

JOHN - A TEACHER'S GUIDE

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
 - b. Why did He record it for our study?
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1. What picture of God would you have if you had only the Gospel of John? Why is John's Gospel so different from the others? Why did the other Gospel writers leave out some of the amazing stories in John? When and why did John write this Gospel? (John 20:30,31) Why did he wait so long? What was happening in the Christian church at the time that may have led to his writing? (1 John 4:1-3; 2 John 7)

The name John (*Ioannes* in Greek) comes from *Yehochanan* or *Yochanan* meaning "Jehovah (Yahweh) is gracious." Nowhere in the Gospel does John mention his own name. He refers to himself as "that disciple" (John 21:23), "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:20), and even "the disciple that testifieth of these things, and wrote these things" (John 21:24). Conservative scholars agree that he also wrote the three letters bearing his name and the book of Revelation.

A small papyrus document known as *Rylands Papyrus 457* and commonly designated as P⁵² was found in a small rural town in Egypt. It was written about A.D. 125 and contains John 18:31-33 on one side and John 18:37,38 on the other. It is perhaps the earliest existing copy of any biblical document. Together with other archaeological evidence, it supports the fact that this book was written about A.D. 90 by John himself.

John, often referred to as the "the disciple whom Jesus loved" or "the beloved disciple" because Jesus "kept on loving him" (the meaning of the Greek expression), was closer to Jesus than any of the other disciples and also was younger in age. John's childhood home was in Bethsaida on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

John wrote his Gospel about thirty years after the others wrote theirs. At the time he was the only disciple still living. Three grave dangers seemed to be threatening the Christian church: 1) a decreasing commitment to Christianity even among church members described in Revelation 2:4 as "a loss of the first love;" 2) heresies, especially Gnosticism; and 3) persecution.

Christian Gnostic thought revolved around the concept that, in essence, good and evil are to be identified with spirit and matter, respectively. Those men in whose souls resides a spark of the heavenly light are said to be prisoners in this world of matter. Salvation consists in the knowledge of how to escape from the realm of matter into the realm of spirit. Gnosticism denied the true incarnation of Christ, holding that the human form men thought they saw, was an apparition. The divine Christ was supposed to have entered into the human Jesus at His baptism, and departed prior to His death on the cross. (5BC 893)

Most of the Gospel of John deals with incidents that took place in Judea and involved the Jewish leaders. The other Gospels deal primarily with His ministry in Galilee. Thus, John is quite different from the others. He included several long discussions with the Pharisees which occurred in the temple at Jerusalem. John's primary goal was to tell us about God. He stated in no uncertain terms that Jesus was One with the Father. (John 10:30; 14:9; 17:21) Twenty-six times he quoted Jesus as saying that the Father had sent Him.

John

In Genesis, the first book of the Bible, God is presented as speaking the creation into existence. God speaks the word and it happens: heaven and earth, ocean and stream, trees and grass, birds and fish, animals and humans. Everything, seen and unseen, called into being by God's spoken word.

In deliberate parallel to the opening words of Genesis, John presents God as speaking salvation into existence. This time God's word takes on human form and enters history in the person of Jesus. Jesus speaks the word and it happens: forgiveness and judgment, healing and illumination, mercy and grace, joy and love, freedom and resurrection. Everything broken and fallen, sinful and diseased, called into salvation by God's spoken word.

For, somewhere along the line things went wrong (Genesis tells that story, too) and are in desperate need of fixing. The fixing is all accomplished by speaking—God speaking salvation into being in the person of Jesus. Jesus, in this account, not only speaks the word of God; he *is* the Word of God.

Keeping company with these words, we begin to realize that our words are more important than we ever supposed. Saying "I believe," for instance, marks the difference between life and death. Our words accrue dignity and gravity in conversations with Jesus. For Jesus doesn't impose salvation as a solution; he *narrates* salvation into being through leisurely conversation, intimate personal relationships, compassionate responses, passionate prayer, and—putting it all together—a sacrificial death. We don't casually walk away from words like that. (*The Message* - Introduction to John)

2. Matthew and Luke talk about Jesus' human heritage, but Mark does not discuss the issue. What does John say about where Jesus came from? (John 1:1-3)

