

Walking *in the Light*: Rejecting Antichrists



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*.

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.*

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.*

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?

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?

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.*

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.*

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.

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

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