

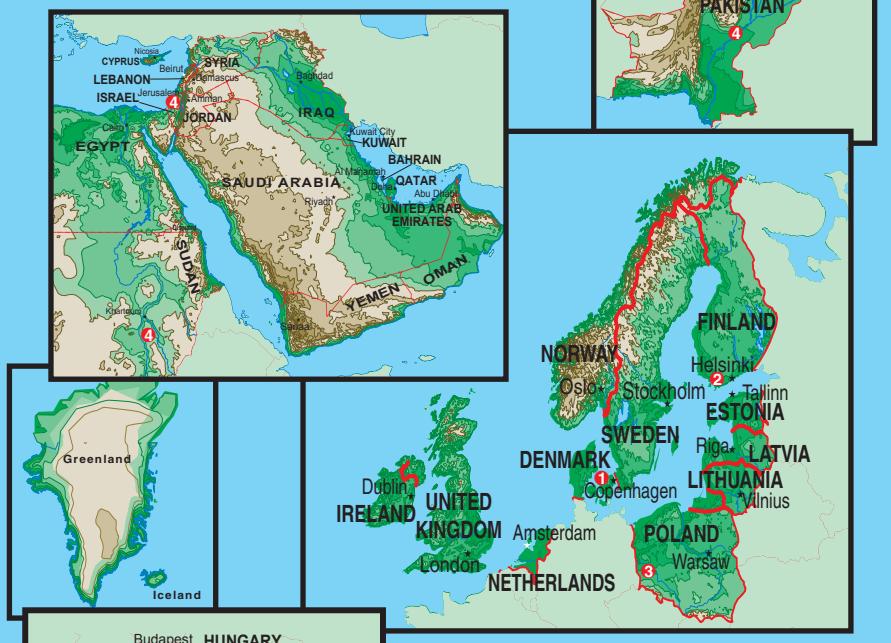
Trans-European DIVISION

Mission Projects

Our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help provide the following projects:

- ① establish an international church in Copenhagen, Denmark
- ② provide a church for an active congregation near Helsinki, Finland
- ③ renovate the Polish Union's campground at Zatonie, Poland
- ④ Children's Project: Bibles for children in Pakistan, Israel, and Sudan

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Unions	Churches	Members	Population
Adriatic	99	3,796	9,708,000
Baltic	88	6,479	6,963,000
British	243	29,325	66,000,000
Danish	46	2,529	5,596,000
Finland	73	5,052	5,312,000
Hungarian	111	4,649	10,034,000
Middle East	79	17,691	236,633,000
Netherlands	54	4,843	16,433,000
Norwegian	65	4,630	4,765,000
Pakistan	122	12,659	172,800,000
Polish	123	5,706	38,110,000
South-East European	215	8,125	16,064,000
Swedish Union	39	2,789	9,214,000
Attached Fields	33	1,949	19,043,000
Totals as of January 2009		1,390	110,212
			616,675,000

* Maps not drawn to scale

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



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ADULT
SABBATH SCHOOL
BIBLE STUDY GUIDE
July • Aug • Sept 2010

Redemption *in* Romans

ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

REDEMPTION IN ROMANS



July • Aug • Sept 2010

SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH



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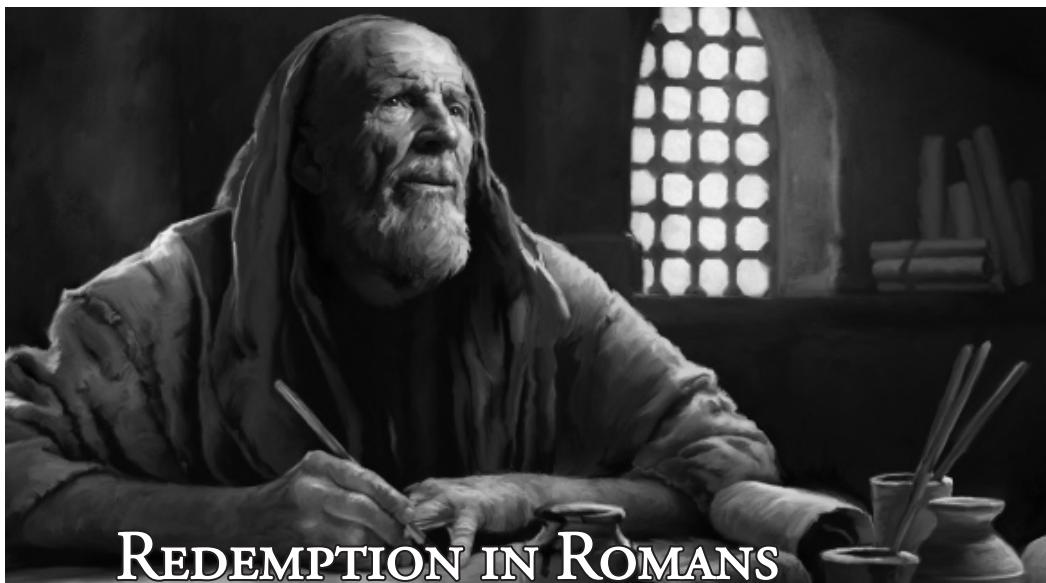
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REDEMPTION IN ROMANS

He had been a monk, a diligent one at that. “I was indeed a pious monk, and followed the rules of my order more strictly than I can express. If ever a monk could attain Heaven by his monkish works, I should certainly have been entitled to it. If I had continued much longer, I should have carried my mortifications even to death.”

No matter his works and mortifications, however, the monk never sensed acceptance with God, never believed that he was good enough to be saved. His personal despair was so great that it was destroying him mentally and physically, because—believing in the reality of God’s wrath—he feared the prospect of ever having to face it.

After all, who wouldn’t?

Then one day, through his study of the Bible, a text jumped out at him that changed not only his life but the history of the world. “The just shall live by faith” (*Rom. 1:17*).

His eyes had been opened: his acceptance with God was based not on his works, not on his bodily mortifications, not on his deeds but on the merits of Christ. Never again would he be open to the delusions of a theology that placed the hope of salvation in anything other than the righteousness of Christ given to the believer through faith alone.

The monk, of course, was Martin Luther, who was used by God to start the great-

est religious revolt in Christian history: the Protestant Reformation.

For Luther, it all began in the book of Romans, the topic of this quarter's study. It's not surprising that the Protestant revolt against Rome began in Romans (ironically enough), because this book has played a key role in the history of Christian thought. All great movements in Christianity—back to the pure gospel and to the theme of “justification by faith”—have found their starting point in Paul's Epistle to the Romans. The epistle contains a complete theological presentation of the gospel and of the hope it presents to fallen humanity.

As we study Romans, we'll follow a crucial rule, and that is, we'll seek to discover what the words of Scripture were meant to say to those to whom they were first addressed. We'll look at them in their immediate context; then, after that, we'll seek their meaning for us today. This doesn't imply that the texts themselves change meanings; it implies, instead, that the truths taught by the Scriptures need to be applied to the present circumstances of those reading the texts.

We must, therefore, first discover what the words of Paul meant to the Roman Christians. What was he saying to them, and why? Paul had a particular reason for writing to that congregation. There were certain issues he wished to clarify, but the great truths that he taught as he clarified those issues were not restricted to only his first readers. On the contrary, these words have reverberated across the centuries, teaching millions the wonderful news of the gospel and its foundational doctrine, justification by faith. It was this light, light from the book of Romans, that scattered the darkness that had enveloped Luther and millions of others, light that revealed to them not only the great truth of Christ pardoning sinners but also the power of Christ to cleanse them from sin. And it's light from these pages that we, this quarter, will seek to uncover for ourselves as we study the great theme of salvation by faith alone as revealed in the book of Romans.

All great movements in Christianity—back to the pure gospel and to the theme of “justification by faith”—have found their starting point in Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

This quarter is based on previous work by Don Neufeld (1914–1980), who served as associate editor of the Adventist Review for 13 years (1967–1980) and as one of the editors of The SDA Bible Commentary.

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Paul and Rome



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Acts 28:17–31; Rom. 1:7; 15:14, 20–27; Ephesians 1; Phil. 1:12.*

Memory Text: “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world” (*Romans 1:8, NKJV*).

Ideally, in our study of the book of Romans, after a study of the historical background, we should begin with Romans 1:1 and then go through the entire book verse by verse. Because only one quarter has been allotted to the study of the book, we have had to be selective in what parts we can study. The book could easily take four quarters, not one, to explore. Hence, only the key chapters, in which the basic message is contained, will be covered.

It is extremely important that a student of the book of Romans understand the book's historical background. Without that background, it will be difficult for the student to know what Paul is saying. Paul was writing to a specific group of Christians at a specific time for a specific reason; knowing, as much as possible, that reason will greatly benefit us in our study.

We must, in our imagination, go back in time, transport ourselves to Rome, become members of the congregation there, and then, as first-century church members, listen to Paul and the words that the Holy Spirit gave him at that time.

Amazingly enough, though written a long time ago and in a whole other context, the book has messages relevant to God's people today, in every land and in nearly every situation. Hence, we need to heed prayerfully the words written here and apply them to our lives.

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

Date and Place

Romans 16:1, 2 indicates that Paul probably wrote Romans in the city of Cenchreae, which was near the eastern port of Corinth, in Greece. Paul's mention of Phoebe, a resident of greater Corinth, establishes that place as the likely background for the letter to the Romans.

One of the purposes of establishing the city of origin of the New Testament epistles is to ascertain the date of writing. Because Paul traveled much, knowing where he was at a particular time gives us a clue to the date.

Paul established the church at Corinth on his second missionary journey, A.D. 49–52 (see *Acts 18:1–18*). On his third journey, A.D. 53–58, he visited Greece again (*Acts 20:2, 3*), and at this time he received an offering for the saints in Jerusalem near the end of his journey (*Rom. 15:25, 26*). The Epistle to the Romans was, then, written probably in the early months of A.D. 58.

What other important churches had Paul visited on his third missionary journey? *Acts 18:23*.

Visiting the Galatian churches, Paul discovered that during his absence false teachers had convinced the members to submit to circumcision and to keep to other precepts of the law of Moses. Fearing that his opponents might reach Rome before he arrived, Paul wrote a letter (Romans) to forestall the same tragedy happening in Rome. It is believed that the Epistle to the Galatians was written also from Corinth during Paul's three months there on his third missionary journey, perhaps shortly after his arrival.

“In his epistle to the Romans, Paul set forth the great principles of the gospel. He stated his position on the questions which were agitating the Jewish and the Gentile churches, and showed that the hopes and promises which had once belonged especially to the Jews were now offered to the Gentiles also.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 373.

As we said, it is important in the study of any book of the Bible to know why it was written; that is, what situation it was addressing. Hence, it is important for our understanding of the Epistle to the Romans to know what questions were agitating the Jewish and Gentile churches. Next week’s lesson will deal with these questions.

What kinds of issues are agitating your church at present? Are the threats more from without or from within? What role are you playing in these debates? How often have you stopped to question your role, your position, and your attitudes in whatever struggles you’re facing? Why is this kind of self-examination so important?

Personal Touch

A letter is one thing, a personal visit another. That's why Paul, even though he wrote to the Romans, announced in the letter that he intended to see them in person. He wanted them to know that he was coming, and why.

Read Romans 15:20–27. What reasons does Paul give for not having visited Rome earlier? What made him decide to come when he did? How central was mission to him in his reasoning? What can we learn about mission and witnessing from Paul's words here? What interesting—and important—point does Paul make in verse 27 about Jews and Gentiles?

The great missionary to the Gentiles felt constantly impelled to take the gospel to previously unentered areas, leaving others to labor in areas where the gospel had been established. In the days when Christianity was young and the laborers few, it would have been a waste of valuable missionary power for Paul to work in already entered areas. He said, “So have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man’s foundation,” so that “they that have not heard shall understand” (*Rom. 15:20, 21*).

It was not Paul’s purpose to settle down in Rome. It was his aim to evangelize Spain. He hoped to get the support of the Christians in Rome for this venture.

What important principle can we take away for ourselves on the whole question of mission from the fact that Paul sought help from an established church in order to evangelize a new area?

Read again the verses in Romans 15:20–27. Notice how much Paul wanted to serve; that is, his great desire was to minister and to serve. What motivates you and your actions? How much of a heart of service do you have?

Paul Reaches Rome

“But when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him” (*Acts 28:16, NKJV*). What does this text tell us about how Paul finally got to Rome? What lesson can we draw from this for ourselves about the unexpected and unwanted things that so often come our way?

Life can take some very strange turns. How often our plans, even the ones formulated with the best of intentions, don’t come out as we anticipated and hoped for. The apostle Paul did, indeed, get to Rome, but it probably wasn’t as he had expected.

When Paul reached Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey with his offering for the poor, which he collected from the congregations of Europe and Asia Minor, unexpected events awaited him. He was arrested and fettered. After being held prisoner for two years at Caesarea, he appealed to Caesar. Some three years after his arrest, he arrived in Rome, and (we can assume) not in the manner that he intended to when he first wrote to the Roman church years before about his intention to visit them.

What do the following texts tell us about Paul’s time in Rome? More important, what lesson can we learn from them? *Acts 28:17–31.*

“Not by Paul’s sermon[s], but by his bonds, was the attention of the court attracted to Christianity. It was as a captive that he broke from so many souls the bonds that held them in the slavery of sin. Nor was this all. He declared: ‘Many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.’ *Philippians 1:14.*”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 464.

How many times have you experienced unexpected twists in your life that, in the end, turned out for good? (See *Phil. 1:12*.) How can, and should, those experiences give you faith to trust God for the things from which no good seems to have arisen?

Called to Be “Saints”

Here is Paul’s salutation to the church in Rome. “To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ” (*Rom. 1:7*). What principles of truth, of theology, of faith, can we take away from his words here?

Beloved of God. While it is true that God loves the world, in a special sense God loves those who have chosen Him, those who have responded to His love.

We see this in the human sphere. We love in a special way those who love us; with them there is a mutual exchange of affection. Love demands response. When the response is not forthcoming, love is limited in its fullest expression.

Called to be saints. In some translations the phrase “to be” is in italics, which means that the translators have supplied the words. But they can be left out with the meaning intact. When they are omitted, we get the expression “called saints”; that is, “designated saints.”

“Saints” is the translation of the Greek *hagioi*, which literally means “holy ones.” *Holy* means “dedicated.” A saint is one who has been “set apart” by God. He or she still may have a long way to go in sanctification, but the fact that this person has chosen Christ as the Lord designates him or her as a saint in the Bible’s meaning of the term.

Paul says that they were “called to be saints.” Does this mean that some people are not called? How do Ephesians 1:4, Hebrews 2:9, and 2 Peter 3:9 help us understand what Paul means?

The great news of the gospel is that Christ’s death was universal; it was for all human beings. All have been called to be saved in Him, “called to be saints,” even before the foundation of the world. God’s original intention was for all humanity to find salvation in Jesus. The final fire of hell was meant only for the devil and his angels (*Matt. 25:41*). That some folk don’t avail themselves of what was offered doesn’t take away from the wonder of the gift any more than someone who goes on a hunger strike in a marketplace takes away from the wonderful bounties found there.

