

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*).

Ben 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*.

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?

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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