

South American DIVISION

ADULT
SABBATH SCHOOL
BIBLE STUDY GUIDE
Oct • Nov • Dec 2012

Growing *in* Christ

ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

GROWING IN CHRIST

Oct • Nov • Dec 2012



Unions	Churches	Companies	Members	Population
Argentina	526	329	109,777	41,000,000
Bolivia	312	602	78,391	10,426,000
Central Brazil	989	688	218,137	46,540,000
Chile	623	311	113,738	17,100,000
Ecuador	194	337	45,900	14,475,000
North Brazil	1,239	1,018	181,312	13,128,000
North Peru	1,025	1,579	182,628	12,420,000
Northeast Brazil	1,516	2,316	347,061	50,215,000
Northwest Brazil	725	540	117,722	5,460,000
Paraguay	60	52	12,437	6,459,000
South Brazil	864	977	172,688	26,410,000
South Peru	975	1,459	185,542	17,050,000
Southeast Brazil	1,071	1,017	164,895	37,700,000
Uruguay	50	27	7,473	3,360,000
West Central Brazil	529	640	104,995	13,860,000
Totals	10,698	11,892	2,042,196	315,603,000



Mission Projects

Our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help the South American Division with these projects:

- 1 Brazil: Churches for existing congregations in west-central Brazil
- 2 Brazil: Church for Central Brazil Adventist Academy
- 3 Northern Peru: Churches for existing congregations
- 4 Northern Peru: An auditorium for the Adventist school in Chiclayo, Peru
- 5 CHILDREN'S PROJECT: Training material for children who lead small groups in northern Peru

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Where legally possible, offerings will go to these projects; otherwise special arrangement will be made with the General Conference for distribution of funds based on the laws of the countries where these offerings are collected.



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SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH



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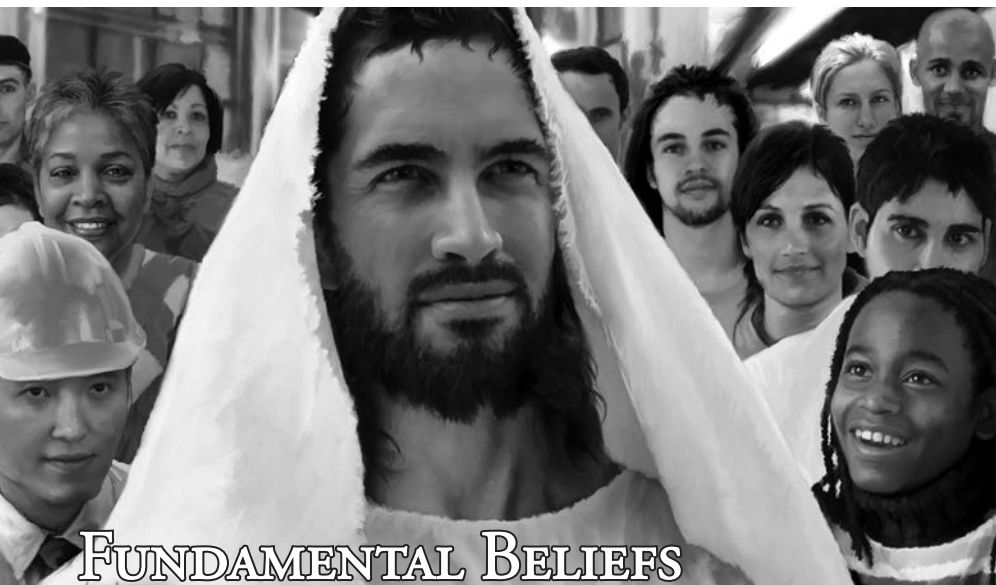
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**Sabbath
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Personal
Ministries**

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FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS

Everyone believes in something. Even those who claim to believe in nothing, or in nothing *absolute*, still believe in something (in this case, their relativism). Beliefs are important because they greatly impact how we live. For some Christians, however, more important than belief or behavior is belonging, a sense of community. Yet, community must be based on shared beliefs, shared goals, and common concerns.

For Seventh-day Adventists—people from almost every conceivable manifestation of humanity—what holds us together as a community are our “fundamental beliefs,” all 28, which are foundational for growing in Christ and living as a community of faith in the light of eternity.

Some argue that what matters is our love of Christ, not doctrine. This sounds nice, but the Bible never separates a love for Christ from a love for the truth. We are told that by “speaking the truth in love,” we may grow into Christ (*Eph. 4:15, 16*). Knowing doctrine is not merely accumulating correct data; rather, knowing doctrine results in love for God (*2 John 6–10*). Furthermore, the Bible is concerned about “sound doctrine” because, among other things, it affects the ethical life (*1 Tim. 1:9, 10; Titus 2:1–5*).

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a statement of 28 fundamental beliefs. These are not a creed, in the sense that one could not expect any further development of the truths expressed in them (or that even more teachings could be added).

And though we must always be open to more light, a firm consensus on these beliefs is crucial to the unity and mission of the church. What has brought together millions of people from all over the world into a unified movement other than our shared doctrines?

This quarter, then, we are going to focus on some of those teachings. Though we believe that all 28 are foundational and fundamental to our identity as Seventh-day Adventists, we cannot study them all in one quarter. But we do hope to present a systematic and coherent guide to some of these beliefs. Special attention will be given to belief Number 11, “Growing in Christ,” accepted by the General Conference Session in St. Louis, Missouri, in 2005 (see lessons 5–7). This belief, in and of itself, didn’t add new or previously unknown teaching; rather, in response to needs in certain parts of the world, it helped to clarify the church’s understanding of God’s power to give believers in Christ victory over the forces of evil. In fact, all the lessons this quarter will be framed within the context of the struggle between Christ and those forces of evil. It’s what we call “the great controversy.”

Within the great-controversy motif, and directly related to it, salvation in Christ is the thread that runs through all our doctrines.

Within the great-controversy motif, and directly related to it, salvation in Christ is the thread that runs through all our doctrines. The great controversy, and the issues it has generated, sets the stage for the plan of redemption, which underlies and permeates all 28 of our fundamental beliefs.

Doctrines, then, are not an end in and of themselves. They are a *means* to an end, and that end is Jesus, knowing Jesus for ourselves and growing in Him. Or, more subjectively, all 28 of our doctrines should lead us to a deeper understanding of what Jesus has done for us through the plan of salvation, which, in turn, should lead us to a deeper love of God and to a life more committed to revealing that love not only to the world but also to “principalities and powers in heavenly places” (*Eph 3:10*).

Yes, everyone believes in something. The goal of the quarter is to help us to not just believe in Truth (*John 14:6*), but to love Him even more and to grow in His grace.

Kwabena Donkor, a native of Ghana, is an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Got Questions?

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SMALL GROUPS, RAPID GROWTH



Small groups are the power behind the Adventist Church's rapid growth in South America. Church members invite neighbors and friends to their homes to study the Bible and pray together. Even children have their own small groups.

But small groups outgrow their homes and need a place in which to worship. Their faith is rich, but their resources are meager.

This quarter our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help several struggling congregations in Brazil and Peru to build simple churches in which to worship. I'm glad I can help. For me, it's personal.

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The Great Controversy: The Foundation



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 3:15, Rev. 12:1–17, Isa. 14:4–21, Ezek. 28:12–19, Isa. 53:6, Rom. 1:20–28, John 16:2.*

Memory Text: “ ‘And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel’ ” (*Genesis 3:15, NKJV*).

Key Thought: The great-controversy motif is the overarching concept that gives cohesion to Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs.

Necessity,” it has been said, “is the mother of invention.” The word *mother*, in this case, means “the source,” “the driving force,” and “the foundation”; in other words, it’s the need, the necessity, for something that moves people to action. For instance, the need for cleaner air is the foundation, the driving force, behind the move for energy sources other than fossil fuels.

Just as with physical inventions, a belief system also needs a foundation or a principle that explains it.

Seventh-day Adventists profess a body of 28 fundamental beliefs. These beliefs have a foundation in a concept that we call the “great controversy.” Each of the 28 fundamentals deals with a particular aspect of this cosmic controversy. The beliefs that will be studied this quarter make the best sense against the backdrop of the great-controversy motif. This week we will look at some of the key points of this foundation.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 6.*

The Controversy and Its Players

All throughout recorded history, people have sensed that humanity is in some sort of battle, a war, a struggle between competing forces. The poet T. S. Eliot wrote, “In all of my years, one thing does not change. / However you disguise it, this thing does not change: / The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil.”—*The Complete Poems and Plays* (New York, San Diego, London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1952), p. 98. However common that understanding, people have radically different views regarding what the conflict is about, who’s involved, what’s at stake, and how it is going to end. As Seventh-day Adventists, however, we have a decidedly supernaturalist perspective regarding this battle, a perspective that comes from our understanding of the Bible and how the Bible depicts what we call “the great controversy between Christ and Satan.”

Study Genesis 3:15 and Revelation 12:1–17. Who are the key players in the controversy? While symbols are sometimes used to depict the players, why do we believe that the powers described here are real, literal beings? What would happen to our whole belief system were we to spiritualize away the reality of the great controversy between Christ and Satan and our role in it?

It is not unusual for people to use terms such as the devil, angels, or even God when they mean something very different from the meaning usually attached to those words. For example, there are some whose interest in the use of the word *God* focuses only on the function that the word performs in human language and society; they have no interest in whether “God,” in any form, exists.

Whatever the symbols used to describe them, the Bible teaches that these figures are real entities engaged in a real conflict. That’s how we as Seventh-day Adventists understand them. Most of the doctrines studied this quarter will not make sense if the players identified in the controversy are not taken literally, which often puts us decidedly at odds with the prevailing culture.

In fact, while secularism has taken many shapes and forms over the last two centuries, nothing characterizes secularism more than the push to eliminate all “otherworldly” language from human discourse. With the success of science, people in some cultures are more and more inclined to think about issues scientifically. Angels and demons do not fare well in the scientific mode of thinking. Hence, contemporary culture is witnessing a gradual demise of belief in the supernatural.

How strongly impacted is your own culture by the scientific, secular worldview? How much have you been impacted by it? Against what aspects of this worldview must we particularly guard?

Lucifer's Fall

Although the Bible does not explicitly tell us the issues involved in the controversy between God and Satan, they can be inferred from some pertinent scriptural passages, such as Isaiah 14:4–21 and Ezekiel 28:12–19. In their original settings, these passages represented pagan kings of Tyre and Babylon; but, when read carefully, they provide details that go beyond these ancient, Near Eastern rulers. Indeed, they point to the origin, position, and fall of Satan.

In 1 Timothy 3:6, Paul warns against ordaining a new convert, cautioning that such an act might cause the person to become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. How does Paul's statement throw light on the two passages above, and in what way do these three passages together help us to understand some issues in the controversy?

At least three issues are raised in the texts cited above: pride, autonomy, and independence. The Old Testament portrays a created, dependent being aspiring to be self-sufficient and independent. But independence is always independence from something or somebody. First John 3:8 says that the devil has sinned from the beginning; 1 John 3:4 defines *sin* as “lawlessness.” It follows, then, that Satan’s sin—which manifested itself as a quest for independence and autonomy—represented a desire to be freed from the “restraints” of God and His laws. Thus, by refusing to allow himself to be brought under the authority of God’s law, Satan showed that he wanted to live under a different set of conditions. This rebellion would also imply that the system of laws in heaven was not ideal, that something was, indeed, wrong with it. But because God’s law is a reflection of God’s character, a defect in the law would amount to a defect in God’s character. In short, Satan’s rebellion was as much against God Himself as it was against anything else.

***Pride, autonomy, independence.* What images do these words conjure up in your own mind? In what ways are any of us in danger of falling into the traps, which are sometimes very subtle, that pride, autonomy, and independence can set for us? After all, under the right conditions, what’s wrong with any of these concepts?**

God's Weapon

“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (*Gen. 3:15*). In what way is the great controversy revealed in this text?

The cryptic language of Genesis 3:15, in which the controversy is here predicted, gives us a hint of God's rules of engagement in this conflict. We can see that the conflict, which had just begun on earth between the serpent and the woman, was going to take shape by involving the followers of the initial contestants: the “seed” of the woman and the “seed” of the serpent. In due course, as we know, the conflict would climax into a mortal clash between Satan and a male descendant of the woman, Jesus of Nazareth. God's weapon of choice was Jesus, who would come to fight on behalf of the woman, suffer “bruises,” but ultimately deliver a deadly blow to the serpent. To be the weapon of choice was an act of sacrifice by Jesus, an act of selfless love.

How do the following texts help us to understand some of the issues involved in the great controversy? How is the plan of salvation central to it?

Compare *Gen. 4:4* with *Heb. 11:4* _____

Compare *Gen. 12:3, 22:18* with *Gal. 3:16* _____

Compare *Exod. 25:8* with *Heb. 4:2* _____

Compare *Isa. 53:6* with *Rom. 5:8* _____

Matt. 16:18, 18:16–20 _____

Heb. 8:1, 2 _____

Satan's Fight

If you looked carefully at yesterday's study, you would have seen a progression of how God manifested Himself and His truth in the midst of the great controversy. God worked through the patriarchal and Israelite sanctuary services, through Christ's sacrificial atoning death, through the church, and through Christ's own ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.

Satan, however, has worked tirelessly to try to undermine the Lord's plans. So much of the great controversy has been, and is now, fought out over these very issues.

For instance, the sacrificial system practiced by the patriarchs, and in Israel's sanctuary service, was designed by God to remind humankind of the Creator and to keep the hope of redemption alive.

How did Satan seek to usurp and destroy the truth about the plan of salvation, especially as revealed in the sacrificial system? *See Rom. 1:20–28; Deut. 32:17, 18.*

Of course, the incarnation of Christ, His ministry on earth, and His atoning sacrificial death on the cross were the central parts of how God chose to defeat Satan in the great controversy. The death of Christ would guarantee the undoing of Satan, who had worked tirelessly against Him.

What do these texts (*Matt. 2:1–18, 4:1–11, 16:21–23, 27:39–42*) tell us about the ways in which Satan worked against Jesus?

After His death and resurrection, Christ established His church on earth to proclaim to lost humanity the good news of salvation. From the inception of the church, Satan has determined to weaken and destroy it. The following passages show some of Satan's tactics against the church (*See Acts 5:17, 18; 7:54–60; 2 Thess. 2:1–4; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Pet. 2:1; Rev. 12:13–17*).

Meanwhile, the book of Hebrews tells of a real sanctuary in heaven where Christ entered after His ascension (*Heb. 4:14–16, 9:24*), performing a priestly function on behalf of sinful humanity (*Heb. 7:27*). In Daniel 8:11–14, we can see Satan's activity in connection with Christ's priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary and his attempt to usurp that ministry.

It's one thing to read 1 Peter 5:8, 9 and have an intellectual understanding of its warning; it's another to actually live out that warning in your daily life. How do you, in fact, resist the devil? How often during a single day are you aware of Satan's efforts against you?

Destinies

“ ‘And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD’ ” (*Josh. 24:15, NKJV*). How does this text reveal what is, in many ways, the most foundational issue in the great controversy?

Prophecy provides us with a view of the closing scenes of the conflict between God and Satan. For a period of 1,260 years (*Dan. 7:25, 12:7, Rev. 11:2, 12:14, 13:5*), Satan sporadically, but persistently, persecuted God’s people. In a final showdown described in Revelation 12 and 13, Satan will employ two earthly powers: a leopardlike beast (*Rev. 13:1–10*) and a two-horned beast (*Rev. 13:11–17*). These beasts will employ all the tactics of Satan that were discussed in yesterday’s lesson.

Revelation 14 is a description of the countermove to Satan’s maneuvers that God will use during the final stages in the struggle in order to bring the struggle to an end. What does Revelation 14:6–13 tell us about the ways in which some of the issues in the great controversy are going to be made manifest?

From God’s perspective, a clear proclamation of the issues involved in the conflict (represented here as being sent by three angels) is necessary before the conflict comes to a close. Humanity needs to be intelligently informed in order for people to make up their minds about the issues.

In the final conflict there will be people who stand loyal to God. In Revelation 14 they are symbolized by the number 144,000, possibly representative of an innumerable people from all the nations of the earth (*Rev. 7:4*). But they remain obedient to the commandments of God in a time of great distress and are wholeheartedly devoted to the worship of their Creator God. They receive the approval of God and are victorious with Him while the impenitent are destroyed in the ensuing harvest (*Rev. 14:14–20*). The point is that one day this great controversy will be over.

One thing about the great controversy: no one can be neutral. You’re either on one side or the other. Anyone can claim to be on the Lord’s side (see *John 16:2*); how do you know, for sure, that you really are? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

Further Study: Read Frank B. Holbrook, “The Great Controversy,” pp. 969–1008, in Raoul Dederen (ed.), *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*.

“The Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with scripture. The student should learn to view the word as a whole, and to see the relation of its parts. He should gain a knowledge of its grand central theme, of God’s original purpose for the world, of the rise of the great controversy, and of the work of redemption. He should understand the nature of the two principles that are contending for supremacy, and should learn to trace their working through the records of history and prophecy, to the great consummation. He should see how this controversy enters into every phase of human experience; how in every act of life he himself reveals the one or the other of the two antagonistic motives; and how, whether he will or not, he is even now deciding upon which side of the controversy he will be found.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 190.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In the quotation from the book *Education* given above, Ellen G. White writes that the great controversy enters into every phase of human experience. How true has this been in your own experience? Has your understanding of the great-controversy motif been a source of strength or frustration as you cope with the issues of daily living in the world of sin and suffering?
- ❷ Some speak about a “delay” in the second coming of Christ. With the amount of injustice and senseless suffering in the world, it seems that every additional day of life on earth is one too many. Have the class members share their individual perspectives regarding the great-controversy motif from the point of view of the so-called “delay.”
- ❸ How confident can we be about the final resolution of the conflict between good and evil? What gives you assurance that evil will be overcome in the end? What reasons do we have for believing that? How, for instance, does the prophecy of Daniel 2 help to give us assurance about the ultimate outcome?
- ❹ In class, go over your answers to the final question on Thursday. The answer is especially relevant because of our understanding of just who the persecutors are going to be in the last days. How, then, can we be sure we will be on the right side?

Following the Sinners

Gustave read the notice of evangelistic meetings in his town in Burundi. He had heard about Seventh-day Adventists. He had heard that they are sinners because they worked in their gardens on Sunday. But Gustave decided to attend the meetings anyway. He hoped to learn something new about God.

The messages touched his heart. Gustave attended the meetings when they didn't conflict with school. By the end of the second week, Gustave had many questions. He asked the church elder to study the Bible with him. Before long Gustave was convinced that Seventh-day Adventists weren't sinning when they worked on Sunday; they were keeping the Bible Sabbath. He asked to join the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Gustave stopped attending classes on Saturday and went to church instead. One of his teachers warned him that if he continued to miss classes he would be expelled. When Gustave's parents learned about it, they were upset. "Please allow me to worship God as He leads me," Gustave pleaded.

Gustave tried to explain his faith to the school principal too, hoping that he would excuse Gustave from classes. But the principal accused him of being a bad influence on other students. Unsure of what else to do, Gustave returned to school on Sabbaths. But he spent his time reading the Bible instead of studying.

The next year Gustave enrolled in a Christian high school, and was the only Seventh-day Adventist in the school. Although the school didn't hold classes on Saturday, they did hold mandatory religious classes that day. Gustave quickly became the leader of his chosen group.

He shared his faith with the young people in the study group, and several wanted to know more about what he believed. He studied the Bible with them, but one by one they dropped out when their parents warned them about Seventh-day Adventists.

After Gustave completed high school, his parents urged him to get a job. Most jobs required Sabbath work, and Gustave refused. His parents refused to support him if he wouldn't work. After many months he found work with ADRA.

Gustave shares his faith with others and explains that Seventh-day Adventists aren't sinners because they work on Sunday; they're sinners saved by God's grace who seek to follow Jesus' example of obedience.

Your mission offerings help to support evangelism in Burundi and around the world. Thank you for giving so that others can learn God's will for their lives.

GUSTAVE NDAYAMBAJE *lives in southern Burundi, a small country in central Africa.*

Revelation, *and the God Revealed in It*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *2Pet. 1:19–21; 2Tim. 3:16, 17; Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19; Heb. 11:6; Exod. 3:1–14.*

Memory Text: “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds” (*Hebrews 1:1, 2, NKJV*).

Key Thought: However important it is to understand the way in which biblical inspiration works, it's more important to know the God who is revealed to us through that inspiration.

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork” (*Ps. 19:1*). What they don't declare, however, is that our God loves us, died for us, and is actively working to save us from the consequences of our sinful choices.

The bottom line is that, whatever we can learn about God from other sources, the key source has to be the Bible. There are great truths, especially about the nature of God and His activity in this world, that we would know nothing about were they not revealed to us. As we have seen already, while people can sense something of a battle going on between good and evil, how else would they know of the great controversy were it not taught in the Scriptures?

This week we'll focus on two things: first, we'll look at what the Bible says about itself and how it was inspired. Next, we'll see what it teaches us about the God who inspired it.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 13.*

The Doctrine of Scripture

Read 2 Peter 1:19–21. What do these verses tell us about how the New Testament authors regarded the Scriptures?

Peter affirms that the prophecies of the Old Testament were not of human origin. His argument is that the prophets spoke because they were “moved by the Spirit of God.” The expression “moved by the Spirit of God” means that the impulse that led to the writing of the Scriptures came from the Holy Spirit. In short, the Bible writers were inspired by the Lord Himself.

Read 2 Timothy 3:16, 17. What do these verses tell us about the Bible and the ways in which it’s to be used?

It’s very clear that Paul wished Timothy to understand that because the Scriptures are divinely produced, they are dependable and valuable for the building up of the believer. Paul leaves no question as to Scripture’s truthfulness, authority, and origin. Notice, too, that he is talking about “all Scripture.” Paul doesn’t leave us the option to pick and choose which parts we think are inspired and which parts aren’t. Not everything (such as the ceremonial laws) is still binding on us, but that fact is radically different from the claim that some parts of the Bible are inspired and others aren’t, or that some parts aren’t as inspired as other parts (whatever that’s supposed to mean).

Read Matthew 4:4, 7, 10; 22:41–46; John 10:34, 35. What crucial truth about Scripture and the authority of Scripture can we take from these texts?