At the very beginning of his Gospel, John stated in clear terms that Jesus was *the Word*, a word he used to mean that Jesus was the living expression of the mind, will, and character of God. John makes it clear that Jesus existed from eternity with the Father. (John 1:1-3) Thus, John goes back before the human story of Jesus to discuss His true identity as the eternal, immortal God who created all things. (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:1-6)

3. After working with the descendants of Abraham for almost 2000 years, at long last, God had a people who did not worship idols, they were Sabbathkeepers, tithe-payers, health-reformers, and Bible students—they were "adventists" waiting for the coming of the Messiah. But when He came to His "home," His "family" did not receive Him. (John 1:11) Could this happen again? Could it happen to us? What do you suppose this said to the universe? If God knew in advance that this would happen, what was He waiting for? Was there anything unique about coming at that particular time that would make it the "fullness of time"? (Galatians 4:4)

John 1:11 is perhaps the saddest verse in the Bible. Jesus came "home" and His "family" rejected Him! The onlooking universe must have been stunned! Of course, by the time John was writing down his Gospel, Jerusalem had been destroyed, and the Jews had been taken captive and scattered throughout the Roman Empire. But, something of supreme importance needed to be demonstrated by these people who were so dedicated to following the "blueprint." Because they had a wrong picture of God, and thus, rejected the picture that Jesus brought, (John 1:18; 17:3,4) these Bible-reading, health-reforming, Sabbathkeeping, tithe-paying, blueprint-following adventists (they believed in the coming Messiah/Christ) were determined to

get rid of Jesus as fast as they could. This shows that if we obey God for the wrong reason, we are just as unsavable (maybe more so) than the heathen!

4. What was it about Jesus that so upset the Pharisees and Sadducees? Weren't they obeying the "blueprint"? Has any group ever obeyed God's laws more carefully? Is it possible to spend your whole life striving to obey God and hate Him when He appears? How could this happen to them? Could it happen to us?

See the previous question. They believed that because they were being so careful in doing what they thought was right and because they were descendants of Abraham, they had a guaranteed ticket to the kingdom. When Jesus came along and began asking questions, He was in effect challenging their whole theological system. This is why Caiaphas thought it was better for this One Man to die rather than for the whole nation to be destroyed. (John 11:49-51) Caiaphas recognized that if they accepted Jesus, it would require a complete change in their thinking—a paradigm shift—and this they were not willing to do. In our day, we see the same kind of response from some when their "security of salvation" is questioned.

5. What about Jesus' words to His mother at the marriage in Cana? (John 2:4; compare Luke 2:49 and John 19:26) Is this the way a young man should talk to His mother? Why do you suppose Mary asked Jesus about this problem? What do you think she expected Him to do? Do you think Jesus would produce fermented wine or unfermented wine? Why? (See Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-35; 31:4-6)

Mary had become so accustomed to having Jesus around and found Him always so helpful that she probably just spoke to him almost impulsively, even instinctively. It is likely that this wedding was a wedding of someone in the family. Otherwise, she would not have concerned herself with this issue. But, running out of wine would reflect badly on the entire family. So, Mary suggested the solution that she had become accustomed to: ask Jesus!

The Greek word used here for *wine* is a word that can mean either fermented or unfermented wine. Given all that Jesus had inspired the prophets to say in the Old Testament about the problems of drinking alcohol, (Proverbs 23:29-35) it is highly unlikely that He would have produced 120 gallons of some alcoholic beverage for them to consume.

Jesus addressed His mother with the usual title of respect used for adult women in those days. The expression is a Hebrew idiom. Some modern versions capture this fact by translating the expression as follows:

John 2:4:

“τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι” (*Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament- 26th*)

“What is it to Me and to thee, woman!” (*Concordant Literal*)

“What—to me and to thee, woman?” (*Young's Literal*)

“What is it to you and to me?” (*Lamsa*)

“What is to me and thee woman?” (*Rheims-RC, 1582*)

“Woman, what have I to do with thee?” (*Tyndale; Great, Geneva, Bishop's, KJV; Noyes; Darby, RV, ASV*)

“Woman, what do I have to do with you?” (*NASB*)

“What part can I take with thee, O woman?” (*Rheims-RC*)

“O woman, what have I with thee?” (*N. Scarlett*)

“O woman, what hast thou to do with me?” (*Dickinson*)

“What have I to do with you, woman?” (*New World*)