Think about it: even before the foundation of the world, God called you to have salvation in Him. Why should you not allow anything, anything at all, to hold you back from heeding that call?

World Reputation

“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world” (*Rom. 1:8*).

It is not known how the congregation in Rome became established. The tradition that the church was founded by Peter or Paul is without historical foundation. Perhaps lay persons established it, converts on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem (*Acts 2*) who then visited or moved to Rome. Or perhaps at some later period converts moving to Rome witnessed to their faith in that world capital.

It is surprising that, in a few decades from Pentecost, a congregation that apparently had received no apostolic visit should be so widely known. “Notwithstanding the opposition, twenty years after the crucifixion of Christ there was a live, earnest church in Rome. This church was strong and zealous, and the Lord worked for it.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1067.

“Faith” here probably includes the broader sense of faithfulness; that is, faithfulness to the new way of life they had discovered in Christ.

Read Romans 15:14. How does Paul there describe the church at Rome?

Paul selects three items as worthy of note in the Roman Christians’ experience:

1. “Full of goodness.” Would people say this of our own experience? As they associate with us, is it the abundance of goodness in us that attracts their attention?

2. “Filled with all knowledge.” The Bible repeatedly emphasizes the importance of enlightenment, information, and knowledge. Christians are urged to study the Bible and to become well-informed as to its teachings. “The words, ‘A new heart also will I give you,’ mean, ‘A new mind will I give you.’ A change of heart is always attended by a clear conviction of Christian duty, an understanding of truth.”—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 24.

3. “Able . . . to admonish one another.” No one can thrive spiritually if isolated from fellow believers. We need to be able to encourage others and, at the same time, be encouraged by others.

What about your local church? What kind of reputation does it have? Or, even more important, does it even have one at all? What does your answer tell you about your local church? More important, if need be, how can you help improve the situation?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Mysteries of the Bible,” p. 706, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5; “Salvation to the Jews,” pp. 372–374, in *The Acts of the Apostles*. Read also *The SDA Bible Dictionary*, p. 922; and *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 467, 468.

“While apparently cut off from active labor, Paul exerted a wider and more lasting influence than if he had been free to travel among the churches as in former years. As a prisoner of the Lord, he had a firmer hold upon the affections of his brethren; and his words, written by one under bonds for the sake of Christ, commanded greater attention and respect than they did when he was personally with them.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 454.

“To see the Christian faith firmly established at the great center of the known world was one of his dearest hopes and most cherished plans. A church had already been established in Rome, and the apostle desired to secure the co-operation of the believers there in the work to be accomplished in Italy and in other countries. To prepare the way for his labors among these brethren, many of whom were as yet strangers to him, he sent them a letter announcing his purpose of visiting Rome and his hope of planting the standard of the cross in Spain.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 373.

“The eternal God has drawn the line of distinction between the saint and the sinner, between converted and unconverted. The two classes do not blend into each other imperceptibly, like the colors of a rainbow, but are as distinct as midday and midnight.”—Ellen G. White, *Messages to Young People*, p. 390.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Dwell on the question at the end of Thursday’s lesson. How could your class help improve your church’s reputation, if need be?**
- ② In class, share experiences about how a situation that at first seemed terrible was able to be turned to good. How can you use these experiences to help others who are struggling with unexpected calamities?**
- ③ Dwell more on the idea that we were called to have salvation, even before the foundation of the world (see also Titus 1:1, 2; 2 Tim. 1:8, 9). Why should we find this so encouraging? What does this tell us about God’s love for all humans? Why, then, is it so tragic when people turn their backs on what has been so graciously offered them?**

Getting to Know God

Ariuntuya laughed at her older sister. “You are going to a Christian meeting?” she asked accusingly. “You used to mock people who didn’t recite traditional prayers!” Ariuntuya’s sister, Moogli, ignored her younger sister’s taunts.

Ariuntuya’s family lives in Mongolia. A school friend had invited Moogli to attend a Seventh-day Adventist worship service held in a rented hall, and Moogli went. She liked the program and invited her sister to go with her. Ariuntuya went, and she had to admit that she liked it. But she preferred to sleep late rather than attend a religious program.

Moogli continued attending the meetings. When some evangelists came to the city several months later, Moogli again invited Ariuntuya to attend. This time Ariuntuya attended with Moogli. Ariuntuya enjoyed the music and felt the love of the church members.

Slowly Ariuntuya realized that church was more than a social club; it was about having a personal relationship with God. Ariuntuya began to consider how God would fit into her life.

When the family moved to the capital city, the sisters found an Adventist church to attend. Ariuntuya’s mother had never approved of the girls attending a Christian church. But when the young Adventist pastor hired the girls’ mother to care for his children, she began attending church with her daughters. Ariuntuya had never really thought about praying for her mother, so she was surprised at her mother’s change of attitude.

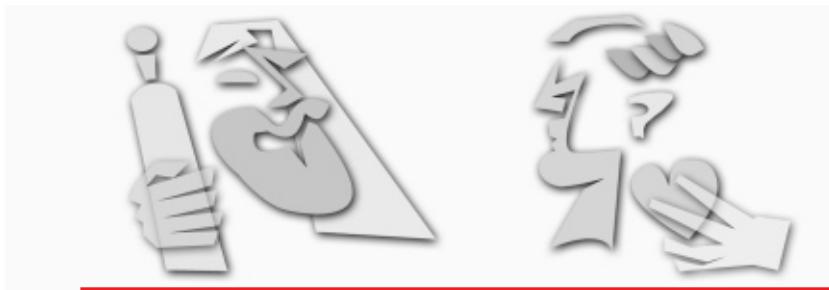
“I realize now that God has been working in my life,” Ariuntuya admits. “I realize that He works in other people’s lives, even when we see no outward sign of it. I am learning to give God first place in my life. Now I pray for my parents to become Christians, and I invite others to consider giving their lives to God too. I’m glad that my sister kept inviting me, even when I made fun of her and refused to go.”

The Adventist Church in Mongolia is young, and members rely on the world church to help them grow. Your mission offerings to this frontline mission field are making a huge difference in the lives of people such as Ariuntuya and her family.



ARIUNTUYA (left) is a teenager living in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

Jew and Gentile



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Leviticus 23, Matt. 19:17, Acts 15:1–29, Gal. 1:1–12, Heb. 8:6, Rev. 12:17.

Memory Text: “The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

The first converts to Christianity were all Jews, and the New Testament gives no indication that they were asked to drop the practice of circumcision or to ignore the Jewish festivals. But when the Gentiles began to accept Christianity, important questions arose. Should the Gentiles submit to circumcision? To what extent should they keep other Jewish laws? Finally, a council was called at Jerusalem to settle the matter (*see Acts 15*).

Despite a firm decision by the council not to trouble the Gentiles with a host of regulations and laws, some teachers continued to plague the churches by insisting that Gentile converts to the faith were required to keep these rules and laws, including circumcision.

In some ways, these issues exist today, only in a different form. How often are we, as Seventh-day Adventists, accused of being Judaizers, or legalists, because of our adherence to the Ten Commandments (or, in actuality, our adherence to the Sabbath commandment)? How often do we hear that we are now under the New Covenant, and so the law (the Sabbath commandment) has been done away with?

On the other side, at times as a church we are confronted with those who would like to impose more Old Testament rules and regulations on us, as well.

Hence, Romans certainly has an important message for us today, as it did for the Roman church back then.

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

Better Promises

Read Hebrews 8:6. What is the message here? How do we understand what these “better promises” are?

Perhaps the greatest difference between the religion of the Old Testament and that of the New is the fact that the New Testament era was introduced by the coming of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. He was sent by God to be the Savior. Men could not ignore Him and expect to be saved. Only through the atonement He provided could they have their sins forgiven. Only by the imputation of His perfect life could they stand before God without condemnation. In other words, salvation was through the righteousness of Jesus, and nothing else.

Old Testament saints looked forward to the blessings of the Messianic age and the promise of salvation. In New Testament times, the people were confronted with the question, *Would they accept Jesus of Nazareth whom God had sent as the Messiah, their Savior?* If they believed in Him—that is, if they accepted Him for who He truly was and committed themselves to Him—they would be saved through the righteousness that He offers them freely.

Meanwhile, the moral requirements remain unchanged in the New Testament, because these were founded in the character of God and of Christ. Obedience to God’s moral law is just as much a part of the New Covenant as of the Old.

Read Matthew 19:17; Revelation 12:17; 14:12; and James 2:10, 11. What do these texts tell us about the moral law in the New Testament?

At the same time, the entire body of ritual and ceremonial laws that were distinctly Israelite, that were distinctly tied to the Old Covenant, all of which pointed to Jesus and to His death and ministry as High Priest, were discontinued, and a new order was introduced, one based on “better promises.”

Helping both Jew and Gentile to understand what was involved in this transition from Judaism to Christianity was one of Paul’s principal aims in the book of Romans. It would take time to make the transition.

What are some of your favorite Bible promises? How often do you claim them? What choices are you making that can stand in the way of having these promises fulfilled in your life?

Jewish Laws and Regulations

As time allows, skim through the book of Leviticus. (*See, for instance, Leviticus 12, 16, 23.*) What thoughts come to your mind as you read all these rules and regulations and rituals? Why would many of these be all but impossible to follow in New Testament times?

It is convenient for us to classify Old Testament laws into various categories: (1) moral law, (2) ceremonial law, (3) civil law, (4) statutes and judgments, and (5) health laws.

This classification is, in part, artificial. In actuality, some of these categories are interrelated, and there is considerable overlap. The ancients did not see them as separate and distinct.

The moral law is summed up by the Ten Commandments (*Exod. 20:1–17*). This law sums up the moral requirements of humanity. These ten precepts are amplified and applied in various statutes and judgments throughout the first five books of the Bible. These amplifications show what it meant to keep the law of God in various situations. Not unrelated are the civil laws. These, too, are based on the moral law. These define a citizen's relationship to civil authorities and to his or her fellow citizens. They name the penalties for various infractions.

The ceremonial law regulated the sanctuary ritual, describing the various offerings and the individual citizen's responsibilities. The feast days are specified and their observance defined.

The health laws overlap the other laws. The various laws relating to uncleanness define ceremonial uncleanness, and yet go beyond this to include hygienic and health principles. Laws regarding clean and unclean meats are based on physical considerations.

While the Jew probably largely thought of all these laws as a package, having all come from God, he or she must have made certain distinctions mentally. The Ten Commandments had been spoken by God directly to the people. This would set them apart as especially important. The other laws had been relayed through Moses. The sanctuary ritual could be kept only while a sanctuary was in operation.

The civil laws, at least in large part, could no longer be imposed after the Jews lost their independence and came under the civil control of another nation. Many of the ceremonial precepts could no longer be observed after the temple was destroyed. Also, after the Messiah came, many of the types had met their antitypes and no longer had validity.

“What Must I Do to Be Saved?”

Read Acts 15:1. What issue was causing dissension? Why would some people believe that this wasn't just for the Jewish nation? See Gen. 17:10.

While the apostles united with the ministers and lay members at Antioch in an earnest effort to win many souls to Christ, certain Jewish believers from Judaea “of the sect of the Pharisees” succeeded in introducing a question that soon led to widespread controversy in the church and brought consternation to the believing Gentiles. With great assurance these teachers asserted that in order to be saved, one must be circumcised and must keep the entire ceremonial law. The Jews, after all, always had prided themselves on their divinely appointed services, and many of those who had been converted to the faith of Christ still felt that since God had once clearly outlined the Hebrew manner of worship, it was improbable that He would ever authorize a change in any of its specifications. They insisted that the Jewish laws and ceremonies should be incorporated into the rites of the Christian religion. They were slow to discern that all the sacrificial offerings had but prefigured the death of the Son of God, in which type met antitype, and after which the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic dispensation were no longer binding.

Read Acts 15:2–12. How was this dispute to be settled?

“While looking to God for direct guidance, he [Paul] was ever ready to recognize the authority vested in the body of believers united in church fellowship. He felt the need of counsel, and when matters of importance arose, he was glad to lay these before the church and to unite with his brethren in seeking God for wisdom to make right decisions.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 200.

It's interesting that Paul, who often talked about his prophetic calling and how Jesus had called him and gave him his mission, was so willing to work with the larger church body. That is, whatever his calling, he realized that he was part of the church as a whole and that he needed to work with it as much as possible.

What is your attitude toward church leadership? How cooperative are you? Why is cooperation so important? How could we function if everyone was doing only what he or she wanted, independent of the larger body?

“No Greater Burden”

Read Acts 15:5–29. What decision did the council come to, and what was its reasoning?

The decision was against the contentions of the Judaizers. These folk insisted that the Gentile converts be circumcised and keep the entire ceremonial law, and that “the Jewish laws and ceremonies should be incorporated into the rites of the Christian religion.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 189.

It’s interesting to note in verse 10 how Peter depicted these old laws as a “yoke” that they were unable to bear. Would the Lord, who instituted those laws, make them a yoke on His people? That hardly seems so. Instead, over the years some of the leaders had, through their oral traditions, turned many of the laws, which were meant to be blessings, into burdens. The council sought to spare Gentiles from these burdens.

Notice, too, that there was no mention or question of the Gentiles not needing to obey the Ten Commandments. After all, could we imagine the council telling them not to eat blood, but that it was acceptable to ignore the commandments against adultery or murder and the like?

What rules were placed on the Gentile believers (*Acts 15:20, 29*), and why these specific ones?

Although Jewish believers weren’t to impose their rules and traditions on Gentiles, the council wanted to make sure that the Gentiles didn’t do things that would have been deemed offensive to the Jews who were united with them in Jesus. The apostles and elders, therefore, agreed to instruct the Gentiles by letter to abstain from meats offered to idols, from fornication, from things strangled, and from blood. Some say that, because Sabbath keeping wasn’t specifically mentioned, it must not have been meant for the Gentiles (of course, the commandments against lying and murder weren’t specifically mentioned either, so that argument means nothing).

Could we, in some ways, be laying burdens on people that are not necessary but are more from tradition than divine command? If so, how? Bring your thoughts to class on Sabbath.

The Galatian Heresy

However clear the counsel, there were those who sought to go their own way and who continued to advocate that the Gentiles keep Jewish traditions and laws. For Paul, this became a very serious matter; that is, it wasn't trifling over the fine points of faith. It had become a denial of the gospel of Christ itself.

Read Galatians 1:1–12. How serious does Paul see the issue he is confronting in Galatia? What should that tell us about how important this question is?

As stated before, the Galatian situation in large degree prompted the content of the letter to Rome. In the Epistle to the Romans, Paul further develops the theme of the Galatian epistle. The Judaizers were contending that the law God had given them through Moses was important and should be observed by Gentile converts. Paul was trying to show its true place and function. He didn't want these people to gain a foothold in Rome as they had done in Galatia.

