

Get into the Study



5 MINUTES

LEADER PACK: Display **Item 1: No Doubt** poster to review the major theme of this study, along with the focus of each session.

No Doubt: Six Things We Can Know for Sure

- ▶ SURE OF FORGIVENESS
1 John 1:5–2:2
- ▶ SURE OF A RELATIONSHIP
1 John 2:3–11, 15–17
- ▶ SURE OF THE TRUTH
1 John 2:18–29
- ▶ SURE OF VICTORY
1 John 3:19–4:4
- ▶ SURE OF GOD'S LOVE
1 John 4:7–13, 19–21
- ▶ SURE OF SALVATION
1 John 5:1–5, 11–13, 18–21

DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 48 of the PSG:
“What’s your favorite comeback story?”



SESSION 4

Sure of Victory

THE POINT

Because Jesus has won the victory, His people are victorious.

LIFE CONNECTION

We love a good story with a dramatic ending, one in which “the good guys” win. Yet we live in a world where it often seems the wrong side is winning. A happy ending is not merely the stuff of fiction. Our circumstances and the state of the world may not be good, but we can be sure that Christ is victorious and He will set all things right. When we choose to align ourselves with Christ and follow Him, His victory means we will also experience victory.

THE PASSAGE

1 John 3:19–4:4

THE SETTING

John wrote the letter we call 1 John to give us assurance and to remove doubts. We have studied Bible passages that reveal we can be

1. Sure of forgiveness (1 John 1:5–2:2);
2. Sure of a relationship (2:3–17); and
3. Sure of the truth (2:18–29).

Our fourth session shows how we can be sure of victory because Jesus has already won it.

1 JOHN 3:19-22

19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

1 ▶ **Verses 19-20.** John's main point in the last six verses of chapter 3 is assurance. Christians have victory over doubt. We have this victory because of Jesus' completed actions. In the final verse we study today, John wrote: "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). This fact, this confidence, can help us overcome doubts. This assurance ultimately depends on God's character, but it requires us to trust in Jesus and therefore to love one another. When we do, the Holy Spirit gives us confidence of victory over any doubts that arise. Because Jesus has won the victory, His people are victorious.

John began by stating: **hereby we know that we are of the truth**, that is, how we know we are Christians. Scholars debate whether **hereby** (more literally translated "in this" or "by this") refers to verses 19-20 or verse 18. The actions listed in verse 18 suggest this word relates better to that verse. Other scholars believe this word (and indeed all of vv. 19-20) serves as a conclusion for and an elaboration of verse 18.

The knowing mentioned in verse 19 leads us to **assure our hearts before him**. The word rendered **assure** is also translated "believe," "persuade," "trust," and "be confident." Frequently this word is used in a legal sense. When we examine ourselves, often we are alarmed at the results. (1) We fall short of God's standards. (2) We do not love others as we should. (3) We cannot claim the freedom from sin that is ours because we are in Christ. Thus, our hearts may condemn us. So how could John say we can have confidence before God? John's reasoning is that God knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows our weak attempts to obey Him spring from a true desire to become like Him. John's argument was based on the

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):

In advance, choose a popular children's nursery rhyme about resilience or a comeback like "The Itsy Bitsy Spider." Begin reading it to the group. Then ask for a show of hands of how many are familiar with the story. Invite a volunteer to summarize the story. Then ask **Question #1**.

GUIDE: Direct group members to "The Bible Meets Life" on page 49 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of recognizing the victory we have in Christ by reading or summarizing the text or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

RECAP: There is a constant shoving match between righteousness and wickedness, and it's hard to tell who's winning. If you draw your information solely from the news media, then darkness seems to be winning. But when you read the Bible, you discover the opposite is true. Darkness may seem to be winning, but it has already been defeated. Jesus has won the victory, and His followers are on the winning side. We have the ultimate "comeback story" because of Jesus.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Ask group members to divide into groups of 3-4 to complete the following activity. As a group, pick a movie that left you frustrated because it didn't end "the way it was supposed to." Then, rewrite or retell the ending together. If there is time, share it with the whole group.

