

ADULT
SABBATH SCHOOL
BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

July • Aug • Sept 2004

Religion *in* Relationships



SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH



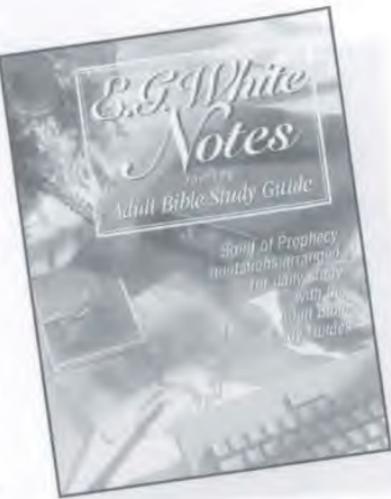
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Religion in Relationships

Life is lived in relationships. Some are deep-rooted, others superficial; some are of short duration, others last a lifetime. Some are purely functional, others intensely personal. We relate to all kinds of people: to a partner, to children, to relatives, to friends and neighbors but also to the service-station attendant, to the person with whom we share a shift at work, and to the police officer who stops us for speeding. And we relate to our pastor, to the superintendent of the school in which we have enrolled our children, to our employer, and, yes, to the tax collector.

All this is true for Christians, as well as for non-Christians. The difference between us and our non-Christian counterparts is not that we live in multiple relationships but that there is an important extra dimension to those relationships: our religion.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe in a set of doctrines. Some we share with other Christians; some are unique to us and help mark us as a *special* people with a unique message and mission. Doctrines are not optional, not if our faith is going to be more than a shallow feeling or a vague awareness of some greater power or transcendent force that somehow relates to us. Doctrines rendered into words—as best as can be expressed within the confines of human language—reveal how we understand the divine self-revelation of God. They help us achieve a clearer sense of who and what God (as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is and what He has done, is doing, and will ultimately do for us as individuals and as a race. We need doctrines to grasp what the implications of our belief in God and His plan of salvation are for our perspective on life and for our daily conduct.

But Christianity—and most definitely Adventist Christianity—is more than a catalog of doctrinal statements. The Christian God is not a distant, impersonal deity who does not get involved in the daily grind of this world and of our existence. Instead, He is a personal God of love who has encountered us in Jesus Christ, in the most personal way possible.

God is a covenant God, One who goes out of His way to establish a close relationship, One who is Love Personified, and One who seeks for a reaction to that love—a response of worship, obedience, and love. Once we have established a relationship with God (or,

more correctly, once we have allowed God to establish a relationship with us), this affects every other relationship we may have.

Once we have gained a glimpse of who and what God is, once we have accepted the Lord Jesus as our Savior and have welcomed the Spirit as our Guide on our pilgrimage through life, we are able to look at the world from a new perspective. No longer is it of prime importance whether or not the people with whom we associate are of the same nationality or ethnicity or of the same political persuasion as we are. The first question we will ask about the people with whom we come in contact is whether they already share with us the knowledge of the good news!

Religion is not work based—in other words, our standing with God does not depend on our achievements. We live by faith through grace. Yet, a religion that does not permeate our daily lives is a dead and meaningless exercise (*James 2:17*). If our relationship with God does not impact our relationships with fellow humans, we have every reason to wonder whether this bond with God is a reality.

This quarter we will study numerous passages of Scripture with the intention of increasing our awareness of the ways by which our faith impacts our relationship to others—to those who are close to us and those who are afar. We will discuss how we can strengthen those relationships, even restore them if they have somehow broken down. We will discover that, indeed, there is more religion in relationships than many may suspect.

This quarter's *Adult Bible Study Guide* was written by Reinder Bruinsma, a native Dutchman and longtime church worker (including six years, from 1995-2001, as executive secretary of the Trans-European Division). He is also the author of 15 books in both English and Dutch. In 2001, he returned to his native Netherlands, where he serves as the president of the Netherlands Union. His pastoral concern about practical Christianity, about how we treat others, comes through in every lesson this quarter.

***A religion that
does not permeate
daily life is dead
and meaningless.***

Got Questions?

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Created for Community



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Exod. 20:2-17, Isa. 1:10-17, 1 Corinthians 13.

Memory Text: "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7, NIV).

In today's world, many people are utterly lonely; they live without meaningful relationships, without a sense of being needed or loved, without a sense of true belonging. Some are married, even have children; yet, in their deepest self, they feel alone. Others appear to have an intense social life but would, nonetheless, in a moment of honest self-assessment, admit to desperate loneliness. Many who share their apartment block with dozens of others and mingle every day with thousands in the metro or the commuter train are incapable of reaching out to those around them.

And, yet, amid all this loneliness is the biblical ideal, which is that we live in community with others—with family, friends, colleagues, authorities, fellow church members, et cetera. The question is, How does God want us to do it?

This week we begin our look at the answers.

The Week at a Glance: What does the Creation account teach us about community? What principles should guide our interaction with others? What does the Bible teach us about love? What did Jesus mean when He talked about us hating our parents? What role does the Cross play in our relationship with others?

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

“ ‘It Is Not Good for the Man to Be Alone’ ” (*Gen. 2:18, NIV*).

The first two chapters of the book of Genesis give us a glimpse of what happened when God created our world. Though much about Creation remains a mystery, all the essential elements we need in order to build a Christian worldview are, nevertheless, revealed there, including the truth that God created humans to be social beings, destined to live in a community.

How does the Creation account emphasize that full human life is experienced in relating to other human beings? *Gen. 1:28; 2:18-25; 4:1, 2.*

It clearly was part of God's original purpose that human beings would exist in relationship with others. The idea of family—of a partnership between a man and a woman and of a bond between parents and children—was part of the original fabric of Creation. Belonging together in a marriage relationship, and as family, is not one option among many but reflects the original and unchanging design for human happiness. This is not to say a single person cannot live a happy and fulfilling life, but it underlines that, from a biblical perspective, the family is the fundamental building block of a healthy society.

“A family is not a spill-over from our romantic passions, nor a product of society’s requirements that parents provide their offspring with bed and board, nor a little circle of people deriving emotional support from living together. . . . Family is rooted in the Creator’s design for the ongoing nurture of children who bring faith and moral value into the next generation. To undermine, neglect, or replace it is to wreck the core community that makes all other community possible.”—Lewis B. Smedes, *Mere Morality: What God Expects From Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983), p. 81.

One of the most famous lines in all English literature reads, “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.” The point being that we are all involved with one another, to one degree or another. What does this tell us about how careful we need to be regarding the influence we exert? Make no mistake about it: We all exert an influence on others, either for good or for bad.

Religion Has Social Dimensions (*Exod. 20:2-17, Matt. 7:12*).

However much our faith rests upon our relationship to God, it cannot be separated from our relationship to others. We live in this world with other people, and our religion very clearly dictates how we are to relate to these other people.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we tend to divide the Ten Commandments into two parts, the first four dealing with our relationship to God, the last six with our relationship to others. Read the first four commandments again (*Exod. 20:2-11*). How does our obedience, or disobedience, to even these specific commandments impact others?

At times, Christians have so emphasized the social aspects of their religion that they have reduced the gospel of Christ to a *horizontal* “social gospel,” which leaves little or no place for the *vertical* aspect of religion: the relationship between us and our heavenly Father through our Lord Jesus Christ. When that happens, our religion has ceased to be Christian. But, at the same time, our faith in God must impact also our relationships with other human beings; otherwise, our religion, likewise, cannot be characterized as truly Christian.

Look up the following texts. What do they tell us about the social aspects of our faith?

Lev. 19:18

Isa. 1:10-17

Hos. 6:6

Matt. 7:12

James 1:27

Summarize in a paragraph the essence of what those texts above are saying; then ask yourself, How well am I doing in that area? What changes might you need to make in order to live out the social dimensions of our faith better?

Building Relationships Takes Effort

(Matt. 5:9).

Faith in God and reliance on His grace presuppose a commitment to focus on Him and His will for our lives; they demand an intentional turning away from what is evil and negative. They also demand a determination to bring our lives into harmony with God's will for us. Likewise, harmonious relationships do not happen by accident. We must be intentional about building relationships. As sinners living on a planet filled with other sinners, we are naturally prone toward selfishness, greed, and jealousy, attributes that, if left unchecked, would destroy any fruitful, loving relationships we would seek to have.

How do harmonious relationships come about? *I Pet. 3:11.* What are we supposed to pursue actively? *Rom. 12:18.*

The peace we are to pursue in our interaction with others is not a mere absence of strife or disagreement. The biblical ideal of peace is rooted in the Hebrew concept of *shalom*, which stretches far beyond mere tolerance and includes a deep interest in others, expressed in support and affirmation for those around us. Again, we must remember that these things don't come naturally to us; what comes natural is greed, envy, and the desire for self-supremacy. No wonder we need the Lord working in our lives.

What basic rule should govern our relationship with others? *I Cor. 10:24.* What is that text saying to us? Why is it so opposite of what we, in our essential nature, are?

To look after others purely for their own good, with no selfish motives, is to reveal Christ, whose love for suffering humanity was premised on nothing selfish. He loved for love's sake. No selfish motive led Him to do good. On the contrary, Jesus did good, because He loved others and wanted the best for them. What a model, what an ideal for us to seek to follow!

Contemplate the different ways Jesus revealed unselfish love toward others in contrast to how you relate to others. End your contemplation at the Cross, where Christ died to save those who have fallen so short of His example.

The Basis: Agape Love (*1 Cor. 13:1-13*).

The New Testament uses several distinct words that all can be translated “love.” One refers in particular to love for friends, while another is mainly used in the context of sexual love. There is nothing inferior about these kinds of love. They are meant to be a vital and enriching part of human life in their proper time and place. But there is one specific term—*agape*—which refers to the kind of love that God has for us. And this is the love we also must cultivate in our lives as the foundation of all our dealings with others, a disinterested love that puts the good of others before ourselves, the kind of love revealed perfectly in the life of Christ.

- In** 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, the word for “love” all the way through comes from *agape*. Read the chapter over as many times as you can and then write out what you believe the Lord is telling you with these words.

- From** what Paul writes here, what is he saying love is? How does it differ from much of the world’s concept of love?

Look at some of the attributes of love as expressed in 1 Corinthians 13. Which ones might you find the most difficult to reveal in your own life? Perhaps you tend toward impatience, toward pride, or toward evil surmising—or even all these things. How can you be changed? Look up John 15:5. What is Jesus saying here that offers us the hope that we, too, can reflect *agape* love in our own lives?

God Always Comes First (*Luke 14:26*).

Living as a Christian is a matter of getting our priorities right. A life in which we and our own interests come first is not a Christian life but a pagan existence. We will need to remember this constantly during the coming weeks as we study various interhuman relationships.

In what provocative way did Christ emphasize the need to prioritize our relationships? *Matt. 10:37, Luke 14:26.* What do you believe that Jesus was telling us with these words?

What does it mean that we are to *hate* our loved ones for the sake of Christ? “Scripture usage makes it clear that this is not ‘hate’ in the usual sense of the word. In the Bible, ‘to hate,’ often should be understood simply as a typical Oriental hyperbole meaning ‘to love less’ (*see Deut. 21:15-17*). . . . Whoever has personal interests that take precedence over loyalty to Christ and devotion to His service will find it impossible to meet the requirements Christ makes of him. At all times and under all circumstances the call of the kingdom must take precedence.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 811, 812.

In one sense, there seems to be almost a contradiction here: In a study on how we should relate to others, we bring in Jesus’ statements that, on the surface, seem to downplay interpersonal relationships. Yet, that’s only on the surface. The point is that in order for us truly to have the kind of relationship with others the Lord wants for us, we need to keep Him first and foremost in our lives. Only from our relationship with Him can we then act toward others as He would have us do. Because of what Jesus has done for us at the Cross—by reestablishing the bond between heaven and earth—can we have a relationship with Him.

A young woman, severely damaged by an abusive father, has found it all but impossible to develop long-lasting and meaningful relationships with anyone now. Why must she go to the Cross to begin the healing process? What would tell her she would find healing there?

Further Study: Read from Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, pp. 29–41.

“It is only by an unselfish interest in those in need of help that we can give a practical demonstration of the truths of the gospel. ‘If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.’ ‘And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.’”—*Welfare Ministry*, p. 32.

Discussion Questions:

- ① In today’s world ethnic diversity often appears to be a source of hatred and conflict or seems to lead to an unhealthy kind of nationalism and sense of superiority. Has ethnic bias ever influenced your thinking in a negative way? How can ethnic identity be a positive force, both in society and in the church? Or is it always negative?
- ② As much as time allows, read through the Gospels and see how much emphasis Jesus placed on how we should relate to others. What do the Gospels tell us about how important this topic is for those who claim to be His followers?
- ③ Read Ephesians 2:11-18. How do these verses help us better understand the closeness we can now have with the Lord, a closeness that will impact how we relate to others?

Summary: Religion has social dimensions. It is important to recognize that people have been created for community and are destined to live in relationships with others. We must remember that serving God has both vertical and horizontal aspects. We do well to reflect regularly on whether we allow God to have priority in our life and whether all our interactions with others fit into the larger framework of our relationship with Him.

The Bus Ride: Part 1

by KRASIMIR KAREV

It was a bitterly cold evening. I pulled my scarf tighter around me as I hurried from vespers to the bus stop. I shivered against the cold and tried to shield myself from the wind and blowing snow. I arrived at the bus stop to find just one other person standing there, a man in his forties. He hunched down into his jacket and barely looked up to greet me. Then we stood silently, waiting for the bus.

I felt an almost overpowering urge to talk to this man. I asked the man what time it was, just to make conversation. After a few moments of chit-chat, this stranger told me that his name was Stefan and that he intended to commit suicide soon. I knew he was serious, for his entire body spoke of hopelessness and unrelieved burdens.

I asked him if he would tell me why he was so down on life. He told me he was an engineer and had been working in a factory in town. But recently he had lost his job when the factory laid off many workers. Although he had two university degrees, he could not find suitable work. To make matters worse, his wife, who was a doctor, seemed to enjoy rubbing it in that he was not working. Her attitude discouraged him more. He felt the sting of her reproach and knew that she did not appreciate him as a man or as a husband.

In the dim light of the street lamp, I could see that this man was visibly suffering as he shared his story. It was evident that he felt helpless to climb out of his depression. But how could I help him? Soon the bus would come, and we would part. I prayed silently that God would give me wisdom to say the right thing to this man.

Within a few minutes the bus came, and we climbed aboard. It was almost empty, and we found seats together in the back of the bus, where we could talk without interruption. Stefan's eyes begged for a thread of hope to hang on to.

My mind sifted through Bible stories to find one about a man who had undergone great difficulties. The prophet Elijah came to mind, and I began telling Stefan about Elijah. As I talked, I felt reassured that God had planted this prophet's story in my mind. It was as if the words came to me from nowhere, and I sensed that each word was doing its good work in this man's consciousness. I had no doubt that the Holy Spirit guided our conversation. We spoke animatedly, and he had lots of questions. It was as if we were alone on the bus, totally unaware of the other passengers or of the snow swirling outside.

(continued next week)

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“Honor Your Father and Your Mother”



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Gen. 22:1-14, Exod. 20:12, Luke 2:41-52, Eph. 6:1-3, 1 Pet. 5:5.

Memory Text: “Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth” (Ephesians 6:2, 3).

As Seventh-day Adventists, we point to the seventh-day Sabbath as one of our core beliefs. And rightly so. It is part of the Ten Commandments, which encapsulate the basic principles for humanity. But to “ ‘honor your father and your mother’ ” (Exod. 20:12, NIV) is also one of the foundational principles for a healthy society. It is interesting to note that these two principles—keeping the Sabbath and honoring our parents—are singled out and mentioned together: “ ‘ ‘Each of you must respect his mother and father, and you must observe my Sabbaths’ ’ ” (Lev. 19:3, NIV).

This week we'll take a look at just this specific concept, of how children, or even how adults, should relate not only to their parents but to those who are older, in general. Because, in almost all cases, no matter who we are or how old we are, we come in contact with those who are even older.

The Week at a Glance: What does the Bible say about how we should relate to older people? How do we honor our parents? Can obedience to our parents ever interfere with our obligations to God? What kind of examples does the Bible leave regarding parent-and-child relationships?

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

Respect for “Gray Hair” (*1 Pet. 5:5*).

Over the past few decades, in a large part of the world, a youth culture has developed, teaching that the secret of successful living is to remain young and beautiful. Detection of a first wrinkle can cause a minor, or even not so minor, trauma for someone who embraces the ideals of the youth culture. But this youth culture goes far beyond the way we look. Children and young people have become important markets for manufacturers of clothing and sport shoes and for all kinds of gadgets. They are specifically targeted by the entertainment industry, as well as by fast-food chains. Parents are made to feel guilty if their offspring cannot get the latest fads or follow the latest fashions.

Just as worrisome, if not more so, is a parallel trend: In many modern homes in many parts of the world, the younger members of the family tend to set the domestic agenda and to determine the value system by which the home operates.

What basic rule does the apostle Peter refer to as a guiding principle in any relationship between older and younger persons? *1 Pet. 5:5*. How was this same principle regarding the relationship between young and old already embedded in the Mosaic law? *Lev. 19:32*. How do we apply this principle in our dealings with older people?

Showing respect, and being submissive, does not mean accepting everything without comment or complaint; nor must we obey everything anyone older than we are tells us to do. These principles need to be understood in the larger context of all God’s commandments.

At the same time, however, this principle does underline the basic concept that age and experience count and that respect is due those who are older than we are, whatever our age. Indeed, we can honor and respect those who are older than we are, even if we don’t necessarily agree with what they say or believe.

On a purely practical level, why does it make good sense to honor and respect our elders? What justification, outside the Bible imperatives, do we have for such an attitude?

Honoring Our Parents (*Exod. 20:12*).

How we relate to our parents is clearly an important issue. One of the Ten Commandments specifically addresses the parent-and-child relationship.

Read Exodus 20:12. How does this principle inform us about our relationship to our parents? For instance,

1. What does honoring mean?
2. Is honoring the same as being obedient? If not, how do these two concepts differ?
3. Is it possible to honor parents whose lifestyles we disapprove of? Can children honor parents even if the parents are abusive?

“Our obligation to our parents never ceases. Our love for them, and theirs for us, is not measured by years or distance, and our responsibility can never be set aside.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 360.

Read Proverbs 19:26. What further light does this text shed on how we should relate to our parents? Does it mean children have a duty to support their parents materially?

In many societies, aging parents have to rely on the material support of their children. Often elderly parents live in the home of one of their adult children and form part of their *extended family*. In other countries, this is no longer the case. One pays taxes and contributes to social-security systems and expects to be cared for by society when one no longer has regular income from work or can no longer live independently. But, whatever the social system under which we live, children must continue to care for their parents; if not in material ways, certainly in immaterial ways. Few things are more abhorrent than the neglect of aging parents by children too busy to spend time with them.

Why do you think the Lord placed this commandment in the law? What does this commandment tell us about the importance of caring for those (not only of family) who need help?

What About Obedience? (*Eph. 6:1-3, Col. 3:20*).

Many people have a problem with authority. They want either too much or too little. Authoritarian people are a problem to themselves and to others, ruining relationships as they bully their way through life. Those who do not want to exert any authority and/or do not accept any authority are, likewise, a source of trouble. This is true in general but in particular in the parent-child relationship. Parental love does not exclude the concept of discipline and obedience, and the love of children to their parents finds concrete expression in accepting parental authority.

What aspect of the relationship between generations is singled out in Paul's list of last-day conditions? *2 Tim. 3:2*.

Paul's catalogue of elements of godlessness that will be rampant in "the last days" is frightening. It is significant that he mentions disobedience to parents as one of the terrible conditions of the time of the end. This reveals a general moral breakdown that reaches into the inner sanctum of the family, as well. And if the family is falling apart, there's little hope for society as a whole.

How does the Bible stress the importance of the acceptance of parental authority? *Eph. 6:1, Col. 3:20*.

The obedience the Bible demands is not blind obedience, and respect for parental wishes cannot simply be enforced but must, to a significant degree, be earned. Parents may make demands, but these must be reasonable, consistent, and always with the best interest of the child and, most important, not contrary to other biblical principles.