No matter what we believe, we need a starting point, a foundation upon which to base that belief. For Seventh-day Adventist Christians, that foundation is the Bible—the ultimate standard and arbiter of truth.

How much time do you spend in the Word? How much of your life is patterned by what it teaches? Think back on the past 24 hours. What have you done, or not done, in that time frame that was based on the authority of Scripture?

The Nature of Inspiration

“It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 21. How do these words help us to understand how biblical inspiration works?

In the whole question regarding inspiration, people sometimes get obsessed with what are often deemed as problematic texts. Consider, for example, the wording of the inscription above Jesus’ cross as depicted in the Gospels. According to Matthew 27:37, it said, “THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS”; according to Mark 15:26, “THE KING OF THE JEWS”; according to Luke 23:38, “THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.” How are we to understand these differences?

As the Bible says, “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God” and is trustworthy; yet, we are given different accounts of the inscription on Jesus’ cross. These two points together can give us insight into the way in which inspiration works. This case shows that inspiration permits different expressions of an idea or event to the extent that the expressions adequately depict it. When a general approximation is an adequate expression, as in the inscriptions on the cross, inspiration accommodates it. On the other hand, where specificity is required, as in 1 Kings 6:1, inspiration provides it and should be accepted as such.

Compare Acts 1:18 and Matthew 27:5. In what ways do these accounts of Judas’ death seem to differ?

For a long time, critics of the Bible claimed that these verses gave conflicting accounts of Judas’ death. However, recent research has shown that the word translated as “falling headlong” in Acts 1:18 also means “swelling up.” Therefore, it’s likely that, after hanging himself, Judas was not discovered until his corpse had swelled up, causing his intestines to burst open. The point is, what at first seemed to be contradictory is now shown not to be. The vast majority of the Bible is not problematic. In the few places where some questions remain about apparent “errors” or “contradictions,” the prudent attitude would be humility. Who knows how many people have made a shipwreck of faith by focusing on “problem” texts. We have not been called to stand in judgment over the Word; we have been called, instead, to obey it.

The Mystery of the Triune God

“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (*Gen. 1:26*).

Understanding how inspiration works, however important, is only a means to an end, and that end is to know God. A deep understanding of how the Bible was written, or even a deep understanding of the truths revealed in it, mean nothing if we don’t know the Lord for ourselves (*John 17:3*).

And one thing that the Bible explicitly affirms about the Lord is His oneness.

Read Deuteronomy 6:4 and Mark 12:29. What crucial truth is found in these texts?

The expression in the Bible about the oneness of God precludes any idea of many gods. There is only one God. However, the total picture we get from the Bible is that there is an inner “content” to Him, even in His oneness.

Read Genesis 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; John 1:1–3, 18; 20:28; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Matthew 28:19. How do these texts begin to clarify the inner reality of God?

The Old Testament’s suggestion of plurality provides hints about the nature of the inner being of God. When we couple this with the New Testament’s statement about Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, we start to realize that there’s a lot about God’s nature that we don’t fully understand and probably never will. The triune aspect of God is one mystery, among many, with which we will have to learn to live.

The information that the Bible gives about God, including His three-part nature, is not provided in order for us to engage in speculative philosophizing but in order to further our understanding of His activities, especially His redemptive work on our behalf as the great controversy unfolds and is finally ended.

Who doesn’t have a lot of questions that only God can answer? How can we learn to trust Him until the time comes when He will give us answers?

The Attributes of Our Creator

The Bible reveals to us truths about God that we aren't going to find anywhere else. Among those truths is that He is the Creator. In fact, that's the first thing the Bible tells us about God, that He created "the heavens and the earth" (*Gen. 1:1*).

One of the many fascinating things about this text is that the Bible simply assumes the existence of God without trying to prove or show it. The Bible spends a great deal of time teaching us about what God is like, particularly as His character is revealed through His interaction with fallen humanity. But it spends no time trying to prove that He exists. It just assumes His existence.

Read Hebrews 11:6 and Romans 10:17. What do they say about God and the role that His Word plays in bringing us awareness of His existence?

Conviction about the existence of God cannot come from rational arguments alone. The Bible teaches that a person is convinced of God's existence through personal experience with Him as the Holy Spirit impresses one's heart and mind with the fact of His existence. In many cases, people may come to believe in God first; only after do they start to build a logical and intellectual foundation for faith in a God whom they cannot see.

Read Malachi 3:6; James 1:17; 1 John 4:8, 16; and 2 Chronicles 6:18. What do these texts tell us about the attributes of God? What other attributes of God are revealed in the Word?

Dwell on the attributes of God as expressed in the Scriptures. How many of them could you know from other sources, that is, from nature or from personal experience? What does your answer teach you about how crucial the Scriptures are to our understanding of what God is truly like?

The Activities of God

Even the most cursory reading of the Bible reveals that God is actively involved in humanity and in what happens here on earth. He is not distant, detached, or removed, as some ancient Greek concepts of God taught, or as even some Christian theologians try to depict Him. Though radically different from what He created, the Lord has intimately tied Himself to His creation.

As we saw yesterday, the Bible depicts the Lord as our Creator, an act that shows just how intricately tied to this world He really is. What do the following texts tell us about God's other activities here on earth, especially in the context of the great controversy?

Gen. 11:9 _____

Gen. 19:24 _____

Exod. 3:1-14 _____

John 3:16 _____

1 Thess. 4:17 _____

Without a doubt, the Bible reveals a God who is greatly involved with humanity. The whole great-controversy scenario is, really, about how the Lord is working to save humanity from the clutches of sin and Satan. From the first act of the earth's creation (*Gen. 1:1*) to the cross (*John 19:18*) to the recreation of the earth (*2 Pet. 3:12, 13*), the Bible shows us unequivocally the Lord's intimate activity with humanity.

In what ways have you, personally, experienced the activity of God? In what ways have you seen Him work in your life and in the lives of others? In what ways can you learn to draw comfort from knowing God's closeness and intimacy with us?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Danger in Speculative Knowledge,” pp. 427–438, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “The Word Made Flesh,” pp. 746–749, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5; “Preface” and “Introduction,” pp. 5–7, in *The Great Controversy*.

“God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do this work. He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write. The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, nonetheless, from Heaven. The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language, yet it is the testimony of God; and the obedient, believing child of God beholds in it the glory of a divine power, full of grace and truth.

“In His word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience. ‘Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work.’ 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 8, 9.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Apart from information we may obtain from the Bible, how confident can we be about our conclusions concerning God? Is there any room at all for an understanding of God from other sources? If so, what are those sources, and how can we be sure that the information they give us is correct?
- 2 Why is any worldview that denies the supernatural in fatal contradiction to the Word of God?
- 3 Science and technology have, in many ways, been a great blessing to humanity. In some ways, too, science has helped us to better understand the power of God (for instance, look at what it has shown us about the utter complexity of life!). What, though, are the obvious limits to what science can teach us about God? When, too, can science work against a true understanding of God?
- 4 Why is the doctrine of a triune God (no matter how difficult to understand) so important to us as Seventh-day Adventists? Think what it would mean, for instance, if Christ were anything other than fully God?

Embracing the World's Cities

More than half the world's population lives in cities, yet the Seventh-day Adventist work in the cities languishes. God has a heart for cities. Speaking of Nineveh, He asked, "Should I not be concerned about that great city?" (*Jon. 4:11, NIV*). When Jesus came to this earth, He "had compassion on [the people] because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (*Matt. 9:36, NIV*).

Jesus showed how to minister. He mingled with people, showed sympathy, ministered to needs, won confidence, and bid them to follow Him.

Pastor Wayne Krause helped to plant a church in an area north of Sydney, Australia, where thousands of families live who have never entered a church. One day a young man asked two women from the church to take him to a methadone clinic for treatment. They agreed, and then prepared this young heroin addict a hot meal.

The young man started attending church. Each Sabbath afternoon members drove him to his methadone treatments. And when he had to appear in court, several church members went to support him. After the trial the young man's mother approached the members who were helping her son. She asked if she could visit the church.

A few weeks later a group of people clad in black leather and heavy chains entered the church and sat in the front row. Pastor Krause changed his sermon to the great controversy between good and evil.

After worship Pastor Krause met the visitors and learned they were the family of the young addict. They had come to see what kind of church showed such love to their son and brother. They asked Pastor Krause how they could be on God's side. He explained the plan of salvation, and they prayed to make Jesus the center of their lives.

None of them had a Bible, and the only Bibles Pastor Krause could find were in the lost and found. He offered them to his new friends and showed them where to start reading. One young man, a singer in a rock band, received a tattered Bible. Pastor Krause offered to find him a nicer one, but the young singer gently stroked the Bible, and said, "No, please, I've never had a Bible. It's mine."

Every city in the world is filled with people hungry for something better. They are sons and daughters of God, but they don't know it yet. Our commission is to go into the entire world to share God's love. That includes the cities. They're waiting for us; what are we waiting for?

GARY KRAUSE is director of Adventist Mission at the General Conference.

Mankind: God’s Handiwork



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Gen. 1:27; Rom. 5:12–19; Gen. 1:26; Mark 12:13–17; Gen. 2:19–25; Acts 17:26.*

Memory Text: “Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves” (*Psalms 100:3*).

Key Thought: God created humanity in His own image; sin defiled that image. God’s plan is to restore that image in us.

A nineteenth-century thinker, Arthur Schopenhauer, while deep in thought about the essence of human identity, accidentally bumped into someone on the street. The person whom he hit angrily demanded, “Who do you think you are?”

“Who am I?” Schopenhauer responded. “I wish I knew.”

Who am I? Who are we as a race? What are we doing here? How did we get here, and why?

These are ancient questions that humans still debate today. Scripture, however, answers them all. That’s because there is an inseparable link between the question of our identity and the doctrine of creation. The answer to all those questions is found there; no other biblical doctrine is as central to our understanding of humanity as is creation, because it focuses on our origin, not merely our beginning. “Beginning” simply may refer to the fact of coming to be; “origin” attaches the idea of purpose to that fact of coming to be.

Therefore, the Bible teaching on the creation of humanity is radically opposed to evolution, which argues that there is no purpose for our existence (we are here by chance alone). Rarely have there been two teachings that present starker or more irreconcilable alternatives not only to our existence but to our identity as human beings.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 20.*

Creation and Human Origins

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (*Gen. 1:27*). What does this text tell us about our origins that is so radically different from, even openly contradictory to, other views of human beginnings, such as evolution?

It is impossible to miss the point that, as a conscious act of God, humanity’s creation had a purpose behind it. Scripture has no room for any idea of chance. We were made with a distinct purpose, and we were given a distinct nature and essence right from the start.

Made “in the image of God” is about as concrete and distinct an essence, a purpose, as could be imagined. This point is important because some thinkers have argued that humans have to create their own meaning, their own purpose, because we are born without any meaning or purpose inherent in us. If, for instance, evolution were true, one could make the point that—because evolution teaches that we didn’t come with any purposes—we have to make up our own. In contrast, according to the Bible, we were made in the image of God and created to bring glory to Him.

Origins deal with history. Read **Jude 14, Romans 5:12–21, and 1 Corinthians 15:20–22**. How do these texts help us to understand the historicity of Adam in Genesis 1, 2? Why is it important to understand Adam as a historical person?

It’s amazing how many Bible scholars dismiss the historicity of Adam: he’s a myth, they say, a symbol for humanity but not a real person. One can hold those beliefs only through greatly distorting the texts themselves, both in the Old and New Testaments.

Dwell on the fact that you were made in the image of God. What should that tell you about your own inherent self-worth, regardless of your faults, weaknesses, and shortcomings?

The Image of God: Part 1

As we saw yesterday, Adam and Eve were literal people, not symbols or myths but actual flesh-and-blood beings made “in the image of God.” Obviously, being made in the image of God is something good, something sacred, something that bestows inherent value on us. What, however, does that really mean?

Read Genesis 1:26 carefully. What statement of intention seems to be linked to the creation of man in God’s image? That is, God says that humanity is to be made in His image, and then something immediately follows as a result. What is that something, and how does it help us in our understanding of the concept of “the image of God”?

Genesis 1:26 is God’s statement of intention. God creates man in His image and then commands him to do something. Being created in God’s image appears to be necessary for a certain function; in this case, to have “dominion” over the rest of what God had created. Therefore, “the image of God” points to physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual endowments needed in order for humanity to fulfill God’s purpose for it. Whatever it meant to have “dominion over” the rest of the creation, it certainly entailed respect, care, and good stewardship. Humanity was, perhaps, to interact in a dynamic way with the “lower” created order in a manner that reflected how God interacted with humans themselves. And being made in the image of God also meant that humans were to represent God in the world.

What a responsibility!

Read Mark 12:13–17. How do these verses help us to understand what it means to be made in God’s image?

Jesus’ practical message seems to be “ ‘Give your money to Caesar; it has his image on it, and thus it belongs to him. But give yourselves to God. You bear his image, and you belong to him.’ ”—Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1998), p. 515.

How is this translated into practical terms? Most likely, we also show that we bear God’s image in our love, commitment, and loyalty to Him, as well as in the ways in which we treat others. Again, being made in the image of God, whatever else it entails, is something manifested by our actions.

The Image of God: Part 2

Whatever else it means to be “made in the image of God,” it also shows that we were made to be in relationships. What are those relationships, and how should we, made as we are, act in them?

Read Genesis 2:19, 20. What does that tell us right away about humanity’s relationship to the world?

Notice the autonomy, the freedom, given to Adam here. He was to name the creatures that God had created. God didn’t do the naming Himself; He left that work to Adam. The text suggests that God was going to accept whatever names Adam gave to the creatures.

Read Genesis 2:20–25. How do these verses reveal more about the relational aspects for these beings made in God’s image?

A lot of commentary has been written over the centuries about the meaning of these verses. What is fascinating here, among other things, is the closeness and the intimacy that was meant to exist between Adam and Eve. Adam was created out of the soil and Eve out of Adam (something that helps to distinguish her from every other earthly created being). To be made in God’s image, then, certainly entails the capacity for close and loving relationships—something that surely reflects the relationship in the Godhead itself.

Now study Genesis 1:27 together with Genesis 3:20 and Acts 17:26. In what way is the unity between the first pair of humans extended to cover the unity of the entire human race? What does the unity of humanity have to say about ethical issues such as justice, racism, et cetera?

A Defiled Image

One of the many great obstacles for those who read evolution into the biblical creation account is the Fall. In the Bible, the world and humanity were perfect when created, a teaching that contradicts evolution at the most basic level. Only through transgression did suffering and death enter the world, a concept that's contrary to the evolutionary model, in which suffering and death are part of the very means of creation itself.

Imagine what it would say about the character of God if He had created us in the manner that evolution teaches. According to that false theory, God uses processes of violence, selfishness, and dominance of the strong against the weak in order to create a morally flawless and selfless being who “falls” into a state of violence, selfishness, and dominance of the strong over the weak—a state from which he has to be redeemed or else face final punishment.

Think, too, of what evolution does to the plan of salvation. The Lord incarnates into an evolved ape that was created through the vicious and painfully murderous cycle of natural selection, all in order to abolish death, “the last enemy” (*1 Cor. 15:26*)? But how can death be the “enemy” when it was one of God’s chosen means for creating humans? The Lord must have expended plenty of dead *Homo erectus*, *Homo heidelbergensis*, and *Homo neanderthalensis* in order to finally get one creature into His own image (*Homo sapiens*). So, Jesus comes to save humankind from the very process God used to create humankind in the first place? The whole idea is foolish and unbiblical.

Read Romans 5:12–19 and Colossians 3:10. How do these verses help us to understand what sin has done to humanity? How does the great controversy play into this whole picture? See 1 John 3:8.

Sin has touched all aspects of human life, and even the earth itself. Ellen G. White talked about a “threefold” curse that has rested on the world, the first resulting from Adam’s fall, the next from Cain’s murder of Abel, and the third from the damage caused by the Flood. Theologians also talk about “total depravity,” the idea that every aspect of humanity, life, and personality has been damaged by sin. As we look around at the world, and even at ourselves, it’s not hard to see, is it?

Some believe that violence, suffering, and death were all part of how God created humanity. Others believe that violence, suffering, and death were all part of how Satan seeks to destroy the humanity that God has created. Think about the differences in the character of God that these two opposing views present.

Restoration

As deep and pervasive as the effects of sin have been on humanity, our plight is not irreversible. The Bible speaks about the possibility of renewal and restoration of the image of God in us, at least to some degree.

Study the following passages carefully: *Rom. 8:29*; *2 Cor. 3:18*; and *Eph. 4:23, 24*. **What hope is presented in them?**

The Bible clearly holds up the hope for us to be remade in God's image. The renewal of the image of God in humanity is accompanied by a reduction of the effects that sin has had on us and our relationships. None of this, however, is the result of man's own achievement. The Bible points to Christ as being the basis of hope for man's renewal. Also, whatever changes are wrought in our lives, our hope of salvation must rest always on what Christ has accomplished for us and on the offer of salvation based on His righteousness, not our own.

How is 2 Corinthians 5:17 related to the re-creation of man in God's image? Does being a new creature place a person beyond the reach of sin and its effects on the human experience? What does your own experience tell you about the answer?

Overall, the evidence from Scripture leads to the conclusion that spiritual renewal comes at the cost of watchfulness in spiritual warfare. It is warfare between the flesh and the spirit (*Gal. 5:16, 17*). Those who are being renewed in God's image find this spiritual warfare to be the reality of the human experience, and thus they embrace the challenge in the strength of the Lord (*Eph. 6:10–13*). To choose to be re-made in the image of God is to place oneself on the side of God in the great controversy. Writing about those who have experienced the renewing power of Christ, Ellen G. White noted, "But because this experience is his, the Christian is not therefore to fold his hands, content with that which has been accomplished for him. He who has determined to enter the spiritual kingdom will find that all the powers and passions of unregenerate nature, backed by the forces of the kingdom of darkness, are arrayed against him. Each day he must renew his consecration, each day do battle with evil. Old habits, hereditary tendencies to wrong, will strive for the mastery, and against these he is to be ever on guard, striving in Christ's strength for victory."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 476, 477.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Creation,” pp. 44–51, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“In the beginning, man was created in the image of God. He was in perfect harmony with the nature and the law of God; the principles of righteousness were written upon his heart. But sin alienated him from his Maker. He no longer reflected the divine image. His heart was at war with the principles of God’s law. ‘The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.’ Romans 8:7. But ‘God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son,’ that man might be reconciled to God. Through the merits of Christ he can be restored to harmony with his Maker. His heart must be renewed by divine grace; he must have a new life from above. This change is the new birth, without which, says Jesus, ‘he cannot see the kingdom of God.’”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 467.

“The true object of education is to restore the image of God in the soul. In the beginning God created man in His own likeness. He endowed him with noble qualities. His mind was well balanced, and all the powers of his being were harmonious. But the Fall and its effects have perverted these gifts. Sin has marred and well-nigh obliterated the image of God in man. It was to restore this that the plan of salvation was devised, and a life of probation was granted to man.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 595.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In what way does the teaching of evolution fit into the great-controversy scenario? How has Satan used this doctrine to undermine faith in the Bible?
- 2 Go through the New Testament and look up all the texts that talk about Adam. How clear is it that the New Testament writers all believed Adam to be a real person? Why is that understanding so important to our understanding of who we are, how we got into the situation we are in, and the hope that we have in Jesus?
- 3 Dwell more on the idea of being restored into God’s image. In what way are we meant to understand that, especially as beings who are subject to decay, death, sickness, and disease?
- 4 The two most foundational teachings in physics—quantum theory and general relativity—directly contradict each other. What should that tell us about how careful we need to be when accepting something as “fact” merely because science says it is so?

The Bible Text

The foreign evangelist wasn't sure what to expect as the evangelistic meetings among the Romani (Gypsy) people of Bulgaria neared. The leaders couldn't locate a suitable hall to rent. But the Romani Seventh-day Adventist community would let nothing stand in their way. They built a platform on a dead-end street and put benches in the street.

On opening night, crowds packed the street around the homemade platform. People filled the yards, balconies of homes, even nearby rooftops to hear the message of salvation in Jesus. The crowd was estimated at 5,000 people and didn't diminish during the five weeks of meetings. Hundreds were baptized. One of these new members was Ivan.

Ivan was 21, and his decision for Christ was based more on emotion than on an acceptance of a new lifestyle centered on Christ. Adventure called, and Ivan drifted away from Christ.

When Ivan realized that his life was headed in the wrong direction, he prayed. But nothing happened. He returned to church—at least on some Sabbaths—but still nothing changed. One day he cried out to God, “Lord, do You hear me? Are You still interested in me?”

That night he dreamed that the Lord spoke to him. “Find your baptismal certificate in the drawer. Read the Bible text written there.”

The next morning Ivan found the baptismal certificate exactly where he had seen it in his dream. He noticed a Bible text that the pastor had written on it. Ivan grabbed his Bible and looked up the text, Isaiah 43:2. “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze” (*NIV*).

Ivan reread the words, amazed that God had known several years earlier that he would now need this very text at this time in his life. God knew him; God cared. Ivan rededicated his life to God. He spends time every day in prayer and Bible study to keep him from falling into the lake of indifference again.

Ivan praises God for sending evangelists to teach the Romani people about God. Recently a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering helped to build a church for a Romani community in northwestern Bulgaria. Thank you for sharing God's love through your mission offerings.

IVAN KIRILOV is part of a rapidly growing Romani Seventh-day Adventist community of more than 1,000 members in Kyustendil, Bulgaria.

Salvation: The Only Solution



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 2:25; Jer. 17:9; Titus 1:1, 2; Rom. 3:19–24; Acts 2:36–38; Luke 7:47; Eph. 2:1–5.*

Memory Text: “ ‘For 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, NKJV*).

Key Thought: The sin problem is very big; how thankful we should be that the solution was big enough to solve it.

The “sin problem” refers to the crisis caused by the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, which brought to the earth the great controversy between good and evil. God’s part in the controversy has been to stop, and ultimately eliminate, the deleterious effects of sin, not just on the earth but on the creation as a whole. God’s action to rescue the creation from the destructive results of sin constitutes the doctrine of salvation. And though that battle, at least in terms of salvation, does play out here on earth, the great-controversy motif has shown us that the issues are, literally, universal.