GUIDE: Call attention to "The Point" on page 49 of the PSG: "Because Jesus has won the victory, His people are victorious."

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking God to help the group understand the significance of the victory we have in Christ. Thank Him for making us victors with Him.

Study the Bible

1 John 3:19-22



10 MINUTES

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 John 3:19-22 on page 50 of the PSG.

unchanging nature of God's character. God still welcomes and forgives everyone who seeks His forgiveness and casts himself or herself on God's mercy. Facts, *not* feelings, can quiet our condemning hearts. The imperfect love we have for God and others as well as God's all-inclusive knowledge of our thoughts and motives can give us confidence. By saying, **God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things**, John explained his greatest reason for our reassurance whenever our hearts condemn us.

Verse 21. This is the third of six times John has used the Greek word translated **Beloved** in 1 John. This demonstrates John's personal, intimate connection with his audience. John wrote about our hearts condemning us (v. 20), but what if our hearts do *not* condemn us? That does not mean we are sinless. But John did urge believers to put aside condemning hearts and to have hearts that do not condemn. Doing this results in further confidence before God. When we lay aside self-condemnation on the basis of God's great forgiveness, our hearts will no longer condemn us. Stated another way, **we have confidence toward God**. The word rendered **confidence** means "boldness," "frankness," and "courage to speak or act freely." What does your confidence *in* God lead you to do *for* God?

Verse 22. This is the first mention of prayer in 1 John. Because of Jesus' complete dependence upon and unswerving obedience to the Father, Jesus knew His prayers were always heard. Jesus' relationship with God is the model for the type of relationship all believers should have with God. To the extent we are united with God in faith, love, and obedience, we too are assured of having our prayers answered. Obedience to God's commands is tied to answered prayer (John 14:14-15; 15:7,9-12,16; 16:23,26-27 and other passages). To pray "in the name of Jesus" is to pray in virtue of His character and our union with Him. That union is one of love and obedience, in which Christ's love and obedience to the Father are reproduced in us through faith.

Why are our requests heard by God? According to 1 John 3:22 the answer is **because we keep** (obey, follow) **his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight**. Each of these actions helps explain the other. When we keep God's commands, we do those

things pleasing in God’s sight; when we do what is pleasing in God’s sight, we are keeping His commands. The word rendered **pleasing** also refers to being agreeable and being favorable. What are you doing that is pleasing in God’s sight?

The answer to prayer is given not as a reward for our actions, but because the prayer itself coincides with God’s will. Marshall explained it this way. “John’s purpose is to encourage us to enter fully into the ... relationship in which God delights to hear and answer the requests of his children. The more fully we enter into that relationship, the more will our asking be in accordance with his will.”¹ Obedience is the key; because Jesus has won the victory, His people are victorious. We have victory over doubt. ◀

1 JOHN 3:23-24

23 And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

2 ▶ **Verse 23.** Victory comes when we remain in Jesus and He remains in us. The union we have with God through Christ (specifically, through His blood shed on the cross) gives us that victory. Once again, John stressed the absolute necessity of remaining. Because we remain in Jesus and He remains in us, we have victory: total, complete, and final victory.

Some Bible translators render the first word in verse 23 as “now” , wanting to show how verse 23 connects to the previous verse. Again, verse divisions sometimes get in our way of understanding John’s intent (he did not use verse numbers). Verse 22 reminds us of a prominent theme in this letter: obeying God’s commands. A logical question that follows is: “To which command is John referring?” He answered that in verse 23.

The Bible is full of commands. In Jesus’ day, the Jewish religious leaders had counted 613 commands in their Scripture (our Old Testament), including 365 “do nots.” Was John referring to one of these “do nots” or to one of the 248 positive commands? We don’t have to guess; John specified in verse 23.

LEADER PACK: In advance, make copies of **Item 2: Book of 1 John** handout and distribute them to any group members who don’t have one from week 1. Use this handout to review the background and context for this study.



RECAP: In the previous verses, John has been teaching on our responsibility to love one another. Love is proof of genuine salvation (1 John 3:14), which in turn assures our hearts before God. Sadly, we have times in our lives when we don’t love as we should. When this happens, a sense of failure can set into our minds causing us to feel condemned before God, which in turn can fill us with doubt. Such doubt can be debilitating at times and can even render us unable to move forward.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 51 of the PSG: **“Why would our hearts need reassurance?”**

Alternate: How do you typically respond when you face doubt?

