

The Father, *the* Son, and *the* Spirit



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *John 14:10, 24; Gen. 3:7–9; John 16:27, 28; John 16:7–11; John 17:1–26.*

Memory Text: “The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (*John 14:26, NKJV*).

The Gospel of John is a mosaic of themes. John calls upon signs (miracles) to show that Jesus is the Messiah promised by the prophets. John uses an array of witnesses to proclaim Jesus as the Christ. He also uses the “I AM” statements to point to His divinity.

All three members of the Godhead are mentioned in John 1 (*John 1:1–4, 14, 18, 32–34*). For centuries humans have tried fully to understand the nature of the Godhead, but because we can’t, many reject the idea. How foolish, though, to reject something just because we can’t fully understand it or because it doesn’t fit within the narrow limits of human reasoning.

John says that if you want to understand God, you must look at Jesus and what has been revealed in the Word. This approach opens to us a whole new world of relationships—among the Three Members of the Godhead, between the Members of the Godhead and humans, and among humans themselves. This week’s lesson looks at how the Gospel of John presents the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but now within the context of the farewell discourse (*John 13–17*).

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 14.

The Heavenly Father

The Gospel of John is written from the standpoint of the overall biblical narrative, beginning with our origins. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (*Gen. 1:1*). Or: In the beginning the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit created the heavens and the earth. They are the Source of all that exists. They created the universe, including the beings who inhabit it. On our planet there was a special creation of life, and the most special of that creation was humanity. And God’s purpose for creating humanity was that we should live in loving harmony with Him and with one another.

Unfortunately, Lucifer brought sin into this world. Sin is, among other things, a disruption of our relationship with God. It misrepresents who God is. Thus, Jesus took upon Himself our human nature in order to restore knowledge of God and to bring salvation to humanity.

While here, Jesus submitted His life to the Father, living according to His guidance. He said, “I and My Father are one” (*John 10:30, NKJV*). “The Father is in Me, and I in Him” (*John 10:38, NKJV*). “If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me” (*John 10:37, NKJV*).

What were some of the roles of the Father, as described in the following passages?

John 3:16, 17; John 6:57 _____

John 5:22, 30 _____

John 6:32; John 14:10, 24 _____

John 6:45 _____

John 15:16, John 16:23 _____

These verses present the Father in close connection with Jesus Christ, His Son. The Father has intimate contact with our world and a deep investment in our salvation. What does this truth teach us about God’s love for us?

Jesus and the Father

We were created by the Godhead for a personal relationship with Them (*Gen. 1:26, 27*). Yet, because of sin, that relationship was radically disrupted. We can see the immediate impact of this disruption in the Garden of Eden story.

Read Genesis 3:7–9. How does this reveal the breach that sin caused, and what does it mean that it was God seeking them out, not vice versa?

The intention of the Godhead was to offer healing to all humanity for that breach caused by sin, even if all humanity would not accept what They offered.

To accomplish the restoration of this relationship, one Member of the Godhead became human. Thus, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, manifesting the glory of God (*John 1:14–18*). As a result, humanity has received His fullness and grace. This is what Jesus came to share, to declare the glory of God so that the relationship broken by sin might be restored, at least to all who were willing to accept by faith what has been offered them in Christ Jesus.

What wonderful hope is seen for us in these texts? *John 1:1, 2; John 5:16–18; John 6:69; John 10:10, 30; John 20:28.*

“In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 530. Yet, as the incarnate Son who had “emptied himself” (*Phil. 2:7, RSV*) of the exercise of His prerogatives, Christ, speaking of His existence on earth as a man among men, could refer to His possession of life as a gift from God. “The divinity of Christ is the believer’s assurance of eternal life.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 530.

God was not recognized by humanity (*John 17:25*). Thus, He sent His only Son (*John 9:4, John 16:5*) in order that He, the Father, might be known.

In the context of the cosmos, an atheist wrote, “In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves.” What does the Bible teach, which shows just how wrong this man is?

Knowing the Son Is Knowing the Father

Throughout the Gospel of John, the apostle describes how Jesus, the Son, does activities that point to the Father. Jesus explains who the Father is and shows what His relationship to our world is. This is all in keeping with John 1:18, which says that He makes the Father known (Greek *exēgeomai*: to explain, interpret, exposit). Again and again Jesus does this. The word Father (*patēr*) appears 136 times in John and 18 times in 1–3 John, more than one-third of the entire uses in the New Testament. The farewell discourse is one of the prime locations in the Gospel where Jesus makes the Father known.