“What wouldst thou have me do, woman?” (*Douay-Confraternity-RC*)

“Why dost thou trouble me with that?” (*Knox-RC*)

“O woman, what have you to do with me?” (*RSV; Williams*)

“Woman, Jesus said, what have you to do with me?” (*Moffatt; Montgomery*)

“What do you want with me?” (*Twentieth Century*)

“I can’t help you now.” (*TLB*)

“Leave it to me.” (*Weymouth*)

“Leave that to me, mother!” (*Kleist and Lilly-RC*)

“Will you leave that to Me, woman?” (*Beck*)

“Is that your concern, or mine, Mother?” (*Phillips*)

“Woman, how does your concern affect me?” (*NAB-RC*)

“Woman, why need you concern yourself with my affairs?” (*Greber*)

“Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me?” (*NKJ*)

“Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?” (*NRSV*)

“How does that concern you and me?” (*The Living Translation*)

“Why did you come to me?” (*God’s Word*)

“Mother, why should that concern me—or you?” (*Jewish New Testament*)

“Woman, what do you want from me?” (*New Jerusalem-RC*)

“Woman, what has this concern of yours to do with me?” (*Anchor*)
 [footnote: It was Jesus’ normal, polite way of addressing women (Matthew 15:28; Luke 13:12; John 4:21; 8:10; 20:13)]

“Do not try to direct me.” (*Goodspeed*)

“You must not tell me what to do, woman.” (*GNB*, the second edition leaves out the word “woman”)

“Mother...you must not tell me what to do.” (*CEV*)

“Why do you involve me?” (*NIV*) [footnote: Greek *involve me, woman* (a polite form of address)]

“Woman, why turn to me?” (*Jerusalem*)

“Your concern, mother, is not mine.” (*NEB*)

“Mother, why are you interfering with me?” (*Translator’s NT*)

“Mother, I love you, but why are you wanting me to help them?” (*Clear Word*)

“Is that any of our business, Mother—yours or mine?” (*Message*)

“(Dear) woman, what is that to you and to Me? [What have we in common? Leave it to Me.] (*Amplified*)

“Dear woman, why come to me?” (*NCV*)

“Woman, what does this have to do with me?” (*ESV*)

“How does that concern us, woman?” (ISV)

6. Probably the best known verse in the Bible is John 3:16. Does this sound like the God of Sinai? Is the God of Sinai the Father while the God of John 3:16 is the Son?

1 Corinthians 10:4 says that the One who led Israel through the wilderness was Christ Himself. (Compare John 5:39,40,46; Luke 24:44) In light of this verse, we must either question the inspiration and authority of Scripture or begin to ask why Jesus would do what He did at Sinai. All through the Bible, God has demonstrated repeatedly that He is willing to stoop down to meet us where we are even if that is at a pretty low level! God met Moses at a very high level of understanding and required a lot of him, but He met the people who had just come out of slavery with a very distorted view of what it meant to worship a real God at a level they could understand. As recent slaves they were not ready for a carefully-thought-out dissertation on theology.

In the New Testament, however, Jesus was speaking in John 3 to Nicodemus, who was a religious leader and should have understood a great deal about truth. To him, Jesus could speak in broad principles such as are included in John 3:16.

7. What is the basis for God’s final judgment? (John 3:17,18; 5:22; 12:47,48) Who or what actually does the judging? Is it that we have a condemning God, and are grateful for the kind, interceding Son? How does Revelation 22:11 fit with your understanding of the judgment?

The answer to this question is a very basic one and depends on your understanding of the entire plan of salvation. In Greek, *salvation* is the same word as *healing*. God is doing His best to “heal” us of the damage done by sin. In order to be saved, we must be willing to let God heal us. So, what does this have to do with judging?

1 John 2:1 suggests that the Son is pleading with the Father on our behalf. But John 5:22 suggests that all judgment has, in fact, been handed over to the Son. John goes even further to state in John 3:17-21 and John 12:47,48 that it is actually truth that is the final judge. In other words, in the end God simply makes a “diagnosis” of our condition. That is why John said in Revelation 22:11 that we will all actually remain in the same condition of character as we were in here on earth. God simply opens the “books” and it is clear to anyone who cares to check things out that some are “savable” and others are not. God never excludes anyone unless there is nothing further that even He can do to save him without violating his/her freedom.