Do children ever reach an age when their parents may no longer expect respect, if not necessarily obedience, from them? If so, when? When the children leave the home? Or when they become legal adults? Can we show our parents respect and honor while not obeying them? If so, how?

Parents and Children: Part 1

The Bible is, in many ways, a family history. All through its pages, we are shown the lives of families, often revealed in the context of parent-and-children relationships. Some of these relationships are quite healthy; others aren't. Yet, all are placed in the Bible for reasons, because all can teach us something. The culture back then was radically different from our culture today, but basic principles remain.

Look up the following texts. What can we learn from them about how we should or should not relate to our parents?

Gen. 22:1-14

Genesis 27

Lev. 20:9

Deut. 21:18-21

2 Sam. 15:1-12

Matt. 8:21, 22

Luke 2:41-52

John 19:26, 27

Parents and Children: Part 2

Yesterday's study provided us with some powerful and dramatic examples of parent-and-children relationships, particularly in the context of how children should relate to their parents. The hard question is, How do we apply those examples to us, today, such as those in Deuteronomy, where rebellious children who don't obey their parents should be taken out and stoned? Or what do we do with the Abraham and Isaac story (obeying and honoring your parents is one thing, but this . . .)?

Again, keeping in mind the time and culture in which these incidents occurred, what universal principles can you draw from these stories that help us understand how we are to relate to our parents while, at the same time, keeping our first loyalty to the Lord?

It is clear from some of these accounts that there can be a conflict between obeying parents and obeying the Lord. Read Genesis 27:8 for one example. Or look at the situation in Matthew 8:21: What could be more basic and honorable than burying one's own father?

Read Ephesians 6:1. What does this say that helps us better understand our obligations to our parents in light of our walk with the Lord?

Notice in Ephesians 6:1 that Paul not only tells children to obey their parents "in the Lord" but gives the reason why they should: "for this is right." And why is it right? The next verses give the reason: Because it is a commandment of God.

A young woman had grown up in a home of abusive, drug-addicted, even violent parents whose shameful treatment of her as a child left the woman an emotional cripple. Eventually, she became a follower of Jesus. How is she supposed to honor her father and mother?

Further Study: “Isaac believed in God. He had been taught implicit obedience to his father, and he loved and reverenced the God of his father. He could have resisted his father if he had chosen to do so. But after affectionately embracing his father, he submitted to be bound and laid upon the wood.”—Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 82.

“Said one of her mother, ‘I always hated my mother, and my mother hated me.’ These words stand registered in the books of heaven to be opened and revealed in the day of judgment when everyone shall be rewarded according to his works.

“If children think that they were treated with severity in their childhood, will it help them to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, will it make them reflect His image, to cherish a spirit of retaliation and revenge against their parents, especially when they are old and feeble? Will not the very helplessness of the parents plead for the children’s love? Will not the necessities of the aged father and mother call forth the noble feelings of the heart, and through the grace of Christ, shall not the parents be treated with kind attention and respect by their offspring? Oh, let not the heart be made as adamant as steel against father and mother!”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 362.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Read again Exodus 20:12. What qualifications, or exceptions, if any, does it place on the commandment to honor our mother and father?
- ❷ What do you think it means to honor your parents “in the Lord”? How does that help us better understand what is said in Exodus 20:12?

Summary: In today’s society, the rights of children are very much emphasized. And rightly so. But we should not lose sight of the fact that older people are also important and that they have the right to be respected by the youth. The commandment to “honor” our parents applies to the young and to the not so young. Our parents deserve our support and respect and, above all, our love. Families cannot function adequately if there is no respect for authority.

The Bus Ride: Part 2

by KRASIMIR KAREV

I met Stefan at the bus stop on a cold evening. I could tell he was burdened down with a heavy weight of care. I felt impressed to speak to him and prayed that God would tell me what to say. On the bus ride across the city we talked, oblivious to the cold inside the bus or the snow swirling around outside. Little by little I saw a glimmer of hope in Stefan's eyes.

We talked about God's love for the sinner and about Jesus Christ, the Savior. I could see hope begin to light his eyes. As we approached my stop, I gave him the address of the church in the town where I lived and told him when services were held. Then we parted.

Two weeks later on Saturday evening, Stefan came to the church for vespers. He had brought a chess game with him, in hopes of playing a game of chess with me. At the end of the service I greeted him warmly and introduced him to several men in the church whom I had asked to pray for Stefan. He told me that after we had talked that night on the bus he had decided to find the courage to continue living rather than commit suicide. I asked Stefan if he could share with me what had happened in the past two weeks. He agreed, so we went outside into the cold and talked for two hours.

He told me that he had learned that his wife was having an affair. He had decided to move to a town in Bulgaria as far from his wife as possible. I asked him if I could pray for him before he left, and he agreed. We prayed, then I gave him my telephone number, and we parted. I did not know if I would ever see Stefan again, but I prayed for him every day.

A few months later my telephone rang. It was Stefan. He sounded so happy, so well, that I hardly recognized him. He had located the Adventist church in his city, and the members had welcomed him and loved him. He had found a job and was enjoying his work. He was studying the Bible and seemed sincerely eager to learn more about what God had in store for him.

And he told me of the surprise that had awaited him—he had learned that his great-grandmother had been an Adventist. "I have found myself!" he exclaimed. "I am saved!"

Later still, I learned that Stefan had been baptized into the Adventist Church. God took a man at the end of his rope on a freezing night and warmed him with His love. He truly is able to save to the uttermost.

KRASIMIR KAREV is a pastor in Pernik, Bulgaria.

Parenthood—Joys and Responsibilities



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Ps. 127:3; Prov. 13:24; 23:13, 14; 29:15; Eph. 6:4; Phil. 4:9.

Memory Text: “[Sons and daughters] are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from Him” (Psalm 127:3, NIV).

Is it more difficult to be a parent today than it was a few decades ago? Or are people today simply more conscious of the demands of parenthood than they were in the past? Has it become more difficult to find the time to be a good parent? Is it becoming more and more difficult to lead children in the right direction, in this age of television and Internet, than it was when life was less hectic, when we were not bombarded with fast-paced commercials and sentimental soaps?

Also, however ideal the biblical notion of a two-parent family (mother and father) is, the world is not an ideal place; many other types of families exist. But whatever the type, the Bible offers us inspired principles on how to be the best parents possible.

This week we will look at some of the key factors in responsible Christian parenting. The Scriptures convey a clear message: To be a parent is not only meant to be a great joy and honor but also an enormous responsibility.

The Week at a Glance: What is expected of a good parent? What does the Bible say about discipline? Who ultimately is responsible for the spiritual decision children make when they get older? How important is our example to our children?

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

Fruit of the Womb (*Ps. 127:3*).

The attitude of most people toward starting a family has changed drastically. In the past, people were usually expected to have children fairly soon after marriage. In many cultures, having a child before nine months of married life raises eyebrows or worse. On the other hand, not having children in the first few years after getting married would be a reason for wonder or pity.

Attitudes today have greatly changed. The question for us, as a people who seek to follow the Lord, is What should our attitudes about children be?

Read the following texts. What point do they seem to be making about who does and does not have children? *Gen. 29:31; 30:2, 22; 1 Sam. 1:5, 6, 19, 20; 2:21; Luke 1:7, 13-25.*

These texts show that God worked miracles in order for these women to conceive. Yet, we must not assume that every barren woman is barren because God has closed her womb. Although there is no question that, when all is said and done, God is the Giver of life, we need to be careful not to jump to conclusions regarding fertility problems. Sin has brought physical damage to all of us, in one form or another. In the end, whatever our situation, we need to trust in the Lord. Those who do have children, however, must realize what an awesome responsibility they have been given.

What does the psalmist have to say on this topic? *Ps. 127:3.*

In ancient biblical times, as in some cultures today, not being able to have children was often the cause of great shame. Having a son to ensure the family would not die out was of particular value, and having many sons would usually bring enormous prestige. Against this background, the statement of the psalmist that children are “a heritage” or even “a reward” from the Lord becomes extra meaningful. But, in a more general way, the text emphasizes a truth many modern people are inclined to forget: God is the Giver of children. Even today, in an age of sexual enlightenment and fertility treatments, children are a divine inheritance!

In what ways is having children parallel to the act of Creation as depicted in Genesis 1:26, 27? What should these parallels tell parents about their responsibilities toward their children?

What Is Expected of a Good Parent?

(Deut. 4:9; 6:6, 7; Eph. 6:4).

No one ever said that raising children was easy; and all of us know that babies do not come into the world with instruction manuals.

Paul reminded Timothy of the duty we have to *provide* for our relatives, and that, of course, applies, when we are married, first of all to our partners and, when we have children, also to our offspring (*1 Tim. 5:8*). We are supposed to know what is good for them and to provide them with these good things (*Matt. 7:11*). But there is more to Christian parenting than giving children food, clothing, and shelter.

What is to be a key element in the upbringing of children? *Deut. 4:9; 6:6, 7; Ps. 78:5-8; Prov. 22:6.*

Read Ephesians 6:1-4. What is this telling parents about how they should relate to their children?

Ephesians 6:1-4 looks at the parent-and-child relationship from two perspectives: that of the parent, as well as that of the child. The child has the duty to obey and honor the parent, but the parent cannot treat a child in any manner he or she wants to. Parents must be careful not to discourage their children by continuous criticism and rebuke or by the wrong kind of discipline. Order is essential, but unnecessary regulations and endless petty rules may do more harm than good and may well “embitter” children (*Col. 3:21, NIV*).

“The parent-child relationship is not one-sided. It is a feature of Paul’s treatment of these domestic categories that the stronger have obligations to the weaker. The gospel introduced a fresh element into parental responsibility by insisting that the feelings of the child must be taken into consideration. In a society where the father’s authority . . . was absolute, this represented a revolutionary concept.”—*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelein, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, 1978), vol. 11, p. 81.

What do you think it means to refrain from provoking your children to wrath? If you are a parent, ask yourself how well or how poorly you have been following Paul’s words.

Discipline—Yes, But How? (*Prov. 19:18*).

“Discipline” can be understood in several ways. Not only is discipline described as *training expected to produce a specific characteristic or pattern of behavior, especially training that produces moral or mental improvement*, but also as *punishment intended to correct or train*. This is surprisingly close to how the Bible describes *discipline*.

The writer of the proverb has a lot to say about the necessity of timely discipline. In 19:18 he puts it in these strong words: “*Discipline your son in his early years while there is hope. If you don't you will ruin his life*” (TLB).

Does physical punishment have a role in disciplining a child? *Prov. 13:24; 23:13, 14; 29:15.*

Many countries have introduced legislation that forbids any corporal punishment in schools. In some countries the law also forbids, or severely restricts, physical punishment of children by their parents. With this in mind, what can we say from a Christian perspective?

First of all, we must not forget that discipline varies from culture to culture, and what is considered appropriate in one culture might not be in another.

Second, we must realize that corporal punishment can easily become a way of releasing the frustration and pent-up anger of the parent or educator rather than a carefully thought-through response to the objectionable attitude or action of a child.

And third, if corporal punishment ever has a place, it must be the exception rather than the rule.

“Whipping may be necessary when other resorts fail, yet [the parents] should not use the rod if it is possible to avoid doing so. . . . Many times you will find that if you will reason with them kindly, they will not need to be whipped. And such method of dealing will lead them to have confidence in you.”—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 250.

How is the way in which God disciplines us as His sons and daughters a model for the disciplining of children by their earthly parents? *Heb. 12:6-11*. What principles can we learn about disciplining our children from these verses? If you are a parent, ask yourself, Has my corporal punishment been out of anger or out of the principle depicted in Hebrews?

Young People Must Decide for Themselves

Christian parents are challenged to do everything they can to urge their children to stay close to the “faith of their fathers” and to the church. But who, in the end, are responsible for the choices children make as they get older? *Prov. 1:8-15.*

The disciples believed religion was something for adults, but Christ wanted the children also to come to Him (*Matt. 19:13-15*). He took time for them, to talk to them, and to bless them. Christian parents and other adult church members must be intentional in bringing children to Christ and must take away any barriers they can possibly dispose of.

Of course, eventually each person, young or old, must make his or her own decision whether or not to become a follower of the Lord. No undue pressure should ever be applied. Children should not sign up for baptism simply because their parents are eager they do so. But this does not mean children should not be tactfully urged to make a choice. As parents, we should try in our God-given power to make the path as easy as possible for our children to accept the Lord.

Read Matthew 19:16-23. What does it teach about free will regarding salvation? Why must all parents always keep this principle in mind? At the same time, because our children do have free will, what does this tell us about how careful and tactful and loving we must be with our children as we seek to guide them in the right direction?

We can tell our children about Jesus. We can read daily from a good children’s Bible. We can teach them how to pray. We can take them each week to the children’s Sabbath School. We can make sure we have videos in our home that are worth watching, and we can help our youngsters, as they are developing into teenagers, to make deliberate choices about the music to which they listen, the books they read, and the films they watch. We can sacrifice financially by providing Adventist education. But one of the most important aspects of Christian parenting is never to cease praying for our children. Countless are the stories of how God has answered the prayers of parents who talked to the Lord about their children. This is an aspect of parental care that never comes to an end.

Being a Role Model (*Phil. 4:9, 2 Tim. 1:5*).

Read *Philippians 4:9.* What is Paul saying there? What principle do we see in that text that can be very crucial for parents to be aware of as they seek to guide their children on the right spiritual path?

It is easy for people, at least in public, to appear as fine Christians. You can fool some of the people, most of the time. However, the people you can't fool, at least for very long, are those in your own family, particularly your children as they grow older. They will see things about you no one else outside your family will see. How important, then, that no matter what we profess, our lives not be lived in contradiction to our profession. This doesn't mean we are perfect; it means only that our children see the sincerity and reality of our Christian walk, which includes our own repentance, our own humility, our own willingness to apologize to them, even when we make mistakes. How we live impacts our children so much more than what we say or profess to believe.

What role models did Timothy have in his youth, and how did these help him to shape his life? *2 Tim. 1:5.* What message is here for us as parents, as well?

In his book *Passing on the Torch*, Adventist sociologist Roger L. Dudley makes the following observation: "I like to think of value transmission as a huge smörgåsbord where all the tempting dishes of competing values are displayed. Here the youth will eventually get to choose the items that are most appealing to them. And which will they choose? Those that are the most colorful and attractive, most delectable, most tasty! It is not our responsibility to force our values upon our young people. It is our responsibility to model our values so attractively that these young people cannot help seeing that they are vastly superior to the competition, and will freely choose them."—(Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1986), p. 117.

Of all the things we can do for our children, why is loving them, unconditionally, the way Christ loves us, the most important?

Further Study: Read from Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, pp. 131–186; *Child Guidance*, pp. 169–174.

“Parents may do everything in their power to give their children every privilege and instruction, in order that they may give their hearts to God; yet the children may refuse to walk in the light and, by their evil course, cast unfavorable reflections upon their parents who love them, and whose hearts yearn after their salvation.”—*Child Guidance*, p. 173.

“Children imitate their parents; hence great care should be taken to give them correct models. Parents who are kind and polite at home, while at the same time they are firm and decided, will see the same traits manifested in their children. If they are upright, honest, and honorable, their children will be quite likely to resemble them in these particulars. If they reverence and worship God, their children, trained in the same way, will not forget to serve Him also.”—Page 215.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Numerous times in the Bible, the Lord is called our Father, and we are called His children. What do those images teach us about how we, as parents (either as mother or father) should relate to our children? How does our heavenly Father relate to us? What can we learn from how He deals with us regarding how we should deal with our children?
- ❷ What should a parent do who realizes he or she has been a very poor role model for his or her child? The child is now 18. He or she no longer goes to church and follows a lifestyle that conflicts in many ways with Seventh-day Adventist standards. How can the harm be undone?

Summary: As modern people, we are aware of the biological aspects of conception and childbirth. However, that does not take away from the fact that every child is a gift from God. Receiving children brings joy but also a heavy responsibility. Parenting has to do with teaching and with the transmission of values. Discipline, administered in love, will ever be an important aspect of parenting. But, most significant of all is that parents and other adults involved in the rearing of children live by the faith they profess and make sure they are credible role models.

The Shout

of Joy by J. H. ZACHARY

Stevanus Widjaja is the only Adventist in his family. Although his family is Buddhist, he attended the Adventist university in Indonesia to study English, knowing English would help him in his business plans. As graduation approached, a college professor became concerned that Stevanus had never made a decision for Christ, though he had attended weeks of prayer and classes every day. The professor invited him to give his life to Christ, but Stevanus held back.

The next day the professor was surprised to see Stevanus among the baptismal candidates. During a nightlong struggle, the young man had surrendered to Jesus.

And Stevanus has never turned away from Christ. Today he owns a major importing business in Indonesia and employs 50 people. He committed using God's financial blessings to share his newfound faith with others. He provides the finances for several major evangelistic programs in Indonesia every year and has preached for three evangelistic series. He praises the Lord that more than thirteen hundred persons have come to God during the evangelistic meetings he has sponsored.

During one meeting in the province of Kalimantan (on the island of Borneo), Stevanus sensed the presence and power of God in the hall as he appealed to his audience to accept Jesus as Savior. Suddenly, a little girl shouted, "Mommy, look!" She pointed to the ceiling. Her mother tried to hush her. After the service the child's mother asked her, "Why did you shout during the pastor's call?"

"I saw Jesus, Mommy. He was up there near the ceiling!"

That night Stevanus reported that 49 persons had responded to the call of Christ. "Surely Christ was present that night," he says quietly.

Stevanus continues to preach at two evangelistic series a year, leaving his business in the hands of his employees. "I have experienced the presence of God during these meetings. I must share Jesus with others as often as possible."



J. H. ZACHARY (left) is coordinator of international evangelism for The Quiet Hour.

Marriage Is Not Out-of-Date



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Gen. 2:18-25, John 2:1-11, Eph. 5:22-33, Heb. 13:4, 1 Pet. 3:1-7.

Memory Text: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25, NIV).

All through the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, the image of marriage appears, in one form or another. Sometimes the images are of good marriages; sometimes they are of bad marriages; sometimes the images depict faithfulness; sometimes they depict infidelity. Either way, and whether in the Old Testament or in the New, marriage is often used as a metaphor for the relationship between the Lord and His people.

Thus, it should be clear how seriously the Lord esteems marriage. For Him to use it time and again as a metaphor for His relationship with His people should tell us marriage should be something special.

Therefore, this week we take a look at some biblical principles regarding this divinely inspired institution.

The Week at a Glance: What can we learn about marriage from the Genesis account? How should a husband treat his wife? How does Christ's death reflect an important principle necessary for creating a good marriage?

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

Marriage in Paradise

Read Genesis 2:18-25. What basic principles can we find in this account of the first husband/wife relationship that can help us, today, understand what God's ideal for marriage should be? As you read, ask yourself the following questions: (1) What significance is in the fact Eve was created out of Adam's physical body, as opposed to her being created from something separate? (2) What do Adam's words in verse 23 mean? (3) Why, when they saw each other naked, were they not ashamed?

However unique the background to the story, it does show there was to be an intimacy between a husband and his wife that wasn't found anywhere else. There showed a closeness, a bond, both physical and spiritual, that no other person should be allowed to violate. The marriage relationship is blessed of God; it's something sacred, something we have been able to take from Eden, from a perfect world. How crucial, then, that we cherish it as we should.

Read Ephesians 5:22-33 and 1 Peter 3:1-7. How do both Paul and Peter stress the unique bond of a marriage relationship? Who, ultimately, is deemed the head of the home? And yet, at the same time, what principles should dictate how the husband should treat the wife?

Though both Peter and Paul are clear about the role of husband and wife in marriage, notice how many times they stress that the husband should love the wife; in fact, Paul, in Ephesians, admonished husbands to love their wives with the kind of self-sacrificial love that compelled Christ to love the church. Imagine how much better our marriages would be if both husband and wife, in the Lord, followed these biblical principles.

Dwell more on the idea of Christ's death as an example of the kind of self-sacrificing love husbands should have for their wives. What great changes could that attitude on the part of husbands bring to homes and marriages?

Marriage—Till Death Do Us Part (*Matt. 5:32, 19:9*).

Some people who have been married for just a year or two decide they made a mistake and go their separate ways. Others who have been together for thirty or more years conclude that their relationship has become empty and stale and get a divorce. Also, an increasing number of people live in common-law relationships and shy away from marriage.

