

**Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes**  
**Fourth Quarter 2018: *Oneness in Christ***  
**Lesson 10 Unity *and* Broken Relationships**

**Read for this week's study**

2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 1–25; 2 Corinthians 10:12–15; Romans 5:8–11; Ephesians 4:26; Matthew 18:15–17.

**Memory Text**

“For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Romans 5:10, NKJV).

**Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide**

- I. Introduction
- II. Restored Friendship
- III. From Slave to Son
- IV. Spiritual Gifts for Unity
- V. Forgiveness
- VI. Restoration and Unity
- VII. Further Study

**Questions and Notes for Consideration**

**Facilitator: Daniel Duda**

1. “In this week’s lesson, we will focus on restored relationships and how our human relationships impact our oneness in Christ. The ministry of the Holy Spirit involves bringing people closer to God and to one another. It includes breaking down the barriers in our relationship with God and breaking down barriers in our relationships with one another. In short, the greatest demonstration of the power of the gospel is not necessarily what the church says but how the church lives.” (Sabbath afternoon)
2. This week we look at the stories of John Mark and Onesimus. What can we learn from their lives that would inspire us in our journey today? What are the similarities and what are the differences between them?
3. Why is investing in others a better way to live? Why are so many of us reluctant to do it? Are there some in our immediate sphere of influence who could benefit from our care?

4. What is the role of spiritual gifts in: a) the New Testament; b) the work of ministry; c) as an agent of unity? How can we live our lives in a way that our Spiritual Gifts become a unifying agent in our local community of believers?
5. How can forgiveness be a game changer in relationships? How can forgiveness be abused and result in destroyed relationships?
6. “Our repentance and confession do not create reconciliation. Christ’s life and his death on the cross did; our part is to accept what was done for us. It is true that we cannot receive the blessings of forgiveness until we confess our sins. This does not mean that our confession creates forgiveness in God’s heart. Forgiveness was in His heart all the time. Confession, instead, enables us to receive it (1 John 1:9).”  
(Wednesday’s lesson)
7. If forgiveness was in God’s heart all the time, then what does the life and the death of Jesus on the cross accomplish?
8. Which part of Matthew 18:15-17 is the most difficult to put into practice and why? How can conflicts be used positively this side of eternity? What is the meaning of the words of Jesus, “if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector”? (Matthew 18:17) How did Jesus treat pagans and tax collectors?
9. What is the greatest thing holding us back from the kind of unity that Christ prayed for? What is the connection between the level of unity needed in order to reach the world and “finishing the work”? How was it in the early church? How do you imagine it to be at the end of ages?
10. If the gospel of Jesus is about the healing and transformation of relationships, what are the implications for how we “do” church?

### Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Obviously Jesus did not die to win his Father. And how clear Paul is on this. Look quickly at the remaining verses. 2 Corinthians 5:19: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.” (RSV)

Nowhere ever does the Bible suggest that God had to be reconciled to us. Never once! But God paid the price to reconcile us to himself! Nor did Jesus die to pay some mere legal penalty. He died to reveal the truth about God and the falsity of Satan’s charges. And even the angels had to learn this. Look at Colossians 1:20: “. . . and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace [not war, but], making peace by the blood of his cross.” (RSV)

As Jesus said in the next verse, John 12:32: “When I am lifted up from the earth I will draw everyone to me.” (GNB) Not all men, everyone in the whole family of the universe. You see, viewed in the larger setting of the great controversy, the way in which Jesus suffered and died is the greatest revelation of the truth about God and his government that the universe will ever

see or ever need. Correctly understood, the message of the cross is final defeat for the adversary. No wonder Satan has worked so hard to obscure and misrepresent and even pervert the meaning of the cross. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #8, "The Most Costly and Convincing Evidence" recorded March, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/8MMCAG>*

Lou: I want to come to something that you touched on a bit as you came to the conclusion of your presentation. How could it be that Christians could allow the adversary to deceive us regarding the very truths that we hold?

