

Salvation *and the* End Time



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 14:9; Zeph. 3:17; John 1:1–3; Rom. 8:38, 39; Ps. 91:15, 16; Rev. 14:6, 7; Eph. 1:4, 5.*

Memory Text: “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*).

One fascinating but crucial difference between Christianity and non-Christian religions is that while the others emphasize what their founders have taught them, they do not emphasize what their founders *have done for them*. And that's because whatever their founders may have done for them, it cannot save them. All these leaders can do is try to teach the people how to “save” themselves.

In contrast, Christians emphasize not only what Jesus taught but what He did. This is because what Christ did provides the only means by which we are saved. Christ's incarnation in human flesh (*Rom. 8:3*), His death on the cross (*Rom. 5:8*), His resurrection (*1 Pet. 1:3*), and His ministry in heaven (*Heb. 7:25*)—these acts alone are what save us. It's certainly not anything in ourselves. “If you would gather together everything that is good and holy and noble and lovely in man and then present the subject to the angels of God as acting a part in the salvation of the human soul or in merit, the proposition would be rejected as treason.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 24.

This wonderful truth is especially important for us amid the perils and deceptions of the last days.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 28.

The Love of the Father

Not too long before the cross, Jesus spoke with His inner circle about how people can come to the Father through Him. It was then that Philip said: “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us” (*John 14:8, NKJV*).

How did Jesus respond to Philip? See *John 14:9*. What does His response teach us about the Father? What misconceptions about God should His response clear up?

Some people say that the God of the Old Testament is a God of justice in comparison to the God of the New Testament, who is full of mercy and grace and forgiveness. They draw a distinction between the two that is not valid. He is the same God, with the same traits, in both the Old and New Testaments.

One reason Christ came to this world was to reveal the truth about God the Father. Through the centuries, wrong ideas about Him and His character had become widespread, not just among the heathen but among God’s chosen nation, as well. “The earth was dark through misapprehension of God. That the gloomy shadows might be lightened, that the world might be brought back to God, Satan’s deceptive power was to be broken.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22. These were some of the reasons that Jesus came to this earth.

God does not change. If we knew all the facts surrounding events in the Old Testament, we would find God just as merciful in the Old Testament as He is in the New. Scripture declares, “God is love” (*1 John 4:8*) and that God does not change. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (*Heb. 13:8, NRSV*).

Remember, too, it was the God of the Old Testament who hung on the cross.

This God is also gracious, compassionate, and slow to anger (*Ps. 145:8*). He is faithful, has unfailing love (*Ps. 143:8*), and delights in His followers (*Ps. 147:11*). God plans to prosper people and give them hope (*Jer. 29:11*). In His love, He will no longer rebuke but rejoices over His people with singing (*Zeph. 3:17*). This, and so much more, is what God the Father is truly like.

Think about the fact that Jesus represents God the Father. Why is this such a wonderful and hopeful truth, especially for those who sometimes might be afraid of God?

The Love of Christ

Sin separated the human race from God; a yawning chasm opened between them, and unless that chasm closed, humanity was doomed to eternal destruction. The gulf was deep and dangerous. Yet, it took something utterly incredible to solve the problem of sin and to reunite sinful humanity with a righteous and holy God. It took One eternal with God Himself, One as divine as God Himself, to become a human being and, in that humanity, offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sins.

Read John 1:1–3, 14 and Philippians 2:5–8. What do they teach us about who Jesus is?

Christ was eternal and not dependent upon anyone or anything for His existence. He was God—not the mere outward appearance of God but God Himself. His essential nature was divine and eternal. Jesus retained that divinity but became a human being in order to keep the law in human flesh and to die as a Substitute for all those who have broken the law, which is all of us (*Rom. 3:23*).

Christ became human, without any advantage over other humans. He kept God’s law, not through His internal divine power but by relying upon the same external divine power available to any other human.

Jesus was fully God and fully human. This means that the One who upholds “all things by the word of his power” (*Heb. 1:3*) was the same One who was found as a “babe lying in a manger” (*Luke 2:16*). This means that the One who “is before all things, and in Him all things consist” (*Col. 1:17, NKJV*) is the same One who, as a human child, “increased in wisdom and stature” (*Luke 2:52*). This means that the One without whom “nothing was made that was made” (*John 1:3, NKJV*) was the same One who was “murdered by hanging on a tree” (*Acts 5:30, NKJV*).

