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LESSONS

God Is Love

1, 2, and 3 John



Luis M. Jiménez

APR MAY JUN 1997

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God is Love

1, 2, and 3 John

"Only God is permanently interesting."—J. F. Newton. In the letters of John we have a firsthand description of the excitement of knowing God. Every verse proclaims: What a God! Added to this is the central conviction that without God there is no hope, no assurance, no salvation, and no love—for God Himself *is* love. All this is made the more compelling by John's conviction that "this is the last hour" (1 John 2:18, NIV), and that we must "continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming" (1 John 2:28, NIV).

No empty words of pretentious piety here! John's emphasis is "I know because I heard, I saw, I touched. I am a material witness." The personal relationship of "the disciple Jesus loved" with his resurrected Lord shines through in his loving concern for the spiritual welfare of his fellow believers. That is why at times he speaks so strongly. For John and for us, these are life-and-death matters. He writes because he wants no one to miss out on a living relationship with the Saviour.

John writes as the elder statesman of the church. In 2 and 3 John he simply identifies himself as "the Elder"—and no one in the Christian church of the time had the spiritual authority of the last living apostle. In 1 John he does not identify himself at all—and in reality he does not have to. There is no doubt as to who is writing. In style, in content, and in personal enthusiasm this is the same John who wrote: "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1). John's credentials are those of the "living witness" to Jesus Christ.

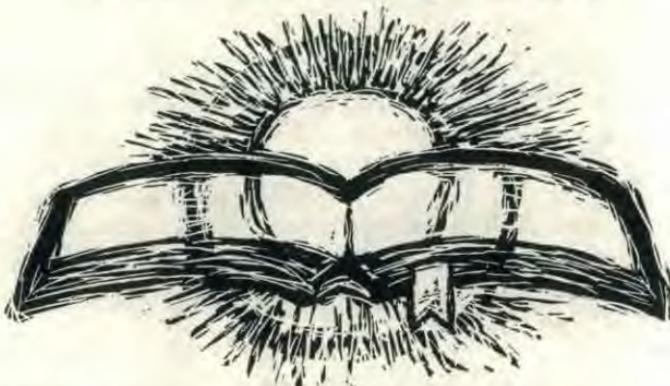
He counters the false ideas that are beginning to circulate in the church. He denies the theory that:

- the physical world is evil and that Jesus only "seemed" to take on human form;
- Jesus was the natural son of Mary and Joseph who took on "Christ" at his baptism;
- salvation is dependent on some "secret knowledge" of God;
- Christian behavior and morality are unimportant; and so on.

But John does not spend time attacking error point by point; instead, he counters error by promoting the truth, by showing the positive reality of the gospel. We have lessons to learn here!

At the heart of John's message is the true nature of God as revealed by Jesus Christ, and the essential importance of responding to this loving offer of free and full salvation. May we respond to this saving, healing God before it is too late.

The Word of Life



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 John 1:1-4.

MEMORY TEXT: “We write to you about the Word of life, which has existed from the very beginning. We have heard it, and we have seen it with our eyes; yes, we have seen it, and our hands have touched it” (1 John 1:1, TEV).

KEY THOUGHT: Jesus, the Word of Life, became one with us so that we could know God, believe in Him, and be saved for eternal life.

KNOWING GOD AS HE TRULY IS. This is the great theme expressed as John opens his message. He is absolutely convinced that Jesus is the express image of the invisible God—Jesus with whom he walked and talked was and is truly the Almighty, eternal God!

“In asserting that he is about to write concerning the One whom he and his associates have actually heard, John contests the claims of those who deny the reality of the incarnation.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 627.

It is helpful to read the whole book of 1 John through—it's quite short. You will gain something of the eagerness that John wants to share. The book is really breathless with the thrill of being with God and following His ways. Ask yourself: what is this epistle telling me about God and how He acts? Thoughts rush on you in quick succession from the conviction of a sincere Christian. Then read the epistle again as if it were a letter directly sent to you, rather than a dusty part of an ancient book. In so many ways, this is one of God's love letters to His friends, and it expresses the intimate relationship we need to have with the One who is love, the very Word of Life!

THE EVER-EXISTING WORD OF LIFE (1 John 1:1).

What immediately crosses your mind as you read 1 John 1:1?

I've read something like this before! The key words *beginning* and *Word* remind us of the beginning of John's Gospel, and this must have been in his mind as he wrote this first letter. "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1) announces the arrival of Jesus, the revelation of God Himself. But this, too, echoes the very start of God's revelation to humanity: "In the beginning God" (Gen. 1:1). Through these words we are brought into the presence of the creating, saving God. No time for introductory remarks! And perhaps there is a lesson here. In our writing and talking, let's put God first.

Though people often are reluctant to discuss religion, they frequently are quite happy to talk about God. Try it, and you will find it is true.

What do you think "the Word of life" (1 John 1:1) means?

John's Gospel shows that the *Word* is a way of describing Jesus. Jesus said that He came to bring abundant life (John 10:10). So we could read *the Word of life* as Jesus, who comes to bring life. Jesus was *the living Word*—the One who has life of Himself: "I am the resurrection, and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25, 26, NIV).

John also emphasizes that this *Word* has existed from the beginning—making sure that no one is confused into thinking that Jesus was created at some time.

At the heart of this term, the *Word of life*, is the essential truth that without Jesus we cannot live. Life is of God, and eternal life comes only through the gift of God. Such *life-quality* begins now and continues forever, even if the first death should intervene.

What is significant in the way John elevates the idea of the *Word*? Compare John 1:1-3 with 1 John 1:1.

Jesus is the *revelation* of God. The term *Word* is used to include not only the spoken and written word, but the idea that God *discloses* Himself to us through Jesus.

For consideration: How real is "the Word of life" to you?

TOUCHING GOD (1 John 1:1).

How do we get our information, and how does this relate to what we know about God? 1 John 1:1, 2.

Information about the world we live in comes through our five senses. "Seeing is believing," we say. "Heard it with my own ears." "So real, I could reach out and touch it." We rightly place much weight on what our senses tell us. And to contradict those who want to make Jesus into some kind of ghost, John is quite adamant: "We heard, we saw, we even touched!" Jesus wasn't someone you could put your hand through. Remember Jesus' invitation to His disciples after His resurrection: "Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have" (Luke 24:39, NIV).

In the same way, doubting Thomas was finally convinced when he could actually touch and feel the risen Jesus. Jesus urged him, "put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe" (John 20:27, NIV). Likewise, John's certainty was based on his own experience. His knowledge and understanding of God came through his closeness to Jesus and what Jesus represented.

Why is it important to give evidence that what we say about God is true? 2 Peter 1:16-21.

How many different ideas are there about God? We all know people who have different understandings as to what God is truly like—even within the church! That is why two things are essential: the truth about God as revealed in the person of Jesus, and our own personal experience of Him in His dealings with us. John points us to these two basic aspects of Christian faith: he knew Jesus personally, and he identified Jesus as God. Much of the message of 1 John is summed up in this.

The New English Bible uses striking language in its abrupt and uncompromising beginning: "It was there from the beginning; we have heard it; we have seen it with our own eyes; we looked upon it, and felt it with our own hands; and it is of this we tell. Our theme is the word of life" (1 John 1:1). John had not only heard of Jesus, but he had also seen Him, touched Him, and associated with Him. The witness of his senses was irrefutable.

For reflection: Without the actual physical presence of Jesus, how can you touch God?

THE MATERIAL WITNESS (1 John 1:2).

What is important about an eyewitness? List some specific aspects. Acts 10:38-43; 13:30-33; 1 Peter 5:1.

We give credibility to the testimony of witnesses who see and hear something firsthand. They are considered to have the best knowledge of a situation, since they were actually present, unlike others who may have heard only second- or thirdhand.

John presents himself and the other apostles as eyewitnesses (1 John 1:2). He himself was the man on the scene, *who knows it to be true because he heard, saw, and touched for himself*. The conviction of personal experience is hard to argue against. John speaks of what he knows to be true because he saw *the life become visible* in the person and nature of Jesus Christ.

[1 John 1:1-3 quoted.] Thus John bears testimony that he had seen Christ, had been with Christ. In the early history of the Christian church, the enemy tried to bring in questions that would lead to doubt and dissension. At this time the testimony of John was invaluable in establishing the faith of the believers. He could say with assurance, I know that Christ lived on this earth; and I can bear testimony regarding His words and works."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 947.

How could someone who looks like only a man be God? John 14:6-11.

By depicting haloes, medieval artists tried to make sure Jesus (and other specially holy persons) were recognized. But Jesus came as a man among men, and there was nothing to attract us to him other than the truth itself. "[Isa. 53:1-3 quoted.] . . . In the eyes of the Jews, Christ had no beauty that they should desire Him. They looked for a Messiah who would come with outward display and worldly glory, one who would do great things for the Jewish nation, exalting it above every other nation on the earth."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1147.

We have become so familiar with the story that we may need to think again of what John is really saying. How easy is it to believe that someone who from outward appearance looks like just another man is actually the God of the universe?

How easy is it to be disciples today? Was it more difficult then? If so, why? If not, why not?

PROCLAIMING FELLOWSHIP—WITH GOD! (1 John 1:3).

Like a herald announcing the visit of a king, John proclaims the truth and invitation of God. The amazing fact is that God invites us all to join John in friendship with him: “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3).

How does Christianity differ from many other religious systems? John 15:14, 15.

Where else is the idea of friendship with God so strongly stated? Ideas of “God” as distant or unconcerned or needing pacifying are frequently found in religious systems, since God is seen as being so “far above” us. The God revealed in Jesus remains all-powerful, the great Almighty—yet He invites us into fellowship (friendship) with Himself. What a gracious God! And this is truly the message of Jesus, who invites us into understanding friendship.

How are we to relate to God? James 2:23.

“We need to educate and train the mind so that we shall have an *intelligent faith*, and have an *understanding friendship* with Jesus. Unless we continually cherish friendship between God and our souls, we shall separate from Him, and walk apart from Him. We shall make friends of those around us, and place our trust in humanity, and our affections will be diverted from the true object of worship. We must not allow coldness to chill our love for our Redeemer. If we have fellowship with Him, we must ever set the Lord before us, and treat Him as an honored Friend, giving Him the first place in our affections.”—*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 27 (italics supplied).

How inclusive is John’s invitation in 1 John 1:3, 4?

Some Christians have thought they should be *exclusive* and have even incorporated that idea into their system of beliefs. But following the example of Jesus, John wants to invite all who will respond into fellowship with *us* and with the Father and the Son. The church is to reflect the God who is inclusive—inviting all who will to come into fellowship with Him.

For reflection: Are there any ways in which you are exclusive? What can you do about this?

COMPLETING JOY (1 John 1:4).

How does John think his joy and that of other members of the church will be made complete? 1 John 1:4.

It is interesting that John does not feel joy to be complete without those to whom he is writing. And though we are far down the ages, this surely applies to us too. All true Christians feel that their joy is incomplete unless it is shared with others who also can experience the joy of the gospel. As Phillips puts it: "We must write and tell you about it, because the more that fellowship extends, the greater the joy it brings to us who are already in it" (1 John 1:4).

This infectious enthusiasm for evangelism is often what we miss. How can it be recaptured? We may think that what is needed are methods, plans, and schemes—or more advertising, better technology, or improved presentations. All these may be good, but none can be a substitute for the irresistible zeal of the Christian who holds on to the experience of first love for God. All through his Gospel and letters, John speaks of this inner joy. (See John 3:29; 15:11; 16:20-24; 17:13; 2 John 12; 3 John 4.) How can this joy be sustained?

Define in a few words *real joy*. What is the reason for this joyful enthusiasm?

"If there is anything in our world that should inspire enthusiasm, it is the cross of Calvary. 'Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not.' 1 John 3:1. 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' John 3:16. Christ is to be accepted, believed on, and exalted. This is to be the theme of conversation—the preciousness of Christ." —*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 338.

If this is so, how does my conversation match up? Is this my theme in the talks I have with others? And how do I bring such themes in without appearing preachy or spiritually vain? We also need to question our relationship to those new Christians joining the church as well as the way we prioritize evangelism and our own personal commitment to sharing faith.

If these activities seem unenjoyable, what does this say about our experience of the joy of the Lord?

FOR FURTHER STUDY: The prologue (1 John 1:1-4) to 1 John has been the subject of some study. What is the "that which" that John is referring to?

For some useful parallels between 1 John and the Gospel of John, refer to the *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 623, 624.

The "that which" is the truth of and about God, as revealed in Jesus and as witnessed by John and his fellow apostles. All Christians may experience this truth as they come to know Jesus personally.

"By coming to dwell with us, Jesus was to reveal God both to men and to angels. He was the Word of God,—God's thought made audible. In His prayer for His disciples He says, 'I have declared unto them Thy name,'—'merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,'—'that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them.' But not alone for His earthborn children was this revelation given. Our little world is the lesson book of the universe. God's wonderful purpose of grace, the mystery of redeeming love, is the theme into which 'angels desire to look,' and it will be their study throughout endless ages. Both the redeemed and the unfallen beings will find in the cross of Christ their science and their song. It will be seen that the glory shining in the face of Jesus is the glory of self-sacrificing love. In the light from Calvary it will be seen that the law of self-renouncing love is the law of life for earth and heaven; that the love which seeketh not her own' has its source in the heart of God; and that in the meek and lowly One is manifested the character of Him who dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 19, 20.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What exactly does Jesus, the Word of Life, tell us about the nature and character of God?
2. We cannot directly see, hear, or touch Jesus today. Does this put us at a disadvantage or not? Why?

SUMMARY: Only by believing and accepting the Word of Life, Jesus Christ, can we experience God's truth and His healing salvation. Without Jesus, who reveals God, we would be in ignorance of God. But thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ we have access to friendship with God and to eternal life. We have complete joy with God and with one another.

The Devil Tried!

Paul Newman Yao

My parents are from Togo in West Africa, but I was born in Ghana. When I was about 8 years old, my father took me back to his village in Togo to live with relatives. He wanted me to learn about the culture and heritage of Togo.

I had attended a Catholic school in Ghana, but my father's family would not allow me to practice Christianity. They taught me their culture and religion, which is a form of animism and spiritism. (Togo is the voodoo capital of the world.)

When I was 12 years old the other boys and I were initiated into the tribe. The men took us far from the village. We were not permitted to look at the sun or the sky, for the spirits lived there. Each boy performed sacrifices and consulted with the spirits to learn the future. When it was my turn, the witch doctor told me I should not eat certain foods or attend crowded events. Then he gave me the name of a spirit god: Looso Akla.

When I became an adult, I moved far from Togo to a village in northern Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast). I began to think about my spiritual life, and I felt a yearning to return to Christianity. A nearby Adventist church was having evangelistic meetings, and someone from the church invited me to attend. I did. The speaker promised gift Bibles to all who attended every night, so I came to every meeting to get my Bible. But I received far more; I received Jesus Christ and was baptized. I found what my heart was searching for!

I took a lay-ministry-training course and moved to an area with no church. I went door to door seeking people to study the Bible with me. I began holding meetings for children. We sang and I told them stories. We had a wonderful time! They invited their parents to come, and soon I began giving Bible studies to those who asked.

In three months we had seven people ready for baptism, and in three years our little group had grown to 40.

Praise God! He took me from heathenism and voodooism and gave me something far better—Jesus! The devil tried to keep me, but Jesus won the victory!

Paul Newman Yao (left) is studying natural remedies used in healing. He hopes to open his own practice in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire.



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Light Against the Darkness



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 John 1:5-10.

MEMORY TEXT: "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: God is the source of light and truth, and His true followers cannot be part of darkness and error.

GOD IS LIGHT. "The best way to see divine light is to put out thy own candle," said Thomas Fuller. If we are busy making our own way to heaven, then the quicker we look to the true light and not our own, the better. God identified as light means the source of life itself, the basis of truth and the only way of salvation-healing.

Knowing this, we cannot live in the two worlds of light and darkness at the same time. We must live in the light—the life-giving, all-transforming, glorious light of the Creator-Redeemer God. "No one is a light unto himself" (Antonio Porchia).

There are significant consequences to this. Sin has to be spelled out. I remember my landlady being horrified at a poster I put in my window when I was a student that read, "Repent: for all have sinned." She confronted me and said, "You can't say everyone's a sinner. I'm not a sinner!" From my observations of the kind of life she led (without being judgmental), I found it hard to agree with her! But she well illustrates so many who refuse to accept their sinful state. Until we accept our sinfulness, we make God a liar and refuse His help.

LIGHT AND NO DARKNESS (1 John 1:5).

What is God like? 1 John 1:5; Ps. 27:1; Isa. 60:20. How are light and darkness symbols? Write a few examples.

John announces what he has heard and knows to be true. What he has to say is no philosophical speculation—it is the revelation of God Himself. Identifying God as absolute light in whom there is no darkness at all immediately creates a striking image in the mind. We are not nocturnal animals. We look for the light and cannot exist without light. Light is a symbol of so many things: vision, growth, knowledge, and understanding—even life itself. As an illustration, it reveals God's divine character in all its beauty, wisdom, and majesty.

More than this, light is equated with moral good and ethical right. Darkness, in contrast, is seen as the kingdom of the enemy, and the home of evil. And so comes the challenge—where are you living? You cannot live in both darkness and light. You cannot split your time between two opposing principles. Nor can you say that light is darkness, or the opposite.

The thought of light also echoes the Genesis account and the first creative act of God in saying, “Let there be light” (Gen. 1:3). God is seen as the Creator who *is* light; He is described as being surrounded by glorious light, and in His appearances to humanity is always associated with blazing light (Eze. 1:26-28).

Why do you think that John adds “in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5)? Wasn’t it enough to say that God is light?

“It is in the ethical sense that John here affirms that ‘God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.’ God, that is to say, is the source and essence of holiness and righteousness, goodness and truth; in Him there is nothing that is unholy or unrighteous, evil or false.”—F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of John* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1970), p. 41. “It is typical of John to make a categorical statement such as ‘God is light,’ and then to reinforce it with a denial of the opposite (cf. vs. 6, 8; ch. 2:4; John 1:3, 20; 10:28).”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 630.

This verse also makes it clear that God is neither the author of nor responsible for evil. Some philosophies teach that God is the creator of evil—but this John emphatically denies.

For reflection: What does the phrase *God is light* really mean? What relevance does this have for you?

LIVING IN BOTH LIGHT AND DARKNESS (1 John 1:6, 7).

Why is it not possible to belong to both God's kingdom and the devil's kingdom? 1 John 1:6.

Can you live a split existence between two worlds that are so opposite? And yet so many try to perform this acrobatic feat! John does not mince his words here. Anyone who claims to be a Christian and yet lives in darkness he calls a liar—not just in words, but in actions too.

Why is this so serious? It is because we fool ourselves into thinking we can have "the best of both worlds" when there is nothing good in the darkness. And we also fool others by giving out such confusing signals.

For reflection: Think of some examples of how our lives are inconsistent with what we say we believe.

Three tests of true belief: in 1 John 1:6, 8, and 10, John sets up three tests so we can discover how deep our commitment is to the truth of God. The first is the failure to reject evil. In retaining our home in the darkness of the devil's evil deceptions, we demonstrate where we belong spiritually. The second self-deception is to deny our sins, to make out that we are right when we are not. If we do this, says John, there is no truth in us—we are lying again! The third test is to suggest that we do not even have a sinful nature—we never sinned—which actually makes God Himself into a liar and denies the whole reason for the plan of salvation.

But by living in the light we share together in God's blessings and can experience the mutual friendship of true believers in the Lord. At the same time, this does not mean the immediate achievement of total goodness, for an ongoing process of purifying from sin continues.

When we speak of the blood of Jesus, what do we really mean? How would you explain this vital aspect of Christian belief to the person in the street who knows nothing of religious ideas? How does the blood of Jesus cleanse us "from all sin"? (1 John 1:7, RSV) Does this mean: (1) our fallen natures are destroyed; (2) our fallen natures are subjected to the control of the Holy Spirit; or (3) we are given victory over sinful behavior? Are more than one of these alternatives involved in Jesus' cleansing power?

LIVING WITHOUT SINNING—IS THIS DECEPTION? (1 John 1:8).

What is being said in 1 John 1:8? How do you relate this verse to the statement at the end of the previous verse, that “the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (verse 7, RSV)?

The ideas of perfection and sinlessness have been much fought over—and the very term *fought* should alert us to the unchristlike words and actions of some. John is not denying the working of God, which as he has just said, “purifies us from all sin.” The focus in verse 8 is on *our* saying that *we* have no sin. This arrogant lie is a self-satisfied confidence that *we* have achieved the state of sinlessness, and even that we did it by ourselves for ourselves. This makes a mockery of God’s gift in Jesus Christ.

How should you respond to those who make claims of sinlessness?

A friend of mine told of a letter his father had once received. At the foot was PS: “I have lived without sinning these last 45 days.”

Suggest how you would have responded.

As a church, we have had to relate to those who have claimed sinless perfection. Ellen White wrote: “The words of John came forcibly to my mind, ‘If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.’ 1 John 1:8. I was shown that those who triumphantly claim to be sinless, show by their very boasting that they are far from being without taint of sin. The more clearly fallen man comprehends the character of Christ, the more distrustful will he be of himself, and the more imperfect will his works appear to him, in contrast with those which marked the life of the spotless Redeemer. But those who are far from Jesus, those whose spiritual perceptions are so clouded by error that they cannot comprehend the character of the great Exemplar, conceive of Him as altogether such a one as themselves, and dare to talk of their own perfection of holiness. But they are far from God; they know little of themselves, and less of Christ.—*Life Sketches*, p. 84.

For reflection: How do you view yourself when you consider the character of Christ?

HOW GOD DEALS WITH OUR SINFULNESS (1 John 1:9).

What steps are spelled out in the way God deals with our sinfulness? 1 John 1:9.

Step one: We have to confess. We cannot be like those in the previous verse who simply deny their sin. If we do not admit and accept that we are sinners, God cannot help us. We must identify our need of God to heal us from our sinfulness.