It is an oversimplification to ask whether in Galatians and Romans Paul is speaking of ceremonial or moral laws. Historically, the argument was whether or not Gentile converts should be required to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. The Jerusalem council had already ruled on this question, but some refused to follow its decision. Some read in Paul's letters to the Galatians and the Romans evidence that the moral law, the Ten Commandments (or, in truth, only the fourth commandment), is no longer binding on Christians. Yet, they are missing the point of the letters, missing the historical context and issues that Paul was addressing. Paul, as we'll see, stressed that salvation was by faith alone and not by keeping the law, even the moral law—yet that isn't the same thing as saying that the moral law shouldn't be kept. Obedience to the Ten Commandments was never an issue; those who make it one are reading back into texts a contemporary issue, one that Paul wasn't dealing with.

How do you respond to those who claim the Sabbath is no longer binding upon Christians? How can you show the truth of the Sabbath in a way that complements the integrity of the gospel?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Jew and Gentile,” pp. 188–192, 194–197; “Apostasy in Galatia,” pp. 383–388, in *The Acts of the Apostles*; “The Law Given to Israel,” pp. 310–312; “The Law and the Covenants,” pp. 370–373, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “The Chosen People,” pp. 27–30, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“But if the Abrahamic covenant contained the promise of redemption, why was another covenant formed at Sinai? In their bondage the people had to a great extent lost the knowledge of God and of the principles of the Abrahamic covenant. . . .

“The people did not realize the sinfulness of their own hearts, and that without Christ it was impossible for them to keep God’s law; and they readily entered into covenant with God.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 371, 372.

“Through the influence of false teachers who had arisen among the believers in Jerusalem, division, heresy, and sensualism were rapidly gaining ground among the believers in Galatia. These false teachers were mingling Jewish traditions with the truths of the gospel. Ignoring the decision of the general council at Jerusalem, they urged upon the Gentile converts the observance of the ceremonial law.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 383.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In class, go over your answer to Wednesday’s final question. In what ways might your local church or you in your own home or maybe even you with yourself be laying burdens on others (or on yourself) that are not necessary? How can we recognize whether we are really doing these things? Or might we be in danger of going too far the other way? That is, how can we recognize whether we have become too lax in our lifestyle and standards to the point where our lives don’t reflect the high calling that we have in Christ?
- ❷ What are some of the arguments folk use to claim that the Ten Commandments are no longer binding on Christians today? How do we answer those claims? Why, on the face of it, are those claims so wrong, and why in many cases do those who make such claims not really live as though they believe the Ten Commandments are no longer binding?
- ❸ Read again the first 12 verses in Galatians 1. Notice how uncompromising and how fervent Paul was regarding his understanding of the gospel. What should that tell us about how, at times, we must stand absolutely unwavering in certain beliefs, especially in a day and age of pluralism and relativism? How does this show that certain teachings cannot be compromised in any way?

Adventists Join the MOB

Michael Surak, an Adventist from Pennsylvania, recently joined the MOB. So did Edgar and Joycie Lao of Texas. In fact, more than 320 Adventists across North America have joined the MOB and are experiencing a fulfilling ministry.

Missionaries Of the Blind (MOB) is an arm of Christian Record Services, the Adventist church's ministry to the blind. MOB connects Adventists across North America with the 23,000 blind and visually-impaired people who receive Braille, large print, or audio publications from Christian Record Services. Volunteers spend one or two hours a month visiting blind or visually impaired people in their communities, building friendships and praying with them.

Michael visits Carl, a 31-year-old man who has been blind since birth. "Carl has such a cheerful spirit," Michael says. "I thought I would uplift him, but he uplifted me."

"So many blind people receive materials from Christian Record on a regular basis," says Pastor David Klinedinst, personal ministries director for Christian Record. "Some of them even attend our camps for the blind program. We want to reach out to the people we serve and connect them with a local Seventh-day Adventist church where they can find fellowship, friendship, and worship."

"Most blind people are eager for a visit," Klinedinst says. "They receive Christian Record's materials regularly, so when visitors identify themselves as volunteers with Christian Record, they are welcome. MOB is a wonderful way to be involved in an outreach ministry and make friends for Jesus."

Edgar and Joycie Lao had tried to start a Bible study group in Texas, but they found most people too busy to attend. Then they joined MOB. The first blind person Edgar became friends with was Raul, a bird watcher who "watches" birds with his ears. Edgar went bird watching with Raul and was introduced to other blind birders. He prayed with the group and invited them to church. Among the group of blind birders was a young woman named Gladie. Edgar offered to sign her up to receive the free books and magazines Christian Record provides. She accepted the offer and enjoys receiving the free materials. Soon Edgar invited Gladie to church, and she came, along with two of her sisters and her nephew. Gladie has since been baptized.

Your mission offerings help support the ministry of Christian Record Services.

Christian Record Services, the Seventh-day Adventist Church's ministry to the blind and visually impaired, is located in Lincoln, Nebraska. If you would like to visit a blind person, visit mob.christianrecord.org, or call 402-488-0981.

All Have Sinned



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Rom. 1:16, 17, 22–32; 2:1–10, 17–23; 3:1, 2, 10–18, 23.

Memory Text: “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (*Romans 3:23*).

Unless a person acknowledges that he or she is unrighteous, that person will sense no need for justification (God’s declaration of a sinner as righteous in His eyes). Therefore, for Paul, the first step in justification is that a person recognize himself or herself as a helpless, hopeless sinner. In building this argument, Paul presents first the terrible depravity of the Gentiles. These have sunk as low as they have because they have pushed God from their memories. Paul then shows that the Jews are just as bad, the point being that none can save themselves with their good works.

Ellen G. White makes it so clear: “Let no one take the limited, narrow position that any of the works of man can help in the least possible way to liquidate the debt of his transgression. This is a fatal deception. If you would understand it, you must cease haggling over your pet ideas, and with humble hearts survey the atonement.

“This matter is so dimly comprehended that thousands upon thousands claiming to be sons of God are children of the wicked one, because they will depend on their own works. God always demanded good works, the law demands it, but because man placed himself in sin where his good works were valueless, Jesus’ righteousness alone can avail. Christ is able to save to the uttermost because He ever liveth to make intercession for us.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1071.

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

Not Ashamed of the Gospel

"I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live'" (Rom. 1:16, 17, RSV). What do these verses say to you? How have you experienced the promises and hope found in them?

Several key words occur in this passage:

1. *Gospel*. This word is the translation of a Greek word meaning literally "good message" or "good news." Standing alone, the word may refer to any good message; but modified as it is in this passage by the phrase "of Christ," it means "the good news about the Messiah" (*Christ* is the transliteration of the Greek word meaning "Messiah"). The good news is that the Messiah has come and all people may be saved by believing in Him. In Jesus and in His perfect righteousness—and not in ourselves, or even in God's law—can one find salvation.

2. *Righteousness*. This word refers to the quality of being "right" with God. A specialized meaning of this word is developed in the book of Romans, which we shall bring out as our study of the book proceeds. It should be pointed out that in Romans 1:17, the word is qualified by the phrase "of God." It is righteousness that comes from God, a righteousness that God Himself has provided. As we'll see, this is the only righteousness good enough to bring us the promise of eternal life.

3. *Faith*. In Greek the words translated *believe* and *faith* (KJV) in this passage are the verb and noun forms of the same word: *pisteuo* ("believe"), *pistis* ("belief" or "faith"). The meaning of faith as related to salvation will unfold as we progress in the study of Romans.

Do you ever struggle with assurance? Do you have times when you truly question whether or not you are saved, or even if you can be saved? What brings these fears? What are they grounded on? Might they be grounded in reality? That is, could you be living a lifestyle that denies your profession of faith? If so, what choices must you make in order to have the promises and assurances that are for you in Jesus?

The Human Condition

Read Romans 3:23. Why is this message so easy for us, as Christians, to believe today? At the same time, what could cause some people to question the truthfulness of this text?

Amazingly enough, some folk actually challenge the idea of human sinfulness, arguing that people are basically good. The problem, however, stems from not understanding what true goodness is. People can compare themselves to someone else and feel good about themselves. Even the mobster Al Capone was a saint compared to Adolph Hitler. However, when we contrast ourselves to God, and to the holiness and righteousness of God, none of us would come away with anything other than an overwhelming sense of self-loathing and disgust.

The verse also talks about “the glory of God.” The phrase has been variously interpreted. Perhaps the simplest interpretation is to give the phrase the meaning it has in 1 Corinthians 11:7, “He [man] is the image and glory of God” (*RSV*). In Greek, the word for “glory” may be considered as loosely equivalent to the word for “image.” Sin has marred the image of God in man. Sinful man falls far short of reflecting the image or glory of God.

Read Romans 3:10–18. Has anything changed today? Which of those depictions best describes you, or what you would be like were it not for Christ in your life?

As bad as we are, our situation is not hopeless. The first step is for us to acknowledge our utter sinfulness and also our helplessness in and of ourselves to do anything about it. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring about such conviction. If the sinner does not resist Him, the Spirit will lead the sinner to tear away the mask of self-defense, pretense, and self-justification and to cast himself or herself upon Christ, pleading His mercy: “ ‘ ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!” ’ ” (*Luke 18:13, NASB*).

When was the last time you took a good hard cold look at yourself, your motives, your deeds, and your feelings? This can be a very distressing experience, can't it? What's your only hope?

From the First to the Twenty-first Century

At the turn of the twentieth century, folk lived with the idea that humanity was improving, that morality would increase, and that science and technology would help usher in a utopia. Human beings, it was believed, were essentially on the path toward perfection; that is, through the right kind of education and moral training, humans could improve themselves and their society. All this was supposed to start happening, *en masse*, as we entered into the brave new world of the twentieth century.

Unfortunately, things didn't quite turn out that way, did they? The twentieth century was one of the most violent and barbaric in all history, thanks—ironically enough—in great part to the advances of science, which made it much more possible for people to kill others on a scale that the most depraved madmen of the past could only dream about.

What was the problem?

Read Romans 1:22–32. In what ways do we see the things written there, in the first century, being manifested today in the twenty-first century?

When humanity lost sight of God, a floodgate of sin and error and degradation opened. We, today, each of us, are living the consequences of that problem. In fact, unless we are moment by moment surrendered to God, we become part of the problem, as well.

Focus specifically on Romans 1:22, 23. How do we see this principle being manifested now? By rejecting God, what have humans in our century come to worship and idolize instead? And, in so doing, how have they become fools? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

Jews and Gentiles Together

In Romans 1, Paul was dealing specifically with the sins of the Gentiles, the pagans, those who had lost sight of God a long time ago and, thus, fallen into the most degrading practices.

But he wasn't going to let his own people, his own countrymen, off the hook either. Despite all the advantages that they had been given (*Rom. 3:1, 2*), they, too, were sinners, condemned by God's law, and in need of the saving grace of Christ. In that sense, in the sense of being sinners, of having violated God's law, and of needing divine grace for salvation, Jews and Gentiles are the same.

Read Romans 2:1–3, 17–24. What is Paul warning against here? What message should all of us, Jew or Gentile, take from this warning?

“Do not think yourself better than other men, and set yourself up as their judge. Since you cannot discern motive, you are incapable of judging another. In criticizing him, you are passing sentence upon yourself; for you show that you are a participant with Satan, the accuser of the brethren.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 314.

It's often so easy to see the sins of others and to point them out. How often, though, are we guilty of the same kinds of things, or even worse? The problem is that we tend to turn a blind eye on ourselves, or we make ourselves feel better by looking at just how bad others are in contrast to ourselves.

Paul will have none of that. He warns his countrymen not to be quick to judge the Gentiles, for they, the Jews—even as the chosen people—were sinners, in some cases even more guilty than the pagans they were so quick to condemn because, as Jews, they had been given more light than the Gentiles.

Paul's point in all this is that none of us is righteous, none of us meets the divine standard, none of us is innately good or inherently holy. Jew or Gentile, male or female, rich or poor, God-fearing or God-rejecting, we all are condemned, and were it not for the grace of God, as revealed in the gospel, there would be no hope for any of us.

How big of a hypocrite are you? That is, how often do you, even if only in your own mind, condemn others for things that you, yourself, are guilty of? How, by taking heed of what Paul has written here, can you change?

Repentance

A five-year-old boy pushed his little sister down, and the parents made him say he was sorry. He didn't want to, and out of the side of his mouth, with no sincerity and gaze boring into the ground, he barely squeezed out, "Sorry." Hardly true repentance, for sure.

With that story in mind, read the following: "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*). What message is here for us?

We should notice that God's goodness leads, not forces, sinners to repentance. God uses no coercion. He is infinitely patient and seeks to draw all men by His love. A forced repentance would destroy the whole purpose of repentance, would it not? If God forced repentance, then would not everyone be saved, for why would He force some and not others to repent?

What comes to those who resist God's love, refuse to repent, and remain in disobedience? *Rom. 2:5–10.*

In these verses, and frequently throughout the book of Romans, Paul emphasizes the place of good works. Justification by faith without the deeds of the law must never be construed to mean that good works have no place in the Christian life. For instance, in verse 7, salvation is described as coming to those who seek for it "by patient continuance in well doing." Though human effort can't bring salvation, it is part of the whole experience of salvation. It's hard to see how anyone can read the Bible and come away with the idea that works and deeds don't matter at all. True repentance, the kind that comes willingly from the heart, always will be followed by a determination to overcome and put away the things that we need to repent of.

How often are you in an attitude of repentance? Is it sincere, or do you tend just to brush off your faults, shortcomings, and sins? If the latter, how can you change? Why must you change?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Lord’s Vineyard,” pp. 291–294, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “God’s Love for Man,” pp. 9–15; “The Sinner’s Need of Christ,” pp. 17–22, in *Steps to Christ*; “In Contact With Others,” pp. 492–494, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “Agents of Satan,” pp. 146, 147, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5.

“Many are deceived concerning the condition of their hearts. They do not realize that the natural heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. They wrap themselves about with their own righteousness, and are satisfied in reaching their own human standard of character; but how fatally they fail when they do not reach the divine standard, and of themselves they cannot meet the requirements of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 320.

“A terrible picture of the condition of the world has been presented before me. Immorality abounds everywhere. Licentiousness is the special sin of this age. Never did vice lift its deformed head with such boldness as now. The people seem to be benumbed, and the lovers of virtue and true goodness are nearly discouraged by its boldness, strength, and prevalence. The iniquity which abounds is not merely confined to the unbeliever and the scoffer. Would that this were the case, but it is not. Many men and women who profess the religion of Christ are guilty. Even some who profess to be looking for His appearing are no more prepared for that event than Satan himself. They are not cleansing themselves from all pollution. They have so long served their lust that it is natural for their thoughts to be impure and their imaginations corrupt.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 346.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In class, go over your answers to Tuesday’s question. How do we see this principle manifested in today’s society?
- ❷ Look at the second quote from Ellen G. White in Friday’s study. If you see yourself in there, what is the answer? Why is it important not to give up in despair but to keep claiming God’s promises—first, of forgiveness; second, of cleansing? Who is the one that wants you to say, once and for all, “It’s no use. I’m too corrupt. I can never be saved, so I might as well give up”? Do you listen to him or to Jesus, who will say to us, “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more”? John 8:11.
- ❸ Why is it so important for us as Christians to understand basic human sinfulness and depravity? What can happen when we lose sight of that sad but true reality? Into what errors can a false understanding of our true condition lead us?