Graham: Particularly on the atonement, that Christ died to reconcile the Father to us. This is widely held by Christians. Or, he died to assuage the Father's wrath. Here you have a God who is vengeful, unforgiving and severe. You don't have the picture that Jesus brought. Who had to die to persuade Christ? And yet he's God. Who had to die to win Christ to our side? Yet he said, "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father." So a very widely held Christian view could be used to support the devil's charges. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #17 with Lou Venden, "Satan's Final Effort to Deceive" recorded May, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/17MMCAG>*

Then Tyndale, who was such an admirer of Luther, brought that over into English, and "gnad stul" became "mercy seat", and from then on the Bible says, "God said to Moses, 'Make a mercy seat'", but up till then it was "make a cover."

Now how could Luther interpret that cover as being so important? When the Jews fled from Palestine during the Babylonian invasions, many of them fled to Egypt. And you remember, they took Jeremiah with them against his will. And after they had lived there awhile, the young people began to forget how to read the Old Testament in Hebrew. And so it was translated into Greek. That's what produced the Old Testament in Greek known as the *Septuagint*, because there is a story that seventy scholars were sequestered in seventy cells, and all seventy of them translated the Old Testament, and all seventy translations were exactly the same. That gives authority, doesn't it? All seventy versions exactly the same. That's how it got its name. *The Septuagint*. "The Seventy."

And when those Jewish scholars came to "the cover", to "the lid", they didn't translate it into the Greek word for "lid" or cover, they translated it into the Greek word that appears in Romans 3:25, and it's translated "propitiation" in the *King James*, "expiation" in the *Revised Standard*, or what other translations have you found there? So what Luther called a mercy seat

they called; well, what shall we call it? I'll pronounce it in Greek, if that would help: "*hilastērion*," which comes from a Greek verb "*hilaskomai*" that means "to reconcile."

And "to atone" is "to bring back to one." Atonement is "at-one-ment", meaning reconciliation has taken place. And isn't that the meaning of the "lid" and the "cover"? If it represents Christ and all that he has done, including his death, is not that to make possible reconciliation between sinners who do not trust God and are not willing to do his will and obey his law? God being represented by the brilliant Shekinah above.

So when Paul was looking for a word to explain why Jesus died, he used this one, the one that was used by the Hebrew scholars who translated the Bible into Greek for the younger generations who were in exile, he chose this word "*hilastērion*." {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in All 66 – Leviticus*, recorded October, 1981, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

\*Audio links to the West Covina series recorded in 1983:

<http://pkp.cc/5MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/6MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

So I chose rather, "How One's Perception of God Affects One's Understanding of the Atonement." And I'd like to begin by clarifying something in the newsletter.

On the backside it says, "*The SDA Bible Commentary* discussion on Romans is his contribution." Although he notes that "editing changed the meaning of some of what was submitted for publication." Not in the first edition; but later. I was allowed to read the galleys, and I agreed that what they had in the galleys was alright. It didn't mean I had to agree with every point. I submitted to their plan that Elder Nichol worked out so carefully, that the *Commentary* would not reflect the thinking of any one person, but it would represent consensus at the time. And while we were allowed considerable freedom, nevertheless we were not to strike out in some new direction on our own. And so if you read something in the first edition of the *SDA Bible Commentary*, it was thought to represent consensus at the time.

About twenty years later there came an urgent letter from Australia to the president of the General Conference, Neil Wilson. And it said, "How is it that the *Commentary* teaches that God had to be reconciled to man?" And Elder Wilson immediately consulted one of the editors of the *Review*. I'm sure he'd love to have gotten to talk to Elder Nichol, but he's no longer with us, so he went to the person who's actually had more to do with the *Commentary* than any other single person, and that's Dr Raymond Cottrell. He wrote two thousand pages, plus editing the whole thing; a very extraordinary gentleman. He said, "What's that you say? The *Commentary's* supposed to say that God was reconciled to man? Yes, Romans 5:10. So Elder Cottrell said, "That's not the way it read when we printed it." So he said maybe I'd had something to do with

it. He phoned me up at Loma Linda. He said, "What's this change you made in the *Commentary*? That isn't the way it read when we agreed on the consensus." "Well," I said, "it certainly didn't enjoy such a change under my influence, I can tell you." But I had to run down to the Adventist Book Center and buy the revised version. That's what's in this heavy case.