Step two: Because by nature He is “faithful and just” (or “utterly reliable and straightforward,” as Phillips puts it), God forgives our sins. Sometimes God’s forgiveness is made out to be some way in which He makes allowances or bends the rules. This misses the whole point. God *forgives* because it is the *right* thing to do, and God is always right. The devil is the one who complains about the correctness of forgiveness, but forgiveness is at the heart of the nature and character of God. God sees the true motives of the heart, accepts the sincerity of repentance, and consequently forgives—which means accepting us back as if we had never sinned.

Commenting on 1 John, Ellen G. White makes this vital point: “The plan of redemption is not merely a way of escape from the penalty of transgression, but through it the sinner is forgiven his sins, and will be finally received into heaven—not as a forgiven culprit pardoned and released from captivity, yet looked upon with suspicion and not admitted to friendship and trust; but welcomed as a child, and taken back into fullest confidence.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 950.

Step three: God purifies us from all our unrighteousness (“wrong-doing,” TEV). In fact, God’s forgiveness includes purification. “God’s forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness *for* sin, but reclaiming *from* sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 114. Sometimes in our gratitude and amazement at God’s gracious forgiveness, we stop there and miss the essential third step. God does not leave us simply as “forgiven culprits.” He sets to work to heal the damage sin has caused, and to remake us into His image. He not only *sets* us right, but *keeps* us right. (See also the Ellen G. White article, “God Made Manifest in Christ.”—*Signs of the Times*, Jan. 20, 1890).

Think of how these three steps have worked in your experience. Do you realize the accepting and transforming nature of God’s forgiveness?

MAKING GOD A LIAR (1 John 1:10).

How do we make a liar out of God? 1 John 1:10.

Note Phillips' pointed translation of this verse: "For if we take up the attitude 'we have not sinned,' we flatly deny God's diagnosis of our condition and cut ourselves off from what he has to say to us."

More than this—we buy into the lies of the devil, who assured Eve that she would not die as a result of her sinful action, but rather would be godlike. The devil has always tried to clothe God in his own evil nature. How can we refute the following allegations?

God is a liar. (See Gen. 3:4.) The devil directly contradicts what God has said.

God is selfish. (See Gen. 3:5.) The devil insinuates that God is keeping the best for Himself by not allowing Adam and Eve access to the tree, for they would then be like God.

God is a bad governor of His universe. (See Isa. 14:13, 14.) Lucifer claims he can do a better job than the Most High.

God exhibits favoritism. (See Job 1:9, 10.) Satan accuses God of being partial, and claims that those who follow Him do so only for material and personal gain.

God asks for worship that is not deserved. (See Matt. 4:9.) In contrast, Satan asks for that worship to be directed to himself.

"And many other charges are demonstrated by the work that Satan carries out and his attitude to God revealed in Scripture: God is hostile, cruel, unforgiving, antagonistic, vengeful, severe, unjust—and all the other qualities that the devil transfers from himself to God. . . . No wonder then that God is 'defaced,' and is rejected so often by those whose picture of God has been given them by the archliar. They have swallowed the distorted, perverted picture of God fed to them by the antagonist, so that God's name continues to be blackened and blasphemed. 'On rumour's tongue continual slanders ride.' (Shakespeare.)"—Jonathan Gallagher, *Is God to Blame?* (Grantham, England: Stanborough Press, 1992), p. 38.

"Why have we had so hard a judgment of our Heavenly Father? From the light that God has given me, I know that Satan has misrepresented our God in every possible way. He has cast his hellish shadow athwart our pathway, that we might not discern our God as a God of mercy, compassion, and truth. . . . We thus put our kind Heavenly Father in a false light. All this should change. We must gather up the rays of divine truth, and let our light shine upon the darkened pathway of others."

—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Feb. 26, 1889.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Review the introduction to the Gospel of John and the comments on John 1:1-5 in the *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 891-899.

Further on "God is light": "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If there were no light, there would be no shade. But while the shade comes by the sun, it is not created by it. It is some obstruction that causes the shadow. So darkness emanates not from God, but is the result of an intruding object between the soul and God. . . .

"Disregard of the light that God has given brings the sure result. It creates a shadow, a darkness that is more dark because of the light which has been sent. . . . If a man withdraws himself from light and evidence, and yields to Satan's seducing arts, he himself draws the curtain of unbelief about him, so that light cannot be distinguished from darkness. More light and evidence would only be misunderstood by him."—*Our High Calling*, p. 26.

Further on how God deals with our sinfulness: "In ourselves we can see nothing but weakness, nothing to recommend us to God, and Satan tells us that it is of no use; we cannot remedy our defects of character. When we try to come to God, the enemy will whisper, It is of no use for you to pray; did not you do that evil thing? Have you not sinned against God and violated your own conscience? But we may tell the enemy that 'the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.' 1 John 1:7. When we feel that we have sinned and cannot pray, it is then the time to pray. Ashamed we may be and deeply humbled, but we must pray and believe. 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.' 1 Timothy 1:15. Forgiveness, reconciliation with God, comes to us, not as a reward for our works, . . . but it is a gift unto us, having in the spotless righteousness of Christ its foundation for bestowal."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 115.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How would you describe "living in the light"?

2. Why are we still attracted to the darkness at times?

SUMMARY: Only by living in the light that is of God can we experience the true Christian life. There is no darkness in God—no moral darkness or error of any kind. We are invited into this life-giving light as God deals with our sinfulness and wins us back to love and trust in His gracious concern for us.

Don't Let Our Church Close!

James H. Zachary

"Dear Lord, help us keep our church open," Cheryl Hodge and Marie Pesak of Rochester, Indiana, prayed. Their little church was the only Adventist church in the county. During World War II it had been home to 60 members, but over the years people moved away or slipped away until only two members remained. But the women were determined to do all they could to keep their church alive.

Then one Sabbath morning Patrick Noonan walked into the church. "I want to be baptized," he announced. The surprised women listened to his story of how family problems had driven him to find the Lord.

"Praise God!" Marie and Cheryl said. "You can be our elder!" The church had just increased its membership by 50 percent, to three active members!

For five years Patrick met with the two women to pray, "Lord, help us keep the light of truth shining in this county." Then in 1993, another member joined the church; Cheryl was married!

Besides their constant and earnest prayers, the four church members worked hard to draw interests from the neighborhood. They held a prophecy seminar that resulted in six new members, more than 100 percent growth! Encouraged, they planned another seminar that helped bring in four additional members.

Other Adventists saw the church members' zeal and transferred their memberships to the Rochester church. Then Pastor David de Pinto was assigned to the little congregation. Impressed by the group's dedication to evangelism, the pastor and his wife settled in, determined to stay and help the church grow.

More seminars, more outreach, and lots more prayer have brought other new members to the church. Today some 30 believers worship and fellowship in the Rochester church. "It is sharing the love of Jesus that attracts people," Marie Pesak says with a smile. "The light of God's truth is shining brightly in Rochester, thanks to the Lord's blessing and eight years of praying, 'Lord, help us keep this church open.'"

James Zachary is Global Evangelism coordinator for the Quiet Hour.



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Walking Like Jesus



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 John 2:1-11.

MEMORY TEXT: He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:6, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: The true test of genuine Christianity is Christlikeness.

FOOL'S GOLD? All too often gold prospectors have been bitterly disappointed to discover that the wonderful "mother lode" of bright-shining, glittering gold has turned out to be worthless fool's gold. To the untrained eye, this deceptive "gold" looks like the real thing. The test is to take it to the chemist and have it analyzed. The first test is a drop of "aqua regia"—a strong acid combination—that dissolves the fool's gold but leaves the true gold untouched.

What an image of true and false Christianity! Both can seem to sparkle in the sunlight and look equally valuable. But when the test of truth comes, the fool's gold is found wanting. And that truth has much to do with *how we really live*. Too frequently those who *claim* to have the truth do not *demonstrate* this in their lives and behavior.

In this week's lesson, we study John's inspired concept of what it means to be a true Christian, one through whom the untarnished love of Christ shines with sparkling beauty. "John insists that he who claims to abide in Christ should give daily evidence that he is emulating his Saviour."—SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 638.

SIN REMEDY (1 John 2:1, 2).

What is God's attitude toward acts of sin? In what way does Jesus plead with the Father? 1 John 2:1.

Commenting on the first clause of 1 John 2:1, Alfred Plummer writes that the Greek "is conclusive against the rendering 'that ye may not *continue* in sin.' He would help them to avoid every act of sin. . . . This is the moral effect of the death of Christ;—to unite men to the God who is Light, and to enable them to hate and avoid the darkness of sin."—Alfred Plummer, *The Epistles of St. John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1886, 1980), p. 33.

Some have the idea that, as our Advocate, Jesus is pleading for the Father to be nice to us. This is absolutely wrong, as both Scripture and Ellen White point out. Note the words of Jesus: "In that day you will ask in my name; and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from the Father" (John 16:26, 27, RSV).

"The atonement of Christ was not made in order to induce God to love those whom He otherwise hated; and it was not made to produce a love that was not in existence; but it was made as a manifestation of the love that was already in God's heart."—*Signs of the Times*, May 30, 1895.

**What does it mean for Christ to be the *propitiation* for our sins?
1 John 2:2; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24.**

The old word *propitiation* may convey the wrong meaning as to the relationship of God to humanity. In some contexts, it carries the connotation of appeasement of a hostile and angry deity, which is more related to pagan than true ideas of God.

The Greek word (*hilasmos*) that the King James Version translates *propitiation* means "expiation" (the act of making atonement, the means by which atonement is made), or *sin-offering*. John is referring to the fact that the guilt of the whole world was laid upon Christ (Isa. 53:6; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24).

"Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 753.

TRUE OBEDIENCE (1 John 2:3-5).

What does disobedience to God show? 1 John 2:4.

John does not hesitate to use strong words because the issue is so important. He is dealing with people who say they know God but whose lives and Christian behavior are not consistent with their claim. They have great theories about God and His nature, but they do not allow God to come in and change their evil natures. Like many down through the ages, they have the theory but not the practice. We, too, need to see the contradiction between our claims of piety and the evidence of unspirituality in our lives.

How do we truly obey? 1 John 2:3, 5; 5:4, 5.

While disobedience may demonstrate that God is not truly known, obedience can also be from wrong motives. Note this:

"The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey. . . . True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because right doing is pleasing to God."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 97, 98.

Can obedience be legalism? Gal. 3:1-5.

Much depends upon the motives of the heart. Obedience just because the law *says* so is not enough! There must be an appreciation of right for its own sake, a *love* to do right, and love for Christ that transcends all personal inclinations. If we have wrong attitudes and motives, we may attempt to keep the law, and yet still not obey. This is why John says, "But whoever obeys his word is the one whose love for God has really been made perfect" (1 John 2:5, TEV). Love for Christ and reception of His power enable us to obey, and successful obedience deepens our love for God.

For reflection: Can you think of a situation in which someone could be a commandment keeper and yet not know God? Are there any examples from the past?

LIVING LIKE JESUS (1 John 2:6).

"We have only one perfect photograph of God, and this is Jesus Christ."—Ellen G. White, MS 70, 1899. What does this statement tell you?

Jesus came to show us God (John 1:18; 12:45; 14:9). And so through the visible presence of Jesus as God we can see His true nature and character in contrast to all the lies the devil has told. Jesus is the representation of all that is good and pure and true. So we should spend much time in contemplation of the life of Christ, since it is a living illustration of how God acts in all kinds of situations.

Often we hear of Jesus as our example. In so many ways this is true. He shows us what Christian ideals are in practice. He provides a practical example of godliness. He demonstrates the way to live in a sinful world. But Jesus did not need to be saved! Dangers are there if we seek to copy Jesus as a way of earning salvation. This leads to works righteousness: trying to make our way to heaven by our own efforts. Jesus came to *show* us how to live (Rev. 3:21). And He came to *be our salvation*.

So let us look to Jesus as our example of how to live, but let us not think we can walk alone!

Exactly how did Jesus live? 1 Peter 2:21-23. Write down some examples from the Gospels that seem particularly relevant to you.

"How did Jesus walk? Certainly in the light with God, due to his perfect obedience to the heavenly Father's will, to which God himself testified (Mt. 3:17; 12:18; 17:5). But he also walked in love towards the crowds of needy, lost people whom he daily encountered (Mt. 9:36). Walking in the light is not only characterized by the absence of sin but equally importantly by the presence of love. Those who remain (abide) in Christ cannot fail to display the fruit of the Spirit, in a Christ-like character."—David Jackman, *The Message of John's Letters* (Leicester, England, and Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 50.

"If we abide in Christ, if the love of God dwells in us, our feelings, our thoughts, our purposes, our actions, will be in harmony with the will of God as expressed in the precepts of His holy law. 'Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous.' 1 John 3:7. Righteousness is defined by the standard of God's holy law, as expressed in the ten precepts given on Sinai."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 61.

OLD AND NEW COMMANDS (1 John 2:7, 8).

One frequent charge against the Bible is that the Old Testament and the New Testament are so different. A few have even suggested that different "Gods" were responsible for the two testaments! But the truth is that though circumstances and situations varied, the message of salvation that God has wanted to communicate has always been the same. It is truly the "everlasting gospel."

Assignment: Write out a few examples that seem to show a difference between the Old and New Testaments. What do these tell you about the way God works?

**What is the difference between the "old" and "new" commands?
1 John 2:7, 8.**

In the same way that Jesus used the "old" in expressing His message and mission, John reminds his hearers that what He is saying is nothing new. God is consistent: "the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8, NIV). He may use different methods and have to operate in emergency situations, but what He wants is unchanging: the willingly given love and trust of His children so that He may save and heal them.

John emphasizes the historic nature of the good news—from Creation until now. But then he remembers that Jesus called it a "new command" (John 13:34). It is new because Jesus has come—not to remove the "old" but to "fulfil" it (Matt. 5:17). Jesus is the clearest representation of God and His character.

John is reminding his readers that the original gospel to which they responded is the only true one. Original and best! As Paul emphasized to the Galatians: "Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned" (Gal. 1:8, NIV). Because the devil attempts to pervert the true gospel, every Christian must be on guard against accepting a "modification" of the truth. Ultimately "its truth is seen in Christ. . . . and the real light is already shining" (1 John 2:8, TEV).

"We must believe the words of God just as he has spoken them; we must take Christ at his word, believe that he came to represent the Father, and that the Father, as is represented in Christ, is our friend, and that he desires not that we should perish, or he would never have given his Son to die our sacrifice."—Review and Herald, March 8, 1892.

BROTHERLY LOVE (1 John 2:9-11).

What does the need for loving one another say about the kind of God we worship? 1 John 2:9-11.

God is light—and God is love. Hating means darkness, loving means light. By loving one another as brothers and sisters, we demonstrate that we are following the way of God. Love is a reflection of our acceptance of God and His ways as right. “He who keeps on loving his brother despite circumstances that might produce hatred, must be living a life with God, and therefore dwelling in His light.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 639. The opposite is also true: if we hate, we show that the nature of God is not in us.

Why, then, are there so many arguments and divisions in the church? What is God's ideal for the church? 1 Cor. 1:10.

The devil also knows the spiritual truth that love unites! We can have all the theology we want, we can study our Bibles from morning to night, but if we do not have love for one another, we are still in the devil's camp. Like “sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (1 Cor. 13:1), we are just making a lot of noise but with no real result. So while we may not always agree on every issue, our methods and behavior must be consistently Christlike.

For your thinking: Once a group of members in the church thought a minister was in error and so decided not to speak to him or even shake his hand. How would you have reacted to such a situation?

“How do you really know you are in the dark?” a father asked his daughter. Quickly she replied, “When you bump into things!” Her reply illustrates a spiritual truth, for as Phillips translates this verse: “The man who hates his brother is shut off from the light and gropes his way in the dark without seeing where he is going. To move in the dark is to move blindfold” (1 John 2:11, Phillips). It is a painful experience and very foolish. And yet because hate can be so strong, sometimes people will put up with the agony of living in the dark for the futile satisfaction of maintaining their hatred for someone.

For reflection: Do you hate like this? If so, what should you do about it? Think of some practical answers.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: On the subject of the remedy for sin and living like Jesus, study Hebrews 9:11-14.

"There are those who have known the pardoning love of Christ and who really desire to be children of God, yet they realize that their character is imperfect, their life faulty, and they are ready to doubt whether their hearts have been renewed by the Holy Spirit. To such I would say, Do not draw back in despair. We shall often have to bow down and weep at the feet of Jesus because of our shortcomings and mistakes, but we are not to be discouraged. Even if we are overcome by the enemy, we are not cast off, not forsaken and rejected of God. No; Christ is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Said the beloved John, 'These things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.' 1 John 2:1. And do not forget the words of Christ, 'The Father Himself loveth you.' John 16:27. He desires to restore you to Himself, to see His own purity and holiness reflected in you. And if you will but yield yourself to Him, He that hath begun a good work in you will carry it forward to the day of Jesus Christ. Pray more fervently; believe more fully. As we come to distrust our own power, let us trust the power of our Redeemer, and we shall praise Him who is the health of our countenance."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 64.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe in simple terms how God deals with sin.
2. Why is obedience to God not the only requirement for salvation?
3. Why is it important to God that we love one another?
4. How can we change from hate to love?
5. How is it possible to walk as Jesus walked?

SUMMARY: In the same way that Jesus hated no one, but loved all—even the unlovable—so must we. Our objective is to refrain from sin. But if we do sin, God still accepts us back when we accept His gift of repentance. He provides the remedy for our sinfulness. We must not take God's graciousness lightly, but seek complete obedience. This obedience has its source in love for Christ and for His definition of what is right. Obedience cannot result from a mere sense of obligation. Day by day we are to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.



Taking God at His Word

Izaias Storch and Carlos Roberto Alvarenga

When 10-year-old Gilda Martins Pereira, of Brazil, was baptized last year, the pastor promised her that God would use her in wonderful ways if she placed her life in His hands. Gilda took the pastor—and God—at their word, and they both kept His promise.

Gilda and her parents were baptized following meetings held by lay members of the Central Adventist Church of Lins, Brazil. The church's 200 members divided into 13 teams and held evangelistic meetings in several surrounding towns during Holy Week. One of those towns was Guaiçara, where Gilda and her family live.

For eight months the team members held meetings, visited door to door, and prayed for those who showed an interest. Eight precious souls were baptized into the church, including Gilda and her parents. When the pastor visited with Gilda before her baptism, he noted her leadership potential, and invited her to become a leader in the newly established Sabbath School.

The new believers in Guaiçara continued the work of evangelism begun by the members from Lins. When they decided to hold another series of evangelistic meetings, Gilda took upon herself the task of finding a speaker. She called the leaders of the Lins church and convinced them to send a speaker. Then she continued to call the assigned speaker and remind him to bring a projector, slides, and a good program. Other church members did not think Gilda could get a speaker for their meetings, and they did not invite their friends to come. But when the speaker and his wife arrived at the appointed time, Gilda chided the adults. "Didn't I tell you he would come? But you did not believe." Then she turned to the speaker and urged him to come again the following Sunday, promising that the room would be full.

The following week the speaker arrived to find the room full and people standing in the aisles. He learned that Gilda had gone throughout the town placing posters in the bus depot, stores, and anywhere she could. As a result, 70 people came to the meetings.

The little group of believers was so encouraged by the success of the meetings that they plan to hold another series soon. They are looking for land on which to build a church. In the meantime, 11-year-old Gilda continues to take God at His word and lead out in Sabbath School. "If we do little for Jesus it is because we trust little," she says.

Izaias Storch and Carlos Roberto Alvarenga are members of the Lins Adventist Church in Brazil.

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Inside Story

What Knowing God Means



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 John 2:12-17.

MEMORY TEXT: "I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father" (1 John 2:13, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: Only by knowing God as He is and by accepting His gracious offer of salvation can we find hope and assurance in this evil world.

ON KNOWING GOD. The King James Version illustrates an old meaning of the word *know*. It is not just mental assent or factual content; it describes *an intimate relationship*. A few examples:

"Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived" (Gen. 4:1). "Cain knew his wife; and she conceived" (Gen. 4:17). "Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son" (Gen. 4:25). "Elkanah knew Hannah his wife. . . . She bare a son" (1 Sam. 1:19, 20). "[Joseph] knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son" (Matt. 1:25).

The word *knew* is used to describe the intimate physical relationship of marriage. This marital union illustrates the fellowship that God wants to have with us. He wants to become one with us, united in a permanent spiritual bond. (See John 17:21-26.)

The relationship of man and woman in self-giving love is used by God as a beautiful figure of the relationship He wants with each of us. It is based on total trust, it has no secrets, and it is very intimate. The church is the "bride" of Christ (Rev. 21:9), the object of His supreme love, and the church includes you and me. This is the kind of *knowledge* of God that is the subject of 1 John 2.

KNOWLEDGE AND FORGIVENESS (1 John 2:12, 13).**How sure are we of God's forgiveness? 1 John 2:12.**

John writes with assurance. He does not qualify his statement. He simply says, "Your sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake." There is an important lesson here. While we may not *feel* forgiven, the truth is that, having genuinely repented and confessed, we *are* forgiven.

Perhaps you are like the woman who was still asking God for forgiveness 30 years after she had sinned, never able to believe she was forgiven. This is a denial of what God has stated. Thinking like this prevents us from moving on in our spiritual experience.

The truth is that "the moment we ask for forgiveness in contrition and sincerity, God forgives."—*Signs of the Times*, Sept. 4, 1893. And even the desire to repent is God's work. Christ is constantly drawing sinners by the exhibition of His love upon the cross. This softens their hearts and inspires them to contrition and repentance. (See Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890.)

Why did John write (with implied approval) to the *fathers*? 1 John 2:13.

As we saw before, this knowledge of God is not mind knowledge, but a shorthand description of the total relationship between God and humankind. John uses this term despite the fact that those whose influence he is writing to counteract use the term *knowledge* also. These early Gnostics had the idea that secret knowledge was the key to salvation. Certain mystical ideas were supposed to be known only to the spiritually elite. Interestingly, John refers to Christ as the One "who is from the beginning." One of the ideas that became central to later Gnosticism was that Jesus was a kind of created being, one of the emanations of God.

