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SABBATH SCHOOL
BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

APRIL MAY JUNE 2003

The Forgiven



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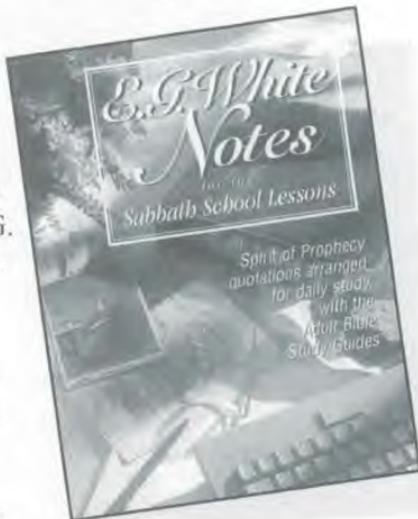
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School Bible Study Guide.

Prisoner and Oppressor

The prisoner, imprisoned for the same reason his entire family had been murdered—his race (nothing else)—was called into a hospital room where a soldier from among the oppressors lay, his life draining out from a war hole. Caked in crusted and rancid bandages, the oppressor sputtered this painful plea:

I was in an elite unit. A land mine killed thirty of our men. In revenge, we herded three hundred of your people into a building; men, women, children; doused it with gasoline; and set it on fire. Those who fled we shot. I remember specifically a mother, a father, and a small boy. The parents, covering the child's eyes, ran outside. All were screaming. I shot them dead. I can't get away from the sight and sound of that family and their screams. And now, as I am dying, I beg forgiveness from someone of your race. Without it, I cannot die in peace. Please, please, forgive me!

The prisoner stared at the heaving mass of hard bandage (in two spots damp with tears). No word dripped from his lips into the ears slowly dying before him. The only sounds were his feet shuffling toward the door and the cries squeaking out of the crusty bandages.

What would you, or what should you, have done? As a Christian, whose own sins have been forgiven—and who believes that, at the cross, Jesus had bore the sins of this oppressor (including his massacre of the men, women, and children)—were you not obligated to forgive? Though the Lord commands, even demands, that we forgive, does He mean to forgive even this? If He does demand it, is a forgiveness that comes only because it is demanded true forgiveness?

On the other hand, "Forgiveness to the injured does belong," wrote poet John Dryden. Was it even the prisoner's place to forgive what had been done to others? What made the prisoner the proxy for those who, even if they would have forgiven, could not because they were dead?

Whatever the answer, even in the best of situations, forgiveness doesn't come easy. If it takes so much for us to forgive an unkind word, a rebuff, a cold shoulder, an insult, or curse, what did it take for God to forgive our lusts, our murders, our cruelty, our hatred, our crimes, our violence, and even, if need be, our mass murders?

The Cross, of course, is what it took—and if Christ bearing the sins of the world does not make us see what forgiveness costs, nothing will. Even more so, if the penalty for the world's sin falling on the Sin Bearer does not help us see how crucial forgiveness is to this universe, what will?

This quarter's Bible Study Guide, based on the work of Geoffrey Gurne, examines the difficult but inescapable question that confronts us all every day: What does it mean to be (in a sense) both prisoner and oppressor; that is, both in need of getting and giving forgiveness?

Sandwiched

Forgiveness. Such a simple word. Such a basic word. Such a common word. Just a few syllables uttered from the tongue, a few scratches scrawled from the tip of a pen, that is all. Yet, how much power, how much potential, how much healing exists within those few sounds and scratches. How many lives would be so much different, so much better, so much happier and richer, were forgiveness written into the variables that made up the equations of their personal existence?

Forgiveness. It's double-edged. Its force pushes in two directions, forward and backward. It impacts the subject (those who forgive) as well as the object (those who are forgiven). It radiates in all directions, reaching out and caressing those who, if nothing else, stand on the sidelines and see what forgiveness does to those on either end of this divine blessing.

Perhaps this whole quarter's Bible Study Guide should be titled "Sandwiched." Because as Christians, we are sandwiched in by forgiveness: the forgiveness that we have received from Christ and the forgiveness that we, having received, give to others. The attendant blessings are manifold: the blessings that we have received from God, the blessings that we give to others because of what we have received from God, and the blessings that we get back when we give to others. Not a bad wrap, all things considered.

This quarter, we will try to consider, if not all things about forgiveness (that will take eternity, and we have only three months), as much as limits of time and space allow. We will study forgiveness from two perspectives, that of subject and of object, because, as Christians, we become both. We are the object of God's forgiveness, and because of that forgiveness, we become the subject, giving forgiveness to those who perhaps are as undeserving as we are.

First, we will look at what it means to be forgiven by God; what it means for us that, no matter what we've done, no matter how ugly our record, we can stand before our Creator forgiven, justified, pardoned, and cleansed by the blood of Jesus.

Second, we will look at what happens in the lives of those who have been forgiven.

What does that forgiveness do to us? How does it change us? What does it motivate us to do for others?

Forgiveness. It comes with such a heavy price tag: the blood of Christ of Christ. Yet, as we will see over the next few months, no one can afford to be without it.

Got Questions?

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University has answers!*

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THE **BIG CITY** CAN BE A **SCARY PLACE**

For the Aborigines who come from small settlements, even attending school or getting medical care in the city can be a huge step. Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will make it a little easier for these gentle people to get the education and medical services they need and bring them closer to Christ. The Aboriginal Outreach and Care Center in western Australia will minister to children of God who have been overlooked for too long.

MISSION

The Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on June 28 supports projects in the South Pacific Division.



God and Forgiveness



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

HE WAS ONE OF THE MOST GRUESOME MURDERERS in American history. Jeffrey Dahmer had sexually abused, then murdered (and cannibalized), 17 young men. His crimes shocked the world. How could anyone, who walked on two legs and had opposable thumbs, sink so low? Dahmer, in his own macabre way, personified the words of Russian poet Joseph Brodsky, who wrote: “Man is more frightening than his skeleton.”

Yet, Jeffrey Dahmer had, in the last months of his life (he was murdered by fellow inmates), repented, been baptized, and openly professed faith in Jesus Christ, who, while we were yet sinners, died for us—a death that would include, one assumes, Jeffrey Dahmer. Because there was no chance of Mr. Dahmer being freed, his profession of faith did not come with the taint of dubious motives: He was not leaving prison, no matter what he believed.

Though God alone knows Mr. Dahmer’s heart, his story brings to light one of the most amazing of all Bible truths: God’s willingness to forgive even the worst of sinners.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: When did God start loving us? Did the Cross create God’s love for humanity? What role does confession have in the plan of salvation? Why is it necessary for sinners to confess before God? Is God’s love and willingness to forgive sin and evil greater than sin and evil themselves?

*Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 5.

AN ETERNAL LOVE.

The salvation of the human race does not result from a divine afterthought; our redemption hasn't arisen from some sort of heavenly improvisation made necessary because of the unexpected rise of sin. On the contrary, God's love for sinners existed even before there were sinners, even before the foundation of this world. We are saved by a God whose love for us is rooted in eternity. That concept is difficult for us to grasp for a number of reasons, one of them being that we as finite beings can't even begin to grasp the concept of eternity. Nevertheless, the thought is comforting, that of being loved by an *eternal love*.

Look up these texts and write down in your own words the essence of what each is saying:

1 Cor. 2:7 _____

Eph. 1:3, 4 _____

Rev. 13:8 _____

Perhaps the most crucial point to remember regarding this notion of God loving us from even before we existed is that Jesus' death on the cross did *not* change the way God feels about us. He does not love us because Jesus died; Jesus died for us because God already loved us.

What Christ's death did, instead, was provide a way in which God—because of His preexisting love for sinners—could save them from the inevitable results of their sin, in a manner that does not violate the moral order of the universe. There seems to have been a self-imposed constraint on God; that is, He had to forgive sinners in a way that was in harmony with His own character as a righteous and merciful God. If all He had to do was "forgive," there would have been no need for the Cross. The Cross solved the problem of how God could be both just and merciful at the same time (see Rom. 3:26).

Imagine living in a universe with one of these options: (1) There is no God or transcendent force at all. (2) There is some sort of deity who nevertheless does not care about us at all. (3) There is a God, and He hates us and likes to see us squirm (to quote Shakespeare, "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods/ They kill us for their sport"). (4) There is a God who loves us beyond our imagination. Take some time to go through each option. How does each one change your perspective on what your life means? Why, then, is our understanding of God's attitude toward us so important?

CONFESSiON.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

If God's attitude toward us is acceptance and forgiveness, why must we confess our sins? Does confession justify us before God? Does confession tell God something about us that He doesn't know? Does confession appease God's anger at our deeds, even the worst ones? Does confession change God's attitude toward us?

If your answer to the last four questions above is "No" in all cases, then write down your reasons for believing that we need to confess our sins to God. Then compare them with what is written afterward:

Confession changes us, not God. We confess because God has announced that, as far as He is concerned, we are no longer His enemies. Confession is a means by which we better understand just how repulsive sin is to God. It helps us understand just what the issues and the consequences with sin are and how much it cost to redeem us from those consequences. Confession is our acknowledgment of our sinfulness and need of a Savior. Confession is a means of strengthening, in our own *lives*, our personal faith in Christ. Confession of sin before God is simply one aspect of what Paul talked about in Philippians 2:12, 13; it is part of the sanctification process.

Confession, then, is not for the purpose of persuading God to forgive us; it is, rather, a heaven-appointed means to enhance our understanding of how painful sin is to God and to ourselves. It also is a means of helping us heal spiritually from the effects of sin. This healing principle can be seen even on a purely worldly level: Who has not experienced, personally, just how good confession of wrongs can be when we confess to a person we have wronged, or even simply when we tell others about the wrong we have done? How much more so when we confess to God?

Think about it: Why would it be foolish to talk about being forgiven our sin if we were not required to even acknowledge what sin needs to be forgiven?

"FRIEND, YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN."

"Some men came carrying a paralytic. . . . When Jesus saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven'" (Luke 5:18-20, NIV).

Though none of us would envy the paralytic, he did experience something that (more than likely) none of us ever had: He heard Jesus, with His own mouth, say to him, " 'Friend, your sins are forgiven.' "

Wow! How many of us would love to be in that position, that of actually hearing Jesus first call us "friend" and then tell us that our sins are forgiven? Talk about assurance of salvation!

Yet, whether we hear the promise directly from Christ's mouth or whether we accept it from His Word, the final result is the same. The paralytic received the same forgiveness anyone else who is forgiven ever receives; there's no difference between what happened to him (in terms of being justified by his faith) and what happens to any of us who, by faith, claims the forgiveness that Jesus offers.

Look up these verses: Are they not telling us basically the same thing that Jesus told the paralytic? Rom. 4:7; Eph. 4:32; Col. 1:14; 2:13; 1 John 1:9; 2:12. Why, then, should we have any less assurance of forgiveness than did the paralytic?

Many people intellectually accept the idea that God loves and forgives them; but, for one reason or another, the reality of what it is all about does not make an impact on their experience. They live in fear of eternal damnation, they are plagued by guilt, and they suffer from spiritual loneliness and emotional depression. Even though their minds tell them that He is near, God seems to them to be far away. Their religious experience is characterized by a deep insecurity.

Some of these might respond that they really cannot "believe it" if they do not feel it; others would say there might be emotional blocks that go back as far as their childhood that keep them from experiencing God's forgiveness. But if we allow Jesus to "draw" us as He did the paralytic, nothing can prevent us from being forgiven.

What keeps people from believing they have been forgiven, despite the fact that the Bible tells them they *have been*? List three possibilities:

How would you answer each one of these?

FORGIVENESS GREATER THAN SIN.

"Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20).

Just as God's love is a gift, something we cannot earn, so is His forgiveness. In fact, His forgiveness is one of the greatest tangible manifestations of that love. To be totally forgiven even the most heinous of sins (such as Jeffrey Dahmer's) requires a love that we as humans barely can begin to understand (we can, like beggars, take with humility and appreciation only what's being graciously offered us).

The New Testament writers view God's grace as being infinitely greater than sin. No matter how terrible sin is—and we can see how terrible it is simply by opening our eyes and looking around at the world—the New Testament teaches that the power of God's love and forgiveness is immeasurably greater than all evil and all sin. God's love for us and His willingness to forgive us our sin and evil (thanks to the Cross) transcends all the evil in a world in which evil is all but in the air we breathe.

In Romans 5 the apostle Paul uses such phrases as "overflowing" and "much more" when he contrasts the grace of God to sin. The entire chapter sets up a series of contrasts between grace and sin.

In order to better understand Paul's emphasis in Romans 5, list all the verses in which the words "much more" are used in this chapter. Indicate after listing the verse what the "much more" relates to.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Summarize in a few lines the essence of what Paul is saying in Romans 5. Look especially at the first five verses. What is his message here, and how could you use what he's saying to help someone who is facing some spiritual discouragement: struggling with faith or unsure of salvation or discouraged because of sin in his or her life? Write a small note to that person, based on this chapter, that could help.

GOD'S FORGIVENESS ILLUSTRATED.

"Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:21, 22).

Is there some point at which God's forgiveness can be exhausted? Write your answer (along with some justification for it) on the lines below. Think your reasoning through to its logical conclusion. Also, what biblical examples can you find to support your position?

The rabbis taught that the law required God's people to forgive someone three times. Peter, sensing that Jesus usually went "beyond" the Mosaic law, suggested doubling the requirement of the law and adding one for good measure. In addition, the number seven symbolized completeness in the Jewish culture. (See Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 243.)

Jesus' response to Peter must have startled the disciple and the rest of His hearers. It challenged Peter's assumption about forgiveness as an action that could be added up, like money in the bank. Each time someone forgives, he or she keeps a record until the limit is reached; then that person can retaliate. Talk about living according "to the letter of the law" (this thinking is somewhat parallel to one of the conventions of war: Soldiers are not supposed to shoot paratroopers while they are coming down from the air; once they hit the ground, then the soldiers can shoot them).

What was Jesus saying in this verse? Is there something magical about the number 490 or 77 (the Greek can be read both ways)? Did Jesus really want people to count that high and then stop forgiving? Or, instead, does this story represent how God will never stop forgiving us, as long as we seek that forgiveness? Again, think through the implications of whether, in fact, this is the message Jesus wanted us to learn by answering Peter as he did. In light of Paul's words that "God is not mocked" (Gal. 6:7), what wrong conclusions could someone possibly draw from this wonderful truth?

FURTHER STUDY: Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, "God's Love for Man," pp. 9-15; *Christ's Object Lessons*, "The Measure of Forgiveness," pp. 243-251.

The heart that has once tasted the love of Christ, cries out continually for a deeper draft. . . . Every revelation of God to the soul increases the capacity to know and to love. The continual cry of the heart is, 'More of Thee,' and ever the Spirit's answer is, 'Much more.' Romans 5:9, 10. For our God delights to do 'exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.' Ephesians 3:20. To Jesus, who emptied Himself for the salvation of lost humanity, the Holy Spirit was given without measure. So it will be given to every follower of Christ when the whole heart is surrendered for His indwelling."—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 20, 21.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you" (Matt. 5:43, 44). If God commands me to love my enemies, does He not do the same? If God loves His enemies, does He love His chief enemy, Satan? Would He not have been willing to forgive even the devil if he genuinely had repented? If this is true, then the tragedy of the destruction of the wicked is that they all are sinners who could have been forgiven but have refused to accept the forgiveness God made available. Do you agree with this line of reasoning? Write your reasons either way.
2. Why do some people feel it necessary to "earn" a forgiveness that is freely given?
3. Why does knowing that there is no way I can destroy God's love or willingness to forgive make it possible for me to be more honest with God than I can be with even my own spouse, parents, or siblings?
4. What do you say to someone who says "If I confess and am forgiven, why don't I feel forgiven? Why does the burden of guilt still sit heavily upon me?" Or what do you say to the person who says "Look, I confessed my sins, God has forgiven them, and now I don't want to hear any more about them, or what problems they might have caused. I am forgiven; that's all that matters"?



In Search of Peace

Mahama Daari

I come from a pagan background. My family worshiped Tigani (tee-GAH-neh), the supreme god in my village in Ghana. I knew no other religion until I was 16 and enrolled in a Catholic school, where religion was a compulsory class. However, I never considered Christ's love or His sacrifice for me personally. I finished school and forgot about Christianity.

I began working as a teacher in northern Ghana. One day I met Andrew, a man who came from my home village. When we were in elementary school this boy left our traditional religion to become a Christian. We all made fun of him. Now Andrew was a pastor. He often visited my house, and the conversation usually turned to Christianity. Sometimes I felt that his talk about religion was a nuisance. I told him that the Christians I had known were no better than the pagans. "What is there in Christianity that would make me want to be one?" I asked.

But Andrew did not give up. He invited me to a Revelation Seminar he was leading. I attended the first night just to please Andrew, but I found the presentation made sense. I felt compelled to attend the entire series. Little by little I began to see the essence of Christianity.

As I studied, I drew closer to Christ. I used to live for a drink, but suddenly the taste of alcohol made me sick. Other vices I had enjoyed now turned my stomach. I realized God was changing me, and eventually I asked Christ to take over my life.

My wife is a Christian and attended the Revelation Seminar with me. When I decided to be baptized she gladly stood beside me, for God had answered her prayers. She has not yet joined the Adventist church, but I am praying for her.

God has changed me so completely that my friends hardly recognize me. I talk about God instead of sports or business or money. I thank God, who loves me and sent my friend Andrew to show me the way to Him.

Mahama Daari is a superintendent of schools in Tamale, northern Ghana.



Forgiveness in the Hebrew Bible



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: "The Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exodus 34:6, 7).

IN JULY OF A.D. 144, Marion was condemned as a heretic for teaching that the God of the Old Testament was an evil being who could not be the same loving God of the New Testament.

Though that view is erroneous, some even today tend to think that the God of the Old Testament is not the same God of the New, particularly as revealed by Jesus. Of course, it is the same God—a loving, merciful God who forgives all who come to Him in true penitence and faith, no matter how bad they have been.

This week we will broach God's forgiving nature as revealed in some books of the Hebrew Bible; in them we will see the love of Christ manifested centuries before Jesus came in the flesh.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Why do we need divine forgiveness? What does it mean to sin against God? What are the various Hebrew words in the Old Testament for "forgiveness," and what can they teach us about how God forgives? What does the story of Hosea teach us about God's willingness to forgive sins? Is forgiveness any different in the Old Testament than in the New?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 12.

THE FORGIVING GOD.

"But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath" (Ps. 78:38).

The Bible is filled with examples of God's forgiveness toward humankind. The theme pulsates through its pages. The reason, of course, is simple. The Bible is a book about God's interaction with humanity; that is, fallen humanity, a race that through transgression has severed itself from its only Source of life—a race, therefore, in desperate need of God's forgiveness. In short, we needed forgiveness, and God has supplied that need. If He didn't, we would have no hope.

Look up these texts: Gen. 39:9; Ps. 51:4; Jer. 51:5; Dan. 9:8; and Zeph. 1:17. What do they all share in common? How do they help us understand why we need divine forgiveness?

When a person violates a criminal law, even if his or her act involved hurting another person, the violation is viewed as an act *against the state*. That person transgressed a law of the state; thus, he or she is deemed as having acted against the state, the one who made the law.

In parallel, sin—whether or not someone else is directly involved—is always an offense against God, the One who established that law as the moral foundation of His government. Now, if all humans sin and all sin is against God, then all have sinned against Him. Is it any wonder, then, that we need His forgiveness?

Fortunately, God is merciful, loving, and compassionate. That is why He is willing to forgive, again and again and again (after all, we sin again and again and again). If He did not forgive, what hope would we have?

The Old Testament abounds with examples of divine forgiveness. It has to, because it is filled with examples of human sin; and were it not for the promise and the reality of forgiveness, such sin would lead to death. The Old Testament is a book filled with hope, because it is a book filled with forgiveness.

It is easy to understand the idea of sinning against another person. You violate, cheat, or steal from him or her, and the hurt can often be seen. But to sin against God? What does that mean? Does sin "hurt" God? If so, in what way? Think about this during the week, write out your thoughts, and share them with your class on Sabbath.

TO BEAR, TO CLEANSE, TO FORGIVE.

The Old Testament is filled with examples of God's forgiveness. The word *forgive* in translation often comes from three main words, rich in meaning. Each conveys its own aspect of forgiveness; taken together, they form a nice tapestry that helps us understand the concept as it appears in the Hebrew Bible.

Look up the following texts: Exodus 32:32; Psalm 25:18; Psalm 32:1. The Hebrew word translated there for *forgive* comes from a word whose most basic meaning is "to bear," "to carry." In the context of these texts, write out how that basic meaning helps you understand how God forgives:

Look up Deuteronomy 21:8 and Jeremiah 18:23. The word translated for *forgive* here comes from the word that, at its root, means "to atone" (Lev. 1:4; 4:20, 35). This makes sense, because atonement is the foundation of forgiveness. The word also carries the meaning of "to cleanse," "to wipe off," and even "to cover" (in Genesis 6:14 the noun and the verb "pitch" come from the same root). Again, write down how knowing these meanings helps you understand the concept of forgiveness.

In Leviticus 4:26, 5:10, 1 Kings 8:30, Psalm 86:5, and Jeremiah 31:34, the Hebrew verb in these verses for *forgive* (by far the most common word) means, basically, "to pardon."

Take what you have learned from these different root words and the verses they're used in and write out how all together (look also at the context in which they are used) they give you an understanding of the process of forgiveness, as it appears in the Old Testament. Is the basis of forgiveness any different in the New? If so, what are the differences?