8. Why do you suppose the Samaritans believed on Jesus, (John 4:39-42) and so many of the Jews who saw much greater things did not?

The Jews had to overcome all their preconceived notions before they could give serious thought to accepting Jesus as the Messiah. So many of their national aspirations were tied to the idea that the “Messiah” was going to come and rescue them and help them conquer the Romans and rule the world that it seemed literally impossible for them to accept a Messiah who did not do what they expected.

On the other hand, the Samaritans had a lot less baggage that they had to get rid of before they could accept Jesus.

9. What does the story of the healing of the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda/Bethsaida on the Sabbath say to us about God? (John 5:1-15) What is implied by John 5:4? Is John 5:4 inspired? (See note in *NIV*, *RSV*, *TLB*, and *NEB*) Why were those people there? What kind of healings were taking place? Do you think God would send an angel to heal only the winner of the race to get into the pool?

A quick look in many modern versions—especially those with footnotes—will demonstrate that John 5:4 was not present in the oldest manuscripts. But, the story does not seem to make sense unless you understand that the Jews believed that there was an angel who stirred the waters from time to time and healed the first person to get into the pool. No doubt, at some time in the past, some copyist or scholar made a note about that belief (which was held by many of the Jews) somewhere in the margin of his version. Later copyists, realizing the importance of

this information to help us understand why the sick had gathered in this location, copied the marginal note into the actual text of Scripture.

John 5:4: For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. (*KJV*)

For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. (*NKJ*)

Important textual evidence may be cited for omitting the words 'waiting for the moving of the water,' and the whole of v. 4. Thus the story of an angel's bestowing supernatural healing powers upon the water of the pool appears not to have been part of the original gospel text, but was probably added in an attempt to explain v. 7. However, that this legend was based on an early tradition is indicated by the fact that Tertullian knew of it at the beginning of the 3d century. There is no evidence for this insertion prior to his time. In view of v. 7 this passage evidently preserves what was a popular opinion regarding the waters of the pool (see *DA* 201).

The rippling of the water was real (*DA* 202), but there is evidence implicit in the account of the legend that this popular belief had no further basis in fact. The stronger trampled upon the weak in their anxiety to reach the waters when they were agitated, and many died on the brink of the pool (see *DA* 201,202,206). Thus, the more selfish, determined, and strong a man might be, the more likely he was to reach the pool first and be healed. The most needy were least likely to benefit, whereas Jesus chose the worst case. The first to reach the pool each time the waters were agitated, apparently was healed, whereas the gifts of God are for all alike who qualify to receive them. Also, healing took place only periodically. The principles implicit in this record of those "healed" at the pool seem strangely different from those principles by which Jesus performed His miracles. (*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 948)

Scholars generally agree on these points. Jesus was walking, apparently alone, on a Sabbath afternoon and came to that pool. He saw that one case of a paralyzed man, and His compassion just could not ignore the man. Furthermore, He recognized in him an opportunity to say something important about the Sabbath. The man had been crippled for 38 years. There is no way this could be considered an emergency! So, in healing this man, Jesus was able to demonstrate the kind of actions that should take place on the Lord's holy day.

10. What do you think of God's treatment of the woman caught in adultery? (John 8:1-11) If she was caught "in the very act," (John 8:4) why didn't they bring the man as required in the law? (See Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22-24) Were they really trying to carry out the law? Or, were they just trying to trap Jesus? Do we have anything to fear from a God who would treat sinners the way Jesus treated the woman and especially the way He treated those who brought her? Shouldn't Jesus have exposed them? What does this imply about how God feels toward His sinful children? What does this imply about the judgment? Wouldn't this suggest that if God finally has to declare sinners incurable/unsavable, it must really be true? Does this sound like the God we read about in the Old Testament?