Jesus was the Father’s representative on earth, and He came to live out, in human flesh, the Father’s will. In fact, Jesus said that in all things He sought to do the Father’s will, and not His own (*John 5:30*). This may seem at first a startling statement, but it shows how totally surrendered Jesus, as a human being, was to the Father.

Jesus said, too, that He had been sent by the Father to finish His work—the salvation of humanity—and that the Father Himself bore witness to His work (*John 5:36–38*).

Jesus proclaimed that the Father sent Him to serve as the only one through whom humanity may come to the Father (*John 6:40, 44*). The Father wants people to have the eternal life found in Jesus, who promises to raise them up in the resurrection.

What do the following texts teach us about the relationship between Jesus and the Father? *John 7:16; John 8:38; John 14:10, 23; John 15:1, 9, 10; John 16:27, 28; John 17:3.*

Jesus’ claims about His relationship to the Father are astonishing. He asserts that all of His teachings are the teachings of the Father; that all He says He had personally heard from the Father; that belief in Him is the same as belief in the Father; that both His very words and His works are all of the Father; and that He and the Father are united in loving and working for the salvation of humanity. What a powerful testimony to the closeness of Jesus to His Father in heaven!

How would your life be changed if your thoughts and actions were fully an expression of God’s will for your life? That is, how can we better live out what we know from Jesus is God’s will for our lives?

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is not as prominent in the Gospel of John as the Father and the Son are. Yet, His role is crucial to the success of Jesus' mission.

Read John 1:10–13. What does this text teach us about the importance of the Holy Spirit for conversion?

In the first chapter of John, we can see just how central the role of the Holy Spirit is. John tells us that as many as received the Word (that is, as many as believed in Him) became children of God, those “who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (*John 1:13, NKJV*). This comes only from the work of the Holy Spirit.

What do the following passages tell of the activities of the Holy Spirit? *John 3:5–8, John 6:63, John 14:26, John 15:26, John 16:7–11.*

“In describing to His disciples the office work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus sought to inspire them with the joy and hope that inspired His own heart. He rejoiced because of the abundant help He had provided for His church. The Holy Spirit was the highest of all gifts that He could solicit from His Father for the exaltation of His people. The Spirit was to be given as a regenerating agent, and without this the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail. The power of evil had been strengthening for centuries, and the submission of men to this satanic captivity was amazing. Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

What a blessing, then, to receive the Holy Spirit, who certifies that God is true (*John 3:33*). It is the Spirit that convicts of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment (*John 16:8–11*). Hence, the key for us to know what is right, what is true, and what is good is our submission of our reason and life experiences to the Word of God through the convicting and convincing power of the Holy Spirit.

The Prayer of Jesus

John 17 is sometimes called the high priestly prayer of Jesus. It concludes the farewell discourse. Jesus came to this earth so that humanity might be restored, ultimately, to its original personal relationship with God. He faithfully performed the signs that God gave Him to do. In words and acts, He communicated God to the people.

Jesus would soon be leaving this earth. He desired to share once again His love for His disciples. He wanted them to understand the close relationship between Himself, the Father, and the Holy Spirit. And He wanted to bring them into the same personal relationship with God the Father and the Spirit that He Himself had.

Read John 17:1–26. What words or phrases in this chapter express the desire of Jesus for a close relationship of love between Himself, the Father, and His disciples?

Many read John 17 to mean that the only thing that matters is unity and love. No question, God's purpose is to restore us to a personal relationship with Him and with all people. But a more careful reading suggests a much more vital connection between love and truth.

“ ‘This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God’ ” (*John 17:3, NKJV*), not God, whoever we think He is. “ ‘I have made your name known to those whom you gave me, . . . and they have kept your word . . . and know in truth that I came from you’ ” (*John 17:6, 8, NRSV*). “ ‘Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth’ ” (*John 17:17, NKJV*).

Christ came to reveal the Father. This revelation was important because of the many misconceptions about God. The Gospel of John shows how seriously Jesus took this mission. He rightly represented God's Word and actions. If truth did not matter, why go to such lengths?