GUIDE: Use Commentary **1** on pages 51-53 to help explain the reassurance of our hearts.

RECAP: Because of Christ, we can walk in victory over doubt. This confidence allows us to pray with boldness in accordance with God's will (1 John 5:14). Think about it this way: When we abide faithfully in Christ, assurance blooms within us, which allows us to pray in faith according to God's will. Prayer, in this way, carries a promise.

TRANSITION: We have victory over doubt. In the next verses, we see that we have victory because we remain in Jesus and He remains in us.

Study the Bible

1 John 3:23-24



10 MINUTES

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 John 3:23-24 on page 52 of the PSG.

One commandment is expressed with two distinct clauses: **believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.** Likely John is referring to Jesus' commandment at the last supper when He told His disciples to love one another (John 13:34-35). The two parts of God's command, **believe** and **love** are inseparable, like the two sides of a coin. Doing one without doing the other is impossible. We can't believe in the **name** (character, person) of Jesus without loving one another. Likewise, we can't love one another (at least with God's kind of love, *agape* love) without believing in Jesus. However, the Greek grammar of these two verbs (*believe* and *love*) indicate a difference in this command. "Believe" is in a tense that reflects its having happened at some point in the past; "love" is in a tense indicating this should be a continuous action and attitude in the present. Studying the two aspects of this commandment together, we find that the Christian life depends upon right belief and right conduct being combined. Our belief is *not* real unless action grows out of it; our actions are meaningless unless they grow out of right belief.

Unfortunately, many people consider the biblical word *believe* to mean merely acknowledging something as factual, true. Biblically speaking, the word requires not only an intellectual acknowledgment of facts (in this case, facts about Jesus), it also describes agreement with Jesus' claim to be God's Son and commitment to Him as Savior and Lord. Likewise, *love* has frequently been understood as merely a feeling. In the Bible, *agape* love requires the person who is loving to help the person being loved. *Agape* love always results in actions that help the one being loved. Simply put, *agape* love is God's love—love given regardless of the worthiness of the object. These twin themes of *love* and *belief* characterize the rest of John's letter. Love must be grounded in belief. Belief in the name of Jesus means believing His name contains the character and power it signifies and acting accordingly.

Verse 24. The concept of remaining **in him** (God the Father or God the Son, perhaps both) occurs several times in 1 John. In 2:6, John combated the false teachers who were claiming to remain in Christ by writing that only those who imitate Christ remain in Him. John insisted that remaining in Christ (in the light) meant to obey God's command to love. In 2:24-29, John wrote that the only

ones who remain in Him are those who are loyal to the gospel with its command of love. These people constitute the church. Now in 3:24, John linked obeying Christ's commands with remaining in Him.

John addressed those who were keeping **his commandments**. Previously, John offered two proofs by which the new life in Christ is demonstrated: (1) regeneration, the new birth and its effects, and (2) mutual indwelling of Christ and the believer. John described the Holy Spirit as the *proof* of indwelling. This is the first of twelve times the word **Spirit** (or spirit) is used in 1 John. The Holy Spirit whose presence is the proof of Christ's abiding in us manifests Himself in our life and conduct. As God, He convicts us of sin, inspires us to confess, empowers us to live righteously, and enables us to love everyone.

John had six interrelated points in this passage.

1. Love in action assures us of being Christians.
2. If we have doubts because of our conscience, we have the assurance of God's complete knowledge of us.
3. Our clear consciences enable us to live a life of fellowship with God in prayer and obedience to His commands.
4. Faith and love are the two sides of the same coin of God's command.
5. Obedience to God gives us assurance of our union with Him at the same time our union with Him gives us assurance of our obedience.
6. The Holy Spirit gives us further assurance of this union. We have victory because we remain in Jesus and He remains in us. ◀

1 JOHN 4:1-4

1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

RECAP: At first glance, the two actions we are called to do sound like two commands from Christ: "believe" and "love." However, John referred to these as "his commandment" (singular). These two commands function together as one test for true Christianity. If we truly believe the right doctrine, then we will manifest the right ethic. We confirm the authenticity of our faith by obeying the singular commandment to believe Christ and love others, which in turn produces assurance of salvation and confidence in prayer.