The doctrine of salvation primarily concerns God and His work to save us, of course. But humanity has an important role too. Yes, God has made an incredible provision for the salvation of the human race. Our crucial part comes in the answering of the question, What will be our response to that provision? On that answer, the eternal destiny of souls truly hinges.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 27.*

The Scope of the Problem

Because salvation is God’s solution to the problem created by sin, the extent of sin’s damage determines the scope of the solution. After all, it wouldn’t be a solution if it was unable to solve the problem, no matter what the size of the problem.

What do the following texts reveal about the scope of the sin problem? How have you experienced it yourself or seen around you the reality of these texts?

John 2:25 _____

Ps. 59:2 _____

Jer. 17:9 _____

Rom. 5:12 _____

James 5:1–7 _____

Isa. 5:23 _____

2 Thess. 2:10 _____

Who among us hasn’t known deeply, personally, and painfully just how bad the sin problem is? We live every moment of our lives with the reality of sin and its effects. Every aspect of human existence on this planet is, to some degree (a great one, in fact), dominated by the reality of sin. From politics to the innermost recesses of the human heart, sin has infected the race. It is so bad that, without a divine solution, there would be no solution. How grateful we should be that the solution has been given. It’s called “the plan of salvation,” and its purpose is to solve the problem of sin.

God's Provision: Part 1

The effects of sin did not wait for a “grace period.” The results of sin were immediate and needed immediate attention. It was necessary, therefore, for some kind of provision to be in place when sin manifested itself. Ellen G. White expresses it so clearly: “As soon as there was sin, there was a Saviour. Christ knew that He would have to suffer, yet He became man’s substitute. As soon as Adam sinned, the Son of God presented Himself as surety for the human race, with just as much power to avert the doom pronounced upon the guilty as when He died upon the cross of Calvary.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1084.

What do the following texts tell us about the plan of salvation and when it was established? What great hope and promise can we take from the texts ourselves?

Titus 1:1, 2 _____

Eph. 1:3–5 _____

2 Thess. 2:13, 14 _____

Rev. 13:8 _____

Dwell on the implications of these texts. What are they saying? Basically, from eternity, provisions had been made by God for the problem of sin. Though God did not foreordain that sin would occur (if He had, He would be responsible for it—a horrific and blasphemous idea), He knew that it would; so, back in eternity He made the provision to meet it.

This is biblical predestination, which is radically different from “predestination” as is commonly understood. It was God’s plan, from eternity, that all human beings would have salvation in Jesus. The fact that some reject this salvation doesn’t annul the force or the breadth of the provision. It only adds to the tragedy of what it means to be lost in the face of what has been done for us.

Dwell on the amazing truth that, from eternity, God’s plan was for you, personally, to have salvation. Think about what that means. In what way should a truth like this impact your life?

God's Provision: Part 2

Throughout salvation history, from the first gospel promise (*Gen. 3:15*) through the early sacrificial system (*Gen. 4:4*), the covenant with Abram (*Gen. 12:1–3*), and the Israelite sanctuary service (*Exod. 25:8*)—everything was to point to, and climax in, the life, death, resurrection, and heavenly ministry of Jesus Christ, God's ultimate provision to solve the sin problem.

The seriousness of the sin problem can, perhaps, be best understood only when we grasp just what it took—the Cross—in order for it to be solved. The Cross alone proves the utter futility of humanity to solve the sin problem by itself. An extreme situation called for an extreme solution, and the death of Christ, *God bearing in Himself our sins*, is about as extreme a measure as could possibly be imagined.

Christ's sacrificial death is presented in Scripture as an atonement for sin, i.e., the means by which the sin problem in all its manifestations is ultimately dealt with. How does the death of Christ provide for humanity's need of salvation? Explore this question from the following perspectives:

1. Justification/Reconciliation (right standing before God): See *Luke 18:9–14; Isa. 53:4–7; Rom. 3:19–24, 28; Zech. 3:1–4.*

2. Sanctification/Regeneration (living right before God): See *1 Cor. 6:8–11, Rom. 6:1–8.*

3. Glorification (assurance of resurrection to eternal life): See *John 5:24, 25; 1 John 5:9–13; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17.*

Dwell more on the fact that sin is so bad that it took the Cross to save us from the ultimate result, eternal death. How should keeping the Cross before us at all times be a deterrent to sin?

The Experience of Salvation: Part 1

The sinner is justified and reconciled on the objective basis of Christ's atoning sacrifice for all (*Rom. 5:6–10*). The provision that God has made for the justification and reconciliation of humankind to Himself through the death of Christ needs, however, to be brought into the experience of the believer. It is not enough to just have a theoretical knowledge about justification. We need to experience what it means for ourselves.

Acts 2:36–38 and Acts 3:19 bring up repentance as the beginning of the sinner's experience of salvation. How does the nature of repentance as a feeling of remorse help us to connect the experience of justification with the death of Christ?

Ponder the following comment: "Nothing so touches the depths of the soul as a sense of Christ's pardoning love. When sinners contemplate this unfathomable divine love, displayed on the cross, they receive the most powerful motivation possible to repent. This is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance (*Rom. 2:4*)."—Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2005), pp. 135, 136.

Read Romans 3:23–25 and Ephesians 2:8. What is the role of faith in the experience of justification?

We are told in the Bible that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (*Rom. 10:17*). We have also seen that contemplating the love of Christ motivates a person to repentance. Repentance, then, is not the special prerogative of a privileged few. In view of these facts, the importance of the study and the contemplation of God's Word in the experience of justification cannot be overemphasized.

It is the goodness of God that leads to repentance and justification. Thus, if I should repent of sin and experience justification, God is the one to receive the credit. Salvation, then, is truly a gracious gift from God, for, indeed, it is by grace through faith that we are saved (*Eph. 2:8*).

What are some tangible and practical ways in which you may flood your heart and mind with the goodness of God, especially as you think of what He has done for you and what He has spared you from?

The Experience of Salvation: Part 2

The experience of justification places within the life of the believer spiritual realities that initiate change in the person's life. In justification, the sinner is forgiven (*Luke 7:47, Eph. 1:7, Rom. 4:7*), acquitted of the charges of sin and reckoned righteous (*Rom. 5:16, 18; Rom. 8:1*), and given the gift of a new life (*Eph. 2:1–5, 2 Cor. 5:17*).

The foundation of this new experience is the reality that, no matter our past, no matter our sins, no matter how faulty and wrong we have been, we can stand pardoned, forgiven, and cleansed before God.

Think through what this means. Christ's death covers all sin, even the worst; no matter how much your own heart might condemn you (*1 John 3:20*), when you surrender yourself to Christ, in faith, and accept His perfect life instead of your own "filthy rags" (*Isa. 64:6*), then you are at that moment covered in Christ's righteousness. His perfect life is credited to you as if it were yours. Talk about a gift, especially to a sinner!

The question is, How can something like this happen to a person and that person not be radically changed? That change, often called the "new birth," is part and parcel of the experience of salvation.

Read the texts in the above paragraphs and summarize their teachings about justification and the way in which we experience it in our own lives.

The experience of forgiveness ends the sinner's vulnerability to God's wrath and clears away any barriers to reconciliation and fellowship between God and humans. A new life opens up for the sinner, who has the privilege of living in fellowship with Christ under the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Repentance is the prerequisite for entering into the experience of forgiveness and justification, and it comes accompanied by confession and baptism (*Acts 2:38, 1 John 1:9*). This helps to explain the fact that although forgiveness is available to all, not all will be forgiven.

Where would you be if you couldn't lean on the promise, every moment of your life, that your acceptance with God is based on what Jesus has done for you and not on yourself or your own performance and law-keeping?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “‘God With Us,’” pp. 19–29, in *The Desire of Ages*; Ivan T. Blazen, “Salvation,” pp. 271–313, in Raoul Dederen (ed.), *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*.

“The plan for our redemption was not an afterthought, a plan formulated after the fall of Adam. It was a revelation of ‘the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal’ (Rom. 16:25, R.V.). It was an unfolding of the principles that from eternal ages have been the foundation of God’s throne. . . . God did not ordain that sin should exist, but He foresaw its existence, and made provision to meet the terrible emergency. So great was His love for the world, that He covenanted to give His only-begotten Son, ‘that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’” —Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Think about how bad sin must be that it took the death of the Creator Himself to solve it. What does the Cross reveal to us about the utter inability of humanity to save itself? What do we think we could add to what has already been done for us?
- 2 Some believe in what is called the “subjective atonement,” the idea that nothing about the Cross changed our standing with God. Rather, the whole point of the Cross was, they claim, to change our attitude about God, nothing more. What’s terribly deficient about such a theology? What does it say about the problem of sin if all it would take is an “attitude adjustment” on our part to solve it?
- 3 How possible is it to have a good deal of knowledge about salvation and yet not the experience of it? What do you make of Ellen G. White’s comment that “consecration to God must be a living, practical matter; not a theory to be talked about, but a principle interwoven with all our experience”?—*Our High Calling*, p. 243. How do we, on a daily and practical level, live out the experience of salvation?
- 4 Dwell on the role of salvation in the context of the great controversy. Why does Satan want to keep as many people as possible from having salvation in Jesus? What are the means he uses against us, and how can we defend ourselves against them?

Our First Choice

I am a Christian, but not a Seventh-day Adventist. My husband follows a different religion. We chose to send our two sons to Zamboanga Adventist Elementary School in the Philippines because we wanted them to study in a school with strong moral values. We looked at several schools, most of which had better facilities, but we chose the Seventh-day Adventist school.

Our boys like this school. They joined Pathfinders and really enjoy the activities. The children and teachers are so friendly. I love working with the teachers and parents. We really are a family!

Our children are learning to be leaders as they take part in chapel programs and other activities at the school. They enjoy Bible class and memorize many Bible texts. My husband even joked that our son could become a pastor because he has learned so many Bible verses.

Even though I'm not a Seventh-day Adventist, I believe in Adventist education, and I thank God for this school and what it has meant to our children.

—Fely Bawari, Zamboanga, Philippines

In 2009, part of your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering helped to complete a new building for the school in Mindanao so that it could offer secondary education as well as elementary education. Thanks to your offerings, Zamboanga Adventist School is reaching many more students and parents with God's message of hope and love.



Zamboanga Adventist School spreads God's love on the island of Mindanao, in the southern Philippines.

Growing *in* Christ



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 35:10, Mark 10:45, Rom. 6:12–23, Eph. 6:12, Col. 1:16, Gal. 4:1–11, Col. 2:15.*

Memory Text: “Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it” (*Colossians 2:15, NKJV*).

Key Thought: Christ's victory on the cross defines the scope of the victory into which the Christian may grow.

The amendment to the church's fundamental beliefs, voted at the fifty-eighth General Conference Session (in 2005), was titled “Growing in Christ.” When the statement is analyzed, the following significant points become evident: Jesus has defeated satanic powers and evil forces; through Christ, victory over these powers, including their past manifestations in a person's life, is possible; and, finally, there are conditions in order for these victories to be realized in a person's experience.

These points will occupy our attention for the next three studies. This week we will be looking at the nature of the victory that Christ won on the cross. By His victory—not only over sin but over every other force that works against humanity and God's creation—Christ has achieved salvation for us.

As we seek to understand what Christ has accomplished in our behalf, we will be better prepared to understand what we can have in our lives now. His victory can be our victory if we claim it for ourselves, because, no matter what Jesus has done for us, we must choose to accept it. Victory is not automatically given to anyone.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 3.*

The Redemption

Christianity is “a religion of redemption,” in which people are saved from the devastation of sin through what someone else—in this case, Jesus—has done for them. Thus, the Christian religion may be distinguished from “a religion of law,” where one may rectify his or her doom by one’s own efforts at “doing good works.” We need this redemption because, according to the Bible, people without Christ are enslaved to sin (*John 8:34*) and under a death sentence (*Rom. 6:23*). They cannot free themselves from these two conditions. The sinner’s plight requires outside intervention, and this intervention comes at a price. As the New Testament so clearly teaches, that price was the death of Jesus on the cross.

What do the following passages reveal about the concept of redemption? *Isa. 35:10; Mark 10:45; Gal. 4:4, 5; Titus 2:14; Heb. 9:12; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19.*

From the New Testament’s point of view, Christ’s redemptive death is sacrificial and substitutionary. He took our place, sacrificing Himself in our behalf, suffering our fate for us so that we don’t have to suffer it ourselves. Though some reject this idea because they don’t like the notion of someone suffering in place of another (especially in the place of someone who is guilty), that’s the heart and soul of the gospel message.

“When the New Testament speaks of redemption, then, unless our linguistics are at fault, it means that Christ has paid the price of our redemption. To the extent that the price paid must be adequate for the purchase in question this indicates an equivalence, a substitution.”
—Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmann Publishing Co., 1965), p. 61.

Think of some things in your own life that you find are impossible to change, things that you are absolutely helpless to do anything about. In the same way, we are absolutely helpless to save ourselves. How does this realization help us to better understand what Christ did for us on the cross? More important, how should this amazing truth of redemption impact our lives?

Slaves Set Free

When we understand redemption as freedom from a form of enslavement that required external assistance, we may conclude that sinful humanity is bound by a power or influence stronger than itself. The question that needs to be answered is, By what power or agency has sinful humanity been so bound?

Study Romans 6:12–23. Notice that in verses 18, 20, and 22, Paul speaks about freedom. What is the context of this freedom? What is Paul talking about here?

Think about what Paul says in the above verses along with what he says in Romans 6:1–11. Paul talks about what happens in Christian baptism. Here he sets forth some things that were to have died with Christ in baptism. Having spelled these out, Paul challenges the Christian, who has been united with Christ, to manifest the lordship of Christ, who has “freed” him/her from the power of sin.

The bottom line here is that, according to Paul, no matter how corrupted our nature has been by sin, through Christ we can be free from its enslaving power. Who hasn’t seen just how devastating this kind of slavery can be? Who hasn’t seen lives ruined by sin? Who hasn’t struggled with the power of sin in their own lives? It is, by far, the greatest foe that we as human beings will ever face.

What makes it so bad is that it’s a slavery not imposed solely from without; rather, it’s one that comes from within us. How are we freed from a slavery, a bondage, that originates in us, even in our very nature?

The answer, as we’ve seen in the above verses, comes only from the power of Jesus, who won the victory for us and who offers us the power to overcome. Through Christ, we are not only forgiven our sins, we are to be dead to them, and we are freed from them. They no longer have to dominate us. These are amazing promises, powerful promises, promises that all who profess the name of Christ must claim for themselves.

What has your own experience been with the enslaving and brutal power of sin? How can you learn to better grasp hold of the wonderful promises of freedom that have been offered to us in Jesus?

Principalities and Powers: Part 1

The Bible pictures our world as being under the dominion of evil forces that seek to control and to ultimately destroy us. The great controversy is, of course, the result of the Lord's work against these powers. The great news is that, after the Cross, victory against them is assured, even though the battle continues to rage. The conflict is dramatic, cosmic, and fierce; but the victory belongs to God, a victory in which we can share by faith.

Study the following texts: *1 John 3:8; 5:19; John 12:31; 16:11; Eph. 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:15; and Rom. 8:38, 39.* **What do these reveal to us about the reality of this battle? What great hope and promises are found in them for us?**

Many people of the twenty-first century world function on the basis of a scientific worldview alone. This means that things are examined mainly from a naturalistic perspective, the only perspective that many believe to be valid. For these people, a world populated with evil forces and dominated by demonic hostile powers is predominantly viewed as a holdover from an age of superstition and ignorance. In contrast, the Bible presents, as part of the reality of our world, an array of hostile forces comprising demonic principalities and powers. Though the biblical worldview incorporates naturalistic and scientific concepts, it certainly doesn't base all understanding of reality on them. The Bible's view of the world is large enough to encompass both natural and supernatural worldviews.

In Romans 8:38, for instance, the word translated as "principalities" is the Greek word *archai*, which could refer to civil rulers as well as to supernatural powers that attempt to exercise evil dominion over men. In Ephesians 6:12, the literal phrase "the rulers of the darkness of this age" could also be translated as "world rulers of this darkness."

"Clearly Paul is referring to personal evil spirits, who exercise a degree of authority over the world. Compare the phrase 'prince of this world,' describing Satan, in John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11. The personality of the devil was also clear to the revelator (Rev. 2:10; 12:10)." —*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1044.

How does the reality of the great controversy reveal itself in your own life? In what ways do you sense the struggle? What's the only way to be defeated in this struggle when you have the promise of Christ's victory in your behalf?

Principalities and Powers: Part 2

As we saw, the word translated as “principalities” could refer to world rulers or supernatural powers that attempt to exercise control over human life. Another Greek word that is used in conjunction with the word *principalities* (*archai*) is the word *stoicheia*, which literally means “elements,” or “elementary substances or principle.” The contexts in which *stoicheia* is used reveal other aspects of this fallen world from which we have been redeemed by Christ’s victory on the cross.

Given the context of what we are talking about, from what other things have we been delivered through Jesus, other than literal evil powers? See Col. 2:8, 14, 20; Gal. 4:1–11, especially verses 3 and 9.

The New Testament, especially Paul’s concept of the “powers,” seems to connect spiritual beings to forces or powers that rule over human life outside of Christ. These could be political, social, traditional, even religious. The word *stoicheia*, as used in Galatians 4:3, 9, talks of the system of heathenism from which the Christians in Galatia had been delivered. It is used also in reference to aspects of the ancient Jewish legal system. In Colossians 2:8, 20, it refers metaphorically to worldly philosophical principles.

“In Isa. 24:21 the phrase ‘the kings of the earth upon the earth’ implies that ‘the high ones that are on high’ refers to Satan and the evil angels. Paul refers to Satan as ‘the prince of the power of the air’ (Eph. 2:2), and to the unseen leaders of evil as ‘the rulers of the darkness of this world’ that abide ‘in high places’ (Eph. 6:12). In 1 Cor. 15:24, 25 Paul refers to their subjugation by Christ. Isaiah foresees the time when evil angels and evil men will all suffer punishment (see Matt. 25:41; 2 Peter 2:4, 9; Rev. 20:10–15).”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 198, 199.

In short, the Bible teaches us that life is ruled by a series of powers, both personal and impersonal. Without Christ, man is at the mercy of these powers, in whatever form they come. The pressures of the present moment, not to mention the fear of the future, as well as the demands of life, society, tradition, and ideology, all can exert influences that can separate a person from the Lord. But through Christ we have been acquitted not only of our sins but also from our bondage to these “powers.” We need to understand the nature of that victory and claim it as our own.

Besides the supernatural realities that exist in our world, with what other forces and influences do you struggle, forces and powers that work against you and your faith? First, identify what they are and then claim the promises you have in Jesus in order to gain victory over them.

A Murderer Revealed

Christ came into the world for the purpose of destroying the works of the devil (*Heb. 2:14*). He did this at the Cross. But if Christ has been victorious over the devil and principalities and powers, why are we still wrestling with principalities and powers? Why is the devil still able to roam about like a lion looking for prey to devour?

Study Colossians 2:15 carefully. Look at the three different verbs that Paul uses in order to describe what happened at the Cross. How do we understand what this means?

First, Christ “spoiled” (*KJV*) or “disarmed” (*NASB, NKJV*) the “powers.” The Greek word is *apekduomai*, which literally means “to strip off one’s clothes.” Here it may mean that the powers were stripped of their weapons.

What weapons? “Christ’s life of victory, culminating in Calvary, spelled the doom of the devil. Satan’s disguise was torn away. His methods of operation were laid open before the angels and the entire heavenly universe. He had exposed his true colors. . . . By His cross Jesus Christ stripped from the principalities and powers of darkness both their robe of office and authority as princes of this world, and their armor of strength in their warfare against right.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 205.

Christ “made a shew . . . openly” (*KJV*), or “made a public display” (*NASB*) of the “powers.” How were the powers exposed publicly at the Cross? What image of them became evident? See *John 8:44*.

After Christ’s death, “Satan saw that his disguise was torn away. His administration was laid open before the unfallen angels and before the heavenly universe. He had revealed himself as a murderer. By shedding the blood of the Son of God, he had uprooted himself from the sympathies of the heavenly beings. Henceforth his work was restricted. Whatever attitude he might assume, he could no longer await the angels as they came from the heavenly courts, and before them accuse Christ’s brethren of being clothed with the garments of blackness and the defilement of sin. The last link of sympathy between Satan and the heavenly world was broken.

“Yet Satan was not then destroyed. The angels did not even then understand all that was involved in the great controversy. The principles at stake were to be more fully revealed. And for the sake of man, Satan’s existence must be continued. Man as well as angels must see the contrast between the Prince of light and the prince of darkness. He must choose whom he will serve.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 761.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Book of Books,” p. 136, in *Fundamentals of Christian Education*; “Spiritualism,” pp. 394, 395, in *The Story of Redemption*; “Agency of Evil Spirits,” pp. 511–517, in *The Great Controversy*.

“A battle unseen by human eyes is being waged. The army of the Lord is on the ground, seeking to save souls. Satan and his host are also at work, trying in every possible way to deceive and destroy. . . . Day by day the battle goes on. If our eyes could be opened to see the good and evil agencies at work, there would be no trifling, no vanity, no jesting or joking. If all would put on the whole armor of God and fight manfully the battles of the Lord, victories would be gained that would cause the kingdom of darkness to tremble.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 41.

“As men seek to come into harmony with God, they will find that the offense of the cross has not ceased. Principalities and powers and wicked spirits in high places are arrayed against all who yield obedience to the law of heaven. Therefore, so far from causing grief, persecution should bring joy to the disciples of Christ, for it is an evidence that they are following in the steps of their Master.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 29, 30.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Look at Hebrews 2:14, 15 a little more closely. Death as an agent of enslavement is clearly depicted here. Notice, too, the emphasis on our fear of death. Why do we fear death so much? How does the fear hold us, as the text says, in a kind of slavery? How should the Christian, free in Christ, view death?
- 2 For some people the whole idea of demonic forces is silly superstition; for others, this fear dominates their entire life. How, as Christians, can we strike the right balance in our understanding of the reality of these powers, and yet at the same time understand what Christ has done for us in the fight against them?
- 3 What are some examples of how evil forces control or influence various worldly powers?
- 4 How does the great-controversy worldview help us to understand the continued existence of evil, even after Christ’s victory at the cross?

