

RELIGION

God's divine provision through love

I John 3:1, 2, 11-24

The word "love" has lost much of its significance in the language of our day. We use the word to describe anything from the most intimate of relationships to the simple fondness for something, or even a set of circumstances.

However, there are two Greek words used in the New Testament that are translated by this one word. The word "phileo" shows "a fondness for" and "agapao" is that "self-giving love shown outwardly with no expectation of return."

It is important for us to understand the words, as they were recognized by the people who first heard them spoken, or the first readers of the messages. In what is recognized as the "cover letter" for his gospel, the Apostle John used "agapao" in every instant that we read in this communication.

As the apostle began to focus the attention of the readers on the divine provision of salvation through

faith in Jesus Christ, he wanted them — and us — to grasp a glorious realization. "Behold, what manner of the father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God..." 1 John 3:1a.

The acceptance of this divine provision causes one to be "set apart" (2 Corinthians 6:17) from the society in which he or she lives — "therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." 1 John 3:1b. It becomes important for the believer to make the decision regarding the "life standard" that will control his or her life.

There was — and continues to be — the teaching that "eternal life" and the knowledge of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is "always future." The apostle addressed this error. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God..." 1 John 3:2a. The life "in the spirit" has both "present and future" aspects. "... And it doth not yet appear what

Sunday School Lesson



Rev. James Temples

we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear (John 14:3), we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." 1 John 3:2b,c. This promise carries a personal responsibility. 1 John 3:3.

With the existence of many "new revelations," these early believers saw much contradiction, leading to great controversies. The apostle knew that these people — and all believers who would follow — needed to realize the necessity of "remaining in the basics." "For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." 1 John 3:11; John 13:35.

The scriptural illustration that was used pointed these believers to the very

beginning of the human race. John spoke of the members of the "first family." Using a "negative example," he wrote, "Not as Cain (Genesis 4:3-8), who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." 1 John 3:12.

These early readers were familiar with the Old Testament account of these two brothers. The same principle applied in the lives of those readers, and continues to guide lives, today. "Marvel not my brethren, if the world hate you." 1 John 3:13. It is not necessary for the world system to "appreciate" those who have determined to make Jesus Christ the lord of his or her life.

John often contrasted "life and death" — meaning spiritual life or spiritual death. He gave the "standard" by which each believer can make a personal determination. "We know that we have passed from

death unto life, because we love the brethren." 1 John 3:14a. The contrast is clear. "He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." 1 John 3:14b.

The apostle addressed a very important issue. "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." 1 John 3:15.

Yes, there are eternal consequences for our attitudes.

John gave a "self-test" regarding our relationship with God. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he hath laid down his life for us..." 1 John 3:16a. Since Jesus Christ is our example (1 Peter 2:21), there is a divine expectation regarding the lives of believers — "and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." 1 John 3:16b.

It is easy for any person to "readily accept the principle" of service to others. However, to "translate into shoe leather" the "lofty principles" of the word of

God calls for personal action. "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" 1 John 3:17. What is our "spiritual score" on this question?

The phrase "put your money where your mouth is" has a scriptural basis. "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." 1 John 3:18. The advice of "spiritual couch potatoes" has no place in the divine plan.

These "sources of advice" can "develop plans" for "others" to accomplish the word of God. John wrote, "And hereby we know that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before him." 1 John 3:19. Using the "self-test" is important for each believer.

"For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." 1 John 3:20.

Yes, we can know God.

The value of living up to your name

Just how important is a person's name?

According to Shakespeare, in so many famous words, not much. "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other word would smell as sweet" (Romeo and Juliet, Act II Scene II). Of course, Mr. Montague's romantic denial of his own name met with a tragic ending. Names, we learn, are of great consequence.

This is the finding of economists Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner in their best-seller **Freakonomics**. They prove that when parents give their children outlandish ethnic or otherwise weird names, they severely dampen the child's future employment and economic opportunities. A name, therefore, is highly significant.