Jesus lived a life of great difficulty ultimately to be rejected by the religious authorities. He suffered indifference from the people and even, at times, from His own disciples. One of His disciples betrayed Him, and another denied Him three times. He went through an unremitting trial and died on a cross at the hands of the very ones He came to save.

How can you better reflect the love of God, such as exists between Jesus and the Father, in your own life?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “‘Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled,’ ” pp. 662–680, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Additional Note on [John] Chapter 1,” *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 911–919.

In assessing who Jesus is, His opponents judged by human standards “‘according to the flesh’ ” (*John 8:15, NKJV*). This is probably even worse than judging “by mere appearances” (*John 7:24, NIV*). Here they resorted to the criteria of the flesh, of fallen humanity in a fallen world, without the compelling control of the Spirit (*see John 3:3–7*). They saw His “flesh,” as it were, but never contemplated the possibility that He could be the Word made flesh (*John 1:14*). To regard Christ by such limited criteria is to weigh Him from a worldly point of view (*2 Cor. 5:16*).

“The Comforter is called ‘the Spirit of truth.’ His work is to define and maintain the truth. He first dwells in the heart as the Spirit of truth, and thus He becomes the Comforter. There is comfort and peace in the truth, but no real peace or comfort can be found in falsehood. It is through false theories and traditions that Satan gains his power over the mind. By directing men to false standards, he misshapes the character. Through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit speaks to the mind, and impresses truth upon the heart. Thus He exposes error, and expels it from the soul. It is by the Spirit of truth, working through the word of God, that Christ subdues His chosen people to Himself.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Eternal life is to know God (*John 17:3*). What does it mean to know God, as opposed to merely knowing certain facts about Him, that is, that He is mighty or loving or a God of justice? If someone were to ask you, “Do you know God?” what would you say? How does Jesus fit in with your answer?
- 2 In practical, everyday terms, what is implied by Jesus’ words “Thy word is truth” (*John 17:17*)?
- 3 Jesus prayed, “‘I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one’ ” (*John 17:15, NKJV*). How do our own choices impact how well this prayer can be answered in our own lives?

A Dream in Dallas

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Samuel declared that he had no interest in Bible studies. “But you marked that you were interested on a Bible-study interest card,” said the caller, a Bible worker from the Dallas First Seventh-day Adventist Church in the U.S. state of Texas. He and other Bible workers were following up on cards distributed by the church. “Well, I’m not interested,” Samuel said.

The caller placed the Bible-study interest card aside.

A week later, another Bible worker called Samuel.

“I’m not interested,” Samuel said.

The next week, the Bible worker called again.

“How much will the Bible studies cost?” Samuel asked.

“Nothing.”

At the first Bible study, Samuel said he and his wife had been looking for a church. Their son had invited them to his church, but they had been offended by a sermon about the pope and the seventh-day Sabbath. “I’ll never set foot inside a Seventh-day Adventist church again,” Samuel said.

The Bible worker prayed silently and continued the Bible study.

After several weeks, the Bible worker invited Samuel to evangelistic meetings at the Dallas First Seventh-day Adventist Church. He wondered what Samuel would say. Samuel agreed to go.

At the first meeting, Samuel looked around the church with great interest. The building had a unique architecture, with a rounded sanctuary, a rounded ceiling, and pews curved around the platform. Samuel sought out the Bible worker. “I need to talk to you,” he said. The Bible worker was helping to prepare for the meeting, and he asked Samuel if he could wait. Samuel agreed and sat down. He listened attentively to the evangelist’s sermon about Daniel 2. Afterward, he found the Bible worker and blurted out, “I want to be baptized!” The Bible worker was shocked and exclaimed, “What?”

Samuel said he had had a dream 18 years earlier. “In the dream, Jesus led me to a church and said, ‘This is My church,’ ” he said. “When I walked into the church this evening, I recognized it immediately. Finally, I’ve found the church from my dream. I want to be baptized.”

The Bible worker took Samuel to the evangelist, who was equally surprised to hear about the dream. What made the story even more remarkable was that the church had burned down and a new building had been constructed 13 years earlier. Samuel had seen the new church in his dream five years before it was constructed.



“Everything is possible when we cooperate with God in His mission,” said the evangelist, Slavik Ostapenko, now pastor of the Spokane Slavic Seventh-day Adventist Church in Washington State.