The Broadcasters

A boy stood on the bank of a lake, tossing bread crumbs into the water. Small minnows and larger fish came to the surface to grab the crumbs. I thought of Ecclesiastes 11:1 which says, “Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again” (NIV).

The Seventh-day Adventist Church’s radio and television ministries are like that boy and the bread. We are “broadcasters”; we cast the Bread of Life into the waters of the world, and pray for “hungry fish.”

Augustín Martínez had been struggling for years to understand the book of Daniel. One night he dreamed that a figure dressed in white told him that soon he would understand these messages.

Augustín awoke and turned on the radio. The first words he heard were, “As it says in Daniel 7. . .” The program was *La Voz de la Esperanza*, the Spanish-language *Voice of Hope*. Augustín listened carefully and found answers to many of his questions. In time he wrote to *La Voz* and said that he, his wife, and his son had been baptized as a result of the message he had heard on the radio.

Sometimes the Bread of Life arrives just in time to save a desperate soul. Elena was a teenager when she left home to find the love she had never known from her father. What she found was heartache and AIDS. Too sick to live alone, she returned to her mother, the only person who had loved her unconditionally.

Maria’s heart broke to see her daughter wasting away. She felt she had failed the one she loved most, and she decided to end her daughter’s suffering and then kill herself. She went to the dresser and got the gun she kept there. But as she walked toward her daughter’s bedroom, the radio on the bureau turned itself on, and a voice said, “Even through your suffering and pain, Jesus understands.”

Shaken, Maria sat down and listened as the speaker’s words brought comfort to her suffering heart. At the end of the program the announcer gave a phone number. Maria dialed it immediately.

A member of *La Voz* staff visited Maria and Elena and comforted them with God’s promises of eternal love. Elena died knowing she’d see Jesus again. Maria was baptized. Maria is convinced that an angel turned on the radio so she could hear the words of life and hope.

Your mission offerings help to support Christian media around the world. We may never know this side of heaven what blessings will come from the bread we cast upon the waters through our offerings and prayers, but God knows.

FRANK GONZÁLEZ is speaker-director of *La Voz de la Esperanza*, a Spanish Adventist radio and television ministry based in California.

Victory *Over* Evil Forces



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Eph. 1:18–22, Rom. 8:26–39, James 4:7, 1 Pet. 5:6–10, Luke 10:1–20, Acts 5:12–16.*

Memory Text: “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (*Romans 8:37, NKJV*).

Key Thought: In Christ, we have victory over all forces that would oppress us.

In some parts of the world, religion is basically a source of power that may be seen as nothing but a way to help one meet the challenges of daily living. The Christian notion of salvation from sin, for example, is foreign to many traditional religions. In these places, Christianity risks being seen mainly as a means to help solve the problems of everyday life.

Though there are, of course, many practical advantages to a Christian's lifestyle, we must always remember that Christianity has an “otherworldly” outlook. In other words, Christianity sees another dimension of reality beyond the material world. Both realms are important, and both host forces that are at cross purposes with each other. How thankful we can be for the promises of victory for us in both realms.

Again, we stress that the overarching narrative of the great controversy between Christ and Satan needs to form the background template for our understanding of the world and our place within it as Christians. In the midst of this conflict, Christianity does not abandon its adherents to the mercy of the opposing forces. On the contrary, in Christ we have the promise of victory over those forces.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 10.*

A Stage Set for Our Victory

The Christian would have no hope of victory over the forces of evil unless the stage was set for it. In last week's study it became clear that Christ, through His death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave, gained victory over all sorts of evil and antigodly "powers." In a very real sense, the unmasking and disarming of these "powers" have placed a limit on them. The fact that the "powers" have been brought under subjection sets the stage for the victory of the Christian.

Study Ephesians 1:18–22. Paul prays for the enlightening of the eyes of the Christians in Ephesus. According to Paul, what did Christ accomplish for us? How do we understand these words in the context of the great controversy? What is promised to us here? How do we make these promises real in our own experience?

Paul is praying that a new and deep illumination will accompany the Christian. When this has happened, their lives will be filled with Christian hope. They will know their privileges as God's heirs, and they will know by experience the power of God in their lives, a power that is of the same magnitude as that which raised Jesus from the dead.

Notice Ephesians 1:20–22 in particular. What can we claim from these promises for ourselves and our struggles with forces stronger than we are?

As a consequence of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, all things, including principalities and powers, function in subjection to Him. The stage is truly set for the possibility of our individual victories over all that would spiritually oppress us.

Read the verses for today. What can you take from them for yourself in whatever struggles you are facing at the moment? Think about what is being said in them and what is promised to us in Christ. How, in your own experience, can this message go from being mere theology to reality?

Hope of Victory

Not only is the stage set for the possibility of the Christian's victory over evil forces, but the Bible explicitly gives us the hope of victory over them.

Study Romans 8:26–39. What point is Paul trying to make here? What reasons does Paul give for the Christian to look confidently to the future? Look at all the wonderful promises and words of encouragement found in these verses. Again, how can we take them beyond theology, beyond something that sounds nice, and live according to the clear teachings of the Word of God presented here?

Romans 8:29, 30 has been a battleground for discussions on predestination. But the passage really occurs in the context of a great promise. Paul gives at least two solid reasons for the Christian to be confident in the Lord. First, the Spirit helps us in our trials and “groanings.” Second, according to God’s eternal purpose, all things, including trials, contribute to the Christian’s ultimate welfare (no matter how hard that might be to see at this present time). Trusting God in difficulties is, indeed, a crucial component of what it means to live by faith and not by sight.

Verses 29 and 30 are Paul’s way of justifying the confidence expressed in verse 28. In these verses he shows how God’s purpose for those who love Him is developed, a purpose that includes all the processes of salvation.

How does Paul’s argument for boosting the confidence of the Christian reach a pinnacle in verses 31–34? Look especially at verse 31. In the context of the great controversy, what can we take from this verse for ourselves?

Romans 8:35–39 gives an array of entities over which the Christian can be victorious. Notice that “principalities and powers” are included in the list. The sheer inclusiveness of Paul’s list points out that there is nothing in the universe over which the Christian cannot be victorious, thanks to Jesus.

Christians Versus the Devil

Read James 4:7. What clear promise is given to the one who stands against the devil? How do we stand against a force so much more powerful than we are, in and of ourselves? See also Deut. 4:4.

The Christian is not a helpless victim, at the mercy of the devil. (Can you see here, too, why it's so important to understand the literal reality of Satan and the fallen angels?) But the Christian is not so much called upon to rise in opposition to the devil as to take a stand against him. The word translated as "resist" is the Greek *anthistemi*, which means "taking a stand against something." It is an attitude the Christian takes that causes the devil to flee. That attitude has to be one of complete surrender to Jesus, who alone has the power to cause the devil to flee from us.

Study 1 Peter 5:6–10. What promise is given to the Christian in the face of an enemy who is described as a "roaring lion" seeking someone to devour? How do these verses help us to understand what James wrote? See also Eph. 4:27 and 6:11.

Peter wrote these words to admonish Christians who were suffering persecution. Obviously he knew that lurking behind the persecution his readers were suffering was the archenemy, Satan. The apostle admonished his readers to resist the devil. Here Peter uses the word *anthistemi*, as James did, but he adds the modifier *stereo*i ("hard" or "firm"). Thus, he suggests that the devil may flee from those who present a solid, rock-like front against his attacks. A cowardly attitude will not suffice. Still, Peter knows that in spite of a strong stand, suffering may endure for a while yet; but God Himself will perfect (mend), establish, strengthen, and settle the Christian (*1 Pet. 5:10*).

Even with all the promises given here, we are not promised freedom from suffering, are we? What Christian doesn't know the reality of suffering? As humans, we seem destined in this world to suffer. What crucial difference should our faith make for us amid sorrows and pain?

Examples of Victory

So far we have been shown by the Bible the hope and promises of victory that the Christian may have. Actually beyond these, we have real examples of Christian victories over evil forces recorded in the Bible. We begin with the example of the ministry of the early disciples whom Jesus sent out.

Read Matthew 10:1–8; Mark 6:7, 12, 13; Luke 9:1, 2; Luke 10:1–20. Look at what these people were commissioned to do. How are these texts to be understood in the context of the great controversy? Also, what do these texts say today to us, the ones who are called to preach to the world about Jesus?

It is quite interesting that as Jesus sent the Twelve out to proclaim the gospel of the coming of God’s kingdom, He deemed it important to give them power over demons and unclean spirits. This is not surprising, because proper preaching of the gospel necessarily entails the unmasking of such powers. The manifestation of the “powers” was to be expected as the gospel would be proclaimed; hence, the need to give the Twelve power over them. Surely, the evil forces manifested themselves as the Twelve went about preaching, and, just as surely, many demons and evil forces were cast out.

As far as can be seen from the records, Jesus did not, in specific terms, commission the Seventy to cast out demons (*Luke 10:9*). Yet, this is the aspect of the mission that seems to have excited the Seventy the most (*Luke 10:17*). With joy the Seventy reported that as they went about preaching the gospel of the kingdom, demons were brought into subjection to them. Of course, they understood that it was the power of Jesus working through them that made this possible.

Though much can be discussed and debated about these texts and the way in which they should be understood today, the important point is that, as Christians who have been called to proclaim the gospel to the world, we have, through Christ, the power to do it.

Read Luke 10:20. What important point should we take for ourselves from Jesus’ words here? How does His response show us what should be important in our lives? How can we make sure that we keep this correct emphasis?

Examples of Victory (Book of Acts)

The examples of victories over demonic forces that we looked at in yesterday's lesson happened in the days of our Lord on the earth. But the victories were by no means restricted to that period. In the book of Acts we find the continuing victories of Jesus' followers over demonic forces.

Of course, this shouldn't be surprising, not with all the promises that Jesus left to His followers about the Holy Spirit being with them when He Himself left (*see, for example, John 14:16*).

At the same time, too, as we so well know, the great controversy between Christ and Satan, though settled finally at the cross, is to rage until the end of time. Thus, Christ's followers, even after He left, were to be engaged in the conflict, especially as they sought to fulfill the gospel commission.

Read the following examples of some of these victories over evil forces. What lesson can we learn from them for ourselves in our present context of outreach and witness?

Acts 5:12–16 _____

Acts 3:1–11 _____

Acts 16:16–18 _____

Acts 16:16–18 presents an unusual case. When the slave girl mentioned “the Most High God,” her words expressed a great truth. Paul, though, would have none of it. He could see what was really going on. The supernatural powers that she had manifested, which were making money for her masters, were not of the Lord, and Paul knew it. When she cried out about these men being “servants of the Most High God” (*NKJV*), she was not talking about the true God but, most likely, about a Canaanite god who was also called *Elyon* (Most High). Notice how easily, merely through the use of certain common terms, error could have greatly compromised the truth.

Look again at Acts 5:12–16 and the amazing part about the people hoping that “at least the shadow of Peter” (*NKJV*) might touch them. What warnings should that have for any Christian who is working for the Lord, especially when his or her work is deemed “successful”?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “ ‘Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled,’ ” pp. 662–680, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Appropriating the Righteousness of Christ,” p. 93, in *Faith and Works*; “Science and Revelation,” p. 310, in *Selected Messages*, book 3.

“Jesus gained the victory through submission and faith in God, and by the apostle He says to us, ‘Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.’ James 4:7, 8. We cannot save ourselves from the tempter’s power; he has conquered humanity, and when we try to stand in our own strength, we shall become a prey to his devices; but ‘the name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.’ Prov. 18:10. Satan trembles and flees before the weakest soul who finds refuge in that mighty name.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 130, 131.

“The omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit is the defense of every contrite soul. Not one that in penitence and faith has claimed His protection will Christ permit to pass under the enemy’s power. The Saviour is by the side of His tempted and tried ones. With Him there can be no such thing as failure, loss, impossibility, or defeat; we can do all things through Him who strengthens us. When temptations and trials come, do not wait to adjust all the difficulties, but look to Jesus, your helper.

“There are Christians who think and speak altogether too much about the power of Satan. They think of their adversary, they pray about him, they talk about him, and he looms up greater and greater in their imagination. It is true that Satan is a powerful being; but, thank God, we have a mighty Saviour, who cast out the evil one from heaven. Satan is pleased when we magnify his power. Why not talk of Jesus? Why not magnify His power and His love?”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 490, 493.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Take some of the examples from this week that show the victories revealed in the Bible. In what ways do we see similar things happening today? What can we do, if anything, to see more of them?
- 2 What does it mean to “draw nigh unto God,” as Ellen G. White quoted above? How do we do that? Discuss in class what it means, how we do it, and what happens when we do.
- 3 Imagine that you are Peter, and people want to merely be touched by your shadow. Think about what that could do to you spiritually. What’s your only safety in a situation like that?

Twice a Fisherman

Fabrice knew nothing of God or Jesus. As a fisherman, he spent weeks at a time on board a ship. One day one of the sailors gave him a book about God. He read it with great interest. Following the book's instructions, Fabrice prayed his first prayer.

Fabrice wondered which Christian faith was the true path to God. He really didn't know who God was or where to find answers to his questions, but he continued praying in the only way he knew.

Then, while visiting a friend, he met a young woman who was staying with his friend's family. Fabrice realized that she was somehow different, and he learned that she was a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. He told her of his search for God, and she invited him to church.

The couple was married, but Fabrice's job kept him away from home and slowed his search for God. He and his wife prayed for work that would allow him more time at home, and God answered.

With more time together, Fabrice's wife gently guided her husband to a total commitment to Christ. Fabrice wanted to share his new faith with others, but he didn't know how. The local mission sent him to a lay training seminar, and his faith grew as he shared what he had learned.

Fabrice and his family were called to work as Global Mission pioneers in a remote region of northern Madagascar. He worked with the villagers in their fields to gain the people's trust, and on Sundays the couple held literacy training programs. In time 33 people were baptized.

When the family's two-year contract was up, the family returned to their home. Fabrice worked as a lay pastor. He had a passion to work for God and wanted to become a minister. But with a family to support, his dream seemed impossible. Then the local mission offered Fabrice a scholarship to study for the ministry. He was thrilled, but it meant huge sacrifices for his family.

Fabrice had to leave his family behind while he prepares for the ministry at Zurcher Adventist University in central Madagascar. He works hard to provide for his family's needs and to pay his remaining school fees. "God stretches the little bit I can earn to provide for us all," he says. "It's worth it to become a fisherman for God."

Part of your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering last quarter will help to provide classrooms for Zurcher Adventist University so that it can continue to train leaders for service to God in Madagascar. Thank you.

FABRICE JAOVOAVY *is studying theology at Zurcher Adventist University.*

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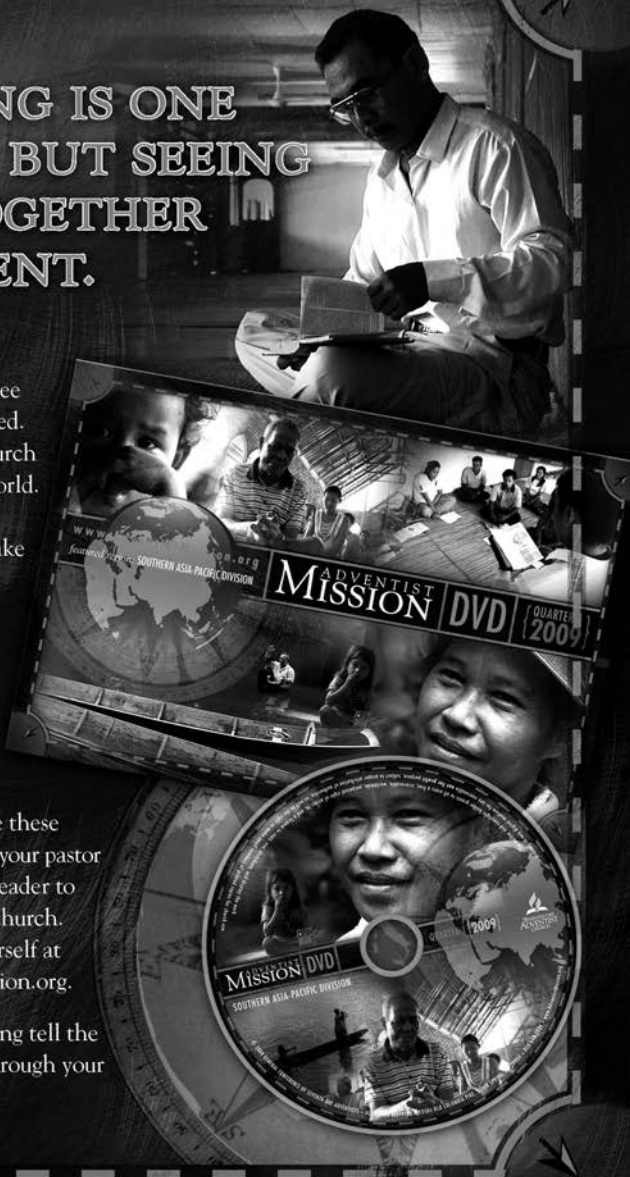
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“Arming” for Victory



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Eph. 6:14–17, 2 Cor. 6:7, Eph. 5:9, Rom. 10:15, 1 Thess. 5:8, Mark 14:38.*

Memory Text: “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (*Ephesians 6:13, NKJV*).

Key Thought: Every believer must be personally and individually armed as we each find ourselves immersed in the great controversy.

Satan's ultimate goal is to wrest for himself the allegiance that all true believers give to Christ. Before conversion, people belonged to the devil's realm; he ruled over them. Although conversion to Christ takes the believer away from the devil's dominion, it does not completely shatter the devil's power. If anything, Satan increases his efforts to destroy our faith and win us back to himself. He has a vast array of deceptive ploys; Scripture calls them “the wiles of the devil” (*Eph. 6:11*). In the end, though, no matter the enemy's deceptions, ploys, and wiles, he can take no one from Christ who is determined to stay faithful to the Lord (Satan might make our life miserable, but that's another matter entirely).

This week's lesson focuses on the Christian's armor in this warfare. Putting on all of God's armor is our only protection. Therefore, we need to understand the nature of that armor because, without it, we would surely fall prey to the enemy; with it, our victory is assured.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 17.*

The Need for Arming Personally

In Ephesians 6:12, Paul describes the Christian life as a struggle, saying, “we . . . wrestle.” Notice, he uses the plural. The passage reads, literally, “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood” (*NKJV*). Every Christian is brought into the picture. In verse 13 Paul urges his readers to put on the whole armor of God. It is with God’s armor that we are to equip ourselves, and it has been made available for our use. Paul begins the verse with the word *wherefore/therefore*, implying that, in view of the nature of the conflict, such arming is necessary. Paul then describes the way in which the Christian ought to be armed and does so using the imagery of how a Roman soldier would have been armed for battle.

Consider the imagery of Ephesians 6:14–17 carefully. What in the picture impresses you with the fact that here is a struggle that not only involves every Christian but calls, fundamentally, for personal engagement? What does that mean to you that you, yourself, have a fight in which to engage?

The word translated as “wrestling” originally referred to hand-to-hand combat but was later applied to other types of fighting. As used here, although a real hand-to-hand contest with demons may not be in view, the word clearly points to an *individualizing* of the struggle.

The parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1–13, though in a different context than what’s being considered here, nevertheless speaks to the issue of *personal* engagement in spiritual matters. Ellen G. White applies the spiritual conditions of the five virgins to Paul’s description of a class of end-time people who have a form of godliness but lack its power (*2 Tim. 3:1–5*). “This is the class that in time of peril are found crying, Peace and safety. They lull their hearts into security, and dream not of danger. When startled from their lethargy, they discern their destitution, and entreat others to supply their lack; but in spiritual things no man can make up another’s deficiency.” —Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 411, 412.

What are some things that only you, yourself, can do for yourself—things that no one else can? (For instance, no one can eat for you.) How do you then apply that same principle to the arming of self for the spiritual conflict in which we are each individually engaged?

Girdle of Truth, Breastplate of Righteousness

“Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness” (Eph. 6:14, NKJV).

Though it’s a little difficult to know the exact nature of the girdle, it seems that in Ephesians 6:14, Paul may have been referring to a leather apron that offered some protection to the lower abdomen but also made freedom of movement and readiness for action possible. In this sense, the girdle was a piece of basic armor. And that armor, said Paul, was “truth.”

Along with the girdle of truth was the breastplate of righteousness. Thus, in this one verse Paul links the concepts of truth and righteousness.

Look up the following texts. How can they help us to understand the link between truth and righteousness, and why are they so crucial for our spiritual protection in the great controversy? 1 Kings 3:6, Ps. 15:2, 96:13, Prov. 12:17, Isa. 48:1, 2 Cor. 6:7, Eph. 5:9.

When the apostle Paul speaks of righteousness as a breastplate in the context of spiritual warfare, he has moral issues in mind. Doing right and practicing righteousness, or, in other words, living out the “truth,” are as vital to Christians in the battle with the powers of evil as the breastplate is to the soldier on the battlefield. When we neglect to do what is right, when we turn our backs on what we know to be the truth, we are easy prey for Satan’s attacks, because we are leaving a wide-open hole in our armor.

At the same time, though this “righteousness” includes living a righteous life, we must always remember the other aspect of righteousness, and that is the righteousness of Christ, which covers the believer and remains the believer’s only hope of salvation. As long as we cling to this truth—that our salvation rests in Jesus—we can be protected from one of Satan’s most efficient spiritual assaults against us: discouragement.

Have you ever been tempted to give up your walk with Jesus because you’ve been discouraged over your life, your character, and/or your actions? If so, why is understanding the truth about Christ’s righteousness so crucial to a strong defense against Satan’s assaults?

Preparation and the Shield of Faith

The Roman soldier armed himself to ensure that his steps would not be impeded on rough terrain. To facilitate movement over all kinds of roads, Roman soldiers often wore shoes studded with sharp nails. Such shoes ensured a good grip, and Paul likens the shoes to the “readiness,” or “preparation,” of the gospel of peace (*Eph. 6:15*).

Read Isaiah 52:7, Romans 10:15, and Ephesians 6:15. Paul’s idea seems to be steadfastness in the Christian life of warfare. In what sense does the gospel of peace provide the Christian with a “good grip” in spiritual warfare?