Jean Claude Comes Around

When Jean Claude joined a charismatic church in Burundi, a tiny country in central Africa, church leaders saw his potential and urged him to become a pastor. Jean Claude studied and was sent to northern Burundi to pastor. Soon he became the district leader with some 250 churches and 79 pastors under his guidance.

One day he went to a shop owned by an Adventist man. The shop owner shared some Bible texts with Jean Claude. Jean Claude wasn't interested in Adventist beliefs. He thought Adventists were legalists and poked fun at them. But the layman didn't give up. He continued to share Bible truths with the pastor every chance he had.

One day when Jean Claude stopped by, the layman challenged him to explain Matthew 5:17, 18 and James 2:10, which say that Jesus never did away with the Ten Commandment law. Jean Claude couldn't explain them, and the layman introduced him to the Adventist district pastor, who offered to study the Bible with him. Reluctantly, Jean Claude agreed.

Jean Claude became convinced that he had been wrong, that God's laws had never been abolished. And if the law still stood, then he was teaching the people under his authority a lie.

Jean Claude resigned from his church position saying, "I can no longer teach lies. I'm going to join the Seventh-day Adventist Church." He sent copies of the letter to the pastors who served under his leadership.

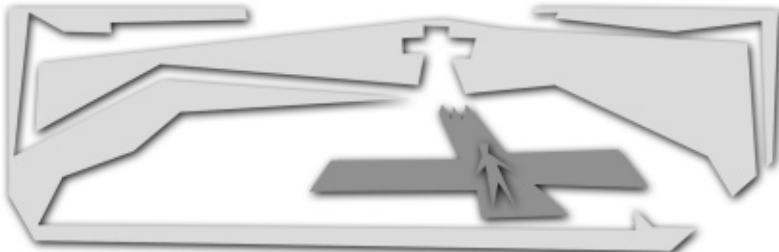
His church headquarters sent pastors to talk to him, but Jean Claude stood firm and read to the pastors the Bible texts that had convicted him. "We've not been observing all the Ten Commandments," Jean Claude said. His wife supported his decision, and the couple began worshipping in the Adventist church with the shopkeeper who had introduced him to the Adventist faith. But the church was quite far from where he lived.

Near Jean Claude's home was a small Adventist congregation with only 20 members. Jean Claude arranged to hold evangelistic meetings in the area. He bought a piece of land and invited the larger church's choir to come and sing for the meetings. The members helped build a simple church.

Several members of Jean Claude's former church came to the meetings, and some of them have joined the church. Jean Claude continues to share his faith in the same eager way that was so successful in his former church.

Our mission offerings help build up the church in Burundi and in other areas where few people know the truths we love.

Justified by Faith



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rom. 3:19–28.*

Memory Text: “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (*Romans 3:28*).

In this lesson we come to the basic theme of Romans: justification by faith. The phrase is a figure based on law. The transgressor of the law comes before a judge and is condemned to death for his transgressions. But a substitute appears and takes the transgressor's crimes upon himself, thus clearing the criminal, who—by accepting the substitute—stands before the judge not only cleared of his guilt but regarded as never having committed the crimes for which he was first brought into court. And that's because the substitute—who has a perfect record—offers the pardoned criminal his own perfect law-keeping. Thus, the guilty one stands before the judge as having never transgressed.

No one is saying that the person was innocent. On the contrary, his guilt is presumed. The good news is that, despite the guilt, he is pardoned.

In the plan of salvation, each of us is the criminal. The substitute, Jesus, has a perfect record, and He stands in the court in our stead, His righteousness accepted in place of our unrighteousness. Hence, we are justified before God, not because of our works but because of Jesus, whose righteousness becomes ours when we accept it “by faith.” Hence the term “justification by faith.” No matter our past, when we accept Jesus we stand before God in His righteousness, the only righteousness that can save us.

Talk about good news! In fact, the news can't get any better than that.

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

The Deeds of the Law

Read Romans 3:19, 20. What is Paul saying here about the law, about what it does and what it does not or cannot do? Why is this point so important for all Christians to understand?

Paul is using the word *law* in its broad sense as the Jew in his day understood it. By the word *Torah* (the Hebrew word for “law”), a Jew even today thinks particularly of God’s instruction in the first five books of Moses but also more generally in the entire Old Testament. The moral law, plus the amplification of this in the statutes and judgments, as well as the ceremonial precepts, was a part of this instruction. Because of this, we may think of the law here as the system of Judaism.

To be under the law means to be under its jurisdiction. The law, however, reveals a person’s shortcomings and guilt before God. The law cannot remove that guilt; what it can do is lead the sinner to seek a remedy for it.

As we apply the book of Romans in our day, in which Jewish law is no longer a factor, we think of law particularly in terms of the moral law. This law can’t save us any more than the system of Judaism could save the Jews. To save a sinner is not the moral law’s function. Its function is to reveal God’s character and to show people wherein they fall short of reflecting that character.

Whatever law it is—moral, ceremonial, civil, or all combined—the keeping of any or all in and of itself will not make a person just in God’s sight. In fact, the law never was intended to do that. On the contrary, the law was to point out our shortcomings and lead us to Christ.

The law can no more save than can the symptoms of a disease cure the disease. The symptoms don’t cure; they point out the need for the cure. That’s how the law functions.

How successful have your efforts in law-keeping been? What should that answer tell you about the futility of trying to be saved by keeping the law?

Faith and Righteousness

“Now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets” (*Rom. 3:21*). How are we to understand what this text means?

This new righteousness is contrasted with the righteousness of the law, which was the righteousness with which the Jew was familiar. The new righteousness is called “the righteousness of God”; that is, a righteousness that comes from God, a righteousness that God provides, and the only one that He accepts as true righteousness.

This is, of course, the righteousness that Jesus wrought out in His life while here in human flesh, a righteousness that He offers to all who will accept it by faith, who will claim it for themselves, not because they deserve it but because they need it.

“Righteousness is obedience to the law. The law demands righteousness, and this the sinner owes to the law; but he is incapable of rendering it. The only way in which he can attain to righteousness is through faith. By faith he can bring to God the merits of Christ, and the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the sinner’s account. Christ’s righteousness is accepted in place of man’s failure, and God receives, pardons, justifies, the repentant, believing soul, treats him as though he were righteous, and loves him as He loves His Son.”
—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 367. How can you learn to accept this wonderful truth for yourself? (See also *Rom. 3:22*.)

The faith of Jesus Christ is here, doubtless, faith *in* Jesus Christ. As it operates in the Christian life, faith is much more than intellectual assent; it is more than just an acknowledgment of certain facts about Christ’s life and His death. Instead, true faith in Jesus Christ is accepting Him as Savior, Substitute, Surety, and Lord. It is choosing His way of life. It is trusting Him and seeking by faith to live according to His commandments.

Grace and Justification

Keeping in mind what we have studied so far about the law and what the law cannot do, read Romans 3:24. What is Paul saying here? What does it mean that redemption is in Jesus?

What is this idea of “justifying,” as found in the text? The Greek word *dikaioo*, translated “justify,” may mean “make righteous,” “declare righteous,” or “consider righteous.” The word is built on the same root as *dikaiosune*, “righteousness,” and the word *dikaioma*, “righteous requirement.” Hence, there is a close connection between “justification” and “righteousness,” a connection that doesn’t always come through in various translations. We are justified when we are “declared righteous” by God.

Before this justification, a person is unrighteous, and thus unacceptable to God; after justification, he or she is regarded as righteous, and thus acceptable to Him.

And this happens only through God’s grace. *Grace* means “favor.” When a sinner turns to God for salvation, it is an act of grace to consider or declare that person to be righteous. It is unmerited favor, and the believer is justified without any merit of his or her own, without any claim to present to God in his or her own behalf except his or her utter helplessness. The person is justified through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, the redemption that Jesus offers as the sinner’s substitute and surety.

Justification is presented in Romans as a punctiliar act; that is, it happens at a point in time. One moment the sinner is outside, unrighteous, and unacceptable; the next moment, following justification, the person is inside, righteous, and accepted.

The person who is in Christ looks upon justification as a past act, one that took place when he or she surrendered himself or herself fully to Christ. “Being justified” (*Rom. 5:1*) is, literally, “having been justified.”

Of course, if the justified sinner should fall away and then return to Christ, justification would occur again. Also, if reconversion is considered a daily experience, there is a sense in which justification might be considered a repeating experience.

With the good news of salvation being so good, what holds people back from accepting it? In your own life, what kinds of things cause you to hold back from all that the Lord promises and offers you?

“His Righteousness”

In Romans 3:25, Paul expounds further on the great news of salvation. He uses a fancy word, *propitiation*. The Greek word for it, *hilasterion*, occurs in the New Testament only here and in Hebrews 9:5, where it is translated “mercy-seat.” As used in Romans 3:25, describing the offer of justification and redemption through Christ, *propitiation* seems to represent the fulfillment of all that was typified by the mercy-seat in the Old Testament sanctuary. What this means, then, is that by His sacrificial death, Jesus has been set forth as the means of salvation and is represented as the One providing the propitiation. In short, it means that God did what was needed to save us.

The text also talks about the “remission of sins.” It is our sins that make us unacceptable to God. We can do nothing of ourselves to cancel our sins. But in the plan of redemption, God has provided a way for these sins to be remitted through faith in Christ’s blood.

The word for remission is the Greek *paresis*, literally “passing over” or “passing by.” The “passing over” is in no sense an ignoring of sins. God can pass over the sins of the past because, by His death, Christ has paid the penalty for all people’s sins. Anyone, therefore, who has “faith in His blood” can have his or her sins remitted, for Christ has already died for them (*1 Cor. 15:3*).

Read Romans 3:26, 27. What point is Paul making here?

The good news that Paul was eager to share with all who would listen was that there was available to humanity “his [that is, God’s] righteousness,” and that it comes to us, not by works, not by our merit, but by faith in Jesus and what He has done for us.

Because of the cross of Calvary, God can declare sinners righteous and still be considered just and fair in the eyes of the universe. Satan can point no accusing finger at God, for Heaven has made the supreme sacrifice. Satan had accused God of asking of the human race more than He was willing to give. The Cross refutes this claim.

Satan expected God to destroy the world after it sinned; instead, He sent Jesus to save it. What does that tell us about the character of God? How should our knowledge of His character impact how we live? What will you do differently in the next 24 hours directly as a result of knowing what God is like?

Faith and Works

“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (*Rom. 3:28*). Does this mean that we are not required to obey the law, even if it doesn’t save us? Explain your answer.

In the historical context, Paul was speaking in Romans 3:28 of law in its broad sense of the system of Judaism. No matter how conscientiously a Jew tried to live under this system, if he or she failed to accept Jesus as the Messiah, that person could not be justified.

This verse is Paul’s conclusion from his claim that the law of faith excludes boasting. If a man were justified by his own actions, he could boast about it. But when he is justified because Jesus is the object of his faith, then the credit clearly belongs to God, who justified the sinner.

Ellen G. White gives an interesting answer to the question “What is justification by faith?” She wrote, “It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 456.

Works of law cannot atone for past sins. Justification cannot be earned. It can be received only by faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Therefore, in this sense, works of law have nothing to do with justification. To be justified without works means to be justified without there being anything in ourselves to merit justification.

But many Christians have misunderstood and misapplied this text. They say that all one has to do is to believe, while downplaying works or obedience, even obedience to the moral law. In so doing, they completely misread Paul. In the book of Romans, and elsewhere, Paul attaches great importance to the keeping of the moral law. Jesus certainly did, as well, as did James and John (*Matt. 19:17; Rom. 2:13; James 2:10, 11; Rev. 14:12*). Paul’s point is that, although obedience to the law is not the means of justification, the person who is justified by faith still keeps the law of God and, in fact, is the only one who can keep the law. An unregenerate person who has not been justified can never fulfill the requirements of the law.

Why is it so easy to get caught in the trap of thinking that because the law doesn’t save us, we need not worry about keeping it? Have you ever rationalized away sin by claiming justification by faith? Why is that a very dangerous position? At the same time, where would we be without the promise of salvation, even when tempted to abuse it?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Righteousness of Christ in the Law,” pp. 236–239; “Come and Seek and Find,” pp. 331–335; “Perfect Obedience Through Christ,” pp. 373, 374, in *Selected Messages*, book 1; “Things New and Old,” pp. 128, 129, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*.

“Christ’s character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 62.

“Grace is unmerited favor. The angels, who know nothing of sin, do not understand what it is to have grace exercised toward them; but our sinfulness calls for the exercise of grace from a merciful God.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 331, 332.

“Faith is the condition upon which God has seen fit to promise pardon to sinners; not that there is any virtue in faith whereby salvation is merited, but because faith can lay hold of the merits of Christ, the remedy provided for sin. Faith can present Christ’s perfect obedience instead of the sinner’s transgression and defection. When the sinner believes that Christ is his personal Savior, then, according to His unfailing promises, God pardons his sin, and justifies him freely. The repentant soul realizes that his justification comes because Christ, as his substitute and surety, has died for him, is his atonement and righteousness.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 366, 367.

“Though the law cannot remit the penalty for sin, but charges the sinner with all his debt, Christ has promised abundant pardon to all who repent, and believe in His mercy. The love of God is extended in abundance to the repenting, believing soul. The brand of sin upon the soul can be effaced only through the blood of the atoning Sacrifice . . . of Him who was equal with the Father. The work of Christ—His life, humiliation, death, and intercession for lost man—magnifies the law, and makes it honorable.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 371.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Read over the texts for this week and then, in your own words, write a paragraph summarizing what they are saying. Share your paragraphs with each other in class.
- ② Think about what it cost to save us: the death of the Son of God. What should that tell us about just how bad sin is? After all, if we stopped sinning and never did it again, why would that still not be enough to make us righteous before God? How can these facts help motivate us to resist the temptation to sin?
- ③ What are ways one could be tempted to abuse this wonderful news about salvation by faith alone? What trap is someone falling into who gets caught up in that kind of thinking? (See 2 Pet. 3:16, 1 John 3:7.)

Ryan's Birthday Mission

Like most children, Ryan Wigglesworth from Australia looked forward to his seventh birthday and the party his parents had promised. He would have a birthday cake and play games with his friends. But Ryan wouldn't receive birthday gifts. Instead, it was his family's tradition that he would ask his friends to bring a donation of money for a special mission project.

Ryan's family was planning a mission trip to the island of Vanuatu [van-oo-AH-too] in the South Pacific, and Ryan wanted to use his birthday money to buy books and literature to give to the people there so they could learn more about Jesus.

After his birthday Ryan and his mom went to the Adventist Book Center to buy the books for their trip. The store was having a big sale, so Ryan's money went even farther than he dreamed! "We bought 245 books and Bible study guides and other literature," he says.

Soon the family flew to Vanuatu. They visited a marketplace, where Ryan's mother bought fruits and vegetables while Ryan gave the children some colorful pamphlets about Jesus. Then Ryan met Sope, a man who worked with prisoners. Ryan gave him some Bible study guides to share with the prisoners.