What is the underlying problem? Many of today's younger generation have a problem in making long-term commitments, whether it comes to church membership and/or to sealing a love relationship with a marriage vow.

How do the words of Christ Himself indicate that marriage is a life-long commitment? *Matt. 5:32, 19:9.*

Those are very strong words, leaving what seems like little room for extenuating circumstances. Indeed, the principles stated in the *Church Manual* continue to provide a solid basis for our thinking:

"Central to God's holy plan for our world was the creation of beings made in His image who would multiply and replenish the earth and live together in purity, harmony, and happiness. He brought forth Eve from the side of Adam and gave her to Adam as his wife. Thus was marriage instituted—God the author of the institution, God the officiator at the first marriage. . . .

"The church adheres to this view of marriage and home without reservation, believing that any lowering of this high view is to that extent a lowering of the heavenly ideal. The belief that marriage is a divine institution rests upon the Holy Scriptures. Accordingly, all thinking and reasoning in the perplexing field of divorce and remarriage must constantly be harmonized with that holy ideal revealed in Eden.

"The church believes in the law of God; it also believes in the forgiving mercy of God. It believes that victory and salvation can as surely be found by those who have transgressed in the matter of divorce and remarriage as by those who have failed in any other of God's holy standards."—(Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Pub. Assoc., 2000), pp. 194, 195.

Focus on the last paragraph of the *Church Manual*. What hope does that give you if you have, indeed, violated the biblical standard of marriage? At the same time, what should Christ's words above tell us about how important it is that we do everything possible to keep our marriages intact?

The Joy of Sex

Read Genesis 1:27, 28; 2:24, 25. What do they tell us about sexuality? Who originated it? Who encouraged it? Was there anything “dirty” about it in the context in which it is presented here?

Through the centuries there have been Christians who have rejected sex as dirty, unspiritual, and sinful, even to the point that many believed that those who wanted to dedicate themselves to the Lord in a special way ought to remain celibate. Throughout church history, in many religious communities, sex was, at least officially, outlawed, even among married people.

On the other hand, immorality has, at times, been hailed as true freedom, with all inhibitions set aside in the name of advanced religious truth.

The Christian view of sex is a balanced view. There is more to life than sex. But the enjoyment of our sexuality is definitely a precious part of life—a gift of our Creator, who made us “male and female,” and within the right context it can be a beautiful expression of both human and divine love.

Like all God’s gifts, however, it can be abused, and few gifts have been more greatly abused than this one. The key for the Christian is to understand under what circumstances the Lord wants him or her to benefit from and enjoy this blessing. When is sexual activity appropriate, and when is it not? These are important questions, because our world is filled with sad results of those who have misused one of God’s greatest manifestations of His love for humanity. How like the devil to take something so wonderful and turn it into something that will lead to the ruin of many souls.

All of the following texts talk, in one context or another, about human sexuality: Genesis 2:24; Proverbs 5:15-23; Ecclesiastes 9:9; Song of Solomon; Romans 1:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 7:5. From these texts and any others you find, write a paragraph for someone who isn’t a Christian, explaining the biblical view of sexuality.

When There Are Problems (*Matt. 5:27, 28; Heb. 13:4*).

We live in a world full of temptations. Never should we underestimate the determination of the devil to divert the followers of Christ from their life of discipleship; and one of the most effective ways of doing so is to lead them into sexual immorality. The apostle Paul was specifically addressing instances of immorality among church members when he stated: "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall" (*1 Cor. 10:12, NIV*).

What principle ought to be kept in mind and to be pursued with firm determination by all who are married and claim to be followers of Christ? *1 Cor. 10:13, Heb. 13:4.*

Ellen G. White makes an important point when stressing the role of our will in remaining faithful to a marriage vow. A determination to focus our mind on spiritual matters will help us when we face sexual temptations: "Christ presented before His disciples the far-reaching principles of the law of God. He taught His hearers that the law was transgressed by the thoughts before the evil desire was carried out in actual commission. We are under obligation to control our thoughts, and to bring them into subjection to the law of God. The noble powers of the mind have been given to us by the Lord, that we may employ them in contemplating heavenly things. God has made abundant provision that the soul may make continual progression in the divine life. . . . We give our time and thought to the trivial and commonplace things of the world, and neglect the great interests that pertain to eternal life."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1145.

But not all is necessarily lost when we do succumb to temptation. Although sin may result in consequences that can not be undone, God is always willing to forgive. And to forgive impure thoughts, sexual indiscretions, or even blatantly immoral conduct is no more difficult for God than to forgive a lie or an act of pride or selfishness.

What practical steps can both men and women take in the area of alleviating sexual temptation, not only for themselves but to make sure they aren't a stumbling block to others? How do what we read, watch, or wear, and where we go all play a role in how well we deal with this problem?

Christ Endorsed Marriage (*John 2:1-11*).

Some of the advice given by the apostle Paul would suggest he was not overenthusiastic about marriage. Statements to that effect (*such as in 1 Corinthians 7:8*) should, however, be read in their context. They were written in response to a specific question (*vs. 1*), under circumstances we do not know in detail. Just two chapters later, Paul claims the right to marry and refers to the “other apostles and the Lord’s brothers and Cephas,” who traveled together with “a believing wife” (*1 Cor. 9:5, NIV*). The overall message of the Bible is undeniable: Marriage not only is permitted but it is a great gift, in particular, for believers who know the One who instituted it.

What does the prominent place given in John’s Gospel to the story of Christ’s attendance at the wedding in Cana suggest? *John 2:1-11*.

It is quite significant that John includes the story of the wedding in Cana among the very few miracle stories he recounts. The account makes abundantly clear that Jesus was happy to be associated with this wedding feast and that, by His very presence, He underlined not only how good it is to have a party but that it is good when people get married.

How does the use of the imagery of the wedding feast further underline the value and importance of marriage? *Matt. 22:1-14, Rev. 19:7-9*.

“In Biblical times a marriage involved two major events, the betrothal and the wedding. These were normally separated by a period of time during which the two individuals were considered husband and wife and as such were under the obligations of faithfulness. The wedding began with a procession to the bride’s house, which was followed by a return to the house of the groom for the marriage feast. By analogy, the church, espoused to Christ by faith, now awaits the parousia when the heavenly groom will come for his bride and return to heaven for the marriage feast which lasts throughout eternity.” —Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1977), p. 340.

Christ gave Himself totally and unselfishly for His people; we, as a people, are to give ourselves totally and unselfishly to the Lord. How does that model of giving one’s self to another reveal essential principles of a strong Christian marriage?

Further Study: Comments on marriage and related topics by Ellen G. White are found in a number of different compilations. Her book *The Adventist Home* contains much relevant material. See, for example, Section III: "Choosing a Life Partner," pp. 43–75, and Section V: "From the Marriage Altar," pp. 99–127.

"Like every other one of God's good gifts entrusted to the keeping of humanity, marriage has been perverted by sin; but it is the purpose of the gospel to restore its purity and beauty. In both the Old and the New Testament the marriage relation is employed to represent the tender and sacred union that exists between Christ and his people, the redeemed ones whom he has purchased at the cost of Calvary. 'Fear not,' he says; 'thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel.' 'Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you.' "—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, December 10, 1908.

"It should henceforth be the life study of both husband and wife how to avoid everything that creates contention and to keep unbroken the marriage vows."—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 85.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ If sex is to be enjoyed only within the context of marriage, how do those who do not have a partner, or those who have lost their partner, experience their sexuality? Should they simply forget they are sexual beings? Can one be fully *male or female* without having any sexual relationship? What does Christ's example offer them?

- ❷ Look at the second Ellen White quote above. What practical things can both the husband and wife do in order to protect the sanctity of their marriage vows?

Summary: Many marriages fail. As Christians we can never go along with a situation in which unfaithfulness, in word or thought, is condoned. At the same time, a forgiving spirit can save and restore many a relationship that would otherwise be doomed. The Lord deems marriage as something sacred; we, as humans, should do no less.

Flee Into His Arms: Part 1

by CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN

Maryam's eyes burned from crying. Her body ached from the beating she had received. *A failure, she thought. I can't even kill myself. If life isn't worth living, why is death so hard?*

Maryam was born into a Muslim family in a Middle Eastern country. When Maryam was born her father shouted at her mother, "Why did you have to have a girl? Can't you do anything right?"

Maryam feared her father and hated the abuse that she and her mother faced. She was not permitted to invite any of the neighborhood children to her home, for they were "filthy infidel Christians." If she even talked to a Christian child, her father would beat her. And when she cried, her mother simply told her to pray, pray. Maryam prayed, but her prayers were never answered. She became convinced that no one heard her prayers. Maryam hated her life, hated what her father was doing to the family, but she saw no way out.

When Maryam's father made some bad business deals and was sent to prison for five years, Maryam found work to help her mother support the family.

After several years Maryam's father convinced a friend to pay for his release from prison. He returned home and announced that Maryam would be married to the son of his friend. When Maryam learned that her father had agreed to give her in exchange for his freedom, she was devastated. Once more she realized that she was only an object to her father, never a cherished child.

Maryam did not know the man she would marry, but she knew that he had a terrible temper. He was powerful and rich and had great influence in the government. Maryam did not consider this a marriage. She felt like a slave, sold to a man for her father's freedom.

From the beginning Maryam's husband oppressed and abused her. He beat her for almost any reason. Maryam lived in fear. When she learned that she was pregnant, she was secretly pleased, for she thought at last she would have someone who would love her back. But her husband's constant beatings killed the child and left Maryam badly bruised. Heartbroken, she tried to commit suicide. But she failed. *I can't even kill myself, she thought.*

Maryam desperately wanted out, but Islamic law forbade her to get a divorce. And her husband would never allow her to have a passport, so she could not run away. Her own family would not listen to her when she tried to tell them her troubles. She had to get out, but how?

(continued next week)

CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN is editor of Mission.

Friendship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *I Samuel 20, John 15:12-15, 2 Cor. 6:14-18, Phil. 2:3-8.*

Memory Text: "A friend loves for all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (*Proverbs 17:17, NIV*).

Many people claim to have lots of friends, though, in reality, they have only superficial links with other people and then only to the degree they find these links personally useful. True friendship, in contrast, does not focus on usefulness but on a personal interest in selected fellow human beings with whom we talk, with whom we listen, and with whom we share our time and emotions. After all, as we'll see this week, friendship is one of the concepts used to describe what our relationship with the Lord should be; thus, friendship must be based on something more than a superficial need to use someone for our own ends.

"Our affection for one another springs from our common relation to God. We are one family, we love one another as He loved us. When compared with this true, sanctified, disciplined affection, the shallow courtesy of the world, the meaningless expression of effusive friendship, are as chaff to the wheat."—Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 211.

The Week at a Glance: How is friendship depicted in the Bible? How can friendship become a negative experience? How do friendships reflect our relationship with God? What is the basic principle behind true friendship? What must be experienced in our hearts in order to be a true friend?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 31.

What Is a Friend? (*1 Samuel 20*).

While it is true we cannot always choose all our relatives, we do have more leeway in choosing our friends. It seems inevitable that for beings who are, essentially, social creatures, we will be in contact with those whom we deem *friends*. Yet, not all friendships are alike. Centuries ago the Greek philosopher Aristotle categorized various kinds of friendships based on the motives that established the relationship between the parties. Since that time, many writers have expounded on this very interesting and, at times, complex phenomenon of *friendship*.

Think about someone whom you consider or had considered a *friend*. What particular qualities identify your relationship with that person? Read Proverbs 18:24. How does that text reflect the qualities that define your experience of friendship, if at all?

It is interesting, too, that the word translated “friend” in the last part of this verse in Proverbs comes from the Hebrew word for “love.” In other contexts, that word could have been translated “lover.” The point seems to be that a friend is indeed someone with whom you have a close bond, different from a mere acquaintance or co-worker.

Read the story of the friendship between Jonathan and David as depicted in 1 Samuel 20. What characteristics emerge from this account that help us understand what a friendship is? How does this story relate to Proverbs 18:24? How do these characteristics compare with what you wrote above? Also, how do Jonathan’s actions fit in with what Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:1?

Notice from this story how the Lord formed the center of their friendship. Look especially at *1 Samuel 20:14*, with the phrase “the kindness of the Lord.” We now see, though, in this whole relationship, a reflection of the kindness and mercy of God, manifested in the relationship between these two men.

Looking at the story of David and Jonathan, ask yourself about someone whom you consider a friend. How could you better manifest the traits of friendship as revealed in the biblical account?

Bad Company (*2 Cor. 6:14-18*).

The term *friend*, at least in English, does not have to be of necessity something positive. Who knows how many lives have been ruined because of the negative influence of a *friend*? For instance, many people who struggle with some sort of substance abuse, be it alcohol or drugs, often trace their introduction to the substance: not from a shadowy figure hiding in a dark alley but from their best friend. How ironic and, yet, how common, when best friends turn out to be bad friends.

A young man, somewhat of an outcast in school and coming from a cold, uncaring family, found friends who made him part of their close-knit circle. He soon knew they would put their lives on the line for him, and he felt such a sense of belonging that he would have risked his life for them. Sounds like a great thing, right? Sounds like the beauty of friendship, as depicted in Proverbs 18:24, right? Well, not quite, because we're talking about a young man who joined a youth gang heavily involved in violence, theft, and drug abuse. Thus, like anything, friendship, even what we might call a "good friend," can be a double-edged sword.

Read *2 Corinthians 6:14-18*. Notice the contrasts depicted in the texts. What do they tell us? Though we often apply these verses to marriage, what principles could help us understand the kind of friendships the Lord desires us to have? How should these principles guide our friendships? At the same time, in what ways can we take this admonition too far? How do we balance it, for instance, with *Matthew 5:13, 14*?

"Paul is telling the Corinthians that they cannot have *compromising* relationships with unbelievers—not that they cannot have relationships whatsoever. Relationships that cut the connection with God are to be completely excluded."—W. Larry Richards, *The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier—2 Corinthians* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1998), pp. 148–150.

How can you tell if your friendship with a nonbeliever is hurting you spiritually? If you believe it is, what should you do?

Let This Mind Be in You (*Phil. 2:3-8*).

As human beings, we are by nature selfish and egotistical: Our first inclination is to look out for “number one.” Though some struggle with this problem more than others, it is the default mode for a sinful, fallen race. For any relationship—including friendship between selfish and egotistical people—to survive, these qualities need to be subsumed. In the end, only the sanctifying power of God working on the heart can bring about the kind of changes needed for a true friendship. No wonder, as we saw in Sunday’s section, the Lord was in the center of the relationship between David and Jonathan. What friendship will succeed if it’s based on people looking out only for themselves?

Read Philippians 2:3, 4. What essential principle is shown there, and why is it so crucial for forming a true friendship?

In so many ways, the key to a good friendship is found in the same principles found in a good marriage: the willingness of each member to put the good of the other first. This is seen in the example we have of Jesus, giving Himself for the good of others. Think of the kind of friendships we would have were we to esteem others better than ourselves (and were they to do the same for us) or if we looked not upon just our own things but upon the things of others (and they were to do the same for us). This was, of course, the essence of what Christ did when here in the flesh.

The sad reality is so many friendships are often based on selfish motives (What’s in this for me?); and when someone realizes there’s no benefit for them in the relationship, the friendship cools, if not ends. This is nothing extraordinary; it is simply human nature. Far from putting the needs of others before ourselves, oftentimes we find jealousy and envy ruining a friendship. In his *Confessions*, Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote about how, once he became famous, many of his friends turned against him. Again, this isn’t anything extraordinary; it’s human nature unsubdued by the power of Christ working in our lives.

Read Philippians 2:5-8. Here is the key to bringing about the kinds of changes in us that can stimulate strong friendships. How are your friendships? Are they defined by the texts for today or by jealousy, expediency, and convenience? Dwell, pray, and meditate on these verses in Philippians.

How Christ Made Friends (*Luke 19:1-10*).

The gospel shows us how Christ made friends. He took time to talk to people and to listen to them. He took time to eat together with others and to celebrate special events with them.

Read the following passages and analyze what each tells us about Christ's skills in interhuman relations and, in particular, in making friends.

John 4:4-26: Jesus speaks and listens to the Samaritan woman.

Luke 19:1-10: Jesus stays with Zacchaeus.

Luke 14:1-14: Jesus accepts hospitality from a prominent Pharisee.

In all these situations, Jesus comes to people where they are and mingles among them as one of them. He doesn't act too good for the Samaritan woman or doesn't feel too low for the chief Pharisee. Jesus shows Himself ready to listen, to get involved, to show a genuine interest in others. If we will reach out to people, listen, show empathy, and give others the sense that they are valued and accepted, we will be able to establish meaningful relationships and even friendships with the most unlikely people.

This is important if we are to reach others with the gospel. How are unchurched, secular people ever going to listen to a sermon? How can they ever be persuaded to read a book about Christ? Many will be intrigued enough to decide they want to know more only if they have seen Christianity in action and actually have met a credible Christian.

Christ, however, didn't make friends just for the sake of making friends. He came in contact with the lost, and He became their friend in order to reach them with eternal life. What about us? What motivates our friendship with nonbelievers? At the same time, if it becomes apparent that they have no interest in our faith, do we then just shake the dust off our feet and walk away? What kind of friendship is that?

Not Servants but Friends (*John 15:12-15*).

No matter how ideal our friendships, people are people, and we should never lean totally upon them (*Ps. 118:8, 9; Jer. 17:5*), for sooner or later people will fail us, just as we fail others. That's why our Best Friend, the One whom we can trust implicitly, must be the Lord, whom we can know intimately through Jesus Christ (*John 14:9*). However important human friendships are, however much we can learn to trust in the love and dedication of others, we build upon a flimsy foundation when we build our faith upon anything other than the Rock (*Matt. 7:24, 25*).

Read John 15:12-15. What did Jesus call His disciples? What does it mean to say we are “friends” with God, as opposed to servants? What’s the difference? What kind of relationship does He seek with us? What can we learn from our friendship with God that can help us with other friendships? At the same time, what is unique about our friendship with God that we can have with no one else? (*See, for instance, vs. 14.*)

In verse 13, Jesus reveals the essence of true love and true friendship, which again comes back seeking unselfishly the best for others over and above ourselves. This is the highest ideal, and Jesus here points to His own manifestation of that ideal as His words point to the Cross. It’s only as we have the kind of assurance, peace, and security that comes from knowing God, from knowing He is our Friend, from knowing we are accepted by Him, that we can give of ourselves and become the kind of friend who truly is a friend, not only with the Lord but with others.

Look at John 15:13. It presents an incredibly high ideal for friendship. How many friends do you have for whom you would be willing to die? Do you have to be willing to die for someone in order to be called his or her friend? If not, what do you think Jesus is telling us with those words? What principle is He teaching?

Further Study: "Friendship may be the only form of human social relationship that is sustained primarily by kindness. . . . One continues to function as a parent, spouse, worker, and neighbor, even though kindness may be lacking. . . . With friendship, it is entirely different. Kindness is the glue that binds friends together. If I should humiliate a friend, be insensitive to the feelings of a friend, cause unnecessary harm or hurt to a friend, or in any way treat a friend as an object that I use for my own pleasure and gratification, the friendship dissolves."—Ray S. Anderson, *Living the Spiritually Balanced Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House Co., 1998), pp. 78, 79.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ Research indicates that new Seventh-day Adventists tend to lose most of their old friends within approximately seven years of joining the church. Their former circle of friends tends to be replaced by others whom they have met in their new spiritual home. Is that a good thing, or should new members strive to retain their non-Adventist friends of the past? If so, why, and under what circumstances?
- ❷ The Bible presents some high ideals for friendship, including even the giving up of one's life for a friend. How, though, do we balance that out with our other relationships and obligations, such as to our family or to the Lord? What happens when obligations to friends clash with obligations to family or to the Lord?
- ❸ Euripides wrote that real friendship is shown in times of trouble; prosperity is full of friends. How does this idea compare with what we have studied this week about friendship?

Summary: The Bible presents some high ideals for friendship, something that does not come naturally to the human heart. Fortunately, through the example and power of Jesus, we can be the kind of friends the Lord would have us to be.

Flee Into His Arms: Part 2

by CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN

Maryam was desperate to get out of her abusive marriage, but with no money, no passport, no friends, she could see no way to escape. Then she met Samaan. He was kind and seemed to care what happened to her. He offered to help her escape, but she hesitated to trust him. One day her husband found Maryam talking with Samaan and threatened to kill them if he caught them together again. Maryam had no choice. It was better to risk death by fleeing than to face a slow death at the hands of her husband.