Then, consider the case of California couple Mike Buday and Diana Bijon. When they married in 2005, he chose to take her last name.

This is illegal in their home state (but not in Georgia and five other states). So, they have enlisted the help of the ACLU to sue the state so that he can take her name. Like Romeo, that's kind of romantic, isn't it? But what does it prove? That a name is very important.

A name is a symbol of whom we are, whom we love, what is important to us. "Live up to your name." This is a challenge couples give to each other, parents give to their children, and countries give to its citizens. It is also a command that God gives to his people. And when we don't live up to the name God has given us, the lord is not pleased.

Check out Malachi 1:6-14. God's people in the Old Testament were named "Israel." Sometimes they were simply referred to as the "Jews" (derived from the tribe of "Judah"). These names were important. They signified that they were God's people ("Israel")

whose ultimate purpose was to give praise ("Judah") and glory to God. However, at least at the time of Malachi's preaching, they were not living up to their name.

The text at hand is actually an indictment against the Old Testament priests. But the people were guilty, too. They were not honoring their father. They were not obeying their master. They were not living up to their name. With the last question in verse six as our guide, let us answer the question, How did Israel fail to live up to God's name?

They were not offering acceptable sacrifices. Animal and agricultural sacrifices were part and parcel of Old Testament worship. God demanded the first and the best. It is clear in the text, however, that the Israelites were not giving it. They were not living up to their name. Instead of presenting the Lord with the first and best, they were giving him the last and least. Read verses 7-8 and 13. Is this what God's people should have been offering to God? Is this living up to your name?

They were not receiving God's blessings. God loves and saves unconditionally. He blesses and curses discriminatively. God chose Israel to be his people based on no merit of their own. However, once they became his people, God promised often to either bless them or curse them according to their behavior. Was Israel being blessed at this time in their history? Read the first part of verse 14. The curse in Israel was evident in the economic and spiritual stagnation they were living under by not living up to their name.

They were not pleasing God with their worship. Never should the name of God be more glorious as when the people of God gather for worship.

What did God think of Israel's worship at this time. Read verse 10.

The Gospel Truth



Dr. Charles F. DeVane Jr. First Baptist Church

He told them they might as well not bother. Lock the door and throw away the key, God said, for they were wasting their time. Wrong worship results in no fame for the great name of God.

They were not expanding the kingdom of God. The middle east was a well worn path in Malachi's day. Religion, then as now, was a major concern. God's concern was for true religion, true worship of the only true and living God, be practiced in Israel and spread to other nations. Read verses 11a, 11b, and 14b.

When people know, love, respect, and worship God, God's fame spreads, God's name is great, and God's people have a great name to live up to. They weren't doing it.

What about us? According to the New Testament, the church and her members are the "Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16). There is no more any significance to being a "Jew" or non-Jew (ref. Romans 1:16; Galatians 3:28), since all members of the church are part of one body of Christ (Ephesians 2:14). As the "church" we are the visible, often assembled people of God. As "Christians" we are followers of Jesus Christ. Are we living up to our name?

Are we offering acceptable sacrifices to God?

Radio commentator Paul Harvey told the true story of a woman and her Thanksgiving turkey. She discovered one had been in her freezer for at least 20 years. She called Butterball, who informed her that while the turkey was safe to thaw and eat, it would not

taste good at all.

Her reply (and I quote): "That's what I thought. We'll give the turkey to our church."

Isn't that a painful picture of modern American Christianity? We don't live up to our name. If we paid our taxes with way we pay our tithes and offerings, most professing Christians would be in jail. If we showed up for work the way we show up for worship and Bible study, most professing Christians would not have a job. The gospel and church of Jesus Christ demands our first and our best, not our least and last. Are we living up to our name?

Are we being blessed or cursed by God?