The family held a week of meetings on two different islands. The first day 49 children came after school. The next day they brought their friends, and the attendance grew to 100! Even though the meetings were for children, some adults came to hear the messages of God's love. When Ryan and his brothers and parents gave out literature, they were surprised at how happy people were to receive it.

The family said Goodbye to their new friends and took a boat to the second island. There they held another series of meetings with much the same results. People were amazed that Ryan and his brothers led out in the programs, even though they were children themselves.



Too soon it was time to say Goodbye. Ryan's family agreed that this was the best possible vacation—sharing God's love with people who were eager to learn. "The people were so happy to receive even one piece of literature. That was gift enough for me! I know now that even though I'm just a boy, I can do lots of things for Jesus!"

Our mission offerings provide literature and training so that people in South Pacific and around the world can hear God's message of love.

LESSON 5

*July 24–30

Justification and the Law



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Gen. 15:6; 2 Samuel 11, 12; Rom. 3:20–23, 31; 4:1–17; Gal. 3:19; 1 John 3:4.

Memory Text: “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law” (*Romans 3:31*).

In many ways, Romans 4 gets to the foundation of the biblical doctrine of salvation by faith alone. By using Abraham—the paragon of holiness and virtue—as an example of someone who needed to be saved by grace, without the deeds of the law, Paul left readers no room for misunderstanding. If the best one’s works and law-keeping weren’t enough to justify him before God, what hope does anyone else have? If it had to be by grace with Abraham, it has to be the same with everyone else, Jews and Gentiles.

In Romans 4, Paul reveals three major stages in the plan of salvation: (1) the promise of divine blessing (the promise of grace); (2) the human response to that promise (the response of faith); and, finally, (3) the divine pronouncement of righteousness credited to those who believe (justification). That’s how it worked with Abraham, and that’s how it works with us.

It is crucial to remember that for Paul, salvation is by grace; it’s something that is given to us, however undeserving we are. If we deserved it, then we’d be owed it, and if we’re owed it, it’s a debt and not a gift. And for beings corrupt and fallen as we are, salvation has to be a gift.

To prove his point about salvation by faith alone, Paul goes all the way to the book of Genesis, quoting Genesis 15:6—“Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (*NIV*).

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

The Law Established

Read Romans 3:31. What's Paul's point here? Why is this point important to us as Seventh-day Adventists?

In this passage, Paul states emphatically that faith does not make void God's law. Even those who kept the law, even the entire Old Testament corpus of law, were never saved by it. The religion of the Old Testament, as that of the New, was always one of God's grace given to sinners by faith.

Read Romans 4:1–8. How does this show that even in the Old Testament, salvation was by faith and not by works of the law?

According to this Old Testament narrative, Abraham was accounted righteous because he "believed God." Therefore, the Old Testament itself teaches righteousness by faith. Hence, any implication that faith "makes void" (Greek *katargeo*, "renders useless," "invalidates") the law is false; salvation by faith is very much part of the Old Testament. Grace is taught all the way through it. What, for instance, was the entire sanctuary ritual if not a representation of how sinners are saved, not by their own works but by the death of a substitute in their stead?

Also, what else can explain how David was forgiven after the sordid affair with Bathsheba? Certainly it wasn't law-keeping that saved him, for he violated so many principles of the law that it condemned him on numerous counts. If David were to be saved by the law, then David would not be saved at all.

Paul sets forth David's restoration to divine favor as an example of justification by faith. Forgiveness was an act of God's grace. Here, then, is another example from the Old Testament of righteousness by faith. In fact, however legalistic many in ancient Israel became, the Jewish religion was always a religion of grace. Legalism was a perversion of it, not its foundation.

Dwell for a few minutes on David's sin and restoration (*2 Samuel 11, 12, Psalm 51*). What hope can you draw from that sad story for yourself? Is there a lesson here in how we in the church should treat those who have fallen?

Grace or Debt?

The issue Paul is dealing with here is much more than just theology. It gets to the heart and soul of salvation and of our relationship to God. If one believes that he or she must earn acceptance, that he or she must reach a certain standard of holiness before being justified and forgiven, then how natural to turn inward and to look to oneself and one's deeds. Religion can become exceedingly self-centered, about the last thing anyone needs.

In contrast, if one grasps the great news that justification is a gift from God, totally unmerited and undeserved, how much easier and more natural is it for that person to turn his or her focus on God's love and mercy instead of on self?

And in the end, who's more likely to reflect the love and character of God—the one self-absorbed or the one God-absorbed?

Read Romans 4:6–8. How does Paul here expand on the theme of justification by faith?

"The sinner must come in faith to Christ, take hold of His merits, lay his sins upon the Sin Bearer, and receive His pardon. It was for this cause that Christ came into the world. Thus the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the repenting, believing sinner. He becomes a member of the royal family."—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 215.

Paul then continues, explaining that salvation by faith was not only for the Jews but for the Gentiles, as well (*Rom. 4:9–12*). In fact, if you want to get technical about it, Abraham wasn't Jewish; he came from a pagan ancestry (*Josh. 24:2*). The Gentile-Jewish distinction didn't exist in his time. When Abraham was justified (*Gen. 15:6*), he was not even circumcised. Thus, Abraham became the father of both the uncircumcised and the circumcised, as well as a great example for Paul to use in order to make his point about the universality of salvation. Christ's death was for everyone, regardless of race or nationality (*Heb. 2:9*).

Considering the universality of the Cross, considering what the Cross tells us about the worth of every human being, why is racial or ethnic or national prejudice such a horrible thing? How can we learn to recognize the existence of prejudice in ourselves and through God's grace purge it from our minds?

Promise and Law

“For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith” (Rom. 4:13).

In this verse, “promise” and “law” are contrasted. Paul is seeking to establish an Old Testament base for his teaching of righteousness by faith. He finds an example in Abraham, whom all the Jews accepted as their ancestor. Acceptance or justification had come to Abraham quite apart from the law. God made a promise to Abraham that he was to be “heir of the world.” Abraham believed this promise; that is, he accepted the role that it implied. As a result God accepted him and worked through him to save the world. This remains a powerful example of how grace was operating in the Old Testament, which is no doubt why Paul used it.

Read Romans 4:14–17. How does Paul here continue showing how salvation by faith was central to the Old Testament? See also Gal. 3:7–9.

It’s important to remember, as we said in the beginning, to whom Paul is writing. These Jewish believers were immersed in Old Testament law, and many came to believe that their salvation rested on how well they kept the law, even though that was not what the Old Testament taught.

In seeking to remedy this misconception, Paul argued that Abraham, even prior to the law at Sinai, received the promises, not by works of the law (which would have been hard, since the law—the whole Torah and ceremonial system—was not in place yet) but by faith.

If Paul here were referring to the moral law exclusively, which existed in principle even before Sinai, the point remains the same. Perhaps even more so! Seeking to receive God’s promises through the law, he said, makes faith void, even useless. Those are strong words, but his point is that faith saves, and the law condemns. He’s trying to teach about the futility of seeking salvation by the very thing that leads to condemnation, because we all, Jew and Gentile, have violated the law, and, hence, we all need the same thing as Abraham did: the saving righteousness of Jesus credited to us by faith.

Law and Faith

As we saw yesterday, Paul showed that God's dealings with Abraham proved that salvation came through the promise of grace and not through law. Therefore, if the Jews wished to be saved, they would have to abandon trust in their works for salvation and accept the Abrahamic promise, now fulfilled in the coming of the Messiah. It's the same, really, for everyone, Jew or Gentile, who thinks that their "good" deeds are all that it takes to make them right with God.

"The principle that man can save himself by his own works lay at the foundation of every heathen religion. . . . Wherever it is held, men have no barrier against sin."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 35, 36. What does this mean? Why does the idea that we can save ourselves through our works leave us so open to sin?

How did Paul explain the relationship between law and faith in Galatians? *Gal. 3:21–23.*

If there had been a law that could impart life, it certainly would have been God's law. And yet, Paul says that no law, not even God's, can give life, because all have violated that law, and so all are condemned by it.

But the promise of faith, more fully revealed through Christ, frees all who believe from being "under the law"; that is, from being condemned and burdened by trying to earn salvation through it. The law becomes a burden when it's presented without faith, without grace—because without faith, without grace, without the righteousness that comes by faith, being under the law means being under the burden and the condemnation of sin.

How central is righteousness by faith to your walk with God? That is, what can you do to make sure it doesn't get blurred by other aspects of truth to the point where you lose sight of this crucial teaching? After all, what good are these other teachings without this one?

The Law and Sin

We often hear folk say that in the New Covenant the law has been abolished and then they proceed to quote texts that they believe prove that point. The logic behind that statement, however, isn't quite sound, nor is the theology.

Read 1 John 2:3–6, 3:4, and Romans 3:20. What do these texts tell us about the relationship between law and sin?

A few hundred years ago, Irish writer Jonathan Swift wrote, “But will any man say that if the words *drinking, cheating, lying, stealing* were by Act of Parliament ejected out of the English tongue and dictionaries, we should all awake next morning temperate, honest and just, and lovers of truth? Is this a fair consequence?”—Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal and Other Satires* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1995), p. 205.

In the same way, if God's law has been abolished, then why are lying, murder, and stealing still sinful or wrong? If God's law has been changed, the definition of sin must be changed, too. Or if God's law was done away with, sin must be, as well, and who believes that? (*See also 1 John 1:7–10; James 1:14, 15.*)

In the New Testament, both the law and the gospel appear. The law shows what sin is; the gospel points to the remedy for that sin, which is the death and resurrection of Jesus. If there is no law, there is no sin, and so what are we saved from? Only in the context of the law, and its continued validity, does the gospel make sense.

We often hear that the Cross nullified the law. That's rather ironic, because the Cross shows that the law can't be abrogated or changed. If God didn't abrogate or even change the law before Christ died on the cross, why do it after? Why not get rid of the law after humanity sinned and thus spare humanity the legal punishment that violation of the law brings? That way, Jesus never would have had to die. Jesus' death shows that if the law could have been changed or abrogated, that should have been done before, not after, the Cross. Thus, nothing shows the continued validity of the law more than does the death of Jesus, a death that occurred precisely because the law couldn't be changed. If the law could have been changed to meet us in our fallen condition, wouldn't that have been a better solution to the problem of sin than Jesus having to die?

If there were no divine law against adultery, would the act cause any less pain and hurt than it does now to those who are victims of it? How does your answer help you understand why God's law is still in effect? What has been your own experience with the consequences of violating God's law?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Christ the Center of the Message,” p. 388, in *Selected Messages*, book 1; “The Call of Abraham,” pp. 125–127; “The Law and the Covenants,” pp. 363, 364, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “The Sermon on the Mount,” pp. 307, 308; “Controversy,” p. 608; “‘It Is Finished,’ ” pp. 762, 763, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“In that age of caste, when the rights of men were often unrecognized, Paul set forth the great truth of human brotherhood, declaring that God ‘hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.’ In the sight of God all are on an equality.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 238.

“In order for man to be saved, and for the honor of the law to be maintained, it was necessary for the Son of God to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin. He who knew no sin became sin for us. He died for us on Calvary. His death shows the wonderful love of God for man, and the immutability of His law.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 240.

“Righteousness is obedience to the law. The law demands righteousness, and this the sinner owes to the law; but he is incapable of rendering it. The only way in which he can attain to righteousness is through faith. By faith he can bring to God the merits of Christ, and the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the sinner’s account.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 367.

“If Satan can succeed in leading man to place value upon his own works as works of merit and righteousness, he knows that he can overcome him by his temptations, and make him his victim and prey. . . . Strike the door-posts with the blood of Calvary’s Lamb, and you are safe.”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Sept. 3, 1889.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Why is it important to understand salvation by faith alone without the deeds of law? What errors can that knowledge protect us from? What dangers await those who lose sight of this?
- ❷ What other reasons can you give for the continued validity of God’s law, even when we understand that the law and obedience to it are not what save us?
- ❸ Dwell more on this idea that because of the Cross all human beings are equal. Why is it that so often Christians, who have the Cross before them, seem to forget this important truth and can be guilty of racial or ethnic or even national prejudice?
- ❹ As justified sinners, we have been made the recipients of grace and undeserved favor from God, whom we have sinned against. How should this fact impact how we deal with others? How full of grace and favor are we toward those who have wronged us?

Loving the Truth

by LYSA SALINAS

My name is Lysa, and I live in the Philippines. But while I still lived in Malaysia, a friend gave me a Bible and invited me to her church. I went and found a group of loving people who drew me to God. I read the Bible and joined a small-group Bible study. I surrendered my life to Christ and joined that church. I felt fulfilled and blessed.

Then my father died, and my mother felt all alone. She called me back to the Philippines to live with her and help care for my disabled sister. I returned to the Philippines and began attending a church of the same denomination as the one I had left in Malaysia. But it wasn't the same. I missed the close fellowship of loving friends who had been closer than family to me.

Then one day a man came to our home selling books. I wasn't interested in what he had to say, but my mother invited him in and they talked for a long time. Finally I began listening to them. I asked what church he belonged to, and he told me he was a Seventh-day Adventist. I hadn't heard of Adventists before, and I asked him many questions.

He couldn't answer all my questions that day, but he promised to return. The next day the man came back with his Bible. Again I began asking questions, and he answered each one from the Bible.

He invited me to evangelistic meetings that were being held in a church not far from our home. I went because I was thirsty for God's Word. I attended the meetings, but the Sabbath was too strange for me to accept. I wondered why these Adventists worship on Saturday when other Christians worship on Sunday. But I was determined to study the issue for myself. If the Sabbath was true, I needed to know so I could tell my spiritual brothers and sisters in Malaysia.

I asked God to show me the truth in this Sabbath issue. I visited the library of a religious university in town searching for a book on the history of Christianity. I prayed again and opened my eyes. There was the book I was looking for. I checked it out and started reading it. Sure enough, it said that the Bible Sabbath was Saturday; men had changed the day of worship to Sunday.

I began attending the Adventist church, and in time my daughter and I were baptized. I pray for my family and for my Christian friends in Malaysia who don't yet know this wonderful truth.

Thank you for sharing your mission offerings so that people such as I can learn to love God's truth.

Lysa Salinas shares her faith in central Philippines.

Expounding *the Faith*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Romans 5.*

Memory Text: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (*Romans 5:1, 2*).

Paul has established the point that justification, or acceptance with God, comes only through faith in Jesus Christ, for His righteousness alone is enough to give us the right standing with our Lord. Building on that great truth, Paul now expounds more on this theme. Showing that salvation has to be by faith and not by works, not even for someone as “righteous” as Abraham, Paul in a sense steps back and looks at the big picture—at what caused sin and suffering and death and how the solution is found in Christ and what He’s done for the human race.

Through the fall of one man, Adam, all humanity faced condemnation, alienation, and death; through the victory of one man, Jesus, all the world was placed on a new footing before God, one in which, by faith in Jesus, the record of their sins and the punishment due those sins could be remitted, could be forgiven and forever pardoned.