She and Samaan fled their homeland and took refuge in Europe, where Maryam hoped her husband would never find her. They applied for asylum and waited for word of their fate. Maryam knew that if they were sent back to their homeland, they both would be killed.

Maryam suffered frequent nightmares and depression from her years of abuse and her uncertain future. Samaan tried to comfort her and protect her, but often nothing helped.

One day Maryam and a friend were walking in a store when a young man approached them and spoke in their native language. His simple message stunned Maryam. "Jesus loves you," he smiled as he gave the women a pamphlet. Maryam listened as her friend peppered the young man with questions about God.

"Can you come to my house and tell me more?" her friend asked the young man. He agreed. Maryam decided to join her friend as they learned more about God. For several weeks the two women and young man spent hours together talking about God. And little by little Maryam began to hope that maybe there is a God who cares after all.

Maryam shared what she was learning with Samaan, and together the two accepted Jesus into their lives. Samaan wanted to marry Maryam, but she could not obtain a divorce without risking their lives. At last they found a way, and Maryam and Samaan were married.

"I still have problems," Maryam says, "but now I know that Jesus loves me and will never leave me. Samaan loves me too. Samaan's love helps me understand God's love. At last I have found a sense of worth, of value in life."

"I can never return to my homeland, never see my mother or brothers again. But God is showing me that I have a huge family around the world. And even better, I have hope of eternity. I may never have a home on this earth, so all I can hope for is a home in God's mansion forever."

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Religion in the Workplace



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Gen. 2:15; 3:17-19; Lev. 19:35, 36; Eccles. 9:10; Matt. 18:21; Luke 15:11-32.

Memory Text: "The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out" (*Proverbs 10:9, NIV*).

In the aftermath of a ferry disaster in 1987 near Belgium, the experts faced serious problems in identifying all the victims. They found that one of them had a double identity; he had lived for years under one name in England and under another name in France. Just imagine how difficult it must have been for this man to keep those two lives, with two families and two sets of friends, in two different countries, totally separate.

This kind of situation does not, of course, occur very often. But in many ways people can live double or even multiple lives. That goes for Christians too. We must make sure not to compartmentalize our life into totally different spheres, in which we are quite different persons in different places. We must be the same kind of person in the workplace as we are at home or in church, operating with the same set of Christian values. This week we'll take a look at some Bible principles on how we as Christians should behave in the workplace.

The Week at a Glance: What happened to work after the Fall? What are the obligations of a Christian employer and employee? How should Christians give or receive discipline and correction?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 7.

Work Ethic (*Gen. 2:15, 3:17-19*).

Read Genesis 2:15. What does it tell us about the existence of work in the pre-Fall world?

According to the Bible, work existed even in Paradise, in a perfect environment. Obviously, work must have been something good, something that was an integral part of God's original plan for the human race. After the Fall, the concept of work continued but, no doubt, in a radically different environment than before.

Read Genesis 3:17-19. What does it imply about work in the post-Fall world?

Cursed, sorrow, sweat, thorns, thistles—these are some of the words used to describe the fate that awaited humanity because of sin, words used even in the context of the work human beings would need to do in a fallen world.

Read carefully Genesis 3:17. What does it mean that God “cursed . . . the ground” for the sake of Adam?

“The thorn and the thistle—the difficulties and trials that make his life one of toil and care—were appointed for his good as a part of the training needful in God’s plan for his uplifting from the ruin and degradation that sin has wrought.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 9. In other words, the Lord made life more difficult for the race, not as punishment but as a means to help mitigate against the ravages of sin. This principle can be seen often, even today: Those who engage in honest labor usually get into less trouble than those who are idle, with nothing to do. There’s something about the discipline and routine of work that, under the right circumstances, can help build character, a crucial task for beings steeped in sin.

In what ways, in your own experience, have you seen the benefits and blessings that come from work?

“Whatsoever Thy Hand Findeth . . .”

(*Eccles. 9:10*).

Whether in the poignant paintings of Vincent Van Gogh, who tried to capture the hardship of coal miners toiling at their task, or in some of the beautiful prose of Leo Tolstoy, who all but romanticized the toil of peasants in the field, human beings have sought to capture, in one way or another, the inescapable fact of work. With rare exceptions, most people have worked in one capacity or another. Many people, in fact, spend a great deal of their time working. The big question for Christians, then, is What kind of relationships should we have in the workplace?

Read Ecclesiastes 9:10. What is this text telling us that could give us a principle for the Christian on the job?

One thing most of us have learned, or at least should have learned, is that if we profess to be Christians, people will watch us. As Christians, we make some pretty bold claims, claims about having a new life in Christ, about having a peace that passes all understanding, about striving for a higher moral ideal. We are witnesses, in one way or another (*Isa. 43:10, 1 Cor. 4:9, 2 Cor. 3:2*). Thus, think for a moment: Which would give a better witness to your faith: if you were a hard, diligent, honest worker who did not only what was expected of you but perhaps even more, or if you were a slacker—cutting corners, trying to get away with as much as you could? The answer, of course, is obvious. Sure, there are all sorts of circumstances that can, at times, make it difficult for us to be good witnesses at work, but, as a rule, a Christian should be a reliable, honest worker doing what he or she is paid for, knowing the true reward is not here but in a new heaven and a new earth. In this context, Ellen White wrote of Christ’s early years: “He was not willing to be defective, even in the handling of tools. He was perfect as a workman, as He was perfect in character. By His own example He taught that it is our duty to be industrious, that our work should be performed with exactness and thoroughness, and that such labor is honorable. . . . All should find something to do that will be beneficial to themselves and helpful to others. God appointed work as a blessing, and only the diligent worker finds the true glory and joy of life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 72.

The text in Ecclesiastes and the excerpt from Ellen White present an ideal attitude about work. How does your attitude compare? If you’re honest with yourself, what changes do you need to make?

Christian Values in the Workplace: Part 1

Buying a secondhand car is often considered a rather hazardous adventure. The car may be beautifully cleaned and polished, but what dark secrets are hidden under the hood? Can you trust the odometer? It is said that one should never buy a car from, or sell a car to, a friend, since this may well put the friendship in jeopardy. This should not apply to Christians. Our business deals must be above reproach, whether we privately sell our car or whether we trade professionally. Indeed, whatever work or business we are in and whatever level at which we work, we should be honest, honorable, and fair, because that is what our God tells us to be.

Look up the following texts. What is each one saying, and what are their messages for Christians in the workplace? *Lev. 19:35, 36; Prov. 10:17; Jer. 22:13; Mal. 3:5.*

Whether employer or employee, as a Christian we need to be honest and fair with either our employer or employees. The only thing worse than employees who abuse their work situation by being dishonest are employers who are dishonest with those under their supervision.

Read again Leviticus 19:35, 36. What motivation is given for honesty in business dealing?

Because we are Christians, our concepts of right and wrong, good and evil, aren't based merely on the fluctuating whims of culture and time, which change from culture to culture and from time to time; rather, they are based on the eternal God, who never changes (*James 1:17*). Thus, we should do what is right and honest, because those things that are right and honest are rooted in God, our Creator and Redeemer. We shouldn't manifest honesty, integrity, and fairness only when they suit us, when they work to our advantage; rather, they should be foundational principles that underlie all we do as Christians, whether at home or in the workplace.

Christian Values in the Workplace: Part 2

Read Proverbs 16:32, 10:1, and 12:1 carefully and prayerfully. What do these texts teach us regarding the importance of discipline and correction?

Whether it is the army or a school or a factory or whether we talk about the home or the church, discipline is essential. The issue of discipline is a coin with two sides. Most of us will, at least from time to time, have to discipline others: children, co-workers, or church members. We must learn how to do this with consistency, tact, justice, and compassion. But we must also be receptive to discipline and learn how to accept counsel, direction, and, if necessary, correction all in a mature and constructive manner. As Christians in the workplace, we must learn not only to give discipline and correction but to receive it, as well.

We have all through the Bible, particularly in the Gospels, examples of Jesus either forgiving offenders (*John 8:4-11*) or teaching us the principles of forgiveness (*Matt. 18:21, 22; Luke 15:11-32*). How helpful are these texts for a Christian employer or supervisor who is dealing with a troublesome employee? Do these texts, though, imply that no discipline or correction should be administered, or are they, instead, teaching a principle that could, in the right context, be applied in the workplace?

At the same time, a Christian employee could believe he or she has been treated unfairly by his or her boss. Jesus, however, expressed some powerful words regarding the attitude of those who are treated unfairly (*Matt. 5:38-42*).

Look at Matthew 5:38-42. In what ways is this passage helpful for understanding how an employee should react to unfairness? Do these verses mean an employee should, therefore, accept abuse unconditionally, or do they teach something else? Explain your answer.

Seeing Potential in Others (*Acts 15:36-41, 2 Tim. 4:11*).

Unfortunately, we do not always look for the best in others. We often tend to see the things others cannot do rather than the things they could do if properly trained and challenged to do so! In our relationships with co-workers, we need to build on one another's strengths rather than to focus primarily on one another's weaknesses.

What kind of people did Christ choose as His disciples? What does that teach us? *Matt. 4:18-22, 9:9, Luke 5:1-11.*

It has often been remarked that very few of us would have chosen these kind of men as our closest co-workers. But Christ saw the potential in some uneducated fishermen, as well as in an unpopular tax collector, and He challenged them to follow Him and work with Him. They received three years of intensive training and then went out into the world. Jesus *discovered* them and recognized a potential in these men that few of us would have detected.

Paul had a sharp disagreement with Barnabas about John Mark's suitability for a leading role in the work of the church. Barnabas believed there was potential in John Mark, while Paul pointed to John Mark's weakness in the past. See *Acts 15:36-41, 2 Tim. 4:11*. What lessons are here for us (in the context of today's study)?

When we hear a sermon on these passages, there usually is sharp criticism for Paul and praise for Barnabas. However, we owe it to Paul to put ourselves for a moment in his shoes. John Mark deserted and left Paul and Barnabas when they reached Pamphylia on their first missionary journey, even before the task was completed. It stands to reason that Paul did not want to run the risk that this would happen again.

In our day and age, we tend to argue as Paul did. If we have a choice, we do not continue with someone who has let us down at a crucial moment. Yet, on the other hand, how many of us know people who never again faltered when given a second chance to prove themselves? Maybe we ourselves have been such a person.

Dwelling on the lesson for today, ask yourself, Have I too quickly written off someone who has failed me in the past, either in the workplace or in any other situation?

Further Study: "If you have taken advantage in your business dealings, which the Lord calls injustice, this must be adjusted before you can be honest and righteous in the sight of God. These things need to be corrected by our people everywhere. . . . When you take up this work of readjustment and getting right with God, angels of heaven will cooperate with you, giving you discernment to see where you have viewed matters in a wrong light. . . .

"The Lord can not bless the men who corrupt themselves by unjust business dealings, either with their brethren or with worldlings. And those who do such things lose their spirituality; they grow cold and formal and selfish. They gloss over their past mistakes by theories of their own invention that are opposed to the principles of the Word of God."—Ellen G. White, *This Day With God*, p. 343.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Putting aside the obvious things that involve outright crime or vice, are there certain *respectable* jobs that Christians, in good conscience, cannot do? If so, what are they, and why should a Christian in good conscience not do these kinds of work?
- ② Suppose your boss asked you to work on Sabbath; you said you couldn't but knew someone else in the office who would take your place. Suppose, however, your boss asked you to steal or lie, and you said you couldn't but knew someone else in the office who would take your place. What, if any, is the difference between the two situations?

Summary: As Christians, we bring our religion with us as we enter the workplace. Though there are usually limits to the amount of open discussion about religious subjects that can take place, we must still operate only with Christian values. Working together with others in a positive spirit is high on our agenda. Absolute honesty and integrity—as well as love, compassion, and justice—will characterize our conduct. And while we seek to display these values ourselves, we will also try to bring out the best in others and do what we can to make them realize their full potential.

Turning Opposition

Into Blessing

by J. H. ZACHARY

The Volga Conference in Russia is a challenging field in which to work. A lingering communist influence, a strong national church, and several Muslim communities in the area make this a difficult area to penetrate with the gospel. In 1999 the director of Global Mission for the conference and two volunteers went to a town of 45,000 citizens and began scattering seeds of faith. This town has three large national churches. The Adventists had not been in the region long when the priests of these three churches set out to work to oppose them.

When the Adventists began holding evangelistic meetings in the town, the police arrested them and took them to headquarters for questioning. But when they checked the Adventists' papers and found everything in order, they had to release the trio. Later the Adventists learned that one of the priests with close ties to the police had requested their arrest.

The next day while the Adventists were shopping, a gang of rough-looking young men threatened them, "Leave our city within 24 hours, or you will die!"

"We are not afraid of you," the pastor told the gang members. "We are not breaking any laws. We will stay and hold our meetings."

Soon posters appeared throughout the city warning the residents of the "great danger" from the "Seventh-day Adventist sect" that had invaded their town. "Be careful. Do not attend their meetings. Do not associate with them," the posters warned.

When one woman saw the poster, tears filled her eyes. "Thank God my prayers have been answered," she exclaimed.

The woman, an Adventist, and her husband had moved to this city a year before. She had been praying that God would send some Adventists to her.

She urged her husband to attend the meetings with her. At the close of the meetings, 27 persons took their stand for Christ, and a company was organized.

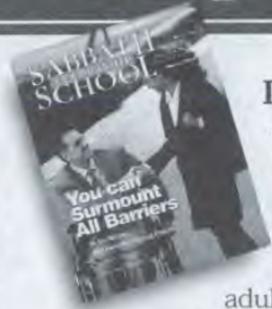
The next year another evangelistic series was planned. The police chief gave them permission to hold their meetings and told them to fear no disturbances.

From one community to another in this difficult area, God is spreading the message in unentered areas in spite of strong opposition.

J. H. ZACHARY is coordinator of international evangelism for The Quiet Hour.



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Respect for Authorities



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Matt. 5:13-16, 22:15-21,
Acts 5:29, Rom. 13:1-5, 1 Pet. 2:13-15.

Memory Text: "Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience" (Romans 13:5, NIV).

One of the greatest questions facing the church is the issue of political involvement. How do people in the world but "not of the world" (John 17:14) relate to the political challenges presented by the world? History is replete with examples of churches that have kept silent during times of great moral and political crises; history, however, also bears a sad witness to what happens when churches take upon themselves political prerogatives that place them decidedly upon the side of evil.

This week we look at the complex and often difficult question of how Christians are to relate to the political issues of the day. Because Christians exist in all sorts of political environments, we can look only at broad principles; in fact, the Bible gives us only broad principles. Perhaps that's because the Lord, knowing the various and often delicate situations His people would be facing through the centuries, revealed principles broad enough to be used in any environment.

The Week at a Glance: What kind of influence should Christians have in society? How should Christians relate to the political process? Should Christians be in government? What principles should we follow in seeking to balance our obligations as citizens with our obligations to the Lord?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 14.

Sanctified Caution (*Matt. 5:13-16*).

Many Christians believe we should give up on the world. The world is so evil, so confused, and so estranged from God's original purpose that there is no hope of turning the situation around. Plus, the more we are involved with the world, the greater the chances we will become even more contaminated by it. Withdrawal is the only option for those who want to remain faithful to the Lord. This argument may sound plausible, but is it biblical?

What role does God expect a Christian to play in society? *Matt. 5:13-16.*

Christians must do all they can to make a difference in society. They are called to give a more pleasant taste to the world around them and to provide spiritual light. As someone once said: "It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness!"

In early Adventism, the question was often asked whether it would be right for an Adventist Christian to go to the ballot box. Today, most Seventh-day Adventists do recognize that it is their privilege to cast their vote in democratic elections and referendums in an attempt to help promote an agenda that is closest to upholding kingdom values. How we do this, of course, isn't always easy; much depends not only upon our political and social environment, which can vary greatly from country to country, but also on what individual members believe regarding which agenda best upholds *kingdom values*. Because these questions can be so fraught with many potential hazards, as believers we should always proceed with *sanctified caution* when it comes to dealing with social and political issues.

How do you balance the verses quoted above in Matthew with texts such as 2 Corinthians 6:17 or James 4:4?

The issue for most Christians isn't that we should seek to better whatever society we find ourselves in, but rather, How do we best do that in a way that doesn't compromise our witness or our obligations to the Lord? As with so many things, we need to strike a correct balance, which is not always easy. At such times, when these questions can have a very powerful impact for good or evil upon the church or upon society as a whole, members, more than ever, need to seek the guidance of the Lord and the counsel of others in how to best proceed.

Christians in Government?

Imagine your nation is overrun by a foreign power that occupies your land, defeats your army, kills thousands of civilians, levels numerous cities, and takes many prisoners. Imagine, next, that one of those prisoners not only becomes a favorite of the very ruler who destroyed your nation but actually serves that ruler faithfully for many years. Most people would deem this person a traitor, would they not?

Who is the Bible character described above?

The answer, of course, is Daniel (*see Daniel 1; 2:48, 49*), whose story (among those of others) raises all sorts of interesting questions regarding the role of faithful people who are in positions of political power and authority.

What other biblical hero became a powerful political figure? *Gen. 41:41-44.*

Though, no doubt, the world of politics offers many potential pitfalls for any Christian, there have been those who have faithfully served in government positions. Indeed, even in our own church, Seventh-day Adventists have been involved in government. For a number of years a Seventh-day Adventist Christian served as the prime minister of Uganda. In Papua New Guinea, Seventh-day Adventists form a sizable percentage of the population, and, thus, it should not surprise us that there are many church members in high government positions. The same is true for several of the small island states in the Pacific. And even in countries where Adventists are less numerous when compared to the size of the population, we now find Seventh-day Adventists as members of Parliament or in other high positions.

Think about this: We believe God's law is a transcript of His character; that is, the law He has given us reflects the kind of God He is. With this idea in mind, why would we be better off living in a nation where Christians are involved in the political process, the very process that originates the laws of the country? At the same time, what potential dangers arise from those who seek to use government power to promote a religious agenda?

Obedience, Yes . . . But (*Acts 5:29, Rom. 13:1-5*).

Read Romans 13:1-5 and 1 Peter 2:13-15. What attitude toward political leaders do they admonish Christians to have?

Read Acts 5:29 and Romans 13:7. How do these verses help us better understand the texts quoted in the previous question?

There's no question that Christians, in whatever land they are in, should be good citizens, obeying the laws of their country. At the same time, as followers of the Lord, they answer to a higher Power, One greater than the government, to whom they are to give all due honor and respect, tribute, and custom (*see Rom. 13:6, 7*). At the same time, we must not forget that Paul and Peter died at the hands of the very authorities they were telling their people to obey. Obviously, then, respect for authority and obedience to the government have their limits.

Indeed, one powerful example comes from the history of the United States. In the nineteenth century, when the issue of slavery was dividing the Christians in the United States, Ellen G. White made it no secret as to where she stood.

"When the laws of men conflict with the word and law of God, we are to obey the latter, whatever the consequences may be. The law of our land requiring us to deliver a slave to his master, we are not to obey; and we must abide the consequences of violating this law. The slave is not the property of any man. God is his rightful master, and man has no right to take God's workmanship into his hands, and claim him as his own."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 201, 202.

Throughout the years, there have been many examples of civil disobedience, of people purposely violating the law of their land in order to bring about political change. What potential dangers await Christians who get involved in such action? At the same time, what situations might exist where their Christian duty demands they get involved?

Paying Taxes (*Matt. 22:15-21*).

Few people, if any, like to pay high taxes. But in any modern society, the state must have large amounts of money to pay for the things a government is expected to provide: education, basic health care, roads, tunnels, bridges, police, armed forces, and so on. We may question whether the taxes should be as high as they often are, but we cannot question the legitimacy of being taxed.

What did both Jesus and Paul say about the legitimacy of taxation by the authorities? *Matt. 22:15-21; Rom. 13:6, 7.*

The tax referred to in Matthew 22 was “payable into the imperial exchequer, imposed on every inhabitant of the country from the time of puberty until the age of sixty-five. It was resented by the Jews as a repeated reminder of the fact that they were subject to foreign power in their own land.