Now there's the original, and here is the revised. Now let's see Romans 5:10. It is this reference to reconciliation in Romans 5. And the second paragraph under "reconciled" reads like this: "The Bible nowhere speaks of God being reconciled to man. It is true that the death of Christ made it possible for God to do for man what he otherwise could not have done." And lower down: "But this does not mean that God needed to be reconciled. The alienation was entirely on man's part." And that was screened, and that was consensus at the time.

But then I picked up the revised one. Romans 5:10. Well it fits exactly the same. If there's a change, it's a work of art. It's exactly the same space. But instead of saying "the Bible nowhere speaks of..." it says: "the Bible elsewhere mentions God's being reconciled to man. But the text is the same one, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." They came up with no text saying that God was reconciled to man, but that God was in Christ reconciling man to himself, and then it left out the fact that the alienation was on man's part. Corinthians has this text, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." I wonder if that was changed too. I looked over here, in Corinthians. Dr. Ted Hopenstal wrote this. You know his theology. Here's how he wrote it:

Reconciliation involves no change on God's part, for God never changes. It is not God who needs to be reconciled to man, but man who needs to be reconciled to God. There has never been enmity on God's part. Men sometimes conceive of God as a stern judge, angry with sinners, hard to be placated, unmerciful, ready to condemn. This characterization misrepresents him and is an affront to him. Christ did not have to go to the cross in order to appease God, but as a demonstration of his love. God did not demand the death of his Son, but gave him out of a heart of infinite love. [And the end of that section is] reconciliation removes the enmity by means of a substitutionary fulfillment of the law's requirements.

I wondered if that was changed. So I looked over; here's how it reads:

Reconciled us to himself. Here the thought is expressed that it is man who needs to be reconciled to God. However, it is also true that God needed to be reconciled to man. Sin had brought a separation between God and man, and this gap was bridged by Christ, who reconciled not only man to God, but also God to man.

So we immediately began a detective search, to find out if this had been authorized. And after years of investigation, nothing has ever been found. Nobody knows how this happened. And nobody has come forward to admit doing it. Certainly the editors had nothing to do with it.

And if you know how things occur in a publishing house, things like that *cannot happen* without some editorial agreement that it should be done. It just cannot happen. It could only be if some soul with real conviction had somewhere in the printing process done a masterful work; it fits exactly the space. It's just amazing. I told this story to the Pacific Press, and afterwards several came up and said, "We guessed who did it." But so far I haven't had the nerve to go see him.

You see, it may be wrong; it may be quite wrong. It's just nobody knows. But the search went on in some interesting ways. To make a long story short, I got a letter the other day recognizing that this was unauthorized change, and it will be corrected, part way back at least, to the original. For there is no verse in the Bible that says God had to be reconciled to man; it doesn't exist in the Bible. Along with the commentary on Romans and Corinthians, as far as is known, this is the only change in the text of the *SDA Bible commentary*. In the introductory chapters, yes, but not in the exposition of the rest of the seven volumes. No changes have been authorized of any kind whatever, and that's a wonderful mystery as to how that got in.

But if you look up atonement in the *Bible Dictionary*, which is volume 8 in the same set, there's a wonderful article. Now I'm showing my colors when I say it's a wonderful article. I haven't said how it reads, but now you'll know. First of all it explains the meaning of the word atonement, which I'll say more about later, and I fully agree with the meaning of the word.

"Understood in terms of its original meaning, "atonement" means a state of reconciliation that terminated a state of estrangement, and thus was reasonably close to the Biblical terms if was used to translate.

However, the word "atonement" has acquired the special, technical, theological meaning of "propitiation" or "expiation," and when so used implies the sacrifice of Christ on the cross constituted reparation to an offended God. This concept reflects the pagan idea of propitiating an offended deity in order to avert his anger and vengeance, and assumes that God must be reconciled to us. Thus, today, the word "atonement" does not properly convey either its own original meaning—the state of being "at one"—or the sense of the Hebrew and Greek terms thus translated."

