

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*), and 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 _____

1 John 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 fishermen 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.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Daniel 12:13*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Rediscover God's love for humans and His plan to save them from death and evil.

Feel: Appreciate God's love, even though he or she does not deserve it.

Do: Trust and love God and love his or her neighbor in turn even if he or she does not see an immediate response.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: God's Salvation Is Beyond Me.

- Ⓐ Why does God love you?
- Ⓑ Is it possible to understand God's love? Explain. What is God's love?
- Ⓒ What is the historical evidence of God's love for you?

II. Feel: God's Love Is Real.

- Ⓐ Why can I be sure of God's love?
- Ⓑ What did God do to make His love a reality?
- Ⓒ Is feeling the love of God enough to convince you that He loves you?

III. Do: God's Love Is Contagious.

- Ⓐ Why is loving your neighbor a sign that God has saved you?
- Ⓑ Why are you responsible for the salvation of your neighbor?
- Ⓒ Why does your faith in God help you to love your enemy?

► **Summary:** The reality of God's love is made manifest in His design to save humans in spite of themselves, and even though they do not deserve it.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *1 John 4:10*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The love of God is the only reason He saved humankind. The love of God is not made up of just emotions and nice words. What makes the biblical revelation of divine love unique and yet universal is that God did not reveal Himself through an emotional and mystical experience or through beautiful and insightful wisdom. God revealed Himself in the reality of history. It is because the good news of God’s salvation is for everyone and because salvation is real that the crowning event of salvation can take place only at the end of human history.

Just for Teachers: The purpose of this lesson is to make God’s love and His plan of salvation real to your students. Salvation cannot reach its ultimate fulfillment in this broken world, limited as it is by sinful human flesh. Therefore, salvation can happen only at the end of time. Although we are sure of salvation, all salvation depends on God, and so only the coming of Christ, at the end of days, will make the reality of salvation possible. Although we may experience miracles and blessings, these gifts are just sparks that suggest the reality of fire but are not the fire.

Opening Discussion: How does our experience of God’s love in this present life help us to understand and imagine the ultimate fulfillment of God’s salvation at the end of time? What in this life is evidence of the future kingdom of God?

Questions for Discussion:

- ① Discuss with your class why having hope in the kingdom of God is important at the end of time.
- ② Why is salvation through Christ at the end of time the only possible salvation?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: In our secular societies, it is difficult to speak of the kingdom of God. This language sounds utopian. People are concerned with this earth and with this present life; they are largely materialists, interested only in the reality they can see and enjoy now. They are not interested in a vague kingdom, located in heaven, that will take place in a faraway future.

The challenge is to shake this group of people up—to awaken them to the need to be saved. This lesson will propose a strategy in three steps to reach this group. First and foremost, this group will need to discover God’s love for them. Only then will they long for His kingdom, where they will live with Him; and only then will they be ready to believe in Him.

Bible Commentary

I. God Is Love (Review 1 John 4:8–10 and Exodus 34:5–7 with your class.)

God’s salvation begins in His love. To speak of a kingdom of God and of the salvation of God to people who do not believe in God and have not experienced a loving relationship with Him is vain. A knowledge and experience of the love of God is, therefore, essential. And for that knowledge of God, we turn to His Word.

The whole Bible defines God as love. In the Old Testament, God’s first action is Creation. God’s love is not a response to what we could have done. God loved us even before we existed. This precedence of God’s love over our love, which is simply our response to His love, is an affirmation of the way He saves us. God does not save us because of what we do but because of who He is. This belief is a part of Daniel’s plea to God: “ ‘Do not delay for Your own sake’ ” (*Dan. 9:19, NKJV*). God does not save us because we love Him or because we obey Him. Salvation is not based on our merits, but “for His own sake.” For this reason, God’s proclamation of His love precedes and founds the gift of the law: “ ‘The LORD, the LORD God merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth’ ” (*Exod. 34:6, NKJV*). And even in the law, God’s action of salvation precedes the commandments: “ ‘I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage’ ” (*Exod. 20:2, NKJV*).

We find this same quality of divine love in the New Testament: “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (*Rom. 5:8, NKJV*). Christ died for us and loved us even when we were not lovable. He loved us, despite us. Love is also the characteristic of the Holy Spirit, who is called the “Comforter” (*John 14:16*)—that is, the One who consoles and embraces us when we grieve and when we suffer. The Greek word *parakletos*, “Comforter,” is used in the Greek Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word *nakham*, meaning “console” (*Jer. 16:7, Hos. 13:14, Isa. 57:18*).