“The attitude to the payment of taxes remained a moot issue in the early church. Paul finds it still necessary, nearly thirty years later than this, to lay down the rule for Christians. The authority of the state is divinely ordained, and the payment of taxes is to be made ‘for the sake of conscience.’”—Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Oxford, Eng.: Basil Blackwell, 1981), p. 439.

What other principle comes into play when we deal with our taxes? *Luke 16:10-12, 2 Cor. 13:7.*

We must show honesty and integrity in all our financial dealings. This principle also extends to what we can receive from or must pay to the government. It is dishonest to claim a benefit to which we are not entitled, and it is just as wrong to withhold from *Caesar* what is his due.

Of course, we may use all legitimate means to lower our taxes. But making false claims and defrauding the government are as much a dishonesty as stealing from our employer or from our neighbor. A Christian cannot be expected to smile when his or her taxes are higher than expected, but he or she can be expected to be honest.

Suppose you have cheated on your taxes in the past. What can you do to make restitution?

Promoting Christian Values

The Seventh-day Adventist Church always has been strongly opposed to any interference by the state in the affairs of churches and other religious communities and, vice versa, the meddling by organized religion in matters of government. Individual members may choose to serve their country in a high office, but the Adventist Church believes that, as a corporate body, it should stay away from politics.

This does not mean, however, that the church has no interest in the values that are promoted in society and that it should not make its voice heard on moral issues that affect society. It would be wrong to impose some of our values on others, but it would be equally wrong not to present a strong witness with regard to the values we believe would make the world a better place in which to live. It is not always an easy balance to find.

What examples can we find in the Bible of faithful followers of the Lord who sought to bring about a change in government policy?

Exod. 5:1-3

Esther 7:1-7

Dan. 2:24-27

Besides these examples, the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, is filled with examples of the prophets attempting to influence government policy; that is, to try to get the rulers to turn away from apostasy and to follow the Lord. Of course, the times back then were radically different from any we face today. Nevertheless, there's nothing wrong with Christians seeking to use their influence toward helping bring about positive moral and social changes. The difficult questions arise, however, concerning just what changes a church should seek to bring about and how a church should implement these changes. Not everything that's sinful should be made illegal, a distinction Christians in all ages have not always understood. Where to draw the line has been and still is a difficult question for the church to answer. Thus, as mentioned earlier, this is a topic in which *sanctified caution* must be used.

What have been your own attitudes toward church involvement in politics? Do you tend to be an aggressive advocate of involvement, or do you think the church should shy away from these issues? What reasons do you have for the position you take?

Further Study: "Christ's reply was no evasion, but a candid answer to the question. Holding in His hand the Roman coin, upon which were stamped the name and image of Caesar, He declared that since they were living under the protection of the Roman power, they should render to that power the support it claimed, so long as this did not conflict with a higher duty. But while peaceably subject to the laws of the land, they should at all times give their first allegiance to God."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 602.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Ellen White was very active in the temperance movement in the United States. In fact, she was so strongly in favor of banning alcohol (prohibition) that she encouraged people to vote for prohibition—even if the vote was held on Sabbath. “‘Shall we vote for prohibition?’ she asked. ‘Yes, to a man, everywhere,’ she replied, ‘and perhaps I shall shock some of you if I say, If necessary, vote on the Sabbath day for prohibition if you cannot at any other time.’”—A. L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Lonely Years* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1984), vol. 1, p. 160. Discuss the implications of her stance in the context of this week’s lesson.
- ② Is it legitimate, or even a duty, for the church to speak out on some moral issues, even if this may draw the church into a political debate?
- ③ Though living at a time of great political corruption, Jesus said very little about the political issues of His day. What lessons can we draw from His example? What lessons should we not draw from that example?

Summary: Christians are citizens of the heavenly kingdom first, but they are most definitely also citizens of their own country and are to accept their part of the responsibility all citizens should share. The principle of rendering to Caesar what is his and to God what is God's gives us a broad outline from which Christians are to work in whatever land they reside.

Two-Banana War

by BONNIE NORTON and TREVOR ROBINSON

Too often it takes very little to start a war, and in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, it took only two bananas. When two Adventist pilots flew into an isolated village in the highlands of PNG, they discovered almost the entire village burned to the ground. Slowly they pieced together the story.

About two weeks earlier two friends from the village had gone to Port Moresby, the major city on the southern coast. One man had two bananas, but the other man had brought nothing to eat. In the morning Friend A awoke to discover one of his bananas was missing. Friend B denied having taken the banana, but Friend A was not convinced. In his mind he vowed that he would get revenge for the stolen banana.

The night that the two men returned to their village, Friend A sneaked out and set Friend B's hut on fire. The grass-mat sides and grass roof erupted into a ball of flame and burned to the ground in minutes. Thankfully, no one was killed. But Friend B knew who had done this and he vowed revenge.

The next night Friend B set Friend A's hut afire. Friend A called his clan members together, and that night they set fire to all the huts that belonged to Friend B's clan. In turn, Friend B and his clan set fire to clan A's huts. The remaining villagers could not stand to watch the excitement, so they took sides. Friend A's supporters set fire to Friend B's supporters' huts, and Friend B's supporters set fire to Friend A's supporters' huts. Soon nothing was standing except the little Adventist church.

Even the church seemed doomed when a man ran toward it with a burning torch in his hand. Then suddenly the man tripped and fell. He landed on a sharp stick poking out of the ground. The raging villagers stopped in their tracks. "God is watching out for His church!" they cried. "Which one of us would dare set fire to God's church?"

And so, if you fly into that village today, you will see our lone little Adventist church standing amidst a burned-out village. It stands as a reminder that amidst human frailties and passions, God stands waiting to change hearts and lives into the likeness of His Son.

BONNIE NORTON lives in Goroka, Papua New Guinea, with her husband, Adventist Aviation Services pilot Bill Norton. TREVOR ROBINSON works as a nurse at Sydney Adventist Hospital and is a missionary pilot in his free time.

Christ's Other Sheep



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: John 10:16; John 13:34, 35; 1 Corinthians 13; 2 Pet. 1:12; Rev. 14:1-12.

Memory Text: "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16, NIV).

However committed we should be to our message, we mustn't read more into it than is there, such as the belief that we alone as Seventh-day Adventists are saved. That view has not, nor has ever been, the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church: "We recognize those agencies that lift up Christ before men as a part of the divine plan for evangelization of the world, and we hold in high esteem Christian men and women in other communions who are engaged in winning souls to Christ."—*General Conference Working Policy* (1999–2000), p. 494, Policy O 100, art. 1. The question for us this week is How should we relate to these other Christians, those who, for all we know, have been redeemed by the blood of Christ?

The Week at a Glance: If you don't have to be an Adventist to be saved, why should we seek to reach other Christians with our beliefs? What advantages does our faith give us over those who might be Christians but in another denomination? How should we relate to other Christians?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 21.

Other Sheep

Read John 10:16. What point was Jesus making here? (Keep in mind to whom He was speaking.) What principle can we, today, pull from His words, especially in the basic context of this week's lesson?

For any of us to proclaim dogmatically who is or is not saved is to play God. It is to take prerogatives that belong only to Him. The Lord alone knows the heart; the Lord alone can judge motives; the Lord alone knows those who are His. As Seventh-day Adventists, we are called to preach our message to the world; we are not called to pass judgment upon who is or is not saved.

"God has children, many of them, in the Protestant churches, and a large number in the Catholic churches, who are more true to obey the light and to do [to] the very best of their knowledge than a large number among Sabbathkeeping Adventists who do not walk in the light."—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 386.

What are the following texts saying that help reinforce the point the Lord made in John 10:16?

Mark 9:38-40

Acts 10:35

2 Tim. 2:19

The fact is that, all over the world, the Lord has His faithful people, those who are living in accordance with all the light they have. Our job, in a sense, is to give them more light, to lead them into light that points more directly to Jesus Christ and the events surrounding His return. All people, no matter of what faith, need to hear what we have to say. How people respond is, basically, between them and God. All we can do is preach, teach, and reveal to people in our lives the love and grace of God.

If you don't have to be an Adventist to be saved, then what's the purpose of trying to evangelize? Keep in mind Revelation 14:12 as you answer.

Present Truth

How did you answer the last question in Sunday's study? If you don't have to be an Adventist to be saved, then why should we bother even trying to witness to Christians of other denominations? After all, salvation comes only from Jesus Christ and what He did for humanity at the Cross; it doesn't come from joining any particular religious community, including our own. Thus, why bother witnessing to Christians in churches other than our own?

Read 2 Peter 1:12. What insights does that, though expressed in a context different from ours today, give us regarding our Seventh-day Adventist message and the need for us to spread it around the world?

The fact remains that no one else is preaching what we as Seventh-day Adventists are preaching. And this point becomes important, especially in the context of the last days, when the whole world is to be divided into those who fit the description in Revelation 14:12 and those who don't.

Read Revelation 14:1-12. What's at stake here?

As Seventh-day Adventists, we have been called to preach to everyone the three angels' messages of Revelation 14. Christ's other sheep need to know the things we know; they need to understand how the deep issues in the great controversy between Christ and Satan are going to be manifested at the close of time. We have been called to point these people not only to the texts that make prominent the "faith of Jesus" but to the "commandments of God," with the special emphasis on the fourth commandment. Again, because we don't know the hearts of anyone, we must tell everyone—"faithful Christians" in other denominations—the present-truth message as found in Revelation 14. They need to know what we know, especially as we near the closing crisis.

Read Revelation 18:4. Whom is the Lord calling out of Babylon, and why? How does this text help us better understand how we are to relate to faithful Christians of other denominations?

The Adventist Difference: Part 1

However important the issues surrounding the mark of the beast (as depicted in Revelation 14), our message isn't just limited to warnings about end-time persecution. There's so much we have been given that can be a blessing in a very practical and personal way now. That's why we must share it, even with Christians of other denominations.

Below are some texts that are tied in with our message. Write down some of the benefits we have, here and now, from understanding these important truths:

Exod. 20:8-11

Eccles. 9:10

Mal. 3:8-10

Rom. 8:34; Heb. 8:1, 2

1 Cor. 6:19

Though, of course, some of these truths are understood, to some degree, by various Christians, we alone have them tied nicely into a complete package. And, indeed, these special *Adventist* truths don't depict mere marginal differences with other Christians. They represent important biblical concepts, and people who do not know about them miss out on something that can make a major difference in their Christian experience. The Adventist message helps us to know where we are in human history. It unveils the great-controversy perspective, which shows us the larger picture of what God is doing for our rebellious planet. It tells us about the ongoing heavenly ministry of Jesus Christ and the hope He presents for us as erring sinners.

The Adventist message also helps us to follow through on our commitment to Christ in very concrete ways: in finding physical and spiritual rest on God's holy day, in living a life of faithful stewardship of all that has been entrusted to us, and in learning how to take care of our bodies while we're still in this mortal clay.

If asked by a Christian of another denomination how the Adventist faith is different from what most other evangelical Christians believe, what would you say?

The Adventist Difference: Part 2

Just because someone is a Christian doesn't mean there's no more truth for him or her to learn. On the contrary. Many of Paul's letters were written to Christians, often on the assumption that these people already knew the Lord and were already in the faith. Indeed, most of the New Testament was written to those already in the faith. Nevertheless, that didn't stop Paul (and the others) from giving the churches more light.

Read Romans 1:1-7, Galatians 1:1-5, Ephesians 1:1-4, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. How do these texts help affirm the above paragraph?

As we relate to other Christians, we must remember: The issue isn't that we judge who's saved and who isn't (remember the Ellen White quote in Sunday's section); rather, the issue is, Do we have something to say, not just to the world at large but to other Christians? The answer, of course, is that we most definitely do.

For instance, millions of Christians believe the dead go right to heaven or right to hell immediately at death. Others believe in purgatory, where the dead are purged from worldliness before entering into heaven. Most of these people have no protection, therefore, against spiritualism of any kind, and who knows how many fear that right now some loved ones are suffering the flames of eternal torment?

Others believe final events will unfold with a massive Mideast war, in which some future antichrist power will make a pact with the Jews in Israel, an event that will begin a seven-year tribulation period, before which all true Christians are taken to heaven. Most who believe this way have no concept as to how final events regarding Rome, America, and the issue of the Sabbath will unfold.

All over the world, many Christians have no knowledge of health principles; thus, they eat, drink, and live like so much of the non-Christian world.

Millions of others believe salvation can be found in Jesus only through the mediation of their church body and that they must perform various works in order for the merits of Christ to be applied to them.

Most of the Christian world totally ignore not just the seventh-day Sabbath but the whole concept of a serious rest day. Not only do they miss out on the spiritual blessings of the Sabbath but they also miss out on the physical renewal that Sabbath keeping offers.

What other things do we as Seventh-day Adventists teach that could be a blessing, even now, to other Christians?

Love One Another

"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34, 35).

Read the above quote, the words of Jesus. How are all to know who are Christ's disciples? How well have His disciples followed that command?

There's no question: Christians are to show their love to one another. Sadly, that has hardly been the case. History is filled with examples not just of hatred between different churches but of violence, as well.

Whatever the immediate context of Christ's words, we can hardly believe they meant we were to love only those of our own denomination, whatever that denomination or church body happens to be. Love should know no denominational boundaries and certainly not be limited only to those who know the truth. Indeed, there's no more powerful witness for truth than the love compelled and generated by that truth.

Of course, loving someone isn't the same as agreeing to his or her beliefs; rather, it's acknowledging the value of this person in the sight of God and the commonality we have as followers of Jesus, however different our expressions might at the present time be.

As Seventh-day Adventists, with the understanding we have been given of God's love for us, particularly as revealed in the context of present truth, we should be the most loving of all Christians. And that's because to whom much has been given much is expected, and because we have been given much, we should give much, not just to the world at large but to our brothers and sisters in other churches, as well. And nothing we can give means anything without love.

Examine your own relationship with Christians in other churches. Do you look down on them? Do you see anything in them that you could learn from them? Do you feel a need to tell them what we know? Based on what we've studied this week, what changes, if any, in your attitude toward them should you make?

Further Study: Ellen G. White has a lot to say about our attitude to other Christians. See, for instance, *Evangelism*, section 17, "Laboring for Special Classes," pp. 552–586.

"Our ministers should seek to come near to the ministers of other denominations. Pray for and with these men, for whom Christ is interceding. A solemn responsibility is theirs. As Christ's messengers, we should manifest a deep, earnest interest in these shepherds of the flock." —Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 78.

"You may have opportunity to speak in other churches. In improving these opportunities, remember the words of the Saviour, 'Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.' Do not arouse the malignity of the enemy by making denunciatory speeches. Thus you will close doors against the entrance of truth. Clear-cut messages are to be borne. But guard against arousing antagonism. There are many souls to be saved. Restrain all harsh expressions. In word and deed be wise unto salvation, representing Christ to all with whom you come in contact. Let all see that your feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace and good will to men. Wonderful are the results we shall see if we enter into the work imbued with the Spirit of Christ. Help will come in our necessity if we carry the work forward in righteousness, mercy, and love. Truth will triumph, and bear away the victory." —Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, pp. 563, 564.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Imagine that you are given the pulpit in another church; it will be your only opportunity to preach there. What would you say, what wouldn't you say, and why?
- ② Is it wrong to worship with Christians in their church on Sunday, or not? Justify your answer.

Summary: All our relationships with other Christians should be marked by warm respect for them as brothers and sisters in the Lord. But, at the same time, we must also be sure of our reason for existence as Seventh-day Adventists, and we must be ready, when the right opportunity arises, to tell them the things we believe that they need to know. And, just as important, they need to see in our lives the reality of our experience with Christ, a reality that will be manifested by our unconditional love.

Drug Addict Finds Jesus

by J. H. ZACHARY

For ten miserable years Svetlana was a drug addict. She searched for ways to overcome her addictions, but even medical professionals could not help her. Desperate, Svetlana prayed, "God, if You exist, please help me." God heard her prayers, and she felt the stranglehold of drugs begin to weaken.

Svetlana sought out a church. She hoped to find someone there who would talk with her, pray with her, and help her.

But not even one person talked to her. Disappointed, she left.

Svetlana became discouraged. Even though drugs no longer had a hold on her, she still searched for peace.

Eventually she turned to alcohol, and she quickly sank into another addiction. When she contracted tuberculosis, she gave up hope and prepared to die.

One day some Adventist neighbors visited her and offered to help her. But she had heard that Adventists were a sect, and she refused their help. For three years she refused their offers of help and prayer. Finally, in desperation, she agreed to listen to them and let them pray for her. She went to church with them.

Svetlana was touched when the church members prayed for her by name. After church one woman gave her a Bible and a copy of *Steps to Christ*. As she read them her life began to change.

When Svetlana went to her next doctor's appointment, the doctor found no trace of tuberculosis. She had been healed.

The emptiness that Svetlana had tried to fill with drugs and alcohol was now filled with the peace of God. Her old life was transformed, and her former friends noticed. "What has happened to you? You are like a different person," they told her.

Recently Svetlana was baptized. Because the nearest Adventist church is some distance from her home, she has opened her home for a small group of believers to meet on Sabbaths. Half of the people who attend the services are drug addicts. These former friends have seen the change in Svetlana and want to receive God's help in their lives, as well.

One of her former addict friends has accepted Jesus as Savior and now is drug free. "I thank God for the Adventists who did not give up on me when I refused their help. Now Jesus is giving me the opportunity to help my friends find a new life also," Svetlana testifies.

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How to Relate to Non-Christians



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom. 1:18-20; 2:14-16; Phil. 2:5-11; Rev. 14:6, 7.

Memory Text: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, NIV).

Many people today no longer want to hear about absolute truth. The various religions, including the Christian faith, are seen as equally valid ways to reach the beyond. Many claim that, in essence, we all worship the same God—we simply have different historically and culturally conditioned ways of doing so. Everyone should be allowed to have his or her own truth. And no belief system should claim superiority over another.

As Christians, of course, we reject that concept. The very nature of our Christianity demands we do. We maintain that the religion of Christ is unique and that we must continue to call people everywhere to become His disciples.

The question, then, remains for us: How should we relate to those who are not of the Christian faith? This week we look at some broad principles regarding this important topic.

The Week at a Glance: Why, as Christians, must we reject the notion that all religions are valid? How should we treat non-Christians? What's the best way to witness to them? Why should we witness to them? To whom does the three angels' messages go?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 28.

Incurably Religious

All through human history, in almost every culture, in every age, even in the most adverse and trying conditions, humans have had belief in some sort of god or gods. Through the centuries the question has been asked: Where does this belief come from? Was religion “invented” or “discovered”? Does humanity’s belief in God originate in humanity itself, as a projection of some inner need? Has humankind always been religious? And if so, why so?

As Christians, we believe that religion originated with God, who has revealed Himself to us in various ways, the greatest revelation being that of Jesus Christ coming in the flesh, where He revealed to us the love and self-sacrificing character of the Lord.

Not everyone, though, has heard or known the good news of the love and character of our Lord. And yet, God has not forsaken these people, either. Remember, at the Cross, Christ died for the sins of the whole world (*1 John 2:2*); His death, by default, excluded no one (*John 3:16*); He suffered death for every person (*Heb. 2:9*). No one was left out, not even those who have never heard, nor will ever hear, of Christ’s death, at least in this life. Why would the Lord die in their behalf if they weren’t, somehow, offered the option of salvation?

Read Romans 1:18-20, 2:14-16. What do these texts tell us about those who haven’t heard directly about Jesus and the salvation He offers? Are they still accountable to God, and, if so, why?

Those who consciously turn their backs on God do so at their eternal risk, that’s for certain. But many have always lived in *darkness* through no fault of their own. Yet, even these people have had a limited revelation of God and, thus, will be held responsible only for what they knew in their deepest of hearts.

English poet Samuel Coleridge once suggested that instead of locking criminals in jail, the offenders should be placed in nature, where, seeing the natural world’s “soft influences,” they would turn from their evil ways. However nice an idealized and romantic view of the natural world this is, what are its flaws? What are the limits of what we can know about God, truth, and morality from nature alone?

The Universal Claims

Read John 14:6. What is Jesus saying? Why would many people, especially in today's world, find such words so hard to accept?