Ephesians 6:15 may be translated in various ways: “feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace,” “having feet fitted with the readiness of the gospel of peace,” or “having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace.” The key is a Greek word that can mean “preparedness,” as in a prepared foundation or base. Hence, the gospel of peace as a “prepared foundation” is the peace a Christian experiences as a result of having been reconciled with God through the blood of Christ. This reconciliation gives the Christian a firm foothold from which to engage in the spiritual battle that we all face.

The next piece of armor that Paul speaks about is the shield, which he likens to faith (*Eph. 6:16*). In introducing this armor, the apostle prefaces his point with a phrase that may be translated as “above all” or “besides” or “in addition to all.” What do you think the apostle means by this opening phrase?

The word translated as “shield” comes from the word for “door.” The shield, measuring about four feet by two-and-a-half feet and consisting of two layers of wood glued together, was shaped like a door. Because arrows in those days were dipped in pitch and then set on fire, the wooden shield was covered with leather in order to extinguish the glowing arrows and blunt their tips. This was a prominent weapon among all the weapons of defense.

The spiritual analogy isn’t hard to see: among the “fiery arrows” of Satan are lust, doubt, greed, vanity, and so forth. “But faith in God, held aloft like a shield, catches them, snuffs out the flame, and makes them fall harmless to the ground.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1045. This kind of faith is primarily faith in action, a faith that, while including doctrinal truth, goes beyond mere belief. It is a faith that manifests itself in an active defense against the assaults of the enemy. Of course, we can’t save ourselves, and we can’t fight the devil ourselves; our battle is to daily choose the Lord and His ways over anything the devil will throw before us.

Helmet and Sword

The helmet of salvation in Ephesians 6:17 is most likely taken from Isaiah 59:17, although Paul applies it differently. In Isaiah 59, it is God who wears the helmet of salvation; here, in Ephesians, the Christian is called upon to receive it. Whereas the previous items may have been laid out for the soldier to be picked up, the helmet is handed to him. Perhaps this is to emphasize the total “giftedness” of salvation.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:8, Paul speaks of the helmet as the hope of salvation. In Ephesians 6:17, the helmet is depicted simply as salvation. How may this shift in emphasis help to explain how salvation can be a weapon of defense?

Salvation in the New Testament is a present experience that will climax in eternity by way of deliverance from every kind of evil. The victorious helmet that God (*Isa. 59:17*) wears is given to the believer as protection. Because the ultimate goal of the devil’s attack is to deprive Christians of their salvation, the present assurance of salvation that is “given” to them apart from their own works becomes a powerful weapon for surviving the conflict. Truly can the believer in any spiritual conflict proclaim with the psalmist, “O God the Lord, the strength of my salvation, You have covered my head in the day of battle” (*Ps. 140:7, NKJV*).

After mentioning the helmet of salvation, Paul speaks next about “the sword of the spirit,” which is the Word of God. Compare that text with Hebrews 4:12. What important truth is being conveyed by these verses, especially in the context of our battle with Satan?

The temptation of Christ as recorded in Matthew 4:1–10 is a beautiful illustration of how the Word of God can be an effective weapon. The passage should also provide an incentive to Christians to buttress themselves with the truths that are revealed in the Word of God.

So many forces are at play in attempts to weaken our trust in the Bible. What are some of those forces in your own society, church, or culture? More important, how can you defend yourself against any and every attempt (which at times can be very subtle) to weaken your trust in the Word of God?

Praying Always

Ephesians 6:18 begins with the phrase “praying always,” which suggests that praying is connected with the previous verses. The idea is that the putting on, taking up, and receiving of heaven’s armor, all necessitate reliance on God. Hence, “prayer is not another weapon; rather, it is the spirit, the manner, in which the whole armor is to be worn and the battle fought. Paul is here urging it as a perpetual state of mind, a continuous attitude of communion with God.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1046.

Study carefully Ephesians 6:18. What words and phrases associated with Paul’s admonition to the Christian regarding prayer suggest alertness and discipline?

The Bible frequently calls on people not to cease from prayer (*Luke 18:1, Rom. 12:12, Phil. 4:6, Col. 4:2, 1 Thess. 5:17*). But in the context of the combat with evil forces that Paul is addressing in Ephesians 6, he stresses the fact that every occasion in life is to be wrapped in prayer. Such an attitude about prayer is no small demand of Christians, especially because our first instinct in moments of difficulty is to consult friends and colleagues, which is fine and has its place. Prayer, though, should always be the first line of defense and is something that we should be always doing.

Ephesians 6:18 begins with the phrase “praying always” and continues with another about being “watchful.” About what are we to be watchful, and why?

When Jesus was in Gethsemane, He told Peter and the other disciples whom He found sleeping to watch and pray (*Mark 14:38*). Before this happened, Jesus had spent some time warning the disciples to watch (*Mark 13:33–37*). From the perspective of Luke, watching is linked with prayer as a constant affair that brings spiritual strength to the Christian. In Ephesians 6:18, the emphasis is on praying for others. No doubt, as we pray for others, we ourselves are spiritually strengthened, and we ourselves are better armed for the ensuing conflict, no matter what form it takes.

Why is praying for ourselves more important for us spiritually than having others pray for us (however important that is)? What does personal prayer do for you that the prayers of others just can’t?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Importance of Seeking True Knowledge,” pp. 312–314, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8; “The Color Line,” pp. 219, 220, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9; “O God! Help Me to Higher Levels,” p. 105, in *My Life Today*; “Called to Reach a Higher Standard,” pp. 311–315, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“In every soul two powers are struggling earnestly for the victory. Unbelief marshals its forces, led by Satan, to cut us off from the Source of our strength. Faith marshals its forces, led by Christ, the author and finisher of our faith. Hour by hour, in the sight of the heavenly universe, the conflict goes forward. This is a hand-to-hand fight, and the great question is, Which shall obtain the mastery? This question each must decide for himself. In this warfare all must take a part, fighting on one side or the other. From the conflict there is no release. . . . We are urged to prepare for this conflict. ‘Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.’ The warning is repeated, ‘Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Youth’s Instructor*, January 10, 1901.

“We must put on every piece of the armor, and then stand firm. The Lord has honored us by choosing us as His soldiers. Let us fight bravely for Him, maintaining the right in every transaction. Rectitude in all things is essential to the welfare of the soul. As you strive for the victory over your own inclinations, He will help you by His Holy Spirit to be circumspect in every action, that you may give no occasion for the enemy to speak evil of the truth. Put on as your breastplate that divinely protected righteousness which it is the privilege of all to wear. This will protect your spiritual life.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1119.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ However much this week’s lesson emphasized the personal aspect of the struggle in which we’re all engaged, as Christians we are part of a larger community. How can the community as a whole help one another in their individual conflicts? What are the practical things that the community can do to help those who are in spiritual need, in whatever form that need may come?
- ❷ How does the military imagery that Paul uses reinforce the reality of the great-controversy motif that is so central to the Bible? Why is it always important to keep the reality of this conflict before us? Who could imagine a soldier on the battlefield, forgetting that he was in a war? How much more important is it for us not to forget either?

Power of Music

Kai Ming was a Christian. Her greatest joy was leading her church choir. Then she met Yen, a Global Mission pioneer who was working in her city. Kai Ming was impressed with Yen's singing and invited him to teach her choir how to sing better. Yen agreed.

Soon Kai Ming realized that Yen knew his Bible well. She asked him to teach her more about the Bible. She invited her fellow church members to join her to learn more of the Word of God. When the leaders of Kai Ming's church learned that Yen was teaching their members Bible truths the leaders didn't believe in, they threatened Yen and warned Kai Ming not to associate with her former church members.

Kai Ming was baptized and opened her home to start a house church. She invited her friends to come and learn more about God. In spite of her former church's edict, Kai Ming invited her former church friends to come and hear Yen teach about God. She wanted her friends to understand God's will and the reasons why she had left her former church.

Within a month of Kai Ming's baptism, 12 people were coming to her house church, seven of whom came from her former church. They wanted to know what had drawn Kai Ming away from their church and the choir that she loved so much.

Kai Ming visited one old woman who was bedridden with a bad back. She prayed for the woman every day, and within a month the old woman could walk again. The woman, her daughter, and her granddaughter began attending Kai Ming's house church to thank God for her healing.

Others came asking for prayer for health and personal issues, and the group prayed for them. When several saw answers to their prayers, they came back and brought others.

Kai Ming made a good living selling blankets. But she yearned to reach more people for God. So, she gave up her blanket business and became a Global Mission pioneer. She has taken over Yen's work in her city, allowing Yen to begin working in another city. In the past three years Kai Ming has led about fifty or sixty people to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, including her two adult daughters.

"I've always believed in Jesus," she says. "But when I met Yen, I learned the whole truth of the Bible. I thank God that He is willing to use me to lead others to Jesus. God is so important in my life."

Our mission offerings help support the work of Global Mission in China and around the world. Thank you for giving.

KAI MING FANG is a Global Mission pioneer in Jiangsu Province, north of Shanghai, China.

The Church: In Service to Humanity



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Pet. 2:9; Matt. 28:19, 20; John 17:21, 22; Acts 15:1–29.*

Memory Text: “These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (*1 Timothy 3:14, 15, NKJV*).

Key Thought: “We should remember that the church, enfeebled and defective though it be, is the only object on earth on which Christ bestows His supreme regard.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 396.

For many, church isn't what it used to be (whatever that was). Some people even talk about “a churchless Christianity,” a concept that is self-contradictory. Others rail against “organized religion” (what is better, “disorganized religion”?). The Bible teaches, clearly, about the importance of the church. It's not an option; it's a crucial component in the plan of salvation. No wonder, then, that as the great controversy unfolds, Satan works so hard against it, especially because the church is one important means by which sinners are brought into contact with God's offer of salvation. The church, wrote Paul, was “the house of God,” even “the pillar and ground of the truth” (*1 Tim. 3:15, NKJV*). The church is not a human invention; it was created by God for the purposes of bringing erring sinners into a saving relationship with Him.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 24.*

Nature of the Church: Part 1

When we speak about the nature of something, we are usually interested in its origins, function, and purpose. Besides providing several images to depict the church, the Bible uses a particular word in reference to it, *ecclesia*, which means “called out” or “called forth.” In secular Greek life the word was used primarily to describe a group of citizens who had been called out from their homes into a public place for an assembly or gathering. The New Testament uses the word in this general sense.

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (called the Septuagint), the “congregation” of Israel, especially when gathered before the Lord for religious purposes, is referred to as *ecclesia*.

The Jews were “called out” to be God’s special people, but the early Christians may have used the word to identify those Jews and Gentiles who, as recipients of God’s grace, had been called out to be Christ’s witnesses. In the New Testament, the church describes the company of the faithful the world over. It’s important to note that the word *ecclesia* is never used with reference to a building in which public worship is conducted. Equally significant is that whereas the word *synagogue* originally denoted an assembly of people gathered for a specific purpose, the Christians preferred to use the word *ecclesia*. Nevertheless, both words indicate that the New Testament church was in historical continuity with the Old Testament church, the “congregation” of Israel (*Acts 7:38*).

The word *ecclesia* indicates, in general terms, a group of people called out through God’s initiative. How does this explain Paul’s use of the word at three different levels: (i) the church in individual homes (*Rom. 16:5, 1 Cor. 16:19*); (ii) the church in specific cities (*1 Cor. 1:2, Gal. 1:2*); and (iii) the church in larger geographical areas (*Acts 9:31*)?

Ecclesia is the depiction of any group of people gathered together who share in a saving relationship with Christ. This means that individual congregations are not just a part of the whole church; each unit represents the whole. Furthermore, the church is one throughout the whole world but at the same time present in each assembly.

Think about your local church, which functions as a representative of God’s whole church. What kind of responsibilities does that place on you as part of the church body and on the local church itself?

Nature of the Church: Part 2

Besides the word *ecclesia* itself, the New Testament describes the church with several images that further explain its nature and function. Today we will look at just two crucial concepts regarding the church: the church as the people of God and the church as the body of Christ.

1. The “people of God” as a concept is applied in the Bible to the children of Israel (*Deut. 14:2*). Read 1 Peter 2:9, where the concept is clearly applied to Christians. How are we to understand what this means for us today?

Notice that even as the concept is applied to Christians, it is still used to describe the nation of Israel (*Luke 1:68; Rom. 11:1, 2*). Evidently the New Testament applies the concept to the church in a way that suggests continuity and consummation. (*See Gal. 3:29.*)

2. “Body of Christ”—Romans 12:5, 1 Corinthians 12:27, and Ephesians 1:22, 23 depict the church as the body of Christ. How do these texts help us to understand better its nature and function?

Numerous ideas can be found within these texts, perhaps the most obvious one being the unity (see Wednesday’s lesson) that should be seen in the church. This is an idea expressed elsewhere in the New Testament, especially in 1 Corinthians 12, where Paul writes: “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?” (*1 Cor. 12:12–17*).

Some people suffer from what are known as auto-immune diseases: their own immune system, which is supposed to protect the body, attacks it instead. Think about the implications of this analogy for the church as “the body of Christ.”

The Mission of the Church

The church as “the body of Christ” means that the church is to do what Christ would do if He were still on the earth “bodily.” It is for this reason that the church as an “assembly” has been called out. The church does not simply have a mission; the church is mission.

Read Matthew 28:19, 20. How does it address the issue of the church’s mission?

Mission involves sending people out to speak for God. It is what God Himself did with the prophets of Israel (*Jer. 7:25*) and with the apostles (*Luke 9:1, 2; 10:1, 9*). Jesus also sent out His disciples just as the Father had sent Him (*John 20:21*). The church today can do no less and still remain faithful to its calling.

What do the following texts also teach us about the church’s mission? *Eph. 4:11–13, Matt. 10:5–8, James 1:27, Eph. 1:6, and 1 Pet. 2:9.*

Clearly, evangelism is central to the mission of the church. The church exists also for the edification of believers, for the promotion of true worship, and for engagement in matters of social concern.

Though the church faces many challenges, one of the most difficult is to keep a proper balance in its understanding of mission. On one hand, it would be so easy to get caught up in social reform and in working for the betterment of society and its ills. While that work is important, in and of itself, it must never be allowed to swallow up the ultimate mission of the church, which is to reach the lost for Jesus and to prepare people for His return. At the same time, too, we need to avoid the extreme of living as if every headline signaled the end of the world and thus neglect the basic tasks of daily life. We need divine wisdom in order to know how to strike the right balance.

How involved are you in the mission of the church? In what way could you do more than you are doing? Why is it important for your own spiritual growth to be involved in the church’s calling?

Unity of the Church

The church—depicted as the “called out” of God, the “people of God,” the “body of Christ,” and the “temple of the Holy Spirit”—is fitted for service or mission. Unity is essential to the church because without it the church cannot successfully accomplish its mission. It is no wonder that the issue of unity was on Christ’s mind toward the close of His earthly life (*John 17:21, 22*).

Jesus prayed for the unity of the church (*John 17:21, 22*); Paul exhorted the believers about it (*Rom. 15:5, 6*). **How are we to understand unity as it is expressed in these texts? What does this unity mean?**

The unity that Christ prayed for and that Paul exhorted the believers to attain clearly involved a union of feeling, thought, action, and much more. It is not a harmony that is achieved through social engineering, diplomatic management, or political subterfuge. It is a gift bestowed upon believers by the indwelling Christ (*John 17:22, 23*) and kept by the power of God the Father (*John 17:11*).

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10 and 2 Corinthians 13:11. How are we to achieve what Paul calls for in these texts?

There is no question that we are all different people, and that we have different views regarding many things views that can at times make unity difficult. Though stresses and strains are inevitable at every level of the church, we all need to keep an attitude of humility, self-denial, and a desire for a good that is greater than ourselves. So many of the divisions that arise do so because of selfishness, pride, and a desire to exalt oneself and one’s views over others. None of us has it all right; none of us understands all things perfectly. Whatever the inevitable differences that will arise, were we all to daily take up our crosses, daily die to self, daily seek not only our own good but the good of others and the good of the church as a whole, so many of the problems with which we struggle and which hinder the work would vanish.

In short, unity begins with each one of us, individually, as followers of Christ—not just in name but in a life of true self-sacrifice, a life dedicated to a cause and a good greater than ourselves.

Governance of the Church

Governance means getting things done. This is true of general social life, and it is also true of church life. Governance also involves organization, which means the organizing of things into a functioning, coherent whole with rules, regulations, and structures designed to facilitate a task at hand. Authority is also critical to governance. At the practical level of church life, who has authority to authorize things and who can be authorized to do things? Different answers to these questions have led to different forms of church governance.

Seventh-day Adventists have a representative system of church governance. Ideally, leadership acts only as representatives, receiving delegated authority and responsibilities from the membership. It is not simply enough to show that a system of church governance is based on Scripture; the exercise of authority within the system must demonstrate sensitivity to biblical values.

Look at Acts 15:1–29. What can we learn from these verses about some key principles that are involved in church organization and governance?

Whatever we can learn from these verses about church governance, one point should be clear: church organization needs to be centered around advancing the spread of the gospel. Biblically, church governance is only as good as its promotion of mission and evangelism.

We need to remember, too, that though Christ exercises His authority through His church and its appointed officials, He has never handed over His power to them. He retains the headship of the church (*Eph. 1:22*). The early church was conscious of the fact that it could not exercise any authority independently of Christ and His word. In Acts 15:28 it was important to the assembly that what it decided “seemed good to the Holy Spirit” (*NKJV*), the true representative of Christ. Holders of offices in the church today cannot act differently.

Consider Matthew 20:24–28 and 23:8. What implication is there for the exercise of authority in the church at all levels?

How willing are you to serve others? Think deeply about your own motives and what they are in regard to what you do in the church, regardless of whatever position you might hold. What are these motives, and how can they be more in harmony with the principles revealed in the Word?

Further Study: Read Raoul Dederen, “The Church,” pp. 538–581, in Raoul Dederen (ed.), *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*; Ellen G. White, “Thou Shalt Have No Other Gods Before Me,” pp. 361–364, in *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*; “The Church the Light of the World,” pp. 455–467, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5.

“If a man is sanguine of his own powers and seeks to exercise dominion over his brethren, feeling that he is invested with authority to make his will the ruling power, the best and only safe course is to remove him, lest great harm be done, and he lose his own soul, and imperil the souls of others. . . . This disposition to lord it over God’s heritage will cause a reaction unless these men change their course. . . . A man’s position does not make him one jot or tittle greater in the sight of God; it is character alone that God values.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 362.

“The mission of the church of Christ is to save perishing sinners. It is to make known the love of God to men and to win them to Christ by the efficacy of that love. The truth for this time must be carried into the dark corners of the earth, and this work may begin at home.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 381.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 There is no question that the church, our church, has problems. Jesus explained it as such: “ ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away’ ” (*Matt. 13:24, 25, NIV*). Read the rest of the parable. How do we apply what Jesus said to our church about the way in which we deal with those who cause problems? Does this mean that there are no circumstances under which someone could be disfellowshipped? See, for instance, *Titus 3:10, 11* and *Rom. 16:17*.
- 2 What do you say to someone who, believing the church is corrupt, decides to pull away from the body as a whole and go it alone?
- 3 Our church affirms the notion of what has been called the “priesthood of all believers.” What does this idea include? What responsibilities does the idea carry for us?
- 4 Discuss in class some of the potential threats to our unity as a church. What issues have caused division in the church in the past? What can we learn from the past that can help to prevent similar things from happening in the future?

A Changed Heart

Fourteen-year-old Veresa [veh-REH-sah] listened as the doctor spoke to his parents. “Veresa has a hole in his heart. But surgery can repair his heart and help him live a normal life.” Veresa tried not to worry about the surgery; he just wanted to be well.

Veresa’s surgery was a success. His parents couldn’t stay with him while he recovered in the hospital, so his nurse stopped by often to chat. Veresa looked forward to her visits and enjoyed hearing her talk about Jesus and read him promises from the Bible.

Veresa had grown up attending church every Sunday, but he had never heard some of the things that his nurse talked about. One thing in particular stood out in his mind: the seventh day is the Sabbath day.

When Veresa returned home, he went to the nearby Seventh-day Adventist church. He wasn’t sure what his parents would think of his going to this church, so he didn’t tell them. Veresa met the pastor and asked him questions about the Sabbath and other things that his faithful nurse had taught him.

One day Veresa told his parents that he had been attending the Seventh-day Adventist church. They were stunned when he told them that he wanted to become a Seventh-day Adventist. “Why would you leave our church?” they asked. He tried to explain that he wasn’t leaving their church; he was following God’s way.

“If you insist on attending this church,” his father said, “then leave our home.” Sadly, Veresa packed his few clothes and his school books and walked to the Seventh-day Adventist church. He told the pastor that his parents had sent him away. “You can live with us,” the pastor said.

Veresa stayed with the pastor for several months, during which time he joined the church through baptism. Every Sabbath he walked by his family’s home on the way to and from church. He prayed for his parents, who refused to discuss his faith.

One day Veresa’s parents asked the pastor to send their son home. Gladly, Veresa returned home, and his parents welcomed him back. They didn’t try to change his mind about his beliefs. Veresa shared his faith with them, and his parents began keeping the Sabbath. But they have not made a decision to become Seventh-day Adventists.

“I hope that one day soon we can worship together again, this time in the Adventist faith,” Veresa says.

Pray for Veresa and his family. And remember that your mission offerings help to give people around the world an opportunity to hear God’s truths and accept His love into their lives.

VERESA shares his faith in Fiji, an island nation in the South Pacific.

The Church: Rites *and* Rituals



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 28:19, 20; Rom. 6:3–8; John 13:1–17; Matt. 26:26–28; 1 Cor. 11:24–26.*

Memory Text: “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (*Acts 2:38, NKJV*).

Key Thought: God has instituted ordinances that, properly understood, help to reinforce our faith.

Many societies have initiation rituals, sometimes called “rites of passage.” In some cultures, rites of passage are designed in order to help persons to transition from one stage of life into another. For example, rites of adulthood are performed around the onset of puberty. These rites vary from place to place; yet, all have the goal of ensuring that younger members are shaped to be productive and responsible, community-oriented individuals. In the process, boys or girls are taught the ways of adulthood; that is, they are shown what is expected of them as adult members of the society.