It was supposed to be the woman's husband who brought the woman before the religious leaders to accuse her. (*DA* 461) Furthermore, both the man and the woman were to be brought and dealt with equally. (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22-27) The Pharisees were not concerned about meeting the requirements of the law. All they wanted was to trap Jesus. If He said, "Let her go free," they would accuse Him of setting aside the law of Moses. If, on the other hand, He told them to go ahead and stone her, they would accuse Him of assuming authority that belonged to the Romans. (*DA* 460,461)

Jesus knew exactly what they were trying to do! He also knew that many of these accusers were the very people who had been involved in similar sins on numerous occasions in the past, possibly even with this same woman who is elsewhere identified as Mary Magdalene. (See Luke 7:37; *Signs of the Times* May 9, 1900; 4ST 116:1:5,6; *Desire of Ages* 566,567)

God always treats even His most wayward children with dignity and honor. Look at how He treated Judas on the night of His betrayal. When Jesus told him to do quickly what he had to do, the other disciples thought that he was perhaps going out to make an offering for the poor! (See John 13:29) This is the only kind of Person who could be trusted with a full knowledge of our past lives. That is one of the main reasons why God is our Judge!

11. Right after being so considerate to all the sinners in the adultery case in John 8:1-11, why did Jesus find it necessary to say to the religious leaders, "You are of your father, the Devil"? (John 8:44)

These religious leaders had committed what has proven to be the most serious sin of all—misrepresenting God. (Romans 1:18) That is what Lucifer did in heaven. They were just following the footsteps of their true father! If someone is so self-deluded as to believe that he is representing the truth when he is 100 percent in Satan's camp, is it better to tell him the truth or to pretend that it is not so?

Who gave Jesus the biggest problem during His ministry? Was it the "world of unbelievers" or the "duly-appointed church leaders"? The evil that was being done in Jesus' day and the evil being done back in the beginning in heaven was not "smoking and drinking or open adultery," etc., but selfishness, covetousness, and misrepresenting God! (*Steps to Christ* 30 (1892); Compare *MB* 7; *2T* 238,239) At the end of the discussion in John 8, who was it that wanted to pick up stones to kill Jesus? Was it the world or the "brethren"?

Jesus needed to teach His followers to think for themselves and not just accept the religious traditions of the day. It was hard for the Jews even to think that their cherished dreams so carefully nurtured by the Pharisees could be completely wrong! So, the entire population played into the hands of the religious leaders!

12. What is implied by John 8:32, "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"?

Jesus was not just discussing the physical condition of slavery. It was true that the Jews were not really free, but subject to the Romans every day! But, Jesus was talking about a much more significant type of freedom.

Real freedom exists only when real choices are available and when there is an orderly universe in which those choices can take place. (See handouts on **Love** and **The Great Controversy**) Real freedom also means that we will be able to do whatever we want for eternity. However, it is also true that we will be living together in a community with God as the Leader for all of that time. Whenever there is a group living together, there must be certain rules to govern mutual practice. As some have stated, "Your freedom ends where my nose begins!" But, if we could live in a society where every resident recognizes the advantages of living according to mutually agreed upon guidelines, then none of them would even *want* to do anything wrong and certainly not anything that would hurt someone else. Heaven will be just such a society.

I believe that as we come to recognize more and more the benefits of living according to the rules that God has set down (Which of the Ten Commandments would you really want to do away with if you were setting up a perfect society?), we will each come to the place, sooner or later, when we will realize that the rules that God has suggested are not as a way of forcing us to comply with His ideas but rather are designed for the mutual good of all. When we realize that, we might walk up to God some day and say, "Thank you for the guidelines You gave us so long ago. Now I realize that I would not choose to break any of them even if You had not given them." At that point, I believe God will smile broadly and say, "Now you know the truth, and the truth has made you free! (See John 8:32) You can do whatever you want from now on!"

13. Why did Jesus wait four days to raise Lazarus? What is implied about death by Jesus' statements about Lazarus? (John 11:11-14) Was everyone thrilled to see that miracle?

There was a Jewish tradition clearly documented back as far as the 3rd century A.D. that suggested that it was not until the third day that you could be sure that a person was truly dead and not just in a coma. Some even believed that for three days after a person "died," the "soul" of that person would return daily to the body to see if it could re-enter that body. It was suggested that if the person was truly dead, on the fourth day, the face would be sufficiently disfigured by decomposition that the soul would leave and never return. Thus, recognizing that some of the Sadducees—who did not believe in the possibility of a resurrection and who had claimed that His previous resurrections were just resuscitations—doubted His ability to resurrect anyone, Jesus wanted to make it absolutely clear that He had power over death and that He could raise people from the dead. The fact that He did it so close to Jerusalem and with so many witnesses present made it impossible for anyone to challenge His ability to give life. This is what made the Sadducees so furious and ready to join with the Pharisees in condemning Jesus to death.