The religion of the Bible knows nothing of the notion of relativism, of each person seeking his or her own version of *truth*. There is only one God, one Creator, one Redeemer, one Lawgiver, and one means of salvation. Given the very nature of what we believe as Christians—that *all* the world is fallen into sin and that at the Cross Jesus Christ bore the sins of *all* people upon Himself—it's hard to see how there can be different *truths* for different folk. The very claims of the Bible regarding Creation, Redemption, sin, are universal, encompassing every human being. Given these claims, then, it's not realistic to assume that every other spiritual or religious path is valid, as long as those who are on these paths act from a sincere and loving heart.

Look up the following texts. What point do they make about the universality of the claims of the Bible? Gen. 1:1, Rom. 3:23, 5:12, Heb. 2:9, Rev. 20:13.

What all this means, then, is that we, as Christians, should preach to non-Christians, sharing with them what we believe. If Christianity is true, then other religions have to be false. This doesn't mean there isn't some good in these faiths, and we certainly aren't in a position to judge the hearts of others, whatever their beliefs. Instead, because of the universal claims of Christianity, we must, in meekness, humility, and love tell others the good news of a loving God who sent His own Son into human flesh and in that flesh ransomed the world from sin. The claims of the Cross included everyone; everyone, therefore, must be told about it.

How do you respond to someone who makes the claim, "Well, your religion is just *your* truth; I have my own truth"? What's wrong with that statement?

Christ—the Only Way (*Acts 4:12*).

It is often pointed out that other religions also have their heroes, just as Christianity has Christ. And, indeed, we must have great respect for Muhammad, who insisted—in a highly polytheistic society—upon the worship of one God. Who can't help respecting and admiring the Gautama Buddha's compassion and sensitivity to human suffering? And there's much good, too, in the profound teachings of Confucius.

But these people do not begin to compare with Jesus Christ, not in who they were nor in what they accomplished, nor even claimed to accomplish, for the world. To suggest that Jesus and these other people are simply different versions of good men teaching good things is to pervert the basic teaching of Scripture grossly. The Bible teaches that Jesus is the Savior of the world. Either we accept the claim fully, or we reject it fully. It's hard to see, with such a claim, how there can be any middle ground, any compromise.

What fundamental truth must we recognize when comparing Christianity with other religions? *Acts 4:12; see also Isa. 45:5.*

It's precisely because of the universality of what Christ has done that, as Christians—having now been redeemed by Jesus (*Eph. 1:7, Col. 1:14, Heb. 9:12*)—we should be motivated to tell others in order that they, by faith, can share in the promises of God made to them, as well.

"How then should we relate to those of other religions? First of all, we must treat them as fellow human beings—with respect and honor. . . . We need to approach them with openness, ready to listen and learn. In our finiteness we do not have all that we need at any point in our experience. Different points of emphasis may help to strengthen our own experience. Nor should we apologize for what we believe or our conviction that we have truth in having Jesus Christ. Never should we hesitate to witness to another. But our efforts must always reflect humility and avoid a spirit of triumphalism or a subtle attitude of imperialism."—S. Kubo, *The God of Relationships* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Pub. Assn., 1993), p. 138.

How do you show respect for people and for their personal faith and integrity, while at the same time rejecting their beliefs? Or can you?

All Things to All Men

Though the truths of what we believe are eternal and unchanging, the context in which we spread those truths is always changing. The approach one would take with an Indian shaman wouldn't be the same as with a New Age German banker; the witness to a Canadian Inuit living in the far end of the Yukon wouldn't be the same as with a Singaporean business executive. Though the message is the same, the methods often vary.

How did the apostle Paul apply this basic principle in his ministry? *Acts 16:1-3, 1 Cor. 9:19-23.* How does that explain his actions in Jerusalem? *Acts 21:17-26.* What principle of ministry do we see here by Paul's words and actions? Remember, too, that he is the same man who wrote Galatians 1:8, 9.

"More than 2 billion of the world's population will hear the gospel only if cross-cultural missionaries will make themselves servants and become all things to them. From tribes in Africa to heavy-metal rockers in the 'jungles' of New York City, from the sophisticated professional to the troubled teenager next door, people desperately need to hear the gospel in a context they can understand. Who will humble themselves and become incarnate as slaves for the sake of these souls? Who will go through the hard, risky business of contextualization so others may clearly hear the gospel?"—Jon Dybdahl, "Cross-Cultural Adaptation: How to Contextualize the Gospel," *Ministry* (November 1992), p. 17.

In what perfect way was this principle of reaching people where they are realized in the ministry of our Savior? *Phil. 2:5-11.*

Christ came to meet us where we are. He assumed human form. He expressed Himself in human language. He became one of us. If, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the church wants to reach the modern world with the message of Christ, it will have to meet people where they are and speak the language of the people of today and not of a century ago.

Christ's Method Alone

We've tried to show this week a crucial point regarding the universality of our faith; we can't be true to what we believe without believing that these truths that offer us so much hope, offer that same hope to every other human being. The nature of the claims cry out for us to tell them to others. Indeed, that's an essential component of who we are as Seventh-day Adventists. It's also why, through the grace of God, we are in almost every country of the world.

Read Revelation 14:6, 7, the first angel's message. What does it tell us about whom we are to preach to?

That's every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, which would include those of every faith. Our commission is set before us in no uncertain terms.

At the same time, we must remember that no matter where people live, no matter their religious faith, no matter their beliefs, we are all the same, beings created in the image of God, beings who are sinners, beings who have basic needs. As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we believe that the light that God has given us can help meet those needs better than anything else the world has to offer. The better we seek to meet those needs, the more we can reveal to the non-Christian world the love and character of God, and the more effective our witness will be.

Look at this quote from Ellen White: "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.' "—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143. Why would an approach like this be effective for whatever people group we were seeking to reach?

The bottom line is that we live in a world filled with hurting, suffering people; the good news is that we worship and know the Lord, who cares about these people and their suffering. As Adventists, we can minister to them, even from our own personal sufferings, and point them to something better in this life, as well as to the only One who can give them eternal life. This is our calling; to do anything else would be unfaithful to that calling.

Talk to those in your church about ways to reach out to the non-Christian faiths in your own community. What practical things could you do to make a positive impact for the Lord?

Further Study: "Even among the heathen are those who have cherished the spirit of kindness; before the words of life had fallen upon their ears, they have befriended the missionaries, even ministering to them at the peril of their own lives. Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 638.

"There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice. Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit."—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 458.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Look at that last quote from Ellen White. How can your church, as a whole, better manifest those principles in your community?
- ② To what extent do believers hold the eternal destiny of non-believers in their hands? Why did God choose to involve human beings in His plan of salvation?

Summary: As Christians, we do not believe that our faith is just one path of many that ultimately leads to God. The Bible makes it clear that there's only one path, and that's through Jesus. Thus, it becomes crucial that we witness to those of every other faith, and the most effective way to do that is through kind, loving, self-sacrificing service. That's how we are to relate to non-Christians. It's also the essence of who we should be as Seventh-day Adventists.

Freed by Christ

By ROMBEK SOKIRI LOGWORONG

"Do not burn us!" the evil spirits commanded Abuk Deng as she ironed her employer's clothes. Abuk tried to ignore the spirits and continue with her work, but the spirits threw her to the ground and tormented her for several minutes before finally leaving her alone.

After the death of her husband, Abuk and her children fled to northern Sudan to escape the ongoing civil war in the south. She left everything of value in the village, taking only what she could fit into a small suitcase. She carefully packed the eagle claws her husband had given her before he died. "Take good care of them," he said, "for they will protect the family from harm."

Abuk and her children arrived in Khartoum, and she found work as a maid. But soon evil spirits took possession of her and demanded sacrifices. But because she had no regular source of income and could not buy animals for the spirits, they made her life miserable, disturbing her at work and threatening her. Abuk feared that the spirits would make her or her children sick.

She longed for deliverance from the spirits, and although she was not a Christian, she let some Christians pray for her. But nothing happened. Then an Adventist relative learned of Abuk's problem and asked the pastor to pray for her. Abuk was not sure it would work, but she was willing to try anything.

When the pastor and church members visited Abuk, they asked her when the spirits had begun tormenting her. Abuk mentioned the eagle claws, and the pastor explained to her that the eagle claws symbolized the presence of the evil spirits and must be destroyed. He asked her to get them. As Abuk retrieved the claws from the small suitcase, she screamed loudly and started to shout at the visitors in unknown languages. The pastor and church members prayed, asking God to set Abuk free from the power of Satan. They continued praying until Abuk stopped shouting.

Abuk gave the pastor the eagle claws, and he destroyed them. Since then Abuk has been free from the evil spirits that had tormented her. Today she is a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Khartoum, Sudan. She no longer fears the evil spirits, for she has discovered the power of Jesus Christ to free her from physical and spiritual bondage. She knows the truth of the verse, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36, NIV).

ROMBEK SOKIRI LOGWORONG serves as accountant in the Egypt Field. Abuk Deng is a pseudonym.

Loving Our Enemies?



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Jer. 31:31-34, Matt. 5:44, 6:12, Luke 6:27-36, 23:1-34.*

Memory Text: “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (*Romans 12:18, NIV*).

Some people have or claim to have only friends and no enemies; some have no friends but only enemies. Most of us are somewhere in the middle: We have friends, but we also do not get along with everybody. This may seem a simple fact of life, but, as Christians, we cannot simply shrug our shoulders if our relationship with some others is disrupted or if we harbor feelings of distrust, even antipathy, toward some people. Nor should it leave us indifferent if some people have problems with us. The Christian message of love has relevance for our relationship with those whom we dislike or, even worse, might even feel hateful toward.

We are admonished to “turn from evil and do good” and to “seek peace and pursue it” in every way we can (*Ps. 34:14, NIV*). Though it is important not to forget the larger picture, this week we’ll focus on ourselves and the way we relate to those with whom we have (shall we put it kindly?) unresolved issues.

The Week at a Glance: What does Christ’s example on the cross tell us about loving our enemies? How can we love our enemies? Why should we do so? Why must we forgive before we can love?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 4.

Jesus and His Enemies

"Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (*Luke 23:34*).

Read Luke 23:1-34, reviewing the events that lead to Christ uttering these incredible words. In light of all that was happening to Jesus, how He was being treated, how He was being spoken to, how He was being mocked, how He was being lied about, what powerful lesson can we learn from this example regarding how we treat our enemies?

Unrewarded, unaccepted, reviled, mocked, tortured, Jesus has every reason to hate those who treated Him as they did. And yet, amid His own sufferings, amid His own abasement, Jesus—forgetting self—prays for those who would, by most standards, be deemed His enemies. What an amazing testimony to God's love! What a powerful rebuke to our own pride, envy, and hateful attitudes toward others!

Some of history's cruellest and meanest characters have been able to manifest kindness and love to those who were kind and loving to them. Indeed, almost anyone can do that. But we see Jesus here living out a principle that reflects something greater: unconditional love, even to those who hate Him back. It's hard to imagine a more powerful witness to the world of the character of our God and His power to work in our lives.

This attitude, in a sense, reveals the essence of the Cross. "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (*Rom. 5:10*). In other words, despite our attitude toward God, He poured Himself out for us through the life and suffering of Jesus. And He did this even while we were sinners, even while we were alienated and estranged from Him.

With such an example before us, how could we do anything other than, through God's grace, seek to manifest that same principle ourselves?

Go back over Luke 23:1-34. In what similar ways have you been treated unfairly? How did you respond? What does your response, in contrast to Christ's, tell you about your own personal need to grow in grace?

Loving Our Enemies (*Matt. 5:44, Luke 6:27-36*).

Ghandi (1869–1948) once said, “It is easy enough to be friendly to one’s friends. But to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy is the quintessence of true religion.”—*Non-Violence in Peace and War* (New York: New Directions Pub. Corp., 1965), vol. 2, sect. 248. These words sound like an echo from the One who practiced, even more perfectly than Ghandi, what He preached.

What basic principle was given by Christ, which must govern our relationship with those who have turned against us? *Matt. 5:44, Luke 6:27-36*.

Having grown up in Galilee, an area renowned for its political unrest, and living in a land under occupation by a ruthless foreign power, Christ knew about civil unrest, war, tyranny, and enemies. When He began His work and challenged the beliefs and practices of the religious elite of His days, He inevitably made many bitter enemies. But He did, indeed, love His enemies, even when He was brutally arrested, flogged, and nailed to a cross (*Luke 23:34*).

Review the following texts, which spell out in more detail what loving our enemies implies: Proverbs 24:17, 25:21, Matthew 5:38-42, Ephesians 4:26.

“We are to love our enemies with the same love that Christ manifested toward His enemies by giving His life to save them. Many may say, ‘This is a hard commandment; for I want to keep just as far as I can from my enemies.’ But acting in accordance with your own inclination would not be carrying out the principles that our Saviour has given. ‘Do good,’ He says, ‘to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. . . .’ This scripture illustrates one phase of Christian perfection. While we were yet enemies of God, Christ gave His life for us. We are to follow His example.”—Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry*, pp. 253, 254.

We clearly have been told by inspiration to love our enemies. Now, if someone were to ask you, “How do you love your enemies?” what would you respond?

Increase Our Faith

For the past two days, we've looked at one of the loftiest principles in Scripture: love, not for those who love us back but for our enemies. We have not only Christ's words to that effect but His example, too, manifested most clearly at the Cross, unquestionably the greatest revelation of that principle ever revealed in the universe.

It's one thing to be told what to do, to know what to do, or even to want to do it; it's another, however, to do it. Here, perhaps more than anywhere else in our lives, we need power from above.

Read Matthew 18:21, 22 and Luke 17:3-5. What question do the disciples ask Jesus? How does He answer? How do they respond to His answer?

"Lord, increase our faith." Who of us couldn't relate to their request? Jesus here points them to a standard they are not used to, a standard that goes beyond what even many of the most forgiving people would aspire to—which is why their response is so sensible. They want to do this but realize they need something more than what they have in themselves at the moment to be able to do it. Thus, their appeal to Jesus for help.

Of course, faith is a gift (*Eph. 2:8*), but there's so much we can do to receive the gift, to multiply the gift, to strengthen the gift. Here's where a life of prayer, of devotion, and of meditation upon Christ all play a crucial role. Only as we surrender ourselves to the Lord, only as we reckon ourselves dead to self and sin (*Rom. 6:10, 11*), only as we allow the Lord to work in us (vs. 4), will we by God's grace be able to love our enemies, to pray for them, and to do good to them. Left to their own, our sinful, vengeful hearts will never allow us to love our enemies. That's why we need to surrender constantly to the Lord, and we can do that only by a conscious choice on our part to make such a surrender.

Who are your enemies? What makes them your enemies? If you're not loving them, what's the first step you could take in at least trying to?

The Grace of Forgiving (*Jer. 31:31-34, Matt. 6:12*).

Before we can love our enemies, we must forgive them; and before we can forgive, we must first learn to accept forgiveness. This is where the Christian life begins: the certainty of having been accepted by God and the assurance of forgiveness through faith in our risen Lord.

How does the Lord's Prayer remind us that we must, in turn, be willing to forgive those who have sinned against us? *Jer. 31:31-34, Matt. 6:12, Heb. 8:12*.

"If we really know Christ as our Savior our hearts are broken and cannot be hard, and we cannot refuse forgiveness. If you are refusing forgiveness to anybody I suggest that you have never been forgiven. . . . Pray to God and say, 'Forgive me O God as I forgive others because of what Thou hast done for me. All I ask is that Thou shouldst forgive me in the same manner; not to the same degree, because all I do is imperfect. In the same way, as it were, as Thou hast forgiven me, I am forgiving others. Forgive me as I forgive them because of what the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ has done in my heart.' "—D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1960), vol. 2, pp. 75, 76.

The author presents a crucial point. To truly forgive, we must understand how much we have been forgiven. Whatever others have done to us, is it worse than what our sins have done to the Lord? Hardly. The distance we have to cross in order to forgive others is almost nonexistent in contrast to the distance Christ, the eternal God, crossed in order to forgive us. This is a reality we must constantly keep before us if we are to forgive and then to love.

How does the Cross help us understand what our forgiveness cost God? *Isa. 53:4-6, Phil. 2:5-8*.

By dwelling on the Cross, by dwelling on the cost of our forgiveness, we can, through God's grace, come to the point where we can learn to forgive others, even those whom we might deem, and rightly so, our enemies.

Are you having trouble forgiving, much less loving, an enemy? Write down your understanding of what Christ suffered at the Cross in order to forgive you. Pray and meditate over just what He did in your behalf. See if it will not help open you up toward those who have earned your anger.

Why Should We Love Our Enemies?

"A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (*Prov. 15:1*).

Why should we love our enemies?

If you answered the above question, *Because God tells us to*, you have given probably the best answer a Christian can give. We should love our enemies, because our God has told us to, and if we are Christians, we obey the Lord.

But the Lord doesn't ask us to do things in a vacuum; there's usually a practical reason for what He asks, because He loves us and wants what's for our good. (*See Deut. 10:13*.) Thus, there's an incredible amount of practical, personal good that can come not just to our enemies but to ourselves by learning to love those whom we deem enemies. Think of how much different our world would be if we learned to love our enemies. It would be the closest thing to heaven we're ever going to find on this earth, at least for now.

Read Romans 12:20, 21 and 1 Thessalonians 5:15. What is Paul saying there? How do his words fit in with the overall theme of this week's lesson?

God has done so much for us. As Christians, we have so much reason to have hope, because we have the promise not only of all things working for good now but the promise of eternity in a whole new existence; one filled with love, peace, and prosperity, an existence we can't even begin to comprehend now. Thus, with such a promise before us, we, of all people, should be able to rise above the common hatreds that have poisoned this planet until it's a cauldron of hate, violence, and revenge. What better way to be salt, to be light, than to love our enemies, thus bearing a powerful witness to the world that we have something it desperately needs, and that, of course, is Jesus.

In your own situation, wherever you live, what changes would come about if all the Christians you knew, yourself included, started to love their enemies? Write out a paragraph imagining the changes.

Further Study: Read "The Measure of Forgiveness" in Ellen G. White's book *Christ's Object Lessons* (pp. 243–251). Note in particular the following statement:

"Our Lord teaches that matters of difficulty between Christians are to be settled within the church. They should not be opened before those who do not fear God. If a Christian is wronged by his brother, let him not appeal to unbelievers in a court of justice. Let him follow out the instruction Christ has given. Instead of trying to avenge himself, let him seek to save his brother. God will guard the interests of those who love and fear Him, and with confidence we may commit our case to Him who judges righteously."—Pages 248, 249.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Dwell more on this idea of the practical good that can come from loving our enemies. Discuss what this world would be like if this principle were to take hold of the world as quickly and as firmly as does the desire for revenge.
- ② Should the idea that in the end God will bring justice and punishment to evildoers play a role in helping us learn to love our enemies? Is it really love if we want God ultimately to punish them? How does Christ's prayer on the cross help answer that question?
- ③ Relatives of a murder or rape victim often say they will never be able to forgive the person who committed that heinous crime. How can one help someone in dealing with this very human and understandable reaction?

Summary: Many of us have enemies or are regarded by others as their enemies. It is important to analyze our relationships and ask ourselves why some relationships have broken down and what can be done to restore them. As Christians, we are challenged to build positive relationships, even with those we do not really like. Loving our enemies does not come naturally. Yet, if we realize how God always stands ready to forgive us, we should be prepared also to forgive "our debtors."

Not-So-Smart Solomon Wises Up

by DENNIS RODRIGUES

As a teenager Solomon was not so smart. He let his peers influence his decisions and began smoking and taking drugs. He experimented with every drug he could get, and often he grew weak because he was not eating. Drugs were all he cared for.

Solomon and his friends were always together, smoking and taking drugs. They formed a gang and often fought with other teens. Once when he was high on drugs, he picked up a machete, ready to strike his father. But a voice shouted to him, "Stop!" and he dropped the machete as if it were on fire.

"Help me, please!" he cried. His family took him to a mental hospital for treatment. But the hospital kept him for only a few days.

Solomon's grandmother prayed for him constantly and encouraged him to attend church with her and let God heal him. Solomon went, and there he felt God's love calling him. But he continued taking drugs for ten more years. Then Solomon's grandmother and his father died. The two people who had tried to help him were gone. Finally Solomon could run away from God no longer. He gave up and gave his life to God. It had taken him years to heed the voice of God.