What is wrong in not recognizing Jesus as equal with God in His divinity? Give some specific reasons. John 5:18; 8:58; Col. 2:9.

To deny the full divinity of Christ is arguably the worst heresy; it prevents our seeing in Jesus the complete picture of God's nature and character. Only God Himself could atone for those who had broken His law, only He could suffer adequately for human sin.

KNOWLEDGE AND VICTORY (1 John 2:13, 14).**To what should the knowledge of God lead? 1 John 2:13, 14.**

These verses parallel the previous ones. We should remember the Hebrew mind's fondness for parallelism. Much Old Testament poetry is of this form: a thought is stated, and then the next line parallels the first thought. It is probable that John is being poetic here. John repeats what he writes to the fathers and the young men. But there is a contrast in what he writes to "my children"; in verse 12 he writes of their forgiven sins, and in verse 13 he writes of their knowledge of the Father.

Which comes first? Do we come to know the Father as forgiving, or, having been forgiven, do we come to know the Father? Both are true! That the forgiving nature of God is emphasized as being the central characteristic of the Father is surely significant.

"God in Christ gave Himself for our sins. He suffered the cruel death of the cross, bore for us the burden of guilt, 'the just for the unjust,' that He might reveal to us His love and draw us to Himself. . . . Let Christ, the divine Life, dwell in you and through you reveal the heaven-born love that will inspire hope in the hopeless and bring heaven's peace to the sin-stricken heart. As we come to God, this is the condition which meets us at the threshold, that, receiving mercy from Him, we yield ourselves to reveal His grace to others.
—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 114, 115.

What is the consequence of God's healing forgiveness? Luke 1:77 (compare 4:18; Eph. 1:7, 8; Col. 1:13, 14).

The consequence is spiritual cleansing, victory over sin, and reception of Christ's redeeming love. Having come in repentance, having received forgiveness, having been spiritually healed, "you have overcome the evil one" (1 John 2:13, 14, NIV). This is the hallmark of successful Christian living by the power of the indwelling Christ.

God's desire for all of us is that we should be one with Him and right with one another. In order to have these experiences, we must come to the only One who can help us. Taking care of guilt is only part of God's forgiveness. When we are sick and go to the doctor, he doesn't say, "I forgive you." He attempts to provide a cure. In a similar way, when we are spiritually sick, God doesn't merely say, "I wipe out the guilt of your past sins." He enters into our hearts by the Holy Spirit and begins the process of change and healing.

KNOWING GOD (1 John 2:13, 14).

How do we know God? Where do our concepts of God come from? Think of how you personally have gained an understanding of God. 1 John 2:13, 14; Jer 9:24; John 14:9; 16:30.

"When a person receives a crucial message, he usually checks several sources to make sure the news is authentic. If a source is unreliable, the message may be treated with suspicion. But sources tested and found reliable can be counted on to provide trustworthy information.

"Such is the case with information about God. People sometimes accept facts about God without checking their sources. Information about Him may be passed subtly through the media (which normally give the God of the Bible a bad press). Other images of Him come from parents or ourselves. As a result, the God we perceive may be a God of our own making. Therefore, psychologists are partially correct in stating that God often is nothing more than a father figure or the projection of our own desires.

"A concept of God based on such perceptions *will* be erroneous. Yet Christians have an authentic and reliable knowledge of God. Why? Because our source is 'God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, [who] has made Him known' (John 1:18)."—Roy Matheson, *Loving God's Family* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1985), p. 37.

"Our whole spiritual life will be molded by our conceptions of God's character."—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, April 5, 1887.

How we understand God will affect the way we view all other doctrines. We must not accept a picture of God's nature that is distorted or warped in any way.

How can you test your concept of God? Who can be sure anyway? 1 John 2:14; John 14:21, 23.

Once again, the touchstone is the revelation of Jesus and that "the word of God lives in you" (1 John 2:14, NIV). Anything that does not square with the thoughts and actions of Jesus must be rejected, as must any ideas that do not find scriptural support. We must be careful not to bring our own preconceptions to Scripture and see there the kind of God we have already decided upon.

For reflection: How can you rightly represent the truth about God to those around?

LOVING THE WORLD (1 John 2:15, 16).

What is involved in loving the world? 1 John 2:15, 16.

Some aspects are easy to identify. Status symbols: the big house, the smart car, the motor cruiser—all these are easy to condemn as loving the world, especially if you do not have any such possessions and are unlikely ever to have them. It is easy to say, "Of course I don't love the world." But we live in a world that is hard to ignore. In some way or other, we all absorb ideas and beliefs from the world. And not everything out there is wrong.

So what of those concepts that are not so clearly identified as wrong? What about the idea of competition—beating the opposition? Is that right or wrong? How does this relate to Christian belief and lifestyle? Can you be a true Christian in business?

What are your primary objectives? What do you want most? You may not want a massive fortune, but there are few people who would not say that they could do with more money.

Then what of the way we relate to others? The world has affected our relationships and distorted our ideas of love, affection, and morality.

If we think we are not distracted by what the world has to offer, one last thought from Jesus: "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32).

What do you see as the real difference between the Christian and those who operate according to the ideas of this world? Col. 3:2; Titus 2:12; Rom. 12:2.

"As we see Jesus dying upon the cross to save lost man, the heart echoes the words of John, 'Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not' (1 John 3:1). There is nothing that more decidedly distinguishes the Christian from the worldly man than the estimate he has of God."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 183, 184.

What are your life's priorities? Check those that apply to you:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting ahead | <input type="checkbox"/> Knowing God better |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Happy marriage | <input type="checkbox"/> Fame |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plenty of money | <input type="checkbox"/> Eternal life |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Successful career | <input type="checkbox"/> Prestigious home |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Helping others | <input type="checkbox"/> Designer clothes |

LIVING FOREVER (1 John 2:17).

According to 1 John 2:17, who will live forever?

“Who wants to live forever?” asks a popular song. And if it is simply life in this world, who would want that? This is where the Christian perspective is so very different. Whatever you set your heart on in this world will eventually pass away.

“The Worldly Hope men set their Hearts upon
 Turns ashes—or it prospers and anon,
 Like Snow upon the Desert’s dusty Face,
 Lighting a little hour or two—is gone.”—Omar Khayyam

Like snow in the desert—that is the substance of worldly hope. Temporary, transient, fleeting—it simply does not last. There is a terrible futility if all we have is this world. So many have understood this, all down the ages:

“We are things of the day. What are we? What are we not?
 The shadow of a dream is man, no more.”
 —Pindar (Greek poet, ca. 5 B.C.).

“Life is but a day;
 A fragile dew-drop on its way
 From a tree’s summit.”—Keats (1816).

The Bible points to the passing nature of this world: “As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more” (Ps. 103:15-17, RSV; compare Isa. 40:7).

**So if everything is passing away, what is the point to life?
 Ps. 1:1-3; 1 John 5:11-13.**

The *only* way to find lasting satisfaction, meaning, and purpose is to come to the eternal God. “The world passes away and disappears, and with it the forbidden cravings (the passionate desires, the lust) of it; but he who does the will of God and carries out His purposes in his life, abides (remains) forever” (1 John 2:17, *The Amplified Bible*).

For reflection: How do you do God’s will? What have you set your heart upon? Do you want to live forever? If so, why?

FOR FURTHER STUDY: On knowledge and forgiveness—the aim of knowing God, study Acts 5:31; 13:38, 39; Ps. 103:3; Matt. 6:14.

"Jesus knows the circumstances of every soul. You may say, I am sinful, very sinful. You may be; but the worse you are, the more you need Jesus. He turns no weeping, contrite one away. . . . He bids every trembling soul take courage. Freely will He pardon all who come to Him for forgiveness and restoration."—*God's Amazing Grace*, p. 118.

"It is peace that you need—Heaven's forgiveness and peace and love in the soul. Money cannot buy it, intellect cannot procure it, wisdom cannot attain to it; you can never hope, by your own efforts, to secure it. But God offers it to you as a gift, 'without money and without price.' Isa. 55:1. . . .

"As you read the promises, remember they are the expression of unutterable love and pity. . . . Yes, only believe that God is your helper. He wants to restore His moral image in man."—*The Faith I Live By*, p. 103.

"Let the sinner come just as he is, and contemplate the love that has been bestowed upon him, all unworthy as he is; and the first thing he knows, he will realize that Christ's love has broken every barrier down, and that he exercises repentance which is not to be repented of. The sinner must go to Christ in order that he may be enabled to repent."—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Sept. 3, 1901.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What else is involved in knowing God, apart from knowing about Him?
2. How would you define the Christian's attitude to material possessions?
3. How do we help others to find meaning and purpose in this life that seems so temporary and uncertain?
4. What does the concept of eternal life mean to you?

SUMMARY: Knowing God means entering into a deep and personal relationship with Him as Saviour and Lord. The result is expressed in His forgiveness and in our victory over the devil's attempt to destroy us. As a consequence, Christians do not identify with the world and its value system; they seek friendship and fellowship with God and look to do His will. The result for them is eternal life.

God's Hand in Cambodia

M. Daniel Walker

Men Mara and his young son were returning home by train from a pastor's training seminar in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Suddenly the engine hit a large land mine planted by the Khmer Rouge. The engine was blown to pieces, and the train's cars thrown from the tracks, scattering passengers like an angry child's toys.

Waiting soldiers opened fire with rockets and machine guns, riddling the train cars with bullets and shrapnel. Men Mara and his son lay flattened against the car's floor, but shrapnel from an exploding rocket ripped across Pastor Mara's back, leaving him bleeding and in pain. His young son suffered crushed ribs and possible internal injuries.

For more than an hour the soldiers peppered the train as wounded and dying passengers lay all around. Suddenly the shooting stopped. Gunmen burst into the car and ordered the passengers to run for their lives. Bleeding and unable to walk, Men Mara and his son were forced from the train. They began picking their way carefully through a large mine field, where one misstep could cost them a limb or their lives. They stumbled on for 10 miles to the nearest village, where they received first aid for their wounds. The next day they were transported to a hospital in their home town of Battambang. There they learned that 29 had died and more than 100 had been injured in the siege. Every passenger lost his belongings.

Men Mara and his son have nearly completely recovered from their wounds. Their faith is strong, and Pastor Mara is again at work in his large district. He thanks God for saving his life and allowing him to continue to serve Him.

Such incidents remind us that Cambodia is still not a free country, and dangers still threaten the church's work. But God is blessing the work there, and Cambodia now has more than 1,000

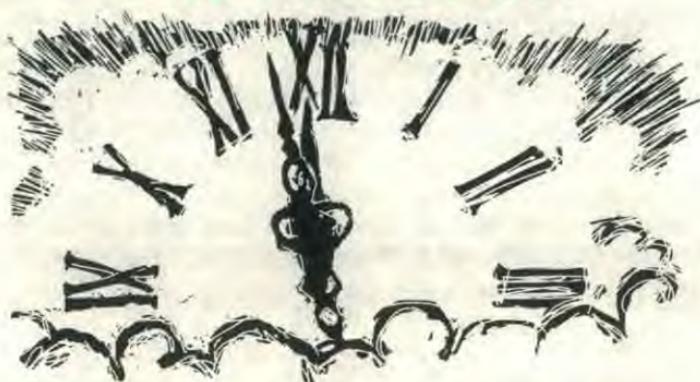
Adventist believers, where just a few years ago there were none. Keep praying for our young believers in Cambodia, and for the workers who faithfully nurture them.

M. Daniel Walker is director of the Cambodian Mission. (Left) Men Mara, his son, and his wife.



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The Last Hour!



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 John 2:18-29.

MEMORY TEXT: "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 John 2:28, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: Though some will attempt to deceive, teaching all kinds of error, the true Christian will remain true to God, realizing that widespread apostasy is proof that the end is soon to come.

ALMOST THERE! A soccer match is in its final minutes. The two teams make an all-out effort, throwing as many men forward as possible into their opponents' half, trying to score that all-important goal. A cycle race is in its final mile. The competitors redouble their efforts, sprinting toward the finish. The marathon race is nearly over. Just a few more paces to run, one last struggle to find that extra energy to push over the line, so that victory is achieved.

These are familiar images that fill the media, images of people who have trained long and hard, who have run a good race, and have won the gold. The victors were those who endured to the end.

We are told to run the race set before us. And as we run, we must not be unaware of the finishing post just up ahead. To fail in sight of the prize would be foolish and futile. John encourages each one to realize that this is the last hour.

As the end comes, we can say with Paul: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7, NKJV).

ANTICHRISTS AND THE LAST HOUR (1 John 2:18, 19).

How does John say we can identify that this is the last hour?
1 John 2:18.

The very fact that the voices of deception and rebellion have reached such a crescendo means that the last hour has arrived. While John was not trying to date the time of Christ's return, he pointed to the same signs that Jesus identified to indicate the urgency of the times. "For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible" (Matthew 24:24, NIV).

What does John tell us about the antichrists who had arisen in his day? 1 John 2:19.

Antichrists are those who follow the devil, either deceived by him, or deliberately adopting his evil ways. For John, they were those who had once been part of the church but had now gone their own separate ways. These were substitute christs and opponents of Christ. "John sees it as a sign of the approaching end and warns his readers accordingly."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 644.

The course adopted by the antichrists of John's day has been followed all too often since then and is part of the devil's attack on the church today. Unfortunately, many in today's world have given up on biblical Christianity and have bought the deceptive lies of the devil. They may even be sincere, but they are sincerely wrong! Just because you are sincere that you are going in the right direction is no guarantee that you will arrive where you should.

And as the end approaches, we will see an intensification of hostility to the gospel. The ultimate end-time antichrist is identified in the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. (See Dan. 8:25; 11:42-45; Rev. 13:16, 17; 16:13, 14.) A religious union based on non-biblical teachings will arise that will claim to be Christian but which will support secular powers in their opposition to the faithful people of God. Apostate Christians will unite with pagans in substituting the power of spiritism for the power of Jesus Christ. They will accept unbiblical teachings because they are popular and will bitterly persecute those who insist on adhering to Bible truth. Only as we remain in close union with the Lord can we escape Satan's deceptive snare.

For reflection: Is there any way in which you, even indirectly, assist the antichrist?

ANOINTED BY THE SPIRIT (1 John 2:20, 21, 26, 27).

How do we *know* the truth? Is it head knowledge, a feeling, a spiritual experience, or a combination of these? 1 John 2:20, 21, 26, 27.

Even the phrase “anointed by the Holy One” (1 John 2:20, RSV) is interpreted by some to mean that we receive mysterious impressions telling us what is right.

“I am afraid of anything that would have a tendency to turn the mind away from the solid evidences of the truth as revealed in God’s Word. I am afraid of it; I am afraid of it. We must bring our minds within the bounds of reason, lest the enemy come in as to set everything in a disorderly way.”—*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 43.

This is why John later on (in 1 John 4:1) tells us to “test the spirits.” What the Holy Spirit is telling us can always be confirmed by referring to Scripture. From Scripture we can know for sure whether the impressions we are receiving are from the Holy Spirit. “‘To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them’ (Isa. 8:20). Even the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart is to be tested by the Word of God. The Spirit which inspired the Scriptures, always leads to the Scriptures.”—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 43.

There are many who claim to have the truth. How do we tell what is false and what is true? List a few ways of knowing. Isa. 8:20; Matt. 7:20.

Examine the Bible evidence for what many who claim to have the truth are saying and how they are living! This is surely what John means when he says, “You do not need anyone to teach you” (1 John 2:27, NIV). Why then was John writing to them? Because he realized that what he was writing was inspired truth. But he wanted to distance himself from the idea that you can place absolute trust in any human teacher in whom you have total confidence.

Paul wrote sharply to the Christians in Corinth: “My brothers, some . . . have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, ‘I follow Paul’; another, ‘I follow Apollos’; another, ‘I follow Cephas’; still another, ‘I follow Christ.’ ” (1 Cor. 1:11, 12 NIV). Paul then asks, “Is Christ divided?” No; the fellowship of remaining in Christ, of examining God’s Word together, will help us identify truth. And as for the different teachers: “By their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:20).

DENYING CHRIST (1 John 2:22, 23).

In what ways do people deny Christ? 1 John 2:22; Matt. 10:33; Mark 8:38.

People can deny Christ by a lifestyle contrary to the principles of His Word. They may choose to be ignorant of Him. They may directly deny His claims. Christians may deny Him by claiming to know Him while not allowing Him to change them from sinners into trustworthy friends of God. "Who, then, is the liar? It is anyone who says that Jesus is not the Messiah. Such a person is the Enemy of Christ—he rejects both the Father and the Son" (1 John 2:22, TEV).

John wrote like this because some of those to whom he was writing believed the old Greek idea that the physical world is naturally evil; they could not accept that Jesus was a real person in human flesh. They thought that God is too exalted to take on human form. So they suggested that Jesus only *seemed* real (Docetism) or that Christ came down on a totally human Jesus at His baptism. Or they found some other way to avoid the truth that God actually took on humanity.

But the incarnation *was* vital to the gospel. Any attempt to make Jesus less than God would mean that He could not rightly represent God to us! His statement that "anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9, NIV) would then become invalid. In Jesus' death on the cross, the answers about God would become questionable. Only God could pay the legal penalty for all human sin (1 Peter 2:24), only God can save, only God can rise again. Christ is God, equal in authority and power with the Father (Col. 2:9).

What happens if you *do* totally accept that Jesus always was, is, and ever will be God? 1 John 2:23.

Then "the man who believes in the Son will find that he knows the Father as well" (1 John 2:23, Phillips).

"Had God the Father come to our world and dwelt among us, humbling Himself, veiling His glory, that humanity might look upon Him, the history that we have of the life of Christ would not have been changed. . . . In every act of Jesus, in every lesson of His instruction, we are to see and hear and recognize God. In sight, in hearing, in effect, it is the voice and movements of the Father."—*That I May Know Him*, p. 338.

For reflection: How do you deny Christ in what you do or say?

REMAINING IN CHRIST MEANS ETERNAL LIFE (1 John 2:24, 25).

How do I remain in Christ? 1 John 2:24; 4:13; John 15:7-10.

Fellowship with the indwelling Holy Spirit is abiding in Christ. This is the means by which we do His will. The word *remain*, which is used all through this section, means, "making a settled home, having a permanent address." The Christian is to make a permanent home in Jesus Christ, not use Him as some kind of temporary *campsite*. Often in the news we hear of people of *no fixed abode*; they do not claim to have any home; they are drifters, transients without an address. In other words, they do not *belong*. To belong is a vital human need. We all want somewhere we call home, where we can feel we truly belong. We seek love from our family, a sense of belonging. We identify with a particular place, or a certain country. This is the idea John wants us to have of Christ—in Him we truly belong.

Paul talks about having our "citizenship in heaven" (Phil. 3:20, NIV). This is the same idea. We must not remain comfortable here. We are to be restless for our true home, our destiny, which is *out of this world*. And so the Christian remains in Christ now, walking with Him along the way, looking for His return to complete the redemption process so that we can then be truly *at home* with Him in the glorious future He promises.

What exactly does God promise? 1 John 2:24, 25.

The abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is the presence of the Father and the Son (John 14:18, 23). God's presence in our lives by the Holy Spirit is the gift of eternal life. "It is through the Spirit that Christ dwells in us; and the Spirit of God, received into the heart by faith, is the beginning of life eternal."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 388.

Of course, if this were an eternity with someone you did not care for, this would not be something to be desired. *But because we know God through Christ now, we can be completely confident of a wonderful eternal life in the presence of our loving Lord.*

Remember the words of Jesus: "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3, NIV).

For reflection: What future do you want, and how can you be sure of having it?

READY FOR JESUS TO COME (1 John 2:28, 29).

Why do you want to be ready when Jesus comes? 1 John 2:28 (compare Rev. 6:13-17).

Sometimes we have a desire to be *ready* because we see the coming of Jesus as a kind of nightmare. Because we fear the negative consequences, we desperately want to make ourselves ready. The truth is that we should not fear, but eagerly anticipate the return of Jesus. We should live with joyous expectancy, not in an attitude of apprehension and dread, but of exhilaration and joy.

This will be our experience if we “continue in him” (1 John 2:25, NIV). John encourages us not to give up in sight of the prize. In a cycle race, one boy, tired of the troubles and hazards he had to face, ended up sitting by the roadside discouraged and gloomy. When the race officials found him, they were astonished. For right around the corner was the finishing point!

We are called to continue, not to give up, not to be quitters in the race of life. Yes, the situation may seem appalling. Yes, troubles will inevitably come. Yes, you will meet opposition and hardship. *But don't give up*, shouts John. For Jesus is coming, and you want to meet him in confidence and not feel embarrassed for your lack of faith in him. John seems to be using a play on words here as a way of teaching this truth. You need to have confidence (*parresia*) when Jesus appears (*parousia*)—two words that sound similar in the Greek. This would be like saying in English we need to have *com-fort* at His *com-ing*!

What makes it possible for Christian believers to do works that God regards as righteous? 1 John 2:29.

First John 2:29 translates literally: “If you know that He is righteous, you know that anyone who does righteousness has been born of Him.” In other words, the individual who is born of the Holy Spirit has the power to do righteous works. John adds to the thought in 1 John 3:7. “He who does righteousness is righteous, as He is righteous.” The one who does righteousness is the born-again believer (1 John 2:29). By the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, this person reflects the righteous character of Jesus (Gal. 2:20), which is manifested in good works. (Compare Eph. 2:8-10.)

For reflection: How do you demonstrate your eagerness for the return of Jesus?

FOR FURTHER STUDY: On the Second Advent, study: 1 Thess. 4:16-18; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; 2 Peter 3:8-14.

Ready for Jesus to come. “We are looking for the second coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We are not only to believe that the end of all things is at hand. We are to be filled with the advent spirit that when the Lord comes He may find us ready to meet Him, whether we are working in the field, or building a house, or preaching the Word; ready to say, ‘Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us’ (Isaiah 25:9).”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 10, no. 847.

“Living power must attend the message of Christ’s second coming in the clouds of heaven. . . . The message for this time is positive, simple, and of the deepest importance. We must act like men and women who believe. . . . Waiting, watching, working, praying, warning the world—this is our work.”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 10, no. 844.

