

God or Money?



SABBATH—JANUARY 13

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Psalm 33:6–9; Matthew 19:16–22; 1 Peter 1:18; Hebrews 2:14, 15.

MEMORY VERSE: “Because of this, God lifted Jesus high above everything else. He gave Him a name that is greater than any other name. So when the name of Jesus is spoken, everyone in heaven and on earth and under the earth will bow down before Him. And every tongue will say Jesus Christ is Lord. Everyone will give honor to God the Father” (Philippians 2:9–11, NLV).

HOW DOES GOD FEEL about our wanting too much money? God makes His feelings very clear. Jesus' words in Luke 12:16–21 to the rich man should cause us all to be afraid of wanting too much.

We cannot serve God and money. We must choose one or the other. We cannot serve both. People who try to serve both God and money end up getting into trouble. We might fool other people. We even might trick ourselves into believing we are not trying to live for both God and money. But we cannot fool God. One day we must stand before Him and answer for the choices we have made in this life.

We must choose: God or money. But what happens if we do not choose God? Then the hold that money has on our souls will grow stronger. Faith involves a choice.

Three things make our choice easier. They are (1) knowing God, (2) knowing the things He has done for us, and (3) knowing how much we owe Him.



We cannot serve God and money. We must choose one or the other.

JESUS IS THE ONE WHO MADE US (Psalm 33:6–9)

Read Genesis 1:1; Psalm 33:6–9; Isaiah 45:11, 12; Jeremiah 51:15; and John 1:3. What do these verses tell us about how good the earth is that God made?

“Jesus was the One who made the heavens. He set up the earth. His hand set the planets in space. He made the flowers of the field. ‘You [Jesus] made the mountains by your strength. You have great power’ [Psalm 65:6, ICB]. ‘The sea is His [Jesus]’, for [because] He made it. And His hands made the dry land’ [Psalm 95:5, NLV]. Jesus filled the earth with beautiful things. He filled the air with music. He wrote the message of His Father’s love to us on everything He made on earth, in the air, and in the sky.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 20, adapted.

The things on the earth that God made are not evil. Some religions teach that these things are evil. But the Bible places great value on the beautiful things of nature. After all, Jesus Himself made them. So, how could nature or this earth be evil? True, we can use God’s gifts in evil ways. But that does not make the things that God made evil at all. The Bible warns us against harming the things that God made and using them in bad ways. But this warning does not mean that the things that God made are bad.

Of course not! God made the earth for His people to enjoy. In fact, the Bible tells us: “Then you [God’s people] and the Levites and the outsiders [foreigners] among you will be full of joy. You will enjoy all the good things the LORD your God has given to you and your family” (Deuteronomy 26:11, NIV).

Jesus is the One who made us (John 1:1–3). The earth is just one small part of all that He made. Jesus’ power to make things from nothing gives Him a special view of life itself and of the people living on the earth. He knows the true cost of the things that He made. He knows that He gave these things to us for our own good and for our joy. He also knows what happens when people use those gifts in the wrong way or let those gifts take God’s place in their lives.

What a beautiful earth we live on! Look at all the beautiful things in nature that God made. Yes, sin ruined a lot of things that God made. But even now, we see God’s goodness in so much of nature. What does nature and its wonderful goodness tell us about how good God is?



“Jesus wrote the message of His Father’s love to us on everything He made.”
—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 20, adapted.

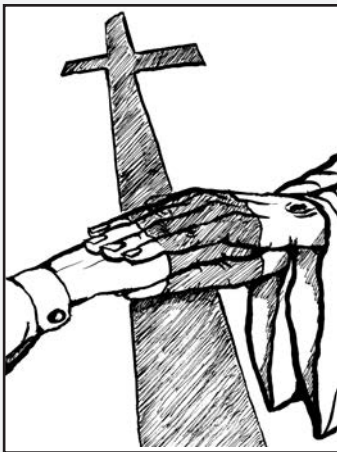
JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD AND MAN (Matthew 19:16–22)

As Christians, we believe that Jesus is fully God and fully Human. In Jesus, both God and humans are joined as one. This joining between God and humans that takes place because of Jesus makes Jesus' view about things very special. Jesus is both God and Man. So, He can understand the things that are important on earth and in heaven. Now, we cannot understand how Jesus can be both God and Human at the same time. But this fact is still true even if we cannot understand it. Just because someone does not understand how an airplane works does not make the airplane stop flying!