Solomon did not know which church to attend. He tried several before he visited an Adventist church. There he watched the pastor baptize someone, and instantly he knew what he must do. He went to the pastor and asked for baptism. The pastor reviewed the doctrines with him and baptized Solomon.

Solomon's repentance was real. He serves his church and his God with joy and faithfulness as a deacon and an elder. Several members of his family have given their hearts to Christ because of his witness.

Recently he held his own evangelistic series and led seven people to Jesus.

He is trained as an accountant, but he has chosen simpler work that puts him in touch with people he can talk to about God. Solomon shares his faith on the bus, to strangers in the street. "For years I was compelled to take drugs; today I am by God compelled to preach," he says. He is eager to redeem the time he has left for God.

DENNIS RODRIGUES is a pastor living in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

Brothers and Sisters in the Faith



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Matt. 26:21-25; John 10:16; 17:11; Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:3, 13; Phil. 2:2.

Memory Text: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10, NIV).

As Seventh-day Adventists, we often refer to one another as "brother" and "sister." When overused, however, such terminology can, of course, easily become an empty phrase; and if used without care, it can, at times, create an awkwardness when nonmembers are around. Nonetheless, the idea that we are "brothers" and "sisters" in faith is something we should not lose, even if, at times, like all families, our relationship with our "brothers" and "sisters" faces hard challenges. Some of our spiritual siblings have traits we do not admire, and not every "brother" and "sister" always acts brotherly and sisterly toward each other. This is a fact of church life; we might as well get used to it.

Thus, as most of us who are church members could understand, there is ample reason to devote a week on the topic of our relationships with fellow believers, especially those who can try our patience and mercy to their limits.

The Week at a Glance: How did Paul describe the diversity amid the unity of the church? Around what should our core unity rest? What things may cause disunity among us? How was Christ's treatment of Judas an example in how we should respond to those among us who treat us badly?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 11.

One in Christ (*Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27*).

One of the greatest challenges facing our church is the question of unity. The church started as a movement among North Americans with a predominantly Protestant background. It then moved into Europe and gradually also into other parts of the world, encountering more and more different belief systems and cultures. Today the church has a presence in more than two hundred countries and is growing fast, particularly in the non-Western world. It is not hard to see how there is a continuous danger of growing apart or even fragmenting, unless we are determined to stay together. A sustained focus on unity is, therefore, needed more than ever as we face the challenges ahead. After all, how can we light the world with the glory of the three angels' messages if we are busy fighting among ourselves?

What is one of the favorite images of the apostle Paul to describe the nature of Christ's church? How does this image underline the essential aspect of unity? *Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27.*

"Paul . . . makes a very effective parallel with the church collectively being compared to the parts of the human body. The comparison was not original with Paul. Many ancient writers had made a similar point. . . . The Corinthians would therefore readily understand Paul's words, 'If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body' (*1 Cor. 12:15, NIV*). . . .

"The very weakest members . . . are indispensable; and, furthermore, the parts that we think are less honorable, we treat with special honor. For example, the vital organs (such as the heart, the kidneys, the lungs, the liver, and the stomach) are not visible, but life cannot exist without them."—W. Larry Richards, *The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier—1 Corinthians* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1997), pp. 216, 217.

How did the early church at its very beginning display the kind of unity God had intended? *Acts 1:14, 2:1, 4:32.*

How's your local church doing in terms of the kind of unity depicted by Paul or as in those verses in Acts? If you are divided in certain areas, what can you yourself do to help bring about a change?

The Beauty of Diversity

The McDonald's restaurant chain has tens of thousands of restaurants worldwide. Whether in Pakistan or in the U.S.A., in Hungary or in South Africa, you will find the golden arches. And you can be sure the product is always the same. The burgers will always have the same size and weight, and the milk shakes always come in three tastes and in the same size cups. Some might call this unity. But this kind of similarity has nothing to do with real unity; instead, this is uniformity, and there's an important distinction between the two. In our thinking about the unity of the church, we must be careful not to confuse uniformity with unity.

What are some of the characteristics of the unity that the church ought to display? What is emphasized, and what is not mentioned?
John 10:16; 17:11, 21; Eph. 4:3, 13; Phil. 2:2.

"The secret of true unity in the church and in the family is not diplomacy, not management, not a superhuman effort to overcome difficulties—though there will be much of this to do—but union with Christ."—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 179.

Ellen White's words, in the context of the texts listed above, are so crucial to an understanding of unity. We can come from different ethnic, national, religious, and economic backgrounds, but at the foot of the cross, we are all the same: sinners in need of God's grace.

And yet, the hand is not the foot, the foot is not the eye, and the eye is not the heart; all are different—all have different compositions, different functions, different roles. If the eyes demanded that the heart be like them, the body would soon be dead; if the heart demanded that the eyes be like them, the body would be blind.

Thus, because our church is so different—composed of various national, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, many of which have clashed over these differences—our unity must be found in something that, while not denying these differences, transcends them. And for us as Adventists, that must be Jesus Christ and the common mission He has given to us. This side of heaven national, ethic, and political differences will remain; but as Adventist Christians, with a common Savior, a common mission, a common message, we should seek, through God's grace, never to allow these things to disrupt the unity that God seeks for His church. Admittedly, this isn't always easy. But if we are called to love our enemies, we certainly should be able to love fellow church members, should we not?

If any ethnic, national, or political issues are dividing your church, what can you do to pull people to the Cross, the only true solution to the problem?

The Ugliness of Division (*Num. 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:11, 12*).

During the 2000 General Conference Session, Andrews University professor George R. Knight gave a thought-provoking speech about issues he sees as threatening the church. Among many other things, he said: “[If I were the devil,] I would get as many Adventists as possible to think tribally, nationally, and racially. I would make the church one big power struggle, without regard to mission or efficiency. Having made that statement, I hasten to add that there are injustices that need to be rectified and complex situations that can never be made completely straight. My plea is that even in the most difficult and unjust situations we need to behave as born-again sisters and brothers, able to discuss these things without losing sight of the mission of the church, which makes the issues meaningful in the first place.”—George R. Knight, “If I Were the Devil,” *Adventist Review* (January 2001), pp. 14, 15.

There are numerous causes for disunity in the church. State, in a few words, what the core issues were in the conflicts mentioned in the following Bible passages: Numbers 16:1-3; Acts 6:1, 2; 15:1, 2; 1 Cor. 1:11-17.

Who is in charge? Who will benefit more than others? And whose theology is correct? These are the most common causes (often in some combination) of division in a local church or in a denomination. The issues themselves can be quite legitimate. Social groups—and this includes spiritual organizations—need to determine how matters of leadership and authority must be dealt with. When an organization consists of various subgroups, there must be a mechanism to ensure that the interests of these groups are safeguarded. Real problems are not to be swept under the carpet. But those who profess to follow Christ and want to imitate His nature will choose a strategy in which prayerful dialogue, a desire to understand one another, patience, tolerance, and love are the key concepts.

Look at some of the problems listed in the above texts. There were power struggles, doctrinal differences, and ethnic tensions, even cliques. How little has changed over the centuries. Again, why must we all come to the Cross and be broken if these problems are ever to be resolved?

Servanthood Versus Power Play

To be a servant is not our idea of success. We see success in terms of influence, of power, of the ability to direct and control others. It seems to be part of human nature to make comparisons between ourselves and selected others, with the desire to come out on top.

What fundamental principle did Jesus state in response to the request from the mother of James and John for a place of special prestige for her sons? *Matt. 20:20-27.*

If you study the above verses carefully, you will see clearly the contrast between sinful humanity and a perfect God. Here is first a mother, zealous for the success of her children; then there are the other disciples, indignant at what they must deem a power play. And remember, these are all followers of Christ (the mother came worshiping Jesus); yet, greed, jealousy, and selfishness are unveiled.

All this is contrasted to Jesus, who not only spoke the principle of servanthood but, in a way that our finite minds can barely grasp, lived it.

Read Matthew 20:28. What is Jesus talking about? How did He express this principle in the most amazing manner?

No question, many of the things that divide or threaten to divide the church would vanish were we to take seriously Christ's words about being a servant to others. Being great, or chief, doesn't necessarily have anything to do with office or prestige. Yet, it can have a lot to do with power, not power as the world sees it but power to change lives, to bring healing, to reveal to others the love and character of God. And this comes through influence—of being a good example and of revealing to others the spirit of Christ. That's true power and greatness.

It's one thing to talk about being a servant; it's another to act in that role. What are some practical things that you could do that would express the principle of servanthood in your own church body? How, for instance, does the foot-washing service represent this principle?

Dealing With Difficult People

Have you heard of the 20-80 principle? It suggests that 20 percent of the people you have to deal with produce 80 percent of the problems. Ask personnel directors or customer-service directors what their experience is, and you will find them in agreement. Virtually all pastors will confess that a relatively small percentage of their parishioners give them most of their headaches. Yes, unfortunately, not all people are as lovable and likable as we would prefer them to be (of course, others might and with some justification say the same about us, as well). Some people provide a serious challenge to our Christian experience.

Read Mark 14:43, 44; Luke 22:3-6, 47, 48; John 18:3-7. What did Judas do to Jesus? Why was his act such an act of treachery?

Few people in history have gone to their grave with such infamy as Judas Iscariot, who, with his betrayal of Jesus, brought upon himself eternal ruin. And yet, even knowing what Judas would do, Jesus still sought to save him.

Read Matthew 26:21-25. What happened here that showed that Jesus was still trying to work with Judas?

"But Judas was not yet wholly hardened. Even after he had twice pledged himself to betray the Saviour, there was opportunity for repentance. At the Passover supper Jesus proved His divinity by revealing the traitor's purpose. He tenderly included Judas in the ministry to the disciples. But the last appeal of love was unheeded. Then the case of Judas was decided, and the feet that Jesus had washed went forth to the betrayer's work."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 720.

What a powerful testimony to us of how we should treat those who are, for better or for worse, among us. Indeed, who hasn't experienced personally how, sometimes, the most painful struggles we have are not with those whom we would deem our enemies but those whom we would deem otherwise our "brothers" and "sisters"? We have here an example from Jesus how we should respond.

Have you been betrayed by a Judas? If so, how can you, through the grace of Christ, respond as Christ did?

Further Study: Read the chapter "Who Is the Greatest" in Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 432–442.

"In these first disciples was presented marked diversity. They were to be the world's teachers, and they represented widely varied types of character. In order successfully to carry forward the work to which they had been called, these men, differing in natural characteristics and in habits of life, needed to come into unity of feeling, thought, and action. This unity it was Christ's object to secure. To this end He sought to bring them into unity with Himself. The burden of His labor for them is expressed in His prayer to His Father, 'That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us;' 'that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me.' John 17:21, 23. His constant prayer for them was that they might be sanctified through the truth; and He prayed with assurance, knowing that an Almighty decree had been given before the world was made. He knew that the gospel of the kingdom would be preached to all nations for a witness; He knew that truth armed with the omnipotence of the Holy Spirit would conquer in the battle with evil, and that the bloodstained banner would one day wave triumphantly over His followers."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 20, 21.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How does one determine what belongs to the unchangeable core of our beliefs in contrast to what are mere cultural expressions and can, therefore, be changed to fit the context of various groups? Why, for the sake of unity, must we be able to distinguish between the two concepts?

- ❷ Imagine that your local church has a membership of around one hundred. Most members are pleasant and easy to get along with. But a few are capable of destroying the atmosphere. They are very opinionated and have very strong convictions about what should and should not be done during a divine service. This situation clearly hampers the growth of the church. What would you advise?

Summary: The church must be characterized by unity rather than uniformity. There is beauty and richness in diversity as long as there is unity in Christ. Only as we all learn to surrender at the Cross can we have the kind of unity that Christ seeks for His people.

The Reverend Father Finds His Home

by J. H. ZACHARY

Jeofelo was determined to have a better life than his parents, who had to work hard to provide for their five children. He joined a Catholic youth group in high school and eventually began assisting the priest at Mass. The priest noticed his faithful work and urged Jeofelo to consider studying to become a priest. Jeofelo took a test to qualify to study for the priesthood, and he passed. He enrolled in a program to prepare him to study theology at a university.

Jeofelo's parents were as proud as he was when at last he was ordained as a priest. Jeofelo liked his new title, Reverend Father. He served as priest in several congregations.

One day he went to the optometrist for new glasses. An attractive young woman waited on him. Jeofelo was impressed with her professionalism and kindness and decided to get to know her better. He learned that she was a Seventh-day Adventist.

Jeofelo resigned his position and joined a denomination in which he could marry and still serve as a Reverend Father.

Jeofelo dated the young optometrist and soon proposed marriage. He promised her that there would be no arguments over religion in their home, that she could raise their children as Adventists. She agreed.

One day while riding his motorcycle, Jeofelo was seriously injured in an accident. He spent weeks in the hospital and two months at home in a wheelchair. With nothing else to do, he picked up a book that a friend had given him and began reading it. It was called *From Sabbath to Sunday*. Jeofelo was amazed to learn that Saturday was indeed the Sabbath of the Lord. But he refused to follow what he now knew to be the truth. He had worked too hard to earn the "Reverend Father" title to give it up over a theological point.

Within a year Jeofelo was involved in another accident, and soon after, another. Jeofelo felt that God was trying to get his attention. He opened his Bible and read Matthew 16:26, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (NKJV).

Jeofelo could put off his decision no longer. He asked his wife to call her pastor and arrange for Bible studies. Within a few weeks the family was united in the Adventist faith.

Jeofelo gladly laid aside his treasured title and is studying at the Adventist seminary in the Philippines to become a Bible teacher.

J. H. ZACHARY is coordinator of international evangelism for The Quiet Hour.

Supporting Our Leaders



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Ps. 51:3, 4, 10; 1 Pet. 2:9; Eph. 1:22, 23; Col 1:18.

Memory Text: "Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ" (*Ephesians 4:15, NIV*).

To be a leader in the church is not always easy. In fact, we live in a general climate in which leadership is suspect. Leadership, in general, is often almost synonymous with *politics*, and *politics* usually has connotations of power, self-interest, and even dishonesty or corruption. Church leadership is not totally immune to those accusations either.

Thus, more than ever, the church needs good leaders at all levels, and we must use the best possible processes to select those leaders. And while we must hold them accountable for the decisions that they make while in power, it's even more important that we seek to support them in all ways possible. We owe that to them and to God.

This week we look at the important topic of how, as Christians, we should relate to our church leaders.

The Week at a Glance: Does the idea that we are all equal before God mean that there's no need for church leadership? In what ways are we all unequal? Who is the Head of the church? What does the Bible teach about the necessity of church leaders?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 18.

All Are Equal (*1 Pet. 2:9*).

One of the great rediscoveries of the sixteenth-century Reformation was that all people have the same standing before God. We do not need other human beings as our mediators. We all have the same direct access to our heavenly Father (*Heb. 10:19*).

How is the fundamental equality in status before God underlined by the apostle Peter? *1 Pet. 2:9; see also Exod. 19:6.*

The idea of a priesthood of all believers was one of the great concerns of the Protestant Reformers. The concept recognizes that every church member has a spiritual ministry to perform. The ordained ministry does not have a more privileged form of service than do others in the church body. The clergy merely performs a different service. All members have spiritual gifts, and all have important contributions to make. As a church, it's important not to forget this principle.

What other assurance is given in the Holy Scriptures that affirms our equal standing before God? *Gal. 3:28.* What is this text saying?

"No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple, that every soul may have free access to God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere. It lifts out of Satan's circle the poor souls who have been deluded by his deceptions. It places them within reach of the throne of God, the throne encircled by the rainbow of promise."

"In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free. All are brought nigh by His precious blood."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 386.

Dwell on the thoughts for today's study. Why is this principle so important for Christians to understand? How can it be a cure for one of the greatest and most dangerous of all sins: spiritual pride? What practical changes would you see in your own church were this principle put into practice?

We Have Different Roles

What a paradox: We are all equal and, yet, we are not. Though we all have the same status before God, we do not all function in the same role. It is God's design that there is order, and that the church—as a spiritual organization—has leadership. Strong support for the principle of "the priesthood of all believers" does not mean that leadership arrangements are unnecessary. From the earliest days we have evidence of God instituting leaders for His people.

How do the following texts establish the legitimacy of leadership among the people of God, in Old Testament as well as in New Testament times?

1. Moses

Exodus 3

2. Assistance for Moses

Exod. 18:21-27

3. Deborah

Judg. 4:4

4. David

1 Sam. 16:1-13

5. The twelve disciples, or apostles

Mark 3:13-19

6. Stephen and the other deacons

Acts 6:1-7

7. Elders

Titus 1:5

Though the Bible does not prescribe a detailed organizational model that is to be implemented in all times, God wants His people to do things in an orderly manner. Organization and leadership are not only legitimate but necessary, as is choosing the right kind of leadership.

Even Saints Are Not Perfect (*Ps. 51:3, 4, 10*).

Reading biographies of famous missionaries and great religious leaders can be extremely inspiring. Often one wonders: Would I have been able to demonstrate that same commitment? Would I have been able to persevere under such adverse circumstances? Would I have had the faith and spiritual strength to help and direct people? When we think of the history of our own church and of the energy, courage, and determination of many of the Adventist pioneers, we cannot help being impressed and inspired.

Take a good look at Hebrews 11 and list some of the great heroes of faith who, “by faith,” were sure of what they hoped for and persevered in their leadership role, often despite countless challenges. What was the secret of their success?

The Bible presents us with inspiring examples of faith but also informs us, in all honesty, that even the greatest leaders of ancient times were not perfect. It is not difficult to find examples of how great leaders made serious mistakes. Sometimes the mistakes were such that they could not be maintained in their role. But in many cases, God was willing to continue working through them.

Go back again through Hebrews 11. Pick out some of those mentioned there who were, in one capacity or another, in leadership roles. What mistakes did these great people of faith make, despite their calling before God? What message do their mistakes have for us concerning how we should view our leaders?

Leaders, as the rest of us, are sinners in need of grace, forgiveness, counsel, and encouragement. At the same time, to be a leader is a great privilege, and with privilege comes responsibility. Though our leaders aren’t perfect, they are still leaders, and in that role they should be expected to act accordingly.

Should church leaders be expected to adhere to a higher moral and spiritual standard than someone not in that role? If so, why so? If not, why not?

Supporting Our Leaders

We owe it to our leaders to support them in whatever way we can. As Aaron and Hur supported Moses and helped him to reach out to heaven, we have the sacred duty to help our leaders in their ministry (*Exod. 17:12*).

What may those who are full-time employed in the gospel ministry expect from the members of the church? *Matt. 10:9, 10; Rom. 16:23.*

God has arranged for a system of support for those who serve Him as full-time ministers so that their material needs are provided for as they preach the gospel and nurture the church. If all church members gave according to the plan that God instituted, there would be more than sufficient means to meet the needs of many more church workers.

What other form of support for our pastors and other leaders is just as essential as material support? *Eph. 6:18, 19; 2 Thess. 3:1.*

"Leaders know the importance of support. It comes in many different forms—regular prayer, encouragement through calls, conversations, and notes, interaction on ideas and communicating what is going on in the organization. Often it is as simple and straightforward as asking the leader, 'What can I do to help you?' "—Leith Anderson, *A Church for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House Publishers, 1992), pp. 230, 231.

While support for leaders shouldn't be blind—that is, we do whatever they say we should do, no questions asked—true support doesn't mean we support them only when we absolutely agree with everything they do. Sometimes leaders might make a decision that someone disagrees with. Here, too, out of respect for the position the person is in, we should as *much as possible* seek to work with those decisions.

How's your attitude toward your church leaders? Are you showing them the mercy Christ has shown you? What changes might you need to make in relating to them?

Christ Is Our Leader (*Eph. 4:15, 2:20, 1 Pet. 2:25*).

Read the following texts. What are they all saying about Christ and His church?

Eph. 1:22, 23

Eph. 4:15

Col. 1:18

As we have seen this week, though we are all equal in the sight of God, this fundamental equality does not imply that there should not be any leaders, or even a *hierarchy* of leadership, among us. The biblical model teaches that there is, indeed, a structure, and that the church does have human leaders at various levels.

At the same time, however, we (and our selected leadership) must remember that Christ is the head of the church and that He alone is the Source of its authority. Not only is Christ the Head of each person, He is the Head of the church, in a corporate sense. As individuals, and even more so as leaders, we can be faithful to our calling only to the degree that we are faithful to Christ. Only as we submit to Him in faith, repentance, and obedience can we fulfill whatever role He deems for us in His church.