In the Christian community there are specific rites as well, acts that formalize the commitment of individuals to the faith that they profess. These sacred acts not only confirm a person’s participation and fellowship in the community but, ideally, help to prepare each individual to become a faithful and productive member of that community. These acts also are the means of helping members to understand what their commitment to Christ must entail. This week we’ll look at three rites that express our faith: baptism, foot-washing, and the Lord’s Supper.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 1.*

Naming the Sacred Rites

During the early stages of the Christian church, believers in the eastern part of the church, where Greek was the common language, used the word *mysterion*, or “mystery,” to describe Christian sacred rites. In the west, where Latin predominated, the term employed was *sacrament* (Latin, *sacramentum*). A *sacramentum* was an oath that a Roman soldier swore, declaring his obedience to the commander’s order. Those who employed this word felt that it described accurately the nature of the sacred rites. With time, however, the idea came to represent an act with an inward invisible power. The church of the Middle Ages identified seven such acts, called “sacraments,” which were seen as means of infusing grace into a person’s soul.

During the Reformation, the sacraments came under scrutiny and criticism. In the minds of many, the term *sacrament* appeared tainted. A different term was felt to be in order, and that was *ordinance*. The word *ordinance* comes from the verb “to ordain,” which makes an ordinance a special act that Christ Himself instituted or ordained. To prefer the term *ordinance* to *sacrament* is to say that one participates in the acts because they are the divinely ordained means for us to show our obedience and loyalty to Jesus as Lord. Seventh-day Adventists see baptism, foot-washing, and the Lord’s Supper as ordinances—acts that reveal our loyalty to Christ. They are symbolic ways of expressing our faith.

Read Matthew 28:19, 20; John 13:14; and 1 Corinthians 11:23–26. To what extent do these passages support the idea that the sacred acts should be described as “ordinances”?

However much importance we place on the “ordinances,” we must always remember that these are not conduits of grace or acts by which we earn salvation or gain merit before God. Sin and what it has done to us is far too serious a matter for rituals, even those instituted by Christ Himself, to be able to redeem us. Only the death of Jesus on the cross was sufficient to accomplish the salvation of beings as deeply fallen as we are. As we understand them, the ordinances are outward symbols of our acknowledgment of what Christ has done for us and of our union with Him (and all that this union entails), and they serve their purpose well. They are a means to an end, not an end in and of themselves.

Baptism

The New Testament uses several images to describe what baptism means. First, baptism symbolizes a spiritual union with Christ (*Rom. 6:3–8*), involving participation in His suffering, death, and resurrection, as well as the renunciation of one’s former lifestyle. In this way, baptism is linked with repentance and the forgiveness of sin (*Acts 2:38*); the new birth and reception of the Spirit (*1 Cor. 12:13*); and, consequently, entrance into the church (*Acts 2:41, 47*).

Baptism symbolizes a covenantal and spiritual relationship with God through Christ (*Col. 2:11, 12*). Baptism represents what circumcision represented in the Old Testament. And, too, baptism symbolizes a transfer of loyalties, one that places a person into a community that is consecrated to the service of Christ. The reception of the Spirit in baptism enables believers to serve the church and work for the salvation of those who are not yet of the faith (*Acts 1:5, 8*).

Many years ago the Joint Committee of the Church of England on Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Communion made an impressive admission. The statement said that “the recipients of Baptism were normally adults and not infants; and it must be admitted that there is no conclusive evidence in the New Testament for the Baptism of infants.”—*Baptism and Confirmation Today* (London: SCM, 1955), p. 34, quoted by Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1988), p. 1102. The meaning of baptism precludes infants as legitimate candidates, because biblical baptism requires faith and repentance on the part of the participants. Also, the idea of the role of the Word of God in the development of faith (*Rom. 10:17*) indicates that repentance must be coupled with biblical and spiritual instruction. These elements are necessary in order for candidates to bring forth “fruits worthy of repentance” (*Luke 3:8*) as evidence of their relationship with Christ.

The nature of baptism helps us to understand the difference between an ordinance and a sacrament. Baptism, according to those who see it as a sacrament, is the means that brings about the transformation in a person from spiritual death to life. In this understanding, the age of the person doesn’t matter, because it’s all a supernatural event anyway. On the other hand, baptism as an ordinance is an indication or symbol of an internal change (a supernatural event) that has already occurred in the life of the believer by way of his or her experience with Jesus. In this view, candidates for baptism ought to have already experienced faith in Christ; therefore, the question of who is baptized, and when, becomes very important.

If you have been baptized, think back upon the experience. When you understand what it means, why (in a sense) do we need to be “baptized” every day? How can this be accomplished?

The Ordinance of Humility

It's hard to imagine the pain that must have been going on in the heart of Jesus as He—about to face the Cross, the greatest humiliation possible—saw the jealousy and infighting among His own disciples over who would be the greatest in His kingdom.

Read Luke 22:24–27 (see also Matt. 18:1, 20:21). **What crucial truth had the disciples still not learned?**

Our world is so twisted and perverted by sin that it has it all backward, however “rational” and “sensible” backward may seem. Who in their right mind would rather be the one serving than the one served? Is not the whole point of life to get ahead, to become wealthy, and to be someone who is waited on and attended to by others rather than being one of the ones who serve? It's no wonder, then, that at the Last Supper, Jesus washed the disciples' feet. No words He could have said would have conveyed the truth of what real greatness is in the eyes of God more forcefully than His washing the feet of those who should have been kissing His.

What does John 13:1–17 teach us about foot washing as a part of the Communion service?

So much amazing truth rings out through these verses. In verse 3 it says that Jesus knew that the Father had given “all things into His hands.” What happens next? Yes, Jesus, knowing full well that “He had come from God and was going to God” (*NKJV*), rose from the meal and started washing the disciples' feet (*vs.* 5). Even without fully knowing who Jesus really was, the disciples must have been astonished. How could they have failed to see the lesson there?

Before claiming for ourselves all that Christ has done for us, remember how important it is to come to the Lord's Supper with a sense of our own humbleness and lowliness and need of divine grace.

Whose feet might it do you some immense spiritual good to wash?

The Lord's Supper

Read Matthew 26:26–28. What meaning is evident in what Jesus is telling us to do here? Why is it important to see this in terms of symbols?

The Lord's Supper replaces the Passover festival of the old covenant era. The Passover met its fulfillment when Christ, the Paschal Lamb, gave His life. Before His death, Christ Himself had instituted the replacement, the great festival of the New Testament church under the new covenant. Just as the Passover festival commemorated Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt, the Lord's Supper commemorates the deliverance from spiritual Egypt, the bondage of sin.

The Passover lambs' blood applied to the lintel and doorposts of each house protected the inhabitants from death; the nourishment that its flesh provided gave the children of Israel the strength to escape from Egypt (*Exod. 12:3–8*). So, Christ's sacrifice brings liberation from death; believers are saved through the partaking of both His body and blood (*John 6:54*). The Lord's Supper proclaims that Christ's death on the cross provides our salvation, provides our forgiveness, and promises us victory over sin.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:24–26. What important doctrinal truth about the Cross is revealed here?

Here we see, clearly, the substitutionary aspect of Christ's death. His body was broken and His blood shed for us; at the cross He took upon Himself what rightly belonged to us. Each time we partake of the Lord's Supper, we should always remember what Christ accomplished in our behalf.

When you add to the Lord's Supper the foot washing, which helps to prepare our hearts before we partake of the Communion service, we should also get a sense of the communal nature of this ordinance. With the Cross so vividly symbolized through the partaking of the bread and wine, we are reminded that, whatever earthly things divide us, we are all sinners in constant need of grace. The Communion service should help us all to realize our obligations, not just to the Lord but to one another, as well.

Anticipation of the Second Advent

“For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come” (1 Cor. 11:26). What great hope is presented here?

With these words we see how closely entwined the Second Coming and the Communion service are. That makes so much sense too, because the Second Coming is, really, the culmination of what happened at the Cross. One could argue that the biggest reason for the First Coming—which included Christ’s body being broken and His blood shed for us—was the Second Coming. The First Coming is what paved the way for the Second.

What good would the First Coming of Christ be without the Second?

The Communion service, in a sense, spans the interim between Calvary and the Second Coming. Each time we partake of communion, we dwell on the Cross and what it accomplished for us. Yet, what it accomplished for us cannot be separated from the Second Coming. In fact, what Jesus did on the cross for us doesn’t reach its ultimate culmination until the Second Coming.

Read Matthew 26:29. What is Jesus saying in this one verse?

Look at the promise, the assurance, and the hope that the Lord gives us here. These words imply a closeness, an intimacy, between the redeemed and the Redeemer that will extend into eternity. Jesus is promising us that He will not drink of this fruit of the vine until He drinks it new with us in the eternal kingdom. When we remember who He is, the Creator of the universe (*Col. 1:16*), this promise is even more astonishing. Thus, besides everything the Communion service points to, it should also point us to the great hope that awaits us at the Second Coming of Jesus.

Discouraged? Downtrodden? Welcome to a fallen world. Why, amid all that you may be going through, is it so important to look at the Cross, what it means for you now, and what it means for your ultimate future?

Further Study: Read the Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, chaps. 15–18, in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*.

“Baptism is a most sacred and important ordinance, and there should be a thorough understanding as to its meaning. It means repentance for sin, and the entrance upon a new life in Christ Jesus. There should be no undue haste to receive the ordinance. Let both parents and children count the cost.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 93.

“The Passover pointed backward to the deliverance of the children of Israel, and was also typical, pointing forward to Christ, the Lamb of God, slain for the redemption of fallen man. The blood sprinkled upon the door-posts prefigured the atoning blood of Christ, and also the continual dependence of sinful man upon the merits of that blood for safety from the power of Satan, and for final redemption.”—Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 201.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ When was the last time that you washed someone’s feet in the foot-washing service? Why is this such an important practice?
- ❷ Read 1 Peter 3:20, 21. What analogy does Peter use in order to help to explain the meaning of baptism?
- ❸ Early Christians were accused of many things of which they were not guilty, including cannibalism. One of the reasons were the following verses: “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him’ ” (*John 6:53–56, NKJV*). What is Jesus teaching us with these words? Why is it so important that we understand the spiritual meaning of texts such as these?
- ❹ In class, discuss in more detail the communal aspect of the Communion service. What are ways in which it should help your church to better understand what our obligations are to each other and to the outside community as a whole?

Divine Appointment

I was a troublemaker in my village in India. My father had introduced me to alcohol when I was nine years old, and it had become an overpowering habit. I quit school and stole money to buy liquor. My family, my health, and my friends all suffered because of me.

I began spitting up blood. Frightened, I stopped drinking until the blood-spitting ended. Then I started drinking again. I was 23 years old and married. Our lives were miserable because of my addiction. I drank up my earnings and left my family to find food.

One night I staggered home drunk and saw a man waiting at a bus stop. He turned to me and said he was a man of God. I stopped to listen, and he told me, “There is a God who can solve your problems. I want to come to your house and tell you about Him.”

“I’m not interested,” I told him. “I’m a drunkard, and I don’t know God.” But the man walked with me to my home. There he told me about God. But I was too drunk to understand what he said. “I’m going to sleep,” I said. “You can sleep here until morning.”

The next morning I found the pastor still there, so we talked again. I was sober and could understand what he was saying about God. I was curious about this God who is alive and powerful and who answers honest prayers. I wanted to know more, so I went with the pastor to his house some 25 miles (40 km) to study with him.

God took away the desire for alcohol and cleared my mind. I accepted Jesus as my Savior, and my wife and I were baptized in 2008. Today I know that the meeting with the pastor was a divine appointment.

My wife and I began sharing God’s love with others. Today we serve as Global Mission pioneers, sharing God’s love in my home town, where everyone knew me as a troublemaker, a drunkard, and an idol worshiper. They can see what God is doing in my life, and I tell them that God can do the same in their lives.

So far God has given us 20 people for Christ. I’m working with 30 or 40 more people. I am filled with joy that God could use me, a drunken idol worshiper, to bring the love of Jesus to others. Thank you for your offerings that help to sustain the work of Global Mission around the world.

RAMESH RAUT is a Global Mission pioneer in India.

The Law *and the* Gospel



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 19:7, 8; Exod. 23:1–9; 1 John 5:3; Rom. 3:19, 20; Exod. 20:11, 12; Deut. 5:15.*

Memory Text: “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:3, 4, NKJV).

Key Thought: God’s entire moral law is what reveals our sin and, thus, our need for a Savior. The law and the gospel are, therefore, inseparable.

The law and character of God are central to the great controversy, and when the controversy is finally over, God’s law and character will be vindicated before the onlooking universe. Until then, the controversy rages on. As human beings we wind up on one side or another, and the side we choose decides which master we follow. In the words of Bob Dylan, “*You’re gonna have to serve somebody, / Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord / But you’re gonna have to serve somebody.*”

Those who choose to serve the Lord do so out of love and appreciation for what has been done for them through Christ. Having been buried with Christ by baptism into His death, they know that the body of sin was destroyed so that they no longer need to serve their former master, sin; but now have been given the freedom to obey God and His law.

In this week’s lesson we will look at the nature of the law, its purpose, and its relation to the good news of God’s saving grace. For, rightly understood, God’s law helps to reveal just what God’s grace has offered us in Christ.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 8.*

God's Laws and Regulations

The word *torah* is a commonly used Hebrew word in the Old Testament and is often translated as “law.” The New Testament uses the Greek *nomos* (law) to translate *torah*. *Torah* means “direction” or “guidance.” Because the Bible is a record of God’s relationship with humans, *law* in the Bible generally refers to all of God’s instructions to His people. And because God Himself is good and righteous, and guides and instructs His people in goodness and righteousness, we rightly assume that His law reveals His goodness and righteousness. Or, as we like to say, the law is a reflection of God’s character.

What do the following texts tell us about the law and, ultimately, about God? *Ps. 19:7, 8; Rom. 7:12; Ps. 119:151, 152, 172.*

It is by way of the Bible that God has explicitly revealed Himself to humankind. As one reads through the sacred texts, one comes across an abundance of materials that are, basically, directions or instructions that cover many aspects of human life: morality, ethics, health, sexuality, diet, work, et cetera. Some of these instructions are clearly universal; others appear to be more limited in time and scope. But because all of them are God’s instructions (*torah*), the greatest care is needed in the development of principles that help us to understand what is universal and what is limited. Seventh-day Adventists and many other Christian groups generally make a distinction between “ceremonial” laws (regulations that teach the plan of salvation by symbols and ritual practices), “civil” laws (instructions regarding the community life of the nation of ancient Israel), and “moral” laws (instructions of God’s pattern of conduct for humanity).

The book of Leviticus contains many ceremonial laws, especially with regard to the sanctuary service and its ritual system. The nature of civil laws and the principle of justice underlying them can be seen, for example, in Exodus 23:1–9. Then there is the moral law, the Ten Commandments, which most Christians (in theory, at least) believe are still God’s law for all humanity.

Look through Exodus 23:1–9. What universal moral principles can we take from what was given specifically to ancient Israel?

The Moral Law Today

Most Christians claim that the Ten Commandments are God’s universal moral code. This view is seen, for instance, in various legal battles in the United States in which Christians have sought to have the Ten Commandments posted in various public places, especially public schools. Years ago, Alabama was involved in a legal battle involving a state judge who refused to remove a monument of the Ten Commandments from a courtroom, despite orders from a higher court to do so. In the minds of many, the Ten Commandments, far from being invalidated, remain God’s legal standard for morality.

And with good reason too. To begin with, although the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) was codified at Sinai, the book of Genesis suggests that most of the commandments were known before then.

What do the following texts reveal about the existence of the law prior to Mount Sinai? *Gen. 35:1–4, 2:3, 4:8–11, 39:7–9, 44:8, 12:18.*

On logical grounds alone, it makes no sense for the Ten Commandments to have been purely a Jewish institution, something intended only for a particular people in a particular time and place. Doesn’t it make sense that moral issues such as stealing, killing, adultery, and idolatry are universally wrong, regardless of culture? Also, when the Bible is so clear that sin is defined through the law (*Rom. 7:7*), the notion of the law being abrogated or superceded is, on the face of it, an illogical position for any Bible-believing Christian.

How does James 2:11 help us to understand the perpetuity of God’s law?

First John 5:3 says that obedience to God’s commandments is an expression of our love for Him. What does that mean? Why is obedience to the commandments an expression of this love?

The Law and the Gospel

Though many understand that the Ten Commandments remain binding in the lives of Christians, the role that they play in the plan of salvation can be confusing. If we're not saved by the keeping of the law, then what is its purpose?

How do the following texts help us to understand the role that the law plays in the lives of those who are saved by grace?

Rom. 3:19, 20 _____

Ps. 119:5, 6 _____

Rom. 7:7 _____

The law was never designed to be a means of salvation. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, the law creates in the sinner a need for the grace (gospel) of Christ. By pointing out what is right, what is good, and what is true, those who fall short of that standard (which is all of us) realize our need of salvation. In this sense the law points us to the need for the gospel, the need of grace. This grace comes to us through Jesus. The function of the law, even in the Old Testament, was to show us our need of salvation; it was never a means of providing that salvation.

“To ask whether the law can bring salvation is to ask the wrong question as far as Scripture is concerned—in both the Old and New Testaments! Never does either Testament affirm, imply, or even hint that this might ever have been the case. . . .

“It is a further error to argue that the writer of Hebrews (10:1–4) corrected the law, as if it had taught that ‘the blood of bulls and goats [could] take away sins.’ . . . The sacrifices were pictures, types, and models of the one perfect sacrifice that was to come.”—Walter C. Kaiser, *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1993), pp. 394, 395.

Look around at what violation of God’s law has done to humanity. How has your own life been impacted by the violation of God’s law? What does your answer tell you about just how relevant the law remains?

The Sabbath and the Law

As we saw in Monday’s lesson, many Christians still believe in the binding nature of God’s law. Again, as long as one accepts the reality of sin, it’s hard to see how anyone could believe anything else.

Yet, as we know so well, the whole issue of the Christian obligation to the law suddenly gets very murky when the question of obedience to the fourth commandment arises, particularly in regard to the seventh day itself. In fact, the irony is that the Alabama judge who got himself in trouble for his insistence on placing the Ten Commandments monument in the courtroom was himself living in violation of that law because, however strict a Sunday keeper he might have been, he wasn’t keeping the biblical commandment to rest on the seventh day. If we take the Bible for what it says, then, according to James—“Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (*James 2:10*)—then the judge was guilty of violating every precept of the law that he insisted upon leaving in the courthouse!

Exodus 20:9, 10 explains the Sabbath commandment. The text is careful to point out when the Sabbath occurs (the seventh day), and how it is to be kept (cessation of regular work by all under one’s shelter) in order for its holiness to be guarded. “The Sabbath is not portrayed as a day of recuperation from those too weak to keep working day after day without rest. It is portrayed rather as a stoppage good for everyone, for the purpose of refocusing on holiness (all concerns that stem from belonging to God, which is what holiness is) in order to enjoy God’s blessings of that day and its potential.”—Douglas K. Stuart, *The New American Commentary, Exodus*, vol. 2 (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), p. 460.

The spiritual potential of the Sabbath is embodied in what it symbolizes. What do the following texts tell us about the spiritual meaning of the Sabbath? How has your own experience with the Sabbath helped you to better appreciate what these texts teach us? *Exod. 20:11, 12; Deut. 5:15, Exod. 31:13, Ezek. 20:20, Heb. 4:3–9.*

The Sabbath and the Gospel

In the final question of yesterday’s lesson, we looked at both Exodus 20:11, 12 and Deuteronomy 5:15. What we see here is the Sabbath pointing us toward two ideas: creation and redemption, two concepts that are very powerfully linked in the Bible. God is not only our Creator, He is also our Redeemer; and both these important spiritual truths are brought home to us every week, every seventh day, as we rest on the Sabbath, “according to the commandment” (*Luke 23:56, NKJV*), just as the women who “c[a]me with Him [Jesus] from Galilee” (*Luke 23:55*) did.

Read Colossians 1:14–16 and John 1:1–14. How do these texts link Jesus as both our Creator and Redeemer?

“Since the divine law is as sacred as God Himself, only one equal with God could make atonement for its transgression. None but Christ could redeem fallen man from the curse of the law, and bring him again into harmony with Heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 63. Only as Creator, only as One equal with God, only as the One who had made “all . . . that was made” (*John 1:3*), could Jesus be the One to redeem fallen humanity.

By pointing us to Christ as our Creator and Redeemer, the Sabbath is a powerful symbol of the gospel of grace. In fact, our resting on the Sabbath reveals that we, indeed, are not saved by the works of the law but by what Christ has done for us. Thus, Sabbath rest becomes a symbol of the rest we have in Jesus (*see Heb. 4:3–9*).

Salvation, too, is restoration; it is re-creation, a process that not only starts now when we have accepted Jesus (*see 2 Cor. 5:17, Gal. 6:15*) but that culminates and climaxes with the re-creation of the heavens and the earth (*see Isa. 65:17, Rev. 21:5*). These verses show even more clearly how Creation and Redemption are linked, and both these crucial truths are embodied in the Sabbath commandment, one of the Ten Commandments.

It’s one thing to say that you are a Sabbath keeper, and to even rest on the Sabbath. The scribes and Pharisees did that. But it’s another to experience the fullness and richness of the Sabbath. What about your own Sabbath keeping? What might you do in order to better reap the spiritual and physical blessings that God provides for us on the Sabbath day?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, pp. 140–146, in *A Solemn Appeal*; “God’s Law Immutable,” pp. 433–450, in *The Great Controversy*.

“God would have us realize that He has a right to mind, soul, body, and spirit—to all that we possess. We are His by creation and by redemption. As our Creator, He claims our entire service. As our Redeemer, He has a claim of love as well as of right—of love without a parallel. . . . Our bodies, our souls, our lives, are His, not only because they are His free gift, but because He constantly supplies us with His benefits, and gives us strength to use our faculties.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*, Nov. 24, 1896.