THE LORD REPENTS (Exodus 32:1-14).

Imagine someone who—having neither seen the Bible nor heard anything about the God revealed in it—found a fragment that contained only Exodus 32:1-14. Write down what this person might think about the Lord. Why could this section alone possibly give the wrong impression about the character of God?

Most people do not believe that Moses, by pleading with the Lord, changed God's mind about wiping out the Hebrews because of their worship of the golden calf. Look at what the Lord had done for them through the miraculous deliverance from Egypt after centuries there (Exod. 12:41), look at the swiftness of their apostasy (Exod. 32:8), and look at the fact that they sinned despite the clear command of God (Exod. 20:3-6). Nevertheless, even after all this, God was willing to forgive them. Thus, far from presenting a harsh God who relents only because some sinful human being asks Him to, this story is an example of God's willingness to forgive His people, even though they do not deserve it.

We believe that the God presented in this story is Jesus of Nazareth. See John 8:58, 14:9, and 1 Corinthians 10:1-10. What examples can you find from the life of Jesus that reveal this same willingness to forgive the undeserving?

Many are confused by the phrase found in Exodus 32:14 that says the Lord “repented” of His intention to wipe out the Israelites. How does an all-powerful God, who knows the beginning from the end, “repent” from something? Even if one can find a translation with another verb (the NIV uses the past tense of the verb “relent”), how can we understand this idea of God, in a sense, changing His mind?

The best answer seems to be that the words *the Lord repented* are a feeble attempt to express the divine will in human language. God “repents,” not when He changes His mind but when, instead of bringing wrath and punishment on sinners as they deserve, He forgives out of His own mercy and graciousness.

Imagine that you met a person who knew nothing else about our Lord other than what he or she found in Exodus 32:1-14. What other verses and stories could you share that would give this person a fuller account about the character of God? What lesson can we learn, too, about the danger of building a theology from a single passage or a single story?

LOVING THE UNLOVABLE: PART 1.

"The beginning of the word of the Lord by Hosea. And the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord" (Hos. 1:2).

Many are the ways in which the Lord teaches us what forgiveness is about, what it means, and what results it brings. The story of Hosea and his adulterous wife dramatically demonstrates some of these important truths.

Read Hosea 1. Why would God ask someone to marry an adulterous woman? What point was the Lord making?

How many people would marry someone, knowing beforehand, that this person was going to commit adultery at some point in the marriage? Yet, this is what Hosea did; and his story presents a graphic message, not only about sin but about forgiveness, as well.

Think about it: There are few ways in which a husband-and-wife relationship (symbolic of the intimacy God wants with His people) can be more violated than in the case of adultery. The key word here is *relationship*. Sin, at its core, damages our relationship with God and with each other. Sin is a corruption of the entire being, one that results only in conflict and turmoil within ourselves and with others. A person becomes incapable of trusting or being trusted, loving or being loved. Sin is not just what we do; it reflects what we are. Adultery, as presented here in Hosea, is just one dramatic manifestation of sin and of how it impacts our relationships, not only with each other but with God.

"O miserable man, what a deformed monster sin has made you! God has made you 'little lower than the angels'; sin has made you little better than the devils."—Joseph Alleine, quoted in Michael Brown, *Go and Sin No More* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1999), p. 20.

Only as we understand just how damaging sin is to us can we understand what it cost to forgive us our sin. Look at the Cross and what happened there. Jesus, equal with God Himself, bore in Himself the penalty for our sins—the only way these sins could be forgiven. What, then, does that tell us about just how evil sin must be, that it took so much to be able to forgive it?

LOVING THE UNLOVABLE: PART 2 (HOSEA 3).

"The Lord said to me, 'Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes'" (Hos. 3:1, NIV).

Try to catch what is going on in this story. Gomer openly commits adultery, and yet the Lord tells Hosea to take her back, despite such a blatant violation of their marriage vows.

Read Hosea 3:1-3. What must have been on the minds of those who saw Hosea go back and redeem her? How many understood this act as an example of God's willingness to take back His adulterous people, forgive their sins, and heal them from what those sins have done to them?

According to the letter of the law, Hosea could have stoned her to death; instead, he brought her back to live as his wife. That is the basic difference between law and grace: The law demands death for the transgressor, grace grants forgiveness.

Read Romans 5:20, 7:5; 1 Corinthians 15:56; Galatians 2:21; and Ephesians 2:8. What do these texts say about the difference between law and grace?

"Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt" (Hos. 2:14, 15, NIV). What does this text say about the willingness of the God of the Old Testament to forgive? In what ways can you see Jesus in these words?

Time after time Israel was surprised by the depth of God's love and forgiveness. True, there were moments when the people had to be disciplined in order for them to perceive how low they had fallen, but it was always for the purpose of helping them see God's love more clearly. A superficial reading of the Old Testament might give the reader the impression that God is not the same deity manifested in Jesus Christ. However, a careful reading unveils the same forgiving Deity who—in order to help His people grow into the likeness of the God who passed in front of Moses—met a rebellious people where they were in their social and spiritual development and gently led them step by step in an effort to bring them up to the level of the relationship He envisioned.

FURTHER STUDY: Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 552–556.

As Moses interceded for Israel, his timidity was lost in his deep interest and love for those for whom he had, in the hands of God, been the means of doing so much. The Lord listened to his pleadings, and granted his unselfish prayer. God had proved His servant; He had tested his faithfulness and his love for that erring, ungrateful people, and nobly had Moses endured the trial. His interest in Israel sprang from no selfish motive. The prosperity of God's chosen people was dearer to him than personal honor, dearer than the privilege of becoming the father of a mighty nation. God was pleased with his faithfulness, his simplicity of heart, and his integrity, and He committed to him, as a faithful shepherd, the great charge of leading Israel to the Promised Land.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 319.

“Few give thought to the suffering that sin has caused our Creator. All heaven suffered in Christ’s agony; but that suffering did not begin or end with His manifestation in humanity. The cross is a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that, from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God. Every departure from the right, every deed of cruelty, every failure of humanity to reach His ideal, brings grief to Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 263.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Look at the second quote by Ellen White. How does the Cross help us understand what sin does to God?
2. Read Daniel’s prayer in chapter 9. Look specifically at verses 18, 19. On what basis is Daniel appealing to God for forgiveness? How does that appeal fit in with our understanding of the gospel? In other words, is his appeal really based on anything different than what someone in New Testament times would appeal to? Explain your answer.
3. Think about this: The whole concept of forgiveness implies the existence of guilt. For example, does God forgive animals if they steal food or kill someone? Of course not. But why not? It is because the animal is amoral; it is not capable of making a moral choice. It is no more guilty and in need of forgiveness than would be a car that kills someone in an accident. Yet as human beings, we need forgiveness from God, because we have been guilty of wrong acts. The fact that we (as opposed to animals) need forgiveness implies what about us as moral beings?



Touched With God's Love

J. H. Zachary

Valentina grew up in a village near Rostov-on-Don, Russia. Her life was centered on the Orthodox church, which she believed was the only true church. In spite of this, she never owned or read a Bible.

One day a neighbor invited Valentina to visit her church. She agreed. However, the service was so alien to her understanding of a worship service that she felt awkward, as if she was going against God. Valentina feared that God was very angry with her and would punish her for attending the church.

Her friend gave her a Bible. Valentina took it, but later she decided to sell the dangerous heretical book. When she was offered another book, called *The Great Controversy*, she refused to take it.

Then tragedy struck. Within a few weeks Valentina's sister, then her brother, died. She wept bitterly and asked God, "Why don't You love me?"

Valentina's Adventist friend attended her brother's funeral and later visited her at home. She introduced Valentina to a missionary couple who had recently moved to town. They also visited Valentina and prayed for her. Hope began to return to Valentina. The three friends shared precious Bible promises that proved God's love and revealed His plan to return for those who love Him.

It was difficult for Valentina to abandon her lifelong faith and her precious icons. At first she thought that if she did, she would be denying God. But little by little Valentina saw that personal faith in the Lord and His promises were the source of peace and salvation.

She began attending the Adventist church in a neighboring town. It was difficult to adjust her thinking to observe the Sabbath and to focus her worship on the God revealed through Bible study. She joined a small group that met in her village. As they studied and prayed together, her life changed. Her heart was filled with peace. She relaxed in the knowledge of God's love for her. Valentina began to reach out to others.

There are only five Adventists in Valentina's village. Their burden is to share Jesus with their neighbors. They are patient, for they understand how difficult it is for people to leave their lifelong religious traditions. But they share their faith in God, knowing that God will bless them and those they touch with His love.

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Forgiveness and Repentance



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (Romans 2:4).

THE BUMPER STICKER had only one word written across it: “Repent!” That is all it took, one word, not even exclusively a Christian word (it is used in other contexts and even in other faiths), and the faith of the owner was clearly identified. That is because the concept of repentance is tied so intricately to Christianity. In fact, not only did the word reveal the faith of the owner, but that word, as expressed, was also a form of witnessing.

Thus, with one word, the owner of the car revealed his faith; he was able to witness for it, as well.

This week we will look at that word, not so much in the verb form (“repent”) but as a noun, “repentance,” even if, at its core, repentance is nothing if not a verb; that is, something a Christian does.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: How important is the concept of repentance in Christian theology? How does repentance help us understand what it means to be forgiven? How does our understanding of the Cross help us come to repentance? What is true repentance? Why must repentance involve more than just sorrow for the consequences of sin? What danger is there of making repentance an attempt at salvation by works?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 19.

TO COME TO REPENTANCE.

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

Read the chapter in which this verse appears, focusing particularly on the texts leading up to verse 9. The context is that of the last days, before the Second Coming, when this world as we know it ends. Peter is talking also about scoffers, about those who deride the notion of Christ's return—a time that will ultimately lead to the "destruction of ungodly men" (2 Pet. 3:7, NASB). It is in the midst of these thoughts that Peter expresses the wonderful truths, in verse 9, that God's promises are not delayed and that He will fulfill His purposes among us.

Though the immediate context of the chapter is one of "gloom and doom," of mockers, of delay, and of destruction, what does Peter say in verse 9 that should give followers of Christ hope and security? What does the text itself also imply about God's love, even for those who, even now, might be mocking the notion of His return?

Though God does not want anyone to perish, some clearly will (Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:14, 15); it is obvious, then, that whatever God's desire might be for all human beings, He respects our freedom of choice and free will—even if those choices can lead to the death of beings for whom Christ died (something He does not want to happen). This text, among other things, presents a powerful testimony to the sanctity of free will and free choice.

Notice the crucial word in verse 9 that, in a sense, separates the "dead" from the "living": *repentance*. God does not want any to perish; that is why He wants all to "come to repentance." The clear implication being, of course, that those who repent will not perish, while those who don't repent will. Whatever, then, repentance means, it obviously has consequences of eternal importance.

Write down somewhere your understanding of what it means to "come to repentance." When this week's lesson ends, write down your thoughts on the same topic, comparing what you learned with what you wrote for today's study. Share the differences with your class on Sabbath.

"TO BE FORGIVEN."

"But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:13).

The first task of Christians, for the most part, is not to learn to forgive but *to be forgiven*. "To be forgiven" is, in many ways, the foundational principle of Christianity. Without it, our actions become mere outward religious forms, and our profession of faith becomes nothing but cold dogmas, things containing no more value before God than the idols Israel made and worshiped while still professing faith in the same God we profess to worship, as well.

How, then, do we learn "to be forgiven"?

We learn when we acknowledge our inability to do anything of ourselves to earn or to merit God's grace. We learn when we realize just how bad our moral situation is and why we must fall before God with nothing to plead but our own great need of His mercy. We learn when we experience true sorrow for our sins themselves and not merely for the immediate consequences of those sins. We learn "to be forgiven" when we, indeed, learn to repent.

Look at the text for today in the context of the whole chapter (see also Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32). What did Jesus mean when He said the righteous do not need repentance but only sinners? Are we not all sinners? (Rom. 3:23).

Jesus called sinners to repentance because the righteous *had already repented*. They had to, because that is the only way they could be deemed "righteous." The "righteous" are those who have acknowledged their sin, who have accepted God's forgiveness for their sin and thus have Christ's righteousness credited to them as their own. They have, under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, confessed their sins, put away their sins, and surrendered themselves to God, grasping by faith alone the promise of forgiveness and righteousness made available through Christ's sacrifice. The righteous have already come to repentance; they have, in short, learned "to be forgiven."

Dwell more on this idea of learning "to be forgiven." Why is this idea so basic and crucial to the Christian life? Ask yourself this crucial question: Have I learned to be forgiven? If so, how could you explain what that means to someone who is struggling with this question but who hasn't learned it? How does repentance teach us what it means "to be forgiven"?

THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

"Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Rom. 2:4).

The human condition boils down to one simple point: Because of Adam's sin, we, as a race, have been alienated from the Creator, a situation that, if left unremedied, would lead to our eternal demise (Rom. 5:12). The good news is that Jesus, at the Cross, resolved that situation (5:8-10). How? Because there, in human flesh, Jesus died for the sins of the world (Gal. 3:13).

But do we really know what it means? What it means is that, at the Cross, your sins—whatever they were, and no matter how much damage they might have caused—have already been punished (Isaiah 53). It means that the legal penalty—before God—for every foul thing you have ever done or could ever do has been paid, in full, now and forever (Rom. 3:25). It means if you stole, the divine penalty for that sin has been taken care of; it means if you murdered, God's justice regarding that horrible act has already been satisfied; it means if you lied, if you cheated, or if you seduced your best friend's spouse (or daughter)—God's just anger at those sins has been met through Jesus' death (1 Pet. 2:24). It means that although you still have to deal with the immediate legal, moral, social, and relational *consequences* of those sins (which can be devastating), if you have surrendered in faith and obedience to the Lord, you will still never have to face God's wrath for those sins.

This means that your lies, your deceit, your foul thoughts have already been condemned at the Cross (John 12:31); your lusts, your greed, your perversions have already been condemned at the Cross; your hatred, your envy, your violence have already been punished at the Cross. If they were not, you would have to face that judgment, that condemnation, and that punishment yourself; and if you did, you would be judged *guilty*, you would be condemned, and you would be punished severely (Rev. 21:8). Fortunately, this judgment, condemnation, and punishment have already happened—at the Cross.

This is the provision that God, through His love (John 3:16), has provided as the only means to forgive us for our sins (2 Cor. 5:19).

Does what you have learned today cause you to want to continue in sin? Or does it cause you to hate your sin, to want to be forgiven, and to want to be purged and cleansed of your sin so thoroughly that you never do it again? If it's the latter, you are beginning to understand what the Bible means when it says that "the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance."

"GODLY SORROW."

Please read 2 Corinthians 7:9, 10.

The context of these words quickly can be summarized: Paul receives some terrible reports about the situation at the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 5:1; 6:1-8; 11:20-30), a church he himself had founded (Acts 18:1-11). He writes them a stern rebuke that, apparently, is accepted in the right spirit. Second Corinthians 7 contains his words of rejoicing over their positive response.

Paul, in 2 Corinthians 7:9, 10, contrasts two kinds of sorrow: godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. One leads to salvation, the other to death. Obviously, there is a big difference between the two. Keeping 2 Peter 3:9 in mind (Sunday's section), what do you think that difference is?

Perhaps the best way to understand "godly sorrow," the kind that "worketh repentance to salvation," is first to understand the real problem with sin, which can be understood only in the light of the Cross. Christ's death on the cross wasn't to save us from the immediate consequences of sin (obviously not, because we still suffer those consequences). Instead, Christ's death struck at the heart of sin, at the principle of sin as sin. Ultimately, He came to destroy sin itself.

Thus, "godly sorrow," the kind that leads to repentance, is sorrow for sin itself, for the principle behind it, as opposed to the immediate consequences. Almost anyone can sorrow over wrong deeds that lead to punishment or to embarrassment or to some unfortunate consequences. But that's not the real problem with sin, which is a rupture in the moral fabric of God's universe. Christ didn't die in order to spare the child of an adulterer the trauma of divorce; He didn't die to spare a thief time in jail, because the issue of sin goes so much deeper than the immediate and earthly, physical consequences of sin.

"Godly sorrow," though it can include the consequences of sin, must go deeper, to the principle of sin itself and to what sin means to God and to His creation. Only then, when we understand just how bad sin is (apart from immediate consequences), will we be sorry enough ("godly sorrow") to want it eradicated from our lives.

If we are sorry only for the consequences of sin, as opposed to the sin itself, then, if we could avoid the consequences, we would be less inclined to avoid the sin. How does this concept help us understand the true nature of repentance?

WHAT REPENTANCE DOES NOT DO (see Acts 5:31; 2 Tim. 2:25, 26).

In the course of this week's study on repentance and forgiveness, it should be clear how crucial repentance is to forgiveness. In fact, it would seem that without repentance, there can be no personal forgiveness of sin. The provision the Lord made for the human race (see Romans 5) becomes individually efficacious only as the individual accepts what was done; repentance is the process of this acceptance.

Look at Acts 5:31 and 2 Timothy 2:25, 26. Where do they say repentance comes from?

The point that Christians need to remember is that repentance, no matter how crucial to the process of forgiveness, is *not* the means of forgiveness. It is not some work that we do that earns us pardon. There's no merit in repentance in the sense that the act itself is something that can make us acceptable in God's sight or that it helps atone for our sins. Forgiveness comes only through what Christ did for us on the cross, an act that is external to us (Heb. 9:12). Repentance, like faith (see Eph. 2:8, 9), is a divinely endowed gift that allows us to appropriate in our own lives the promise of forgiveness.

In other words, we must not make the doctrine of repentance into a subtle form of salvation by works, which is easy to do (for our natural tendency is to try to work our way to heaven). Sorrow for sin and a desire to turn away from it, though key elements of repentance, are simply not sufficient to solve the problem of sin and forgiveness.

The Greek word for true repentance, *metanoia*, means literally "a change of mind." How does that concept help us understand what repentance involves?

Though repentance is a gift from God, as any gift it has to be accepted. And yet not everyone will accept the gift. Many times people will resist the Spirit's attempts to bring the soul to repentance. Why is that? Keeping in mind the idea that repentance involves sorrow for our sin, the need to turn away from our sin, the recognition of our sin, and our utter helplessness to do anything ourselves about our sin, what are some of the reasons why people might be resistant to accepting the gift of repentance? Look at your own life: Can you see, in yourself, any resistance? If so, how can Romans 2:4 help?

FURTHER STUDY: Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, "A Knowledge of God," pp. 85-91.

As you see the enormity of sin, as you see yourself as you really are, openly do not give up to despair. It was sinners that Christ came to save. We have not to reconcile God to us, but—O wondrous love!—God in Christ is 'reconciling the world unto Himself.' 2 Corinthians 5:19. He is wooing by His tender love the hearts of His erring children. No earthly parent could be as patient with the faults and mistakes of his children, as is God with those He seeks to save."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 35.

"Paul had ever exalted the divine law. He had shown that in the law there is no power to save men from the penalty of disobedience. Wrongdoers must repent of their sins and humble themselves before God, whose just wrath they have incurred by breaking His law, and they must also exercise faith in the blood of Christ as their only means of pardon. The Son of God had died as their sacrifice and had ascended to heaven to stand before the Father as their advocate. By repentance and faith they might be freed from the condemnation of sin and through the grace of Christ be enabled henceforth to render obedience to the law of God."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 393.

"There are many who fail to understand the true nature of repentance. Multitudes sorrow that they have sinned, and even make an outward reformation, because they fear that their wrongdoing will bring suffering upon themselves. But this is not repentance in the Bible sense. They lament the suffering, rather than the sin. Such was the grief of Esau when he saw that the birthright was lost to him forever."—Ellen G. White, *Conflict and Courage*, p. 63.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Paul rejoiced that the Corinthians sorrowed to repentance. Why can there never be repentance without sorrow? At the same time, in what ways can Satan tempt us to take our sorrow too far, and why would he even try to do that?
2. There's a fine line between guilt, the kind that Christians should no longer bear, and repentance, which in a very real sense involves a kind of "guilt." How can we draw the distinction between the two?
3. In light of this week's lesson, what do you think the phrase "works meet for repentance" means? (Acts 26:20; see also Matt. 3:8).



Cuban Revolution, Part 1

Charlotte Ishkanian

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Hector Soque drove a truck for a cement company in eastern Cuba. One day he was to take a load of cement to a church building site. He had to park the truck some distance away from the building site and wondered how he would get the cement to where it was needed. Suddenly, men, women, and children hurried to the truck carrying buckets, cooking pots, anything that would hold cement. They began filling the vessels with the heavy cement and carrying it to the building site.

Hector watched amazed as these people carried cement all afternoon without complaining. "What kind of church is this?" he asked one of the workers. When he learned that it was an Adventist church, he wanted to know more about Adventists.

A church member gave him a Bible, and he began to read it. When someone told him that Adventists are a sect, Hector studied the Bible even more deeply. Soon he was spending all his free time reading the Bible. He shared with his family what he was learning about the hope we have in Christ. The family began to attend the Adventist church, and eventually all were baptized.

When Hector lost his job because of the Sabbath, he claimed God's promise to provide his needs.

An Adventist man invited Hector to visit his home some distance from the church and in an area where no other Adventists live. While there, Hector felt God calling him to start a church in that area. The man offered his home and promised to invite his friends if Hector would come and teach them.