“Here are two mysteries: (1) Our One God is made up of Three Persons. And (2) our One God was joined to humans in the Person of Jesus. . . . Nothing in any story on earth is as wonderful as the truth that God became a Man and lived with humans.”—J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1973), page 53, adapted.

Why did Jesus come to this earth? He came to show us just how loving and caring God is. Some people had the wrong idea about God. They believed He was mean. So, Jesus came to show the truth about our Father in heaven.

But Satan tries to make us think God does not care about us. Satan uses many tricks to stop us from knowing about God's love. One trick Satan uses is our love for the things on this earth. Satan's plan works well.



In Jesus, both God and humans are joined as one.

Read Matthew 19:16–22. What does the story found in these verses tell us about how Satan can use our love for the things on this earth to turn us away from God?

Make a picture of this story in your mind. Here is Jesus, who is God in a human body. He is talking with this young man. It is clear this young man knows that Jesus is somebody very special. But what happens? The young man allows his riches and his love for the things on this earth to get in the way of his love for God. Those things blinded the young man's spiritual eyesight. The young man was sad. Why was he so sad? He was sad because he was losing his soul over his riches. But his sadness was not enough to cause him to make the right choice.

Rich or poor, how can we make sure we have the right thoughts and feelings toward the things on this earth?

JESUS OUR SAVIOR (Galatians 3:13)

God never wanted us to die. But Adam and Eve sinned. They broke God's law. And so, humans were ruined. We owed God what we never could hope to pay back. The cost of breaking the law is death. We were "broke" from owing God what we could not pay back.

But God already had a plan to save us. He made this plan because He loved us. What was the plan? Jesus agreed to pay everything we owed (Hebrews 7:22). He became our Savior. His decision to save us is the most important "deal" ever made. He agreed to pay for our sins with His life. Only His death could pay what we owed to the law. So, Jesus paid the price for our sin. Mercy and fairness joined together in Jesus' death. What great riches were used to pay for our sins on the cross! Heaven never saw before any payment worth more than the riches God gave on the cross.

"God bought the heart, mind, and soul of every person. He bought them by pouring out all the riches in heaven on this earth. All heaven was given to us in Jesus."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 326, adapted.

Read Colossians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 1 Peter 1:18; Hebrews 2:14, 15; Galatians 3:13; and Revelation 1:5. As each verse shows us, what does Jesus save us from?

In John 19:30, we find the Greek word *tetelestai*. It means "It is finished" (NLV). These words have been named the most important words ever spoken. These words were some of the last words Jesus said on the cross. "It is finished" meant Jesus' work on earth was done. These words meant that what we owed the law was paid off. Jesus said "It is finished" with hope. He said these words as One who succeeded in saving sinners from death. What happened on the cross gives us hope now and in the future. Jesus gave His life to destroy sin, death, and the work of the devil forever. And so, we are saved (Ephesians 1:7).

Jesus is our Savior. His work as our Savior shows us the true glory of God. Jesus wants to save us more than He wants anything else. This desire shows us how much He loves us. It also shows us how much Jesus thinks we are worth.

Think about it: Jesus fully paid the cost for all the evil you ever did. What must your answer to this gift be? (Read Job 42:5, 6.)



God bought the heart, mind, and soul of every person. He bought them by pouring out all the riches of heaven on this earth.

A GOD WHO CAREFULLY GUARDS THE THINGS THAT ARE HIS (Exodus 34:14)

In Exodus 9, God is in a spiritual battle with the king of Egypt. The king of Egypt was known also as Pharaoh. Pharaoh refuses to honor God or let His people go free. So, God warns Pharaoh: “‘I will send all My troubles on you and your servants and your people. So you may know that there is no one like [the same as] Me in all the earth’” (Exodus 9:14, NLV).

What does the Lord mean when He says, “‘There is no one like [the same as] Me in all the earth’ ”?

“We are limited in how much we can understand. So, it is impossible for us to fully know God or what He does. The most powerful and educated minds on earth cannot figure out all there is to know about God. God is a holy Person. He always will be wrapped in mystery.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies [Special Messages] for the Church*, volume 5, pages 698, 699, adapted.

God has no equal (1 Kings 8:60). He thinks and acts in ways we cannot begin to know. We may try to make God the same as we are. But God will always be God. He made every snowflake, brain, and star. He made everything special about us that makes us different from anyone else. “‘The Lord is God. There is no other’” (1 Kings 8:60, NLV).