On making sure faith is based on truth, and not only on impressions: “Faith in a lie will not have a sanctifying influence upon the life or character. No error is truth, or can be made truth by repetition, or by faith in it. Sincerity will never save a soul from the consequences of believing an error. Without sincerity there is no true religion, but sincerity in a false religion will never save a man.”—*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 56.

“Impressions alone are not a safe guide to duty. The enemy often persuades men to believe that it is God who is guiding them, when in reality they are following only human impulse.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 279.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does expecting Jesus’ return affect you and the way you live?
2. Is it practicable to live each day “as if it were your last”?
3. If this really is “the last hour,” what should your priorities be?

SUMMARY: While divisions over doctrine and practice will become ever more common as the end approaches, true Christians will hold on to the truth as found in Jesus. Denials of the absolute divinity of Christ will be at the heart of many deceptions, but to follow such ideas would mean a false understanding of our God. The message is *stand firm* and look forward to the soon return of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.



Victor the Victorious

Inge Gray

Victor Kpoto had once been a skilled carpenter. His work was well known, and he had a flourishing business in Cotonou, the capital of Benin, a tiny country in West Africa. Then one day his right hand was crushed in an accident. His work as a carpenter was over. Sometimes Victor wondered how God could bring victory out of such a loss.

Victor had to support his family, so he returned to his home village of Lobogo, a farming region 55 miles north of the capital. His family owned a plot of land there, and he began cultivating it and planted vegetables and nursery stock to sell in the city.

As he traveled back and forth to Lobogo, Victor began to feel a burden for the people there. Many were relatives and old friends. There was no one else to share the Adventist message with them. So Victor began offering his customers Bible studies. In faith, he bought a field on which to build a church, and painted a little sign that read "Seventh-day Adventist Church." He placed it in the middle of the empty field.

He began spending more and more of his time in Lobogo, and soon he had a group of about 30 people meeting in a temporary shelter to study the Bible. Three young men were ready for baptism, and others soon would be ready. But they had no baptistry.

Victor and the other believers began building a baptismal tank in the empty field. Bit by bit they bought cement and made blocks. They sacrificed to put up a temporary shelter around their baptistry. Then they invited a lay evangelist from another area to hold evangelistic meetings.

One day a message came to the mission office. "Pastor, come soon. Eleven people want to be baptized." The minister arrived and interviewed the new believers. Then with great joy he invited one after another of the new believers to enter the new baptismal tank and seal their commitment to a totally different way of life in Jesus. Faces of new believers shone with joy as they began their new life in Christ, but the most radiant face of all was Victor Kpoto's. He had watched God bring victory out of apparent loss.

Pray for the fewer than 1,000 believers in Benin, and the handful of faithful workers to minister there.

Inge Gray and her husband have recently transferred from Benin to the Africa-Indian Ocean Division in Cote d'Ivoire, West Africa.

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Children of God



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 John 3:1-10.

MEMORY TEXT: “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are” (1 John 3:1, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: God not only identifies us as His children, but also makes sure that this is what we truly are. As a result, true children of God will reflect the character of God.

HOW GREAT A LOVE! To be loved when you do not consider yourself lovable—maybe that is what amazes us most about God. That “he first loved us” (1 John 4:19) seems so impossible that all too many deny it.

An elderly gentleman once asked a pastor: “How could God ever love me after all I’ve done?”

When the pastor pointed him to what the Bible says, he still couldn’t believe it: “You don’t know what I’ve done. God could never accept me. He could never love me.”

“No, I don’t know what you’ve done,” the pastor admitted. “But God does. And He still loves you.”

And this was the thought that won that sad and tired man.

God first loves us, then convinces us of His love. Then He seeks to share that perfect love that casts out fear—for how can you love someone you fear? This is not some wishy-washy love, but tough love—love strong enough, committed enough, to go to Calvary for you, to win you back as one of His children. Now what do *you* say?

CHILDREN OF GOD—MORE THAN A NAME (1 John 3:1).

What makes us God's children? 1 John 3:1; John 1:12 (compare Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

Committed believers are children not only in name, but also in actuality. We *really are* God's children as we respond to God's love, repent, and are transformed by the work of the Spirit. Technical terms such as "imputed righteousness" and "imparted righteousness" may obscure the process, suggesting that the first is the identification and the second the actuality. John does not differentiate righteousness; he simply says that God not only identifies us as His children but truly considers us such and treats us as such.

God's claim for His children goes much beyond the declaration "Not guilty" over a bunch of evident rebels. Heaven is peopled, not with pardoned criminals, but with transformed children of God, totally accepted by Him.

"The plan of redemption is not merely a way of escape from the penalty of transgression, but through it the sinner is forgiven his sins, and will finally be received into heaven,—not as a forgiven culprit pardoned and released from captivity, yet looked upon with suspicion and not admitted to friendship and trust; but welcomed as a child, and taken back into fullest confidence."—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Sept. 21, 1886.

If you're a child of God, why isn't your life better? Gal. 5:17, 18; 1 Cor. 9:27; Rom. 7:25.

Children of God retain fallen natures that, worked upon by Satan, struggle for the mastery. Only by allowing "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" to set us "free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2, RSV) can we live as true children of God.

The preachers of the health-wealth gospel would have us believe that proof of our relationship to God must be demonstrated by obvious blessings of material wealth and miraculous healings. Such a philosophy is not new. The Pharisees thought along similar lines, and the comforters of Job expressed like ideas. The truth is that being a Christian is no *guarantee* of business success or of complete health or of what this world defines as happiness.

For reflection: What are the responsibilities of being a child of God? List some.

WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM (1 John 3:2, 3).

What is the future for God's true children? 1 John 3:2 (compare Rom. 8:29; 2 Peter 1:4).

An eternity with our loving Lord! Can you read these words of Scripture without becoming excited? What exactly we will be has not been made known—but the marvelous truth is that “we shall be like him.”

How? What does this mean? How can we be like God? Peter tells us that we shall be “partakers of the divine nature.” As God’s children, we become Godlike in character—identifying with His ways and accepting that right is right because God says it is.

And do not miss the essential clue: “We shall be like him, *because we shall see him as he really is*. Everyone who has this hope in Christ keeps himself pure, just as Christ is pure” (1 John 3:2, TEV, italics supplied). *See* is the transforming word; it means not only visibility, but also illumination and understanding. Once we begin to see God as *He really is*, we begin to be changed into His likeness—spiritually, morally, and behaviorally. This process commences as we come closer to God. We are to receive victory over sin and have the grace to reflect Jesus’ character. But our spiritual growth is to continue until Jesus comes.

According to John, what does this “blessed hope” do in the one who believes? 1 John 3:3.

True believers act to purify themselves by Christ’s abundantly supplied power, so that they can reflect the nature and character of God. Note especially that this is not a once-for-all act. It is a continuing process. The ongoing need and activity gives the lie to the concept that believers are divested of imperfect, fallen natures before Jesus comes. This view implies that in this world we can reach a stage beyond which we no longer need to grow in holiness. The Bible is emphatically consistent: even for those who have victory over sin, growth in spirituality will continue until Jesus comes. Paul wrote that he had not yet arrived spiritually at the ultimate goal, but was still pressing on (Phil. 3:12-14).

For reflection: What do you recognize that needs changing in you? Are you willing to allow the Lord to change what needs to be changed? When?

LAW AND SIN (1 John 3:4-6).**How is sin defined? 1 John 3:4.**

"Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4, NIV). Sin is an attitude and act of lawlessness, of being above or against law. The concept is of beings who *by their nature* choose to act in a lawless fashion. This "lawless" attitude is derived from Lucifer's rebellion against God and His just law. (See *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 109.)

So how does God deal with our lawless attitude toward Him and His government? 1 John 3:5.

Jesus came to take away our sins (1 John 3:5), to win us to love and acceptance of Him so that He might forgive us and restore us to Himself.

"Jesus has said, 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.' . . . Christ draws the sinner by the exhibition of his love upon the cross, and this softens his heart, impresses the mind, and inspires contrition and repentance in the soul."—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890.

What is the result of God's salvation? 1 John 3:6.

The question is not whether John is speaking of one sin or habitual sin. All sin is of the devil (1 John 4:8). As long as we allow the Holy Spirit to retain charge of our minds, we are kept from sinning. "Is it possible to be healed, while knowingly committing sin?—No; it is genuine faith that says, I know that I have committed sin, but that Jesus has pardoned my sin; and hereafter I will resist temptation in and through His might. 'Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.' He has an abiding principle in the soul, that enables him to overcome temptation.

"'Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not.' God has power to keep the soul who is in Christ, when that soul is under temptation."—*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 297. You cannot give in to the desires of your sinful nature, and then say you are in union with Jesus. John is *not* saying that Christians never sin, but sin must *always* be seen by Christians as separating them from God. The commitment must be not to sin at all, "but if anybody does sin" (1 John 2:1, NIV), he or she has Christ as the heavenly Advocate.

DESTROYING DEMONIC DECEPTIONS (1 John 3:7, 8).

In what sense is the believer righteous as Jesus is? 1 John 3:7.

The person who does righteousness (1 John 3:7) is born of the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:29). Christ's righteousness is imputed in two senses:

1. His righteousness is legally counted for the believer (Rom. 4:6-8, 23-25).
2. His righteousness is also imputed in the sense of bestowed upon the believer without any earning work on his or her part (Rom. 4:11; 6:18; 8:9, 10).

"Through faith in His name He imputes unto us His righteousness, and it becomes a living principle in our life."—*That I May Know Him*, p. 302.

Whose side are you on when you do what is sinful? 1 John 3:8.

All sin is of the devil, whether one sin or habitual sin. By sinning, we identify with Satan and his campaign of lies and deception; we show that we distrust God and do not rely on His changing, healing power. We can *choose* to follow Satan or follow God—that is the heart of the issues in the great controversy. And when we choose the devil's way, we show that we do not fully trust God, and in a sense, we damage Him and His reputation. We are "a spectacle to angels and to men" (1 Cor. 4:9). When we sin, we "crucify . . . the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame" (Heb. 6:6). As long as we choose to do this, Christ cannot change our hearts.

What is John's reason for Jesus' first coming? 1 John 3:8.

Jesus came to undo the damage done by Satan. He did this by

1. paying the penalty for all human sin (1 John 2:2; 1 Peter 2:24; 2 Cor. 5:21);
2. earning the right to restore the image of God in sinful human beings (John 14:18-21; 2 Cor. 3:18);
3. demonstrating how believers can live without sinning (1 Peter 2:21-23);
4. clearing up misconceptions about God, thus ending the rule of Satan's deceptions (1 John 4:8, 9).

"When Jesus died on Calvary, men and angels beheld the malignity of Satan, and the love of God for a fallen world."—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, July 12, 1892.

LIKE FATHER, LIKE CHILD (1 John 3:9, 10).

What does John mean by saying that “no one born of God commits sin” (1 John 3:9, RSV)?

Many interpreters assert that, because the verb “commits” (RSV), “does” (Greek: *poiei*) is present tense, the text should be translated, “No one who has been born of God *continues* to sin.” In fact, the present tense in Greek does *not* always express continuous action. (“The aoristic present presents the action as a simple event or as a present fact without any reference to its progress.”—James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek* [Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1979], p. 81. See Acts 16:18; Mark 2:5).

A single sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4); the person *abiding* in Him does not commit lawlessness (verse 6); any and all sin is of the devil (verse 8). First John 3:9 means that as long as “God’s nature abides” in us by the *controlling* presence of His Spirit, we do not wilfully break God’s commandments.

How do we identify the children of God and the children of the devil? 1 John 3:10.

“This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right [Greek: “righteousness”] is not a child of God; neither is anyone who does not love his brother” (1 John 3:10, NIV). We cannot identify ourselves as true children of God if we do not demonstrate in our own lives the qualities of God. We must think and act in ways that correspond to God’s way.

Not loving your brother demonstrates which father you have. Jesus said to the Pharisees: “Ye are of your father the devil” (John 8:44, KJV). You may *say* you are a follower of the true God, you may *claim* to be upholding all the doctrines, but if you demonstrate lack of love, you are not God’s child.

The error is in believing you do not have to show Christian concern for anyone else, because you are saved by “knowledge.” No special information saves! Being part of some inner group (including church membership) is no guarantee of redemption! The saving process is based, not on knowledge or religious formulas, but on *personal experience* of God with the *acceptance of God’s healing forgiveness and rescue from sin*, and *this results in a transformed character that reflects God*. No other way will do!

FOR FURTHER STUDY: On the importance of overcoming sin, study: Isa. 1:16; John 5:14; 8:11; Rom. 6:12; 1 Cor. 15:34.

Understanding sin—a comment on 1 John 3:8: “If, then, the whole purpose of Christ’s first appearing was to remove sins and to undo the works of the devil, Christians must not compromise with either sin or the devil, or they will find themselves fighting against Christ. If the first step to holiness is to recognize the sinfulness of sin, both in its essence as lawlessness and in its diabolical origin, the second step is to see its absolute incompatibility with Christ in His sinless Person and saving work.”—John R. W. Stott, *Epistles of John* (London: Tyndale Press, 1964), p. 125.

On becoming children of God: “We can see in the cross of Calvary what it has cost the Son of God to bring salvation to a fallen race. As the sacrifice in behalf of man was complete, so the restoration of man from the defilement of sin must be thorough and complete.”—*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 135.

On the drawing power of the cross: “He [God] would have us comprehend something of His love in giving His Son to die that He might counteract evil, remove the defiling stains of sin from the workmanship of God, and re-instate the lost, elevating and ennobling the soul to its original purity *through Christ’s imputed righteousness.*”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Nov. 8, 1892. (Italics supplied.)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How do we reveal that we are part of God’s family?
2. What is the promise for those who are children of God?
3. If Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, why isn’t the war over?
4. If I’m not saved by being a church member, what is the point in joining?

SUMMARY: We are children of God, not just in name, but in reality because of God’s saving grace. The promise is that “we shall be like him”—and we look and long for that great day when Jesus returns. Until then we need to live lives that show God our Father in the very best light, not choosing sin, but following the right because His will makes such good sense.



A Little Boy's Lunch

Maye Porter

In Bible times, Jesus used a little boy's lunch to feed more than 5,000 people. The day of miracles is not over. God still delights in answering the prayers of His followers, especially young people who put their trust in Him.

Early one Sabbath morning 9-year-old Edwin went with his classmates to help conduct a branch Sabbath School in a nearby village in Papua New Guinea. The children and their sponsors left their school at 7:00 a.m., too early to prepare a breakfast of boiled sweet potatoes, so Edwin went without eating. The boys and girls returned to the school just in time for their own Sabbath School and church service. Edwin tried to concentrate on the preacher's sermon, but his stomach began to rumble. He was hungry!

On his way back to the dormitory after church, Edwin's stomach growled again. How he wished he had saved a sweet potato from yesterday's dinner, but he had been hungry then, too, as growing boys often are, and had saved nothing, not even a piece of a potato. It would take two hours to peel and boil a sweet potato for lunch, and Edwin was not sure he could wait that long to eat. As he walked, he remembered that his Friend, Jesus, knew all about his growling stomach. He stopped along the path, closed his eyes, and told God how hungry he was. He did not ask God for food; he knew that Jesus would know what to do about his problem.

As Edwin began walking again he heard a bird singing in the tree overhead. He stopped and watched the bird. Then he saw a yellow leaf flutter down from the tree and land beside the path. He walked over to pick up the leaf, and noticed a little bundle lying on the ground near where the leaf had fallen. He bent down to examine the bundle and found two nicely-made sandwiches. He looked around, but saw no one nearby who could own the lunch.

Edwin picked up the bundle and held it in his hands. While his stomach growled for food, he closed his eyes and thanked Jesus for providing lunch for him. Then he sat down and enjoyed the meal that Jesus had left for him. As he ate, he thought of the verse that says, "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). Jesus knew Edwin's need, and He knows yours and mine, too. We only need to ask Him.

Maye Porter is associate child-ministries director in the Papua New Guinea Union Mission.

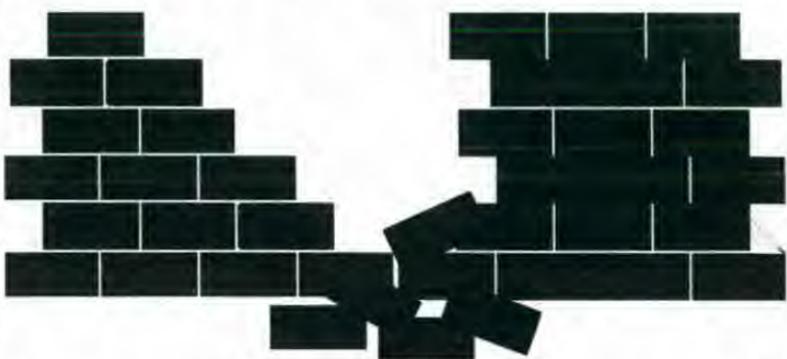
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How can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? *Romans 10:14,15*

Your 13th Sabbath offering on June 28, 1997 will help rebuild the work in the country of Angola which is part of the Euro-Africa Division.

When the wall came down . . .



Not everything returned to normal.

**On 13th Sabbath, June 28, 1997
Your offering will help rebuild
Friedensau Theological
Graduate School
which was in the former
East Germany.**



Love One Another



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 John 3:11-24.

MEMORY TEXT: "Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18, RSV).

KEY THOUGHT: Love is not revealed only in words and claims; it is proved and demonstrated in what we actually *do*. God's love is manifested in action—and this should apply to us too.

LOVE IN THE CHURCH. "I'm sick of all this talk about love in the church," one long-standing member once said. "All the other churches do the same, and we shouldn't be like them." And then he went on to tell how he had joined the Adventist Church.

"I went to one," he began. "They were preaching the love of God."

"Then I went to another. They were preaching the love of God too."

"So I went to yet another. They were preaching the love of God too."

"Eventually, I went to the Adventists. They *weren't* preaching the love of God, so I joined them."

Do you feel uncomfortable over that story?

Of course the 27 fundamentals are important. So are the prophecies. So are all the other aspects of Seventh-day Adventism. But as Paul so clearly says: "If . . . I have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2, NIV). A loveless Christian is the worst representative of God. What Jesus said still applies to us today: "All men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35, NIV).

FROM THE BEGINNING (1 John 3:11, 12).

What is the beginning and basis of Christlike religion?
1 John 3:11, 12.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, so you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34, 35, RSV).

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (John 15:12, NIV). The words of Jesus are summed up in the message "We should love one another" (1 John 3:11, NIV). The *kind* of love is clearly defined: as Christ loves, we must love. The *result* of that love is demonstrated: if you love, everyone will recognize you as a follower of Christ. The *origin* of this love-message is identified: this is the true message that convinced you in the very beginning.

Commenting on 1 John 3:11, Westcott writes: "The words do not simply give the contents of the message, but its aim, its purpose. The fundamental declaration of Christ's life and work is directed to this end, that men should be moved by it to self-sacrifice."—B. F. Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John* (Abingdon, Berks: Marcham Books, 1966), p. 110.

Why did Jesus emphasize "love one another" as a *command*?

Ellen White states quite categorically that "He [God] desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 22. So if love cannot be commanded, why does Jesus make love a command? Obviously, because this is what Jesus most wants us to do—it is so important that He phrases it as a command, even though all know that love cannot be commanded, demanded, or exacted. Since only by love is love awakened, God "first loved us" (1 John 4:19) to try to draw the response of love from us. That which God most wants—the freely given love, admiration, and trust of His beloved children—can be achieved only by revealing Himself as He truly is, for "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Majesty may evoke awe, power may draw our amazement, but God works not by might nor power, but by the sweet influence of His loving Spirit. (See Zech. 4:6.)

**Experiment: Try it out—command your friends to love you.
See what kind of response you receive.**

THE CONTRAST OF SPIRITUAL LIFE AND SPIRITUAL DEATH (1 John 3:13-15).

Why is it true that the person who hates others “abides in death” (1 John 3:14, NKJV)? 1 John 3:14, 15.

All want to be loved. But, living in this world of sin, we cannot expect always to be appreciated: “So do not be surprised, my brothers, if the people of the world hate you” (1 John 3:13, TEV; see also Mark 13:13; John 15:18, 19).

Why does hatred between Christians destroy the effectiveness of their witness? 1 John 2:9-11.

“[1 John 1:5-10; 2:9-11, quoted.] Could any description be more sharp and clear than John has given us? These things are written for us; they are applicable to the churches of Seventh-day Adventists. Some may say, ‘I do not hate my brother; I am not so bad as that.’ But how little they understand their own hearts. They may think they have a zeal for God in their feelings against their brother, if his ideas seem in any way to conflict with theirs; feelings are brought to the surface that have no kinship with love. They show no disposition to harmonize with him. They would as lief be at swords’ point with their brother as not. And yet he may be bearing a message from God to the people—just the light they need for this time.”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 16, p. 104.

What is the proof that “we have passed from death to life”? 1 John 3:14.

“As the presence of murderous hatred is a token that one does not belong to the family of God, the presence of brotherly love is a sure sign that one does belong to it, that one has, through the new birth, ‘passed out of death into life’ (cf. John 5, 24). . . . Love is the supreme manifestation of the new life, so much so that any one who fails to manifest it shows that he has never entered into the new life; he ‘abides in death.’”—F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of John* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1970), pp. 95, 96.

For reflection: Surely there is more to it than that? Why should love for others be considered enough proof? Is this all the evidence that is necessary?

ACTION! (1 John 3:16-18).

What is the result of Christlike love? 1 John 3:16-18.

Christ's love led Him to come to this world, to a ministry of preaching and healing, to death and resurrection, to ascension and ministry in heaven, and to promise to return. *Love has results!* The people with whom John had difficulty were those who said, "Oh yes, I'm a loving Christian" and yet demonstrated quite the opposite in their lives, not seeing actions as being important at all. And there are still people like that in the church.