Hector spent every Sunday visiting people and holding Bible class at his friend's house. Within a year, some twenty people were attending the Sunday-night meetings. They needed a larger house of worship, but there was no money for a church, and the members were very poor. The man who had opened his home to the church sold his car to provide money to build a chapel that holds about fifty people. During evangelistic meetings, 100 people crowded into the chapel.

Hector loves teaching others about Christ, so when the conference asked him to move to another city and start a church there, Hector agreed. He and his wife said Goodbye to their family and friends, left their teenage daughter with her grandmother so she could continue her studies, and moved. It is a sacrifice, but the couple agrees, "Jesus is coming soon, and we want to do what we can to help people be ready to meet Him."

(continued next week)

Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of *Mission*.

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How Jesus Forgave



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: "And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:11).

THE CROSS is the means by which God could be just and, at the same time, forgive our sins. That is quite a feat, because justice, by nature, demands being given the punishment you deserve, while forgiveness demands the opposite, being given what you *do not* deserve. Justice and forgiveness, then, seem mutually exclusive: You can have one or the other—but not both. Yet God, through Christ, accomplished both at the Cross.

This week we will look at one side of this amazing paradox—forgiveness, as it was revealed by Jesus when here in the flesh. Remember, Jesus came to show us the Father, a God who wants to forgive us our acts, no matter how bad. No wonder that Jesus was constantly offering forgiveness to those who would accept it. He was merely expressing His Father's will for us all. Let us look at some examples of how Jesus forgave and see what lessons we can learn.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What was the main reason why Jesus healed the paralytic? What does that story teach about the link between forgiveness and healing? What does forgiveness have to do with human self-esteem? What can we learn from the different accounts of how Jesus forgave Peter? Why did Jesus forgive the woman caught in adultery? Was Christ's prayer for those who crucified Him answered?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 26.

THE FORGIVING OF THE PARALYTIC (Mark 2:1-11).

A powerful illustration of how Jesus forgave is found in the healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:1-11). Mark 1 ends with the news being spread far and wide of Jesus' ability to heal the sick, so that people from everywhere were coming to Him (Mark 1:45). In this context, the story of the paralytic appears.

Read the first five verses of Mark 2. By all indications, what was the reason they brought the sick man to Jesus? Was it to secure healing for their friend, or was it to secure forgiveness of his sin?

Using the typical Jewish understanding of the relationship between sin and sickness and between healing and forgiveness, Jesus proclaimed God's new kingdom by first forgiving this man his sins and then healing him.

What significance, if any, is found in the fact that Jesus first forgave the paralytic his sins and then healed him? Does forgiveness always precede healing, or is the other order more common? Or, perhaps, less important than the question of order is the fact that healing and forgiveness are linked. What do you think?

It is important to remember that whatever good Jesus did ministering to humanity and whatever good He does for us now, without the forgiveness of our sins and the hope of eternal life that come from His forgiveness, any healing, any restoration, any comfort that we derive from the Lord is only a temporary measure, one that doesn't solve our ultimate dilemma. In other words, Christ did *not* come to earth in order to spend three and a half years just healing and comforting people. On the contrary, one could argue that the healing and ministering and comforting were all for a greater purpose, and that was to point people to Him as the Sin Bearer and to God's forgiveness.

Read Mark 2:6-11. "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house" (vss. 10, 11). Was the healing of the paralytic an end in itself? Where was the Lord seeking to lead those who saw what happened with the paralytic? In the context of this story, Ellen White wrote, "It was to manifest His power to forgive sins that the miracle was performed."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 267. Why did Jesus want people to know that He had the power to forgive sin?

FORGIVENESS AND SELF-ESTEEM: PART 1 (Luke 5:1-11).

Of all the Gospel writers, Luke seems most interested in how Jesus dealt with the “sinners” of Jewish society and in how He interacted with individuals whose self-image was so poor that they despised themselves. Not only were they rejected as religious and social outcasts but they often faced numerous verbal and nonverbal messages that made them feel even more filthy and unworthy. Included in this group were peasants who did not keep the law in all its details, such as Simon Peter, the fisherman.

With this background in mind, read Luke 5:1-11. Jesus got into Peter’s boat and preached to the crowd. When He finished speaking, he told Peter to let the nets into the water. Though Peter expressed skepticism about catching anything, he was apparently impressed enough by Jesus that he obeyed anyway. The rest is history.

Read verse 8. Peter says to Jesus, “Depart from me,” because I am sinful. Is it not precisely because we are sinful that we would want Jesus to be with us? What do these words reveal about Peter’s ignorance (however understandable at the time) regarding Christ’s mission? (Compare Peter here to the Peter who wrote 1 Peter 1:18, 19.)

How fascinating that according to Luke, after Peter declared his sinfulness, Jesus said nothing about Peter’s sins being forgiven. Instead, He says to him, “Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men” (vs. 10). In other words, the first thing Jesus does is tell Simon Peter the work He is going to have Him do. Perhaps Jesus, knowing Peter’s lack of self-esteem, immediately told him of his important task in order to help Peter understand that, although he was a sinner, Christ not only accepted him but was going to trust him with important work.

Thus, one result of being forgiven by God is that we should learn to respect ourselves as His children and feel good about who we are by His grace. Sure, Peter was a sinful man, and he knew his sinfulness. Yet, imagine what it must have done for his sense of self-worth to be told by the Master that instead of now catching fish he would be working with Him to win souls. Talk about a career promotion!

How do we strike the right balance between, on the one hand, being aware that we are sinners in need of God’s grace and, on the other, having a healthy sense of self-worth? Are these two concepts mutually exclusive? Can we have both? If so, how?

FORGIVENESS AND SELF-ESTEEM: PART 2.

After accepting Jesus as Lord, Peter emerged as one of Christ's closest and most loyal disciples, boldly proclaiming his faith that Jesus was the Messiah (Matt. 16:16; John 6:69) and his firm intention to stay faithful to His Master, even until death (Luke 22:33).

Notice the transition from the Peter of Luke 5:8 to the Peter of Luke 22:33. What could have brought about such a tremendous change? Which Peter do you think was probably in better spiritual shape, and why?

The story of Peter's blatant betrayal of Christ (Luke 22:55-62) not long after his boastful claim of loyalty is well-known. Of course, Christ forgave him for his denial. What is interesting, however, is the manner in which Christ manifested His forgiveness to Peter.

Read the account in John 21:1-17 and answer the following:

1. What similarities appear both here and in the account of the time when Jesus first called Peter (Luke 5:1-11)? What are some of the differences?
2. What symbolism, if any, can be found in the fact that their nets were now full of fish? (vs. 6).
3. Look at Peter's actions when he first heard it was the risen Christ on the shore. Did he act like someone who felt afraid to see Jesus, even after the betrayal? What might have accounted for Peter's attitude?
4. Jesus told Peter three times to feed His sheep. In what ways were Christ's words to Peter an indication that He had forgiven Him, even without specifically saying so?
5. Though Christ could have forgiven Peter for his shameful betrayal, why did He give him such an important task? Couldn't it have been said, and justly so, that though Peter was forgiven, his act disqualified him for any major role in the church?

THE ADULTEROUS WOMAN (John 8:1-11).

Read the story of the woman caught in adultery. Though the account is rather brief, a few background thoughts may help put it in perspective.

First of all, how can a woman be caught in adultery without a man being caught, as well? Yet, where is the man? Why is only the woman brought to Jesus? Second, according to Jewish law, it was almost impossible to prove that adultery had occurred. Requirements of evidence were so strict that someone would all but have to be set up to be caught. Proof demanded several witnesses who had no prior knowledge or suspicion that the act would be committed. Jewish law also stipulated that if anyone even believed someone else was going to break the law, he or she had to do all within his or her power to prevent the transgression. In other words, catching one in the act was supposed to be completely accidental. There should, ideally, be no plotting to ensnare someone in sin. However, the fact that the man caught with the woman was not accused when she was brought to Jesus indicates entrapment. In fact, Ellen White wrote that the Pharisees who brought her to Jesus "had themselves led their victim into sin, that they might lay a snare for Jesus."—*The Desires of Ages*, p. 461.

Entrapped or not, the woman still committed the sin. She had no excuse for her actions. And yet, look at how firmly and unequivocally Jesus forgave her. Notice His words: "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:11). Just like that, she was forgiven. What did the woman do to deserve such a complete and firm pardon for her sins?

Notice, however, that Christ's words to her did not end with pardon. He then admonished her not to sin again. He did not say to her "Don't do it again, and then I will no longer condemn you." Instead, the pardon came first and then the call to obey. Is this not how the Christian life works? God first forgives our sins, an act of total mercy on His part (as it was for the woman caught in adultery); then, as a result of that forgiveness and pardon, we are motivated and empowered to live in obedience, not in order to be forgiven but because we have already been forgiven. If it were any other way—that is, if works and obedience came first, with forgiveness following as a result—then forgiveness would be not by faith but by works.

Why, in order to have any assurance of salvation, must forgiveness precede good works?

FATHER, FORGIVE THEM (Luke 23:34).

Few words in Scripture have echoed through history with the power and intensity of Christ's quick prayer that the Father would forgive those who were crucifying Him. What a powerful testimony to His unceasing, unconditional love for all humanity. With that utterance, spoken under the most incredible conditions, Jesus gave the world the great example of true forgiveness.

Read Luke 23 and then answer these questions:

1. Did the Father unconditionally answer Christ's prayer? Were those people automatically forgiven? If not, why not? See Rom. 3:28; 8:1; 1 John 1:9.
2. Though Jesus specifically stated that these people didn't know what they were doing, He still asked the Father to forgive them. What does this imply about ignorance of the full implications of our wrong deeds not being a valid excuse for those deeds?
3. By praying to the Father in behalf of these people, what role was Jesus already, in a sense, assuming? How does what He said here help us understand just what He does for us in that role? Rom. 8:34; Heb. 8:1; 1 John 2:1.

Christ's prayer in their behalf becomes even more remarkable when we realize just how unfairly He had been treated. Having spent three and a half years doing nothing but good, having given, time and again, remarkable evidence of His work and mission, having over and over showed His willingness to love and minister to even the most corrupt among them, Jesus nevertheless faced their undeserved scorn. The sheer injustice of it all remains incomprehensible. Thus, if anyone had the right to be angry with them, it was Jesus; if anyone had the right to call out for God's vengeance on them, it was Jesus; if anyone had the right to want to see these people punished for their deeds, it was Jesus. *Instead, He cries out for God to forgive them?*

This same Jesus, who asked the Father to forgive those who were crucifying Him, is the same Jesus who now ministers in heaven for us, who is just as eager for our sins to be forgiven. How can you use this account to help anyone struggling with the fear that, perhaps, their sins are too grievous to be forgiven?

FURTHER STUDY:

The Saviour made no murmur of complaint. His face remained calm and serene, but great drops of sweat stood upon His brow. There was no pitying hand to wipe the death dew from His face, nor words of sympathy and unchanging fidelity to stay His human heart. While the soldiers were doing their fearful work, Jesus prayed for His enemies, ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.’ His mind passed from His own suffering to the sin of His persecutors, and the terrible retribution that would be theirs. No curses were called down upon the soldiers who were handling Him so roughly. No vengeance was invoked upon the priests and rulers, who were gloating over the accomplishment of their purpose. Christ pitied them in their ignorance and guilt. He breathed only a plea for their forgiveness,—‘for they know not what they do.’

“Had they known that they were putting to torture One who had come to save the sinful race from eternal ruin, they would have been seized with remorse and horror. But their ignorance did not remove their guilt; for it was their privilege to know and accept Jesus as their Saviour. Some of them would yet see their sin, and repent, and be converted. Some by their impenitence would make it an impossibility for the prayer of Christ to be answered for them. Yet, just the same, God’s purpose was reaching its fulfillment. Jesus was earning the right to become the advocate of men in the Father’s presence.

“That prayer of Christ for His enemies embraced the world. It took in every sinner that had lived or should live, from the beginning of the world to the end of time. Upon all rests the guilt of crucifying the Son of God. To all, forgiveness is freely offered. ‘Whosoever will’ may have peace with God, and inherit eternal life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 744, 745.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does one reconcile Christ’s prayer for His persecutors with Romans 12:19?
2. Read the quote above. How do we understand the words that upon all “rests the guilt of crucifying the Son of God”?
3. At the same time, Ellen White also states that “to all, forgiveness is freely offered.” Notice that she does not say that all are forgiven but that forgiveness is offered to all. What is the difference between the two concepts?
4. Read Galatians 2:7-14. What does it tell us about Peter again needing forgiveness?



Cuban Revolution, Part 2

Charlotte Ishkanian

Hector Soque and his wife, Doris Sanchez, moved to Tacajó, a city of 40,000 in eastern Cuba, to start an Adventist church. They began making friends with their neighbors and invited them to a Bible study meeting in their little home on Sunday evenings. And people, hungry for spiritual food after years of communism, came.

As the group grew, Hector and Doris added weeknight meetings, as well. Eventually they invited people to worship with them on Sabbath mornings. However, they knew that many people could not come on Sabbaths because of their work, so the couple continued the evening meetings. In the first year, 16 people were baptized. The new believers are humble and eager to learn.

One woman told Hector about her husband, Eulogio. "He is an honest-hearted Christian," she said. "If you invite him to your meetings, he will come." Hector visited Eulogio and invited him to the Sunday-night meeting. Eulogio challenged Hector, "If you show me the truth in the Bible, I will accept it." Eulogio began attending the Bible studies and discovered clear Bible truths. His teenage daughter joined him, but his wife did not come for fear of losing her government job.

Eugenio worked on a farm, but his boss wanted him to work on the Sabbath. In faith he quit his job, and God provided another job cutting grass along the roads in town. "My new job pays the same as my old one," Eugenio says, "but I do not have to work on the Sabbath."

Alex is 11 years old and had a heart problem. His mother began attending the Adventist meetings then took Alex. Now several members of the family attend and are preparing for baptism. When church members learned of Alex's heart problem, they began praying for him. The boy, who once could not run or even walk without becoming tired, now can run and play with his friends as if nothing was ever wrong with his heart.

"God took a humble truck driver and called me to work for Him," Hector says. "I can never imagine doing anything else." Because of dedicated lay people like Hector and Doris, work in Cuba is moving forward rapidly. Keep these faithful believers in your prayers.



Hector Soque and Doris Sanchez (left). Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of *Mission*.

Forgiveness and Guilt



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

IN SHAKESPEARE’S PLAY *MACBETH*, Lady Macbeth—involved in murder—wanders around the castle at night, murmuring to herself, going through the motion of washing her hands. “It is an accustomed action with her,” said a gentleman of the castle, “ . . . [to] continue in this a quarter of an hour.” In the same scene, Lady Macbeth then cries out, “Here’s the smell of blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.”

Though portrayed in the play as a cold-hearted woman willing to do anything to achieve her goals, Lady Macbeth apparently had something inside her that she didn’t realize, and that was a conscience. And that conscience began eating away at her because of the terrible crimes she had committed. In short, even someone so hard, wicked, and callous as Lady Macbeth was suffering from guilt.

Of course, she’s not alone. Who cannot relate? After all, are we not all guilty? Have we not all sinned? Have we not all done things we are ashamed of? This week’s lesson will help us look at the answer to this perennial human problem.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Who’s guilty? How bad are we? Why do we suffer from guilt? How high of a moral standard are we expected to follow? What is the only remedy for guilt? In what ways are guilt and forgiveness linked?

*Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 3.

THE GUILT FACTOR (Rom. 3:9).

On May 29, 1919, Arthur Stanley Eddington pointed a telescope toward an eclipse and proved that gravity did, as Einstein theorized, bend light. Unfortunately, nothing has been pointed toward the heavens, in the earth, or in any direction that has proved, with such "provable" objectivity, that Christ is the Son of God, who, at the Cross, shed His blood as an atonement for sin. People need faith to believe that "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible" (1 Cor. 15:52), but do not need faith to believe that "for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction" or that gravity bends light. In other words, our religion requires faith, belief in something that cannot be "proved" in the same sense that one can prove simple math equations.

However, if there is one aspect of our religion that doesn't require a whole lot of "faith," it is the sinful nature of humanity. It is as obvious as the morning paper, or perhaps even the lusts of our own hearts. Jean Paul Sartre once wrote: "Hell is—other people!" He does have a point.

Read Romans 3:9-18. Write out in your own words the essence of what Paul is saying there.

In one sense, someone could argue that Paul's words are too strong. *There is none that does good? There is none that seeks after God?* Is that not a bit overstated? After all, are there not some people who do good things, who are earnestly seeking to know the Lord and know truth?

On the other hand, perhaps Paul is simply portraying the general state of humanity were it not for the power and presence of God on the earth. Those who do good do it only because of the action of God upon their hearts; those who seek Him do so only because the Spirit is moving upon them. But left to ourselves, without divine intervention, we are all just like those whom Paul wrote about here in Romans.

How do you respond to those who argue against the Christian notion of humanity being essentially evil? Perhaps the best way to help them understand is to help them understand the definition of *evil*. How would you as a Christian define that term?

GUILT TRIP.

Yesterday's study said that every human being was, basically, sinful and evil. This is scriptural. Is it any wonder, then, that human beings suffer from guilt? Or that the whole world is, to some degree, on a guilt trip? Paul continues in Romans: "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, *and all the world may become guilty before God*" (Rom. 3:19, emphasis supplied).

If nothing else, guilt reveals to us our fallen humanity. After all, when we look at history and see some of the worst crimes committed by people who showed no remorse, no sadness, no guilt over their deeds, we often call them "monsters" or some epithet, giving the idea they are devoid of humanity. Guilt is part of who we are, especially if we are creatures who, by nature, do wrong.

Take a look at the past week of your life. What things have you done that make you feel guilty? Make a mental note (or write it out if you want) of what element these acts, thoughts, or words have in common? In other words, look for a common denominator (such as, "It violated the law of God" or "It would have made me ashamed if someone found out" or "It could have hurt someone I love."). What can you learn from this exercise?

There is no question that guilt is a part of our existence. For Christians, the possibility of guilt rises even more so because of the high standards we have. After all, if you are comparing yourself to others, then you might not feel so bad about things, because most of us can find people who do "worse" than we do. On the other hand, as followers of Jesus, we, of course, have only one Example.

Look up Philippians 2:5 and 1 John 2:6. What do they tell us to do?

The Bible gives us a very high standard to follow: Love our enemies, do not lust in our heart, give freely of ourselves, take up our cross daily, minister to others, keep our thoughts in captivity to Christ. We know we are to do these things; we know we have been promised the power to do them—and yet sometimes we don't do them. No wonder we feel guilty.

Though guilt is a reality, how can we as Christians allow God to use that guilt for something good in our lives?

THE CROSS FACTOR (2 Cor. 5:19).

Look at this text for today. Whom did God reconcile to Himself? Not just Asia, not just South America, not just the Solomon Islands—but the world. In other words, all those whom in Romans Paul described in the most unflattering terms he now says can be reconciled to God.

What's the one key phrase in the text that expresses the basis of this reconciliation? What does it say, what does it mean, and how does it bring about this reconciliation?

We feel guilty because of our sins, because of our trespasses. Yet, according to this text, God through Christ no longer imputes or holds those sins and trespasses against us. In other words, no matter how universal the guilt, God's forgiveness is just as universal. We all are sinners, we all are guilty, but through Christ and His sacrifice on the cross, we all are offered forgiveness.

It is crucial to remember that Christ died for us, not despite our sins but *because of our sins*. Because "there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:12), Christ died for us. Because "their throat is an open sepulchre" (vs. 13), Christ died for us. Because "destruction and misery are in their ways" (vs. 16), Christ died for us. Because "their feet are swift to shed blood" (vs. 15), Christ died for us.

Not despite these things but *because of them* Jesus became our Sin Bearer, taking upon Himself the shame, the penalty, and the *guilt* of our sins.

Look at the following statement from Ellen White: "When Satan seeks to cover the people of God with blackness, and ruin them, Christ interposes. Although they have sinned, Christ has taken the guilt of their sins upon His own soul. He has snatched the race as a brand from the fire. By His human nature He is linked with man, while through His divine nature He is one with the infinite God. Help is brought within the reach of perishing souls. The adversary is rebuked."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 169. How does the truth that Christ bore our guilt help us deal with guilt in our own lives? How should it help us?

THE LOVE FACTOR.

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

Some people, plagued by guilt, are like boilers waiting to explode. Years of repressing their guilt have turned it into rage and rebellion. According to psychologists, our parents, by demanding too much, criticizing too much, affirming and praising too little, can produce harmful guilt in us. This process becomes even more acute in the context of religion.

The story of Cain illustrates this point. Notice that Cain (1) becomes angry and commits the murder of his brother, (2) experiences guilt as a result, and (3) deals with his guilt by rebelling against God's authority that condemned him. (See Gen. 4:16.) How often are repeated these principles behind this scenario, in one form or another, throughout history.

Of course, as Christians we are called to a high standard, the highest possible standard (Matt. 5:48). Yet, before seeking to reach that standard, we must be sure we understand that the foundation of our salvation rests not in how close we come to that standard (because we can never get close enough to earn salvation) but only in Jesus. He not only reached that standard for us; He offers His achievement in place of our failures. Without understanding this foundation, many people, fueled with rage and guilt over their failures, have left the church in an attempt to gain some peace of mind.

High standards are essential, as long as the gospel is their center. But without the balance of love for Christ as the basis of high standards, church members can experience frustration that leads to rebellion.