Paul contrasts Adam and Jesus, showing how Christ came to undo what Adam did and that by faith the victims of Adam’s sin could be rescued by Jesus, the Savior. The foundation of it all is the cross of Christ and His substitutionary death there—which opens the way for every human being, Jew or Gentile, to be saved by Jesus, who with His blood brought justification to all who accept Him.

Surely this is a theme worth expounding upon, for it’s the foundation of all our hope.

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

Therefore, Being Justified

Read Romans 5:1–5. On the lines below summarize Paul’s message. What can you take from that for yourself now?

“Being justified” is literally “having been justified.” The Greek verb represents the action as completed. We have been declared righteous, or regarded as righteous, not through any deeds of law but through our having accepted Jesus Christ. The perfect life that Jesus lived on this earth, His perfect law-keeping, has been credited to us.

At the same time, all of our sins have been laid on Jesus. God has reckoned that Jesus committed those sins, not us, and that way we can be spared the punishment that we deserve. That punishment fell on Christ for us, in behalf of us, so that we never have to face it ourselves. What more glorious news could there be for the sinner?

The Greek word translated “glory” in verse 3 is the one translated “rejoice” in verse 2. If it is translated “rejoice” in verse 3 also (as in some versions), the connection between verses 2 and 3 is more clearly seen. Justified people can rejoice in tribulation because they have fixed their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. They have confidence that God will work all things for good. They will consider it an honor to suffer for Christ’s sake. (*See 1 Pet. 4:13.*)

Notice, too, the progression in verses 3 through 5.

1. *Patience.* The Greek word *hypomone* means “steadfast endurance.” This is the type of endurance that tribulation develops in the one who maintains faith and who does not lose sight of the hope he or she has in Christ even amid the trials and suffering that can make life so miserable at times.

2. *Experience.* The Greek word *dokime* means literally “the quality of being approved,” hence, “character,” or more specifically, “approved character.” The one who patiently endures trials can develop an approved character.

3. *Hope.* Endurance and approval naturally give rise to hope, the hope found in Jesus and the promise of salvation in Him. As long as we cling to Jesus in faith, repentance, and obedience, we have everything to hope for.

What is the one thing in all your life that you hope for more than anything else? How can that hope be fulfilled in Jesus? Or can it? If not, are you sure you want to be putting so much hope in it?

God Seeking Humanity

Read Romans 5:6–8. What do these verses tell us about the character of God, and why are they so full of hope for us?

When Adam and Eve shamefully and inexcusably transgressed the divine requirement, God took the first steps toward reconciliation. Ever since, God has taken the initiative in providing a way of salvation and in inviting men and women to accept it. “When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son” (*Gal. 4:4*).

Romans 5:9 says that we can be saved from God’s wrath through Jesus. How do we understand what that means?

As the blood on the doorposts of the Israelites in Egypt on the eve of their departure protected the firstborn from the wrath that befell Egypt’s firstborn, so the blood of Jesus Christ guarantees that one who has been justified and retains that status will be protected when God’s wrath finally destroys sin at the end of the age.

Some folk struggle with the idea of a loving God having wrath. But it’s precisely *because* of His love that this wrath exists. How could God, who loves the world, not have wrath against sin? Were He indifferent to us, He would not care about what happens here. Look around at the world and see what sin has done to His creation. How could God not be wrathful against such evil and devastation?

What other reasons are we given to rejoice? (*Rom. 5:10, 11*).

Some commentators have seen in verse 10 a reference to the life that Christ lived on this earth, during which He wrought a perfect character that He now offers to credit to us. Though this is certainly what Christ’s perfect life accomplished, Paul seems to be emphasizing the fact that whereas Christ died, He rose again and is alive forevermore (*see Heb. 7:25*). Because He lives, we are saved. If He had remained in the tomb, our hopes would have perished with Him. Verse 11 continues with the reasons that we have to rejoice in the Lord, and that’s because of what Jesus has accomplished for us.

Death Swallowed Up

Death is an enemy, the ultimate one. When God created the human family, He designed that its members should live forever. With few exceptions humans do not want to die, and those who do, do so only after the greatest personal anguish and suffering. Death goes against our most basic nature. And that's because, from inception, we were created to live forever. Death was to be unknown to us.

Read Romans 5:12. What is Paul describing here? What does this explain?

Commentators have argued more over this passage of Scripture than over most others. Perhaps the reason is, as noted in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 529, that these commentators “attempt to use the passage for purposes other than Paul intended.”

One point they argue over is, in what way was Adam’s sin passed on to his posterity? Did Adam’s descendants share the guilt of Adam’s sin, or are they guilty before God because of their own sin? Though folk have tried to get the answer to that question from this text, that’s not the issue Paul was dealing with. He had a whole other object in mind. He is reemphasizing what he already stated, “for all have sinned” (*Rom. 3:23*). We need to recognize that we are sinners, because only that way will we realize our need of a Savior. Paul here was trying to get readers to realize just how bad sin is and what it brought into this world through Adam. Then he shows what God offers us in Jesus as the only remedy to the tragedy brought upon our world through Adam’s sin.

Yet, this text tells only of the problem, death in Adam—not the solution, life in Christ. One of the most glorious aspects of the gospel is that death has been swallowed up in life. Jesus passed through the portals of the tomb and burst its bonds. He says, “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death” (*Rev. 1:18*). Because Jesus has the keys, the enemy can no longer hold his victims in the grave.

What has been your own experience with the reality and the tragedy of death? Why, in the face of such a relentless enemy, must we have a hope in something greater than ourselves or greater than anything this world offers?

Law Awakens Need

“Until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come” (Rom. 5:13, 14).

What is Paul talking about here? The phrase “until the law” is paralleled with the statement “from Adam to Moses.” He is talking about the time in the world from creation to Sinai, before the *formal* introduction of the rules and laws of the Israelite system, which included, of course, the Ten Commandments.

“Until the law” means until the detailing of God’s requirements in the various laws given to Israel at Sinai. Sin existed before Sinai. How could it not? Were lying, killing, adultery, and idolatry not sinful until then? Of course they were.

What are some texts that reveal the reality of sin before Sinai?

It is true that prior to Sinai the human race generally had only a limited revelation of God, but they obviously knew enough to be held accountable. God is just and isn’t going to punish anyone unfairly. People in the pre-Sinai world died, as Paul here points out. Death passed upon *all*. Though they had not sinned against an expressly revealed command, they had sinned nevertheless. They had the revelations of God in nature, to which they had not responded and thus were held guilty. “The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen . . . ; so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20).

For what purpose did God reveal Himself more fully in the “law”? *Rom. 5:20, 21.*

The instruction given at Sinai included the moral law, though it had existed before then. This was the first time, however, according to the Bible, that this law was written and widely proclaimed.

When the Israelites began to compare themselves with the divine requirements, they discovered that they fell far short. In other words, “the offense” abounded. They suddenly realized the extent of their transgressions. The purpose of such a revelation was to help them to see their need of a Savior and to drive them to accept the grace so freely offered by God. As stressed before, the true version of the Old Testament faith was not legalistic.

The Second Adam

“Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (*Rom. 5:18, 19*). What contrast is presented here to us? What hope is offered us in Christ?

As humans, we received nothing from Adam but the sentence of death. Christ, however, stepped in and passed over the ground where Adam fell, enduring every test in humanity’s behalf. He redeemed Adam’s disgraceful failure and fall, and, thus, as our Substitute, He placed us on vantage ground with God. Hence, Jesus is the “Second Adam.”

“The second Adam was a free moral agent, held responsible for his conduct. Surrounded by intensely subtle and misleading influences, He was much less favorably situated than was the first Adam to lead a sinless life. Yet in the midst of sinners He resisted every temptation to sin, and maintained His innocence. He was ever sinless.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1074.

How are Adam’s and Christ’s acts contrasted in Romans 5:15–19?

Look at the opposing ideas here: death, life; disobedience, obedience; condemnation, justification; sin, righteousness. Jesus came and undid all that Adam had done!

It is fascinating, too, that the word *gift* occurs five times in verses 15 through 17. Five times! The point is simple: Paul is emphasizing that justification is not earned; it comes as a gift. It is something that we don’t merit, that we don’t deserve. Like all gifts, we have to reach out and accept them, and in this case, with this gift, we claim it by faith.

What was the best gift you ever were given? What made it so good, so special? How did the fact that it was a gift, as opposed to something you earned, make you that much more appreciative of it? Yet, how could that gift even begin to compare with what we have in Jesus?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Help in Daily Living,” pp. 470–472, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “Christ the Center of the Message,” pp. 383, 384, in *Selected Messages*, book 1; “The Temptation and Fall,” pp. 60–62, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “Justification,” pp. 712–714, in *The SDA Encyclopedia*.

“Many are deceived concerning the condition of their hearts. They do not realize that the natural heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. They wrap themselves about with their own righteousness, and are satisfied in reaching their own human standard of character.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 320.

“There is great need that Christ should be preached as the only hope and salvation. When the doctrine of justification by faith was presented . . . , it came to many as water comes to the thirsty traveler. The thought that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, not because of any merit on our part, but as a free gift from God, seemed a precious thought.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 360.

“Trial is part of the education given in the school of Christ, to purify God’s children from the dross of earthliness. It is because God is leading His children that trying experiences come to them. Trials and obstacles are His chosen methods of discipline, and His appointed conditions of success. He who reads the hearts of men knows their weaknesses better than they themselves can know them. He sees that some have qualifications which, if rightly directed, could be used in the advancement of His work.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 524.

Discussion Questions:

- ① How has your faith sustained you through some terrible trials? What things did you learn from these trials about yourself and about God? Also, what have you learned that might be of assistance to others who might be going through some hard times themselves?
- ② Think about the reality of death, of what it does not only to life but to the *meaning* of life. Many writers and philosophers have lamented the ultimate meaninglessness of life because it ends in eternal death. How do we as Christians respond to them? Why is the hope we have in Jesus the only answer to that meaninglessness?
- ③ Just as Adam’s fall imposed a fallen nature on all of us, Jesus’ victory offers the promise of eternal life to all of us who accept it by faith, no exceptions. With such a wonderful provision right there for us, what holds people back from reaching out and eagerly claiming it for themselves? How can each of us help those who are seeking to better understand what Christ offers and what He has done for them?

Conquered by Love

by BASIL BYVALTS

I grew up in Siberia, Russia, during a time when talk of God and religion was forbidden. Although I hadn't thought much about whether God existed, in the depths of my soul I sensed that He must exist. Then one day I heard His voice and I knew.

One evening as I walked from my work to my home, suddenly I felt an overwhelming sense of love fill my body. It was so clear that it almost stopped me in my tracks. I wasn't married at the time and had no special girlfriend. *Who are you?* I wondered. This wonderful feeling had to be from a girl, I reasoned. But I couldn't think of any girl who could give me the kind of love I was feeling. It was more like a yearning.

The love was so strong that I wanted to be with this person forever. *Whoever you are, I thought, I will find you and I will love you forever. But who are you?* I asked myself.

And then I heard the answer, not as a voice, but as a clear understanding in my mind. *It is I, God.*

No! I thought. I thought of God as a judge, an enforcer of laws. Then fearful that I might insult this God, I said in my heart, *I don't deserve Your love.*

And God answered, I know you; I know everything about you. And I love you.

Don't love me so much, I argued in my mind. *Love me just one day a week—or less.*

But God's voice answered, *I love you every moment; I will always love you because I am God.*

I couldn't help myself. I was conquered by God's love. That night on the street in Siberia, with tears rolling down my cheeks, I gave myself to God. *Here I am, God,* I prayed. *I am Yours.* Once more that wonderful warmth swept through my body. *I am in love—with God!* I thought.

The next day a friend invited me to attend some evangelistic meetings. I went, and there I learned about the God who swept me away by His love. Later, I learned that on the evening God spoke to me, the evangelist and other Christians in that city were praying that the Holy Spirit would touch the hearts of the people in my town. I was an answer to their prayers, one of almost 200 who found God at those meetings.

Our mission offerings help send word of God's incredible love to those who still don't know Him. Thank you for sharing.

BASIL BYVALTS shares God's love with others in Siberia, Russia.



In the Trans-European Division many churches are struggling to stay alive. So a vibrant and growing new church is exciting. The Division is home to a growing number of immigrants—workers, students, and refugees. Some have been Adventists for years; others are just learning about the hope that Jesus brings to their lives.

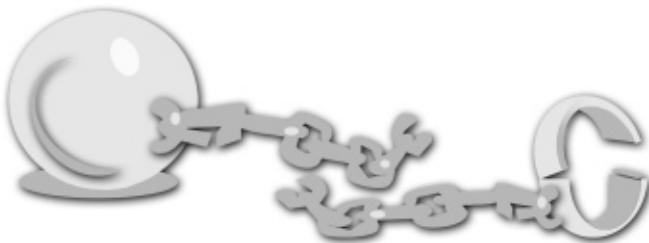
Such a group crowds into a classroom in an Adventist school in Copenhagen, Denmark. They want to invite others who are searching for God to join them, but they have no room. The potential for growth is enormous; they just need a larger place to meet.

I'm glad that my church sees the potential for growth in this new segment of Europe's population. I'm glad that part of my Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help this new congregation to reach out to others. For me it's personal.



**ADVENTIST
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Victory Over Sin



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Romans 6, 1 John 1:8–2:1.*

Memory Text: “Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (*Romans 6:14*).

Having just expounded on justification by faith, apart from the deeds of the law, Paul then proceeds to answer the obvious question: if works can't save us, why bother with them at all? Why not just keep on sinning?

Chapter 6 is his answer to this important question. Paul here is dealing with what commonly is understood as “sanctification,” the process by which we overcome sin and more and more reflect the character of Christ. Yet, the word *sanctification* itself appears nowhere in Romans. (The word *sanctified* occurs once, in Romans 15:16.)

Does this mean that Paul has nothing to say about what commonly is understood by sanctification? Not at all. He simply does not refer to it by that term.

In the Bible “to sanctify” means “to dedicate,” usually to God. Thus, to be sanctified is often presented as a past completed act. For example, “all them which are sanctified” (*Acts 20:32*). The sanctified ones in this definition are the ones who are dedicated to God.

But this biblical usage of “sanctify” in no way denies the important doctrine of sanctification or the fact that sanctification is the work of a lifetime. The Bible strongly endorses this doctrine, but it generally uses other terms to describe it.

This week we'll look at another side of salvation by faith, one that easily can be misunderstood: the promises of victory over sin in the life of one saved by Jesus.

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

Grace Abounding

In Romans 5:20, Paul makes a powerful statement: “But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” His point was that no matter how much sin there is or how terrible the results of sin are, God’s grace is sufficient to deal with it. *What hope that should bring for each of us, especially when tempted to feel that our sins are too great to be forgiven!* In the next verse, Paul shows that though sin has led to death, God’s grace through Jesus has defeated death and can give us eternal life.

Read Romans 6:1. What logic is Paul dealing with here, and how, in the verses that follow, does he respond to that kind of thinking?
Rom. 6:2–11.

Paul follows an interesting line of argument in chapter 6 as to why a justified person should not sin. To begin with, he says that we shouldn’t sin, because we have died to sin. Then he explains what he means.

