

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 Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *1 John 4:1–6*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand what it means to abide in Christ and be aware of antichrists.

Feel: Experience an urgency and a need to rely on Christ's strength.

Do: Be on his or her guard against the power of antichrist.

▶ **Lesson Outline:**

I. Know: Recognizing Antichrists

A The Bible is the authoritative objective standard for all doctrine and teaching. How can we be sure that we interpret it correctly?

B What is the difference between admitting that there are things that we do not understand and doubting the validity of the Bible?

C John stresses the concept of abiding in Him. What does this mean to us as Christians today?

II. Feel: A Sense of Urgency

A Nurturing a sense of alertness and urgency is important to meet the deceptions of the antichrists: how can we guard against complacency?

B Abiding in Christ is crucial for a victorious Christian life. How can we fully rely on Christ's strength?

III. Do: Be Vigilant Against Deception

A Name some of the antichrist deceptions that are prevalent today.

B Prevention is better than cure: what measures can we take against being deceived by false teachers and antichrists?

C What steps can we take to limit the possibility of falling under the influence of false teachings and antichrists?

▶ **Summary:** Although almost two thousand years have passed since John's warning, the dangers presented by antichrists are still with us. The only way we can live a victorious Christian life is by abiding in and having a right relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Understanding the threat the antichrist poses helps us guard against him in our Christian walk.

Just for Teachers: False teachers have been a concern of the church from its inception. Christ Himself predicted the coming of false christs (*Matt. 24:24*). Paul called them “savage wolves” that attack the flock (*Acts 20:29–31, NKJV*). To understand the wolf is to understand something of the nature of the antichrist. Emphasize to your class that the more fully we are aware of the dangers of the enemy, the better prepared we will be to resist him.

Paul didn’t compare the enemy to wolves for nothing. But what makes wolves such cunning hunters? Wolves are nocturnal. They prefer to hunt after dusk under the cover of night. Wolves test herds for signs of weakness, taking advantage of the very sick and old. They sniff the air for wounds or the smell of infection. Once the prey is picked, the wolves travel in the opposite direction from which the wind blows to prevent the prey from catching their scent.

Wolves also observe ravens to find prey. Ravens circle in the air above sick animals. Circling birds mean that food is close by. The wolf pack quietly will close in on their target, often in a single line. They seize their prey by the rump or the sides, preferring to attack from behind.

Discuss: Based on the tactics of wolves, what can we learn about how false teachers operate? How can this understanding help us guard against their attacks?

Consider This: Most of the prey that wolves hunt have horns. Unlike moose and elk, the “flock”—or sheep—as Paul calls the church, has no horns, no natural defense. The only lamb with horns is found in Revelation 5:6, and that Lamb is Jesus. Those horns represent His church down through the ages, His light on earth against false teachings. How does that help us view the role of the church today in the spiritual warfare against the antichrist?

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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.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED► **STEP 2—Explore****Bible Commentary****I. The “Last Hour”:** What It Means *(Review 1 John 2:18, NIV, with the class.)*

The phrase “last hour” describes not chronology but theology. It is the hour in which God’s saints, having experienced the blessings of the kingdom of grace, look forward to the kingdom of glory, to be ushered in by the second coming of Christ (*John 14:1–3; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17*). Christ’s first coming has already sealed the fate of Satan. Since that event, Christians have waited in anticipation of the new order of God. In that sense, every day in the life of a Christian is the last hour—to be ready for His coming and to be on the watch for the deceptive ways of the antichrist.

During the last days, even as the gospel is preached to all the nations, Satan shall lead the antichrist forces to “deceive the very elect” (*Matt. 24:24; see also Mark 13:6*); to let loose perilous times in which spiritual and moral depravity will reach its nadir (*2 Tim. 3:1*); to scoff at the second coming of Christ; and to unleash a war against the saints who “keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (*Rev. 12:17, NKJV*).

The last hour is a time of anticipation when the church awaits her Lord to return again—a time to be watchful in the wake of antichrist’s work, a time of hope, a time to live as though Christ will come at any time.

Discuss: Speaking of the last hour, Peter warns, “The end of all things is at hand” and so “be serious and watchful” (*1 Pet. 4:7, NKJV*). List some areas in which we need to be watchful.

