

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, he says, are 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 Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *1 John 5:1–12*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Recognize that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through Him we can gain the victory.

Feel: Secure in the knowledge that we can be victorious.

Do: Share the good news of victory through Jesus with others.

▶ **Lesson Outline:**

I. Know: Jesus Is the Messiah

A In 1 John 5:6 John refers to Jesus' coming by "water and blood," that is, Jesus' baptism and subsequent death on the cross. Reflect on the events around these two topics. How did they confirm to people at the time that Jesus was the Messiah? What do they say to us today?

B Describe the different facets of Jesus—His humanity, His divinity, the historic Jesus, and the revolutionary Jesus. How do these pictures compare with how Jesus described Himself?

II. Feel: Victory Is Secure

A Jesus' victory assures us of victory. How does this irrefutable truth make you feel?

B Share how looking at life through the filter of the Cross gives you courage in your everyday life.

III. Do: Sharing With Others

A John used the images of water and blood. What images can you think of that would help people understand Jesus' sacrifice better? Try to use these images this week.

B Role-play ways of explaining Jesus' divinity to a doubter.

▶ **Summary:** We can live a victorious Christian life and have the hope of eternal life, because Jesus lived and died to pay the price for our sins.

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 still was 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.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Our assurance of salvation is based on Jesus and what He has done for us.

Just for Teachers: The most critical point on which our salvation and eternal life lie is faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and what He has done on our behalf. This introduction uses a story to illustrate how faith is based on our relationship to Jesus.

Lawrence Maxwell once told a story about a young boy dawdling along a walk down a mountainside. He happened to see his dad farther down the mountain. Thinking he could take a shortcut, he left the path and started running to catch up. His dad looked up to see his son bounding through the rocks and brush straight toward a cliff. He screamed up to his son, “Fall down!” Though the ground was rough, the boy dropped instantly and rolled to a stop. That’s when he saw the cliff, just feet away.

Discuss: Ask your class to comment on their reactions to someone shouting at them to fall down as they are running down a mountain. What can they surmise about the relationship between the boy and his father? What does this story inform us about believing in Jesus? What is the relationship between faith and obedience in this story? What does it take to have faith in Christ?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: Review with your class the great preponderance of evidence that Jesus Christ is worthy of our trust. It is by hearing the Word and dwelling in it that we develop the relationship that is the foundation of faith.

Bible Commentary

I. The Testimony Provided by the Water and the Blood *(Review 1 John 5:6–8 with the class.)*

When Jesus came to this earth, He was very careful to follow all the

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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.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

testimonies that described who He was and what He would do that had been written in the Scriptures before His birth. Though He was King of the universe, the King of glory, He didn't use majestic display and charisma to attract followers. "Only the beauty of heavenly truth must draw those who would follow Him. The character of the Messiah had long been foretold in prophecy, and He desired men to accept Him upon the testimony of the Word of God."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 43.

Jesus' baptism, the event that was foretold by Daniel's prophecy in Daniel 9:24–26 as the coming of the Anointed, proclaimed the beginning of Christ's ministry on earth. This could be called "the testimony of water." Daniel's prophecy also spoke of when the Anointed One would be cut off in the middle of the week, "the testimony of blood."

Consider This: How are baptism and the Cross related? (See *Rom. 6:4* and *Col. 2:12*.) How has your baptism made you a part of Christ's testimony of water and blood?

■ *How did the earthly sanctuary services offer testimony to Christ's work for us through the use of water and blood? How does Christ's work in the heavenly sanctuary continue this testimony?*

II. The Testimony of God (Review *John 15:26* and *1 John 5:6–10* with the class.)

The testimonies of the Father and the Holy Spirit about Jesus are weighty evidence indeed. Not only did the Father and Holy Spirit recognize Jesus at His baptism (*Matt. 3:16, 17*), but the Father gave testimony in regard to His Son on the mount of transfiguration (*Matt. 17:5*) and in response to Jesus' request at the feast in Jerusalem (*John 12:28–30*). Except for these voices and the appearance of the dove at Christ's baptism, however, most other testimonies of God have been more indirect, though just as powerful.

Consider This: What other ways has the Father provided testimony in regard to the work of the Son? (See *John 3:16, 17* and *Matt. 27:45–54*.) Describe the testimony of the Holy Spirit and its effect on our hearts. (See *John 5:26* through *John 16:16*.)

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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**III. Why Must We Believe These Testimonies About Christ?** (Review 1 John 4:1–3, 5:10–20 with the class.)

As far as God is concerned, it is major heresy to deny that Jesus Christ is the Anointed One sent from heaven who, by dying on the Cross, came to save us from our sins. The consequence of not believing in Jesus is death. On the other hand, faith in the Son of God and reliance on what He has done for us on the cross bring eternal life. It is the Cross that crosses the gulf between eternal death and eternal life, and it is the only bridge across the chasm.

“Without the cross, man could have no union with the Father. On it depends our every hope. From it shines the light of the Saviour’s love, and when at the foot of the cross the sinner looks up to the One who died to save him, he may rejoice with fullness of joy, for his sins are pardoned. Kneeling in faith at the cross, he has reached the highest place to which man can attain.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 209, 210.


Consider This: How does the Cross make possible our union with the Father? Why is kneeling at the cross the “highest place” we can attain?

► **STEP 3—Apply**

Just for Teachers: This object lesson will give your class a chance to see the need of moving beyond knowledge of Christ’s work to a personal acceptance of what He has done. You will need a real pair of scales or a paper or flannel set that can be adjusted as you add and remove weights.

Object Lesson: Mark one side of a set of scales as “Evidence for Our Salvation” and the other side as “Evidence Against Our Salvation.” Ask the class for examples of things (such as sins or unbelief) that would weigh the scales against us. Label weights with these names and add them to the scales. Ask for examples of evidence that Christ offers you salvation, such as the testimonies of the water and blood and those offered by the Father and the Holy Spirit. Label these weights, as well; they should be large and balance the scales in favor of our salvation.

Tell your class that belief in God’s testimony and acceptance of Christ’s work for us wipe away all the evidence against us. (Take all the weights of evidence against us away.) The evidence is overwhelming

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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—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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

that the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit offer more than sufficient means to save us. Even unbelief can be forgiven. (*See Matt. 9:24.*)

There is one thing, however, that can outweigh all that God has done for us. Place a weight labeled “Rejection of the Holy Spirit.” (This weight should be the heaviest of all, bringing the scale down on the side against us.) If we refuse the testimony of the Holy Spirit, we refuse to believe in Christ. (Add the weight marked “Unbelief.”) All our sins are against us (add the rest of the weights against us), and we are unsafe to save. Faith in Christ is the difference between being able to benefit from all the advantages God offers and loss of eternal life. (Remove the weights against us so the scale comes down on the side for us.)

Discuss: How does faith in Christ make the eternal difference between being saved and losing everything?

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Give your class an opportunity to put into action the lessons on faith you have been reviewing.

1 Memorize songs of faith that you can sing as you travel and work. Choose from the list in the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* (1985), page 779, or write your own.

2 Think of someone you know who may need encouragement to hold on to Christ in faith. Call, e-mail, or send a card this week.

3 Write out a short prayer expressing acceptance and appreciation of Christ’s work for us both at the cross and now in the heavenly sanctuary. Post it where you can see it often.

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?