Immersion in the waters of baptism represents burial. What is buried? The “old man” of sin—that is, the body committing sin, the body dominated or ruled by sin. As a result, this “body of sin” is destroyed, so that we no longer serve sin. In Romans 6 sin is personified as a master who rules over his servants. Once the “body of sin” that served sin is destroyed, sin’s mastery over it ceases. The one who rises from the watery grave comes up a new person who no longer serves sin. He or she now walks in newness of life.

Christ, having died, died once and for all, but He is now alive forevermore. Death can no more rule Him. So, the Christian who is baptized has died to sin once and for all and should never again come under its dominion.

Of course, as any baptized Christian knows, sin doesn’t just automatically disappear from our lives once we come up out of the water. *Not being ruled by sin isn’t the same as not having to struggle with it.* We have a daily, moment-by-moment battle to keep reckoning ourselves dead to sin and alive unto Christ. Though the promises of victory are there, we must claim them—by faith. We always must remember, too, that God’s grace abounds, even when we sin. If not, what hope would any of us have, even after being baptized?

What has been your experience with the power of sin in your life, even after baptism? What choices are you making that allow sin the power over you that it shouldn’t have, despite all the promises we have in the Bible for victory over it?

Sin Personified

What admonition is given to us in Romans 6:12?

The word *reign* shows that “sin” is here represented as a king. The Greek word here translated “reign” means, literally, “to be a king” or “to function as a king.” Sin is all too willing to assume the kingship of our mortal bodies and dictate our behavior.

When Paul says “let not sin . . . reign,” he implies that the justified person can choose to prevent sin’s setting itself up as king in his or her life. This is where the action of the will comes in.

“What you need to understand is the true force of the will. This is the governing power in the nature of man, the power of decision, or of choice. Everything depends on the right action of the will. The power of choice God has given to men; it is theirs to exercise. You cannot change your heart, you cannot of yourself give to God its affections; but you can choose to serve Him. You can give Him your will; He will then work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Thus your whole nature will be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ; your affections will be centered upon Him, your thoughts will be in harmony with Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 47.

The Greek word in Romans 6:12 translated “lusts” means “desires.” These desires may be either for good things or for bad; when sin reigns, it will make us desire the bad. The desires will be strong, even irresistible if we fight against them on our own. Sin can be a cruel tyrant, one who never is satisfied but who always comes back for more. Only through faith, only through claiming the promises of victory, can we overthrow this unrelenting master.

The word *therefore* in this verse is important. It goes back to what has been said before, specifically to what has been said in verses 10 and 11. The baptized person is now living “unto God.” That is, God is the center of his or her new life. The person is serving God, doing what pleases God and, therefore, cannot serve sin at the same time. He or she is “alive unto God through Jesus Christ.”

Go back over the quote from Ellen G. White in today’s study. Notice how crucial the concept of free will is. As moral creatures, we must have a free will, the power to choose right and wrong, good and evil, Christ or the world. Over the next 24 hours, try to keep track consciously of how you are using this moral free will. What can you learn about your use, or abuse, of this sacred gift?

Under the Law?

Read Romans 6:14. How are we to understand this text? Does it mean that the Ten Commandments are no longer binding on us? If not, why not?

Romans 6:14 is one of the key statements in the book of Romans. And it's one we often hear, usually quoted in the context of someone telling us Adventists that the Seventh-day Sabbath has been abrogated.

Yet, that's obviously not what the text means. As we asked before, how could the moral law be done away with and sin still be a reality, because the moral law is what defines sin? If you were to read all that came before in Romans, even in just chapter 6, it would be hard to see how, in the midst of all this discussion about the reality of sin, Paul were to suddenly say, "Besides, the moral law, the Ten Commandments, which defines sin, has been abolished." That makes no sense.

Paul is saying to the Romans that the person living "under the law"—that is, under the Jewish economy as it was practiced in his day, with all its man-made rules and regulations—will be ruled by sin. In contrast, a person living under grace will have victory over sin, because the law is written in his or her heart and God's spirit is allowed to guide his or her steps. Accepting Jesus Christ as the Messiah, being justified by Him, being baptized into His death, having the "old man" destroyed, rising to walk in newness of life—these are the things that will dethrone sin from our lives. Remember, that is the whole context in which this verse appears, the context of the promise of victory over sin.

We should not define "under the law" too restrictively. The person who supposedly lives "under grace" but disobeys God's law will not find grace but condemnation. "Under grace" means that through the grace of God as revealed in Jesus, the condemnation that the law inevitably brings to sinners has been removed. Thus, now free from this condemnation of death brought by the law, we live in "newness of life," a life characterized and made manifest through the fact that, being dead to self, we are no longer slaves to sin.

How have you experienced the reality of a new life in Christ? What tangible evidence can you point to that reveals what Christ has done in you? What areas are you refusing to let go of, and why must you let them go?

Two Contending Masters

Read Romans 6:16. What point is Paul making? Why is his argument very black and white here? That is, it is either one or the other, with no middle ground. What lesson should we draw from this very clear contrast?

Paul comes back to the point again that the new life of faith does not grant liberty to sin. The life of faith makes possible victory over sin; in fact, only through faith can we have the victory that is promised us.

Having personified sin as a king ruling over his subjects, Paul now returns to the figure of sin as a master demanding obedience of his servants. Paul points out that a person has a choice of masters. He can serve sin, which leads to death, or he can serve righteousness, which leads to eternal life. Paul doesn't leave us any middle ground here or any room for compromise. It's one or the other because, in the end, we face either eternal life or eternal death.

Read Romans 6:17. How does Paul expand here on what he said in verse 16?

Notice how, interestingly enough, obedience is linked to correct doctrine. The Greek word for "doctrine" here means "teaching." The Roman Christians had been taught the principles of the Christian faith, which they now obeyed. Thus, for Paul, correct doctrine, correct teaching, when obeyed "from the heart," led to the Romans becoming "servants of righteousness" (vs. 18). We sometimes hear that doctrine does not matter, just as long as we show love. That's a very simplistic expression of something that's not so simple. As stated in an earlier lesson, Paul was very concerned about the false doctrine to which the Galatian church had succumbed. Thus, we need to be careful about statements that somehow denigrate the importance of correct teaching.

Servants of sin, servants of righteousness: the contrast is very stark. If, after baptism, we sin, does this mean that we are not truly saved? Read 1 John 1:8–2:1. How do these texts help us understand what it means to be a follower of Christ and yet still subject to falling?

Fruit Unto Holiness

Keeping in mind what we have studied so far in Romans 6, read the rest of the verses (19–23). Summarize on the lines below the gist of what Paul is saying. Most important, ask yourself how you can make real in your life the crucial truths that Paul is addressing. Ask yourself, too, what are the issues at stake here?

Paul's words here show that he fully understands the fallen nature of humanity. He talks about the "infirmity of your flesh." The Greek word for "infirmity" means also "weakness." He knows what fallen human nature, left on its own, is capable of. Thus, again, he appeals to the power of choice—the power we have to choose to surrender ourselves and our weak flesh to a new master, Jesus, who will enable us to live a righteous life.

Romans 6:23 often is quoted to show that the penalty for sin—that is, the transgression of the law—is death. Certainly sin's penalty is death. But in addition to seeing death as sin's penalty, we should see sin as Paul describes it in Romans 6—as a master dominating his servants, duping them by paying them off with the wages of death.

Notice, too, that in his development of the figure of the two masters, Paul calls attention to the fact that the service of one master means freedom from the service of the other. Again we see the clear choice: one or the other. There is no middle ground. At the same time, as we all know, being free from the dominion of sin doesn't mean sinlessness, doesn't mean we don't struggle and, at times, even fall. It means, instead, that we are no longer *dominated* by sin, however much a reality it remains in our life and however much we must daily claim the promises of victory over it.

Thus, this passage becomes a powerful appeal to anyone who is serving sin. This tyrant offers nothing but death as payment for doing shameful things; therefore, a reasonable person should desire emancipation from this tyrant. In contrast, those who serve righteousness do things that are upright and praiseworthy, not with the idea of thus earning their salvation, but as a fruit of their new experience. If they are acting in an attempt to earn salvation, they are missing the whole point of the gospel, the whole point of what salvation is, and the whole point of why they need Jesus.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Victory Appropriated,” pp. 105, 106, in *Messages to Young People*; “The True Motive in Service,” pp. 93–95, in *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*; “Appeal to the Young,” p. 365, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3; pp. 1074, 1075, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6.

“He [Jesus] did not consent to sin. Not even by a thought did He yield to temptation. So it may be with us. Christ’s humanity was united with divinity; He was fitted for the conflict by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And He came to make us partakers of the divine nature. So long as we are united to Him by faith, sin has no more dominion over us. God reaches for the hand of faith in us to direct it to lay fast hold upon the divinity of Christ, that we may attain to perfection of character.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 123.

“At our baptism we pledged ourselves to break all connection with Satan and his agencies, and to put heart and mind and soul into the work of extending the kingdom of God. . . . The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are pledged to cooperate with sanctified human instrumentalities.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1075.

“A profession of Christianity without corresponding faith and works will avail nothing. No man can serve two masters. The children of the wicked one are their own master’s servants; to whom they yield themselves servants to obey, his servants they are, and they cannot be the servants of God until they renounce the devil and all his works. It cannot be harmless for servants of the heavenly King to engage in the pleasures and amusements which Satan’s servants engage in, even though they often repeat that such amusements are harmless. God has revealed sacred and holy truths to separate His people from the ungodly and purify them unto Himself. Seventh-day Adventists should live out their faith.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 404.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Though we have all these wonderful promises of victory over sin, the fact is that we all—even as born-again Christians—are aware of just how fallen we are, how sinful we are, and how corrupt our hearts can be. Is there a contradiction here? Explain.
- ❷ In class, give a testimony about how Christ has changed your life.
- ❸ However important it is that we always remember that our salvation rests only in what Christ has done for us, what dangers arise if we overemphasize that wonderful truth to the exclusion of the other part of salvation: that of what Jesus does in us, to transform us into His image? Why do we need to understand and emphasize both these aspects of salvation?

The Pot Sellers' Discovery

by BENJAMIN SCHOUN

Some Adventist pot sellers traveled from village to village across northern Madagascar selling kitchenware. One Friday afternoon they arrived at a village and asked someone whether there was an Adventist church in the village. "No," the person replied.

"Does anyone in this village worship on Saturday?" they asked.

"Yes," the villager answered. "They meet in a house just up this road." The pot sellers followed the villager's directions and found a house with a sign that read, "The Seventh-day Keeping Church."

The pot sellers knocked on the door and were welcomed into a room crowded with 50 people who had gathered for a worship service. The members squeezed together to make room for their visitors, and the service resumed. Soon the pot sellers realized that the worship service looked and sounded like an Adventist meeting. But who were these people?

When the meeting ended, the visitors asked the worshipers where they had learned to worship as they did. "We are Christians," the leader explained. "We listen to a radio program that teaches the Bible clearly, and we now keep the Bible Sabbath and prepare for Jesus' soon coming."

"What is the name of the radio station you listen to?" the pot sellers asked. The answer came back, Adventist World Radio. The leader explained that the believers knew that the radio station was owned by Seventh-day Adventists, but they hesitated to use that name until they learned what they must do to become Seventh-day Adventist members.

The pot sellers told the congregation that they were Seventh-day Adventists and promised to notify the district pastor of this new congregation.

When the district pastor learned of the group meeting on the mountainside, he arranged to hold meetings and organize a new company of believers. A woman donated land for a church, and today the believers in Andravinambo worship as Seventh-day Adventists. A lay pastor continues teaching them and encouraging them to share their faith with others in their region.

Your mission offerings support Adventist World Radio's ministry around the world.

Benjamin Schoun is president of Adventist World Radio. Ramanantsalama Berjoseclin is the district pastor who now cares for this group.

LESSON 8

*August 14–20

The Man of Romans 7



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Romans 7.*

Memory Text: “Now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter” (*Romans 7:6*).

Few chapters in the Bible have created more controversy than has Romans 7. Concerning the issues involved, *The SDA Bible Commentary* says, “The meaning of vs. 14–25 has been one of the most discussed problems in the whole epistle. The main questions have been as to whether the description of such intense moral struggle could be autobiographical, and, if so, whether the passage refers to Paul’s experience before or after his conversion. That Paul is speaking of his own personal struggle with sin seems apparent from the simplest meaning of his words (cf. vs. 7–11; [Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 19; Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 475]). It is surely also true that he is describing a conflict that is more or less experienced by every soul confronted by and awakened to the spiritual claims of God’s holy law.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 553.

Bible students differ on whether Romans 7 was Paul’s experience before or after conversion. Whatever position one takes, what’s important is that Jesus’ righteousness covers us and that in His righteousness we stand perfect before God, who promises to sanctify us, to give us victory over sin, and to conform us to “the image of his Son” (*Rom. 8:29*). These are the crucial points for us to know and experience as we seek to spread “the everlasting gospel” to “every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (*Rev. 14:6*).

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

Bound to the Law?

Read Romans 7:1–6. What illustration does Paul use here in order to show his readers their relationship to the law, and what point is he making with that illustration?

Paul's illustration in Romans 7:1–6 is somewhat involved, but a careful analysis of the passage will help us to follow his reasoning.

In the overall context of the letter, Paul was dealing with the system of worship established at Sinai; that is often what he means by the word *law*. The Jews had difficulty grasping the fact that this system, given to them of God, should end with the coming of the Messiah. This is what Paul was dealing with—Jewish believers still not ready to abandon what had been such an important part of their lives.

In essence, Paul's illustration is as follows: a woman is married to a man. The law binds her to him as long as he lives. During his lifetime she cannot consort with other men. But when he dies, she is free from the law that bound her to him (*vs. 3*).

How does Paul apply the illustration of the law of marriage to the system of Judaism? *Rom. 7:4, 5.*

As the death of her husband delivers the woman from the law of her husband, so the death of the old life in the flesh, through Jesus Christ, delivers the Jews from the law they had been expected to keep until the Messiah fulfilled its types.

Now the Jews were free to “remarry.” They were invited to marry the risen Messiah and thus bring forth fruit to God. This illustration was one more device Paul used to convince the Jews that they were now free to abandon the ancient system.

Again, given all else that Paul and the Bible say about obedience to the Ten Commandments, it doesn't make sense to assert here that Paul was telling these Jewish believers that the Ten Commandments were no longer binding. Those who use these texts to try to make that point—that the moral law was done away with—really don't want to make that point, anyway; what they really want to say is that only the seventh-day Sabbath is gone, not the rest of the law. To read these verses as teaching that the fourth commandment has been abolished or superceded or replaced with Sunday is to give them a meaning that the words were never intended to have.

Is the Law Sin?

If Paul is talking about the whole law system at Sinai, what about Romans 7:7, in which he specifically mentions one of the Ten Commandments? Doesn't that refute the position, taken yesterday, that Paul was not talking about the abolition of the Ten Commandments?

The answer is No. We must keep in mind, again, that the word *law* for Paul is the *whole* system introduced at Sinai, which included the moral law but wasn't limited to it. Hence, Paul could quote from it, as well as from any other section of the whole Jewish economy, in order to make his points. However, when the system passed away at the death of Christ, that didn't include the moral law, which had existed even before Sinai and exists after Calvary, as well.