Read 1 John 4:7-10. What principle is operating here that can help us deal with those who, perhaps rightly so, are suffering from guilt? What is John saying? What did God show toward us that we need to show toward others? Yet, how can we do this without, at the same time, excusing the sin and deeds that brought the guilt to begin with? In what ways does the Cross reveal to us just how fundamental forgiveness is to love? Can we truly love and yet not forgive?

PEACE WITH GOD.

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

Unless we are willing to surrender ourselves completely to Christ, to give Him our wills, our desires, our fears, and our sins—we will fight a losing battle with guilt. We will never be able to forgive ourselves for our sins and, wallowing in our own guilt and anger, we will be less likely to forgive others.

Here is the moment when the Cross becomes so crucial. Only as we understand that we have been forgiven, that our guilt has already gone beforehand to judgment, can we begin to forgive ourselves and others. Only as we look at the Cross and realize that not only did God know beforehand of our sins but He made a way to forgive us those sins can we truly have the peace that we desire.

Look at Romans 5:1. What has happened that gives us peace with God? Using the context of this week's lesson, write in your own words what Paul is saying here. How do guilt and forgiveness fit in the equation? See also Romans 5:8; 1 John 1:7.

That God forgives our sins, even the worst of our sins, is a mystery too deep for us to fathom. There is no question, though, that because He does forgive our sins, because He has borne the guilt of them at the Cross, we can forgive ourselves and live without the crushing burden of guilt.

Yet, this does come with some hard questions. What do you say to someone whose child had been murdered by a person who, though sitting in jail, has just accepted Jesus and who proclaims joy, peace, freedom, not to mention true sorrow of the terrible crime he has committed? As a result of confession, repentance, sorrow, the murderer now claims to have "peace with God." Is it right that this person should now be guilt-free? Could you go to the parents, who weren't Christians (or even if they were), and tell them *with rejoicing* that the individual who murdered their baby now stands perfect in the sight of a loving God and who, though sorry for that sin, has confessed it to the Lord, who not only bore the guilt of that sin but has now given the murderer peace of mind and freedom from guilt? How could you explain this in a way that could make any sense to anyone?

Or can you?

FURTHER STUDY:

Acouncil was held in heaven, the result of which was that God's dear Son undertook to redeem man from the curse and the disgrace of Adam's failure, and to conquer Satan. Oh, wonderful condescension! The Majesty of heaven, through love and pity for fallen man, proposed to become his substitute and surety. He would bear man's guilt. He would take the wrath of His Father upon Himself, which otherwise would have fallen upon man because of his disobedience."—Ellen G. White, *Confrontation*, pp. 16, 17.

"As one with us, He must bear the burden of our guilt and woe. The Sinless One must feel the shame of sin. The peace lover must dwell with strife, the truth must abide with falsehood, purity with vileness. Every sin, every discord, every defiling lust that transgression had brought, was torture to His spirit."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 111.

"God is waiting to bestow the blessing of forgiveness, of pardon for iniquity, of the gifts of righteousness, upon all who will believe in His love and accept the salvation He offers. Christ is ready to say to the repenting sinner, 'Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.' The blood of Jesus Christ is the eloquent plea that speaks in behalf of sinners. This blood 'cleanseth us from all sin.' "—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 517.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What do you say to someone who says "The cross makes me feel even more guilty, because I see God's love for me there and yet I sin anyway, despite that love"?
2. What does it mean that Jesus suffered the guilt of our sins? Is that fair? Is it supposed to be fair?
3. No guilty man "is ever acquitted at the bar of his own conscience," wrote the Roman poet Juvenal. How does the Cross help undo the truth of that statement?
4. Is it right for a Christian no longer to feel guilty about bad deeds, even after those deeds have been forgiven? Explain your answer.



The Power of a Gentle Life

J. H. Zachary

The two young men sat in a New York factory classroom waiting for their new job orientation to begin. Ivan introduced himself to Luis and began telling some off-color jokes. But Ivan noticed that Luis did not respond to the jokes as most men do.

Ivan watched Luis during class. He was different—kind, thoughtful, patient, and seemed to enjoyed helping others.

As the newness of the job wore off, Ivan felt depression settling over him. One day in the factory cafeteria, Ivan saw Luis sitting in a corner by himself. *He must be depressed too*, Ivan thought. As he approached, he saw that Luis was not depressed; he looked peaceful, even joyful. *I've never met anyone like Luis in my life*, Ivan thought.

"Hey man, are you religious?" Ivan finally asked.

"Yes, I am," Luis replied.

During his teen years, Ivan had spent many hours reading the Bible. But some things he read did not agree with the teachings of his priest, such as the Sabbath. *Jesus had kept the Sabbath*, Ivan thought. *Why don't Christians?* Then there were other questions.

Ivan began asking Luis questions about the Bible, and Luis always answered them. Luis's answers made so much sense. Finally Ivan asked, "Hey man, what church do you attend?"

"I am a Seventh-day Adventist," Luis answered. Ivan had never heard of that church. Luis explained. "The Sabbath of the Bible is Saturday, the day that Jesus kept all of His life on earth."

"That answers one of my biggest questions!" Ivan said with excitement. "Ever since I was a kid, I thought that was what the Bible taught."

"Ivan, you would enjoy listening to a pastor who is speaking in town," Luis offered. Their friendship made it easy for Luis to agree to attend a Protestant church for the first time.

Ivan was deeply impressed. Everything the preacher said was founded on the Bible. Ivan took home the sermon review sheet and carefully studied each text. *This preacher is right and follows the Bible*, Ivan told himself.

During the meetings Ivan saw that he was a sinner, and he cried out to Jesus to save him. Ivan continued taking Bible studies and was baptized several months after the meetings ended. "I want to live a life as close to Jesus as I can," Ivan testifies. He would like to study theology, if it is God's will. And the change in his life began when he met a gentle, quiet Christian in a noisy factory.

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

Forgiveness and the Church



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:1, 2).

AUTHOR PHILIP YANCEY begins his book *What's So Amazing About Grace?* with a true story about a prostitute who paid for her drug habit by prostituting her two-year-old daughter to whomever was willing to pay. When asked if she ever thought about going to a church for help, she replied, “ ‘Church! . . . Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They’d just make me feel worse.’ ”—(Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1997), p. 11.

How ironic—the exact kind of person who had been drawn to Jesus when He was in the flesh is afraid to go to the church that bears His name. Maybe with good reason too. *After all, prostituting your own two-year-old daughter?* How should your local church respond to someone who comes to its door with such a story? This week we look at the all-important question of the church and forgiveness.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: How did Paul view the need for discipline in the local church? How did Paul balance that need with mercy? How can we as a church find the same balance? What gives the church the authority to discipline members?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 10.

SIN IN THE CHURCH: PART 1 (1 Cor. 5:1).

Jesus came to save the lost. When we read accounts like the one in 1 Corinthians 5:1, we can understand better what that idea means. Paul says that it is “reported commonly” this there is fornication in the church. In other words, it is not just some vague rumor, some nasty little gossip that fell his way. He has good reasons to believe the sordid account.

The word for fornication forms the root for the English word *pornography*. In the Greek of Paul’s time, that means some sort of illicit sexual relations. In this case, however, the kind of fornication is made rather explicit: A man is having sexual relations with his father’s wife—in other words, *his stepmother*. No details are given regarding her current relationship with the member’s father. Were they still married, or divorced? Was the father dead? Had the member married this woman, or were they living together?

Whatever the details, Paul doesn’t seem to care. He finds the relationship an abomination, a practice, he says, that is not accepted, even among the heathen.

And now it is in the church?

Read 1 Corinthians 5:2. What is Paul saying here to the Corinthian church? In what ways is the issue he is addressing here an even bigger problem than this wayward church member?

The texts themselves do not explain the reason for the church’s attitude about this blatant sin. Maybe the church member is very wealthy. Maybe the church has improper notions of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Instead of mourning the situation, they are actually “puffed up,” proud, if not over the specific sin itself then perhaps over their own spiritual state. Perhaps they feel pride in their tolerant, loving, and graceful attitude toward the sinner. Who knows? What we do know is what Paul feels about not only the act but the church’s attitude toward it.

Take that same situation and apply it to your local church. What reasons could you see your church, or any church, use in order not to act appropriately in such a blatant situation?

SIN IN THE CHURCH: PART 2 (1 Cor. 5:5).

Though Paul was not in Corinth when this problem was happening, he let the church know what he thought ought to be done about it. In fact, he says in 1 Corinthians 5:3 that although he has not been there in person to witness what was going on, he nevertheless has already made a judgment about the person who “hath so done this deed” (2 Cor. 5:3).

Read 1 Corinthians 5:4, 5. What does Paul say to do to the member who is involved in this sinful and shameful relationship? In whose name are they to act? See Ephesians 5:24. Why is that so important a point? Who is the man ultimately disgracing by his actions? First Corinthians, verse 5, is an especially difficult text. What do you think Paul is saying? What is he ultimately trying to do for the sinner?

Paul’s words sound pretty harsh. Though he is talking about disfellowshipping the man, Paul talks about actually delivering him to Satan. What does that mean? Commentators generally agree that what Paul seems to be saying here is that this person, by willfully defying the Lord, has severed Himself from the Lord, and the church is to acknowledge that choice by expelling him from the community of faith. At the same time, too, Paul does not want them to give up on him. There is a remedial element to be found in verse 5. The delivery of a sinner to Satan appears also in 1 Timothy 1:20. The idea of the “destruction of the flesh” (1 Cor. 5:15) perhaps could mean that because of the chastisement the man will put away his sinful actions and as a result be saved “in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:5).

Read 1 Timothy 1:20. What parallel can you find there with what Paul says to the Corinthians regarding the fate of this man?

However difficult the phraseology, Paul’s point seems clear: The man needs to be disfellowshipped for this deed. Perhaps, however, he will change his ways, as a result. In other words, one could argue here that the object of excommunication was not just retributive punishment but actually an act that could lead the sinner to repentance and, finally, reinstatement. In fact, some believe that is exactly what happened.

"CONFIRM YOUR LOVE": PART 1 (2 Cor. 2:1-11).

Though commentators are not in agreement, some believe that the person referred to in the text here (vss. 6-8) was, in fact, the man who had entered into an illicit sexual relationship with his father's wife (see yesterday's study).

Whatever the case, this point is clear from the texts: The disciplined member was to be restored to full fellowship. Just as the church in a public session had condemned him, the church in a public way must restore him. The apostle was calling for a formal action to assure this member of the congregation's love. In that way, no question as to his full restoration could be raised in the future. They were to confirm their love toward him.

Look at verses 7-10. Write down the three verbs Paul uses to describe what their attitude toward this person should be:

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Paul's pastoral side comes through very clearly. Whatever the offender had done, not only should he be reinstated but the church should give him love, comfort, and grace.

What he seems to be saying is that once someone has been exposed in public as a sinner and has subsequently given evidence of repentance, it is imperative that the church make clear in just as open a manner that the person involved is forgiven and accepted as a member of the family again. What is condemned in public cannot be erased in private. In other words, the grace that God bestows upon us when we repent and turn away from our sins needs to be reflected by the body that represents Christ; that is, His church.

Indeed, Paul is so adamant about this that in verse 11 he all but says that not to treat this person in such a manner would be to fall into one of Satan's snares. What kind of snares? Look up Job 1:9-12; Zechariah 3:1, 2; Revelation 12:10.

God is a God of mercy, forgiveness, grace, and love; His people are nothing if they don't reflect those attributes, not only as individuals but as a corporate body, as well.

Look at 2 Corinthians 2:8: "Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him." If, indeed, this is the same person discussed in the two previous days' sections, Paul, who was adamant that he be disfellowshiped, now is just as adamant that they reaffirm their love toward him. What does that tell us about the nature of church discipline?

"CONFIRM YOUR LOVE": PART 2.

Let us go back to Tuesday's study. Someone did something that brought upon him corporate rebuke from the church. Whatever it was (maybe even having an illicit affair with his stepmother), he obviously did what was needed to be done in order to satisfy Paul and the church that he should be reinstated into fellowship.

However, it is clear, too, that Paul was concerned that the person not be "swallowed up" with too much sorrow (2 Cor. 2:7). Thus, he tells the church to confirm their love toward him.

On this topic, *The SDA Bible Commentary* says: "Confirm. Gr. *kuro*, 'to ratify,' 'to confirm,' 'to reaffirm' (cf. Gal. 3:15). It was a legal term used of validating an agreement. Here it means to ratify or confirm by decree or vote of the church (see on Matt. 18:18). Acting in its corporate capacity, the church should revoke its former action and restore the man to fellowship. Discipline had been administered by a formal action on the part of the church; restoration to fellowship should be no less public and official. The man was to have full assurance of the favor of his brethren in the church. Thus, in the future, no question as to the validity of his reinstatement could arise." —Vol. 6, p. 838.

While all this is fine at the corporate level, what could individuals do in order to help such a person understand and accept that he or she has been forgiven and accepted back into the body? In other words, what could we as individuals do to help this person truly feel loved and accepted? What examples can we find from the Bible that would help us know what to do?

As a church, Seventh-day Adventists have long upheld certain moral standards that help define who we are. As a church, we must. At the same time, we need to be careful we don't become so rigid that we forget the human side of those with whom we fellowship and whom we expect to uphold and follow these standards.

We are all sinners; we are all beings weakened by sin; we have all fallen short of the glory of God. The grace that we need for ourselves (and we all need it) we should be just as willing to give freely to others who, perhaps, have not sinned as grievously as we have. Or maybe they have. Grace, remember, is unmerited favor. It is something given to those who *do not* deserve it.

In what kind of situations should a person *not* be extended the kind of grace that Paul talks about here in 2 Corinthians 2? Who should make that kind of judgment?

CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 5:4).

The Bible makes one point very clear: Christ has established His church on earth, and it is from Him that the church has derived its authority.

What do the following teach us about the authority of the church?

Matt. 16:19 _____

Matt. 18:17 _____

Eph. 1:22 _____

Eph. 5:23 _____

Col. 1:18 _____

Notice, too, the authority that Paul acknowledges in the local church at Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 5:4, he tells them to act in the name of Jesus Christ in the action of disfellowshipping the one living in open and blatant sin. In 2 Corinthians 2:10, he again acknowledges the authority of the local church in dealing with its members, even to the point of saying that whom they forgive, he forgives.

The church, of course, is not made up of any single person. It is a body of believers organized for the work of, among other things, proclaiming the gospel. But the important point is that no one individual in the church has the authority to do the things that Paul tells the church as a whole to do. In 1 Corinthians 5:4, he stresses that when you are "gathered together" in the name of Jesus, then you can act. There's wisdom in a multitude of counselors. These types of actions need to be taken on a corporate level, with the duly appointed leaders of the church under the unction of the Spirit, seeking to deal with the problems that arise within the church itself. No one person should be given free rein to decide these matters.

Christ, the Creator of the universe, has given power and authority to His church. That's a heavy responsibility. What can we do, as individual members of the church, to cooperate in ways that will allow the church to exercise that authority in a manner that reveals the mercy and the justice of God?

FURTHER STUDY: See the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, "Church Discipline," pp. 175-190; Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, pp. 260, 261.

Among the more serious of the evils that had developed among the Corinthian believers, was that of a return to many of the debasing customs of heathenism. One former convert had so far backslidden that his licentious course was a violation of even the low standard of morality held by the Gentile world. The apostle pleaded with the church to put away from among them 'that wicked person.' 'Know ye not,' he admonished them, 'that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened.' "—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 303, 304.

"In dealing with erring church-members, God's people are carefully to follow the instruction given by the Saviour in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew.

"Human beings are Christ's property, purchased by Him at an infinite price, bound to Him by the love that He and His Father have manifested for them. How careful, then, we should be in our dealing with one another! Men have no right to surmise evil in regard to their fellow-men. Church-members have no right to follow their own impulses and inclinations in dealing with fellow-members who have erred. They should not even express their prejudices regarding the erring; for thus they place in other minds the leaven of evil. Reports unfavorable to a brother or sister in the church are communicated from one to another of the church-members. Mistakes are made and injustice is done because of an unwillingness on the part of some one to follow the directions given by the Lord Jesus."—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 498.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Look at Matthew 18:15-18 in the context of the week's lesson. How does it parallel what we have studied this week about church authority, mercy, and discipline?
2. The *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* says that the church "recognizes the need of exercising great care to protect the highest spiritual interests of its members, to ensure fair treatment, and to safeguard the name of the church."—(Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Pub. Assoc., 2000), p. 185. How could the principles studied this week, if followed, help bring these stated goals to pass? In what ways could showing forgiveness to wayward members help make these goals a living reality?



Three Strange Visitors

Cyrile Macarayo

Dapilo-an Mission School vibrates with energy when the children gather for morning and evening worship. And the new village church, spawned by the school, is packed every Sabbath. Nearly everyone in the village has joined the church. Sanny attends group Bible studies but was not ready to commit his life to God.

One Sabbath morning Sanny's wife and children prepared to go to church. "Go with us, Papa," they begged.

"I'll follow later," he told them. But he planned to slip away to his garden in the forest instead.

Sanny's house stands near the church. He can hear the service from there. *Shall I attend church or not?* he debated. When the singing stopped, Sanny could hear the voice of a boy preaching. But he couldn't understand the words, so he walked to the church and sat down outside to listen. He still planned to sneak away to his farm.

Then Sanny saw three men dressed in white walk up the hill to the church. Sanny did not recognize them. Two of the men stood outside the church, but the third man walked straight to the pulpit, where the little boy stood preaching. Suddenly Sanny heard the voice of the child become the voice of the man.

Sanny hurried to the church door to hear what the stranger said. But the service was ending.

"Welcome," the members greeted Sanny. But Sanny's eyes were searching for the man who had walked into the church.

"Where's the stranger?" Sanny asked.

"What stranger?" they questioned. Sanny realized that he was the only one who saw the three men in white. Sanny hurried around the far side of the church and found the three men. "Who are you?" he asked, forgetting his manners.

"It is not time to reveal who we are," one said. "But we come every day for village worship, and we especially love to come on Sabbath. Be strong in faith, because the Lord is coming very soon, and those who are faithful will be saved."

Sanny was struck with fear. "Lord, please forgive me," he cried, falling to the ground. But when he looked up, the strangers were gone.

Not long after he met the strangers, Sanny was baptized. Today everyone in the village of Dapilo-an worships together morning and evening, and especially on Sabbath.

Cyrile Macarayo is a student at Mountain View College in southern Philippines. He served as a SULAD (student missionary) teacher in the Dapilo-an Mission School in the mountains of southern Philippines.

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MISSION

The Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on June 28 supports projects in the South Pacific Division.

For the Love of God



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him” (Colossians 2:6).

BRITISH WRITER WILLIAM SOMERSET MAUGHAM once said that “the greatest tragedy of life is not that men perish, but that they cease to love.” Maybe. Or perhaps the greatest tragedy is that they have never loved to begin with.

When one looks around the world, the fruits of so-called *love* can be bitter indeed. Many things done for *love* could make people question whether love is nothing but a curse, an irrational spasm of emotion. Think of the marriages that have been dissolved, the homes destroyed, the hearts broken and abused by *love*. Such examples, repeated throughout history, could give the word a bad reputation.

Yet, love is a fundamental element of creation. In one sense, from the inside of atoms to the coldest folds of curved space, love is what holds God’s universe together. If God is love, then we can be sure that love is something good, no matter how poorly it is at times manifested among us. Yet, we need to know what love is, because, as a result of the forgiveness we have received from the Cross, we are told, even commanded, to love—both God and humanity.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Why should we love God and humankind? What has God done that should cause us to love? Did our love for God lead Jesus to the Cross? What role does the law have for those whose motivation to serve God stems from love? If love fulfills the law, what need is there for the law?

*Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 17.

FIRST LOVE (1 John 4:19).

Sometimes, the deepest thoughts arise from the simplest expressions. Such as 1 John 4:19. It's bare, sparse, yet it comes heavy-laden with deep meaning. Science, technology, and philosophy could never begin to plumb the depths of this verse; all they could do is bounce off it, like rubber bullets against a brick wall.

Look up 1 Corinthians 2:14. What in that text reveals the basic inadequacy of these other disciplines (science, technology, philosophy) in discerning the meaning of this verse?

Textual evidence for 1 John 4:19 implies that the word *him* might not belong there; if so, it would read, "We love, because he first loved us." Either way, the basic point remains: We love only because we have been loved. And not just by anyone, but by our Creator.

And that's a crucial point. If evolution explains us, if we are nothing but the chance products of mere matter and energy, then where did love come from? How has love—not necessarily related to survival—been wedged into the human paradigm? In the Darwinian model, the matter that mutated toward love should have been buried under twenty feet of muck (somewhere between trilobites and *Australopithecus*); our bough of love should be a dried-up twig ending with a cold, dead bud, not a robust branch climaxing into rich foliage at the tree's apogee. Love is an inexplicable development among those deemed the fittest to survive, those who have reached the topsoil and beyond.

In the Christian model, however, love comes from God (where else?). And we love because God loved us—first. Notice the one modifier in the text, "first." Humans love because love flows out from God to us. Without receiving that love, we could never manifest it. Although the immediate context of the verse deals specifically with Christians, with those who profess to know God and His love, even those who do not know or love God are, when they manifest love, merely reflecting an attribute of their Creator. For Christians, however, the response to God's love for us is that we love back, not just God but humanity, as well. Of all the people in the world, we should, indeed, be the most loving of others, because we know that God loved us first.