"It is Christ who makes the church important, not the other way around. As his body, the church derives its significance from him. The church is what it is because of who Jesus is, not because of who its members are.

"The symbol of the body also suggests subordination. As Christ's body, the church is subject to his authority. He is 'the head over all things for the church' (Eph. 1:22). Recognizing that Christ's authority in the church is supreme prevents us from exaggerating the importance of any church official or organizational structure. The church needs organization, of course, but no organization should obscure Christ's authority."—Richard Rice, *The Reign of God* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1985), p. 190.

How can those who lead out in the local church or occupy some position of leadership in the conference or some other organizational unit ensure that they never lose sight of the fact that Christ is the ultimate Leader of the church? If you could give some practical advice to any of our leaders on what's the surest way to stay connected to Christ and allow Him to lead the church through them, what would you say?

Further Study: "Since His ascension Christ has carried forward His work on the earth by chosen ambassadors, through whom He speaks to the children of men and ministers to their needs. The great Head of the church superintends His work through the instrumentality of men ordained by God to act as His representatives."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 360.

"There have ever been in the church those who are constantly inclined toward individual independence. They seem unable to realize that independence of spirit is liable to lead the human agent to have too much confidence in himself and to trust in his own judgment rather than to respect the counsel and highly esteem the judgment of his brethren, especially of those in the offices that God has appointed for the leadership of His people. God has invested His church with special authority and power which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising, for he who does this despises the voice of God."—Pages 163, 164.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Though it's important to work with the leadership of our church, at what point, if ever, should a person stand up and openly challenge leadership? Is this ever the correct Christian response? If you answer Yes, what biblical or historical precedents can you cite? If you answer No, defend your position.

- ❷ Sometimes, when our leaders fall, we tend to be harder on them than on others who might make the same mistakes. Why do you think that is so? Should it be so?

Summary: On the one hand, we must never lose sight of the fact that we are all, truly and fully, equals before God. Yet, it is God's purpose that not all have the same role. Some have a special calling to be leaders, of different kinds and at different levels. Leaders must be held accountable, but we must not expect them to be perfect. We owe our leaders our wholehearted support, in particular in our prayers. But both the *followers* and the *leaders* must remember always that Christ is the Leader of His church.

Left for Dead

by CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN

On June 24, 2002, a runaway train crashed in Tanzania, killing hundreds of men, women, and children. On that train were 350 Adventists, mostly women returning home from a Women's Ministries meeting. Some 54 Adventists, mostly women, were killed.

When the train's brakes failed, the train rolled backward, reaching speeds of 160 miles (240 km) an hour. The two pastors aboard went from car to car comforting and encouraging the women, who prayed and sang during the 20-minute terror ride before the train crashed. One of these pastors lost his life; the other lost his arm.

Joyce Ager was one of the passengers. Shortly after the crash, Valentina, Joyce's sister, learned that Joyce had died in the wreck.

Valentina traveled to the rural crash site to identify her sister's body. She searched the large stadium, where most of the bodies had been laid, but she did not find her sister. Hopeful, she went to the hospital and searched for Joyce's name on a list of patients, but she found nothing. Sadly, grimly, she walked to a smaller makeshift morgue to search for her sister among the dead.

The bodies were piled on top of one another until space could be made for them in the stadium morgue. Valentina began searching through the bodies for the face she hoped she would not see. As she walked among the bodies, she saw a familiar face. She touched her and found her body warm. She felt for a pulse. Yes, she was still alive!

She shouted and ran to find a doctor. "Come, come! My sister is in the morgue, but she's still alive!" Joyce was carried to the hospital. She was unconscious and suffered from multiple fractures, but she was alive.

Joyce woke up six days later and was transferred to a hospital in the city of Dar es Salaam. She suffered some memory loss caused by a fractured skull, and it was several weeks before she could recognize those she loved.

Joyce continues on her long road to recovery, but she thanks God and her sister for saving her life. She is eager to be well enough to serve Him as He wishes.

No one knows why one person died and another lived in that terrible crash. But the Adventists most deeply affected by this tragic wreck hope that through their suffering God will reveal Himself to those who need to know Him.

CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN is editor of Mission.

Embracing the World



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Matt. 13:33; 25:31-46; John 17:15-17; 2 Cor. 5:19, 20; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 4:14.

Memory Text: “‘My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.... As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world’” (John 17:15-18, NIV).

Those who have studied the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church know that it took a while before the church began to understand the immensity of the challenge God had given her. At first, the small band of disappointed Advent believers saw only a very limited task: to encourage fellow Adventists after 1844. Gradually, however, they saw that God had given them a much greater assignment. They sought a wider audience and began to spread their message to Protestant America. In 1874 the horizon widened as the first official missionary left for Europe. By the year 1900 Adventism had gained a small foothold in many parts of the world and was on its way to what it is today: a truly global movement.

Thus the question for us is this: How are we, as Adventist Christians, to relate to the world at large?

The Week at a Glance: What kind of image should we present to the world? How can we be in the world but not of it? What does the universality of Christ's death tell us about the universality of our own mission to the world?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 25.

Representing the King (*Matt. 13:33, 2 Cor. 5:20*).

What images did Paul use to point out to the church members in Corinth that they are representatives of God?

2 Cor. 2:15-17

2 Cor. 3:1-3

2 Cor. 5:20

Our life should be such that it calls people to a decision, for or against the principles we espouse. For those who reject the Christ we serve, our witness will be an irritant or even a “smell of death” (*2 Cor. 2:16, NIV*). But for those who find Christ through us, we are a “fragrance of life” (*vs. 16, NIV*)!

We also are pictured as ambassadors. Ambassadors are a small but important class of people. They go wherever they are sent to represent their government. Often they must venture into a culture that differs greatly from their own. Their work demands tact and diplomacy, as well as frankness and courage. Their duty is to guard jealously the interests and the reputations of their home country. What a fitting metaphor for those who represent the kingdom of heaven!

What other image is used in the Bible to illustrate the positive influence Christians are expected to have in society? *Matt. 13:33*. And what does it mean?

Leaven is, in general, a symbol for evil influences, carrying infection. In this sense Jesus used it when He spoke of the leaven of the Pharisees (*Mark 8:15 and parallels*). It also is used by analogy as a symbol for a wholesome influence, which spreads out, as well. The working of leaven in dough is not a slow, imperceptible process. At first, it is true, the leaven is *hidden*, and nothing appears to happen, but then the whole mass begins to swell and bubble as fermentation advances.

The moment you identify yourself as a Christian, you are, for better or for worse, representing your Lord. In other words, whether you are *good, bad, or indifferent*, you are still representing the Lord to those around you. You can never be neutral. Think about those whom you are around. What kind of influence are you projecting? Where and how can you improve?

“In the World” but Not “of the World” (John 17:15-17).

For many Christians, the church is like a club—strictly for members! Although they will say that they believe in witness and evangelism and want their church to grow, their deeds and their attitude speak a different language!

How are we to relate to the world? Are we to embrace the world and all that it offers? Are we to shun the world? Or is there another option? See John 17:15-17. What principles is Jesus expressing?

If we want to be true followers of Christ, we will have to mix with the people around us. We must not spend all our time in pious meditation, thanking God that we differ from all those *worldly* people around us. The opposite is true. While we must be *holy*—as in being radically different in the way we live—we must not keep our distance from those who must also hear the good news. We are told to “‘Go into all the world’” (*Mark 16:15, NIV*) and, like Paul, identify with the people with whom we come in contact (*1 Cor. 9:19-23*).

Why did God intervene when, after the Flood, the inhabitants of the world decided to build an enormous fortress that would house them all? *Gen. 11:4, 7.*

The descendants of Noah and his sons did not want to move away from where they lived. They wanted to stay together. If ever there was a group of people with a fortress mentality, we find them in Genesis 11. But God intervened. He did not agree with this fortress mentality then, and He doesn’t now.

“Babel plays itself out over and over again in the lives of congregations. A new church is formed with excitement, energy and vision. As the years pass, however, the church functions less to introduce Jesus Christ to nonbelievers than to provide a safe, secure and familiar environment to those who already believe and belong.”—Stephen A. Rhodes, *Where the Nations Meet* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), pp. 25, 26.

Go back and read again John 17:15-17. How does that apply in your own personal situation? Are you really not “of the world”? If you answer Yes, what justification can you give for that answer? How can one be truly “not of this world”?

“Religion in Overalls” (*Matt. 25:31-46*).

The title of today’s study is borrowed from that of a book by William G. Johnsson in which the author takes a close look at the meaning of the Gospel of Matthew. Johnsson writes:

“In an age that proclaims on its T-shirts, ‘Only Believe’ and ‘I love you!’ . . . Matthew insists that practice balances one’s profession, that faith and love put on overalls and get their hands dirty out where the people are—in jail, in the slums, in the poorhouse, in the charity ward.”—William G. Johnsson, *Religion in Overalls* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing Association, 1977), p. 22.

What are the following texts telling us about how we are to relate to the world around us?

Matt. 25:31-46

Luke 1:52, 53

The question is not whether followers of Christ should focus on preaching or helping the needy. It is not a matter of either/or but of and/and. Christians share in the universal responsibility of helping fellow human beings who face particular challenges: hunger, thirst, illiteracy, poverty, poor health conditions, imprisonment, discrimination, etc. Christ is our role model. He ministered to all aspects of our human condition—the spiritual, as well as the emotional and the physical. The early church clearly did not forget its social responsibility, and neither should we. Community-service activities, religious-liberty advocacy, educational programs, prison ministries, and ADRA are just a few of the avenues through which we can minister to people.

“Pure and undefiled religion is not a sentiment, but the doing of works of mercy and love.”—Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, p. 38.

Serving others in these capacities, however, demands self-denial, just as being a Christian does. Only as we learn to surrender and die at the foot of the Cross will we be in a position to minister to others in the same way that Christ did.

What are you doing for the poor, the needy, and the afflicted in your community? If the next time you see some of them and think of Christ’s words, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (*Matt. 25:40*), why wouldn’t it be so easy just to walk away and ignore them?

The Power of Prayer

Intercessory prayer is a reservoir of power that should be tapped to an even larger extent than it is today. Prayer for ourselves, for our own spiritual and material needs, is essential. But prayer for others—for the pastors, literature evangelists and missionaries, the church's administrators, for the leaders of our countries and, yes, for the world—should rank high on our list of priorities.

If someone were to ask you to compose a 30-second prayer for the world, what would you pray, and why?

Praying for fellow human beings, pleading with God on behalf of others, is a duty and a privilege for every Christian. And, though we can never be sure when and in what manner God will answer our prayers, there is no doubt that they do have effect. The apostle James states it clearly: "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (5:16, NIV).

There are countless examples in Scripture of men and women who prayed for others. Read the following texts: Gen. 20:7; Num. 11:1, 2; 1 Sam. 12:19, 23; 1 Kings 13:6-9; Ps. 122:6; Matt. 5:44; Col. 1:9; 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1. What do they tell us about the need to pray for others?

"Our intercessory prayers express a sense of solidarity with other human beings. We are embedded in the great fabric of humanity. What happens to others inevitably involves us, and what we do affects them, too. Furthermore, God has ways of working in the world that we cannot understand."—Richard Rice, *The Reign of God*, p. 297.

In your experience, what impact has prayer had in your own life? How has it changed you? How have your prayers, as far as you can tell, impacted others? What evidence, if any, do you have that prayer does make a difference?

The Cross and the World

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus gives us our calling as a church. Notice it is a worldwide calling. We are to go to all nations with the message of salvation found in Jesus Christ. We see this same basic calling, only in a specific end-time context, in the first angel's message (*Rev. 14:6, 7*).

Thus, God's church is to impact the whole world. And that makes perfect sense, because Christ's mission was for the whole world.

Look up these texts. What are they all saying about the universality of what Christ has done at the Cross? *Isa. 53:6, 2 Cor. 5:19, Heb. 2:9, 1 John 2:2, 4:14.*

The point is simple: Christ's death covered every human being who ever lived. It was complete for the whole world. Thus, the whole world needs to know about Jesus and what He has done for them.

"But the atonement for a lost world was to be full, abundant, and complete. Christ's offering was exceedingly abundant to reach every soul that God had created. It could not be restricted so as not to exceed the number who would accept the great Gift. All men are not saved; yet the plan of redemption is not a waste because it does not accomplish all that its liberality has provided for. There must be enough and to spare."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 565, 566.

We can't be true followers of Christ unless we are, in whatever capacity, seeking to let the world know about what Christ has done for it. Thus, we must not flee the world but must engage the world and make a difference by the way we live and interact with people and by the way in which we respond to the needs of fellow human beings, far and near. This, more than any other way, will open people up to hear what we have to say about the God who not only has created all of us but who has paid for all our sins. Even those living in abject ignorance of Christ have had their sins paid for at the Cross, just as much as ours were paid for there. Thus, these people need to know what we know; and how can they ever learn if we—who do know about the Cross—don't tell them? Hence, our mission to the world.

Not everyone, of course, is in a position to minister directly to those in others lands. What, though, can you, either as an individual or through your church, do to have a part in our worldwide calling?

Further Study: "The suffering and destitute of all classes are our neighbors, and when their wants are brought to our knowledge it is our duty to relieve them as far as possible. A principle is brought out in this parable [of the good Samaritan] that it would be well for the followers of Christ to adopt. First meet the temporal necessities of the needy and relieve their physical wants and sufferings, and you will then find an open avenue to the heart."—Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, p. 118.

"Every provision has been made for the salvation of the fallen race. All power has been given to Him who offered himself as a sacrifice for the redemption of every son and daughter of Adam. 'As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.' "—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Jan. 7, 1902.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ We are told we are "in the world" and that we must identify with those we want to reach. We must understand how they think and must speak their *language*. How are we able to do this without being impacted in a negative way by some of the negative things they do?
- ❷ However important it is to meet the temporal needs of those in the world, we must also remember that meeting the needs of the world isn't the end but a means to an end. What is that end? How can we avoid the danger of forgetting what our true purpose here is?

Summary: Though we are "not of the world," we should be very much "in the world," making a difference and giving a better taste to society. True Christianity is not just a matter of having correct doctrine or calling people to a faith in God. It also is a ministry to the poor and disenfranchised. In addition, we have the responsibility of praying for others, in the church and out in the world. Christ's death covered the whole world; our ministry must, then, be just as inclusive.

Searching for Meaning

by NYAMDAVAA

Nyamdavaa lives in Mongolia. He attended a military school, where he learned that the strongest prevail. He worked hard to strengthen his body and focus his mind.

After completing his training in military school, he joined some friends to start a small business. But his life was not going as he wished. One day he realized that he felt empty, with no sense of purpose or meaning in life. If there were no meaning to life, what was the difference? Why not just die?

Nyamdavaa had read the Christian Bible occasionally, and he sensed that it held the key to meaning in life. He began searching it for answers. An Adventist friend invited Nyamdavaa to church, and he went. There he found meaningful worship and a group of genuinely happy people.

He ended his relationship with his old friends who seemed to want nothing but to have a good time drinking. He no longer wanted to drink and spent much time alone, studying the Bible. His family thought he was crazy, for he spent all his time reading and praying. Often he did not eat; food was not important when he was searching for God.

At one point Nyamdavaa became sick. He was too weak to get out of bed. For two weeks he remained in bed, praying and reading the Bible. His prayer became, "Take my life, God, and use me for Your service. Just use me." He regained his health and was baptized a few months later.

Nyamdavaa was invited to study at the 1000 Missionary Movement in the Philippines. During his three months there, he experienced several miracles of protection and providence. One exercise required him to swim across a river, but Nyamdavaa could not swim. He prayed for God's protection as he jumped into the water. He felt a hand holding him up, and he made it across.

He returned to Mongolia to start a new church in a large city in northern Mongolia. One Friday the apartment building in which he and his roommate lived had no water. On Sabbath the water returned only to their apartment. When his neighbors learned that they had water, they asked the two young men for some. This provided an excellent opportunity to meet their neighbors and share their faith and water with them.

Nyamdavaa and his roommate invited young people to come to their apartment for Bible stories and songs. These children invited more children and their parents. Their group has grown, and in the first year in this city, 45 people were baptized.

NYAMDAVAA continues to work in this city, developing the interests they have found there. He would like to become a trained pastor or Bible worker.

One of the great purposes of the Bible is to show us not only what our ends are but how we can reach those ends. Next quarter's study of the book of Daniel, written by Gerhard Pfandl, fulfills a unique role in helping us do just that. In it are impressive prophecies that, perhaps better than anywhere else in Scripture, help establish a firm and rational foundation for our faith in the One who, through the work of Jesus Christ, has assured us our end: eternal life in a new creation (Isa. 66:22).

Lesson 1: "To Eat or Not to Eat—That Is the Question"

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

SUNDAY: A Tale of Two Cities: Babylon and Jerusalem (*Dan. 1:1*).

MONDAY: The Innocent and the Guilty (*Dan. 1:2-7*).

TUESDAY: Daniel's Determination (*Dan. 1:8*).

WEDNESDAY: The Test (*Dan. 1:9-16*).

THURSDAY: The Reward (*Dan. 1:17-20*).

MEMORY TEXT: *Psalm 119:105*

SABBATH GEMS: What do Babylon and Jerusalem symbolize? What caused the demise of Jerusalem? Why did innocent people have to suffer in the onslaught? Why didn't Daniel eat the king's food?

Lesson 2: Nebuchadnezzar's Image

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

SUNDAY: Nebuchadnezzar's Dilemma (*Dan. 2:1-13*).

MONDAY: Daniel's Prayer Meetings (*Dan. 2:14-23*).

TUESDAY: Daniel's Testimony (*Dan. 2:24-30*).

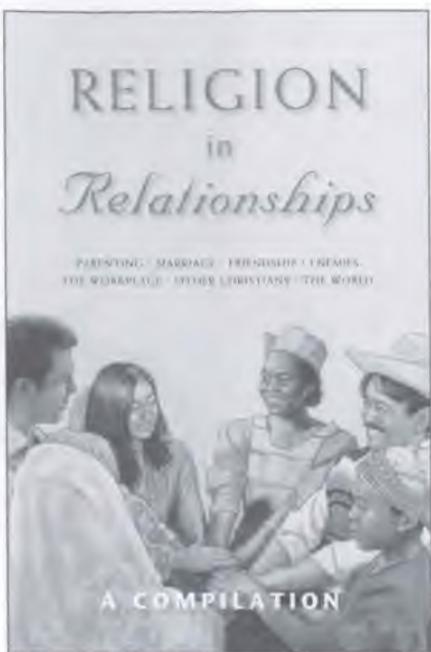
WEDNESDAY: The Image and Its Interpretation (*Dan. 2:28-45*).

THURSDAY: Daniel's Promotion (*Dan. 2:46*).

MEMORY TEXT: *Daniel 2:21*

SABBATH GEM: Using around one hundred-eighty Hebrew words, Daniel describes the course of history in advance and thereby provides comfort to God's people. This gives us the assurance that when the great empires of the world have run their course, God's kingdom, an everlasting kingdom, will follow and remain forever.

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 68506-0097.



The companion book to the Adult Bible Study Guide for third quarter, 2004

Relationships mean everything to God. And if our religion is to have any meaning at all, the relationships we have with our spouses, parents,

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DIVISION



Mission Projects

- ① Classroom and men's dormitory, Lowry College
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- ③ Library, Northeast College
- ④ Dormitories for Adventist schools in newly entered areas, India
- ⑤ Up to 50 chapels for congregations, India

Union	Churches	Companies	Membership	Population
East-Central India Union	793	1,417	375,101	119,786,922
South-Central India Union	178	243	52,078	56,634,316
Southwest India Union	212	127	31,310	33,766,875
Northeast India	150	304	36,206	40,392,021
Northern India	231	1,212	85,684	597,759,177
Southeast India Union	261	582	74,751	66,358,321
Western India	124	294	64,643	140,624,075
Attached Fields:				
Andaman and Nicobar Islands	1	2	198	427,429
Mumbai Metro	10	52	6,469	12,822,864
Nepal	9	21	1,496	25,164,000
Bhutan	-	-	-	945,000
Maldives	-	-	-	285,000
Totals June 30, 2003	1,969	4,254	727,936	1,094,966,000



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