14. How did Jesus treat Judas even on the last night of his life when he had already agreed to betray Jesus? Why didn't Jesus expose him as a thief and tell the others what his plans were? (John 13:18-30; compare John 12:4-6)

See # 10 above. Jesus could have exposed him very easily, but He did not want to give Judas any excuse for what he was about to do. Nor did He want to give others reading the story later the idea that perhaps Judas was justified in what he did because of Jesus' treatment of him. God never wants to embarrass even the most wicked of His children.

15. When the disciples finally realized who Jesus was, (Matthew 16:13-16; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-20) why didn't they ask Him about all their questions from the Old Testament? Did they really believe that Jesus was just like His Father? (John 10:30; 12:45; 14:8,9) Do we have answers to all our questions about the Old Testament? Did the disciples bring up the questions? Did they ask, "Why did You drown all but eight in the flood?" How about, "An eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth"? (Exodus 21:23-25; Leviticus 24:19-22; Deuteronomy 19:21; Matthew 5:38-42) Why did You say, "Kill the women and babies" after being victorious on the battlefield? (Deuteronomy 20:16) And why did You order the stoning of Achan? (Joshua 7) Why did you say that illegitimate children should be banished from the camp for ten generations? (Deuteronomy 23:2) We love the way You treated the woman taken in adultery, but why did You send she-bears to tear those irreverent youths who mocked Elisha? (2 Kings 2:23-25) And why did You kill Uzzah when he tried to keep the ark from falling? (2 Samuel 6:7) Why did You turn Lot's wife into a pillar of salt? (Genesis 19:26) And why did You scare everyone at Mount Sinai? (Exodus 19,20)

It would have been great if the disciples had had the courage and insight to ask all of these questions and many more that could have been asked. However, then we would not have the challenge of thinking through the answers for ourselves. And if Christ had provided some kind of straightforward answers, we might have a hard time accepting all that He would have said. Each of these stories has important historical background information that at least partially determines why things happened the way they did. At many times in the past, God has reached down to touch our lives in a way and in a "language" that we can understand. (See Hebrews 1:1) God always tailors His actions to the people with whom He is trying to communicate. Some may call this "situation ethics," and in the best possible sense, it is.

Each of these stories is discussed in the Teacher's Guide for that book of the Bible; or, in some cases, we have a special handout just for that story. Struggling through the answers to these questions should lead us to a heightened appreciation for God's efforts to communicate with humans. There has been an enormous loss to millions of Christians because they have not had the insight—or perhaps courage—to even ask such questions! But, if we are going to survive through the trials at the end, those of us who live at the end of time need to get to know our wonderful God better than any previous generation. Only those who understand God very well will be able to look the Devil in the face and tell him that he is a fraud.

16. What is implied in John 15:15 about the relationship that God wants with us? Is it reasonable for us to think that we could be “friends” of an omnipotent, sovereign God? What is the difference between the “servants” He talks about and the “friends”?

For a full discussion of this question, read Dr. A. Graham Maxwell’s book, *Servants or Friends*. How we understand and view this issue makes all the difference in the world in the way we relate to God and how we seek to prepare ourselves for the final crisis. If we see God as a harsh Judge waiting to catch His children in some sin, we will live in a constant state of fear and rebellion. On the other hand, if we see God as unjustly accused of being arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe, then we look for evidence on which to base our understanding of Him.

Many people understand this passage as if it said, “I call you my friends because I love you.” This would be nice, but that is not what God said. God said, “I call you friends because I want you to understand!” What a difference! God expects us to use our minds and to think through the issues. He wants to communicate with us as friends so we can come to understand why He has done what He has done. This should challenge us to read our Bibles in an entirely different way! The Bible is not a code book of deeds to be done and sins to be shunned; it is a demonstration of God’s working with humans under all kinds of circumstances to convince us that we should become His friends! (Hebrews 1:1)

17. What should we do with John 16:25-27? Could this really be true? After all the verses about intercession and all the work of the priests in the Old Testament, what could Jesus be saying about His role as a mediator or intercessor? Could Jesus be truthful in saying, “I need make no promise to plead to the Father for you, for the Father himself loves you”? (*Phillips*) How does this fit with 1 John 1:9 and Romans 8:34? How should we deal with this verse where Jesus speaks “plainly about the Father” in light of all the others that appear to contradict it? Could this final statement in the life of Jesus be part of the “testimony of Jesus”? (Revelation 12:17; 14:12) In light of these verses, what do you think Jesus is actually doing in the judgment?