A group in one church had a severe set of rules and regulations as to how life was to be lived. They certainly were not of the hypocritical type; they really practiced what they preached. And yet they had no love, none whatsoever. Theirs was a harsh and loveless religion that preached a harsh and loveless God. And they never smiled.

How did Christ describe the kind of benevolence we should practice? Mark 5:42; Luke 12:23; John 13:35.

Jesus spoke approvingly of total self-giving. Our best happiness comes in dedication to others and to God. Jesus spoke of the poor widow and her two mites: "I tell you the truth . . . this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on" (Luke 21:3, 4, NIV).

And if Christ gave His life for us, what right have we to refuse sacrificial love?

Talk is cheap, say many today, even of Christians. John wrote: "My children, our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action" (1 John 3:18, TEV).

"The religion of Christ is something more than talk. The righteousness of Christ consists in right actions and good works from pure, unselfish motives. Outside righteousness, while the inward adorning is wanting, will be of no avail."—*Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 528.

"It is not enough to believe the theory of truth, to make a profession of faith in Christ, to believe that Jesus is no impostor, and that the religion of the Bible is no cunningly devised fable."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 563.

For reflection: What action have you done recently to demonstrate that your love is more than just talk?

GOD'S ANSWER TO EMPTINESS (1 John 3:19, 20).

These two verses describe Christian experience in a nutshell. Some years ago a group of young people wanted to witness to their age group. Their slogan was "The Gate"—based on Jesus' statement that He was the gate of the sheepfold, and the only way. But they also devised G.A.T.E. as an acronym: God's Answer to Emptiness.

How do you find peace and assurance? 1 John 3:19, 20.

The answer is sure and certain: Through loving "with actions and in the truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in His presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything" (1 John 3:18-20, NIV).

We often feel self-condemned. But, as when Jesus was faced with the woman taken in adultery, God says to us, "Neither do I condemn you," with the added command, "Do not sin again" (John 8:11, RSV). And should you feel worried about what you have done, and hesitant even to mention this in prayer, remember that God knows everything, and He is greater than our hearts. There is nothing God cannot forgive except that for which we do not ask forgiveness. We cannot embarrass God. We can set our hearts at rest in His presence knowing that, by His power, we can practice love in action and in the truth.

The conscience is a useful tool to help us recognize sin. But what can't it do? 1 John 3:19, 20; Heb. 9:14.

"Even if our conscience condemns us, God is greater than our conscience" (1 John 3:20, NEB). To have our conscience shouting, "Wrong! Guilty! Sinner!" can be distressingly depressing. The problem with the conscience is like that of pain nerves. Once you have received the message of pain, you want to say, "OK, I get the message. You can stop now." But the pain does not stop!

So too the conscience. You appreciate its warning signals, but you need to move on. The condemnation of the conscience can lead to spiritual discouragement. But remember that God is greater than our conscience. He is the one to whom we are responsible, and He is the forgiving, healing God who is changing us into His trustworthy friends.

For reflection: When you feel condemned before God, what should you do? Give some specific answers.

CONFIDENCE BECAUSE OF LOVE (1 John 3:21-24).**On what is our confidence to be based?**

On God: "Because we obey his commands and do what pleases him" (1 John 3:22, NIV).

On Jesus Christ: "And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ" (verse 23).

On love: "And to love one another as he commanded us" (verse 23).

Because God loves us and we love Him, we can have complete confidence in living our lives in harmony with His will. As John says later: "This is the assurance we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us" (1 John 5:14, NIV).

What does this tell us about the way we are to act? We may complain about being unloved and unappreciated, but how much do we love and appreciate those around us? While the church is to be more than a mutual-admiration society, the demonstration of Christlike love will solve many of those petty problems that so divide us.

Why do our hearts condemn us? Job 9:20; Rom. 7:23.

"Our hearts condemn us when our emotions overpower our intellect. We respond to situations on the basis of how we *feel*, rather than by relying on what we *know*. . . . When our hearts condemn us, we allow our emotions to get behind the wheel; our intellects are thrown into the backseat. When this happens, we must remember two things. The first is that 'God is greater than our hearts'; the second is that 'He knows everything' (v. 20). This is why we must live by what God says, and not only by how we feel."—Roy Matheson, *Loving God's Family* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1985), pp. 112, 113.

Feelings can be both a help and a hindrance in the Christian life. When you are having a *mountaintop* experience, the emotion of praise and joy can be absolutely wonderful, a thrilling and inspiring sense of God's presence that uplifts and sustains. But when you are *down in the valley*, the negative feelings can lead to spiritual discouragement and depression. Like David in the Psalms, we need to *call to mind* what we *know* to be true and trust in God, however bad we might *feel*.

For reflection: Where is your confidence? In yourself and how you feel from day to day? Or is your confidence in the promises of God?

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Take a modern concordance and look up the word *love* in the New Testament. See how love is almost always associated not with words, but with doing something. List some examples.

Christians to Reflect God's Character: "Many seem to think that they must beg pardon of all the world for being a Christian. John did not regard it so. He says, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1). The Christian does not take a step down to a low level; he is constantly progressing forward, and the religion of Jesus Christ never degrades the receiver. It refines his taste; it sanctifies his judgment. Why should it not, when he is in connection with a pure and holy God, and the power which is invested in God He imparts to His sons and daughters. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord. . . . And I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6: 17-18). Here is the promise that we shall become members of the royal family, that we shall be children of the heavenly king."

—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 8, p. 406.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How do we love one another when we don't even want to?
2. What is the use of talking about love when there are no real results? How can the church put its love principles into action?
3. At times, most Christians feel empty and self-condemned. We may know the truth, but we don't feel saved. How can this be remedied?
4. If "God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything" (1 John 3:20, NIV), why should we pray?
5. How useful is the conscience? How can it help, and how can it hinder?

SUMMARY: Christian love must be far more than talk; it *must* be demonstrated in actions. This love in action may not be well received, indeed Christians may even be hated. Internal condemnation can also lead to discouragement. But the confidence of the Christian is in the God who is greater than our hearts.



Hong Kong's Challenge

Johnny Yip

Hong Kong: The very name brings images of ultra-modern high-rise apartments and office complexes on the tiny nation that sits on the border of China. Hong Kong residents seem to have everything—a modern, fast-paced lifestyle, every convenience, a beautiful city. But most people in Hong Kong do not have Christ.

With the majority of residents living in high-rise apartments, it is difficult to make contact with them. Non-residents cannot enter an apartment building without an invitation. So how do Christians reach others for Christ? That's the challenge. And with the impending reversion of Hong Kong to China, it is a challenge that must be met soon.

Recently a group of Adventists began a small-group program called cell-group evangelism. Members began meeting in their apartments to study the Bible and to pray. They began inviting friends, and the cell groups grew. When groups reached a given number of members, they divided and formed more groups. There were women's groups, students' groups, health groups, and others. Each group reached out to others, especially non-Christians, with similar interests. Friendships formed, and trust grew.

Then a series of evangelistic meetings was planned. Normally, thousands of dollars of advertising would bring only a few non-Christians to such meetings. But this time the focus was on cell-group members and contacts. Without a single pamphlet or tract, nearly 1,000 people attended each meeting, and more than 50 persons were baptized.

One new member is Christine, whose junior high school teacher invited her to a cell-group meeting. This was her first contact with Christianity. She liked the spiritual emphasis, and eventually enrolled in Hong Kong Adventist College. Then came the evangelistic meetings, where she gave her life to Christ. But she did not know how to have devotions or to find fellowship with other Christians. She was introduced to a student cell group, where she learned how to study the Bible more deeply and share with others her feelings about life and God. She found encouragement, support, and training in the cell group. It wasn't long before Christine was baptized.

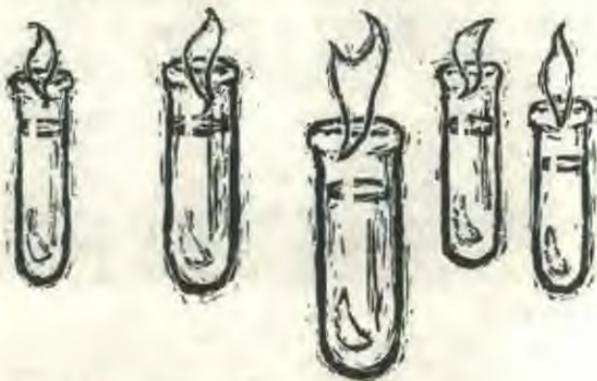
Join with our members in Hong Kong as they pray for the millions who do not know Christ. Time is short, and the challenge is great.

Johnny Yip is director of the Evangelism Research Center of the Hong Kong-Macao Conference in Hong Kong.

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Testing the Spirits



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 John 4:1-6.

MEMORY TEXT: "Test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: Every believer must know *for sure* that what is believed is true. God requires us each to make up our own minds and to distinguish the spirit of truth from that of falsehood.

DEMON-DESIGNED DELUSIONS. John writes with great concern for those who are led away by false ideas. All through history, the truth of God has been marred and distorted by perverted teachings, even taught by those who claim to know the truth. This campaign of misinformation directed by the archliar himself will become more and more frenzied as the end approaches. So we must not be alarmed over the scale and extent of false teaching, especially by those who put God in a bad light. (See 1 Tim. 4:1, 2.)

The emphasis must be on sifting truth from error in our own lives and making sure that we do not unconsciously identify with the devil's portrayal of God and His character. Remember that in the end times the battle is not only between the religious and the secular, but also between believers and unbelievers. The clear scenario portrayed in Revelation 13 is of a religio-political power that forces *worship*.

Only as we test the spirits now will we be sure of truth and right and be able, in God's strength, to withstand the end-time counterfeit, which, *if it were possible*, would deceive even the very elect (Matt. 24:24).

DO NOT BELIEVE ALL YOU HEAR (1 John 4:1).

Why should we be careful about what we believe? 1 John 4:1.

As John says, there are many who claim to be representatives of God, of truth and right, who are false. Think of how you make decisions in life. Do you trust the first salesperson to whom you speak? Do you believe whatever you are told? Or do you examine the evidence, check the facts, and investigate the person's credibility?

Why then should it be any different in the spiritual world? We *know* that the devil is attempting to deceive. We *know* that the issues in the great controversy center on who is telling the truth. We *know* that there are many false teachers in the world. So on what do we base our beliefs? On a warm feeling deep inside? On authority figures? On some kind of hunch?

NO! The Bible is specific in urging us to *test* all sources of information. "Test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1, NIV). "The law and . . . the testimony" (Isa. 8:20)—previously revealed truth is the authority for our beliefs. *God is not contradictory!*

What does God ask us to examine? 1 John 4:1; 1 Thess. 5:21.

"So then, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through preaching Christ" (Rom. 10:17, TEV). God does not want us to believe without first understanding what He is saying, and the reason for it:

"God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His Word, are all established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant. Yet God has never removed the possibility of doubt. Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration. Those who wish to doubt will have opportunity; while those who really desire to know the truth will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 105.

Check out the message. God tells us to examine the content of what is being said: "When a prophet or a dreamer appears among you and offers you a sign or a portent and calls on you to follow other gods whom you have not known and worship them, even if the sign or portent should come true, do not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer" (Deut. 13:1, 2, NEB).

RECOGNIZING THE SPIRIT OF GOD (1 John 4:2).

Are miracles the best proof that someone speaks for God? Explain your answer. Exod. 7:11, 22.

Often it is argued that miracles are the evidence for the presence of God's Spirit. Yet from Scripture we are aware that Satan can use miracles to his own advantage. John points out the true test: belief that Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man.

John was especially concerned to combat the false teachings of those in his time who denied either Christ's full divinity or the incarnation. The same test can be used today. Many will accept the thesis that Jesus was a good man or that He was an interesting philosopher/teacher. But few will admit that He was and is God, the fullness of the Deity (Col. 2:9), the divine Being made flesh. In his Gospel, John expounds the same theme: "And the Word became flesh, and lived awhile in our midst" (John 1:14, Weymouth).

The attraction of Christ was simple: He lived God's truth. We are not to believe merely because of His power, His position, or His miracles, but because He demonstrated the infinitely perfect character of God in His earthly life and in His death for all human sin.

What did Jesus say about signs and wonders (miracles)? John 4:48.

When people believe solely because of miracles, their belief is based on a wrong understanding of Jesus and His mission. So Jesus refused all requests (even from Herod during His trial [Luke 23:8]) to work miracles as a way of convincing doubters.

Why are there so few miracles in the church today? God wants us to believe for His sake and truth's sake—not because of spectacular signs or wonders. Reliance on miracle-working produces the wrong kind of faith. Miracles can get in the way and confuse people. Jesus never performed miracles for their own sake but always for a very real reason. And He never performed a miracle to vindicate himself.

"Let none cherish the idea that special providences or miraculous manifestations are to be the proof of the genuineness of their work or of the ideas they advocate. If we keep these things before the people, they will produce an evil effect, an unhealthful emotion. The genuine working of the Holy Spirit on human hearts is promised, to give efficiency through the Word. Christ has declared the Word to be spirit and life. . . . The Bible will never be superseded by miraculous manifestations."—*Selected Messages*, vol. 2, p. 48. (See pp. 48-53.)

THE SPIRIT OF ANTICHRIST (1 John 4:3).

How can we recognize the spirit of the antichrist? 1 John 4:3; 2:22; 2 John 7; Matt. 24:5, 24.

"Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus be cursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3, RSV). "Any such utterance is sufficient proof that the one who voices it . . . is definitely not influenced by the Holy Spirit."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 769.

In every thought and act that demeans Jesus as God we see the spirit of antichrist; he wishes to prevent humanity from seeing God in the person of Jesus Christ. Through a host of different ways, he leads people to disparage Jesus. There are movies, musicals, plays, books, and articles in which Jesus is portrayed as far from Godlike. His name is used to curse. And most effectively of all, perhaps, His message and mission are ignored.

More subtle is the denial of Christ's full divinity by those who otherwise identify with the Christian faith. Some theologians regard the post-resurrection appearances of Christ as fabrications or myths. Sectarian groups frequently have their own messiahs, which replace the need for Christ as God. We cannot be so "ecumenical" as to say it does not matter. Believing Jesus is God is truly a life-or-death matter. The answer to the question "Who is Jesus?" remains the decisive key, whoever you are, and whatever else you might believe.

Who or what is an antichrist?

Two main meanings are implied by the term *antichrist*. One is a substitute christ, a rival to Christ, one who may even pretend to be Christ. We know at the end Lucifer will appear as "an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14; 2 Thess. 2:8-11) bringing the final end-time deception. How will we be able to tell the difference between the false and the true? Like bank cashiers who know the genuine currency so well that they can intuitively spot the counterfeit, Christians need to know Christ so well that when the devil comes, mixing error with much truth, they will be able to reject this almost overmastering delusion.

The other primary meaning of antichrist is one who sets up in opposition to Christ, as an opponent. This description also fits the devil, who is identified in Scripture as the accuser. The end-time antichrist refers to the religious union that identifies with Satan in opposition to Christ. (See Rev. 13:11-17; 16:13, 14; 17:1-6.)

OVERCOMING THE WORLD (1 John 4:4, 5).

What is important in being “overcomers”? Against each text, write your understanding:

1. We identify with Christ: “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, NIV).
2. We believe specifically in Christ: “Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God” (1 John 5:5, NIV).
3. Overcoming results from salvation: “Everyone born of God overcomes the world” (1 John 5:4, NIV).
4. Christ’s promises are for overcomers (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21).
5. The glorious future for overcomers: “He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son” (Rev. 21:7, NIV).

On what basis are we overcomers? 1 John 4:4.

We cannot be victorious in our own strength. “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27, NIV) is the source of our spiritual victory. Our identification with Him and His truth is our protection from deception (Rom. 12:21, NIV). The battle is not primarily one of superior power, but of moral, ethical, and spiritual *right*. God’s great strength of character wins, in contrast to the lies of the devil. If God had wanted to conquer by use of His might and power, He could have done that from the beginning. This is why God says: “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit” (Zech. 4:6, NIV). God’s victory in our lives results from the conviction of the Spirit.

What modern phenomenon shows that there are false spirits in the world today? Rev. 16:13, 14.

“Modern spiritualism . . . is but a revival in a new form of the witchcraft and demon worship that God condemned and prohibited of old. . . . Concerning such teachers the beloved John declares: ‘Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father.’ 1 John 2:22, 23. Spiritualism, by denying Christ, denies both the Father and the Son, and the Bible pronounces it the manifestation of antichrist.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 686.

GOD-CENTEREDNESS (1 John 4:6).

What dangers do you see in applying 1 John 4:6 to us?

On the surface, this verse, taken out of context, could appear to be arrogant in the extreme: if you are of God, you will listen to us; if you are not of God, you will not listen! Such broad generalizations have been used by some as a way of crushing dissent and demanding unquestioning obedience. This is *not* what John is saying here. John consistently appeals to the *inspired evidence* for the correctness of his position. He is not suggesting that people do as he says without evaluating its accuracy against past revelation and Scripture.

This position is the *result* of trusting God and the proof He has provided of His trustworthiness, His consistency, His intimate interest, His loving care and concern. So those who now choose to *reject* John and his message prove they are not truly of God, for John is merely continuing to represent revealed truth about God. As long as we are true to God and His revealed Word, we, too, can take the same position.

What is the true test of truth and right? John 1:14; 14:6; 18:37.

Christ as the *source* of truth and right means that everything must be tested against these aspects of His character. By *definition*, God is truth, and so those who reject God are obviously operating under "the spirit of falsehood" (1 John 4:6, NIV). God has revealed the laws of truth and right so we can judge whether He operates by such laws. Knowing that He does, and agreeing with Him that His laws are right, we can have confidence that we recognize the Spirit of truth because we know God.

Why should we not be too surprised when people reject our message? 1 John 4:6; Jer. 6:10; 2 Tim. 4:4.

Spiritual things are spiritually discerned, and those who do not recognize or accept the spiritual nature will find spiritual talk meaningless. Our aim must be to present Christ in such a way as to attract the attention of even the most spiritually destitute.

For reflection: If we are *not* from God, why should anyone listen to us?

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Examine the following. Which illustrates the way the devil is operating? What does such a plan mean to us?

THE DEVIL'S PLAN OF ATTACK:

- Promote the self-deception of inherent goodness, that every human being is basically good. Any attempt to require salvation and change can be minimized. Also, evil can be identified as a relatively minor matter.
- Encourage selfish philosophy—the need for a positive self-image, an exalted self-perception. Anything that exalts self makes it harder for Christ to impart His unselfish ideas.
- Suggest that religion is mainly to get “God on your side.” That way, God is only someone to be used for their own selfish ends. Brilliant!
- Turn God’s unselfish gospel into the opposite; make it the way to achieving personal prosperity.
- Manipulate desire for healing by making this a substitute gospel. Have them preach that sickness is only a mental attitude that needs changing, or that if you are sick you are being punished by God.
- Encourage religious observance—as long as I (Satan) am the one defining religion.
- Make people susceptible to the signs-and-wonders philosophy. That way they will not see the truth, only the spectacular. Turn them into a “miraculous” generation. (Adapted from Jonathan Gallagher, *Is God to Blame?* [Grantham, UK: Stanborough Press, 1992], pp. 11,12.)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why does God want us to look at the evidence? Isn’t it enough to “just believe”?
2. What’s wrong in relying on signs and wonders to provide proof?
3. How is the “spirit of antichrist” at work in the world today?
4. How do we “overcome the world”?

SUMMARY: The church must be sure to test the spirits. So many claims are made about religion that the evidence must be examined. Just because the miraculous happens, this must not be the basis for faith. Our role is to be overcomers through our trust in God, holding firm to the truth revealed in Jesus.



God Provides a Way

James H. Zachary

Pastor Michael Melenko did not know what to do. After 70 years of political oppression in Russia, the doors of freedom had swung open, and people swarmed in to hear the message of the gospel. But now that interest seemed to have waned, and in spite of trying many different approaches, it seemed that every door closed to the pastor's efforts to spread the gospel in the city of Perm.

Pastor Melenko did not expect an easy task. His father and grandfather had been pastors during the Communist years. He knew the difficulties they had endured during their ministries. Melenko believed that God would open the door for him to share the gospel as well. He and his wife prayed earnestly for a breakthrough.

Michael watched from his seventh-floor apartment window as his 3 1/2-year-old son, Vadim, played in the courtyard below. A number of *babushkas* [grandmothers] sat nearby, enjoying the sun's warmth in the little courtyard. A few minutes later little Vadim rushed through the door of the apartment. "Please, Mother, may I have my Bible?" he asked, breathless.

"Why do you want your Bible?" she asked. Vadim could not yet read.

"I want to preach to the *babushkas* in the yard," he answered. His mother gave him his little Bible with pictures of his favorite Bible stories, and the little boy raced out the door and back to the courtyard. Vadim's astonished parents watched as the little boy began preaching to the old women who sat in the sun. The women asked Vadim whose son he was. Vadim told them that his father was a pastor, who could tell them even more stories about God if they wished. Several accepted Vadim's offer, and the little boy's witness opened the door of many hearts in Perm.

Several months later the Melenko family moved to another apartment. Vadim quickly made friends with children in the building. He tells them about Jesus and prays with them. Then he invites them to his apartment to watch videos of Bible stories. Pastor Melenko reports that the children tell their parents about the Bible stories, and this has opened the door for more people to find Christ.

Today a growing group of new believers meets every week in Perm, Russia. When the doors seemed closed, God used a little child to open the door and lead people to Jesus.

James H. Zachary is Global Evangelism coordinator for the Quiet Hour.

For Current Newsbreak, Call 1-800-648-5824.

Inside Story

How God Is Love



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 John 4:7-21.

MEMORY TEXT: “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: “God is love” can be a saying that is used to suggest that God is not serious about sin, or that God will save everyone. The truth is that because God is love, Jesus came and died in our place. True love is tough and costly.

THE TRUTH ABOUT ATONEMENT. In these powerful verses (1 John 4:7-21), we observe the connection between love and salvation. The truth that “God is love” is *immediately* linked with the cross—the ultimate proof of the self-sacrificing, saving love of God. God’s love is no vague feeling, no meaningless words. Rather, it is *active and impressive*, striking right at the heart of our sinful selfishness.