“And the Lord says, ‘If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; . . . then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord.’ Isa. 58:13, 14. To all who receive the Sabbath as a sign of Christ’s creative and redeeming power, it will be a delight. Seeing Christ in it, they delight themselves in Him. The Sabbath points them to the works of creation as an evidence of His mighty power in redemption. While it calls to mind the lost peace of Eden, it tells of peace restored through the Saviour. And every object in nature repeats His invitation, ‘Come unto [M]e, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.’ Matt. 11:28.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 289.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Jeremiah 31:33 reads, “But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.” Some try to use this text to show that the law (or, really, the seventh-day Sabbath) has been abrogated under the new covenant. What’s wrong with this line of reasoning? In fact, in what ways does this text reinforce the Seventh-day Adventist position regarding the law, including the Sabbath?
- ❷ Because we do believe that the law, including the Sabbath, should be kept, why must we be careful of falling into the trap of legalism? In class, talk about what legalism is and how we can avoid it.
- ❸ Think through the role of the law in the great controversy. Why, in his attack on God’s law, has Satan singled out the Sabbath commandment for special attention? Why was that such a “brilliant” move on his part?

The Way of Salvation

I'm a single, young adult, and I live with my parents. Recently some Seventh-day Adventists held meetings in my neighborhood in Nairobi, Kenya. I heard some other young people talking about the meetings. They said that I could hear some good preaching and see movies about Jesus. I decided to go.

The pastor's message touched my heart. I decided to go again the next day, and again I was blessed. I wanted to talk to the pastor who had spoken, but he and a group of others were on their way to a meeting with the youth. So I went with them. What a blessing I received!

I told my parents that I was attending the Seventh-day Adventist meetings, and they weren't happy about it. They told me that I shouldn't have gone there. I explained that I felt God's presence there and that I had to listen to the message so I could decide for myself the way to salvation.

The next day I told the pastor that my parents weren't happy that I was attending the meetings; he prayed for me. I continued attending the meetings. I decided to stay with a Seventh-day Adventist family for a few days so that I could learn more about what Seventh-day Adventists believe.

Then one night I saw my parents attending the meeting. I greeted them, and they seemed happy to see me. I told them that I wanted to join the Seventh-day Adventist Church because I had been studying the Bible and realized that these Christians taught the truth. They agreed, and I returned home with them. Not only did they allow me to continue attending the meetings, but they attended with me.

I thank God that I am now a believer. Praise God that my parents allowed me to go to the meetings. I have been baptized, and my precious parents are preparing for baptism. I know that it was the prayers I prayed as well as the prayers of those who prayed with me that touched my parents' hearts.

I thank God for the people who sacrifice their time and give their offerings so that others, such as my parents and I, can know the truth. I urge young people to keep on praying, for He will do something powerful in their lives.



BRENDA MWENDE *shares her faith in central Kenya.*

The Christian Life



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Deut. 8:11–17; Phil. 2:3, 4; 1 Cor. 15:51, 52; Rev. 22:1–5; Matt. 22:39; Gen. 2:21–25.*

Memory Text: “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (*1 John 3:16, NKJV*).

Key Thought: Anyone can call himself or herself a Christian. What, though, does that mean in practical terms?

What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone?” (*James 2:14, NLT*).

The Bible emphasizes “sound doctrine,” but this emphasis is in the context of holy living (*1 Tim. 1:10, Titus 2:1–5*) in order to point out that the true goal of biblical teaching is an ethical life, one that is manifested in obligations to others. In fact, if you look carefully at those texts in Timothy and Titus, they link sound doctrine with correct living *as if correct living itself is sound doctrine!*

The Christian is saved in order to be God's agent for the salvation and good of others amidst the great controversy between good and evil. To be “so heavenly minded that you're no earthly good,” however much a cliché, does represent a reality that Christians need to avoid. Certainly, heaven is our ultimate home, but for now we're still on earth, and we need to know how to live while here.

This week we'll look at how some practical, “hands-on” Christianity should be manifest in our lives.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 15.*

Stewardship

When we think about salvation translating into service to others, we cannot avoid the Christian concept of stewardship. *The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* defines *stewardship* as “the responsibility of God’s people for, and use of, everything entrusted to them by God—life, physical being, time, talents and abilities, material possessions, opportunities to be of service to others, and their knowledge of truth.”

Look at the following passages. With each one ask yourself, given my particular circumstances, how can I manifest in my own life the wonderful principles taught in these texts? How should these truths impact the way I live and how I relate to others, to God, and to the gifts that He has given me?

Deut. 8:11–17 _____

Ps. 24:1 _____

Phil. 2:3, 4 _____

1 John 3:16 _____

The Bible teaches that the fundamental purpose for all of God’s creation is to glorify Him. Sin derailed this reality in a very big way, but God directed His saving action toward us in order to bring us back to participate with all creation in glorifying Him. Christ purchased us for the sake of God’s glory (*Eph. 1:11–14*). It is as we acknowledge in both word and deed the complete lordship of Christ over our lives that we bring glory to God. The complete expression of Christ’s lordship over our lives will involve our service to others through the use of our time, talents, abilities, and material possessions.

Read again the texts for today. Which ones touch you the most, and why? What motivates you to try to live a life that involves seeking the good of others, as well as your own good? Why is it so important for you, spiritually, to live for others?

Tithe: A Mere Pittance

“And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house. For the children of Israel and the children”
(*Neh. 10:38, 39*).

Think about your life; think about the brevity of it; think about the utter inevitability of your death (unless Christ returns in your lifetime). Think what it would mean if, as many believe, the grave is the ultimate end. You’re here, a spasm of cellular metabolism that does its thing (often in pain, hardship, fear), and then ends; one way or another, when all those cells die, nothing’s left but a carcass on which bugs and bacteria feed until they also expire.

Such would be the fate of all of us in a universe so large that our planet, much less our individual lives, could appear to be so meaningless as to be nothing but a cruel joke that most of us don’t find funny.

In contrast to that scenario, look at what we have been given in Christ. Look at what has been offered to us through Jesus. Look at what the plan of salvation tells us about our worth and about what was done for us so that we don’t have to meet the fate pictured above.

What have we been given in Christ? *1 Cor. 15:51, 52; Rev. 21:4; Gal. 3:13; Eph. 1:6, 7; Rev. 22:1–5*. **What** should these things mean to us? **How** should these promises impact every aspect of our existence?

“I speak of the tithing system, yet how meager it looks to my mind! How small the estimate! How vain the endeavor to measure with mathematical rules, time, money, and love against a love and sacrifice that is measureless and incomputable! Tithes for Christ! Oh, meager pittance, shameful recompense for that which cost so much! From the cross of Calvary, Christ calls for an unconditional surrender.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 119, 120.

After all that Christ has done for you, can you not exercise enough faith and give back to Him a mere pittance of what you’ve been given?

The Responsibility to One's Self

Jesus tells us very clearly that “thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (*Matt. 22:39*). This is a very interesting text in light of the idea that we often look at love for self as the height of all that is opposed both to Christianity and to the idea of disinterested selflessness. What did Jesus mean by this text? How do we interpret and apply it in a way that reflects what true Christianity should be about?

Love of self, in the Christian sense, isn't selfishness; it isn't putting yourself first before everyone and anything else. On the contrary, love for self means that, upon realizing your own worth before God, you seek to live the best possible life, knowing that the results of such a life will be a benefit not just to yourself (which is fine) but also, and even more important, to those with whom you come in contact.

How would you relate Jesus' admonition above to the following texts?

Phil. 2:5, 8 _____

2 Cor. 5:14, 15 _____

1 Cor. 10:31–33 _____

1 Pet. 1:13–16 _____

The redemption that the sinner obtains in Christ brings about such unity with Him (*Gal. 2:20*) that the Christian desires to live a life that is ordered after Christ's impulses. The sinner desires to have Christ's mind, to live no longer for one's self but for Him, and to heed the call to holiness (separation from such things as our passions, the sinful trends in culture, and moral impurity). If you love yourself, you want what's best for you; and what's best for you is a life that is committed to God, a life that reflects the character and love of God, a life that is lived not for self but for the good of others. The surest way to guarantee yourself a miserable existence is to live only for self, never thinking of the good of others.

Dwell more on what it means to love yourself in the Christian sense. How easy is it for this kind of love to degenerate into a self-destructive self-centeredness? What's the only way to protect yourself from this trap?

Christian Marriage

Humans are social beings. At home and work and in public and civic places, people are involved in all kinds of relationships. Responsible Christian behavior ought to be evident at all these levels, and the Bible has relevant principles by which to guide these relationships.

Study the following Bible passages in order to come up with a biblical definition of marriage: *Gen. 2:21–25, Mal. 2:14, Eph. 5:28.*

To define something is to provide its meaning. Today it is said that marriage is difficult to define because the meaning of marriage differs for different people, times, and cultures. The Bible, however, has no such flexible idea of marriage. According to the Bible, marriage is an institution put in place by God, in which two adults of different gender covenant to share an intimate and lasting personal relationship. Biblical marriage is marked by an appreciation of the equality of the male and female, a deep bond of unity where goals are blended and a sense of permanence and faithfulness and trust. As with a relationship with God, the relationship between a husband and a wife should be sacredly guarded.

Of course, as we know all too well, marriage, even within the church, has become something that's often treated lightly. People enter into a union that they believe God has created, and then, when things get rough, they stand before a human judge who, through man-made laws and rules, separates what God has united. We all know that something is terribly wrong with this picture; yet, as a church, we struggle with what to do in these situations.

Together with issues of polygamy, cohabitation, divorce, remarriage, and the practice of homosexuality, what challenges of human sexuality can you identify in today's society? What biblically based counsel can you bring to bear on these issues?

Adultery, fornication, and pornography abound in society today, and these are hardly the worst of things that are out there. Nevertheless, God continues to look on human failings with compassion and tender mercy. Yet, these practices remain failings that can be overcome through the grace of Christ. Therefore, redemptive efforts must aim high in order to attain God's ideals—as opposed to seeking to justify and excuse sin through a host of excuses and cultural qualifications.

Christian Behavior

Beyond the family, the Christian has other social and professional involvements—a clear recognition of the biblical view that Christians are in the world but not of the world (*John 17:14–18*).

Consider the following three areas of daily life and discuss the Christian’s responsibilities in regard to lifestyle and behavior:

1. Employer/Employee Relations (*James 5:4–6, Eph. 6:5–9*). Apart from regarding employees as equals in Christ, the Christian employer must be guided by the principle that adequate work requires adequate compensation. On the other hand, Christian workers also ought to resist the temptation to be slothful at work.

“Parents cannot commit a greater sin than to allow their children to have nothing to do. The children soon learn to love idleness, and they grow up shiftless, useless men and women. When they are old enough to earn their living, and find employment, they work in a lazy, droning way, yet expect to be paid as much as if they were faithful.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ Object Lessons*, p. 345.

2. Civic Duties (*Rom. 13:1–7*). The Christian places God first in all things and evaluates all actions and responsibilities from this perspective. For this reason the Christian will, for example, oppose discrimination in any form, even if it is officially sanctioned. At the same time, “loyalty to God first does not entitle anyone to become autonomous and create social disharmony or chaos. Christians pay taxes, participate in civic duties, respect traffic laws and property regulations, and cooperate with civil authorities in curbing or controlling crime and violence.”—*Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2000), p. 701.

3. Social Responsibility (*Isa. 61:1–3, Matt. 25:31–46*). Discuss the following statement in the light of the passages above: “The Christian can exercise his calling to seek the kingdom of God if, motivated by love of neighbor, he carries on his work in the moral communities of family and economic, national, and political life. . . . Only by engaging in civic work for the sake of the common good, by faithfulness in one’s social calling, is it possible to be true to the example of Christ.”—H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), p. 97.

In your work and social interactions, are people able to detect your Christian values? Be honest with yourself (no matter how painful that might be!). Which aspects of your life, if any, draw people to your faith? What does your answer tell you about the way in which you live?

Further Study: Read Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, chapters 22, 23, in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*; Miroslav M. Kis, “Christian Lifestyle and Behavior,” pp. 675–723, in Raoul Dederen (ed.), *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*.

“Acts of generosity and benevolence were designed by God to keep the hearts of the children of men tender and sympathetic, and to encourage in them an interest and affection for one another in imitation of the Master, who for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich. The law of tithing was founded upon an enduring principle and was designed to be a blessing to man.

“The system of benevolence was arranged to prevent that great evil, covetousness. Christ saw that in the prosecution of business the love of riches would be the greatest cause of rooting true godliness out of the heart. He saw that the love of money would freeze deep and hard into men’s souls, stopping the flow of generous impulses and closing their senses to the wants of the suffering and the afflicted.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 547.

“If one has health and strength, that is his capital, and he must make a right use of it. If he spends hours in idleness and needless visiting and talking, he is slothful in business, which God’s word forbids. Such have a work to do to provide for their own families, and then lay by them in store for charitable purposes as God has prospered them.

“We are not placed in this world merely to care for ourselves, but we are required to aid in the great work of salvation, thus imitating the self-denying, self-sacrificing, useful life of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 325.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ The issue of marriage and divorce is of great concern, as it ought to be, in view of the fact that divorce is so rampant in certain countries. How do we apply the clear teaching of the Bible when addressing this topic? If we applied the teachings of Jesus more strictly, would people be less inclined to divorce? Discuss this difficult issue.
- ❷ Dwell more on the whole question of tithing. Some argue that they should be able to give tithe to whom they choose, instead of through the channels of the organized church body of which they are members. What’s the great danger of that attitude?
- ❸ As a church, we cannot ignore all the biblical admonitions regarding the caretaking of the poor and the needy among us. No one who calls himself or herself Christian can ignore this mandate. At the same time, what are the pitfalls of our calling if caretaking becomes our primary focus or the end point as opposed to the means to a greater end? Discuss.

The Compelling Message

Maria grew up in Poland. As a teenager Maria searched for God, but she didn't find what she was looking for. Eventually she returned to her parents' church and immersed herself in its practices, hoping for spiritual fulfillment.

As she read the Bible, she discovered many texts that raised questions in her mind. The book of Revelation posed the greatest challenge, but her priest couldn't answer her questions.

Maria's husband wanted to leave Poland, which didn't have enough television stations to satisfy him. Maria wanted to stay near her grandchildren in Poland. So, she began searching for some television stations her husband might like.

As she flipped through the channels, a program caught her attention. The speaker was discussing the book of Revelation. She watched the program with great interest and tuned in again the next day to hear more. She heard sermons that challenged her long-held beliefs and sent her searching her Bible to verify what the speaker was saying. She realized that everything he said was supported by the Bible.

Maria realized that the church of her childhood, the church she loved so dearly, was not following the Bible. She stayed home from church that Sunday, but she didn't know what to do with herself. She turned on the radio and was surprised to hear a worship service broadcast from a Seventh-day Adventist Church in Warsaw, the capital city. She enjoyed the worship and felt spiritually refreshed. At the end of the broadcast, the announcer said that the pastor was waiting to take listeners' calls. Maria dialed the number and talked to the pastor.

She asked so many questions! When she asked why she should believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the true church, he said simply, "Base your faith on the Bible; follow it alone."

She continued watching the television program she had found and realized that it was a Seventh-day Adventist program. By the following Sabbath, Maria was convinced that God was leading her to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. She found the church and recognized it as one she had visited as a teenager. "I hadn't been ready to accept the Sabbath as a teenager, but on the day I returned, I accepted all the Bible truths I had been hearing. I love this church and the truths that I have found here. It's such a precious message."

Your mission offerings help to support Adventist radio and television broadcasts that are reaching people around the world.

MARIA BARTOK *shares her newfound faith in her homeland, Poland.*

Last Things: Jesus *and the Saved*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Heb. 8:1–5; Isa. 53:6; Rom. 3:24, 25; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 9:23; Acts 3:19–21.*

Memory Text: “ ‘Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began’ ” (*Acts 3:19–21, NKJV*).

Key Thought: The Bible's teaching on Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, His second coming, and the resurrection of the dead stand together as a message of hope for those who have placed their trust in Him.

The history of the great controversy between good and evil has had many pivotal moments; the climax, though, was at the cross, where Satan's ultimate defeat and destruction were ensured. At the same time, biblical prophecy points to a “time of the end” (*Dan. 12:4, 9*), a period in salvation history with its own significance in terms of the relationship between the Lord and His people. Events within this “time of the end” period are described as “eschatological,” meaning “last things.”

In this week's lesson we will look at three special events within this general period of the “last things” that have immense spiritual implications: Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, the second coming of Christ, and the resurrection of those who died in true faith.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 22.*

The Heavenly Sanctuary: Part 1

Fundamental Belief no. 24 opens with the following words: “There is a sanctuary in heaven—the true tabernacle which the Lord set up and not man” (*see Heb. 8:2*). One of the matter-of-fact assumptions of the Bible is the existence of a heavenly sanctuary (*Ps. 11:4*).

Read Hebrews 8:1–5. What is the main point taught in these verses?

The earthly sanctuary is portrayed as a type, or pattern, of the heavenly one; this means that, at a minimum, the former has some functional correspondence with the latter. The earthly sanctuary, then, teaches us a lot about the heavenly; despite that whatever the earthly sanctuary meant to the people of Israel, its true significance was found in the heavenly and what was to happen there. Through the efficacy of sacrifices and priestly ministry, the earthly model taught us about the realities of the heavenly sanctuary. The ministrations of the earthly sanctuary were God’s means of teaching the principles of salvation to His people, a foreshadowing of the “real thing”—which is Christ’s ministry (*Heb. 9:9–15*), both through His death and then His intercession in the heavenly sanctuary.

Ministry in the earthly sanctuary taught that while the shedding of blood was necessary (*Heb. 9:22*) to atone for sin, there was still the need for a priestly mediator between sinners and a Holy God as a result of that shed blood. The ministry of the priest in the Most Holy Place cleansed the sanctuary of sin and required affliction and repentance on the part of the people. Thus, judgment also was highlighted as an integral part of the total ministry of salvation.

What is fascinating, too, is what Hebrews 8:1, 2 say, which is that the goal of all the previous seven chapters in the book is to point the reader to the reality of the heavenly sanctuary and the position of Christ as our High Priest in that heavenly sanctuary. It’s hard to understand how anyone could not see the great significance that Hebrews gives to Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary as part of the entire plan of salvation. Nothing in the verses indicates that the sanctuary in heaven, much less Christ’s ministry there, should be seen as metaphorical or symbolic. In fact, verse 5 makes it clear that the earthly sanctuary—a real structure with real priests and real sacrifices—was only a “shadow” of the reality of what Christ is doing for us in the heavenly sanctuary.

The Heavenly Sanctuary: Part 2

The earthly sanctuary service revealed three phases of salvation: substitutionary sacrifice, priestly mediation, and judgment. The Bible teaches that all three phases of salvation are embodied in the ministry of Christ on behalf of sinners.

Read Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:24, 25; and 2 Corinthians 5:21. How does Christ’s death on the cross satisfy the substitutionary aspect of salvation?

What do these texts say about both Christ and mediation on behalf of sinners? *1 Tim. 2:5, Heb. 7:25.*

Just as animal sacrifices pointed to the death of Christ, the priestly ministry foreshadowed the true ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. In particular, the continual, or daily, ministry of priests in the Holy Place symbolized the access that the sinner has to God through Christ’s ministry as Intercessor and Mediator in the heavenly sanctuary (*Heb. 4:14–16*).

Study Hebrews 9:23. How does the cleansing of things in the heavens relate to the priestly work in the earthly sanctuary on the Day of Atonement?

With the earthly sanctuary services in the background, Hebrews 9:23 points clearly to a cleansing ministry of Christ in heaven. This is a text that has baffled scholars for centuries, because it clearly teaches that something in heaven has been defiled and needs to be purified. For Seventh-day Adventists, with our understanding of the two phases of Christ’s heavenly work in our behalf, this cleansing is the antitype—that corresponds to the yearly cleansing of the earthly sanctuary on the Day of Atonement.

Think about atonement—what it means, how it is accomplished, and who alone can make atonement for us. Why, then, should the news that we are living in the “Day of Atonement” be something positive and hopeful?

The Second Coming of Christ

Study Acts 3:19–21. How does the blotting out of sins that is mentioned here relate to the cleansing of the sanctuary that we studied yesterday?

While Peter may not have known the “times or seasons” (*Acts 1:7*), his reference to Joel’s prophecy in Acts 2:14–21 points to his appreciation of the fulfillment of prophecy in his time. In his prophetic frame of mind, it seems evident that “Peter, speaking by inspiration, and thus beyond his own finite understanding, is referring, tersely, to two great events of earth’s last days—(1) the mighty outpouring of God’s Spirit and (2) the final blotting out of the sins of the righteous—which are tied to a third climactic event, the second advent of Christ.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 160.

The early church was certain of both the second coming of Christ and the promise of a new heaven and earth (*2 Pet. 3:13*). Christ’s first coming provided a theological rationale for the second. As far as we are concerned, without the Second Coming, the First Coming would have been futile. The process of dealing with the sin problem, a process that He began with His sacrifice on the cross, reaches its consummation when, after the “cleansing of the sanctuary,” He appears the “second time . . . for salvation” (*Heb. 9:26–28, NKJV*). In fact, without the Second Coming, and the resurrection it brings, what would the promise of salvation mean to us? (*See 1 Thess. 4:16–18.*) Nothing!

The second coming of Christ will mark the conclusion of the great controversy as far as the destiny of mortals is concerned. Satan, knowing that the end of the controversy is in sight, seeks through deception to lead as many astray as possible. We are told that, “as the second appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ draws near, satanic agencies are moved from beneath. Satan will not only appear as a human being, but he will personate Jesus Christ, and the world that has rejected the truth will receive him as the Lord of lords and King of kings.”—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 14, 1896. Against this deception we have been warned that Christ’s coming will be a literal, personal, and visible event that will impact the entire world, ending it as we know it—a place of sin, suffering, misery, disappointment, and death.

Look at our world. How well have we, as humans, done in making it a better place? While we must try to improve the lot of those less fortunate than we are, and of those who are suffering and in need—why must we *always* keep before us that which is the only solution?

Awaiting the Advent

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11. What is the message here, and why is it so relevant to us today, living when we do? How can we take these words and apply them in the practical moments of day-to-day living?

So much exists in those verses, but one point should stand out so clearly, and that is the hope that those Christians awaiting the return of Christ should have. Certainly, we need to be watchful and sober so that the day doesn't overtake us like a thief in the night. But we should also be full of faith and love and hope; because whether we "wake or sleep" (that is, whether we die before He returns or are alive when He returns), we have the promise of eternal life with Him.