Why does the knowledge that God first loved us mean that we should love? See 1 John 4:11. After all, just because our spouse or our child or our parents love us, why does that mean we should love others? What is it about the knowledge of God loving us *first* that should cause us to love Him, or anyone else?

GOD SENT HIS SON.

It is one thing to say that you love someone. Talk is cheap. How many people only profess their love and then do things that clearly reveal the hollowness of their words?

In fact, one writer says human love does not exist, if by love we mean “to care selflessly and deeply for someone else.” For example, John loves Mary, and by that we mean that John wants Mary to be happy. However, Mary loves Charles, not John. Now, if John truly loves Mary, then shouldn’t he be glad that Mary has found love with Charles and that Charles makes her happy? After all, if love is unselfish care for someone else, then John should be glad that Mary has found happiness with Charles. Of course, if he loves Mary, as love is commonly understood, then John is going to be miserable over the happiness that Mary has found with Charles. Human love is, indeed, full of contradictions.

However, when God says He loves us, what does that mean? How has He manifested that love for us?

Read 1 John 4:8-10. What are these verses saying that God did in order to reveal His love?

What was it about God sending His Son for our sins that was such an act of love?

Notice the parallel between these verses and the text we looked at yesterday: Both reveal that God’s love for us was prior to our love for Him. It was not our love for God that prompted Him to send Jesus; it was His love for us, even before we loved Him. In fact, even if we had not loved God, He would have sent Jesus for us. God’s love for us was not based on anything we could give back to Him. His love transcended ours and was not dependent upon it.

Imagine this: Suppose Christ’s coming to die for us were conditional; that is, He would do it only if human beings first showed enough love toward the Father. If this were the case, where would we be today?

TO LOVE GOD (1 John 5:3).

Anyone, even God, can say he or she loves someone. But what does that mean? God showed His love for us by sending Jesus to die for our sins. Only as we grasp what that means can we realize the incredible love manifested there in our behalf.

Using these few verses as starters (use whichever ones you like)—Isaiah 53:4-6; Matthew 26:39; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13; Colossians 1:16—write down in your own words what happened at the Cross and why, because of this, we love God. As you do, answer these questions: Who was Jesus? What happened to Him at the Cross? What benefit do we get because of the Cross?

No wonder, then, that we love God. Because of Jesus, we have been forgiven our sins. And according to the text for today, we show our love for God by obeying His commandments. Walking with Jesus in obedience is not a matter of mere outward conformity to a set of rules and regulations. A robot could be programmed to do that. Instead, our obedience involves our feelings, thoughts, purposes, and motives—those areas of our lives that are the spring of our actions and behavior. We obey God, not just because we are commanded to but because we love God, because God has shown us that He loves us and wants what's best for us. The Cross shows us that we can trust the Lord, that He has our best interests at heart. We obey not because we want to be saved but because He has already saved us, because, through Jesus, our sins have been forgiven, and because we have the promise of eternal life even now. Because of these things, we love God, and because we love God, we obey His commandments.

"In the heart renewed by divine grace, love is the principle of action. It modifies the character, governs the impulses, controls the passions, subdues enmity, and ennobles the affections."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 59.

Why does God want us to obey His commandments? Why is obedience to God's commandments an expression of love?

WALKING IN LOVE.**Read Exodus 19:5, 6.**

In one sense, there's no great mystery to God's law and why He wants us to keep it. If someone's child were standing next to a ten-foot ledge, wouldn't that person not want his or her child to step over it? Of course. But why? The answer is simple: The law of gravity will cause the child to hit the ground at a specific, calculable rate that will cause the child harm.

And we live in a universe with not just physical laws but moral laws, as well. Just as violation of the physical laws can cause us harm, violation of the moral ones can cause us harm too. God does not want that to happen to us. The reason God does not want bad things to happen to us is, quite simply, that He loves us.

"The law given upon Sinai was the enunciation of the principle of love. . . . God . . . revealed the purpose of the law when He declared to Israel, 'Ye shall be holy men unto Me.' Exodus 22:31."—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 46.

The love of God underlies every precept of His law. The commandments are designed for our happiness, and those who violate them bring about their own ruin.

How does God promise to accomplish His purpose of bringing His people into conformity to the divine principles expressed in His law? Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:26, 27; Heb. 10:16.

The law of God is not so much a matter of *doing* as *being*. The Ten-Commandment law is a code of *principles* more than of rules and regulations, of "dos and don'ts." God desires that these principles shall become the principles evidenced in our characters. This is what He means when He promises to write His laws in our hearts. He will make them the very warp and woof of our lives. When this happens, we *are* walking with Christ. Harmony with His precepts becomes our way of life.

What relationship exists between the Ten Commandments declared by God on Mount Sinai and the Beatitudes proclaimed by Christ on the Mount of Blessing? Compare Exodus 20:3-17 with Matthew 5 and see whether you can find similar principles there. Is one possibly the photographic negative and the other the photographic positive of the same picture of God's will?

THE FULFILLING OF THE LAW.

"Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'You shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love . . . is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom. 13:8-10, NKJV).

Notice in these verses the relationship the apostle Paul establishes between love and law. There is no tension or contradiction or opposition between them. In other words, he is not saying what we so often hear other Christians say (generally in the context of a debate over the Sabbath): "We don't need to keep the law; what we need to do is love."

Clearly, that is not what Paul is saying here. In fact, he seems to be saying the opposite. Keeping the law is not something that is done instead of love; *keeping the law is a specific manifestation of love*. This is a point many people, even Adventists, tend to forget.

Love is a verb. It involves action. The law is simply a guideline on how love is made manifest, both to individuals and to God.

Looking at the two verses for today, what do you think Paul means when he says that "love is the fulfillment of the law"? Notice, too, the specific commandments He is referring to. Why just those? What point is he trying to make?

One point comes through very clearly from these texts: Faith in Christ in no way releases a person from obedience to the law. On the contrary. Because of Jesus, because of what He has done for us, we love God. If the cross, and what it represents for us, does not make a person love the Lord, nothing will. Because of the Cross, we love God (see 1 John 3:16), and we love others, and the Ten Commandments present an outline of how we express our love for both. Far from negating the law, salvation by faith makes it even more a crucial part of what it means to be a follower of Christ.

How would you respond to this argument: Who needs rules to tell us how to love? After all, is not love something natural? If we love, will we not automatically do the right thing?

FURTHER STUDY: Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, "The Spirituality of the Law" (Matt. 5:19, 20), pp. 51–55.

We do not earn salvation by our obedience; for salvation is the free gift of God, to be received by faith. But obedience is the fruit of faith. . . . If we abide in Christ, if the love of God dwells in us, our feelings, our thoughts, our purposes, our actions, will be in harmony with the will of God as expressed in the precepts of His holy law."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 61.

"Christ must be revealed to the sinner as the Saviour dying for the sins of the world; and as we behold the Lamb of God upon the cross of Calvary, the mystery of redemption begins to unfold to our minds and the goodness of God leads us to repentance. In dying for sinners, Christ manifested a love that is incomprehensible; and as the sinner beholds this love, it softens the heart, impresses the mind, and inspires contrition in the soul. . . .

"The sinner may resist this love, may refuse to be drawn to Christ; but if he does not resist he will be drawn to Jesus; a knowledge of the plan of salvation will lead him to the foot of the cross in repentance for his sins, which have caused the sufferings of God's dear Son."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 26, 27.

"God does not require us to give up anything that it is for our best interest to retain. In all that He does, He has the well-being of His children in view. . . . Man is doing the greatest injury and injustice to his own soul when he thinks and acts contrary to the will of God. No real joy can be found in the path forbidden by Him who knows what is best and who plans for the good of His creatures. The path of transgression is the path of misery and destruction."—Page 46.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Go back to Monday's study and the question of what it means to love someone. How would you respond to the argument dealing with Mary, John, and Charles? What is true love? Can a human being manifest true, unselfish love? If so, how?
2. Look at the Ten Commandments in the context of love. What principles are there that, in fact, if kept, would reveal love to both God and humanity?
3. What dangers arise from an attempt to keep the law without the foundation of love? What would that kind of obedience necessarily lead to?



The Power of Friendship

Charlotte Ishkanian

Nara lives in a village in northern Mongolia. She admits she was not a nice person. She lied, gossiped, and did many other things that she is not proud of. When she attended school in another city, she made friends with young people who influenced her to smoke and drink. Even Nara worried about what was becoming of herself. She felt an emptiness in her life, but she did not know how to fill it.

Nara's family was worried and told her to come home. But even in the little village, Nara found friends who shared her bad habits. They stayed out late and drank, and sometimes she did not return home. Desperate to get her away from her destructive friends, her family sent her to live with a relative far away from the cities and towns. Nara hated living so far from everyone and soon returned to the village.

Back home, Nara met two young women from Ulaanbaatar, missionaries who were working in the town. A friend of Nara's was attending a group meeting in the missionaries' home and invited Nara to go and meet her brother from Ulaanbaatar. Nara was not interested in the meetings, but she wanted to meet her friend's brother.

Nara went to the meeting and felt the love of the young people. She continued to attend the meetings and made new friends there. Suddenly, her former friends did not appeal to her. The Christians shared their love for Jesus with her. They spent time talking and singing about God and shared their faith with Nara, drawing her to Christ. Several months later, Nara was baptized.

But Nara's family was not excited about her Christian friends. When Nara's uncle came to visit, Nara feared that this strong-willed, anti-Christian man might burn her religious books if he found them. But to her surprise, he listened to her testimony and quietly told her that she had chosen the best path. "Continue growing in your faith," he said.

Nara thanks God for changing her life. Even her mother admits that Nara's life is better, and she is now taking Bible studies from the missionaries.

Nara wants to share her faith with others who knew her when she wasn't such a good girl. She wants them to see what Jesus can do when they turn their lives over to Him.

Nara (left). Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of *Mission*.



Produced by the Office of Mission
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Loyalties



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment” (Matthew 22:37, 38).

I HAD TRAVELED eight thousand miles around the American continent and I was back on Times Square . . . with its millions and millions hustling forever for a buck among themselves, the mad dream—grabbing, taking, giving, sighing, dying, just so they could be buried in those awful cemetery cities beyond Long Island City.”—Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: New American Library, 1957), pp. 89, 90.

Life, however, does not have to be so futile. God offers us a much better end than what Kerouac depicted here, one that can make this existence full of meaning and purpose now. However, the Lord does not force that end upon us. We have to choose, a choice that is made manifest every day of our lives by the little things we do, things that reveal where our loyalties really lie.

That is what we will look at this week: loyalties. Are we loyal to our God or to something else? This is a crucial question, for whatever our other loyalties are, in whatever form they manifest themselves, one thing’s for sure: In the end, they can lead only to one of those awful “cemetery cities,” wherever they happen to be.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What is the most important commandment, and why? Why can’t we serve two masters? Why is loyalty to God so crucial? What are some of the other things that vie for our loyalty?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 24.

THE PRINCIPLE OF LOYALTY (Exod. 20:2, 3).

Notice, the first commandment listed in the law isn't the Sabbath commandment; it isn't the commandment against adultery, murder, or covetousness. Instead, the Lord commands them to have no other gods before Him.

What is He saying here? Is He saying, "Well, there are other gods out there, but I want you to give Me your best allegiance"? Some scholars argue that, in a sense, this is what the Lord is saying here but only because the Israelites were so steeped in idolatry and false thinking (see, for instance, Exod. 32:4) that God needed to phrase it in ways they would understand.

On the other hand, the real point of the text seems to be not that other gods (as in supernatural deities) exist but that Israel should have nothing that stands between them and the Lord. He alone must come first.

It's no different today, is it? As long as any other "god" claims the first affection of our hearts, as long as we endeavor to divide our allegiance between the God of heaven and the gods of this earth, as long as any darling idol, pet vice, or cherished sin is permitted to share the throne of our hearts with the only true God, then we will have some other "god" before the Lord. And if we are violating that commandment, there's no question—violation of many of the others, to one degree or another, will follow.

**Why is obedience to the first commandment so important?
Why can we have no other "god" before the Lord?**

Read carefully Matthew 6:24, where Jesus, more or less, reiterates the message of the first commandment. Though the wording is different, Jesus here is clearly showing why obedience to the first commandment is so crucial. He doesn't leave any middle ground. There's not much room (in fact, there's none) for compromise, for some sort of half-allegiance. Jesus takes the position that our loyalty to the Lord either will be all or nothing at all. That's pretty stern.

Why is it impossible to serve two masters? What examples can you find from the Bible or from personal experience that reveal the truth of this important principle? Have you ever tried to divide your loyalties between the Lord and something else? If so, what happened?

WHOLEHEARTED ALLEGIANCE.

"Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment" (Matt. 22:35-38).

How fascinating: Jesus is asked to name "the great commandment in the law," and He answers by giving them not even one of the specific commandments in the Decalogue. Read Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5; the words that Jesus spoke in Matthew 22 are not listed in the Ten Commandments. And yet, He specifically calls those words the "first and great commandment."

To understand better the point Jesus is making, we need to look at the text, in context, He quoted to the lawyer. This is found in Deuteronomy 6:5. Read the first ten verses of Deuteronomy 6. What is the Lord saying to Israel there, and why would Jesus quote it as the "first and great commandment"? Also, in what ways does that verse reiterate the idea found in the first commandment in the Decalogue?

We are to love the Lord with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind. This does not leave room for much else.

But that's the point. As the first commandment says, as Jesus said in Matthew 6, as is expressed in Deuteronomy 6, and as Jesus repeats in Matthew 22, love for God has to dominate every aspect of our lives. If not, if there is something that we will not surrender to Him, then that thing that we are holding onto becomes an idol, another god; even worse, it can become the means through which Satan gets control of us. We can not give the enemy any place, anywhere. That's why our loyalty to the Lord has to be complete, undivided, and total. When we love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and mind, we have given all of ourselves to Him. Then He can work in us and make us into the people He wants us to be.

If love for God is the first and great commandment, how would you answer someone who asks, "Please explain to me what it means to love God. How do you love a being that you have never seen, felt, touched, or heard with your senses?"

MONEY AND GOD (Matt. 19:16-22; Luke 12:15-23).

American author Mark Twain wrote: "Some men worship rank, some worship heroes, some worship power, some worship God . . . but they all worship money."

Maybe those words are a bit exaggerated, but the point is well made, and it helps explain why Jesus said the things He did in both the accounts listed above.

What are the parallel traits in the two men talked about in these texts? What do they have in common?

In one sense, both these accounts are telling the same story. Indeed, what the rich young ruler did is not much different from what "the certain rich man" did. Both were so consumed by their money that they lost sight of what really matters. Basically, they loved their money and wealth more than God, and thus they proved who had their loyalty. In the end, the gist of both accounts seems to be that both lost out on eternal life. They sold their place in eternity for a few monetary pleasures here. Both, in short, were ripped off.

Think about this: No one ever bought his or her way into the kingdom of heaven; not enough money exists to get a soul there (besides, the price has already been paid). However, it doesn't take much money to keep a person out. Millions of dollars, when contrasted to the promise of eternity, are just a pile of rubbish, and souls will be lost for a lot less than millions of dollars.

Money, of course, has its place; the problem is that it can so easily get out of its place and get into places it does not belong. "Take heed," Jesus said, "and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he posseseth" (Luke 12:15). Though we all claim to believe those words, trying to live out that belief is not always so easy. Money has a powerful lure upon people that can blind them from seeing what they need to see.

Make a list of the things money can definitely buy. Make another list of things people often think money can buy but, more often than not, it does not, or at least not for long. Then make a list of the things money definitely cannot buy. Compare your lists. What conclusions can you draw about what money can and cannot do? Share your lists with the class.

OTHER GODS.

"Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord" (Jer. 9:23, 24).

Look at these beautiful verses, some of the most profound and deep in all Inspiration. Notice the three points it talks about: wisdom, might, and riches, three things that in and of themselves are not evil. God is not saying do not have these things, do not enjoy these things, do not prosper in these things. Instead, He is saying keep them in perspective; do not let them cloud out your view of what really matters.

What are the aspects of the Lord that these verses tell us to glory in? Why these?

If Jeremiah's words had relevance when he first uttered them, how much more so today, when humanity all but glories in its intellectual and technological achievements. Indeed, these achievements are quite impressive, something we might be inclined to glory in.

Nevertheless, think about this: Of all the things we can know, what is the most important? Of course, that Jesus Christ died for our sins and that through faith in what He has done for us at the Cross, we have the promise of eternal life. After all, in contrast to that, what else really matters? (Matt. 16:26).

Yet, how do we know this, the most crucial aspect of wisdom? Is it something we can learn from pure reason alone? Or from science or technology? Can a study of mathematics lead us to it? Can we deduce the Cross—and the great truth of justification by faith through faith in the shed blood of Christ in our behalf—from nature? Can we, on our own, figure out the great truth of salvation by faith in Christ? Of course not. Instead, this truth is something that had to be told us, spoon-fed to us through revelation.

What does it say about the limits of human knowledge (unaided reason) and wisdom that it can never teach us the most important thing we need to know? Why, then, would it make no sense to worship or make a god out of what cannot even answer the most crucial of all human questions to human existence: How are we saved?

"LOVERS."

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" (2 Tim. 3:1-5).

Paul here talks about the last days as "perilous times." He is not referring, it seems, to peril in the sense of having to worry about physical danger, such as from an errant nuclear weapon; rather, the message seems to be warning of spiritual danger.

Who is Paul talking about here? When you read the list of characteristics, they seem pretty bad, and, yet, whom is he referring to? That answer might help explain what he meant by "perilous times." What does it mean to have the "form of godliness"?

Two times in the texts above, Paul talks about "lovers": lovers of themselves and lovers of pleasures. It is not wrong to love oneself (Matt. 22:39); and there's nothing wrong with loving pleasure. God didn't create us with physical desires and create all around us the means of satisfying them, only to hold them back from us, did He?

Of course not. Instead, what's being said here is what has been touched on all week: the danger of allowing things to spin out of control, even good things such as wealth, wisdom, power, or pleasure, until they assume a place in our lives they should not. We cannot serve two gods: Jesus made that clear, and whatever we love supremely becomes our god.

When people become lovers of themselves, at the expense of everything and everyone else, they make themselves out to be their own gods (Gen. 3:5), and when that happens, evil follows.

In fact, look again at the list of how people would be in the last days. It is not that hard to see how those things can stem from a life in which love of self rules. The problem, Paul says, will become so acute that people who claim to love the Lord will create a theology that justifies them in their selfish actions and attitudes.

Read Matthew 16:24. What is Jesus saying here that can spare someone from these "perilous times"? What does He mean by those words, and how can we take what He said and apply it to our own lives?

FURTHER STUDY:

Whatsoever shall draw away the heart from God must be given up. Mammon is the idol of many. The love of money, the desire for wealth, is the golden chain that binds them to Satan. Reputation and worldly honor are worshiped by another class. The life of selfish ease and freedom from responsibility is the idol of others. But these slavish bands must be broken. We cannot be half the Lord's and half the world's. We are not God's children unless we are such entirely."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 44.

"'No man can serve two masters.' We cannot serve God with a divided heart. Bible religion is not one influence among many others; its influence is to be supreme, pervading and controlling every other. It is not to be like a dash of color brushed here and there upon the canvas, but it is to pervade the whole life, as if the canvas were dipped into the color, until every thread of the fabric were dyed a deep, unfading hue."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 312.

"No outward shrines may be visible, there may be no image for the eye to rest upon, yet we may be practicing idolatry. It is as easy to make an idol of cherished ideas or objects as to fashion gods of wood or stone. Thousands have a false conception of God and His attributes. They are as verily serving a false god as were the servants of Baal. Are we worshiping the true God as He is revealed in His word, in Christ, in nature, or are we adoring some philosophical idol enshrined in His place? God is a God of truth. Justice and mercy are the attributes of His throne. He is a God of love, of pity and tender compassion. Thus He is represented in His Son, our Saviour. He is a God of patience and long-suffering. If such is the being whom we adore and to whose character we are seeking to assimilate, we are worshiping the true God."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 173, 174.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In the context of this week's lesson, how does what Jesus says in Matthew 6:33 solve the problems presented?
2. If things like wealth, wisdom, and power are not wrong in and of themselves and a person can possess these things and still faithfully serve the Lord, how can a person tell when these things have gotten out of hand? What are the warning signs that should tell a person that he or she has a problem?



A Family on Fire

Félix Vasquez

Antonio Huayta was born into a poor family in southern Bolivia. Unable to care for all their children, Antonio was sent to live with Adventist relatives. His uncles and cousins are active lay workers in their region of Bolivia, and young Antonio caught their vision for soul winning.

Antonio wanted to become a minister and began selling Adventist literature to pay for his education. Eventually he and his cousin, Simar, enrolled in the Adventist seminary in Lima, Peru.

As part of their education, the cousins were assigned to assist a pastor in the city. They gave Bible studies, prepared for evangelistic meetings, and took care of other ministerial duties. One day while working in Lima, the boys were attacked by a band of guerrilla soldiers who beat Simar so badly that he almost died. The guerrillas fled, warning Antonio that they would kill him if they ever saw him again. Shaken by this experience, the cousins returned to Bolivia.

Antonio's desire to work for God has not faded. He and his uncles and cousins have accepted the challenge to plant several churches in previously unentered towns. Some of these towns had openly opposed evangelization before Antonio's family came.

