

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.

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