What God wishes is to restore what was lost by the broken relationship that is sin—our loving, freely-given trust in our saving, healing, trustworthy heavenly Father. By suffering infinitely on the cross for all human sin, Christ provided the means for every believing human being to be at one with Himself. In this is the at-one-ment that He seeks, the reconciliation of humanity to Himself. By the demonstration of His true nature on the cross as He made amends for all sin, God forever answers the charges against Him (of being self-serving, uncaring, demanding, exacting, cruel). Truly “in the atonement the character of God is revealed.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 501.

THE SOURCE OF LOVE (1 John 4:7, 8).

That God is love has become a trite expression. Our concepts of love, colored by the way in which love is expressed in our society, fall well short of the kind of love that describes God. John is not saying that love is a quality that God *possesses*; love is a definition of *His actual nature*.

What do you think is meant by the phrase “love comes from God” (1 John 4:7, NIV)? Write down your own ideas.

Does literally all love come from God? As creator of the ability to love, perhaps. But so much of what we call love is so far from the self-giving *agape* love of God that it is arrogant to identify the marred picture of human love as Godlike. We must be careful not to make God in our image by saying, “Because this is the way I love, God’s love must be like this.”

Perhaps this is why John under inspiration is so quick to link the love of God to the coming of Jesus in the next verses. Satan has so twisted the concept of love that for many it has become an image of great selfishness or a showy example of human sensuality. God’s love is the love spoken of in 1 Corinthians 13 that does not seek self-satisfaction but the good of others (see especially verses 4 to 7).

If God is all-powerful, and is love itself, why can’t He win everybody to love Him? Prov. 1:29; Isa. 65:12.

An Adventist student discussed God’s love with a non-Adventist university professor. The professor maintained that because God was both omnipotent and loving, His love would conquer all—however long it took. The professor had a scheme of not only second but third, fourth, and fifth chances for sinful humans. Ultimately, everybody would be convinced by the power of God’s love and be saved—a kind of universalism.

The Adventist student’s understanding was that God’s love is greater than that—for it allows rejection. To love is the opposite of force, and to use power to make sure everybody loved Him would be an abuse of God’s power. Add to that the denial of choice, and you have a God who imposes Himself on His created beings. He might as well have made us servants without the ability to choose.

**For reflection: What kind of love do you see God displaying?
What words would you use to describe it?**

THE PROOF OF LOVE (1 John 4:9, 10).

What is the proof of God's love for us? 1 John 4:9.

God came to this world to save us. Jesus came "so that we might have life through him" (1 John 4:9, TEV; see also John 10:10).

Imagine your son is lost in the city. For whatever reason, he has not returned home. You can say, "I love him," but until you go out into the dark city streets, desperately searching for him, your words are empty and meaningless.

God shows His love by His actions. "God has revealed His character in the goodness, the mercy, compassion, and love manifested to save a race of guilty rebels."—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, March 10, 1891.

Does God love us because we love Him? 1 John 4:10.

No. Love begins with God. "This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven" (1 John 4:10, TEV).

"The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." Isaiah 53:5. Behold Him in the wilderness, in Gethsemane, upon the cross! The spotless Son of God took upon Himself the burden of sin. He who had been one with God, felt in His soul the awful separation that sin makes between God and man. This wrung from His lips the anguished cry, 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?' Matthew 27:46. It was the burden of sin, the sense of its terrible enormity, of its separation of the soul from God—it was this that broke the heart of the Son of God."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 13.

God will not save us without our acceptance (Rom. 5:17). But in all our talk, let us never try to suggest that we save ourselves.

How does God in love draw us to Him? John 12:32; Rev. 22:17.

"Christ came to manifest the love of God to the world, to draw the hearts of all men to Himself. He said, 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me' (John 12:32). The first step toward salvation is to respond to the drawing of the love of Christ. God sends message after message to men, entreating them to repentance, that He may forgive, and write pardon against their names."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 323.

THE RESULTS OF LOVE (1 John 4:11-16).**If God loves us, what do we do? 1 John 4:11, 12.**

Though we have not experienced God's love in an actual physical way (for no one has seen God), we still have oneness with God in love that is in a sense more real than human love. Some people wish they could see God so they can experience His love more tangibly. But through the Trinity (note that Father, Son, and Spirit are all mentioned in these verses), we have the highest form of love, spiritual love, which "is made perfect in us" (1 John 4:12, TEV).

How does God impart His love to us and enable us to remain in a loving state? 1 John 4:13-16.

The Holy Spirit in our hearts is the presence of Christ and the Father (John 14:18, 23). As His presence abides with us, His love continues to pervade our lives. When we lose the reigning Holy Spirit, we cease to love. Our fellowship with God by the presence of His Spirit in our hearts confirms our belief that Jesus is our Saviour and enables us to enter true love relationships with others. "The one thing essential for us in order that we may receive and impart the forgiving love of God is to know and believe the love that He has to us. 1 John 4:16. Satan is working by every deception he can command, in order that we may not discern that love. He will lead us to think that our mistakes and transgressions have been so grievous that the Lord will not have respect unto our prayers and will not bless and save us. In ourselves we can see nothing but weakness, nothing to recommend us to God, and Satan tells us that it is of no use; we cannot remedy our defects of character. When we try to come to God, the enemy will whisper, It is of no use for you to pray; did not you do that evil thing? Have you not sinned against God and violated your own conscience? But we may tell the enemy that 'the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.' 1 John 1:7. When we feel that we have sinned and cannot pray, it is then the time to pray. Ashamed we may be and deeply humbled, but we must pray and believe. . . . Forgiveness, reconciliation with God, comes to us, not as a reward for our works, it is not bestowed because of the merit of sinful men, but it is a gift unto us."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 115-116.

For reflection: You may believe that God is love, but what changes occur in your love when you believe that God loves you?

PERFECT LOVE (1 John 4:17, 18).

How do our ideas of God's love affect our understanding of the day of judgment and punishment? 1 John 4:17 (compare Daniel 7:22).

John tells us that we can have confidence on the day of judgment, not because of ourselves, but "because in this world we are like him [Christ]" (1 John 4:17, NIV). "Those who are truly like the Judge need not fear the judgment!"—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 669.

John also makes it clear that "love has not been made perfect in anyone who is afraid, because fear has to do with punishment" (1 John 4:18, TEV). If we fill our thoughts with "the horrors of hell" or "apprehension of the apocalypse" or "doom and disaster," we show ourselves not to be relying on God's love.

What is the antidote to the poison of fear? 1 John 4:18.

"We do not need to be slaves of fear. God says to us, '*There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out fear.*'"

"THE text for all those who fear. In these words are all the answers to the fears of the world. For it is the word of One who is **defined** as love: God. And in this relationship of love there can be no fear. Fear has to do with uncertainty, with a lack of trust, and with severe doubts as to the nature of the person. But in this right relationship to God (which is based on love) is complete trusting assurance—because the true nature and attitude of God are **known** and **admired**.

"*Perfect* love drives out fear. This perfection of love comes from God. It's not so much our love for God that removes fear, but his love for us. As the next verse says, 'We love because he first loved us.'

"Love here isn't the soft sentimental variety, nor the human form of love. The love from God that removes our fears is a stark, bare and terrible cross. On this terrible torture instrument God's incredible love is demonstrated. . . . Because of what he is and what he **does**, all reasons to fear are gone.

"As our 'slogan' goes on, 'But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment.'"— Jonathan Gallagher, *Fear Not? Why Not?* (Grantham, England: Stanborough Press, 1988), pp. 95, 96. (Used with permission.)

For reflection: What measures can be taken to cure fear based on expectations of punishment?

THE WAY WE LOVE (1 John 4:19-21).

"Only by love is love awakened," wrote Ellen G. White (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 22). Consequently "we love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19, NIV). We are not to think that we generate love of ourselves, that it is because of our love for God that He responds in love to us. *It is the other way around!* "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10, NIV).

How does God awaken love in us? 1 John 4:19.

In His great love demonstrated in creation and redemption, God awakens love in our hearts. But most of all, He accomplishes this by His own *personal* interest in each one of us. Look back over your life, and see the way God has loved you, despite all your rebellion and the tragedies of life-situations. Only as we become conscious of God's great love can we be drawn back to Him. Like the prodigal who became aware of his situation, the foolishness of life with pigs, we need to go back to our heavenly Father. And as we trudge wearily up the road, He comes running to greet us, to welcome us back, not as hired hands, but as fully restored children, welcomed back into the Father's complete confidence.

What incompatibility does John reveal between what we say and what we do? 1 John 4:20, 21.

Once again John emphasizes the need for our actions to confirm our words. We cannot go around mouthing "pious platitudes" about our love for God and then by our attitude show that we hate our brother. "And who is my neighbour [Luke 10:29]?" asked the lawyer. Jesus identified everyone as our neighbor.

If you can be so perverse to hate your visible brother, what of the invisible God? Because God is less tangible, His character is more doubted by many. If we truly believe that God is love, we *must* love one another. This is God's *command* (1 John 4:21). Notice the word again! Brotherly love is the vital aspect of our character that God looks for. Why? Because it shows that we care more for others than for ourselves.

For reflection: How can you be sure that you make your actions match your words? Think of real-life situations you have experienced.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Compare Romans 5:6-11 with John's discussion of God's love.

Ellen G. White on how God is love: "Pardoning, redeeming love is brought to view in Christ Jesus. Satan had misrepresented the character of God, and it was necessary that a correct representation should be made to worlds un fallen, to angels, and to men. . . . In Christ we behold the character of the Father, and see the pitying tenderness which God exercised for fallen man, giving his only begotten Son as a ransom for the transgressors of the law. It is in beholding the love of God that repentance is awakened in the sinner's heart, and an earnest desire is created to become reconciled to God."—*Review and Herald*, March 9, 1897.

"What a love it is that appeals to fallen men! [John 3:16 quoted]. . . . Well did the disciples understand this love as they saw their Saviour enduring shame, reproach, doubt, and betrayal, as they saw his agony in the garden, and his death on Calvary's cross. This is a love the depth of which no sounding can ever fathom. As the disciples comprehended it, as their perception took hold of God's divine compassion, they realized that there is a sense in which the sufferings of the Son were the sufferings of the Father."—Ellen G. White, *The Youth's Instructor*, Dec. 16, 1897.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What illustrations describe *how God is love*?
2. Why is it important to understand that Jesus bore the penalty for all human guilt?
3. How would you prove God's love to someone who does not believe?
4. Why can't you be afraid of some and love them at the same time? How does this apply to God?
5. What exactly is the problem in saying, "I love God" while hating your brother?

SUMMARY: God is love, not merely in what He says about Himself, but in what He does. By dying for our sins and caring for us individually, God awakens love in us. By these means He is able to save us from our sins. Because of God's perfect love, we do not need to be afraid, least of all of God. Through His grace, which enables us to be like Him, we are able to have confidence in the judgment.



Who Will Go?

Robert G. Manners

"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?'

"And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'

"He said, 'Go and tell this people'" (Isa. 6:8, 9, NIV).

Pastor N. K. Roy had received a call to move his family to the city of Jamalpur, a Global Mission target city in Bangladesh. The residents of Jamalpur are predominantly Muslim, and most Christians find living in such an area difficult. Pastor Roy and his family prayed earnestly to know God's will. He did not want to be a Jonah; he determined to answer the Lord's call to witness in that city.

He traveled to Jamalpur to find a house for his family. When he arrived he asked around and was directed to see a Muslim housing agent in the city. When Pastor Roy met him and told him of his plan to move to the city, the man began asking Pastor Roy questions about himself. "What is your business in Jamalpur? Why do you wish to live here?" Pastor Roy hesitated. What should he tell this man? If he said he was a Christian pastor who was coming here to convert people to Christianity and raise up a church, this Muslim man might see him as a disturber of the peace and refuse to help him find housing.

Quickly Pastor Roy prayed for guidance and God's blessing. Then he told the agent, "I am a Seventh-day Adventist minister and I have come to tell the people of this city about Jesus."

The agent thought for a few moments, then spoke. "I know of a group of people who live a few kilometers from here who are searching for a spiritual leader. I will be happy to take you to them if you wish." Pastor Roy could hardly believe his ears. This Muslim man would introduce a Christian pastor to people searching for spiritual support?

Encouraged and assured of God's leading, Pastor Roy quickly moved his family to Jamalpur. Then he returned to visit the Muslim housing agent, and the two went to visit the group of people who were seeking a spiritual leader.

Pastor Roy began visiting members of the group and giving Bible studies to those who agreed. In a short time 27 precious souls were baptized. Today a church stands as a witness of God's love among a predominantly Muslim population in Bangladesh, testimony that God can use Muslims, and anyone who is willing, to win others to Himself.

Robert G. Manners is president of the Bangladesh Union Mission.

For Current Newsbreak, Call 1-800-648-5824.

Inside Story

Victory!



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 John 5:1-12.

MEMORY TEXT: "And this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith" (1 John 5:4, RSV).

KEY THOUGHT: Those who, by faith, accept Christ's sacrifice and maintain their born-again relationship with Him have both the power to overcome sin and the gift of eternal life.

WINNING THE RACE. "All the world loves a winner," goes the saying. And when you look around at all the adoration winners receive in this world, you can believe the truth of those words. Gold medalists, lottery winners, Grand Prix winners, in fact winners in any area of life are at least extolled and at best made rich and famous. Often the winner takes all.

The Bible talks about winning too. But the Christian race is not against others. The great aim of Christians is not to be first past the winning post, but to be sure to finish. Completing the course is the all-important ambition. Says Paul: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:7, 8, NIV).

Our aim is to be victorious, to make sure that "we win the victory over the world by means of our faith" (1 John 5:4, TEV). To do so, we must be single-minded, wanting to know only Christ. Can we say of ourselves: "I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace" (Acts 20:24, NIV)?

BORN OF GOD (1 John 5:1, 2, 4).

What image does the Bible use to describe the relationship the new believer enjoys with God? John 3:1-21.

The idea of *rebirth* is central to Jesus' message. It is not enough to be altered, changed, fixed up. The conversion that Jesus describes is so completely different, so totally transforming, that only the image of being born again is sufficient. This term has been so overused (and some would say abused) that it has lost much of its impact. But we need to react like Nicodemus, who responds in amazement—how can you return to your mother to be born all over again?

Birth is truly one of the greatest of human experiences—for mother, father, and child—and all those around. To be present at the birth of their children is an inspiring experience for fathers. A brand new life!

That is what we are to be when we are born of God. Now we relate, like loving children, to God, as Father—because of our acceptance of Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

Immediately the consequences of this new birth are spelled out—loving the Father means loving the child. Families go together, says John, and the same applies to the spiritual family. You cannot love God without loving His children. How often Christians forget this when they get involved in petty church squabbles over who plays the organ or who should park in which spot. "He who loves God may be sure of also loving his brethren. It is therefore of paramount importance for the believer to cultivate a genuine love for his Maker: it will prove an inexhaustible fount from which all other desirable qualities will ceaselessly flow."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 673.

When and how are you born of God? 1 John 5:1; John 3:5-8.

The sense of the original is that because we believe in the present, we have been born of God. The truth that Jesus came to unveil is that eternal life as one of God's children begins in the here and now. Not that this is a once-for-all experience. Just as we are born once but continue to be part of a family, so are we to continue as part of God's family. "Everyone who really believes that Jesus is God's Christ proves himself one of God's family" (1 John 5:1, Phillips). Only as we go on identifying with the family, with its shared experience and objectives, can we be considered part of that family.

A challenge: Why can't you truly call yourself "born of God" when you treat others badly?

GOD'S COMMANDS (1 John 5:2, 3, 4).**How do we know we love God's children? 1 John 5:2.**

By loving God and obeying Him! A strange kind of answer—or so it might appear. And yet the truth is that each implies the other. Proof positive of your Christian experience, is not what you *say*, but what you *do*. It is perhaps easier to believe you love God, since there is no immediate possibility of that being denied. So as John has already made clear, loving God has to be demonstrated by our loving His children. But the reverse is also true: the way we know we love God's children is through love and obedience to God.

We may make great claims of love for people, but unless we truly love God and therefore follow His law, such claims have no essential value.

Why are God's commands not burdensome? 1 John 5:3, 4.

Not a surprising answer from the one who identified himself in his Gospel as “the disciple whom Jesus loved”—for the commands of Jesus can never be seen as heavy impositions or restrictive encumbrances if there is a relationship of love. Jesus assures us that His “yoke is easy” and His “burden is light” (Matt. 11:30). “Those who love God find joy in fulfilling His requests and in following His counsel, and God Himself provides the power to observe His law (1 Cor. 10:13; Phil. 2:13).”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 673.

Obeying God's commands is not a question of “doing what we're told, or else,” but rather, a natural result of love that is coupled with the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The alternative would be to suffer in silence and keep the law, not because we accept and agree with it in love, but in a spirit of smoldering rebellion:

“A sullen submission to the will of the Father will develop the character of a rebel. By such a one service is looked upon as drudgery. It is not rendered cheerfully, and in the love of God. It is a mere mechanical performance. If he dared, such a one would disobey. His rebellion is smothered, ready to break out at any time in bitter murmurings and complaints. Such service brings no peace or quietude to the soul.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, July 22, 1897.

For reflection: How do you relate to the commandments of God? Do you see them as preventing you from doing what you really want? Or do you agree with God that this is the best way to live?

VICTORY THROUGH FAITH (1 John 5:4, 5).

What is identified as overcoming the world? 1 John 5:4, 5.

“Our faith.” The danger is to believe that we gain the victory through something of our own. So we need to look more closely at what “faith” actually is.

Explain what you think the word *faith* means. Heb. 11:1, 6.

Faith is not some object or substance. You cannot weigh faith by the pound or measure it by the pint. Faith is a *relational* word: you have faith *in* someone (or something). You cannot simply “have faith.” It must always be faith *in*. (See 1 John 3:23; 5:5; Rom. 10:17.)

More than that—faith is not some mystical unknown. Simply put, biblical faith can be defined as trust in God. It implies confidence in God, in His trustworthiness and His saving ability.

So the phrase “our faith overcomes the world” becomes “our trust in God overcomes the world,” which puts the emphasis back where it should be, not with us, but with the power and grace of God.

We hear about *blind faith*. Why is that not what God is looking for? John 20:31; 2 Peter 1:16-19.

“There are many who fail to distinguish between the rashness of presumption and the intelligent confidence of faith. . . . God has given man precious promises upon conditions of faith and obedience; but they are not to sustain him in any rash act.”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, April 1, 1875.

“God gives sufficient evidence to every soul. He does not promise to remove every doubt, but He gives a reason for faith.”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Jan. 24, 1899.

“All whom God has blessed with reasoning powers are to become intellectual Christians. They are not requested to believe without evidence; therefore Jesus has enjoined upon all to search the Scriptures. Let the ingenious inquirer, and the one who would know for himself what is truth, exert his mental powers to search out the truth as it is in Jesus. . . . The Lord positively demands of every Christian an intelligent knowledge of the Scriptures.”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, March 8, 1887.

WATER AND BLOOD (1 John 5:6-8).

What is significant about “water and blood”? 1 John 5:6-8 (compare John 3:5; Rom. 5:8, 9; 6:3, 4).

While we remember both “water and blood” at Christ’s death as recorded by John, a further significant meaning of these symbols is in the context in which John is writing now. He was particularly concerned to counter the argument that Jesus was only a human being until His baptism, at which time Christ came down upon Him and remained until shortly before His death. This theory was popular among those who believed that things physical were evil—for how could God be part of this evil world? In particular, how could God become a human being? This is why John so explicitly states that “He did not come by water only, but by water and blood” (1 John 5:6, NIV).

What should we understand by “the blood of Jesus”? 1 John 1:7 (compare Matt. 26:28; Acts 20:28; Heb. 9:14; 1 Peter 1:18, 19).

As a shorthand term for all that the death and resurrection of Jesus means, surely this is an excellent and thoroughly biblical concept. But we must also be careful not to misunderstand and not to see the symbol as something to be taken literally. When we sing “There’s power in the blood,” we do not actually mean there is literal power in the blood. The power comes from the fact that, because Christ suffered the ultimate penalty for our sins, He is now able to purify us from all sin. The gift of redemption through Christ is always associated with the gift of holiness. The blood represents the way God has chosen to save us—through Christ’s death and cleansing power.

In natural experience, blood does not cleanse—quite the opposite. But in the symbolism of the Old Testamental sacrificial system, blood was seen as the means of taking away the guilt and consequences of sin. But, of course, this is not literally true. It was not the blood of bulls and goats that actually cleansed from sin. It was God who did this. What God wanted then and wants now is that we understand the seriousness of sin and its consequences, that we seek to be forgiven and healed, and that we come to Him so that all this might be accomplished.

For reflection: What do the Spirit, the water, and the blood testify to? (See John 14:26; Luke 3:21, 22; Rev. 1:5.)

GOD'S TESTIMONY (1 John 5:9-12).

What is the basis for accepting God's testimony as trustworthy? 1 John 5:9, 10.

Some would argue that we do not have to verify God's testimony. As the bumper sticker declares: "God said it. I believe it. That's all there is to it." And that would be one way for God to act, if He so chose. As Creator and Sustainer of the whole vast Universe, He can do as He pleases.

But as far as God is concerned, what pleases Him is for us to validate what He says, to make sure it is true. When John writes, "We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater" (1 John 5:9, NIV), he is not saying God has to be believed because of God's greater power. Rather, "God's testimony is much stronger" (1 John 5:9, TEV) because it is given to believers by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Hence, His testimony makes sense, it is true, and it is right. What God has said about the Son is of major importance—and we think immediately of the voice from heaven at both Jesus' baptism and His transfiguration. God's command is "Listen to him" (Matt. 17:5, NIV).

But what is God's testimony? 1 John 5:11, 12.

This is spelled out exactly: "The testimony is this: God has given us eternal life, and this life has its source in his Son" (1 John 5:11, TEV). The message God wants to get across is not only propositional statements or descriptive declarations. God's testimony is that belief in Christ's life, death, and resurrection results in the immediate gift of eternal life.