The family enters a town and begins making friends with the residents. They find land and prepare a large tent for evangelistic meetings. And the family often chooses young Antonio to be the speaker. As a result of fervent prayer, faithful work, and the Holy Spirit's blessings, hundreds have responded to God's call to join with God's people, and new congregations have been established.

Word spread that this family is a powerful evangelistic team, and they were invited to preach outside the city of La Paz. God blessed, and 180 people were baptized.

Antonio has not been able to complete his seminary training. But he is determined to do God's work wherever God leads him. Antonio and his cousins are examples of what God can do through young people who have dedicated their lives to Him.



Antonio Huayta (left). Félix Vasquez is a pastor in Yacuiba, Bolivia.

Reverence



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “Holy and reverend is his name” (Psalm 111:9).

HISTORIANS AND PUNDITS often try to give names and labels to various eras: the Age of Reason, the Age of Aquarius, the Lost Generation, the Age of Deceit, the Modern Era, the Post Modern Era, and so forth. The labels only loosely fit, because they describe only a part of the whole, rarely the whole itself.

If, however, we were to try to label our time, perhaps one label could catch, if not the whole, at least a good part of it, and that would be: the Age of Irreverence. Nothing is sacred these days. In books and magazines, on television, radios, and billboards, few things are taboo. Religion, sex, faith, family—everything is fair game to be mocked, satirized, teased, and distorted. Recently a famous politician’s marriage infidelities were the subject of a comedian’s act—while the politician and his wife sat in the audience, listened, and laughed!

Is nothing sacred? Fortunately, not everyone has lost a sense of reverence. For followers of Jesus, reverence should be one of the premier manifestations of faith. This week, as we continue to look at the results of being forgiven, we’ll look at a subject that deserves, especially in this, the Age of Irreverence, a whole quarter’s study.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Why should we show God reverence? How does the Cross play into the idea of reverence? How is obedience linked to the concept of reverence?

*Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 31.

ISAIAH'S OUTBURST.

"Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isa. 6:5).

Read Isaiah 6:1-5, which gives the context of Isaiah's outburst in verse 5. What makes it even more remarkable is that Isaiah is a chosen prophet of the Lord, someone who obviously had a divine calling. Yet, when presented with a vision of God, he recoiled in personal shame.

What was the one word Isaiah used twice to describe himself and his people? Was he talking about something physical or spiritual? Explain your answer. How do these few verses help us understand what he meant: Isaiah 64:6, Zechariah 3:3, and Revelation 3:18?

The big problem, particularly in the modern world, is that people do not see their own uncleanness, their own sinfulness. That is because they are comparing themselves to others or to the world around them. People always can find others to compare themselves with who are worse than they are. After all, it is hard to see dirt against a dark background.

Contrasted against the background of God's righteousness and holiness, however, that problem vanishes. On the contrary, as Isaiah's example shows, no one who comes into contact with God in such a manner comes away unaware of his or her own personal sinfulness.

Perhaps that is what the world needs: a glimpse of the holiness of God. Because only then will individuals not only see their true state, they will seek a remedy. Which, of course, is where Christ, the Cross, and the gospel come in. Indeed, God's revelation of His holiness was not intended to devastate Isaiah or us. God reveals Himself to us in order to humble us, not to humiliate us. There is a difference. When we are humbled, we sense our need and seek to have that need supplied; we feel helpless but not hopeless. When we are humiliated, we feel devastated and beyond hope. The revelation of God's holiness never devastates. It brings healing.

Read Isaiah 6:6, 7. What happened to Isaiah after he acknowledged his sinful state? What did the Lord do for him? How do we understand what that means? How do we understand the coal on the lips in the context of the gospel? How is our iniquity taken away and our sins purged?

REVERENCE AND THE CROSS.

"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9).

Look at the above text. What is it saying? What are the implications of it, particularly in the context of reverence toward God?

Sure, we revere God because He is the Creator, and we are His creatures (Ps. 100:3). Sure, we revere God because He is a consuming fire (Deut. 4:24), because He is a merciful God (Deut. 4:31), because He is mighty (Deut. 7:21), a powerful God (Ps. 29:4), and because He can do all things (Luke 1:37).

Yet, however good all those reasons are, there is one reason that is by far the best, and that is because He is a forgiving God, a God who does not impute our trespasses against us, a God who will blot out our sins, a God who through the sacrifice of Himself has opened the way for such miserable and sinful creatures as ourselves to be granted eternal life in His presence and the presence of the holy angels for eternity.

Think about it: Jesus, the One who sustains and upholds all things (Acts 17:28), who died as a Substitute for the sins of the whole world (1 Cor. 5:7), who is equal with God (Phil. 2:6), the One who made all things (Col. 1:16), who became a human being and lived a life of perfect holiness (Heb. 2:10). When you look at the Cross and realize that this was God, the Creator, hanging there, dying for His own creation, how can we not have a sense of reverence, of awe? Sure, by virtue of who God is, as God, as Creator, we would owe Him awe and reverence. Even if He didn't die for us, His exalted status in contrast to us alone would make Him worthy of praise and reverence.

But when you add the element of the Cross, when you add the element of what was done at the Cross for us, the forgiveness of sin that was made available to us because of the Cross—the awe, the reverence, the love can only grow.

Of all the reasons we have to revere the Lord, why—from our perspective (that of fallen, sinful creatures)—is the fact that He is a forgiving God the best reason for us to revere Him?

THE NAME OF THE LORD.

Look up the following texts. What does each one say about “the name of the Lord” that helps us understand what that concept means and what’s contained in it?

Exod. 20:7 _____

2 Sam. 6:2 _____

Job 1:21 _____

Ps. 20:7 _____

Ps. 116:4 _____

Matt. 6:9 _____

Rom. 10:13 _____

James 5:14 _____

Among modern Orthodox Jews today, the name of the Lord is considered so sacred that it's deemed blasphemy to say it. Instead, they often call the Lord *HaShem*, which simply means in Hebrew “the name.”

Nevertheless, it is clear from the above texts that the name of the Lord is deemed as something important, something sacred, something powerful. It is not that any inherent magical powers emanate from the name itself; instead, it's what the name represents that evokes the kind of awe and reverence the Bible says it deserves.

In Bible times, a name was often closely linked with what it named, more so than now. Look, for example, at Romans 10:13. There is no salvation in the name itself; salvation is found in Whom it represents, Jesus. Look at Psalm 20:7. Deliverance is found not in the name of God itself (as though something in the sound of the vowels and consonants had power) but in the God who is named there. In the Bible, God is so closely associated with His names that they are often used in a manner that is indistinguishable. That is why the Bible is so clear about why we should use the name with reverence. To profane the name is, in an indirect sense, to profane the One who is named.

So often, in many languages, the name of God is used as a curse. Why would the devil be glad to have people use God's name in such a manner?

TO FEAR GOD.

"Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters" (Rev. 14:7).

If the first and most important commandment is to love God with all our heart and soul (Matt. 22:37), why, then, does the first angel's message tell us to "fear God"? Can we love what we fear?

The answer depends upon our understanding of *fear*. A few times in the Hebrew Bible, the word translated "reverence" (Lev. 19:30; 26:2; Ps. 89:7) comes from the same word that is commonly translated "fear."

Look up those two verses in Leviticus. They can help us see that the idea of "fearing" God isn't to be afraid of Him in the same way we might be afraid of a poisonous snake; instead, to fear God is to hold him in reverence for whom He is in contrast to who we are. To reverence God, to fear Him, is simply to acknowledge how we, as fallen beings, stand in relationship to Him. It is simply to acknowledge the Creator-creature relationship as it should be acknowledged. It is understanding how great, how powerful, and how holy He is in contrast to how small, how weak, and how unholy we really are. This reverence, of course, grows even deeper as we understand our relationship to Him as our Redeemer, as well.

"True reverence for God is inspired by a sense of His infinite greatness and a realization of His presence. With this sense of the Unseen, every heart should be deeply impressed. The hour and place of prayer are sacred, because God is there. And as reverence is manifested in attitude and demeanor, the feeling that inspires it will be deepened. 'Holy and reverend is His name,' the psalmist declares. Psalm 111:9. Angels, when they speak that name, veil their faces. With what reverence, then, should we, who are fallen and sinful, take it upon our lips!"—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 48, 49.

It is one thing to say we reverence God; it is another to manifest it. How are we to show that reverence? Is it merely lowering our heads in prayer or bowing on our knees when we pray (a few places in the Old Testament the Hebrew word translated to do "reverence" comes from a verb that means "to bow down"). Or is there more to it? If so, what?

REVERENCE AND OBEDIENCE.

"Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him" (Deut. 13:4).

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccles. 12:13).

As followers of Christ, above and beyond everything else, we stand forgiven.

No matter what we have done, we can, by faith, claim the righteousness of Jesus, a righteousness He not only wrought out in His own life but freely offers to us. All we have to do is accept it, and then, no matter how sinful our lives have been, we can stand before God as perfect in His sight as was Jesus. Our sins are no longer held against us. They are forgiven.

As a result, our lives are transformed (How could they not be?), and we determine, by His grace, to "shew forth the praises of him who hath called [us] out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). We will want to be the kind of persons He desires His people to be "in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God." We will look "according to his promise . . . for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" and will "be diligent" in order that we "may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (2 Pet. 3:11-14).

All this, of course, means obedience. There is no question that if we love God we will reverence Him, and reverence implies more than just uttering praises to Him or bowing down when we pray. We truly cannot revere God without obeying Him.

Notice how the two texts for today clearly link fear or reverence of God with obedience to His commandments (it also does the same thing with love for God, as well: see John 14:15; 1 John 5:2, 3). How can one show respect, or reverence, to someone or something and then blatantly defy the will of the one they claim to revere? It's like telling someone you love him or her but then overtly and blatantly defying all that you know that person stands for. Why can we not truly revere God while being openly disobedient to Him? How does the Sabbath play into this whole concept of reverence?

Write out in your own words why you believe true reverence for God will be manifested in obedience.

FURTHER STUDY:

Humility and reverence should characterize the deportment of all who come into the presence of God. In the name of Jesus we may come before Him with confidence, but we must not approach Him with the boldness of presumption, as though He were on a level with ourselves. There are those who address the great and all-powerful and holy God, who dwelleth in light unapproachable, as they would address an equal, or even an inferior. There are those who conduct themselves in His house as they would not presume to do in the audience chamber of an earthly ruler. These should remember that they are in His sight whom seraphim adore, before whom angels veil their faces. God is greatly to be reverenced; all who truly realize His presence will bow in humility before Him, and, like Jacob beholding the vision of God, they will cry out, ‘How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.’”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 252.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. It is one thing to show reverence for God in church. How do you show reverence for God in other places, as well? The store? The workplace? Are there differences in how you would show that reverence? If so, what are they?
2. Read Psalm 103. What does it teach us about reverence toward God? What are the elements of the gospel found there? If you rewrote the gist of that psalm in modern language in a modern context, how much different would it be?
3. Dwell more on this idea of God’s willingness to forgive being the best reason to reverence Him. What would it be like if God did not forgive us but left us to face the ultimate consequences of our sins? Would you still consider Him worthy of reverence? Explain your answer.
4. In your own words, explain the difference between reverence and fear. Should reverence contain a little fear?



Dream Brings a Church to the Truth

J. H. Zachary

When Pravadras learned that the God of heaven sent Jesus to die for the sins of the world, he and his wife decided to become Christians. After a year of Bible study, his pastor urged him to share his faith with others. Pravadras helped his pastor on weekends and evenings and eventually studied theology and became a Protestant minister.

After graduation, he moved to a large village and began door-to-door evangelism, looking for Hindus who would come to Jesus. As interest grew, he raised funds and constructed a church.

Among Pravadras's members was a woman who had been praying for help for her church family. One day she dreamed that a helicopter landed in the center of her village. A man stepped out and told her, "All the villagers have dirty spots in their lives. God will remove the spots and make you clean if you follow His teachings."

When she told Pastor Pravadras about the dream, he replied, "Yes, God has more light for us, which we will follow."

A few days later, Pastor Pravadras went to another city to attend a wedding. While there, he heard about a Christian meeting being conducted by a pastor from America. He decided that he would go to one meeting before returning home. However, the meetings were so interesting that he decided to attend the entire series. He was amazed at the Bible knowledge of the pastor and noted that every point was clearly based on Scripture.

Pravadras realized that for 36 years he had not been keeping the Bible Sabbath. Late into the night he reviewed the Bible verses the pastor had presented. How could he have been teaching error for so long and leading others in error too? He asked God to forgive him and decided to follow this new truth God had revealed from the Bible.

At the close of the meetings Pravadras returned home to share the news with his wife and church members. Soon he and his wife were rebaptized. As he presented the new truths to his congregation, they joined him in commitment to God's new light and also joined the Adventist Church. Since Pravadras built his own church, it did not belong to any denomination. The church became the Adventist church.

"My wife and I have dedicated the rest of our lives to sharing the new Bible truths we have learned," Pastor Pavadras testified. He and his wife are sharing the new truths in 14 nearby villages.

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

Why Forgive?



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye” (Colossians 3:13).

OUR WORLD is filled with hurt and offended people. After all, who has not—however inadvertently—offended or hurt someone, oftentimes those whom they love the most? Even more important, who has not been hurt, or offended, even by those whom they love the most?

It is one of the sad facts of life that it is easy to offend; it is even easier to be offended. What's not so easy is to forgive. If only forgiveness came as easy as offense. What a better world it would be.

This week we look at the question of forgiving others. We look at reasons why we should forgive, especially in light of Christ having forgiven us. Jesus told some pretty straightforward parables about the importance of forgiving others. It has, literally, eternal consequences and is an essential part of what it means to be a Christian.

Let's see if we can come to a better understanding of this important, if not always easy to apply, fundamental teaching of our faith.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What is forgiveness? Just because Jesus forgave us, why should we forgive others? What are the practical benefits of forgiveness? How can we forgive those who have hurt us? What is the essential element of unfairness in forgiveness? How can we balance personal forgiveness with the need for legal and civil justice?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 7.

THE FORGIVENESS FACTOR.

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32).

One of the most crucial and foundational aspects of the Christian faith deals with forgiveness. Our religion is nothing if, indeed, there is no forgiveness.

First and foremost, of course, it involves God's forgiveness of us, without which we would be no better off than the beasts. In fact, without the promises that come with this forgiveness, we would be worse off than the beasts, because, unlike us, they have no concept of transcendence, of eternity, and of the chasm between what we are and what we long for. Humans do, and thus, without the promise of eternity that comes with forgiveness, it would be easier to be a chicken, because, even without forgiveness, chickens do not live in hopelessness; in contrast, humans, without divine forgiveness, do.

An unforgiving Christian is as much of an oxymoron as an atheistic Christian or a round square. As Christians, we must forgive; our religion demands it. Of course, that's not always easy. Sometimes we have been so thoroughly hurt, so unfairly treated, so grossly misused and misjudged that forgiveness seems impossible, if not outrageously unfair and unjust.

And yet, there is inherent in the concept of forgiveness a sense of unfairness and injustice. To forgive someone something is not to hold that individual accountable for what he or she should be held accountable for; it is not to bear offense for what is offensive. You don't forgive someone for giving you money, fixing your flat tire, or helping your mother cross a busy street. You forgive them when they insult you, when they cheat you, when they hurt you or someone you love. True forgiveness is often before restitution, prior to amends. You forgive, whether or not the offense is, or ever could be, rectified by the offender. This isn't fairness, this isn't justice—this is forgiveness. If we demanded fairness and justice in every aspect of our lives, we could never forgive or, for that matter, be forgiven.

Why does, or should, a Christian forgive? Look at the text for today. How does it help us understand why we should forgive others? Christ forgave us; that's fine. But why should we, then, forgive others? What does one have to do with the other?

WHY FORGIVE?

Look up the following texts regarding forgiveness. Next to each one, write down any reason you can find from it that would help us understand why we should forgive others:

Matt. 6:14 _____

Mark 11:25 _____

Luke 6:37 _____

Luke 17:3 _____

Luke 23:34 _____

Col. 3:13 _____

We can find in the Bible numerous reasons to forgive. We are commanded to; Jesus, as our example, forgave; we are even told that if we don't forgive others, we ourselves don't deserve to be forgiven by God.

Yet, none of this goes to the root of the question, Why forgive others? We need to be forgiven by a God in order to be spared condemnation at the end of the age; that's clear. But what purpose does God have in wanting us to forgive others? What reasons exist for God's asking us to do something that at times can be very hard?

Perhaps, by forgiving, we help ourselves; we get free from anger and rage and hatred that can destroy our lives. By forgiving, we are manifesting the character of God to the others; in short, we are a witness to the world of the kind of God we serve. By forgiving, we help break the cycle of hatred, revenge, and often violence that does so much damage to the world. In other words, by forgiving, we help make the world a better place. Imagine what this planet would be like if everyone learned to forgive everyone else.

Thus, besides all the spiritual aspects involved in the forgiveness of others, there is (as is often the case) a very down-to-earth practical element, as well.

Look at the world around us today. How much pain and suffering can you see that has resulted directly from a lack of forgiveness? Make a list of either international conflicts, domestic conflicts, or personal conflicts and violence you can trace directly back to one side's unwillingness to forgive the other.

HOW TO FORGIVE.

"To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you."

—C. S. Lewis

Of course, it's one thing to say that we should forgive; it's another to do it. Many people have suffered terrible indignities by those who have shown no remorse or sorrow for what they have done. As Christians, we are to forgive, but many times that isn't easy. How are we to learn to forgive?

There's only one answer: It's called grace. We can learn to forgive only by understanding how we, ourselves, have been forgiven. The grace that forgave us is the same grace that can lead us to forgive others.

Look up the following verses. What do they say about the Cross and what happened for us here that can help us understand how we can forgive others? Isa. 53:6; Rom. 4:5; 5:6-8; Eph. 3:7; 1 Tim. 1:15; Heb. 12:3.

God forgave us our sins, not because we were worthy, not because we deserved it, not because of anything that we could do to earn that forgiveness. It was purely by grace; unmerited favor that we, so unworthy, have been given the privilege of being called the "sons of God" (1 John 3:1).

In order to forgive us, Christ had to bear the sins of the world. God Himself, in the person of His Son, bore in Himself the penalty for all our iniquity. That's what it cost God to be able to forgive us so freely. It was the ultimate in unfairness.

Plus, we must remember that no matter who does what to us, we are all of the same sad ilk, different proportions of one lurid brew, brothers and sisters in sin, nothing else. Thus, the distance we have to cross to forgive others is almost nonexistent in contrast to the distance Christ, the Infinite God, had to cross in order to forgive us.

In the end, the only way we can learn to forgive others is to fall at the foot of the Cross and die to self. Only as self is broken can we be put back together in a way that will allow us to forgive. Only as we learn to partake of the grace bestowed upon us can we bestow grace on others. Only as we realize what we have been forgiven can we begin to forgive others.

What do you say to someone who is a Christian and yet says, "I have so much anger, so much bitterness, so much resentment against people. Please tell me how to get rid of it"?

FORGIVING OUR ENEMIES.

Read Matthew 5:43-45.

The ideal of Christian forgiveness is illustrated in one of the classics that came out of World War II. In Ernest Gordon's amazing story, *Miracle on the River Kwai*, he tells how he was captured while escaping from Sumatra, after the fall of Singapore. With other prisoners of war, he was marched into the jungle to build the notorious bridge on the river Kwai. Here a miracle of grace took place. The Holy Spirit replaced hatred for their enemies with compassion, as is illustrated by this episode:

"We were shunted on to a siding for a lengthy stay. We found ourselves on the same track with several carloads of Japanese wounded. They were on their own and without medical care. . . .

"They were in a shocking state; I have never seen men filthier. Their uniforms were encrusted with mud, blood and excrement. Their wounds, sorely inflamed and full of pus, crawled with maggots. . . .

"The wounded men looked at us forlornly as they sat with their heads resting against the carriages waiting fatalistically for death. . . .

"Without a word, most of the officers in my section unbuckled their packs, took out part of their ration and a rag or two, and, with water canteens in their hands, went over to the Japanese train to help them. Our guards—tried to prevent us, bawling, 'No goodka! No goodka!' But we ignored them and knelt by the side of the enemy to give them food and water, to clean and—bind up their wounds, to smile and say a kind word. Grateful cries of 'Arigatto!' ('Thank you!') followed us when we left."—Ernest Gordon, *Miracle on the River Kwai* (London: Wm. Collins Sons & Co., Ltd., 1963), pp. 162, 163.

What is Christ's antidote for a spirit of revenge? Matt. 5:38-42.

Ernest Gordon regarded his comrades with wonder. Eighteen months ago they would have joined readily in the destruction of their captors had they fallen into their hands. "Now these same were dressing the enemy's wounds. We had experienced a moment of grace, there in those blood-stained railway cars. God had broken through the barriers of our prejudice and had given us the will to obey His command, 'Thou shalt love.' . . .

"God, we saw, was honouring us by allowing us to share in His labours . . . for the world He loves."—Ernest Gordon, pp. 163, 164.

FORGIVENESS AND CIVIL JUSTICE.**Read 1 Peter 2:13, 14.**

A man commits a terrible crime against a woman. The guilty person is caught and convicted. Before sentencing, the court wants to hear from the victim; depending upon what she says, his sentence can be lenient or very harsh. It's up to her.

Now, the victim is a Christian, who feels under the conviction of the Holy Spirit that she needs to forgive the person who committed this crime against her. And she has; through the grace of Christ working in her life, through her understanding of what she herself has been forgiven, and what that forgiveness cost, she has openly professed her forgiveness to the criminal.