[But the article continues], No change is necessary on [God's] part in order to affect the reconciliation. It is the sinner who must be "covered," [that's the Hebrew word that's translated atonement sometimes.] It is the sinner who must be "covered" or reconciled to God, not God with respect to the sinner."

And I wondered; the *Bible Dictionary's* been revised. Here's the revised edition, you can tell by the different binding. And so you look it up, and you'd think that since it's volume 8 of the *Bible Commentary* series, the individual who showed really great skill in making the change in the other two places would surely do the same here. The dictionary...atonement...exactly the same. He forgot to change it in the *Bible Dictionary*. So the way it is now, volume 8 of the *Bible*

*Commentary* series is in direct opposition to the volume 6, which contains the *Commentary* on Romans and Corinthians. Now which one is authentic? Well it's an interesting dilemma for people to deal with. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Atonement and Your Picture of God*, recorded May, 1993, San Diego, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/1MMAANDP> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/2MMAANDP> (Part 2)

What appeals to you most for the inclusion of this little letter? Why would it be in there? Is this Paul, dealing with another very difficult and delicate problem, the problem of slavery?

There were more slaves than free. What should the early church do? Did he turn society upside-down? Or did he sow the seeds of real revolution here by saying to Philemon, "Take Onesimus back and treat him like a brother. And Onesimus, when you get back, be the best servant Philemon ever had. That'll do for now." Because if they had started a revolution then, they never would have had time to talk about the gospel. Have you noticed? The Bible doesn't start great wars of social change. But it sows seeds of real change from inside. And so that comes through in here, also.

There's another very lovely possibility in this. Do you know whether or not Philemon did what he was asked to do? Did he treat Onesimus well? Fifty years or so after Paul wrote the letter to Philemon, another great Christian letter writer, Ignatius, who was bishop of Antioch, sent a letter to the church in Ephesus, in which he speaks highly of the Bishop of the church at Ephesus. "A man of inexpressible love, Onesimus by name." Is it possible that the slave became the Bishop of Ephesus? Why not? It just works out beautifully, because it fits the whole setting so well. And it would suggest that Philemon did the very brave thing. What do you think his neighbors thought of him, not punishing Onesimus? Wouldn't this risk the stability of society at the time? No. Philemon decided on the contrary. To treat Onesimus like this would have an even greater effect for good. And in the end Onesimus became a leader of the church. I love to think it's the same one, because it would be a magnificent ending to the story. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God* in all 66 – 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, recorded May, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/71MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/72MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

*1 Selected Messages*, 233-235: "We are not to regard God as waiting to punish the sinner for his sin." Now she's very strong on discipline, you know, whom the Lord loves he disciplines, no question. She's talking here about final destruction:

We are not to regard God as waiting to punish the sinner for his sin. The sinner brings the punishment upon himself. His own actions start a train of circumstances that bring the sure result. Every act of transgression reacts upon the sinner, works in him a change of character.

And forgiveness doesn't take care of that change. That's why salvation is more than forgiveness, it means healing the damage done. Sin really changes us. The legalist thinks he can go and get it just covered or erased or forgiven or pardoned or forgotten. That's legalism. But to recognize that sin damages us, we're never the same. Adam and Eve were never the same. They were hurt by this thing. They could not pass on a perfect nature to their children. They were weakened by this thing. That's why it's suicide to sin. The reasons are not just that it upsets our righteous heavenly Father. It also is utterly destructive too and he does not wish us to destroy ourselves. There's every reason for not sinning. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio presentation, *We've Camped Around This Mountain Long Enough, #1*, recorded July, 1989, South Dakota Conference Ministers Meeting} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/1MMCAMPED>*

Is it possible that Adam reasoned, "I know God is so gracious, surely he won't go through with that threatened penalty of death; he'll forgive us"? But was that the problem? Did God forgive them? But does forgiveness heal the damage done? See, they were changed by sin and distrust. They had become vulnerable now, to the deceptions of the adversary. And so God forgave them, but now there was need for discipline and healing and all those other things. So I think Adam misunderstood that warning, "In the day you eat thereof you will die," as a threat, as a penalty, "In the day you eat thereof—as a penalty—I will have to execute you." And he thought, "Here is my lovely wife, and this is our first offense. Surely he'll forgive." Yes, he forgave, but that doesn't heal the damage done. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in All 66 – Genesis*, recorded October, 1981, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

