer to position, age, or both. In the case of John, the latter use seems to be probable. (2) By using the title *elder*, John indicates that the letter is not just a letter to a friend but an official communication. (3) The title points to respect and authority, which were due its holder. (4) In 1 Peter 5:1 Peter addresses the elders and calls himself their *fellow elder*, although he is an apostle. John may be following this usage. (5) The use of *elder* by John may point to his humility and collegiality, which differs widely from the attitude of Diotrephes.

### **What** do we learn about Gaius in 3 John 1–4?

John must have had a good relationship with Gaius. He calls him *beloved* and tells him that he truly loves him. Three times derivatives of the word *to love* are used in verses 1 and 2 to describe John's relation to Gaius.

### **How** do we understand what it means, as Christians, to love each other? How do we show that love? *See 1 Corinthians 13.*

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John rejoices that Gaius is walking in the truth; he mentions that twice in verses 3 and 4 and says that even brothers who had met Gaius were praising his wonderful Christian attitude and lifestyle. John, on his part, longs to meet Gaius soon and talk to him personally. The greetings to and from Gaius show that there was a larger circle of believers who were acquainted with him and who supported him.

**Go over 1 Corinthians 13. How well do you manifest the principles that Paul talks about there? In what areas do you do fairly well; in what areas could and should you improve?**



## **Gaius and His Ministry to the Church**

*(3 John 5–8)*

**Read** 3 John 5–8 and paraphrase what John is saying. What important lesson is here for us?

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In his second letter John had addressed the issue of hospitality and had warned against being hospitable to traveling missionaries who were teaching heresy. True believers cannot support antichrists. In 3 John the apostle comes back to the issue of hospitality. And here he stresses that some traveling missionaries needed help. They were preaching the gospel for free but needed a place to stay overnight and some food. Unlike the heretical missionaries John had already dealt with, these missionaries were people dedicated to God in all respects.

Gaius had supported them and had shown hospitality toward them. The missionaries were quite impressed and had mentioned Gaius favorably in church.

What we see here deals not just with hospitality, not just with giving someone a place to sleep for the night, but with the whole principle of support for the work of ministry and missions. John is thankful that Gaius had treated these people as he has. It shows his openness and willingness to give of himself for the work of spreading the gospel. In this sense, Gaius should be an example to all of us. The Lord has chosen us, as believers, to spread this truth to the whole world.

**Read** Revelation 14:6. Who is that angel, and how broad and wide is his mission?

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As Christians in general and Adventists in particular, we must be aware of our calling to support the work of spreading the gospel everywhere in the world. Whatever our position, whatever our role, we all can have a part to play.

**How involved are you in helping to spread the truths we have been given? What more could you do? How much of your own time, money, and pleasure would you be willing to give up for the sake of helping others hear the good news of Jesus Christ and the promise of His return?**

## Diotrephes (3 John 9, 10)

“Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all’”  
(Mark 9:35, NIV).

**What** important Christian principle is found in this verse? More important, how can we learn to follow it ourselves?

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After having pointed to Gaius and his ministry, John is now ready to tackle the problem with Diotrephes, the leader of the church to which Gaius belonged. This man was, obviously, a source of many problems, and John is determined to deal with him at the right time.

**Read 3 John 9, 10.** What was the problem with this man? From the little information we have, in what ways was he going completely against what it means to be a Christian? See also Isa. 14:13, 14; Matt. 12:37; 18:3–6; Phil. 2:3.

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Whoever this Diotrephes was, he was a problem. Church members were being pushed aside or even disfellowshipped for showing basic Christian courtesy to others. But this was not all. Probably Diotrephes was trying to establish himself as the only leader of the congregation or at least as the one in control. He may have confused lust of power with zeal for the gospel. Arrogantly he rejected the authority of the apostle John and others; Diotrephes even went further and slandered John.

This was a dangerous development, because it sounds as if Diotrephes wanted to be independent from those who were overseeing the church on a larger scale. Such an attitude had the potential to dramatically change the nature of the church and the role church members would play in the church.

**Might there not be a bit of Diotrephes in all of us? Look at yourself. Are you greedy for power? Do you speak out against those you don't like? Most important, are you making the sad mistake of automatically assuming that what is best for you personally is best for the church as a whole?**

## Bearing Witness About Demetrius

**Read** 3 John 11. Why would John write this when he did? What important point is he making here, especially given the context, that of warning about a church leader who was acting contrary to the principles of Christ?