If all this reveals to us Christ’s love for us, and Christ’s love for us is but a manifestation of the Father’s love for us, then no wonder we have so many reasons to rejoice and be thankful!

Read Romans 8:38, 39. How does what we read in the study today give us powerful reasons to trust in what Paul says to us here?

The Love of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit has been misunderstood almost as much as the Father. Some theologians have thought of the Spirit as the love between the Father and the Son. In other words, the Spirit would be merely affection between the Father and the Son. This means that He would be diminished to a relationship between two members of the Godhead and not a member Himself.

But Scripture proves His personhood. Christians are baptized in His name along with the Father and Son (*Matt. 28:19*). The Spirit glorifies Christ (*John 16:14*). The Spirit convicts people (*John 16:8*). He can be grieved (*Eph. 4:30*). He is a Comforter (*John 14:16*), Helper (*NKJV*), Counselor (*RSV*). He teaches (*Luke 12:12*), intercedes (*Rom. 8:26*), and sanctifies (*1 Pet. 1:2*). Christ said the Spirit guides people into all truth (*John 16:13*).

In short, the Holy Spirit is God, as are the Father and the Son. Together, they are One God.

Everything the Spirit does reveals divine love. What are some of the things He does? *Luke 12:12, John 16:8–13, Acts 13:2.*

The greatest evidence that the Holy Spirit is God is the incarnation of Christ. Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit (*Matt. 1:20*). Only God could “create” like that.

The Holy Spirit performed two opposite miracles for Christ. First, He brought the omnipresent Christ into the womb of Mary. Christ ascended to heaven confined within that human body. Second, the Spirit brings Christ confined by His humanity and, in another inexplicable miracle, makes Him present to Christians around the world.

Thus, the Holy Spirit, along with the Father and the Son, is working in our behalf. “The Godhead was stirred with pity for the race, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit gave Themselves to the working out of the plan of redemption.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health*, p. 222.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit love us equally and are working in order to save us into God’s eternal kingdom. How can we, then, neglect so great a salvation?

How much comfort can we draw from the fact that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all at work for our eternal good?

Assurance of Salvation

Some Seventh-day Adventists wonder if they will be saved. They lack assurance and long to know their future, in terms of eternal life. They work hard to be good enough and yet know that they come up short. They look within and find little to encourage them in their journey through life.

When we see the immense gap between the character of Jesus and our own character or when we read a text such as “strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (*Matt. 7:14*), who of us doesn’t have moments when we wonder if we are going to make it?

To be prepared for the end time, people must have assurance of salvation in the present. They must revel in the reality of salvation in order to face the future unafraid. Yet, as we have seen, all the living Persons of the Godhead are at work to save us. Thus, we can and should live with the assurance of our salvation.

Read the following texts. What hope and assurances come from them regarding salvation and what God has done for us and promises to do?

Ps. 91:15, 16 _____

Joel 2:31, 32 _____

John 10:28 _____

Rom. 10:9–13 _____

1John 5:11–13 _____

We are called, even commanded, to live holy lives, but these lives are the result of having been saved by Christ, not the means of achieving that salvation. Although we must be faithful, even unto death, we must lean always on the gift as our only hope of salvation. God’s people will be found faithful and obedient in the last days, a faithfulness and obedience that arises from the assurance of what Christ has done for them.

The Everlasting Gospel

Read Revelation 14:6, 7. What is the “everlasting gospel”?

The gospel is referred to here as “everlasting.” This is further evidence that God does not change. An unchanging God has an unchanging gospel. This eternal gospel gives assurance to all who are willing to accept it. The gospel reveals the unchanging love of God, and it’s this message that needs to go to the world. Everyone needs a chance to hear it, which is why God has called His people to spread it.

“Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (*Eph. 1:4, 5, NKJV*). What more does this tell us about just how “everlasting” the gospel really is?

We were chosen in Him “before the foundation of the world.” Talk about an “everlasting” gospel! Even before the Creation of this world, God’s plan was for us to have salvation in Him.