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The point is that we are being considered by our future neighbors and friends. And they're worried. Wouldn't you be, if you were an angel? They're going to let some of us in. They had a war once before, and Satan capitalizes on this. Ellen White says he has an exact knowledge of every sin he's ever tempted us to commit. We sometimes think our sins are rather private, and when they're forgiven nobody knows them anymore. No, they know them. They're headlines throughout the universe. They're not forgotten. It wouldn't be fair to forget our sins and then

put David's in the Bible. We preach about David's sins. Nobody's sins are hidden; they're all well known up there.

And the devil arises and says, "Let me show you that God once more has made a mistake. He says Jones is safe to save." And he lists all the things he's tempted us to do. And Ellen White has a tremendous speech in his mouth. "Look at all the sins that have marked their disloyalty to God. Look at their selfishness", et cetera, et cetera. How he dares make such a speech is almost unbelievable! And then he points to all the records and says, "Look at all the sins they have committed." If you had just heard your life described, and it was put to the vote, would you vote for yourself? I mean would you hang your head and wonder what's going to happen? But then Christ arises, as she describes it, and he does not excuse our sins.

He says, "The devil has told the truth. Jones did everything he's mentioned. In fact, due to the shortness of time, he left out a lot he could have mentioned." And there comes a murmur in the crowd and it's Jones' guardian angel, and he says, "Look, I was there, do you want me to fill in?" And the Lord says, "No, we've heard quite enough. Jones, on the record looks simply frightful. But let me tell you; that record is irrelevant, and it's out of date. It describes the kind of person Jones used to be. But Jones has a new heart and a right spirit within him. He was born as I told Nicodemus he had to be, of the spirit. This doesn't describe Jones."

You see, God is not concerned about our sinful past, he's only concerned about the kind of people we are now. And if I were an angel, I wouldn't be concerned with whether or not God had forgiven Idi Amin; I'd want to know if it was safe to live next door to Idi Amin. When the prophet Isaiah meets King Manasseh in the hereafter, and he's innocently carrying a pruning hook or something to prune his vines; the last time he held one in his hands he was sawing poor Isaiah in half in a hollow log. And will God say, "Well, don't worry about him carrying that saw, I forgave him." That wouldn't reassure me at all; I'd want to know if he could be trusted with a sharp saw! And that's why Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Not unless ye be forgiven." No, he said "Not unless you be born again." It's a healing ministry; new hearts, right spirits. David finally got the message and said, "Sacrifices won't do it, I need a new heart, I need a right spirit, I need truth in the inner man." Now he didn't say, "I'll stop offering sacrifices" because Christ hadn't yet come. But he says, "I'm going to start offering them for a different reason now." As Hebrews says, all the sacrifices were a constant reminder of sin, and that sin leads to death. He says, "I'll go on doing that." But no more were they sacrifices "to propitiate the wrath of God", and things like that.

Well, I see this discussion going on in Heaven. What chance do we have? Has God proved his ability to judge the human heart? Job showed that. And many other places. The last generation may show that. No angel can read our hearts; no angel can read our thoughts. If they could, they could have read Lucifer's thoughts and they would have known he was a deceiver. They couldn't read what his plan was. Only God can read our innermost thoughts. And so they have

to look to God to say, “Is Jones really changed; is he safe to save?” And when Jesus says, “Yes he is”, then they say, “Then we’ll welcome him at the gates.”

And so, I think they have very legitimate questions. I mean, they should be afraid that we’re coming in. They have to hear Jesus say, “Don’t judge the man by the record. Let me tell you, he’s not that kind of person anymore; he’s been changed.” {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Atonement and Your Picture of God, recorded May, 1993, San Diego, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

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But now at the rock, Moses shows no concern for God’s reputation. Instead, he’s angry, when God isn’t. And Moses stands at the rock and says, “You ungrateful rebels; must we bring forth water from this rock?” And he hits it twice. And I’d venture, before his rod hit the rock twice, he realized what he’d done, and he repented.