John 16:26,27:

“καὶ οὐ λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἐρωτήσω τὸν πατέρα περὶ ὑμῶν:” (*N-A Greek New Testament 26th*)

“I say not unto you that I will speak unto my Father for you.” (*Tyndale*)

“I am not saying to you that I shall be asking the Father concerning you...” (*Concord. Literal*)

“I do not say to you that I will ask the Father for you...” (*Young’s Literal*)

“I am not telling you that I will pray to the Father on your behalf...” (*Jewish New Testament*)

“I say not unto you, that I will pray unto the Father for you...” (*Geneva*)

“I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you...” (*KJV, ASV*)

“I do not say to you that I will pray the Father for you...” (*RSV*)

“and I say not to you that I will demand of the Father for you...” (*Darby*)

“I do not say that I will ask the Father for you...” (*Williams*)

“I do not say that I shall pray to the Father for you...” (*Jerusalem; NEB*)

“I do not say that I will ask him on your behalf...” (*GNB*)

“I don’t tell you I’ll ask the Father for you.” (*Beck*)

“I do not tell you that I will ask the Father for you.” (*NAB*)

“I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf...” (*NIV*)

“I do not say to you that I will request the Father on your behalf...” (*NASB*)

“I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf...” (*NRSV; Translator’s*)

“I do not say that I shall have to petition the Father for you.” (*Anchor*)

“I won’t have to ask him for you.” (*CEV*)

“I’m not telling you that I will make requests on your behalf...” (*The Five Gospels*)

“I will not say to you, ‘I will ask the Father on your behalf.’” (*Schonfield*)

“I won’t need to ask the Father to grant you these requests...” (*TLB*)

“I do not say that I will intercede with the Father for you...” (*Twentieth Century*)

“I shall not have to ask the Father in your behalf.” (*Norlie*)

“I do not promise to intercede with the Father for you...” (*Goodspeed*)

“I need make no promise to plead to the Father for you...” (*Phillips*)

“I’m telling you that I won’t have to ask the Father for you.” (*God’s Word*)

“I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf [for it will not be necessary].”
(*Amplified*)

“I won’t continue making requests of the Father on your behalf. I won’t need to.” (*The Message*)

“After that, you’ll feel more comfortable in going to the Father directly and in my name asking Him for anything you need. And I’ll be asking Him for things for you as well.” (*The Clear Word*)

It is never safe to ignore a single verse in Scripture just because it does not seem to fit with our preconceived or even carefully worked out paradigm. The only safety is in taking all of the Bible and trying to give full weight to every verse. This pivotal verse is particularly troublesome for some because it comes in the last few minutes of Christ’s time with His disciples before His death and because even the disciples recognized that He was speaking plainly to them. A full discussion of the implications of this verse would take at least a whole book. To review some of the things that have already been said on the subject see: *Servants or Friends*, chapter 6; A. Graham Maxwell, *God in All 66 Series* recordings, tape on the book of John. (See Pineknoll Publications, audio resources)

Consider the following:

1) The very first reference to “intercession” in the Bible is found in the story of Sinai. The people were scared to death after God appeared on the mountaintop. They asked Moses to speak with God and then speak with them because they were afraid that if God spoke to them again, they would die! (Exodus 20:18-21)

2) The whole ceremonial system—with its tent of meeting and altars and sacrifices—was not invented at Sinai. There was a very simple ceremony that God apparently gave to Adam and Eve outside the Garden of Eden to impress upon them that sin was serious. They were to kill that lamb after confessing their sins over it. But, that simple act had been changed and added to by many religious groups until even the children of Israel as they watched their masters in Egypt had come to the place where they had a very different idea about God and what it was necessary to do to “appease” Him. They adopted, with God’s assistance, a system that was somewhat similar to what others were doing in the world around them. God gave Moses a model on the mountaintop that was much closer to his ideal, but that system was still close enough to what the other nations around were doing that the Israelite people would recognize it as a system that they were somewhat familiar with.