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Verse 11 is a transitional statement. It builds a bridge between what John has said about Diotrephes and what he is going to say about Demetrius. Evil has a representative, and this is Diotrephes. The arrogant and ambitious leader is clearly identified as belonging to that which is evil. On the other hand, a good example for Gaius to follow is Demetrius.

**What** do we know about Demetrius? 3 John 12.

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There is another Demetrius in Acts 19:23–29. He was the silversmith who was responsible for the riot in Ephesus when Paul preached the gospel there. Nothing in the text indicates that this is the same person.

Demetrius was a Gentile Christian. Demetrius supported the apostle John and may have been one of his associates and one of the traveling missionaries. John may have wanted him to be present when he planned to confront Diotrephes.

Perhaps the most important principle we can take away from this one verse about Demetrius has to do with the power of influence. Read the verse again. Who was able to testify about the “faithfulness” of Demetrius? It came from many directions. The point is that if we are living a Christian life, if we are faithful, others will know. Others can bear witness and testimony to it. And most important, others can be influenced by it. In the end, one way or another, our life, our existence, sends a message, and that message can be a positive or a negative influence. This doesn’t mean we are perfect, this doesn’t mean we don’t make mistakes, this doesn’t mean we don’t have room to improve. It means, instead, that others are watching us, others are listening to us, and others are influenced by us. The question is, What kind of witness do we bear?

**Imagine someone giving a report about you and your Christian behavior. What would that person write, and why? Dwell on the implications of your answer.**

## Leadership Crisis in the Early Church

Thus, from what we have seen, there was a leadership crisis in at least one of John's churches. According to this letter, the problem here concerned not so much theology but rather personal ambition and a change in how churches were governed. However, often when a conflict begins, it involves some issues and later moves on to others. So here, too, the doctrines of the church may have been affected in the long run.

We noticed a certain kind of power struggle and some desire for independence. This is found today in the idea of congregationalism, in which local churches try to be completely independent from any governing church body and rather strike out on their own. This is not the New Testament model.

Instead, all believers are the people and body of Christ. All believers are also part of the royal priesthood (*1 Pet. 2:9*). All have received spiritual gifts, which are necessary for the church (*1 Cor. 12:7-31*). A distinction between laity and clergy is foreign to the New Testament. However, God has called some persons to leadership positions in the church and has gifted them. These persons should be respected. Leaders are not infallible and should not pretend to be. In some cases there even may be justified reasons for complaints (*1 Tim. 5:19*). If the leader must be confronted, it should be done carefully and lovingly.

Leaders must indeed lead, but they also need to be shepherds, and, most of all, they need to be examples for the rest of the body of Christ. Qualifications for leaders are listed in both the Old and New Testaments. The terms *overseers* and *elders* are still used interchangeably in the New Testament (*Acts 20:17, 28*), although this changed dramatically in church history when a strict hierarchy was created and the church became more or less identical with the so-called clergy.

**What** can we learn from the following texts about how the church is to be governed? *Mark 10:42-44; Acts 6:1-7; 15:6, 22-25; 1 Tim. 4:14; James 5:14.*

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The New Testament is opposed to chaos and anarchy in the church. Leadership is mentioned for the local level, as well as the universal church. However, Jesus Himself stressed that leadership in the church/churches must be servant leadership. Local churches were governed by a group of elders rather than by one person only. Decisions were made by involving the entire church or representatives of the church.

**Further Study:** Read the following passages on church governance/leadership: *John 13:1–12; Eph. 4:11–16; 1 Thess. 5:12, 13; 1 Tim. 1:3, 4; 4:13; 5:22; Titus 1–3; 1 Pet. 5:1–4.*

“Those who are inclined to regard their individual judgment as supreme are in grave peril. It is Satan’s studied effort to separate such ones from those who are channels of light, through whom God has wrought to build up and extend His work in the earth. To neglect or despise those whom God has appointed to bear the responsibilities of leadership in connection with the advancement of the truth is to reject the means that He has ordained for the help, encouragement, and strength of His people.”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 444.