Read 1 Samuel 2:2; Psalm 86:8; Isaiah 55:8, 9; Jeremiah 10:10; and Titus 1:2. What do these verses tell us about how different God is from what He has made?

Think about all that God is, all that belongs to Him, and all that He does. It is hard to imagine anyone who would dare to challenge God. But things do “challenge” Him for our attention. These things try to take our attention away from Him. So, God must “fight” them for our love. Maybe that is the reason He says He is a “jealous [someone who carefully guards the things that are His]” God (Exodus 34:14, NIV). God made us free. He gave us power to choose whom we want to serve. Too often we choose to serve other gods. Choosing other gods over the Lord has been our biggest problem. The Lord is the only God worth serving. After all, He made everything. Everything belongs to Him. So, that is why He is indeed a jealous God.

What in life challenges God for your loyalty and love?



The things on this earth challenge God for our attention.

TRUE OWNERSHIP (Deuteronomy 10:14)

We belong to God. He made us, and He died to save us. We belong to Him because He did those two things. Everything we own belongs to God too. The only thing we own are the choices we make.

People who do not love God have a different view. They believe we are the true owners of all the things we have. This idea is false. It goes against Bible truth. But Christians know they are not the true owners of their belongings.

God owns everything (Job 38:4–11). We own nothing. We are nothing more than strangers on this earth and managers of everything God gives us. In the same way, the Israelites were managers of all the things God gave them in the Promised Land. We even must depend on God for our next breath (Acts 17:25). So, whatever we think we own, God really owns. We are only His stewards. Stewards are people who take care of the property and things that belong to someone else. We are meant to bring God glory by taking good care of God's property. God does not only put His riches into our care. He also puts into our care things we cannot touch. These things may live only in our hearts and minds. Examples of these gifts include love and knowledge and special skills.

Read Deuteronomy 10:14; Psalm 50:10; Psalm 104:16; Ezekiel 18:4; Haggai 2:8; and 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20. What do these verses say about how we should view what we own?

“All things belong to God. Men may choose not to pay attention to how much they owe God. Men may use all God gives them to please their selfish desires. But men will be asked to give a reason for why they chose to use God's gifts as they did.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies [Messages] for the Church*, volume 9, page 246, adapted.

God uses the gifts He gives us in this life to help us get ready for heaven and to help others. But bad managers can limit their Owner's use of the things He owns. As we learned, God does not force us to serve Him. He gave us things to take care of until He returns. How we take care of these things shows how close our connection to God is.

What does it mean that all you own really belongs to God? What should that fact tell you about how you should think and feel about everything you own?



We belong to God because He made us and died to save us.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Where in the Bible do we find the first example of stewardship? Stewardship is the job of carefully managing the property, things, and riches that belong to someone else. Stewardship started with Adam and Eve. God placed Adam and Eve in a beautiful garden home. They lived in Eden and took care of it (Genesis 2:15). In this perfect place, they learned about the work that God gave them to do. The work Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden gave meaning to their lives. It brought them happiness.

The Hebrew word for “rule over” (Genesis 1:26, 28, NIV) means “to bring under control and govern.” This control does not mean using power to force others to do things. Instead, it is a gentle power that means taking care of everything God made. The duty to take care of everything God made has not stopped. We must continue to care for it. Adam and Eve learned that God was the Owner. They were His stewards. Stewards are managers. As God’s stewards, Adam and Eve were given the job of caring for God’s property. But they were not the owners. They were to show God that they were loyal to the work He gave them.

“God gave Adam and Eve the garden of Eden to care for. They were ‘to work the soil and take care of the garden’ [Genesis 2:15, ERV]. Their work made them happy. . . . Nothing they did made them tired. Their work was not hard. Their hours were filled with useful tasks. They felt very connected to each other. Their work was pleasant. God and Jesus visited them and talked with them. God made Adam and Eve free. . . . God was the owner of their Eden home. They managed it for Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, volume 10, page 327, adapted.



Adam and Eve took care of the Garden of Eden. But they were not its owners. The Garden belonged to God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① God owns the whole earth. What does this fact teach us about our duty to care for the things that He made?
- ② Think more about the idea of God as a “jealous [someone who carefully guards what is His]” God (Exodus 34:14, NIV). Often, we think jealousy is bad. So, it can be hard to understand God’s jealousy. How can we understand God’s jealousy when it is very different from the jealousy we see in humans?
- ③ God made many things for us to enjoy. But we must be careful not to use those things in a wrong way. How can we learn to use and enjoy God’s gifts in the right way?