So what does all this tell us? That, apart from Christ, we are spiritually dead, in rebellion against God, and that the only hope of salvation-healing is to accept the salvation so graciously offered by our loving Saviour. As Phillips so clearly translates Romans 6:23: "Sin *pays* its servants: the wage is death. But God *gives* to those who serve him: his free gift is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord."

The intrinsic consequence of sin is death. No question about it. On the cross, Jesus silently but eloquently demonstrated this inescapable fact as "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21, NIV). In His death and resurrection, Christ reveals God's gracious gift of eternal life.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: *Note on 1 John 5:7:* "V. 7 is found in no manuscript earlier than the fourteenth century. It is first quoted as part of John's text by Priscillian, the Spanish heretic who died in 385 A.D. and it gradually worked its way into the Latin Vulgate. Erasmus omitted the passage from the first printed Greek Testament of 1516, but undertook to introduce the words if a Greek manuscript containing them could be produced. He was faced with a late manuscript which did, in fact, contain the passage, and against his judgment kept his promise. So, by way of Erasmus' 1522 edition, the interpolation invaded the text of the Greek New Testament. The action of the RV in cutting out the spurious words was tardy justice. We should treasure every word of the inspired record, but we want no invasion of that record by the additions of men, however sound the theology expressed."— E. M. Blaiklock, *Commentary on the New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), p. 246.

Assignment: Using a concordance, look at the 16 references John makes in his Gospel to "eternal life." What do these references tell you about this vital gospel theme?

The only way to have this eternal life is through Jesus Christ. He identified Himself as the way, the truth, and the life. He declared that He came that we might have life. He identified Himself as the resurrection and the life. (See John 11:25; 14:6; 10:10.) Consequently: "Whoever has the Son has this life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12, TEV). May we always have the life-giving Son, now and forever!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the test to prove the genuineness of our love for God's family?
2. The victory is through our faith in Christ. Why doesn't that mean that it is our achievement?
3. How would you explain to a non-Christian friend the meaning of Christ's blood?

SUMMARY: We have victory only through our trusting relationship with God—for He is the victor. As we are born again into His image, as we accept God's own testimony about His Son "through water and through blood," we are sure that "God has given us eternal life."

The Church Remained Open

Fred L. Webb

Fausto watched in dismay as the attendance at the Adventist church in their rural village grew smaller and smaller. When the Adventist mission school had closed for lack of money, church members began to scatter. Some moved to villages that still had a school, but others simply stopped attending church. Fausto and his wife tried to keep the church alive. They held regular services, but the attendance dwindled until only the two of them came. They prayed earnestly for their village, but the outlook seemed dim.

Villagers began tying their goats and sheep in the church to keep them out of the rain. Then some villagers began taking boards from the walls of the church to use for firewood. Fausto tried to stop them, but boards continued to disappear.

One day someone noticed that many villagers had large tropical ulcers on their legs. It seemed that the ulcers broke out mostly on people who had desecrated the church. The superstitious people decided that they were being punished for damaging God's church, and they stopped taking the wood.

Fausto was invited to move to another village and minister to an active Adventist church. He decided that if the church did not show growth within three months, he would accept the call. Soon after this Fausto learned that student missionaries from Mountain View College were coming to reopen the school. The villagers welcomed the missionaries, and some began taking Bible studies from Fausto and the students. Many who had slipped away began attending church again. Within four months 147 precious souls were baptized. Fausto and his wife did not leave their village. They stayed to minister to the new believers.

Fausto and his wife thank God for their answered prayers. Their small church, which once stood nearly empty, is now too small for all who want to attend services. The village plans to enlarge the church so that everyone, including children, can worship together.

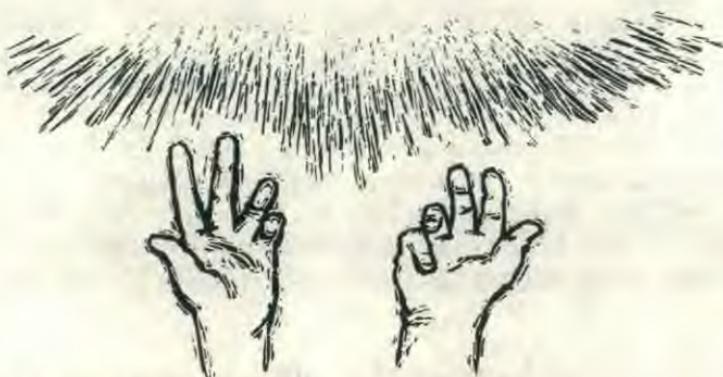
Pray for the work and the workers in the Philippines who dedicate themselves to bring Christ to the lost.

Fred L. Webb is the farm coordinator at Mountain View College in South Philippines. Fausto Bicleram (left).



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Total Confidence



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 John 5:13-21.

MEMORY TEXT: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the assurance we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us" (1 John 5:13, 14, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: In a world that often shatters our confidence, we can always turn to God, the source of supreme confidence.

"THE RING OF CONFIDENCE." Some years ago on British television, an advertisement portrayed the advantages of a particular brand of toothpaste. With the slogan, "The Ring of Confidence," a white halo appeared around the necks of the actors and actresses, accompanied by a musical "ping." It was supposed to convince you that by using that toothpaste you could have complete confidence.

But confidence, real and life-changing confidence, does not come from toothpaste. It comes only from knowing God, who gives us eternal life, the One whom we can approach with the assurance that He hears us (1 John 5:14). We do not worship an idol; we worship the great and glorious God, who in His compassion has come to bring salvation to His rebellious, ungrateful children.

"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Heb. 4:16, NIV).

CONFIDENCE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD (1 John 5:13, 14).**What are John's grounds for confidence? 1 John 5:13, 14.**

John is confident that we have nothing to be afraid of in the presence of God. He *knows* the nature and character of God, and so all his doubts, fears, and insecurities about God and His intentions have been removed. (See also 1 John 3:21, 22; 2:28.) We must *continue in Him* to have that confidence. We need to remain *in Him* in that close and intimate relationship of father and child, doing what pleases Him.

Why do we come confidently to God? Write down exactly what your reasons are. Heb. 10:19-25.

"In him [Jesus Christ] and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence" (Eph. 3:12, NIV). Some take this to mean that God is remote or hostile, so that we have to come through the intermediation of the Son. This is far from the truth. Because we *understand* the truth about God from Jesus, we *wish* to come to God. And what do we say about the divinity of Christ when we say we can approach Him, but not God?

The reason for coming to God in confidence is that, by living a perfect life and dying for our sin, Jesus, who is God, has made the true character of God inescapably clear. Because of our trust in Jesus, we come to God in trusting confidence *and freedom*. We approach because we choose to.

What is the result of your confidence? 1 John 5:14.

People sometimes complain that they feel their prayers go no higher than the ceiling. This is the text to dispel that feeling. We are not to base our faith on feelings. God does not ignore us or refuse to listen, unless we cut ourselves off from Him by choosing to live in sin. Our problem is to make sure we *ask according to His will*. All too often our prayers are foolish shopping lists or arrogant demands. We need to learn the humility of Christ and approach God as a trusted friend rather than as some kind of impersonal *vending machine* that satisfies our wants.

For reflection: If you are not sure "that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us" (1 John 5:14, NIV), what should you do?

GOD ALWAYS HEARS (1 John 5:15).**How should we understand 1 John 5:15?**

Does this mean that whatever we ask for we get? Harry Emerson Fosdick said: "God is not a cosmic bell-boy for whom we can press a button to get things." What kind of relationship is one that is simply a list of requests?

We need to set this verse in the context of all that has gone before. We must remember the concepts of following God's will, of demonstrating love to God and fellow human beings, of being primarily friends of God. As Jesus pointed out, the Father gives gifts for our best good, and if we ask for bread we will not receive a stone. So the answer to "whatever we ask" will be determined by our Christian experience and will be for our benefit, not our hurt.

So what is the real purpose of prayer? 2 Chron. 7:14; Jer. 29:13.

Is prayer telling God something He does not already know? Is it a way to persuade Him to do something He will not otherwise do? Is it to prove to Him that He really is God? No to all the above! We do not pray to win God over or to inform Him or to satisfy His vanity! God is trying to help us, not to please Himself.

"Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 93.

How should you pray? James 1:6.

"There are two kinds of prayer—the prayer of form and the prayer of faith. The repetition of set, customary phrases when the heart feels no need of God is formal prayer. 'When ye pray,' says Christ, 'use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.' We should be extremely careful in all our prayers to speak the wants of the heart, and to say only what we mean. All the flowery words at our command are not equivalent to one holy desire. The most eloquent prayers are but vain repetitions, if they do not express the true sentiments of the heart."—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, Aug. 14, 1884.

PRAYING ABOUT THE SINS OF OTHERS (1 John 5:16, 17).

When we hear of a fellow member's sin, what should be our response? 1 John 5:16.

Sadly, all too often the response is condemnatory and judgmental. Just as the scribes and Pharisees brought the woman taken in adultery to Jesus and condemned her, so we tend to expose and publicize the sins of our brothers and sisters. Perhaps as a way of making ourselves look better, we point the finger and adopt a holier-than-thou attitude toward our fallen friends.

Instead, the response should be one of grief and support, thinking of what we can do to help and restore. As John says, "you should pray to God, who will give him life" (1 John 5:16, TEV). God's nature is inclusive, "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9, NIV). God is always there to save, revive, and reestablish the one who has fallen. While we do not believe in the doctrine of once-saved-always-saved, in our attitudes we can give the impression of once-lost-always-lost.

What is the difference between sin to death and that which is not? 1 John 5:16, 17.

Some have developed curious doctrines from this verse—that there are *mortal* sins and *venial* sins, for example. But sin is sin, and the only sin that God cannot forgive is the sin for which forgiveness is not truly asked. As Jesus made clear, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable (Mark 3:29) because it is the Holy Spirit who convicts of sin (John 16:8-11). So to resist the conviction of sinfulness is denial of sin and rejection of God's desire to forgive and restore. God will not impose Himself on anyone who rejects Him.

So how should we pray—especially with and for others? Rom. 1:9; Col. 4:12.

"If we keep the Lord ever before us, allowing our hearts to go out in thanksgiving and praise to Him, we shall have a continual freshness in our religious life. Our prayers will take the form of a conversation with God as we would talk with a friend. He will speak His mysteries to us personally. Often there will come to us a sweet, joyful sense of the presence of Jesus. . . . Prayer turns aside the attacks of Satan."

—*The Faith I Live By*, p. 225.

SAFE IN THE LORD (1 John 5:18, 19).**How are we safe in the Lord? 1 John 5:18.**

The text is specifically speaking about being kept safe from sin. This does not mean that God denies us choice—but as we pray “lead us not into temptation,” we choose to stay safe in the hands of our loving Lord.

What does the experience of Job say to us? Job 1:1, 8-12.

As with Job and his troubles, God does not prevent problems and temptations from coming, not to convince Him of the kind of people we are, but to convince ourselves, others, and the whole onlooking universe. “We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men” (1 Cor. 4:9, NIV).

Our safety from sin is not in our being removed from temptation, but in the way we respond to it. God gives “grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb. 4:16, NIV). As we choose God, the evil one cannot harm us, despite the distress of the moment, for we are safe with God as long as we trust in Him. Jesus, “the one who was born of God keeps . . . [us] safe” (1 John 5:18, NIV).

We remember Job’s denial that he had done anything for which his present experience was a punishment. This was countered by his *comforters* who appealed to their understanding of God—that He would indeed act in this way to Job because Job needed to repent. There is the actual example, at the end of the story, of Job praying for the sins of his comforters (Job 42:8, 10).

To whom do we belong? 1 John 5:19; 1 Cor. 6:19.

“We know that we belong to God even though the whole world is under the rule of the Evil One” (1 John 5:19, TEV). The whole concept of *belonging* is critical. We have chosen to belong to God’s family, despite the current situation, in which this world is under Satan’s domination. Even though this makes us *aliens and strangers* here, we are part of God’s kingdom already, a kingdom that is soon to be fully established with the return of the King. *So let us always be absolutely sure where we belong!*

For reflection: On what basis do you have the assurance that you really do belong with God?

UNION WITH GOD (1 John 5:20, 21).

How does John describe the closeness of our relationship with God? 1 John 5:20.

We are “in him”—or as the Good News Bible puts it, “We live in union with the true God—in union with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 5:20, TEV). Identifying with Him, agreeing with Him, right with Him, we have harmony of will, purpose, and objective with God. Now truly we are “at one” with God.

What does Jesus say about this union, this being together and at one? John 17:20-26.

Notice these specific points: “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. . . . That they may be one as we are one: . . . May they be brought to complete unity” (NIV).

Words can become familiar so that they lose their impact. So look again at what Jesus is saying here, that we should be one as He is with God. And this is how John chooses to close his Epistle, emphasizing the oneness all of us should exhibit as we share together in our trusting faith in God. There is no room for divisive and destructive behavior, such as John was writing against. We may not all agree on everything, but we can all be one.

“By faith, we enter into a relationship that will never end. We are in God, and he is in us, his people, so that in Christ we are as close as we possibly could be and God shares with us his own indestructible life, the life of the eternal. Here is reality, here is Truth, ultimate and absolute.”—David Jackman, *The Message of John's Letters* (Leicester, England, and Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 171.

How should we live as true Christians? Eph. 4:12-16.

“Oh, how I wish that we would honor Christ by realizing what He wants to do for us, and taking Him at His word. If we would do this, we should be sunshiny Christians. By beholding Christ, we would be changed into His likeness.”—*The Upward Look*, p. 359.

For reflection: Why does John end with the command to “keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21, NIV)? How does this relate to being one with God?

FOR FURTHER STUDY: *What should our prayers be like?* Ps. 51:17. "Prayer is not an expiation for sin; it has no virtue or merit of itself. All the flowery words at our command are not equivalent to one holy desire. The most eloquent prayers are but idle words if they do not express the true sentiments of the heart. But the prayer that comes from an earnest heart, when the simple wants of the soul are expressed, as we would ask an earthly friend for a favor, expecting it to be granted—this is the prayer of faith. God does not desire our ceremonial compliments, but the unspoken cry of the heart broken and subdued with a sense of its sin and utter weakness finds its way to the Father of all mercy."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 86.

"Home religion is greatly needed, and our words in the home should be of a right character, or our testimonies in church will amount to nothing. Unless you manifest meekness, kindness, courtesy, in your home, your religion will be in vain. If there was more genuine home religion, there would be more power in the church. We may have a great deal more faith than we now have, by living up to the light God has given. Says the apostle, 'Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' As you would believe in a friend, so you are to trust God. If your friend has never denied your requests, you will not doubt his promise to favor you in some new desire. You are to believe that Jesus knows just what you need, and will supply all your wants; so you can go on in faith, saying 'I have laid my burden upon the Lord, and I will not lay it upon any human being. God will hear and answer my prayers.' "—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, May 19, 1891.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How can we come confidently to God and ask correctly?
2. Does God impose conditions on answers to prayer?
3. How can we pray for others' sins without exposing them?
4. What is the unpardonable sin?

SUMMARY: Life with God, being in union with Him, is to be found through having total confidence in God's saving and healing salvation. Only by truly knowing God as He is can we trust in Him completely, be sure of the effectiveness of prayer, and come with complete assurance that He invites us into His presence eternally.



God's Spirit Moves Mountains, Part 1

Maye Porter

Mamosi is an isolated village high in the mountains that form the backbone of New Britain Island, a part of Papua New Guinea. No roads lead to Mamosi. To get there one walks—a two-day journey—or flies in. The church's mission office designated Mamosi as a Global Mission target project. The mission plane would arrive soon and would fly two pastors in to a landing field near the village. Pastor Nick and Pastor Norman volunteered to go.

On a bright Sunday morning, the two pastors loaded their materials and food into the small mission plane and flew off into the clouds. In less than an hour the little plane was circling the tiny airstrip in the mountains. They could see the government school below, and a crowd of men and women standing in front of a building. Once the plane landed, the pastors quickly unloaded their cargo. The pilot shook their hands and wished them God's blessing, and the plane took off with plans to return on the following Thursday. The two pastors watched the plane disappear down the runway and into the sky, then turned to face the curious eyes of the watching crowd.

One man, a village leader, stepped forward and asked the pastors, "Who are you and why are you here?"

"We have come to bring you good news," replied Pastor Nick with a smile. "We would like to hold some meetings for you. We will tell you how to be healthier and happier."

"Are you from the government?" asked the village leader.

"Oh, no!" chorused the pastors. "We came to talk about God."

The villagers eyed them suspiciously. "What *lotu* [denomination] are you?" one man asked.

"We are Seventh-day Adventists," replied Pastor Norman, smiling his friendliest smile.

The village leader began shouting at the men. "You cannot stay here. We have our own *lotu*. We don't want 'Seven days' here!"

"Go! Go! Go!" the crowd began to shout at the two surprised pastors. "We do not want you in our village."

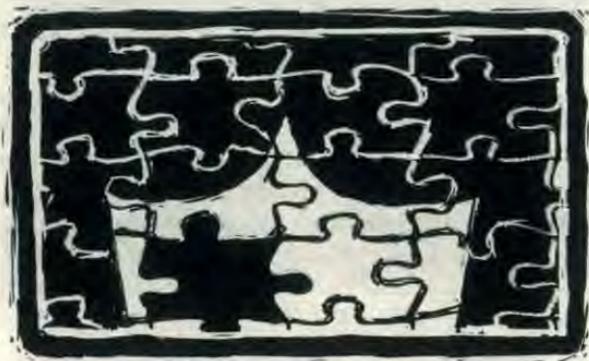
Pastor Nick and Pastor Norman looked at each other. This was serious. The people were clearly angry, but the mission plane would not come back for five days. Breathing a prayer for guidance, Pastor Nick motioned for the people to listen to him.

(Continued nextweek)

Maye Porter is associate child-ministries director in the Papua New Guinea Union Mission.

For Current Newsbreak, Call 1-800-648-5824.

Don't Lose Out!



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 John.

MEMORY TEXT: "Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for" (2 John 8, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: Having come so far in the Christian life, how foolish it would be to give up and lose out now! It is not that we are thinking of the reward; we want to continue through to the end so we can be forever with our God of truth and love.

STAYING WITH THE TRUTH! Hearing of the situation in the church, John dashes off this letter as a way of reflecting his love and concern, although he would far rather speak to them face to face.

His emphasis: Don't lose out! How foolish it would be to give up now, he reminds them. And the same applies to us today. How foolish to give up on the truth now. Despite all the problems surrounding us and the difficulties in the church, we need to remember who the Lord is we love. Deceivers are around; but we do not need to be fooled.

This inspired letter commands us to *walk in love*. We need to set our spiritual priorities.

A boy was running in a school cross-country race, and was in second place. Then he noticed that the boy behind had lost his shoe—so he stopped to help him out. Then this boy dashed ahead and so his helper came in third. This illustrates the way we should be as Christians. While everybody else is concentrating on winning this world's race and gaining their own prizes, we are to have as our top priority our love and concern for others. Our lives are to reflect God's love.

THE DIVINE HARMONY OF TRUTH AND LOVE (2 John 1-3).**What are the two key words of this letter? 2 John 1.**

These essential terms are both repeated six times in the space of this brief epistle. John emphasizes the primary concepts that dominate both his first letter and his Gospel. Truth without love is cold and formal, right without being winsome. Love without truth is misguided and dishonest, affectionate without being legitimate.

By identifying God as a Being of both truth and love, John captures the essence of the way God operates and the response He wishes from us. The principles of God and His government rest on these two great pillars, rightly understood. The divine harmony of truth and love will have definite results in the life of the Christian:

"If the divine harmony of truth and love exists in the heart, it will shine forth in words and actions. . . . The spirit of genuine benevolence must dwell in the heart. Love imparts to its possessor grace, propriety, and comeliness of deportment. Love illuminates the countenance and subdues the voice; it refines and elevates the entire man. It brings him into harmony with God, for it is a heavenly attribute."

—*The Adventist Home*, p. 426.

How does John appeal to "the chosen lady" and her children? 2 John 2.

The truth "lives in us and will be with us forever" (2 John 2, NIV). Could we write a letter like that, with such assurance? Are we convinced that the truth lives in *us* and will be with *us* forever?

What is God's way of using truth and love? 2 John 3.

"God could have destroyed Satan and his sympathizers as easily as one can cast a pebble to the earth; but He did not do this. Rebellion was not to be overcome by force. Compelling power is found only under Satan's government. The Lord's principles are not of this order. His authority rests upon goodness, mercy, and love; and the presentation of these principles is the means to be used. God's government is moral, and truth and love are to be the prevailing power."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 759.

For reflection: Because God operates in this way, what are the implications for the way you live?

NO NEW COMMAND (2 John 4-6).**What was new about the command John gave? 2 John 4, 5.**

Jesus Himself identified a new command (John 13:34). But though it may have seemed new to His hearers at the time, this was not a new command. It reflected the will and character of God since the very beginning. As John wrote in the previous letter, "This command I am writing you is not new; it is the old command, the one you have had from the very beginning. The old command is the message you have already heard. But the command I now write you is new, because its truth is seen in Christ and also in you" (1 John 2:7, 8, TEV). God's command becomes new in the person of Jesus Christ—in Him it is most clearly revealed. This command was at the heart of Jesus' message.

Commands sometimes seem like trying to force people to do something against their will. Is this what God wants? John 7:17.

Only by walking in the truth can we find true obedience, which does not come through force or compulsion. We need to emphasize this point, for the devil has been very successful in suggesting that God does indeed operate this way. It can be said that ideas of divinely-approved coercion are to be found in every example of human religion. But since Jesus stresses the love command, it becomes clear that God never compels or pressures any of His children to obey Him. Indeed, to operate from such principles of force and compulsion would be to negate the whole great controversy and its evidence, accumulated at such tremendous cost. For if God can achieve His intentions by force, why does He not do so? Why did He not do so in the very beginning?