I believe God delights in blessing his church. I do not believe these blessings are automatically physical and material. Sometimes suffering and simplicity in our lives can do much more good that health and wealth. But I do believe God's design is to bless his people with spiritual joy and numerical increase in the church.

However, the landscape of the American church reveals that about 80 percent of Christian congregations are either stagnant or in decline. Location, town size, and population shifts explain some of it. But so does Christians not living up to their name. Most people I know wouldn't want to join most churches I know. Are we willing to obediently live up to our name so that God might grant blessings instead of curses on our churches?

Are we pleasing God with our public worship?

Just as God pleaded for the closing of the doors in Malachi's day, I think the almighty would advocate closing the doors of most churches today. Silly entertainment is not worship. Psycho-babble preaching is not worship. Silence and boredom are not marks of true worship.

Public reading and preaching of the word of God is worship. Praying publicly and reverently is worship. Singing loudly and joyfully to the lord is worship. Shouting a hearty "amen" and clapping your hands is worship. Baptizing new Christians and Christians new and old coming together for the Lord's Supper is worship. When we worship rightly we live up to God's name. When we live up to God's name, God's name is made great. When God's name is made great, God's kingdom expands.

Are we expanding the kingdom of God?

I've told you the names "church" and "Christian" are rather significant. Let me give you two other names: "gatherer" and "scatterer." Every professing Christian and church member here is one of the two. Matthew 12:30.

Those Christians and Christian churches who live up to their name are used by God to gather others who will claim his name and live up to it. Those who do not, in word and deed, actually repel people away from the gospel and God's church. The hypocrisy and indifference of the modern church is not only letting God down, it is letting lost people go down, too.

So, now that I've talked about Old Testament Israel

and most New Testament churches, what about us? What about our church? How can we live up to our name?

Read and apply Romans 12:1-2. Your very life is a living sacrifice to God. In all that you are and all that you do, live up to your name by giving your fist and best for the lord Jesus Christ. If He is not the most important person in your life right now, make it so, today.

Read and apply Malachi 3:9-10. Put your money where your mouth is and let your mouth speak for your heart.

If your heart belongs to God, so do your money and material possessions. Give your time, talents, and treasure appropriately, and he will bless you accordingly, spiritually. Read and apply Hebrews 10:25. Real worship begins with presence. If you give God yours, he will give you his. Then the praise, prayers, and preaching of God's word will have a dynamic effect on your life.

Read and apply Matthew 28:18-20. This not Christ's commission to vocational missionaries, pastors, and ministers. This is Christ's call to all who bear his name. Live up to your name by helping others to claim his name as well. Be a gatherer, not a scatterer.

Above all, live up to your name!

THANKS

The family of the late Jake Dennis Robinson wishes to express their thanks to many friends and in-laws for their expressions of sympathy and love during their time of bereavement. Many

thanks. May God bless each and every one of you.

The Family of Jake Dennis Robinson

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We would like to take this opportunity to thank every-

one, especially the churches in our community, for all of your prayers and kind thoughts during the illness of our father, Mike Griffin.

The road to recovery may be slow but sure. We greatly

appreciate your continued prayers for our father throughout his recovery.

Sincerely,
Christy and Stacey Griffin, Jamie and Dustin Day

Gospel Revival

Fort Gaines Church of Christ

On the corner of Hancock and Habersham Roads

Saturday, March 17

Sunday, March 18

and

Monday, March 19

Leading the services is

Minister Adam Bush,

formerly of Colquitt.

He is the son of Milton and Dianne Johnson and the late Ted Bush.



Adam Bush

Times

Saturday: 6:30 Hamburger Supper
7:30 Worship Services

Sunday: 9:30 Sunday School Services
10:30 Worship Services

Afterwards: Covered dish lunch,
congregational singing and evening services

Monday: 6:30 Sandwich Supper
7:30 Worship Service

ATTEND THE CHURCH OF
YOUR CHOICE THIS SUNDAY