The question is, What does she say to the court? The person has committed a terrible crime. Does she plead for leniency? Does she ask that he be given the lightest sentence possible? Or does she seek the greatest possible punishment?

Look at this question from all possible angles: Perhaps, if he's given a lighter sentence, he'll be free again soon and do the same thing to someone else. Perhaps, if he's given a light sentence, others might be tempted by the light sentence to commit the same crime. Maybe he really deserves the worst possible punishment. Yet, if she forgives, shouldn't she want him to be punished as lightly as possible, or maybe not at all? How would you respond in a situation like this?

The text for today makes it clear that rulers have their part, which involves punishing "evildoers." Of course, in one sense, we are all evildoers (Rom. 3:10-18). Yet, the crucial point to remember is that we need to make a distinction between the civil and the spiritual, between sin and crime, which are not always the same thing.

Maybe we are to forgive all things, but that doesn't necessarily mean all things don't come with legal consequences. They do. The difficult part for Christians is how to make the distinction. How do we forgive and yet, at the same time, respect the right and the need for civil law and punishment?

Read Exodus 21:23-26. Keeping in mind the distinction between legal, civil codes, and spiritual truth, how do you square these with the concept of forgiveness?

FURTHER STUDY: "The Saviour's manner of dealing with Peter had a lesson for him and his brethren. Although Peter had denied his Lord, the love which Jesus bore him had never faltered. And as the apostle should take up the work of ministering the word to others, he was to meet the transgressor with patience, sympathy, and forgiving love. Remembering his own weakness and failure, he was to deal with the sheep and lambs committed to his care as tenderly as Christ had dealt with him."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 516.

"How many are today manifesting the same spirit. When the debtor pleaded with his lord for mercy, he had no true sense of the greatness of his debt. He did not realize his helplessness. He hoped to deliver himself. 'Have patience with me,' he said, 'and I will pay thee all.' So there are many who hope by their own works to merit God's favor. They do not realize their helplessness. They do not accept the grace of God as a free gift, but are trying to build themselves up in self-righteousness. Their own hearts are not broken and humbled on account of sin, and they are exacting and unforgiving toward others. Their own sins against God, compared with their brother's sins against them, are as ten thousand talents to one hundred pence—nearly one million to one; yet they dare to be unforgiving."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 245–247.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Read Matthew 18:24-35. What's the point of the story? How do we reconcile this with the concept of justification by faith alone? Does forgiving others make us worthy of being forgiven by God?
2. How do you understand the role of grace in forgiveness? Can you see a parallel between forgiveness and grace? Is not forgiveness a manifestation of grace?
3. What do you say to someone who said that, even as a Christian, it was impossible to forgive the person who, for instance, murdered and raped his or her daughter?



Against All Odds

Nana Ngidi

When Nana Ngidi received permission to lead a Bible study group on the South African campus where she taught, she was told not to advance her personal beliefs. Nana made it a point to answer all religious questions from the Bible.

The group studied many topics, including the Second Coming and prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. When a student asked a question on Daniel 7:25 regarding changing the law of God, Nana could not answer without talking about the Sabbath. After the meeting, several students wanted to know more about the Sabbath and how to keep it.

Nana asked for and was eventually given permission to take her Bible study students off campus to attend Sabbath services in a nearby town. After the visit, however, the school president reprimanded her for teaching the students her own beliefs and undermining the school's religious teachings. She was told to stop her Bible studies immediately and to send the Bible study students to the president's office for questioning.

As she called each student, Nana wondered if any of them would stand up for what they believed. To her surprise, several who had not come regularly to the Bible study went to the president's office, as well. The students were told that the Bible study group was disbanded and that Nana could no longer study or pray with them. A noted theologian was invited to speak at a campus seminar designed to "deprogram" the students regarding the Sabbath.

The theologian read verses regarding the ceremonial sabbaths of the Old Testament and explained that these sabbaths were no longer valid. He urged the students to forget the Sabbath "nonsense." Although Nana was not allowed to speak at the meeting, one of her students stood and defended the Sabbath from the Bible. The theologian and staff members realized that the students knew what they believed. The meeting was dismissed.

Members of the Bible study group continued meeting without Nana. When they went home on vacation, they continued practicing their faith. Parents wrote to Nana telling of the change in their sons' and daughters' behavior.

Nana left the school, but some students keep in touch with her. One is now a student at Bethel (Adventist) College, in South Africa, and another wrote to encourage her to continue sharing her faith with others. And the colleague who caused Nana the most trouble at the school is now studying the Bible with her.

Nana Ngidi is a teacher living in South Africa.

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Out of the Heart



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matthew 12:37).

WE TALK ABOUT OUR SINS being forgiven by the Lord, but do we understand what that means?

It means that we, who once were alienated from God (Col. 1:21), are now reconciled to Him through the death of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:18). It means that we, who were once condemned because of our sins (John 3:18), no longer need to fear any condemnation from them (Rom. 8:1). It means that we, who were facing eternal death (Eph. 2:1), now have the promise of eternal life (1 John 5:12).

Thus, the question is, How can we who (though once alienated from God) are now reconciled to the Lord, who (though once condemned) are now pardoned, and who (though once facing death) now have eternal life, have all these great things happen to us and not be changed, even radically?

We can't. We are born again, new creatures in Christ. And, among the many different ways we manifest this change in our lives, what we say and what we think are among the most important.

No doubt that's why the Bible has so much to say, not only about our words but about our thoughts, as well.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What does James have to say about the power of words? Why does he paint such a negative picture? How does the Bible depict Satan's use of words? Why would God even care what we think?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 14.

THE POWER OF WORDS.

"The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. . . . Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men. . . . Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing" (James 3:6, 9, 10).

Read the entire passage (James 3:2-13). What James says about words is true not only of the spoken but also of the printed word. How many people have been destroyed by words, either spoken or written; at the same time, how many have been strengthened and encouraged by words, written or spoken? Whether transmitted by light (written) or air (sound), either way, words are a powerful force, either for good or for evil.

Notice the images and metaphors James uses to describe the impact of words. Each is listed below. On the line next to them, write out what point James was making with the image he used:

Bits in horses' mouths (vs. 3) _____

Ships (vss. 4, 5) _____

Fire (vss. 5-7) _____

Animals (vss. 7, 8) _____

Springs of water (vss. 11, 12) _____

Trees and vines (vs. 12) _____

In essence, James is saying that the tongue (a symbol for words, speech), though small, has a lot of influence and that its potential for evil is great.

In fact, notice the negativity all through this section. In one place, he even calls the tongue "an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (vs. 8). Obviously, aware of what words can do, he's telling them to remember that because they are Christians they need to act as Christians (see James 2:14-26), and that includes guarding the tongue.

What pain have you felt from someone using harsh or unkind words? At the same time, what joy and happiness have you felt from someone speaking kindly to you? Dwell on these examples (and if you are willing, share them with the class) until you can see, clearly, the power for good or evil in words. Also, why do you think words come so heavy-laden with power?

LOUD-MOUTH (Lev. 19:16).

The verse for today shows that even back in Moses' day, God's people needed to guard their mouths. The word translated "talebearer" here comes from a Hebrew word that means "to go about" as a slanderer, a gossip, or even a traitor.

What's fascinating is that this word appears (in a slightly different form) in Ezekiel 28:5, when—using an earthly potentate as a symbol of Satan—the Lord says: "By thy great wisdom and by thy traffick hast thou increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches: Therefore thus saith the Lord God; because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God . . ." (Ezek. 28:5, 6). The word *traffick* there comes from the same root word translated "talebearer" in Leviticus 19:16. Without pushing the link too far, it's not hard to see that slander, gossip, and talebearing are all attributes of Satan, unquestionably the greatest slanderer, liar, and talebearer in all creation.

Look up these verses. In each case, what do they all reveal to us about Satan?

Gen. 3:1-4 _____

Job 1:9-11 _____

Zech. 3:1 _____

John 8:44 _____

Rev. 12:10 _____

There's no question: Satan is a loud-mouth, a gossip, a talebearer, and one who traffics in lies, in slander, and in accusations. Thus, when we do the same, even a little, we are reflecting his attributes, not God's. No wonder the Bible puts such an emphasis on words. No wonder that we, who have been redeemed by Christ, who have been forgiven all the things that Satan (or others) could use to make accusations against us, should, of all people, be careful what we say when talking about other people.

At the same time, how do we deal with someone whom we know is doing wrong, especially to someone else? Do we say nothing while harm is happening? How do we remain faithful to the Lord while at the same time not standing idly by as evil unfolds?

HISTORY OF LIES, WORDS OF TRUTH.

The Bible presents a long, tragic history of untruthfulness. It can be briefly summarized as follows:

1. The original lie was an outright contradiction of what God had said, directly challenging both His divine authority and His perfect integrity (Gen. 3:16).
2. Early in the history of the race, it became evident that by believing Satan's lie humans became foreigners to the truth and came to reflect the enemy's untruthfulness and deceitfulness in their own fallen nature (Gen. 4:8, 9; 12:10-20; 27:6-24).
3. Jesus indicated that lying and deception were to play an ever-increasing role in the enemy's bid to gain control of the human race (Matt. 7:15; 24:23, 24).
4. Satan's campaign of deception will intensify as time draws to a close (2 Thess. 2:9-12).
5. At last, the tragic history of lying and deception will come to an end (Rev. 21:27; 22:15).

Look up the following text: Ephesians 4:15, 25, 29. Summarize in your own words what Paul is saying here. Notice his emphasis on what we say. What reasons does he give for admonishing us in how we use our words? What does Paul mean when he says that through what we say we may "minister grace unto the hearers"? How do you understand what Paul says here in contrast to the sad, sordid history presented above?

Perhaps there's so much in the Bible about being careful with words, because they come so easy. All we have to do is speak. Imagine, if every time we opened our mouths, bullets, instead of words, flew out. We would, of course, give very careful and thoughtful consideration before we spread our lips. Words, however, can be almost as devastating. Thus, how crucial that we watch them carefully. At the same time, as Paul wrote in Ephesians, words have the potential to do good, as well.

In Ephesians 4:15, Paul talks about speaking the truth "in love." What does that mean? In what ways is not only what we say but how we say it, or even why we say it, crucial?

THOUGHT CRIME.

"A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things" (Matt. 12:35).

In 1948, Englishman George Orwell wrote a classic story, *1984*, his vision of a world so tightly controlled by the state that even wrong thoughts were punishable as crimes.

Of course, *1984* has come and gone, and most governments, even today, don't really desire to control what you think; it's only what you say or do that concerns them.

Nevertheless, the Bible is clear that God does care about what we think, not just what we say or do.

Read the following texts and then summarize the essence of what they are saying: Exod. 20:17; Deut. 10:16; 1 Sam. 16:7; Matt. 5:8; 12:35; Eph. 5:3.

Though a lot can be derived from these texts, it's clear that God does care about our thoughts, our motives, our hearts. And the reason is not hard to find: What we think, what's in our heart, directly impacts what we say or do. Words and actions, either for good or for bad, stem from what Jesus said (Matthew 12) were either the evil or the good treasure stored up in our hearts.

Also, none of us lives in a vacuum; what we say and what we do impacts others, either for good or evil, and what we say and do comes directly from what we think. If we think good, pure thoughts, then, more than likely, good and pure words and acts will follow; if we think evil thoughts, then more than likely evil words and actions will follow.

Numerous times the New Testament, not just the Old, warns about covetousness. In fact, that's the one sin listed in the Ten Commandments that deals specifically, and solely, with thought alone. Why is covetousness deemed so evil by the Lord that it's listed right there along with murder and adultery? What's so bad about coveting, also deemed idolatry? (Col. 3:5). What other evils arise directly from covetousness?

THINK ON THESE THINGS. . . .

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

If, as we saw in an earlier lesson, words come easy, what about thoughts? Words require at least that we open our mouths; thoughts don't even require that. All they need is consciousness. Thoughts arise without any effort on our part; indeed, they often come whether we want them or not. Thus, if we are told we need to control them, the big question is How? Compared to taming thought, taming the tongue is easy.

The first thing we must remember is that thoughts, however spontaneous, don't arise in a vacuum. What we focus our minds on, what we read, what we talk about, and what we do all impact what we think. Even as born-again Christians, we can't begin to get victory over our thoughts until we claim the grace and power of God.

Look at the verse for today. What are the things Paul tells us to think on? What things are pure, true, honest, just, lovely, and so forth? Make a list of those characteristics and write next to each one of them whatever you believe fits in that category. Look at the list; dwell on it; pray over it (it might even be interesting to share it with the class).

Nothing, of course, is more pure, lovely, true, and just than Jesus. As sinful, fallen beings, we have access to nothing, either in heaven or earth, that reveals to us these traits as perfectly as Christ. If, through daily surrender, we spend time focusing upon Him (2 Cor. 10:5; Phil. 2:5), on His character, His words, His actions, His love, His mercy, His compassion, and His obedience, we will have more victories in all areas of our life.

No wonder, then, that personal devotional time is so important. If we can begin each day reading in the Bible, praying, and studying, we can get a good head start on the daily battle to control our minds and our words and even our actions, as well.

Look at your own life. Look at your thoughts. What do you spend your time looking at, thinking of, and reading about?

What changes do you need to make?

FURTHER STUDY: Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, "Talents" (Speech), p. 337.

It will do you good, and our ministers generally, to frequently review the closing scenes in the life of our Redeemer. Here, beset with temptations as He was, we may all learn lessons of the utmost importance to us. It would be well to spend a thoughtful hour each day reviewing the life of Christ from the manger to Calvary. We should take it point by point and let the imagination vividly grasp each scene, especially the closing ones of His earthly life. By thus contemplating His teachings and sufferings, and the infinite sacrifice made by Him for the redemption of the race, we may strengthen our faith, quicken our love, and become more deeply imbued with the spirit which sustained our Saviour."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 374.

"There are many to whom life is a painful struggle; they feel their deficiencies, and are miserable and unbelieving; they think they have nothing for which to be grateful. Kind words, looks of sympathy, expressions of appreciation, would be to many a struggling and lonely one as the cup of cold water to a thirsty soul. A word of sympathy, an act of kindness, would lift burdens that rest heavily upon weary shoulders. And every word or deed of unselfish kindness is an expression of the love of Christ for lost humanity."—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 23.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Jesus said: "For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:37). What do you think He meant by that?
2. Why does Paul in Colossians 3:5 equate covetousness with idolatry?
3. Think about the importance of our devotional life. Using the basis of this week's lesson as the starting point, what reasons can you give for having a strong, consistent devotional life?
4. What other steps can you take to help guard your thoughts and your words?



The Robber's Unexpected Treasure

Dorothy Eaton Watts

Drick stood in the shadows watching traffic crawl by. A truck loaded with passengers approached, and Drick's eyes focused on a man carrying a hand bag. Waving a gun, he jumped out of the shadows, snatched the bag from the man, and disappeared before anyone could stop him.

The bag was heavy and fat. "It must be full of bank notes," Drick told his friend as they made their escape. "This should keep us going for a while!" When the men were sure that no one was following them, they stopped to open the bag. "What? Is this all I got?" Drick cried in disgust as he pulled a large black book from the bag. He lit a match and held it close to read the title on the cover: B-I-B-L-E. "This is of no use to me!" he grunted, and he touched the match to the book.

"Don't burn it!" his friend warned. "Maybe there's something valuable inside."

Drick shoved the book into the bag and started for home. When he arrived, he tossed the Bible onto a shelf and quickly forgot about it.

One night he returned home and found his wife reading the black book. "Listen to this," she told him. "This is really interesting."

Drick frowned as his wife began reading from John 3. The words caught his attention. They spoke of God's love. *Does God really love me, a thief?* he wondered. He could not forget the words his wife had read, *God let His son die for me? If I believe in Him, I will not die?* He pondered the thought.

Stirred by God's love, Drick asked several pastors to explain the Bible to him. But always he felt thirsty to know more.

One day he heard about a man named Sen Marak, who knew his Bible. He visited Sen and asked many questions. Sen offered to study the Bible with him, and Drick agreed. As the men studied together, Drick had the feeling that he had seen Sen somewhere before. But where? Suddenly he remembered—Drick had robbed this man. It was Sen's Bible that had led him on his quest for God.

Drick recalled his friend's words when he was going to burn the Bible. The Bible had contained something valuable; it contained a great treasure that changed Drick's life forever.

Drick and his wife have been baptized. Now instead of a gun, Drick carries a Bible; instead of robbing people, he shares God's love with anyone who will listen.

Dorothy Eaton Watts is associate secretary in Hosur, India, of the Southern Asia Division.

Selfless Service



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15).

GERMAN PHILOSOPHER Immanuel Kant boiled down life to three great questions: What can I know? What ought I do? What can I hope?

This week’s lesson looks at the second question, What ought I do? even though it’s tied directly to the answer to the other two questions. We can know that Jesus died for our sins, and we can hope in the promise of eternal life offered us because of His death. And, in the meanwhile, we ought to do what God asks us to do, and that is, live our lives in selfless service for others, as He lived His life for us. As John succinctly expressed it: “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16). This isn’t always easy, not for beings whose default mode is *self, self, self*. Only through Christ and an understanding of what we have been given through Him can that change to *others, others, others*.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What have we received from the Lord that we can share with others? How can selfish beings live unselfishly? Why is death to self so important? How do we die to self? What should be our motives for service? What kind of sacrifices must we make for others?

*Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 21.

FREELY GIVEN, FREELY GIVING.

"And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:7, 8).

Heal the sick, cleanse lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils, preach about the kingdom of God. What's important here isn't so much the specifics of what Christ told His disciples to do but the motives behind their actions. In a sense, what Jesus said to them was, *Look what God has done for you. Now, using the power of God, go do the same for others.*

Of course, what Christ has done for us, that is, redeemed us from death, is something that we cannot do for anyone else. But just as Jesus ministered to others and gave of Himself for them, we can do the same. What Christ has given us, He has given to us freely (even though it cost Him so much); we, too, then, should be willing to give freely to others. Here is the heart and soul of Christian service.

Write out what we have received from God and the texts you find that reveal what we have been given:

Example: Forgiveness of sin (Eph. 1:7).

When we think about all that Christ has done for us; when we realize the security, the hope, the promises, the peace, and all that we have received, by grace; how could we not want to give to others? As we make Christ a reality in our lives; as we experience for ourselves His grace, mercy, and forgiveness; as we know for ourselves the joy of what it means to love and serve the Lord, we will have the right motives in wanting to share our blessings with those who need them, as well.

Of all the blessings we have been given from Christ, what are those we can give to others? What are those we can't give but can merely tell about?

THE SPIRIT OF SERVICE.

"If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest; and if one of you wants to be first, he must be your slave—like the Son of Man, who did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life to redeem many people" (Matt. 20:26-28, TEV).

If you want to be great, you must become a servant? If you want to be first, you must become the lowest, even a slave? Look at how Jesus here totally undermines worldly concepts of greatness.

The context of Christ's statement was a mother's request that her two sons would have the two positions of honor in His kingdom (see Matt. 20:20-23). She was covetous for the advancement and success of her sons. Yet, James and John themselves were party to the request. Their mother did not make the request without their knowledge. The Bible says that they came with her (vs. 20). They shared her desire that they be given position and power. The reaction of the other ten disciples reveals that they were not immune from the same desire. Their anger on hearing what had transpired reveals that they begrimed their two colleagues the positions to which they aspired.

One can only wonder, *Had not all those years of being with Jesus, and seeing His self-abnegation and self-denial all for the good of others, had any effect on these people?*

Read carefully what Jesus said (in the texts for today). He used Himself as an example of what He meant. In what ways did Jesus lower Himself to serve others? Give some specific examples; and in what ways can we, in our own spheres, emulate those examples? (See, for instance, Mark 6:37-44; Luke 22:31, 32; John 13:5.)

Jesus (in the texts for today) made it so clear that greatness came not from being first, not from being the richest, the smartest, the most spiritual, or religious but from a willingness to serve others.

Think of His words in the context of the great controversy. Sin began with Satan seeking more than he already had, seeking a greater position for himself. Here is the foundation of sin, of rebellion. No wonder, then, Jesus told us that true greatness comes from doing the opposite, from being willing to serve others, to minister to them, to be willing to become a "slave," the lowest rung on the ladder.

Who wants to be a slave? Who wants to lower oneself? These are not natural tendencies in human nature. What is the *only* way we can do these things that Jesus asks of us?

DYING, TO LIVE.

"He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 10:38, 39).

How much easier our religion would be if we had only a few clear-cut simple rules to follow. Don't steal, don't kill, don't commit adultery, and so forth. But Jesus brought the law to a higher level than a mere outward compliance to a few "do's" and "don'ts." He elevated the written code to where it reaches the inner sanctum of our soul, to where it echoes through the fiber of our entire being. He so magnified the law, bringing out elements in it far beyond the immediate words themselves that, in and of ourselves, we could never follow it. Its demands are too high, its standard beyond our reach, at least without divine aid. Something greatly has to change in us in order for us to be able to obey. And that change comes when we, through the power of God, die to self and become new creatures in Christ.

What is Jesus saying in the above texts? What does it mean to lose our life for Christ's sake? Why must we, in a sense, die in order to serve Christ? See also Luke 9:23; Rom. 6:1-8; Gal. 2:20; Col. 2:13, 20; 2 Tim. 2:11.