"If a man is to be convinced, the truth as it is in Jesus must be presented to his mind, and must appeal to his heart. Christ refuses every other method—everything like compulsion, or restriction, or force. His only weapons are truth and love. 'I, if I be lifted up from the earth,' he says, 'will draw all men unto me.' Fallen humanity is drawn, not forced, into any position."—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, June 28, 1898.

For reflection: How does Jesus' statement about being lifted up from the earth (on the cross) express God's ideals of truth, love, and freedom?

DON'T BE DECEIVED (2 John 7, 8).

Can you think of any modern-day examples of deceivers who refuse to acknowledge the truth about Jesus Christ as did the deceivers in John's day (2 John 7)?

The problem is still with us today. John had to deal with deceivers who taught that Christ was not actually human. Arguments over the exact nature of Christ continue to plague the church and can be very divisive in their consequences. John maintains the biblical position: that the nature of Christ was unique. He was fully God and fully man. Anything else leads us either to reduce His divinity or diminish His humanity.

A teacher once asked a class to gather together as many opinions of Christ as they could. The opinions were varied. But (apart from those from the church group) the majority were not willing even to allow for the actual *existence* of Christ. They considered Him to be a mythical figure. Of those who *did* say he was real, the majority saw him as a *good teacher*.

The *incarnation*—the belief that God was in human form in Jesus—is absolutely essential to the Christian gospel. We *must* see God in the man Christ Jesus, for if we do not, His reason for coming is denied.

What are the dangers in listening to these deceivers? 2 John 8.

The tragedy is that you lose your way. Time and again this has happened, sometimes to dear friends in the church. Some intriguing person or idea comes along, and people become all worked up about the situation. Often this is linked to a denial of certain truths and almost invariably to criticism of leadership and ministry. While not wishing to suggest that leaders and ministers are without fault, any idea or system that makes repeated attacks on the current church leaders must be viewed with suspicion—for it is only by denying others' authority that such people can gain authority for themselves.

Sometimes the points of conflict may seem quite absurd. One spokesman for a particular viewpoint preached on the evils of vinegar and the sin of wearing multicolored clothing. What we must preach is Christ and Him crucified. This is our highest priority.

For reflection: What can you do to protect others from deception?

NEW LIGHT? (2 John 9-11).

What should be our response to new ideas about Christian beliefs? 2 John 9. List some principles that you think are important.

While being careful not to deny the gradual revelation of truth, we must also identify with this position:

"Anyone who does not stay with the teaching of Christ, but goes beyond it, does not have God" (2 John 9, TEV). Christ is not contradictory; anything someone has to say must be tested by what has already been revealed. Deception may seem impressive. A popular TV evangelist may say that he is communicating God's word directly, but this can be no substitute for the study of the Bible. There are no shortcuts here: for "all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16, NIV).

So how should we treat those who demonstrate that they are not teaching truth? 2 John 10, 11.

These verses seem to be harsh, suggesting that hospitality is to be denied and that we should not even greet certain people. John has already said enough to make clear that love must be demonstrated, but he makes clear that love is not a question of imprudent toleration.

"The injunction not to receive any one who does not bring 'the teaching of Christ' means that no such person must be accepted as a Christian teacher or as one entitled to the fellowship of the church. It does not mean that (say) one of Jehovah's Witnesses should not be invited into the house. . . . Still less does it mean that disagreements on church order should be treated as deviations from 'the teaching of Christ' and used as a ground of exclusion. . . . But for a church, or its responsible leaders, knowingly to admit within its bound the propagation of teaching subversive of the gospel is to participate in what John describes as 'evil works.' "—F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of John* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1970), p. 142.

For reflection: How should we as a church investigate "new light," and how should we deal with disruptive teachers? Consider: "We should be careful how we receive everything termed new light. We must beware lest, under cover of searching for new truth, Satan shall divert our minds from Christ and the special truths for this time."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 159.

TALKING HEART-TO-HEART (2 John 12, 13).

What do John's final words reveal about the attitudes Christians should have? 2 John 12.

"I have a lot that I could write to you, but somehow I find it hard to put down on paper. I hope to come and see you personally, and we will have a heart-to-heart talk together—and how we shall enjoy that!" (2 John 12, Phillips).

We can see John's great love that comes straight from the heart. Separated by distance, his heart goes out to his brothers and sisters in the truth, for whom he genuinely loves and cares. What a tremendous example to us. Christianity is shown for what it truly is when theological truth is played out in the lives of individual believers.

How is John's joy made complete? What are the implications for us? 2 John 12.

John's greatest happiness is to be with his extended Christian family. He writes from genuine "parental" concern for those he loves in the truth, and he wishes, more than anything else, to be with them. He expresses a real and deeply felt love for these members of the church. So why do some say that they would rather *not* be in church, that they prefer *not* to associate with other members, that whatever they feel for them, it is *not* love?

Whatever the situation, lack of love in the church is a result of sin and selfishness.

"The Saviour desires His Church to be governed by the principles of love and truth. Love for one another reveals that the love of God is abiding in the heart. But many who profess to be followers of Christ are so filled with a sense of their own importance that they have no room in the heart for the sweet peace of Christ. They do not practice His instruction. They do not manifest His forbearance and love. Their hearts, once full of love for God and their brethren, are frozen by selfishness. . . .

"Love of self excludes the love of Christ. Those who live for self are ranged under the head of the Laodicean Church."—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Aug. 6, 1901.

For reflection: How can you know and love Jesus more fully, so that His love can be seen in you, and you can love others better?

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Reconsider the Laodicean message (Rev. 3:14-22) in the light of 2 John.

A Challenge to us all: “Take the question to your own hearts, and answer it as if before the Judge of all the earth. A reformation must take place in every family, in every institution, in every church. . . [passages from 1 John quoted].”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, April 3, 1900.

On making sure you don't lose out: “The thoughts must be upon heavenly things if you desire the Holy Spirit of God to impress truth upon the mind and soften and subdue the heart, inspiring ardent love of truth, of justice, of mercy, and of purity. The Spirit will bring to your remembrance the most precious jewels of thought. The whole heart will be warm with the contemplation of Jesus and His love, His teachings will be cherished, and you will love to speak to others the comforting things that have been opened to you by the Spirit of God. This is the privilege of every son and daughter of God. Oh, if those who believe the truth would love and fear the Lord always, if they would abide in Christ, they would treasure up the most precious experience; they would have moral and intellectual power; the grace of God would be in them ‘like a well of water springing up into everlasting life,’ and would flow forth from them as streams of living water. When persecution comes, the influence of such souls will be manifest; they will delight to magnify the truth.”—*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 4, p. 345.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How could fear of “losing out” become a selfish desire?
2. What is the real danger from those who misstate the truth?
3. How would you explain “the divine harmony of truth and love”?
4. How do we make sure we are not deceived?

SUMMARY: As we each one allow ourselves to be molded by the influence of God’s healing grace, we will inevitably become more loving, caring people. If this is *not* happening in our lives, it must lead us to question the validity of our experience with God. Our highest desire will be not to lose out on the wonderful experience of being with God now and for all eternity, and *together with all other believers*.



God's Spirit Moves Mountains, Part 2

Maye Porter

Pastor Nick and Pastor Norman had flown to Mamosi, a village high in the mountains of New Britain Island, to witness to the people there. But instead of a welcome, the villagers told the two pastors to leave. However the mission plane had already left and would not return for five days. After praying for God's guidance, Pastor Nick spoke to the shouting crowd. "I'm sorry that our coming has upset you," he said. "We don't know what to do. Our plane will not return until Thursday. Could you please let us stay until then? We will not preach if you don't want us to. It is cold up here in the highlands." Pastor Nick hugged himself and smiled his friendliest smile. "May we stay in a house until then?"

"We will discuss this matter," the leader replied grudgingly. While the villagers talked together, the two pastors prayed. Soon the village leaders returned. "You can stay," they said. "We will prepare a house for you. But you are not to preach."

Several village boys helped the pastors carry their cargo to a bush house. The people brought food for them to eat, according to their custom. Some of the villagers stopped to talk and "story" with the pastors. When darkness fell Pastor Nick said, "We are going to have our worship now, so you people should leave." But the people stayed and listened as the pastors had worship. They pretended to talk together, but their words were intended for their listeners. And when the two men bowed their heads to pray, those listening around the house bowed their heads, as well.

Early the next morning the church bell rang for worship. The village's religious teacher appeared at the pastors' house. "Please come," he begged. "The people want you to speak to them."

"But we are not allowed to talk about God to the people," Pastor Nick said. "We promised we would abide by the rule you gave us."

"We have changed our minds," the teacher said. "We know you have something good to tell us." The two pastors quickly dressed and hurried to the church, where they found a large congregation waiting. They conducted worship and thanked the people for allowing them to speak. When they finished speaking, the people asked the pastors to speak at the evening meeting, as well, and the pastors agreed, delighted at this change of heart.

(Continued next week)

Maye Porter is associate child-ministries director in the Papua New Guinea Union Mission.

Imitating Good



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 3 John.

MEMORY TEXT: "Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good" (3 John 11, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: Through the three personalities mentioned in this letter, we see three models of Christian behavior in the church. Which one we choose to imitate is up to us, but we should be under no illusions what the different results will be.

IMITATING WHAT WE SEE. Churches dominated by one personality are frequently battlegrounds. Our membership can be scarred by involvement in churches that see Christian ethics and standards replaced by power struggles, with all the unchristian behavior that results.

John had to deal with one such congregation under the repressive tyranny of Diotrephes, who seemed to act like a petty dictator. In his letter, John shows that his principle of loving one another *means* taking a firm stand against such influences. What is the real danger? That members see the way such leaders operate, and either leave, or *imitate such behavior themselves*.

One church suffered just such negative domination for a number of years. A great deal of hurt was caused, and many people's Christian experiences were damaged. It was not until the Lord moved that person to one side that the church was able to continue its development and growth. See how important our influence is and how we must always try to make sure we *imitate the good!*

HAPPINESS IN THE CHURCH (3 John 1-4).**How does John express his wish? 3 John 1, 2.**

John's interest is expressed in prayer and praise, a good model for us as we try to encourage one another in the truth. Sadly, churches are sometimes not happy places at all. From time to time, members complain that they do not enjoy church, that there are problems with gossiping and lack of friendliness. This indicates that the enemy is winning the battle, and we must return to the true Source of love, truth, and joy.

How are we *in the truth*? Explain your understanding of this often-used phrase.

"To walk in (RSV, 'follow') the *truth* is more than to give assent to it. He who 'walks in the truth' is an integrated Christian in whom there is no dichotomy between profession and practice. On the contrary, there is in him an exact correspondence between his creed and his conduct. Such conformity of life to the truth on the part of his children brought John *greater joy* than anything else. To him truth mattered. He did not regard theological issues as unimportant trivialities. It was from truth, believed and obeyed by his children, that he derived his greatest joy."—John R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John* (London: Tyndale Press, 1964), pp. 219, 220.

We speak about being *in the truth*. At times this claim may include some tinge of spiritual arrogance. But only as the truth shows itself in loving Christian behavior are our claims valid. And how do we reveal Christian care and concern for those around us? We surely all need to be more interested in others' spiritual welfare.

"A profession of faith and the possession of truth in the soul are two different things. The mere knowledge of truth is not enough. We may possess this, but the tenor of our thoughts may not be changed. The heart must be converted and sanctified."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 97.

For reflection: Could we speak as John does? Or is it occasionally more true to say that we take greater delight in the problems and troubles of others than in their growth in Christ? What can you do to make sure there is true happiness in the church? How can you assist your brothers and sisters to grow in Christ, without giving the impression that you are holier than they?

GAIUS—FAITHFUL FRIEND (3 John 5-8).**Why does John single out Gaius for praise? 3 John 5, 6.**

Two aspects: faithfulness and love for the members. John writes to encourage and inspire Gaius to continue developing his Christian excellence. Maybe Gaius was like most of us—a little unsure of ourselves, somewhat reluctant to take on a responsibility that will perhaps lead us into problems and confrontation. At nominating-committee time, the pastor hears so often, “I really can’t spare the time,” or “I just can’t become involved,” or “I don’t feel I can manage that.”

What the church needs—what God needs—is dedicated people who will not think of their own situation first, but people who will see how they can help the cause of God forward. In practical ways—imitating Gaius’s hospitality and encouragement—we can all do our part.

What if you do not feel able or qualified to do what you are asked?

“You have the pattern, Christ Jesus; walk in His footsteps, and you will be qualified to fill any and every position that you may be called upon to occupy. . . . You are not to feel that you are a bond slave, but a son of God.”—*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 283.

How does John suggest we use our resources? 3 John 7, 8.

If we see a need, we should try to meet it. Like Gaius, who did not try to make it another’s responsibility, we should try to help. John wrote of these visiting church workers who did not ask help of unbelievers, preferring rather to rely on the generosity of their fellow Christians. John concludes: “We Christians, then, must help these people, so that we may share in their work for the truth” (3 John 8, TEV).

“The right use of one’s self is the most valuable lesson that can be learned. We are not to do brain work, and stop there, or make physical exertion, and stop there; we are to make the best use of the various parts that compose the human machinery—brain, bone, muscle, head, and heart.”—*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 171.

DIOTREPHEES—POWER AND PRIDE (3 John 9, 10).

How does Diotrephes show the spirit that is really at work in his life? 3 John 9, 10.

Through malicious gossip, a refusal to accept other church leaders, and the abuse of church power, Diotrephes demonstrates that though he claims to have the truth, the truth is not in him. A philosophy of “the end justifies the means” characterizes those in the church who seek to further their own ambitions at the expense of true Christian conduct:

“What is lying against the truth?—It is claiming to believe the truth while the spirit, the words, the deportment, represent not Christ but Satan. To surmise evil, to be impatient and unforgiving, is lying against the truth; but love, patience, and long forbearance are in accordance with the principles of truth. Truth is ever pure, ever kind, breathing a heavenly fragrance unmixed with selfishness.”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, March 12, 1895.

What is the real contrast between Diotrephes and Gaius?

We can presume from the letter that these two men were both converts to Christianity and began with love for God. Gaius maintained that *first love*, which is expressed in doing good, particularly within the church and among its members. Diotrephes, on the other hand, treats the church like any other organization and as his own power base.

How does John describe Diotrephes' main problem? 3 John 9.

In his self-love, Diotrephes follows the precedent of Satan, who desired to be first—even above God. (See Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28.) The temptation to self-aggrandizement has affected individuals and churches and inevitably leads to sub-Christian behavior. In seeking to be preeminent, lording it over others, any such church dictator is in direct opposition to the words of Jesus: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you” (Matt. 20:25, 26, NIV).

For consideration: How can the church make sure people do not abuse their power?

DEMETRIUS—WELL-REGARDED (3 John 12).

Why is Demetrius commended? 3 John 12.

Nothing specific is mentioned, but the most important criterion is mentioned: "Truth itself speaks well of him" (3 John 12, TEV). Having spoken against Diotrephes, John wishes to identify a person who will be of support to Gaius. How important good friends are in the church, who share the same aims, and reveal by their actions their Christian convictions.

What is the highest commendation? Micah 6:8.

It is the commendation of God that you have said and acted rightly. In contrast to the power-seeking and pride of Diotrephes, Demetrius is an example of one who follows the Lord's requirements: "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8, NIV).

At the end of Job's troubles and worries, God was able to say that he was right, unlike his friends. It was even so with Demetrius. To this commendation John adds his own testimony, that Demetrius is someone he trusts. He emphasizes the point by saying, "And you know that our testimony is true" (3 John 12, NIV). See how much trust there needs to be among true Christians!

Write out what you would wish to be commended for, in humility and not pride. Is it enough to be well spoken of by others?

We all make mistakes, and our judgment may be defective. So we should not be particularly concerned to ensure that others speak well of us, but that we meet with God's approval. What do we wish to be known for? What is to be our epitaph? Sometimes people write their own, sometimes this is done by others. But for Christians, the desire is for God to write our epitaphs. To be called a "friend of God" is surely the most-yearned-for recognition.

Demetrius is to be emulated in the matters for which he was approved, though his part in Scripture is so brief. Our parts may not be major ones, but we can all seek to be commended as was Demetrius.

For reflection: If you were to write your own epitaph and describe yourself honestly, for what would you wish to be remembered? How do you wish to be regarded?

IMITATING GOOD (3 John 11, 13, 14).

It is said that we learn by copying. What are we to imitate?
3 John 11.

Unfortunately, it often seems that people choose to copy bad examples more than good ones. John closes this brief letter with this primary thought—find out what is good, and make sure to imitate that. Although he does not say so specifically, John could have followed Paul’s lead by saying, “Therefore I urge you to imitate me” (1 Cor. 4:16, NIV). And it would be harder to find a better person to imitate than John, who is such a good example because of his close relationship with Jesus.

“The pure, those who are good and do good, are very near to Jesus. The disciple whom Jesus loved most was John, because he was the closest imitator of His character and was imbued with the spirit of love.”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 11, p. 26.

Trustworthy leaders are hard to find in this world, and church leaders should truly be models of good behavior and sound teaching. Without being proud and arrogant, we can encourage others to follow what is good in any leader. For “whoever does good belongs to God” (3 John 11, TEV).

If we are searching to imitate good, where should we go?
1 Peter 2:21, 22.

Obviously to the source of goodness, God Himself. Once again, we are directed back to God in Christ, the theme of all John’s writings.

Remind yourself of all that John has had to say on this theme. For example, see John 1:18; 12:45; 14:9; 1 John 4:14, 15; 5:11, 12; 2 John 9.

John’s message should go with us, ringing in our ears. Reread John 1 and 1 John 1. See how John speaks so clearly of how God is made unmistakably plain in Jesus. And as we think of Jesus—His life, atoning death, resurrection, heavenly ministry, and His soon return—what should be *our* message to this sad and dying world?

In his closing greetings, how does John communicate his continued interest in his friends? 3 John 13, 14.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Quickly review all three of John's letters. Try to write down in 20 words or less your summary of his message.

On being in unity: "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. 3 John 2. God wants each one of us to find his place, and when each one is in his place, doing the work that God has given him, there will be perfect unity."—*The Upward Look*, p. 157.

On personal religion: "Personal religion is of the highest importance. John wrote to Gaius, 'Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth' (3 John 2). Health of body depends largely upon health of soul; therefore whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God. Personal religion is revealed by the deportment, the words, and the actions. It causes growth, till at last perfection claims the commendation of the Lord, 'Ye are complete in Him' (Colossians 2:10)." —*Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 27.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How do we achieve true happiness in the church?
2. How do we determine what is good to imitate?
3. In looking at the three persons mentioned in this letter, what insights do we have into their characters?
4. What was the main problem in Diotrephes' life?
5. What can we learn from the way John wrote his letters to these churches and members?

SUMMARY: Like the early church, today's church has many problems, outside and in. Consequently, we all need to make sure we are imitating the good, and living true and honest Christian lives. The greatest goal is to hear from God His commendation as we enter into eternal fellowship with Him and with the saved from every age.



God's Spirit Moves Mountains, Part 3

Maye Porter

Pastor Nick and Pastor Norman were not welcomed to Mamosi as they had expected. But the village leaders allowed them to stay if they would not preach. The pastors agreed, but villagers stopped by their house to "story," and stayed as the pastors had worship. The next day the pastors were delighted to be invited to speak to the village at morning worship. After worship, the religious teacher invited them to speak again that evening. The pastors spoke every morning and evening during the five days they were in the village. And during the day villagers stopped at their house to learn more of God's love.

The pastors discovered that the people did not have Bibles, and did not know even simple Bible stories. So the pastors used Bible stories from which to draw wonderful gospel lessons to satisfy the spiritual longings of the people.

On Thursday the mission plane came back as promised. This time the villagers wailed, "Don't go yet! There is so much you haven't told us!" But the pastors had to leave, so grateful villagers loaded the little plane with gifts and food from their gardens.

"Please bring us Bibles when you come back," they begged. "We want to read for ourselves the stories you have told us." Pastor Norman promised to bring Bibles when they returned. "When you come," they said earnestly, "stay longer, so you can teach us how to use our new Bibles." The pastors nodded, climbed into the plane, and waved as they sped down the grassy airstrip.

Pastor Nick and Pastor Norman are still hoping to return to Mamosi. When the mission plane returned to New Britain, it had mechanical problems, and the pastors could not get to Mamosi. The villagers are still waiting for their Bibles.

But the people of Mamosi have not given up. They have sent word to Pastor Nick confirming their desire to have the two men return. "There are now people in two other villages waiting for you to come and preach to them," the message said. The message was signed by the leader who had told them to leave the village.

God's Spirit is working, especially in isolated areas such as the mountains of New Britain. Pray that Pastors Nick and Norman can return to Mamosi soon. Pray for more preachers and the means to send them to all the villages that have asked for God's Word in New Britain, the South Pacific, and throughout the world.

Maye Porter is associate child-ministries director in the Papua New Guinea Union Mission.

For Current Newsbreak, Call 1-800-648-5824.

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Lessons for Third Quarter, 1997

The third quarter Sabbath School lessons, entitled "*Parables of Jesus*," focus on the stories Jesus told to reveal God's love and grace.

Lesson 1: The Lost and Found.

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Luke 15.

MEMORY TEXT: Ezekiel 34:11, 12.

KEY THOUGHT: Salvation begins with God's love and mercy. It comes not as much through our searching for God as it comes through God's searching for us.

OUTLINE:

- The Lost Sheep (Luke 15:1-7)
- The Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-11)
- The Younger son (Luke 15:11-20)
- The Waiting Father (Luke 15:20-24)
- The Older Son (Luke 15:25-32)

Lesson 2: Claiming the Treasure.

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matt. 13:44-46; Luke 7:36-50; 12:13-34; 14:25-35.

MEMORY TEXT: Luke 12:34

KEY THOUGHT: The Father's love and grace compels Him to search for us. And once He finds us, the same grace offers to restore us to our original position as His children. How we respond to His offer determines the course of our lives.

OUTLINE:

- The Perfect Pearl (Matt. 13:45, 46)
- Buried Treasure (Matt. 13:44)
- Unfinished Towers; Outnumbered Kings (Luke 14:25-35)
- Where is Your Treasure (Luke 12:13-34)
- The Two Debtors (Luke 7:36-50)

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