In this day and age, when we see signs all around us, we must be careful of the way in which we interpret them and of how we understand their significance. Too often we can get caught up in events that cause all kinds of excitement and drama and anticipation, only to have them fade into nothing. These kinds of things, once finished, can leave members disgruntled, disappointed, and even full of doubt. We need to be vigilant, but we also need to be cautious, wise, and humble as we seek to read and discern the signs of the times (*see Matt. 16:1–4*).

What is the purpose of the "signs of the times," according to John 13:19, 14:29?

The predictions about the end times were not given to satisfy the curiosity of believers but to encourage them to keep watching (*Matt. 24:32–44*). As we await the Second Advent, we need to keep our eyes open, and we need to know what the Word of God teaches about last-day events; this is especially important because there are so many false views within Christendom itself regarding the signs of the times.

How do we strike the right balance in living in anticipation of the Second Coming while refraining from seeing every headline as a sign of the end?

Death and Resurrection

In the New Testament, one of the events connected with the second coming of Christ is the resurrection of those who died believing in Him. In fact, as far as most believers are concerned, that is the most important part of the Second Coming, because most of Christ's followers will be dead when He returns.

What do the following texts teach us about the resurrection of the dead at the time of Christ's return?

1 Thess. 4:13–16 _____

1 Cor. 15:13–25 _____

Rom. 8:11 _____

Phil. 3:20, 21 _____

The Bible teaches that in the resurrection, the “body” is restored to life. In other words, biblical resurrection is a bodily resurrection. This truth becomes even more clear when we keep in mind the fact that after Christ's resurrection, His tomb was empty. The dead body no longer remained in the grave. So, in the certainty of His resurrection, we have the certainty of ours.

If resurrection amounts to the breaking of the power of death, how does that explain why one can attain to it only by being “in Christ”?
2 Tim. 1:8–10.

The key to immortality is not greater scientific research. The power of death has already been broken through Christ's own death and resurrection (*Rom. 6:9*); based on that accomplishment, He is able to bestow immortality upon those who identify with His death and resurrection through baptism (*Rom. 6:23*). Also, the Bible makes it clear that the gift of immortality is not given to believers at death but when Jesus comes the second time, at the “last trumpet” (*1 Cor. 15:51–54*).

“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies.” (*John 11:25, NASB*). How can you learn to better grasp the hope that is contained in these words? Where would you be without them?

Further Study: “The intercession of Christ in man’s behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross. By His death He began that work which after His resurrection He ascended to complete in heaven. We must by faith enter within the veil, ‘whither the forerunner is for us entered.’ Hebrews 6:20. There the light from the cross of Calvary is reflected. There we may gain a clearer insight into the mysteries of redemption. The salvation of man is accomplished at an infinite expense to heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 489.

“To the believer, Christ is the resurrection and the life. In our Saviour the life that was lost through sin is restored; for He has life in Himself to quicken whom He will. He is invested with the right to give immortality. The life that He laid down in humanity, He takes up again, and gives to humanity.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 786, 787.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 John Calvin called Christ’s work of intercession the “continual application of His death for our salvation,” and it is said that “the existence of a heavenly sanctuary was standard theology among Puritan divines.” It’s not hard to see why Christ’s work of intercession should be seen as such an important teaching. After all, look at how much of the Old Testament centered around the sanctuary and the temple. Look at how much the New Testament does, as well! What should this tell us about the importance of this doctrine?
- 2 Dwell more on Hebrews 9:23, a text that for centuries has baffled biblical scholars who can’t understand how something in heaven itself could actually need cleansing. As Seventh-day Adventists, we still have a lot to learn about what this text means. How does our understanding, for instance, of Daniel 8:14 help to clarify this important concept?
- 3 The resurrection of Christ is utterly essential to the Christian faith. Without it we have nothing. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–6. Look at how Paul is seeking to persuade his readers of the evidence for Christ’s resurrection. Notice especially verse 6. What is he saying here? Why is he emphasizing the fact that many of the people to whom Christ appeared are still alive? It’s almost as if he’s saying, “Don’t take my word for it. Ask some of these hundreds who saw Him themselves.” These are not the words you would expect from someone who wasn’t sure of what he was teaching. What other evidence from the Bible can help to reaffirm our certainty of Christ’s resurrection?

Free Indeed!

Esther* slipped across the North Korean border into China. But she still wasn't free. She knew that if she was caught, she would be sent back to North Korea and imprisoned or even killed. While in China, she met a Seventh-day Adventist woman who befriended her. The woman offered Esther a place to stay and introduced her to Jesus.

One day Esther was stopped by security police. Without a Chinese passport, Esther was arrested and sent to a North Korean prison. "God, why are You allowing this to happen?" she pleaded.

The prison was surrounded by high walls, and thick bars covered every opening. Prisoners were guarded constantly when they were allowed out of their cells; there seemed no way of escape.

One cold, rainy day Esther shivered as she waited in line to use the bathroom. The guard was called elsewhere, leaving the prisoners unguarded. Suddenly Esther felt an unseen hand push her toward the prison wall, where she found sacks of cement piled like a stairway. She climbed over the wall and ran to the nearby village. She hid in a small building, shivering from the cold.

She heard voices and watched as a search party moved from house to house looking for her. "Jesus, help me," she pleaded. The guards skipped the building where she was hiding and eventually turned back toward the prison without finding her.

The rain turned to snow, but Esther couldn't stay any longer. She trudged out of the village through the deepening snow. "God, show me the way," she prayed. Immediately a light illuminated her path, and she followed it. The path led out of North Korea and back into China.

For two months Esther walked, crossing a desert and cutting her way through barbed wire fences. She found shelter with sympathetic farmers. At last she crossed out of China. She found soldiers who took her to the embassy of South Korea, where she was given asylum.

Esther eventually arrived in South Korea, where she met Sister Park, an elderly Seventh-day Adventist woman who has made it her ministry to help refugees from North Korea find a new life in South Korea. Sister Park is their Dorcas, cooking for them if they are sick, providing food and clothes and shelter for them until they can care for themselves. But most important, Sister Park leads these people to Jesus.

"God led me to freedom," Esther says. "Today, thanks to His love and His people who helped me, I'm free indeed!"

Our mission offerings help people such as Esther find freedom and faith in Jesus.

*Not her real name.

When All Things Become New



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Thess. 4:16–18, Revelation 20, 1 Cor. 4:5, Rom. 8:20–22, Rev. 21:11–22:5, Rev. 21:3.*

Memory Text: “‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away’ ” (*Revelation 21:4, NKJV*).

Key Thought: What is the millennium, when does it happen, and to what does it lead?

Sir Thomas More (1478–1535) was an English author who coined the word *utopia* in order to depict an imaginary island with a seemingly perfect social and legal system. Since then the word has been often used pejoratively to denote the impossibility of the idea of a perfect society. After all, look at how many times that humans have tried to create “utopias.” They have always failed, and miserably too.

The Bible, however, teaches about the true utopia. In a sense it has been the goal toward which the Godhead has been working ever since the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden. God wants to bring humanity back to the utopia He had originally created for us.

In the heavenly sanctuary, Christ will conclude His work for the salvation of humanity. After that, He will come to earth a second time, but with a glory never before seen. He will resurrect the dead saints and translate those who are living; and all of them will reign with the Lord Jesus in heaven for 1,000 years.

This is the time that we call the “millennium” (for the word *thousand*). The beginning of the millennium marks the onset of the only utopia humans will have known since Eden before the Fall.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 29.*

Events Inaugurating the Millennium

If the millennium marks the beginning of God's "utopia" for His people, it is only natural for us to try to know when the millennium will begin and what it will be like. The millennium, as a concept, appears in Revelation 20, where it is mentioned six times between verses 2–7. In order to know the time of the millennium, the place of Revelation 20 in the overall flow of the book of Revelation needs to be determined. Although the book does not follow a straight time line, in this case it is not too difficult to determine when the millennium begins.

Compare 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 and Revelation 20. How does the nature of the resurrection as mentioned in these two passages help to determine when the millennium begins? What connected events can you find in these passages?

Sometime before Jesus' second advent, Revelation predicts that three powers (the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet) will gather the nations to oppose the work of Christ and His people (*Rev. 16:13*). At the time of Christ's coming (*Rev. 19:11*), the nations will gather to make war against Christ, but in the process the beast and the false prophet will be destroyed (*Rev. 19:19, 20*). Revelation 20, then, takes up the fate of the third power, the dragon. While the dead in Christ are being resurrected, during what is here called the first resurrection (*vs. 5*), the dragon (Satan) will be captured and cast into the bottomless pit for 1,000 years (*vss. 1–3*).

Some of these amazing events are depicted also in 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 and 2 Thessalonians 1:7–9. These passages together help to explain what happens before the millennium begins.

That beginning, of course, coincides with the second advent of Christ. The dead in Christ will be resurrected to join the faithful living, and both groups will be taken to heaven. The wicked living at the time of Christ's advent will be slain by His "brightness" (*2 Thess. 2:8*). And the desolated earth will become the prison house of Satan, who will be "bound" for 1,000 years by, as it were, a chain of circumstances. The reason given for Satan's imprisonment is "so he might not deceive the nations any longer" (*Rev. 20:3*). Many see a symbolic link between the "banishment" of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement (*Lev. 16:22*) and the circumstances of Satan during the millennium.

Go back over the events revealed in these verses. They talk about supernatural happenings that reveal the greatness and power of God in contrast to the weakness and impotence of humankind. How can we always keep this important contrast before us? Why would that be a good remedy for pride and self-sufficiency?

In the Midst of the Millennium

Read Revelation 20:4–6 again. What evidence there shows us that the millennium unfolds in heaven (at least for the saved)?

A specific segment of the group who will participate in the millennium are described as “the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands” (*NKJV*). As Seventh-day Adventists, we understand that the Bible doesn’t teach the existence of separate, immortal, conscious souls. This text, instead, is portraying those who went through the experience of persecution as portrayed in Revelation 12:17–13:18. At the Second Advent (at which time occurs the first resurrection), these persecuted souls come back to life and, after the resurrection, reign in heaven with Christ (*compare with 1 Thess. 4:15–17*).

Revelation 20:4 draws our attention to another event during the millennium, when it says that judgment will be given specifically to the redeemed. Knowing that the faithful are reigning with their Lord and that the wicked were slain by the brightness of Christ’s coming, what is the nature and purpose of this judgment?

One of the three things that we focused on last week (Monday) was the judgment connected with Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary before the Second Advent. That judgment is different from the judgment in Revelation 20:4, which is really a fulfillment of Christ’s promise in Matthew 19:28, and which corresponds to Paul’s statement that the saints will judge the world (*1 Cor. 6:2, 3*).

The concept of judgment in the Bible is rich and multifaceted. The final judgment has three phases, the first of which is the one associated with Christ’s priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. Seventh-day Adventists call this the investigative phase of the final judgment. Next, there is the millennial review phase of the judgment, which is referred to in Revelation 20:4 and 1 Corinthians 6:2, 3. In this phase, the redeemed will have an opportunity to examine God’s ways and judgment with regard to the agents of rebellion. The third phase of the final judgment is the executive phase, which is part of the events that will occur at the end of the millennium.

Keeping what you’ve read today in mind, read 1 Corinthians 4:5. What important hope is found here in view of the fact that we have so many unanswered questions?

Events at the End of the Millennium

Read Revelation 20:7–9. What event marks the close of the millennium, and what opportunity does it provide Satan?

Reversal of the circumstances of Satan marks his being “released.” This event is linked with the resurrection of the rest of the dead who “did not live again until the thousand years were finished” (vs. 5, *NKJV*). The phrase “Gog and Magog” is used figuratively, as in Ezekiel 38:2, to describe those whom Satan will succeed in deceiving—the wicked from all ages. It is this universal multitude that Satan will inspire to try to overthrow the city of God. Revelation 20:9 suggests that the city, the New Jerusalem, at this time will already have descended from heaven to earth (presumably with Christ), and Satan and his hosts will march against it. A detailed description of the city is given in Revelation 21.

As said earlier, Revelation does not move in a distinctly chronological order. Look at Revelation 20:11–15. How is the idea of judgment expressed here? What is the significance of the fact that final punishment occurs after the saints are involved in judgment? *Rev. 20:4.*

“During the millennium the saints participate in a deliberative judgment that reviews the cases of the lost of this earth and the fallen angels. This judgment is evidently necessary in view of the cosmic nature of the sin problem. The course of the rebellion of sin has been the object of concern and interest on the part of other worlds (Job 1; 2; Eph. 3:10). The whole interlude of sin must be handled in such a way that hearts and minds throughout God’s universe are satisfied with its treatment and conclusion, with particular reference to God’s character. It is especially important for the redeemed from earth to understand God’s dealings with those who called for the rocks to fall on them and deliver them from the ‘face of him who is seated on the throne’ (Rev. 6:16). They must be totally satisfied that God was just in His decision regarding the lost.”—*Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Pub. Assn., 2000), p. 932.

What does it say about the character of God that we, ourselves, can be involved in the judgment of the lost? How does this concept fit in with the whole idea of the great controversy?

The New Earth

Revelation 20 ends with the elimination of Satan and his hosts. Revelation 21 opens with a vision of a new heaven and a new earth.

Revelation 21:1–5 carries the promise that God is making all things new. In what ways does this reflect the Genesis creation account? (*Genesis 1–2*). What are the differences?

The word translated as “new” in Revelation 21:1 emphasizes something that is new in form or quality rather than a “new” event in time. God’s purpose in the Genesis Creation remains unrealized until the promise to make all things new is fulfilled on the new earth. Hence the whole creation groans and longs for liberation (*Rom. 8:20–22*). God’s new creation, then, will consist of the liberation of the cosmos and the earth from their present states of incompleteness, and the bringing of them into conformity with His design. Consequently, while the new creation will definitely be different from the old, there will be some continuity between the two. Like the old, the new earth will be a real, tangible place inhabited with real, physical beings. The new earth will be a renewed earth, purified as it were, by fire (*2 Pet. 3:10–13*).

Read Revelation 21:11–22:5 in order to capture the physical aspects of the New Jerusalem, the capital city of the new earth. In what way does John’s description portray the reality of the city?

One thing is clear: we are talking about a literal, physical place. The pagan heresy of the physical being bad and the spiritual being good is, again, debunked by Scripture. Although words are limited in what they can convey, even inspired words, they can teach us to know that a real inheritance awaits us. How important it is to remember that this world, with all its imperfections, is not the way it was supposed to be; it is an aberration, one that Christ came to fix. In contrast, the depiction that we see in Revelation, no matter how hard it is for us to grasp (knowing only a fallen world), is the eternal reality that awaits us. What a hope we have, especially compared to those who believe that death is the end of everything.

Life in the New Earth

Read Revelation 21:3. In what way will this stupendous fact alter the life experiences of the inhabitants of the new earth?

Perhaps there isn't another awe-inspiring vision throughout the Bible comparable to the one that John the Revelator describes here; the new earth will not only be home to human creatures but also to God. The holy, transcendent Creator of the universe will grace the community of the redeemed with His presence. Of course, God will forever remain distinct from His creatures, but in the new earth, the separation between God and humanity that was brought about by sin will be removed.

Also, true fellowship will be restored—not only between God and humans but between humans and nature and within nature itself. John describes there being no more curse (*Rev. 22:3*), and the prophetic anticipation of the cessation of animosity within the animal world is also described as coming to pass (*Isa. 65:25*).

Beyond the restoration of complete fellowship, the elimination of the “groaning of the creation” will mean that all that is harmful—decay, disease, death, and suffering—will be things of the past (*Rom. 8:21, Rev. 21:4*).

Read Psalm 8. What is the message for us here, especially in light of what we have studied this quarter?

The implications of God's presence on the new earth, and the implications for life there, are immense—especially as science has revealed to us, as never before, the size and scope of God's creation. The estimated size of the “visible” universe is many billions of light-years wide; however, scientists now speculate that this immense and vast cosmos represents only about 7 percent of what's actually out there!

And to think: the God who created all that not only died for us but will dwell with us for eternity! At some point, because of the limits of our fallen minds, we have to stop trying to think about this rationally but, instead, fall to our knees and worship and praise the One who not only created us but redeemed us and now promises to live with us for all eternity.

Further Study: “In the typical service the high priest, having made the atonement for Israel, came forth and blessed the congregation. So Christ, at the close of His work as mediator, will appear, ‘without sin unto salvation’ (Hebrews 9:28), to bless His waiting people with eternal life. As the priest, in removing the sins from the sanctuary, confessed them upon the head of the scapegoat, so Christ will place all these sins upon Satan, the originator and instigator of sin. The scapegoat, bearing the sins of Israel, was sent away ‘unto a land not inhabited’ (Leviticus 16:22); so Satan, bearing the guilt of all the sins which he has caused God’s people to commit, will be for a thousand years confined to the earth, which will then be desolate, without inhabitant, and he will at last suffer the full penalty of sin in the fires that shall destroy all the wicked.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 485, 486.

“A fear of making the future inheritance seem too material has led many to spiritualize away the very truths which lead us to look upon it as our home. Christ assured His disciples that He went to prepare mansions for them in the Father’s house. Those who accept the teachings of God’s word will not be wholly ignorant concerning the heavenly abode. . . . Human language is inadequate to describe the reward of the righteous. It will be known only to those who behold it. No finite mind can comprehend the glory of the Paradise of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 674, 675.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 There are three basic positions (with some variations) within the Christian church regarding the millennium: (i) that it represents the era between the first and second advents of Christ; (ii) that it is a long period of peace and righteousness on earth before Christ appears, brought about in part because of the preaching of the gospel and social reforms; and (iii) that the millennium, a period of 1,000 years, will take place after Christ’s return and it will happen in heaven. Seventh-day Adventists, as we have seen, take the third position, with the millennium unfolding in heaven, not on earth (as some erroneously believe). What problems do the other options present?
- 2 Read Revelation 21:27. What do you understand about this exclusion from the New Jerusalem? What other exclusions are there, and why?
- 3 Dwell on the idea of human attempts to create “utopias.” What examples can you think of? What were the results? Why have they always failed, and why do these failures reveal to us our utter dependency upon God’s supernatural intervention in our world?

God Prepares a Way

Moïse drove a taxi in Cameroon to earn a living. He was single and lived with his mother. A Seventh-day Adventist friend often talked about the Bible. As Moïse began to understand the importance of the Sabbath, he quit driving his taxi on Saturdays.

Moïse's Aunt Paulette saw Moïse's interest in God and invited him to church and evangelistic meetings, sitting with him to help him to find the Bible texts. Moïse gave his life to Christ.

"Nonsense," Moïse's mother said when she learned her son wanted to become a Seventh-day Adventist. But he was determined. When he was baptized, his mother ordered him to leave her house. Moïse moved out, gave up driving a taxi, and became a literature evangelist.

His passion to share God's literature with others was contagious. When his mother saw how God was changing his life, she began attending the Seventh-day Adventist Church. She has since been baptized.

Moïse was sent to another town to hold evangelistic meetings. There eight people took their stand for Christ. Church members urged him to prepare for the ministry. *What greater joy can there be than to win souls to Christ?* Moïse thought. He prayed about it, and the call grew stronger.

One day Moïse received a text message from Marlyce, a school friend who was facing school exams. As Moïse prayed for her, he felt impressed that one day they would marry. He told the pastor, who urged him to surrender the future to God.

Marlyce lived far away, so the two talked and prayed by telephone. Moïse was concerned that Marlyce might not want to be a pastor's wife. But before he could ask her, Marlyce told him that she felt he should become a pastor. The two knew then that God had brought them together. A few months later they were married.

But other obstacles stood in their path. Marlyce was teaching school five hours from Cosendai Adventist University, where Moïse would study. But God had prepared a place for them. Moïse's in-laws moved to the town near the university. He could live with them while he studied.

During vacations Moïse and Marlyce canvass and give Bible studies together. The money Moïse earns from colporteurship helps to pay his school fees. "I'm convinced that this is God's plan for us," Moïse says. "It won't be easy, but with God all things are possible."

Our mission offerings support evangelism and education in Cameroon and around the world. Recently a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering raised funds to help Cosendai Adventist University to grow so that more young people can prepare for service to God.

MOÏSE NTAMACK is studying theology at Cosendai Adventist University in Cameroon.

Creation is the foundational truth of Scripture. All other biblical teachings—the Incarnation, the Cross, the Second Coming (and every other one, as well)—are founded upon the truth that our world was created by the Lord. The first quarter lesson study, entitled *Origins*, by James Gibson, delves into the doctrine of creation as depicted in Genesis 1 and 2 and explores its implications for a number of our beliefs—including morality, sin, marriage, stewardship, and more. Although working on the assumption that the story is literal, the quarter will show again and again why it must be taken literally or else many of our most basic teachings would be fatally compromised. In fact, our name Seventh-day Adventist itself bears direct witness to a six-day creation. As this quarter progresses, we'll see even more reasons why a literal six-day creation is essential to all that we believe and why to compromise on Creation is to compromise on all that makes us what we are.

Lesson 1—Jesus, Creator of Heaven and Earth

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **In the Beginning** (*Genesis 1:1, Hebrews 11:3*)

MONDAY: **The Heavens Declare** (*Psalms 19:1–3*)

TUESDAY: **The Power of His Word** (*Jeremiah 51:15, 16; Psalm 33:6, 9*)

WEDNESDAY: **Jesus, Creator of Heaven and Earth** (*John 1:1–3; Colossians 1:15, 16*)

THURSDAY: **The Creator Among Us** (*John 2:7–11*)

Memory Text—*Genesis 1:1, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: Only a being greater than the universe could have created it. And that is the God revealed in the Bible, the God whom we worship and serve because, among other things, He is our Creator.

Lesson 2—Creation: Forming the World

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Without Form and Void** (*Genesis 1:1, 2; Isaiah 45:18, NKJV*)

MONDAY: **Let There Be Light** (*1 John 1:5, Revelation 22:5*)

TUESDAY: **The Heaven Created** (*Genesis 1:6–8, NKJV*)

WEDNESDAY: **Space for Living** (*Genesis 1:9–13*)

THURSDAY: **God's All-Powerful Word** (*2 Corinthians 4:6*)

Memory Text—*Isaiah 45:18, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: The universe has no inherent will of its own. The creation is not an entity independent of God, but is instead God's chosen arena in which to express His love to the creatures He has made.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired The regular Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.