Look at some of the words here: “chose,” “predestined,” “good pleasure,” “adoption.” Look at how much these two verses point to God’s desire for us to have eternal life “in Him.” And the fact that God did all this in eternity past (*see also 2 Thess. 2:13, 2 Tim. 1:9*) points so clearly to His grace and shows that our salvation comes not from anything we can do or from any creature merit but totally as an act arising from God’s own loving character. How could salvation come from anything we could do if we were elected to have that salvation in Him even before we existed? The choice is for us to accept or reject it.

And how is this election made manifest in the lives of the elect? To “be holy and without blame before Him in love” (*Eph. 1:4, NKJV*). This, too, is what we have been chosen for.

We are called to spread the “everlasting gospel” to the world as part of the end-time message prior to Christ’s return. Why must we know and experience the reality of the “everlasting gospel” in our own lives before we can share it with others?

Further Thought: We can have assurance of salvation, but we must not be presumptuous about it. Is there such a thing as a false assurance of salvation? Of course. And Jesus warned about it, too, saying: “Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” ’ ’ (Matt. 7:21–23, NKJV).

These people made two fatal mistakes. First, despite whatever great things they had done in the Lord’s name, they weren’t doing the Lord’s will, which was to obey His law. Jesus didn’t say, “Depart from me” you who were “not sinless,” or you who were not “without fault,” or who were “not perfect.” Instead, He described them as “lawless”—a translation of *anomian*, or “without law.” Second, notice their emphasis on themselves and on what they had accomplished: *Didn’t we do this in your name? Or Didn’t we do that in your name? Or Didn’t we do this other thing, and all in your name, too?* Please! How far removed from Christ must they have been to point to their own works in an attempt to justify themselves before God? The only works that will save us are Christ’s, credited to us by faith. Here is where our assurance exists—not in ourselves or in our works but only in what Christ has done for us. You want assurance? Obey God’s law and rest only in the merits of Christ’s righteousness, and you will have all the assurance you need.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Martin Luther reportedly said: “When I look to myself, I don’t know how I can be saved. When I look to Jesus, I don’t know how I can be lost.” What great wisdom is found in these words? Why is it a good idea to keep this sentiment ever before us?
- 2 Dwell more on this idea that we have been chosen for salvation even before the foundation of the world. Why does this not mean that everyone will be saved? If people are not saved, will it be because God didn’t choose them or because of the choices they made? Discuss this question in class.
- 3 How does the reality of the great-controversy scenario help us to deal better with the reality of evil even in a world that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit love?

Introducing God

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

A coworker asked Seventh-day Adventist business executive David Kim about his favorite weekend activities, while making small talk at a funeral.

“I go to church and spend time with family,” David replied.

The coworker said he also liked to spend time with family, causing David to realize that he didn’t want to discuss faith.

The two men chatted about family. Then David said, “We have talked about family for a while, now how about faith?”

The coworker said quickly, “I am an atheist.”

“Why are you an atheist?” David asked.

The resulting conversation drew in other funeral guests and planted a seed that David hopes will lead to a Bible study.

David says it’s simple to bring God into a casual conversation. Here are some ways that he responds to everyday questions:

- *How was the weekend?* I had a great weekend! On Saturday we went to church, and on Sunday we went to the supermarket.
- *How did you meet your wife?* We met at church in Chicago.
- *Do you still play the cello?* Not like I used to, but I do teach my son, and I also have begun working with a Christian singer who has put together some interesting recording projects on the books of Daniel and Revelation.
- *What do you do for fun?* I spend most of my free time on activities related to my family and faith.
- *How do you manage your ambition versus your desire for work-life balance?* This can be a real challenge, but one of the most helpful things for me—and I don’t know how you feel about these things—is my prayer life.
- *Do you have any advice for how to be successful at work?* One of the things I find most helpful is spending time every morning in prayer and reading the Bible. It helps me to start every day focused on the big picture. David likens himself to a fly fisherman.



“Fly fisherman are always casting,” he said. “I try to put bait out there and allow the hungry fish to respond.”

Coworkers have asked for more information about God through such conversations, and David conducts two to four Bible studies a week. Two coworkers have been baptized.

David Kim is a Seventh-day Adventist business executive and the founder of the Nicodemus Society, an organization that shares the Adventist message with the wealthy, worldly, and well-educated.