3) Killing animals was never God’s ideal! God has always wanted a relationship with His people that would bring them closer to Him in their thinking. Many verses in the Old Testament make this clear. Notice what God wanted from the Israelites in the beginning of His plan to take them out of Egypt. (Exodus 6:1-8) But they were not ready for it. (See Exodus 6:9) The prophets understood very well what God wanted! (See Psalms 51; Hosea 6:1-6; Micah 6:1-8; Isaiah 1:10-20; Jeremiah 7:21-26; 31:31-34)

18. In what sense could just “knowing God” be life eternal? (John 17:3)

To “know” God is to be His friend. Real friendship with God is the key to salvation. What God wants is people who are safe and friendly to live next door to—people who can be trusted for the rest of eternity. Those who really know God and have come to understand His real character and how He runs His universe will be ready for life “eternal.” In fact, when we come to know God, the peace and love and trust that we experience is just a foretaste of eternity. Thus, it can be said that eternal life begins here and now.

19. Why did Jesus say to Mary after the resurrection, “Don’t touch Me”? (John 20:17) If Mary had “touched” Him, would it have been impossible for Jesus to ascend to heaven, thus, spoiling the plan of salvation?

Jesus did not say, “Don’t touch Me!” That is a mistranslation of the Greek. In Greek there are two ways to say don’t do something. One is to tell someone not to start doing it, and the other is to tell them not to continue doing it. Jesus said to Mary, “Don’t continue touching Me or holding Me! I must ascend to My Father!” Jesus had waited to appear to His earthly friends so they would know that He really was alive, but He could not wait any longer to get to heaven and speak to His Father and the waiting crowds of angels. Several of the more modern translations represent this idea.

John 20:17:

“μή μου απτου,..” (*Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament-26th*)

“Touch me not...” (*Tyndale, Great, Geneva, Bishops, KJV, Noye’s, Scarlett; RV; Darby; ASV*)

“Be not touching me...” (*Young’s Literal*)

“Do not touch Me...” (*Concordant Literal, Rheims-Douay*)

“Don’t touch me...” (*TLB*)

“Do not hold me (*now*)...” (*Twentieth Century, RSV, Phillips, Amplified [in italics], Translator’s*)

“Do not hold on to me...” (*NIV, GNB, NRSV*)

“Don’t hold on to me...” (*Beck, CEV, God’s Word, NCV*)

“Do not cling to me...” (*Weymouth, Jerusalem, New Jerusalem; NEB, Amplified; NKJV*)

“You must not cling to me...” (*Goodspeed*)

“Don’t cling to me...” (*Message, New Living*)

“Cease clinging to me...” (*Moffatt, Montgomery*)

“Stop clinging to Me (so)...” (*Williams, NASB, Kingdom Interlinear*)

“So don’t hold me back.” (*Clear Word*)

“Stop holding on to me...” (*NAB; Jewish New Testament*)

“Don’t detain me...” (*Noli; Ellen White in The Desire of Ages*)

20. Why would Jesus create fish for the disciples to eat at His last breakfast with them? (John 21:9) Since He created it Himself, why didn’t He give them something really healthful?

The focus of that meal was not to be on what they had to eat or even nutrition! Jesus certainly did not want the disciples running home to tell their wives, “Guess what we had for breakfast!” Jesus knew that they had worked hard all night and, no doubt, were hungry. He also had some important things to say to them that He wanted them to remember. So, although He could have created anything, He gave them the common food that they were accustomed to eating. He had done the same thing before:

Christ has given in His own life a lesson of hospitality. When surrounded by the hungry multitude beside the sea, He did not send them unrefreshed to their

homes. He said to His disciples, "Give ye them to eat." Matt. 14:16. And by an act of creative power He supplied food sufficient to satisfy their need. Yet how simple was the food provided! There were no luxuries. He who had all the resources of heaven at His command could have spread for the people a rich repast. But He supplied only that which would suffice for their need, that which was **the daily food of the fisherfolk about the sea**. *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 345 (1900); *Adventist Home*, p. 451; *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 87

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info@theox.org

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An elderly black preacher was telling the story of Jesus at the age of twelve in the temple being quizzed by the authorities. At one point the authorities started to ask Jesus some questions about His background which included this brief exchange:

"Son, how old are you?"

"Well, on my mother's side, I'm twelve; but on my Father's side, I'm older than time...."