We are fallen beings, and our basic nature is selfishness. We are all big babies, for just as babies think only of themselves and their immediate needs, we do the same, only a bit more subtly. That's why, in order to be what Christ wants us to be—a servant to others—we need to die to self, and we can do this only at the foot of the Cross, where we make a conscious choice to surrender all to Jesus, to die to ourselves and our selfishness and live, instead, for Him.

As we, through the power of the Spirit, experience this death, we can then live in Christ and through Him serve and minister to others. However, this is a choice we have to make, a choice that often comes with a severe battle against the carnal nature. But only then will we be able to minister as we have been ministered to. Only as we are filled with the fullness of what we have been given can we give to others.

Jesus said a person must lose his or her life in order to find it. What does it mean to "find it"? How does service to others play into the idea of finding one's life?

GIVING INSTEAD OF GETTING (Luke 3:10, 11).

As these verses show, John the Baptist was involved in a head-on collision with the spirit of a world whose motto was *to get all you can out of life for yourself*. John replied, in effect, "That spirit is of Satan, of fallen human nature. The spirit of your Master is not to get all you can but to give all you can give."

How is the divine principle, implicit in John's words, illustrated in the plan of salvation as revealed in Romans 8:32?

In many ways, the principle is so simple. Look what has been done for us as sinful, helpless, needy beings. It was the ultimate condescension for God to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. As a result, He asks us to do for others what, perhaps, they cannot do for themselves, at least, in their present state.

How would you respond to someone who says, "Look, I give a lot of money each year to charity. Isn't that enough?"

While giving to charity is fine, that's not the essence of Christian giving. Even atheists give to charity. In some ways, that's easy. Just write a check, and your conscience is covered.

The Bible reveals that the spirit of giving does not consist merely of giving money. It involves the giving of ourselves—of our time, our talents, our compassion, and our love. It means caring, and caring means expending your own time and energy for someone else. It means suffering with the suffering, weeping with the weeping; and weeping and suffering demand something of yourself beyond the loose change in your pockets.

In Christ's story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), the injured man needed more than sympathy. He needed someone's time, someone's care, someone's money. The priest and the Levite were too selfish to give time and attention. Perhaps they were in a rush to do some religious activity. *Maybe they were in a rush to get home in time for the Sabbath!*

In what ways does giving to others help us understand in our own lives what we have been given by God? How does unselfish ministry for others strengthen our faith?

APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY (Acts 2:44, 45; 4:34, 35).

Whatever difficulties this type of arrangement might lead to in modern practical application, one thing is certain: The members of the early church had their priorities straight. To them the things of the spirit far outweighed in importance the things of the flesh. Temporal considerations were made subservient to the eternal. The interests of the group superseded those of the individual. The church and its mission were their number-one concern. It is mind boggling to contemplate what could happen if the church today were, even in part, to recapture that apostolic outlook.

Read carefully the texts for today. What specifically are the people doing? What principles are seen there that we can draw, and apply, to our own experience today?

The important thing to remember, too, is not only what good the giving of their money did for those who received it but what it did for those who gave. To sell your goods or give them to others is an act of faith, and every act of faith can only strengthen faith. There was no saving merit in what they gave; the giving could never save them (no one ever possessed enough goods for that). The giving merely showed that they understood what they had already received, and these acts were expressions of thanks—expressions of people so close to the Lord that they trusted Him for all things, even to the point of selling their possessions and giving to others. Talk about faith! Talk about a people who had experienced a death to self!

In what ways does paying a faithful tithe express this same principle?

The spirit manifested by these early Christians exists even today. How many people, heeding the prompting of the Holy Spirit, have given up all their worldly comforts to spend years of their lives as missionaries, be it in some distant jungle or in some concrete jungle? In fact, the giving up of our material comforts could be even one of the lesser sacrifices that we make in service to others.

No doubt, the giving up of material possessions in service to others involves sacrifice. But what are other things—even more precious than material things—that people have sacrificed in selfless service? Explain why you think these are even more of a sacrifice than material goods?

FURTHER STUDY: Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 190, 191; *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 93–101.

The spirit of unselfish labor for others gives depth, stability, and Christlike loveliness to the character, and brings peace and happiness to its possessor. The aspirations are elevated. There is no room for sloth or selfishness. Those who thus exercise the Christian graces will grow and will become strong to work for God. They will have clear spiritual perceptions, a steady, growing faith, and an increased power in prayer. The Spirit of God, moving upon their spirit, calls forth the sacred harmonies of the soul in answer to the divine touch. Those who thus devote themselves to unselfish effort for the good of others are most surely working out their own salvation.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 80.

At the Passover feast, “Christ would have His disciples understand that although He had washed their feet, this did not in the least detract from His dignity. . . . And being so infinitely superior, He imparted grace and significance to the service. No one was so exalted as Christ, and yet He stooped to the humblest duty. That His people might not be misled by the selfishness which dwells in the natural heart, and which strengthens by self-serving, Christ Himself set the example of humility. He would not leave this great subject in man’s charge. Of so much consequence did He regard it, that He Himself, One equal with God, acted as servant to His disciples. While they were contending for the highest place, He to whom every knee shall bow, He whom the angels of glory count it honor to serve, bowed down to wash the feet of those who called Him Lord. He washed the feet of His betrayer. . . .

“[Jesus’] whole life was under a law of service. He served all, ministered to all. Thus He lived the law of God, and by His example showed how we are to obey it.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 649.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

Why are motives so important for the Christian who serves others? Can we give for the wrong reasons? If so, what could some of those reasons be? Also, if motives are important, why must we have a proper understanding of salvation by grace alone in order to have right motives? Otherwise, could there be the danger of thinking that our generosity to others is a means of earning salvation? Discuss.



From Death, Life

J. H. Zachary

Raymund Luntungan and his mother heard the news by radio. An airplane carrying his brother and father had crashed in the jungles of Indonesia. Raymund prayed for 12 days that God would help the rescuers find them alive. Then the news arrived, "No survivors."

Raymund's father had been the head elder in their church. His brother was a good Christian boy. Over and over 13-year-old Raymund asked God "Why?" But no answer came, and Raymund became angry with God.

In time Raymund's mother remarried. But Raymund, still bitter, began to rebel. He started smoking then drinking. Desperate, his mother sent him to the Adventist college. But Raymund did not fit in. Beneath the surface the questions remained. Why had God let his father and brother die?

A church pastor took a special interest in Raymund. One day he offered to take Raymund to Mountain View College in the Philippines. Raymund jumped at the chance to get away from home, to start over. After a short flight and a long bus ride, Raymund and the pastor arrived at the college.

Raymund enrolled in the business course at Mountain View. He found the staff and students warm and friendly. Raymund learned that most of the popular students were members of the ministerial seminary, and he decided to join too. Every weekend they visited churches in nearby villages. In his efforts to help others, Raymund began to find healing for his own wounded heart. He mastered many Bible topics so he could share with others the truths his father had loved.

"In serving others, I found Jesus as my own Friend and Saviour," Raymund said. He wrote home, telling his mother that her prayers were being answered. During his year at Mountain View College, Raymund's ministerial team was assigned to pastor a village church. Raymund and his ministerial team praise God for the scores of persons who have come to Jesus through their work.

Raymund decided to stay at Mountain View College to complete his education. He has asked Christ, whom he once shunned, to be his partner for life and to help him win many souls for God's kingdom.

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Living the Life of Faith



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8).

THIS QUARTER we've looked at one of the foundations of the Christian faith—forgiveness, without which we would have no hope of anything beyond the spasm of cellular metabolism we call human life. And that's not just any forgiveness; it's the forgiveness that a perfectly holy and righteous God grants to unholy and unrighteous people, a forgiveness that inevitably leads them to a life of holiness and a righteousness that reflects, however imperfectly, the holiness and righteousness of God Himself.

We've seen, too, that being forgiven by God brings about a radical change in a person's life, changes that should influence every part of our being, because the most fundamental aspect of our existence, our relationship to our Creator, has been altered.

This week we'll take one more look at what forgiveness means in the lives of those who, however unworthy, have been forgiven.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What does it mean to live by faith? In what ways are we “complete in Him”? What are some of the blessings that we have been given through Christ? How should these blessings influence the way we treat others? Though salvation is free, what costs are still involved? How do we manifest our love for God because of what He has done for us?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 28.

LIVING BY FAITH.

"For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17).

Romans 1:17 is one of the most well-known texts in Scripture. It was a verse that changed Martin Luther's life (not to mention the history of the Christian church). But the question is, If the just shall live by faith, *faith in what?*

Dwell on Romans 1:17. If need be, look up the other places where the same phrase is used (Hab. 2:4; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38) and then write out what you think the answer to this crucial question is.

Whatever answer you gave, one thing is for sure: If it didn't include, either openly or tacitly, the notion that our sins are forgiven by God, then your answer is woefully incomplete. To even be called "just" implies that we have been forgiven. Good deeds, kind words, a loving heart, however fundamental to Christianity, doesn't make a person just in the sight of God. Only those whose sins have been forgiven, only those who have the merits of Christ granted to them, are "just."

The question then arises, How do we know that our sins are forgiven? Do we hear a voice shouting down from heaven telling us so? Does God write letters in the sky assuring us of forgiveness? Do we have visions in which the Lord tells us that we are forgiven?

No. We believe it *by faith*. We claim it *by faith*. We accept it *by faith*. How else?

This is why the just, the forgiven, *live by faith*—faith in the promise of forgiveness made to us through the life, death, and high-priestly ministry of Jesus Christ. The hope, the peace, the assurance we have because of the forgiveness that is ours, we have only by faith. Not blind faith, not reckless faith, but faith, nonetheless.

Why is the understanding that our sins have been forgiven so crucial to the Christian? Think of what it would mean if we *didn't* have that assurance of forgiveness. And why, in order to have that assurance, must our forgiveness be based not on what we can do but only on what Christ has done for us at the Cross? If it were based on ourselves, what assurance would we have?

COMPLETE IN JESUS (Col. 2:10).

Look at the text for today. If need be, read a few verses that precede it. What an incredible statement. Verse 9 says that in Jesus “dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” The NIV says “for in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.” And now we, through faith, become united with Christ! No wonder, then, the text says that we are “complete in him.” That completeness becomes easier to understand when we know who He is—the one in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells. Talk about knowing people in high places! Talk about connections!

Thus, through Jesus, who has all power in heaven and in earth, we have been given access to so much that others just don’t have.

“Shall we not strive to use to the very best of our ability the little time that is left us in this life, adding grace to grace, power to power, making it manifest that we have a source of power in the heavens above? Christ says: ‘All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.’ Matthew 28:18. What is this power given to Him for? For us. He desires us to realize that He has returned to heaven as our Elder Brother and that the measureless power given Him has been placed at our disposal.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 186.

Think about what we have through Jesus. First and foremost, we have forgiveness of our sins (Col. 1:14). We have the promise of “no condemnation” (Rom. 8:1). We have the promise, now, of eternal life (1 John 2:25). We have the promise of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). We have the promise of power to overcome sin (Jude 24). We have the promise of His righteousness (Rom. 1:17). We have the promise that no matter what happens we can trust in the goodness of our Lord (Rom. 8:28).

In short, because of the forgiveness offered us at the Cross, we have the promise that whatever our toils, struggles, pains, fears, and failures, we have a God who loves us, who died for us, and who offers us the assurance that when all is said and done, we will live with Him forever in an eternal paradise where there will be no more pain, no more suffering, no more of the terrible things that we suffer here.

Now, with all these promises in Christ, shouldn’t we as Christians be the most loving, giving, and self-sacrificing of all people in the world? Because we have been given so much, shouldn’t we be giving so much? Because we are given so much help, aid, comfort, and hope, shouldn’t we be the most generous in giving others aid, comfort, and hope? Ask yourself, If you are not giving freely to others, could it be because you haven’t fully claimed or grasped, by faith, the promises offered you? If so, what can you do to change?

TO FOLLOW CHRIST.

"The only man who has the right to say that he is justified by grace alone is the man who has left all to follow Christ."

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

There's no question: We have through Jesus Christ been given so much. As fallen, sinful beings, we barely can begin to comprehend the blessings we have in Jesus. And only as we marvel at what happened at the Cross can we start to understand how much those blessings cost.

Yet, those blessing come with a cost for us too. Sure, the gap between heaven and esarth, caused by sin, was way too great for us ever to be able to bridge ourselves. That's why Christ had to do it for us. Yet, only those who have surrendered to Christ, in faith—however faulty the exercise of that faith at times is—will be saved in the end.

Look at the quote by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Do you agree? Is his statement too strong? Look up the following texts and see whether they help illuminate what he meant. Luke 9:23; Luke 18:22; Gal. 6:14; Phil. 3:8; Col. 2:20. After reading them, in the context of the Bonhoeffer quote, write down below your understanding of what being justified by faith alone costs us as followers of Christ.

Only the most misguided and imbalanced notions of what salvation by faith alone means could cause anyone to believe that being a follower of Christ doesn't cost us anything. If need be, it could cost us everything. This isn't salvation by works; this isn't legalism; this is simply the biblical principle, expounded especially in the New Testament, of dying to self and living a new life in Christ, a life of faith, humility, obedience, reverence, and self-denial. These are not easy objectives for beings who, by nature, are consumed with greed, carnality, egoism, and self-exaltation.

Look at your own life in the past twenty-four hours. In what ways, if any, have you revealed, either in words, deeds, or thoughts, the biblical principle of death to self?

"MAH TOV" (Mic. 6:8).

One of the great struggles of living in what has been called the Information Age is that we have so much information. Yet, information isn't the same as knowledge or, especially, the same as truth. With so much information coming from so many directions, from so many sources, some of the most basic and important questions can get muddled or lost amid the barrage of data and facts that often come with conflicting viewpoints. And one of those crucial questions is, simply, How do we know what is good or evil?

Today's text comes with the simple Hebrew phrase "*Mah Tov*," which means "What is good?" And how fortunate for us that it's followed by the answer—from God Himself.

What are the three things the Lord says are good?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Notice the two directions these three points move in: our attitudes and actions toward humanity and our attitudes and actions toward God. This isn't surprising, because the same principle can be found not only in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) but also in the words of Jesus Himself (Matt. 22:37-40).

What's interesting, too, is the balance between justice and mercy here. Justice and mercy are, in some ways, opposites. You can be just and give someone their due; or you can be merciful and spare someone their due. And yet the Lord tells us here to do *justly* and to love *mercy*? How are we supposed to do both?

Jesus came to reveal the Father to us (John 14:9), and the Father is a God of mercy and justice (Ps. 89:14). What happened at the Cross that reveals both the mercy and the justice of God?

Look at the third component of what's required of us, and that is to walk humbly with God. Certainly, that shouldn't be too hard, should it? Fallen, sinful creatures before the Creator of the universe? Walking humbly before Him should be easy. Nothing to it, at least in contrast to doing justice and loving mercy.

On the other hand, could one of the ways we walk humbly with God be by doing justice and by loving mercy? Is how we treat others a manifestation of walking humbly before God? If so, why? In what ways are the first two requirements linked to the third?

FEAR AND LOVE (1 John 4:18).

Of the things we have spoken, this is the sum: God loves us, and because of His love, Christ died in our behalf; and as a result of His sacrifice, we stand before Him with all our sins forgiven. And, because of the love, the graciousness, the kindness, and the forgiveness He has poured out upon us, we should pour out love, graciousness, kindness, and forgiveness on others. And that should be easy for us, because we know and have experienced the love of God. It is a love that should cast out fear from our lives and free us to live for the good of others, because we have nothing to fear, not now and not in the judgment (see the previous verse).

Look at verses 19-21 of the same chapter. In what ways is what John is saying here parallel with what we looked at in yesterday's study? How does He link love for God with love for fellow human beings?

Look carefully at verse 21. Why does He say that those who don't love others can't love God? What's the link there, as well?

In the end, anyone can say he or she loves God; most anyone, too, can go through rounds of rituals that express love for God. But that's not what John is talking about here. We love God because of what He's done for us; and because of what He's done for us, we manifest that love to others.

Of course, sometimes that's not always easy. Some people are just not easy to love. But if we're told to love our enemies (Luke 6:35), then we have no excuse not to love our "brother," no matter his or her disposition.

In short, we have been loved; now we must love.

Why would spending as much time as possible dwelling on Jesus, on the Cross, and on what He has done for us help us learn to love others? Take some time to think prayerfully and earnestly about what God did for us through Jesus. Praise Him for this, worship Him for this, and then see whether these experiences don't lead you to be more kind, loving, and gracious to others.

FURTHER STUDY: Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 146, 147.

Your hope is not in yourself; it is in Christ. Your weakness is united to His strength, your ignorance to His wisdom, your frailty to His enduring might. So you are not to look to yourself, not to let the mind dwell upon self, but look to Christ. Let the mind dwell upon His love, upon the beauty, the perfection, of His character. Christ in His self-denial, Christ in His humiliation, Christ in His purity and holiness, Christ in His matchless love—this is the subject for the soul's contemplation. It is by loving Him, copying Him, depending wholly upon Him, that you are to be transformed into His likeness.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 70, 71.

“Our natures are fallen and we cannot make ourselves righteous. Since we are sinful, unholy, we cannot perfectly obey the holy law. We have no righteousness of our own with which to meet the claims of the law of God. . . .

“More than this, Christ changes the heart. He abides in your heart by faith. You are to maintain this connection with Christ by faith and the continual surrender of your will to Him; and so long as you do this, He will work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. . . .

“He desires to restore you to Himself, to see His own purity and holiness reflected in you. And if you will but yield yourself to Him, He that hath begun a good work in you will carry it forward to the day of Jesus Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 62–64.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Look at Galatians 6:7, 8. Here is Paul, the great teacher of justification by faith alone, stressing how important obedience, holiness, and victory are in the Christian life. In fact, he makes it a matter of salvation versus destruction. In light of what we read about being “complete in him,” how do we understand Paul’s words about those who “soweth to the Spirit”? What does that mean, and what promises do we have that assure us we can do the same?
2. If you would summarize in one paragraph the essence of what you’ve learned this quarter, what would you say? If possible, have members of the class stand up and read their paragraphs. Compare. Is there any one particular point that stands out in common? If so, what?



Changed Completely

Reina Iris Hernandez Gonzales de Ortiz

God had mercy on me even before I knew Him. I was an eager student in school; all I did was study. But when it came to real life, I was naive.

I was spiritually hungry, but I did not know where to find God. I studied several different religions and eventually joined the Hare Krishna sect, and even when they told me to forget my family members, I obeyed. My mother sensed the danger I was in and asked people to help free me from this religion. But she found no one who could help her.

One day as I sold Hare Krishna books on the street, a man stopped to talk to me. He quoted John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Hearing this Bible verse made me want to return to Christ, but something pulled me toward Hare Krishna. Later I found a scrap of paper containing a Bible verse. It was Proverbs 16:25, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." As I read this verse, I struggled with the question, *Is it Krishna or is it God?* Suddenly I knew I must leave this religion and return home.

I joined a church and thought I had found what I had been searching for. But as time passed, I slipped back into my former sinful ways.

I met and married a young man, and soon he wanted to start a family. I had trouble becoming pregnant, so I prayed for a baby. Several months later I became pregnant and delivered a healthy baby girl. Still, I searched for something to fill the spiritual void in my life.

My father was attending a small group meeting in an Adventist neighbor's home. Later, the woman invited him to attend the Adventist church. I wanted to learn more about what attracted my father to this church, so my husband and I visited the church. We felt loved from the start. Church members visited us and offered to study the Bible with us. Within a few months my father, my husband, and I were baptized.

I praise God that even before I knew Him, He protected me from false religions, and when I asked, He gave me a child. With Christ in my heart, my heart is full, and I rejoice in God, my Savior. I want to tell others about God's love, people who may not have found God and are searching as I was.

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Bible Study Guide for Third Quarter, 2003

Hebrews is all about Jesus, a fuller and clear revelation of Him. This quarter's lesson study, *Sanctuary Themes: The Book of Hebrews*, by Ekkehardt Mueller, will focus on Jesus, as He appears in the book of Hebrews.

Lesson 1: Jesus and the Book of Hebrews

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

Sunday: From Whom and To Whom?

Monday: The Content of the Epistle (Heb. 2:3).

Tuesday: The Brightness of His Glory (Heb. 1:1, 2).

Wednesday: The Multi-Purposed God.

Thursday: "So Great a High Priest" (Heb. 4:15).

MEMORY TEXT: Hebrews 13:8.

SABBATH GEM: The book of Hebrews was written in order to help keep faithful those who were tempted to fall away from the faith.

Lesson 2: Jesus Our King

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

Sunday: Jesus, the King (Hebrews 1).

Monday: Jesus, the Promised Priest-King (Psalm 110).

Tuesday: Jesus' Kingship.

Wednesday: The Character of Jesus, the King (Heb. 7:1-3).

Thursday: Jesus, King for Us.

MEMORY TEXT: Hebrews 1:3.

SABBATH GEM: Though Hebrews repeatedly presents Jesus as our High Priest, He also is pictured as King.

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, old age, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.

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Unions	Churches	Companies	Membership	Population
Australia	410	71	50,606	19,300,000
New Zealand-Pacific	138	32	16,823	4,400,000
Papua New Guinea	781	2,603	214,456	5,049,000
Trans-Pacific	423	471	76,476	2,014,200
Totals (3/31/02)	1,752	3,177	358,361	30,763,200

Mission Projects:

- ① Perth (Australia) Adventist Aboriginal Care Center.
- ② 25 churches/chapels in high-growth areas of Papua New Guinea Union Mission.