DO: Direct group members to complete "Engage" on page 56 of the PSG to help reinforce "The Point."

RECAP: When we come to Christ in faith, He comes to dwell in our hearts through His Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9-10). Even as Christ dwells and remains in our lives through His Holy Spirit, the same Spirit draws us, in turn, to remain in Him and obey Him. As Paul wrote: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13). The working out of our salvation and our remaining in Christ is the result of the Spirit of God first working in us.

GUIDE: Use Commentary **2** on pages 53-55 to help explain the meaning of belief in the name of Jesus.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 54 of the PSG: “What does it mean to remain in Jesus?”

Alternate: What does it look like when someone is remaining in Christ?

TRANSITION: In the next verses, we see that we have victory because Jesus has conquered the world.

Study the Bible

1 John 4:1-4



15 MINUTES

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 John 4:1-4 on page 54 of the PSG.

4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

3 ▶ Verse 1. Because Jesus has conquered the world, we have victory. Some have titled these four verses “Rival Spirits” or “Truth vs. Error.” John’s three main points are these:

1. Many spiritual influences are in the world (v. 1).
2. The test of truth is in the witness to the incarnation (vv. 2-3).
3. The test of believers is in recognition of the truth (vv. 4-6.)

The New Testament background for these verses is Paul’s teaching about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12–14. The problem John addressed in 1 John 4:1-6 is that the church was accepting every type of spiritual teaching. A real message for the church today is “test the spirits.” This testing is applied to two groups, false teachers (v. 3) who claimed to be especially inspired and John’s listeners (made specific in v. 6).

The Greek word translated here *beloved* appears six times in 1 John:

1. “Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you” (2:7).
2. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God” (3:2).
3. “Beloved, ... we have confidence toward God” (3:21).
4. **Beloved, believe not every spirit** (4:1).
5. “Beloved, let us love one another” (4:7).
6. “Beloved, ... we ought also to love one another” (4:11).

The unusually frequent use of this intimate term reveals the pattern for love within the church. A good question to ask is “How do I demonstrate and encourage love in my church?”

Believers are to **try the spirits whether they are of God**. Testing the spirits is necessary because there are two types of inspiration: from God and from Satan. In Christian churches, the temptation is to ascribe unusual spiritual activity to God. But since we know Satan is at work also, we must realize the danger of deception. Behind every prophet is either God or Satan. Both Jesus (Matt. 7:15 and other places) and Paul (Gal. 2:4) warned against false prophets or teachers. We need to preserve a biblical balance, avoiding both extreme superstition

(believing everything) and extreme suspicion (believing nothing). John stated one way to determine false prophets is what they confess about Christ. **Many false prophets** (our English prefix *pseudo-* comes from the Greek word translated **false**) had left the church and **gone out into the world**.

Verse 2. Paul's criterion for determining false spirits was similar. "Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost" (1 Cor. 12:3). John was more specific in 1 John 4:2: **Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.** For faith to be real, it must be a witness to Jesus Christ. Jesus rejected those who called Him "Lord" and did not do His commands (Matt. 7:21-23). First John teaches that genuine Christianity is characterized by faith, love, and right living (righteousness); concentration on any one of these to the exclusion of the others is misleading. Christianity is not genuine if it is removed from its historical basis, the life of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Confession is more than the acknowledgment of these historical facts; it is commitment to Christ as Lord. **Hereby know ye the Spirit of God.**

Verse 3. Although John stated the confession of Jesus positively in verse 2, in verse 3 he stated it negatively: **every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.** The authority behind the false teachers was the **spirit of antichrist**. People with the spirit of antichrist either directly oppose Christ or substitute themselves for Christ. That spirit was already present when John wrote in the AD 90s. The purpose of the antichrist was to deny that Jesus has come in the flesh, to separate Christianity from its historical basis. However, as Christians we know we have victory because Jesus has conquered the world.