But why would God take that so seriously? Isn’t this where the whole great controversy began? When a highly trusted person who came from the very presence of God, and reflected the brilliant glory of God, and therefore was regarded as speaking with almost unlimited authority. Lucifer, the Light-bearer, began to misrepresent God. He began to picture God to the angels as exacting, unforgiving and severe, a harsh God who laid arbitrary requirements on his people, just to show his authority and test their obedience.

The whole disastrous controversy that has spread throughout this universe began when a highly trusted person began to obscure and pervert and twist the truth about God. And I doubt anybody in the audience in the wilderness gave that any consideration at all. But the angels knew. They knew how that whole thing began, and they could understand why God would take it so seriously. And God could turn to the angels and say, “Any questions about why I’m not letting Moses in? He’s always been my best friend, and he will remain my best friend. But he did something, and I’ve forgiven him. But I must go on record before my family in the universe that the most destructive thing you can ever do is to misrepresent me. That’s where it all began, and that’s why it’s costing me so much to clear up all these misunderstandings.”

I believe that Moses’ sin is the most destructive sin a person can ever commit. And it’s not just disobedience. It’s not destroying a symbol. But it is misrepresenting God. Now how often have you ever prayed at night, “If today, to my children I left the impression Lord, that you are in any way arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving and severe, then I’m sorry for that more than some other terrible things I may have done.” {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in All 66 – Leviticus, recorded October, 1981, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

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## Further Study with Ellen White

In God's forgiveness the heart of the erring one is drawn close to the great heart of Infinite Love. The tide of divine compassion flows into the sinner's soul, and from him to the souls of others. The tenderness and mercy that Christ has revealed in His own precious life will be seen in those who become sharers of His grace. {COL 251.1}

The truth will have the same molding influence upon hearts whatever the nationalities. Every human heart that accepts the truth will bow to the majesty of its sway, and when Christ is abiding in the heart by faith they will be of one mind, for Christ is not divided. They will be strong in His strength, happy and united in His peace. The truth is the same in its subduing power upon all hearts. It will refine and ennoble the heart of the receiver. {OHC 171.5}

The parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son, bring out in distinct lines God's pitying love for those who are straying from Him. Although they have turned away from God, He does not leave them in their misery. He is full of kindness and tender pity toward all who are exposed to the temptations of the artful foe. {COL 198.1}

In his restless youth the prodigal looked upon his father as stern and severe. How different his conception of him now! So those who are deceived by Satan look upon God as hard and exacting. They regard Him as watching to denounce and condemn, as unwilling to receive the sinner so long as there is a legal excuse for not helping him. His law they regard as a restriction upon men's happiness, a burdensome yoke from which they are glad to escape. But he whose eyes have been opened by the love of Christ will behold God as full of compassion. He does not appear as a tyrannical, relentless being, but as a father longing to embrace his repenting son. {COL 204.2}

In the parable there is no taunting, no casting up to the prodigal of his evil course. The son feels that the past is forgiven and forgotten, blotted out forever. {COL 204.3}

The very first reaching out of the heart after God is known to Him. Never a prayer is offered, however faltering, never a tear is shed, however secret, never a sincere desire after God is cherished, however feeble, but the Spirit of God goes forth to meet it. Even before the prayer is uttered or the yearning of the heart made known, grace from Christ goes forth to meet the grace that is working upon the human soul. {COL 206.1}

Christ came to this world as the expression of the very heart and mind and nature and character of God. He was the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of His person. But He laid aside His royal robe and kingly crown, and stepped down from His high command to take the place of a servant. He was rich, but for our sake, that we might have eternal riches, He became poor. He made the world, but so completely did He empty Himself that during His ministry He declared, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." {MM 19.1}

The same divine mind that is working upon the things of nature is speaking to the hearts of men and creating an inexpressible craving for something they have not. The things of the world cannot satisfy their longing. The Spirit of God is pleading with them to seek for those things that alone can give peace and rest—the grace of Christ, the joy of holiness. Through influences seen and unseen, our Saviour is constantly at work to attract the minds of men from the unsatisfying pleasures of sin to the infinite blessings that may be theirs in Him. To all these souls, who are vainly seeking to drink from the broken cisterns of this world, the divine message is addressed, “Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

Revelation 22:17. {SC 28.1}

In the story of the good Samaritan, Jesus gave a picture of Himself and His mission. Man had been deceived, bruised, robbed, and ruined by Satan, and left to perish; but the Saviour had compassion on our helpless condition. He left His glory, to come to our rescue. He found us ready to die, and He undertook our case. He healed our wounds. He covered us with His robe of righteousness. He opened to us a refuge of safety, and made complete provision for us at His own charges. He died to redeem us. Pointing to His own example, He says to His followers, “These things I command you, that ye love one another.” “As I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” John 15:17; 13:34. {DA 503.6}

In these first disciples was presented marked diversity. They were to be the world’s teachers, and they represented widely varied types of character. In order successfully to carry forward the work to which they had been called, these men, differing in natural characteristics and in habits of life, needed to come into unity of feeling, thought, and action. This unity it was Christ’s object to secure. To this end He sought to bring them into unity with Himself. The burden of His labor for them is expressed in His prayer to His Father, “That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us;” “that the world may know that Thou has sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me.” John 17:21, 23. His constant prayer for them was that they might be sanctified through the truth; and He prayed with assurance, knowing that an Almighty decree had been given before the world was made. He knew that the gospel of the kingdom would be preached to all nations for a witness; He knew that truth armed with the omnipotence of the Holy Spirit, would conquer in the battle with evil, and that the bloodstained banner would one day wave triumphantly over His followers. {AA 20.2}

We seldom find two persons exactly alike. Among human beings as well as among the things of the natural world, there is diversity. Unity in diversity among God’s children—the manifestation of love and forbearance in spite of difference of disposition—this is the testimony that God sent His Son into the world to save sinners. {SD 286.2}

God has different ways of working, and He has different workmen to whom He entrusts varied gifts. One worker may be a ready speaker; another a ready writer; another may have the gift of

sincere, earnest, fervent prayer; another the gift of singing; another may have special power to explain the word of God with clearness. And each gift is to become a power for God, because He works with the laborer. To one God gives the word of wisdom, to another knowledge, to another faith; but all are to work under the same Head. The diversity of gifts leads to a diversity of operations; but “it is the same God which worketh all in all.” [1 Corinthians 12:6.] {GW 483.1}

The Lord desires His chosen servants to learn how to unite in harmonious effort. It may seem to some that the contrast between their gifts and the gifts of a fellow-laborer is too great to allow them to unite in harmonious effort; but when they remember that there are varied minds to be reached, and that some will reject the truth as it is presented by one laborer, only to open their hearts to God’s truth as it is presented in a different manner by another laborer, they will hopefully endeavor to labor together in unity. Their talents, however diverse, may all be under the control of the same Spirit. In every word and act, kindness and love will be revealed; and as each worker fills his appointed place faithfully, the prayer of Christ for the unity of His followers will be answered, and the world will know that these are His disciples. {GW 483.2}

The Lord has not qualified any one of us to bear the burden of the work alone. He has associated together men of different minds, that they may counsel with and assist one another. In this way the deficiency in the experience and the abilities of one is supplied by the experience and the abilities of another. {TDG 154.2}

From the endless variety of plants and flowers, we may learn an important lesson. All blossoms are not the same in form or color. Some possess healing virtues. Some are always fragrant. There are professing Christians who think it their duty to make every Christian like themselves. This is man’s plan, not the plan of God. In the church of God there is room for characters as varied as are the flowers in a garden. In His spiritual garden there are many varieties of flowers.—Letter 95, 1902. {Ev 99.1}

Supreme love for God and unselfish love for one another—this is the best gift that our heavenly Father can bestow. This love is not an impulse, but a divine principle, a permanent power. The unconsecrated heart cannot originate or produce it. Only in the heart where Jesus reigns is it found. “We love Him, because He first loved us.” In the heart renewed by divine grace, love is the ruling principle of action. It modifies the character, governs the impulses, controls the passions, and ennobles the affections. This love, cherished in the soul, sweetens the life and sheds a refining influence on all around. {AA 551.2}