II. The Antichrist: Its Identity and Our Defense *(Review 1 John 2:18, 22 with the class.)*

The word *antichrist* appears four times in the Bible, all in John’s letters (*1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7*). But as a concept, it is an evil system opposed to everything Christ represents and goes back to the origin of sin, to the beginning of the great controversy. John describes antichrist as one who denies that Jesus is the Christ (*1 John 2:22*) and that He is God incarnate (*1 John 4:3, 2 John 7*).

The original antichrist, of course, is Satan, who, since the origin of the great controversy, has stood opposed to Christ. “The determination of antichrist to carry out the rebellion he began in heaven will continue to

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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 also is 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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

work in the children of disobedience.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 230.

Antichrist’s primary work is deception. As a personification of evil and as an opponent of Christ, antichrist is presented in different ways in Scripture. Paul spoke of “the man of lawlessness” who deceives through all manner of miracles and wonders (*2 Thess. 2:3, 9*). Christ spoke of the deceitfulness of false christs in the last days (*Matt. 24:4, 5, 23, 24*). Daniel predicted the little horn (*Dan. 7:7, 8, 25–27*), a religious system that would speak against God, persecute the saints, and attempt to change God’s law, including the Sabbath commandment. John warned of the beast of Revelation 13:1–10—the antichrist power known for blasphemy, persecution, and apostasy, and whose work will go on until he is consumed by God’s final judgment.

Thus, antichrist is Satan working through human agencies to thwart Christ and His redemptive ministry. Such agencies may claim to be part of the church, but they are, in effect, wolves in “sheep’s clothing” (*Matt. 7:15, Acts 20:29*). They stand opposed to God revealed in Christ (*1 John 2:22*) and His teachings. Such teachings may be directed against the Person and work of Christ, God’s law, the high-priestly ministry of Jesus, demands of discipleship, the reality and nearness of the Second Coming, and so forth.


Discuss: The test of doctrine—in John’s time the incarnation of Christ (*1 John 2:22, 4:1–3*)—is one way to identify the antichrist. What particular doctrines will come under attack in the last days?

► STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: John’s teaching about the antichrist contains a warning for every Christian. The warning is about apostasy: “They went out from us, but they were not of us” (*1 John 2:19, NKJV*). Unless we abide in the truth and the truth abides in us, we risk the danger of apostasy. Thus, the Christian journey is not a once-and-for-all experience but a daily event whereby Jesus continues to be at the command post of our lives.

Thought Questions:

❶ First John 2:19 speaks of two groups of people: those who leave and those who remain. What causes some to leave the fellowship and others to remain? Consider Judas and Peter, both of whom were on the verge of apostasy. What caused one to be lost and the other to be redeemed?

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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 twenty 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.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

2 Abiding in Christ places one on the road of confidence to meet Him at His coming (*vs. 28*). To such a person, “the last hour” is not a time of terror but a period of joyful waiting for the final reunion. What kind of a life does the last hour expect of us?

Application Questions:

1 A five-year-old boy asked his seven-year-old sister, “Why is Grandma spending so much time reading the Bible?”

“She is cramming for her final exams,” the older kid said. How are you getting ready for your finals?

2 The fourth commandment and the example of Jesus expect us to keep the seventh-day Sabbath. But someone comes along and offers a new “truth”: it is the principle of rest that counts, and so any day will do. How will you react?

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Having exposed the deceptive ways of the antichrist, John speaks of two safeguards that would keep believers in the straight and narrow way. They are to abide in the Son and the Word (*1 John 2:24*) and to be anointed by the Holy Spirit (*vs. 27*). With these safeguards in mind, invite class members to participate in the following projects:

1 The commentary asks us to consider the fates of Peter and Judas. Go back over the similarities and differences between them. Now imagine you were with one of them on the night Jesus was arrested. Based on your study of his character, write out a brief monologue that imagines in his own words what Peter or Judas might have said about why he made the choice he made that night.

2 Dramatic Monologue: Invite one of the class members to read his or her monologue to the class. If someone has a dramatic talent, have this person memorize his or her monologue and perform it. Encourage him or her to create and dress up in biblical era costume. Discuss the monologues with the class. What spiritual insights can be learned that help reinforce the key concept of the lesson?

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 Jesus’ return, 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 as 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?