Verse 4. John turned from consideration of the false teachers and addressed the church by writing **ye are from God** and calling believers **little children**, an affectionate term. By writing they **are from God**, John could have meant that God was the origin of their faith or the source of all they needed. Perhaps John had both ideas in mind. Both interpretations help us better understand what John wrote.

John also stated that these Christians **have overcome them**, the false teachers. The tense of verb John used here

RECAP: Our relationship with Christ is the source of our victory over the world. Christ overcame the world through His death, burial, and resurrection. Since the Spirit of Christ resides in every believer, every Christian has likewise been given the power to overcome the world. Christ has conquered everything in this sin-soaked world—including all false prophets and antichrists. Because He is victorious, we are victorious.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 55 of the PSG: **"Where do you see the spirit of antichrist at work in our culture?"**

RECAP: The ultimate test is this: what does a teaching or a sermon say about Jesus Christ? Cults and false teachers are infamous for the things they take away from God's Word or the things they add to it (Rev. 22:18-19). But the core doctrine to begin with is where they stand on the truth that "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh."

GUIDE: Use Commentary **3** on pages 56-58 to help explain the testing of spirits.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 56 of the PSG: “What process do you use to determine if something is of God or the enemy?”

Alternate: In what ways has Jesus conquered the world?

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Play a video clip showing the victory scene from *Remember the Titans*. After showing the video, talk about how the team was able to win despite the odds being against them. Give each learner an index card and a pencil. Say: “Take a minute to list a few challenges you are facing in your life. Think about why those obstacles are so difficult and why Jesus can give you the victory.” After a few minutes, encourage learners to take a moment to thank God for providing the One who is greater than their struggles. Challenge the learners to use their cards as a prayer prompt during their quiet times this week.

NOTE: A video option can be found at BibleStudiesForLife.com/AdultExtra.

GUIDE: Refer back to “The Point” for this session: “**Because Jesus has won the victory, His people are victorious.**”

indicates a past completed action followed by a continuing result. The word **overcome** could also be rendered *conquered*. This action is both an “already” and a “not yet.” *Already* Christians have experienced some victory (in salvation and in becoming more like Christ). However, Christians have *not yet* experienced the total victory we will experience at our deaths or Christ’s return. God is the source of strength for Christians—only through being born of Him can we overcome, not by our own limited strength. Others may be taken in by the false teaching, but those in the church (those who respond positively and obediently to the gospel message) overcome. We have victory because Jesus has conquered the world. John could have merely written that God is stronger than Satan. Instead, John expressed it more memorably: **greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.** ◀

1. I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John* in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 200.

ENGAGE

What are some characteristics of false spirits at work in the world today? Use the acrostic below to record your answers. (An example has been provided.) Then answer the questions.

Fear

A

L

S

E

After considering how to discern what is false, what are some ways to have victory over these things in our lives? How can we have victory in Jesus?

LIVE IT OUT

Because Jesus has won the victory, His people are victorious. Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Examine your life.** Do you struggle with doubt? If so, answer these two questions: Do you believe the truth of Christ as taught in the Scriptures? Do you love other brothers and sisters in Christ? If you answered yes to both, then you have no reason to doubt.
- ▶ **Align your life.** Make sure you are practicing the spiritual disciplines regularly. Practice such things as prayer, Bible study, scripture memory, fasting, journaling, and serving. Each of these disciplines will help you walk with Christ.
- ▶ **Make a difference in someone's life.** Do you know someone in doubt? Take time this week to walk them through 1 John. Ask them questions like: Do you desire to have fellowship with God? Are you sensitive to sin in your life? Do you have hatred in your heart toward others?

Live It Out



5 MINUTES

READ: Direct group members to page 57 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the applications to carry out this week.

Wrap It Up

SUMMARIZE: Read or restate this idea from page 56 of the PSG:

The Spirit gives the true testimony of Christ's identity and enables Christians to persevere in that truth. Christ won the victory, and His people are victorious.

PRAY: Thank God for the victory we have in Christ. Ask Him to help group members live in that victory this week.



EXTRA!

Free additional ideas for your group are available at

BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra