

# FROM GOD, WITH LOVE

By Kenneth H. Wood

“Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:8, NRSV).

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17).\*

These passages from Scripture set forth two major truths about God. The first is, God is a God of love. The second grows out of the first: God gives gifts—not just ordinary gifts but “good” and “perfect” gifts.

Satan has endeavored to obscure the truth about God. Throughout the centuries and in every part of the world he has pictured God as a God of anger, a God who wants to harm His earthly children, a God who watches their every move in order to catch them in some mistake, and punish them. He has portrayed God as being far more interested in justice than in mercy. But here is the truth about God:

“Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made,  
Were ev’ry stalk on earth a quill, and ev’ry man a scribe by trade;  
To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry;  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky.”  
—F. M. Lehman.

More than we do, we need to spend time focusing on our heavenly Father as a God of love. We need to be clear in our own minds why God watches us. He watches us closely not to judge us but because He loves us and is interested in our welfare. It is said that when Isaac Watts was but a child he was visiting in the home of an elderly Christian woman who asked him to read a framed Bible text hanging on the wall. The text was Genesis 16:13 as it reads in the King James Version: “Thou God Seest Me.” After Watts had read it, the saintly woman said: “When you are older, people will tell you that God is always watching you to see when you do wrong, in order to punish you. I don’t want you to think of it that way. I want you to take the text home and remember all your life that God loves you so much He can’t take His eyes off you.”

I am grateful that my own mother had this concept. Once in early childhood I went to her in tears with the comment, “I’m afraid I’ll never get to heaven!” She took me in her arms and talked to me about God’s love. Then she said, “I don’t think of God as Someone who’s trying to keep people out of heaven. I think of Him as Someone who’s trying to let everyone in that He possibly can.” Yes, though He is a God of justice, He also is a God of mercy. He is a God of love.

## God Loves to Give

And because He is a God of love, He loves to give. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said: “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” (Matt. 7:11). What an

understandable comparison! How easy to identify with! Parents enjoy finding “just the right” gifts for their children, especially for the little ones. Their hearts leap with pleasure as their children tear open the bright wrappings and squeal with delight at sight of the gift. Using this joyful experience as a base, Jesus continued, “How much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” Truly, God gives “to those who ask.” But He does more. He gives some gifts to everybody! Jesus highlighted this when He said: “Your Father in heaven . . . makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45).

God is a giver! Whatever we have—whether little or much—it has come to us as a gift from God. The apostle Paul highlighted this well when he wrote: “We brought nothing into this world” (1Tim. 6:7). And David, the Psalmist, declared: “The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness” (Ps. 24:1).

I like the story of the little girl who told an older friend that she was going to buy her father a pair of slippers for his birthday. “Where will you get the money?” the friend asked. Opening her eyes wide, the little girl responded, “Why, Daddy will give me the money.” And so it is with us. We receive everything from God. Nothing is truly ours. Our “giving” to God is merely “returning.”

“We give Thee but Thine own,  
Whatever the gift may be;  
All that we have is Thine alone,  
A trust, O Lord, from Thee.”—Selected.

Ellen White tells us that God “loads us with His benefits. We are indebted to Him for the food we eat, the water we drink, the clothes we wear, the air we breathe. . . . He is a bountiful benefactor and preserver.

“The sun which shines upon the earth, and glorifies all nature, the weird, solemn radiance of the moon, the glories of the firmament, spangled with brilliant stars, the showers that refresh the land, and cause vegetation to flourish, the precious things of nature in all their varied richness, the lofty trees, the shrubs and plants, the waving grain, the blue sky, the green earth, the changes of day and night, the renewing seasons, all speak to man [us] of his [our] Creator’s love.”—*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 17.

## Other Gifts

Beyond doubt the gift that most people prize above all others is the gift of life itself. Of this gift Ellen White wrote: Young people “are holding God’s gift of life. He makes the heart beat; He gives strength to every faculty” (*The Adventist Home*, p. 497). This precious gift God asks us to return to Him. His invitation is, “?My son, give Me thine heart; I will keep it pure; I will satisfy its longings with true happiness” (*ibid.*).

In *The Acts of the Apostles* (p. 71), Ellen White mentions other gifts—“money, time, influence,” all of which are to be used “as a means of advancing the work of the gospel.”

Two of God’s gifts were first bestowed on the human race in Eden—the Sabbath and marriage. Of marriage as a gift Mrs. White has written: “Like every other one of God’s good gifts entrusted to

the keeping of humanity, marriage has been perverted by sin; but it is the purpose of the gospel to restore its purity and beauty.”—*The Adventist Home*, p. 100. And of the Sabbath she says: “It was a gift to all his [Adam’s] posterity.”—*Sermons and Talks*, vol. 1, p. 233. Every believer who understands and embraces the many spiritual dimensions of the Sabbath truth will welcome its weekly appearance as a gift of love from the Creator and Redeemer of the human family. They will prize its sacred hours as a priceless opportunity to become better acquainted with the great God of the universe and His Son who died for them on the cross.

In this end-time of the world’s history, one of God’s special gifts is the three-fold message of Revelation 14. Of this gift God’s servant declares: “We knew that this present light was the special gift of God. The impartation of this gift was the prerogative of God.”—*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 110. Embodied in this gift is the everlasting gospel, the judgment hour message, the true Sabbath, and a call to separate from the traditions and confusion of modern Babylon (Rev.18:4). What a great gift this is! It is a gift not only to be received and enjoyed but to be shared with the entire world.

### **God’s Best Gift**

In this overview of God’s gifts, let us now place the gift of Jesus in its rightful place—at the top. This is the gift that reveals the infinite dimensions of God’s love. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

If a little child asks mother or father, “How much do you love me?” the parent sometimes responds by extending both arms and spreading them out as far as possible, saying, “This much!” followed by a hug and a kiss. But when we as a lost race of sinners ask God how much He loves us, He points to Jesus dying in agony on the cross, and says, “This much!” “The gift of Christ reveals the Father’s heart. It testifies that, having undertaken our redemption, He will spare nothing, however dear, which is necessary to the completion of the work.”—*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 14.

“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32).

In a message urging Christians at the Christmas season to recall “the rich gifts which Providence has so bounteously bestowed,” Ellen White urged that above all they “remember the priceless Gift of God’s dear Son. Here is an exhaustless theme for thought.”—*Signs of the Times*, Dec. 8, 1887.

To me, one of the most moving passages in all of Mrs. White’s writings is her description of Christ on the cross. After recounting the fact that Jesus had been arrested at midnight in Gethsemane, “dragged to and fro from palace to judgment hall, . . . mocked, scourged, [and] condemned,” she wrote: “Heaven viewed with grief and amazement Christ hanging upon the cross, blood flowing from His wounded temples, and sweat tinged with blood standing upon His brow. From His hands and feet the blood fell, drop by drop, upon the rock drilled for the foot of the cross. The wounds made by the nails gaped as the weight of His body dragged upon His hands. His labored breath grew quick and deep, as His soul panted under the burden of the sins of the world. . . . What a sight for the heavenly universe!”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 760.

But out of the Gift of the life and death of Jesus came another great gift—justification for repentant sinners. “Christ, coming to earth as man, lived a holy life, and developed a perfect character. These He offers as a free gift to all who will receive them. His life stands for the life of men. They have remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. More than this, Christ imbues men with the attributes of God. He builds up the human character after the similitude of the divine character, a goodly fabric of spiritual strength and beauty. Thus the very righteousness of the law is fulfilled in the believer in Christ.”—*Ibid.*, p. 762.

And, unbelievable though it may seem, God loves His redeemed earthly children as much as He loves His own Son. Jesus made this clear in His final prayer to His Father in Gethsemane when He said: “You have . . . loved them as You have loved Me” (John 17:23).

## **Spiritual Gifts**

When Jesus returned to heaven, did God cease to love His people? Did He stop giving them gifts? No. But in addition to the numberless gifts that He had already bestowed, He gave a special kind of gifts—gifts of the Spirit, gifts often referred to as spiritual gifts. In First Corinthians 12 the apostle Paul wrote: “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed” (v. 1, NRSV). Then, in verse 11 he said: “These are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses” (NRSV).

“The gifts He gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11, NRSV). The purpose of the gifts was “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (v. 12, NRSV).

In this same chapter—First Corinthians 12—the apostle compares the church to a body. He states that the church is the body of Christ (vs. 12, 27) and that every person in the church is important, just as every part of the human body is essential. He declares that Christ is the Head (Eph. 4:15) and that each member fills an essential role in making the body function successfully. The work that each member is to do is determined by the Holy Spirit. The “Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills” (1 Cor. 12:11).

“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. There are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues” (vs. 4-10).

Let us note two facts: 1) These spiritual gifts are not merely natural talents that come through physical inheritance, and 2) the Holy Spirit decides who is to receive them. The Spirit may take into account the natural aptitudes or abilities of the one on whom the spiritual gift is to be bestowed, but not necessarily. The Spirit knows the overall needs of the body, Christ’s church, and makes the choice based on that need. Chaos would result if spiritual gifts were distributed randomly or in response to personal request. The human body is not all eyes, ears, arms, or legs. Neither can the church body be all pastors, administrators, healers, or prophets.

## The Gift of Prophecy

As we have already noted, the gift of prophecy is among the gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:10, 28; Eph. 4:11). The importance of this gift becomes clear when we remember that in Old Testament times prophets were called “seers.” This is mentioned in First Samuel 9:9: “Formerly in Israel, anyone who went to inquire of God would say, ‘Come, let us go to the seer’; for the one who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer” (NRSV). Using Paul’s illustration, we might say that prophets are the eyes of the church, which is the body of Christ. They see what others do not see. They see behind the scenes in the great controversy between Christ and Satan. They see dangers from false doctrines and false teachers, and by revealing Satan’s plans they enable the church to avoid retreat or defeat. No wonder the writings of prophets often contain the expression, “I saw.” As the prophet Amos wrote: “Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).

The Scriptures abound with incidents that reveal how God has given His prophets special “eyes,” and has worked through these inspired messengers for the benefit of His people. In the days of Elisha the king of Syria was conducting war against Israel. Hoping to ambush the king of Israel, “he consulted with his servants, saying, ‘My camp will be in such and such a place’” (2 Kings 6:8). But the prophet sent a warning to the king, “‘Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are coming down there’” (v. 9).

Several times the secret, evil plans of the Syrian king were frustrated in this way by Elisha. “Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was greatly troubled by this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, ‘Will you not show me which of us is for the king of Israel?’ And one of his servants said, ‘None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom’” (vs. 11, 12). What a blessing it was for God’s people to have a seer! And among the spiritual gifts promised to the church this side of the cross, the gift of prophecy is one of the most valuable.

The prophetic witness becomes increasingly important as the church approaches the world’s final crisis. John the Revelator described Satan’s attack against the church by saying, “The dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 12:17). Of this time Jesus said, “False christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matt. 24:24).

“Those who endeavor to obey all the commandments of God will be opposed and derided. They can stand only in God. In order to endure the trial before them, they must understand the will of God as revealed in His Word; they can honor Him only as they have a right conception of His character, government, and purposes, and act in accordance with them. None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict.”—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 593, 594.

In a very real sense, the Holy Scriptures in their entirety are the testimony of Jesus and are a product of the Spirit of prophecy. This is clear from Revelation 19:10 that records the response of the angel when John fell at his feet to worship him. The angel protested, saying, “‘See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.’”

But in addition to the written Word, throughout past ages when God's people faced new challenges, trials, or dangers, the Holy Spirit inspired men and women and gave them the "testimony of Jesus" to meet the unique needs of the hour. Uriah Smith, well-known pioneer of the Advent movement, likened the role of these prophets to that of a pilot who boards a ship as it approaches the port of its destination. While on the high seas the captain, with his experience and general expertise, is capable of guiding the ship safely. But as the ship enters the narrow channel of a foreign port, with giant rocks possibly concealed beneath the surface of the sea, the captain slows his ship and welcomes a pilot aboard. He recognizes that the specialized situation requires someone with added skill and more complete knowledge of the dangers and challenges that lie ahead. By accepting the pilot, the captain is cooperating with the owner of the ship who arranged for this special help before the ship began its voyage. (Editorial in the *Review and Herald*, Jan. 13, 1863.)

### **Special Help in the End-time**

Thus, when God's last-day church needed special help to meet Satan's final attacks successfully, God gave visions to a young woman named Ellen Harmon. Beginning immediately after the Great Disappointment of 1844, Jesus inspired young Ellen to help His people regain confidence in the way the Lord had led them. She joined with them in careful study of the Bible, the "testimony of Jesus" that God had provided for seekers of truth. Often they spent whole nights in prayer and study, endeavoring to understand God's will as found in the Scriptures. And God rewarded them with additional light and a wonderful sense of His presence. At times, however, when the group could not agree on the meaning of a Bible passage, God used Ellen to define what was error and what was truth. The usual result was unity. In 1846 Ellen married James White, a young man who had been much involved in proclaiming the soon coming of Christ. Gradually, under the urging of the Holy Spirit, Ellen White wrote out the messages and counsel she received from the Lord. These messages helped the early Adventists avoid fanaticism, unite on doctrine and organization, and attempt to reach the entire world with the message of Revelation 14.

Of her experience she testified: "The Spirit of God rests upon me with power, and I cannot but speak the words given me. I dare not withhold one word of testimony. . . . I speak the words given me by a power higher than human power, and I cannot, if I would, recall [retract] one sentence. In the night season the Lord gives me instruction in symbols, and then explains their meaning. He gives me the word, and I dare not refuse to give it to the people."—*The 1888 Materials*, pp. 578, 579.

During her 70-year ministry Mrs. White wrote approximately 25 million words, resulting in 100,000 printed pages. Her writings included letters, diaries, books, and articles in periodicals. Among her best-known works are *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* and *Steps to Christ*, which has been translated into more than 140 languages. Not surprisingly, the theme of the first chapter of *Steps to Christ* is God's great love for our world and the human race. Both in writing and in speaking she emphasized this theme, ever pointing to Jesus and His matchless charms as the greatest evidence of God's love. The overall theme of her writings is the great controversy between Christ and Satan, which began in heaven and has increased with ferocity here on earth. In line with this theme, she made clear that every human being is involved in the controversy. "To restore in man the image of his Maker, to bring him back to the perfection in which he was created, to promote the development of body, mind, and soul, that the divine purpose in his creation might be realized—this was to be the work of redemption. This is the

object of education, the great object of life.”—*Education*, pp. 15, 16.

Burdened to win souls and give guidance in character development, she wrote books on a wide range of subjects—education, healthful living, family life, temperance, evangelism, sacred history, medical ministry, and other subjects that might help advance the cause of truth and prepare a people for the return of Christ.

At times students of the Bible compare the Advent movement to the experience of Israel in leaving Egypt and journeying to the Promised Land. In this connection they quote Hosea 12:13: “By a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet he was preserved.” We all know how God used Moses to guide His people from Egypt to Canaan. Every Adventist should know also the exciting story of how God used Ellen White during the seven decades of her ministry, and how He is still using her today through her writings. There is much truth in the statement that is commonly repeated: “Without Ellen White there would be no Adventist church as we know it today.” God knew that His last-day church would need special help, and, like the great Gift-giver that He is, He provided it in what Adventists often speak of as the “Spirit of prophecy.”

Like the early church in the city of Corinth, it can be said of the remnant church: “I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor.1:4-7).

As the apostle Paul considered the gift of Jesus and the wonderful evidences of God’s grace in the Corinthian church, he exclaimed: “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” (2 Cor. 9:15). And today, as we review God’s infinite love and the countless gifts that flow from that love, we can well borrow Paul’s language and say, “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gifts, especially the Gift of Jesus and the testimony of Jesus, which is the Spirit of prophecy!”

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\*All Bible quotations are from the New King James Version (NKJV), unless otherwise indicated.