“God has not set any kingly power in the Seventh-day Adventist Church to control the whole body or to control any branch of the work. He has not provided that the burden of leadership shall rest upon a few men. Responsibilities are distributed among a large number of competent men.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 236.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Think about power and how power is used. When is power a good thing, when is it a bad thing, and how do we know the difference?
- 2 What Christians in your local church could be held up as role models? What about them is admirable? At the same time, what dangers arise when looking toward any sinner as a role model?
- 3 Have you ever been greatly disappointed by someone you regarded as a role model? What lessons did you learn from this that could be of value to others? How can we learn from the good example of others and yet be protected from disappointment if they fail?
- 4 How should a church react when it has a problem in leadership itself? How can it strike the right balance in dealing with the problem firmly, while at the same time showing the grace and mercy of Christ?
- 5 Outside of Jesus Himself, which Bible character is your favorite role model, and why? In class, share your answers with each other and see what you can learn.

# The Thief Who Helped Build a Church

by BERTIN ADJIGNON

I live in a small fishing village in Benin, West Africa. We had a small church until we invited a thief to join us. Francis\* was the leader of a group of bandits who troubled people in the area.

One Sabbath afternoon as we were going to study the Bible with some people, we met Francis. We shared our faith and offered to visit him and study the Bible with him. Some people standing nearby said, “He’s a bandit; he’ll never change.” But we began visiting Francis, and soon he came to church.

We live on the water and travel by canoe. One Wednesday we invited Francis to ride with us in our canoe to our weekly prayer meeting. Some town leaders saw Francis in our canoe and stopped us. They arrested Francis and took him to jail. We went on to prayer meeting, where we prayed for Francis. Then we visited the mayor and told him that Francis was changing and was no problem to us. “Once he was a bandit,” I said. “But if you let him go, you will see that he will change when God touches his heart.”

The mayor released Francis to us, but he warned us that if Francis stole again, he would be thrown into prison.

As the people saw that Francis was changing, their attitudes toward him changed. Some business people from whom Francis had stolen even offered him odd jobs and a small stipend to help him survive without stealing. But the members of his bandit gang wanted Francis back. They begged him and even threatened to steal the church’s canoe unless Francis came back to the gang. But Francis refused. “Leave these Christians alone,” he demanded.

Eventually Francis was baptized and became a leader in the church. People saw that he truly was converted. One day the mayor told Francis that he needed someone to purchase supplies to build a new school and wanted Francis to take the job. So the former thief became a trusted worker in the village. The church grew after Francis became an Adventist, and today we have 25 members in our church.

We don’t have a permanent church building—something that is important in a country such as Benin, where voodoo is rampant. We continue to worship in a thatched-roof building. We have built a foundation and started on the walls of our new permanent church, building as we can buy the blocks. Your Sabbath School offerings will help us realize our dream of having a church that will shine as a light to a dark community leading others like Francis to the love of God.

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BERTIN ADJIGNON *lives in Ganvie, Benin, in western Africa. \*Not his real name.*

Next quarter's Bible study guide will center on the nation of Israel as it headed into the Promised Land. *People on the Move: The Book of Numbers* by the late Frank Holbrook will show there is much to learn from this young nation. Its example should serve as a warning to us. But despite the setbacks, delays, and devastating judgments, perhaps the most important lesson we can learn from this book is that God fulfills His promises.

## Lesson 1—A New Order

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Organizing the Army (*Num. 1:1, 2*)

MONDAY: The Presence of the Lord (*Num. 1:50–54*)

TUESDAY: Under the Standards (*Num. 2:34*)

WEDNESDAY: Call to Ministry (*Num. 3:12, 13*)

THURSDAY: Protecting the Sacred (*Num. 14:10, 11*)

**Memory Text**—*1 Corinthians 10:11*

**Sabbath Gem:** God's order can be seen in the ways He dealt with His covenant people. We, too, can learn invaluable lessons from the example of the Israelites.

## Lesson 2—Preparing a People

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Disease Control (*Num. 5:1–4*)

MONDAY: Social Control (*Num. 5:6*)

TUESDAY: Marital Fidelity (*Num. 5:11–31*)

WEDNESDAY: Consecrated Commoners (*Num. 6:1–12*)

THURSDAY: The Aaronic Prayer (*Num. 6:24–26*)

**Memory Text**—*3 John 1:2*

**Sabbath Gem:** God's regulations can protect us from a world filled with sin and idolatry just as they did for the Israelites.

**Lessons for the Visually Impaired** The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.