Consider This: What lesson can we learn about the process of salvation from the fact that God loved us first? Why did God give the Sabbath to humans, despite their not working with Him during the Creation week? In what ways is the Sabbath a sign of God’s salvation by grace?

II. Jesus Is Surety (Review Hebrews 7:22 and Romans 10:13 with your class.)

The reason one can be sure of salvation is that salvation depends on God. In a sense, our future salvation is related to the experience of our salvation in our present life. This double application of the kingdom of God is found in Jesus' address to the Pharisees and to His disciples. To the Pharisees, Jesus emphasizes the present and personal dimension of salvation: " 'the kingdom of God is within you' " (*Luke 17:21, NKJV*). But when Jesus speaks to His disciples, He refers to salvation as a future and universal event: " 'as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day' " (*Luke 17:24, NKJV*). The reason for this paradox is that the disciples, who already have Jesus in their hearts, look forward to His future coming. On the other hand, the Pharisees, who have not yet experienced the kingdom within themselves, simply feel they do not need the future kingdom of God. In fact, the closer Jesus is to us in our present life, the more we will be sure of His coming and the more we will long for it.

Consider This: Why is it impossible to be a good Christian who loves Jesus and not wait for the Second Coming? Why and how should the hope of the future kingdom of God affect our present life?

III. God, From Everlasting to Everlasting (Review Psalm 90:2 and Revelation 14:6, 7 with your class.)

John sees an angel flying in the midst of heaven, preaching "the everlasting gospel" (*Rev. 14:6, NKJV*). The gospel is qualified as "everlasting" precisely because it derives from "our Lord Jesus Christ . . . who alone has immortality" (*1 Tim. 6:14–16, NKJV*). To speak of an "everlasting gospel" is to speak about God, a way of affirming the gospel as the highest spiritual goal we can embrace. The apostle Paul employs this same reasoning when he urges his followers to compete "for an imperishable crown" (*1 Cor. 9:25, NKJV*), the only award that is worth fighting for (*1 Cor. 9:26*). This everlasting gospel, spoken of by John in Revelation, points to the two divine actions that frame human history—the judgment, at the end, and the Creation, in the beginning (*Rev. 14:7*). Human history, which seems to run at random toward the abyss, now has a sense of purpose and direction: this purpose comes from the God of eternity and is oriented toward Him.

Consider This: Why is the hope of eternal life the only response to our human experience of life's absurdity? Discuss with the class their experiences of death. What thoughts crossed their minds when they were confronted with death? Why is death not a normal ending?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: The temptation of Seventh-day Adventist believers regarding identity is twofold. We may put too much emphasis on the “Seventh-day” aspect of our name, which assigns too much consequence to our temporality and to our world here and now, or we may overemphasize the “Adventist” aspect of our identity, which disconnects us from the world and turns us into fanatics or dreamers. Underscore for your class how vital it is that we keep in balance the tension between the two components of our identity.

Discussion Activities:

- ❶ Discuss the difference between God’s promises of His kingdom and a politician’s promises.
- ❷ Address any doubts that members of the class may have about the reality and importance of the kingdom of God. How can we proclaim the reality of God’s kingdom and still stay in touch with the reality of this world? What is the effect of our hope on our daily life?
- ❸ Discuss the connection between the two kingdoms of God, which have been called the “already” (the good news of present assurance of salvation) and the “not yet” (the good news of the Second Coming).

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: What are some concrete ways your class can make God’s love real among the members of your church community and in the world at large? Choose to do one or more of the activities below as a witness of God’s love.

Activities:

- ❶ Visit someone who is elderly or a single parent, burdened with the demands of caring for a family. Does he or she need help preparing meals, buying groceries, doing yard work, finding childcare, etc.? Offer your services once or twice a week as a demonstration of God’s love.
- ❷ Write an encouraging note to someone who is going through a difficult time. Share your favorite Bible text in the note and what hope it has given you.
- ❸ Make a care package for someone in another state or country or for one serving overseas in the military. Let this person know how much you care.
- ❹ Invite a non-Sabbath keeper to share a Sabbath meal with you in your home. Introduce him or her to the God of the Sabbath through fellowship with your family and friends.