Read Romans 7:8–11. What is Paul saying here about the relationship between the law and sin?

God revealed Himself to the Jews, telling them in detail what was right and what was wrong in moral, civil, ceremonial, and health matters. He also explained the penalties for violation of the various laws. Violation of the revealed will of God is here defined as sin.

Thus, Paul explains, he would not have known if it was a sin to covet without having been informed of that fact by the "law." Because sin is the violation of the revealed will of God, where the revealed will is unknown, there is no awareness of sin. When that revealed will is made known to a person, he or she comes to recognize that he or she is a sinner and is under condemnation and death. In this sense, the person dies.

In Paul's line of argument here and throughout this section, he is trying to build a bridge to lead the Jews—who revere the "law"—to see Christ as its fulfillment. He is showing that the law was necessary but that its function was limited. The law was meant to show the need of salvation; it never was meant to be the means of obtaining that salvation.

"The apostle Paul, in relating his experience, presents an important truth concerning the work to be wrought in conversion. He says, 'I was alive without the law once'—he felt no condemnation; 'but when the commandment came,' when the law of God was urged upon his conscience, 'sin revived, and I died.' Then he saw himself a sinner, condemned by the divine law. Mark, it was Paul, and not the law, that died."—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1076.

In what sense have you "died" before the law? How, in that context, can you understand what Jesus has done for you by giving you a new life in Him?

The Holy Law

Read Romans 7:12. How do we understand this text in the context of what Paul has been discussing?

Because the Jews revered the law, Paul exalts it in every way possible. The law is good for what it does, but it can't do what it was never meant to do, to save us from sin. For that we need Jesus, because the law—whether the entire Jewish system or the moral law in particular—cannot bring salvation. Only Jesus and His righteousness, which comes to us by faith, can.

Whom does Paul blame for his condition of “death,” and what does he exonerate? Why is that distinction important? Rom. 7:13.

In this verse, Paul is presenting the “law” in the best sense possible. He chooses to blame sin, not the law, for his terrible sinful condition; that is, his working “all manner of concupiscence [lust]” (vs. 8). The law is good, for it is God’s standard of conduct, but as a sinner, Paul stood condemned before it.

Why was sin so successful in showing up Paul as a terrible sinner? Rom. 7:14, 15.

Carnal means “fleshy.” Thus, Paul needed Jesus Christ. Only Jesus Christ could take away the condemnation (Rom. 8:1). Only Jesus Christ could free him from slavery to sin.

Paul describes himself as “sold under sin.” He is a slave to sin. He has no freedom. He can’t do what he wants to do. He tries to do what the good law tells him to do, but sin won’t let him.

By this illustration, Paul was trying to show the Jews the need of the Messiah. He already had pointed out that victory is possible only under grace (Rom 6:14). This same thought is reemphasized in Romans 7. Living under the “law” means enslavement to sin, a merciless master.

What has been your own experience with how sin enslaves? Have you ever tried to play with sin, thinking you could control it as you wished, only to find yourself under a vicious and merciless taskmaster? Welcome to reality! Why, then, must you surrender to Jesus, and die to self daily?

The Man of Romans 7

“If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me” (Rom. 7:16, 17). What struggle is presented in these verses?

Using the law as a mirror, the Holy Spirit convicts a person that he or she is displeasing God by not fulfilling the requirements of the law. Through efforts to meet those requirements, the sinner shows that he or she agrees that the law is good.

What points that Paul had already made did he repeat for emphasis?

Rom. 7:18–20.

To impress upon a person his or her need of Christ, the Holy Spirit often leads the person through an “old covenant” type of experience. Ellen G. White describes Israel’s experience as follows: “The people did not realize the sinfulness of their own hearts, and that without Christ it was impossible for them to keep God’s law; and they readily entered into covenant with God. Feeling that they were able to establish their own righteousness, they declared, ‘All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient.’ Exodus 24:7. . . . Only a few weeks passed before they broke their covenant with God, and bowed down to worship a graven image. They could not hope for the favor of God through a covenant which they had broken; and now, seeing their sinfulness and their need of pardon, they were brought to feel their need of the Saviour revealed in the Abrahamic covenant.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 371, 372.

Unfortunately, by failing to renew their dedication to Christ daily, many Christians are, in effect, serving sin, however loathe they may be to admit it. They rationalize that, in reality, they are undergoing the normal experience of sanctification and that they simply still have a long way to go. Thus, instead of taking known sins to Christ and asking Him for victory over them, they hide behind Romans 7, which tells them, they think, that it is impossible to do right. In reality, this chapter is saying that it is impossible to do right when a person is enslaved to sin, but victory is possible in Jesus Christ.

Are you having the victories over self and sin that Christ promises us? If not, why not? What wrong choices are you, and you alone, making?

Delivered From Death

Read Romans 7:21–23. How have you experienced this same struggle in your own life, even as a Christian?

In this passage, Paul equates the law in his members (his body) with the law of sin. “With the flesh,” Paul says, he served “the law of sin” (*Rom. 7:25*). But serving sin and obeying its law means death (*see vss. 10, 11, 13*). Hence, his body—as it was now functioning in obedience to sin—fittingly could be described as “the body of this death.”

The law of the mind is God’s law, God’s revelation of His will. Under conviction of the Holy Spirit, Paul consented to this law. His mind resolved to keep it, but when he tried, he couldn’t, because his body wanted to sin. Who hasn’t felt that same struggle? In your mind you know what you want to do, but your flesh clamors for something else.

How can we be rescued from this difficult situation we find ourselves in? *Rom. 7:24, 25.*

Some have wondered why, after reaching the glorious climax in the expression “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord,” Paul should refer once more to the struggles of the soul from which he apparently had been delivered. Some understand the expression of thanksgiving as a parenthetical exclamation. They believe that such an exclamation follows naturally the cry, “Who shall deliver?” They hold that before proceeding with an extended discussion of the glorious deliverance (*Romans 8*) Paul summarizes what he has said in the preceding verses and confesses once again to the conflict against the forces of sin.

Others suggest that by “I myself,” Paul means, “left to myself, leaving Christ out of the picture.” However these verses are understood, one point should remain clear: left to ourselves, without Christ, we are helpless against sin. With Christ we have a new life in Him, one in which—though self will constantly arise—the promises of victory are ours if we choose to claim them. Just as no one can breathe for you or cough for you or sneeze for you, no one can choose for you to surrender to Christ. You alone can make that choice. There’s no other way to attain for yourself the victories that are promised us in Jesus.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, "The Perfect Law," pp. 212–215; "A Divine Sin Bearer," pp. 308–310, in *Selected Messages*, book 1; "Healing of the Soul," pp. 84, 85; "The Importance of Seeking True Knowledge," pp. 452–454, in *The Ministry of Healing*; "Christ's Victory as Complete as Adam's Failure," p. 323, in *My Life Today*.

"There is no safety nor repose nor justification in transgression of the law. Man cannot hope to stand innocent before God, and at peace with Him through the merits of Christ, while he continues in sin."

—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 213.

"Paul desires his brethren to see that the great glory of a sins-pardoning Saviour gave significance to the entire Jewish economy. He desired them to see also that when Christ came to the world, and died as man's sacrifice, type met antitype.

"After Christ died on the cross as a sin offering the ceremonial law could have no force. Yet it was connected with the moral law, and was glorious. The whole bore the stamp of divinity, and expressed the holiness, justice, and righteousness of God. And if the ministration of the dispensation to be done away was glorious, how much more must the reality be glorious, when Christ was revealed, giving His life-giving, sanctifying, Spirit to all who believe?"—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1095.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Who do you think the man of Romans 7 is? Paul, before or after conversion? Or is this chapter talking about something else entirely? What justification do you have for your answer? In class discuss the answers given.**
- ② How do we explain the fact that even baptized, born-again Christians struggle with sin? Shouldn't we automatically overcome everything? Or will we always be sinning? Or is the answer somewhere in between?**
- ③ What potential dangers arise from the view that, as Christians, we will always be sinning, always be falling, always be violating God's law, no matter what? On the other hand, what potential dangers arise from the view that as Christians we must overcome every wrong thing in our lives, every wrong thought, every wrong tendency—no matter what, or else we are not saved?**
- ④ In the end, regardless of whatever position folk take on the man of Romans 7, what promises can we take from Romans 7 for ourselves that will help us understand what it means to be followers of Jesus?**

New Life, New Hope

by RICHARD LACROIX

I was in and out of prison so many times, most often for drug-related crimes. I even gave my life to Jesus and was baptized there. When I was released, I was full of hope for a new life, but I couldn't find work and became discouraged. I ended up back in prison again.

I was released again, and early on Sabbath morning a man shook me awake saying, "Brother Barker [the prison ministries leader] sent me to fetch you to church—now!" I got up and went to church with him.

This man took me to a Seventh-day Adventist church founded by the prison ministries team. It was the grand opening day, and what a joyful day it was! I returned home filled with joy, only to face reality. I was an addict, and I had no strength of my own to quit. I had bought drugs with money that church members gave me for food! I couldn't face these people.

I was lost in drugs. But one day God said to me, "Do you want this? Or do you want a better life?" I asked God to do whatever it took to clean me up. So when I was arrested and sent to prison again, I actually thanked the judge.

The day after I arrived in prison I told cellmates that I didn't want to see any drugs or know of any drugs. Not even cigarettes.

I went to the church in prison, where Brother Barker led out. We studied and prayed together, and I recommitted myself to Christ. I asked forgiveness for all the wrong things I had done and prayed for my family and friends I had wronged. Although I was in prison, I was free!

God strengthened me with His Word, and I began working with others who were bound by chains of sin and addiction. Every day I committed myself to God, for I knew I couldn't do it alone.

When I was discharged I went to the New Hope Prison Ministries Adventist Church and found a welcome from others who knew the struggles I faced. The church members helped me find a job and get settled into a new life. The devil still pressures me with temptations and distractions, but God sustains me.

I asked for deliverance from drugs, and God gave me so much more. He's given me a new life, new work, and new joy.

Your mission offerings help fund the prison ministries program in Trinidad. And that program helped me find victory in Jesus. Thank you.

Richard LaCroix is an elder and singing evangelist in the New Hope Prison Ministry Church in Bataria, Trinidad.

Freedom in Christ



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rom. 8:1–17.*

Memory Text: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (*Romans 8:1*).

Romans 8 is Paul’s answer to Romans 7. In Romans 7 Paul speaks of frustration, failure, and condemnation; in Romans 8 the condemnation is gone, replaced with freedom and victory through Jesus Christ.

Paul was saying in Romans 7 that if you refuse to accept Jesus Christ, the wretched experience of Romans 7 will be yours. You will be slaves to sin, unable to do what you choose to do. In Romans 8 he says that Christ Jesus offers you deliverance from sin and the freedom to do the good that you want to do but your flesh won’t allow.

Paul continues, explaining that this freedom was purchased at infinite cost. Christ the Son of God took on humanity, the only way He could relate to us, could be our perfect example, and could become the substitute who died in our stead. He came “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (vs. 3). As a result, the righteous requirements of the law can be fulfilled in us (vs. 4). In other words, Christ made victory over sin, as well as meeting the positive requirements of the law, possible.

Because of space limitations, we will cover only the first 17 verses of Romans 8. As time allows, read the rest of the chapter, which is filled with wonderful assurances of God’s love. These verses powerfully point us to the hope we should have as people who are “more than conquerors through him that loved us” (vs. 37) and who, out of that love, “spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all” (vs. 32).

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

Freedom From Condemnation

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (*Rom. 8:1*). What does “no condemnation” mean? No condemnation from what? And why is this such good news?

“In Christ Jesus” is a common phrase in the Pauline writings. For a person to be “in” Christ Jesus means that he or she has accepted Christ as his or her Savior. The person trusts Him implicitly and has decided to make Christ’s way of life his or her own way. The result is a close personal union with Christ.

“In Christ Jesus” is contrasted with “in the flesh.” It also is contrasted with the experience detailed in chapter 7, where Paul describes the person under conviction before his or her surrender to Christ as carnal, meaning that he or she is a slave to sin. The person is under condemnation of death (*vss. 11, 13, 24*). He or she serves the “law of sin” (*vss. 23, 25*). This person is in a terrible state of wretchedness (*vs. 24*).

But then the person surrenders to Jesus, an immediate change is wrought in his or her standing with God. Formerly condemned as a lawbreaker, that person now stands perfect in the sight of God, stands as if he or she had never sinned, because the righteousness of Jesus Christ completely covers that person. There is no more condemnation, not because the person is faultless, sinless, or worthy of eternal life (he or she is not!), but because Jesus’ perfect life record stands in the person’s stead; thus, there is no condemnation.

But the good news doesn’t end there.

What frees a person from slavery to sin? *Rom. 8:2*.

“The law of the Spirit of life” here means Christ’s plan for saving humanity, in contrast with “the law of sin and death,” which was described in chapter 7 as the law by which sin ruled, the end of which was death. Christ’s law instead brings life and freedom.

“Every soul that refuses to give himself to God is under the control of another power. He is not his own. He may talk of freedom, but he is in the most abject slavery. . . . While he flatters himself that he is following the dictates of his own judgment, he obeys the will of the prince of darkness. Christ came to break the shackles of sin-slavery from the soul.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 466. Are you a slave, or are you free in Christ? How can you know for sure?

What the Law Could Not Do

However good, the “law” (the ceremonial law, the moral law, or even both) cannot do for us what we need the most, and that is to provide the means of salvation, a means of saving us from the condemnation and death that sin brings. For that, we need Jesus.

Read Romans 8:3, 4. What did Christ do that the law, by its very nature, cannot do?

God provided a remedy by “sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh,” and He “condemned sin in the flesh.” The incarnation of Christ was an important step in the plan of salvation. It is proper to exalt the Cross, but in the outworking of the plan of salvation, Christ’s life “in the likeness of sinful flesh” was extremely important, too.

As a result of what God has done in sending Christ, it is now possible for us to meet the righteous requirement of the law; that is, to do the right things that the law requires. “Under the law” (*Rom. 6:14*), this was impossible; “in Christ” it is now possible.

Yet, we must remember that doing what the law requires doesn’t mean keeping the law well enough to earn salvation. That’s not an option—never was. It means simply living the life that God enables us to live; it means a life of obedience, one in which we have “crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (*Gal. 5:24, NKJV*), a life in which we reflect the character of Christ.

“Walk” in verse 4 is an idiomatic expression signifying “to conduct oneself.” The word *flesh* here denotes the unregenerate person, whether before or after conviction. To walk after the flesh is to be controlled by selfish desires. In contrast, to walk after the Spirit is to fulfill the righteous requirement of the law. Only through the help of the Holy Spirit can we meet this requirement. Only in Christ Jesus is there freedom to do what the law requires. Apart from Christ, there is no such freedom. The one who is enslaved to sin finds it impossible to do the good he or she chooses to do (*see Rom. 7:15, 18*).

How well are you keeping the law? Putting aside any notions of earning salvation by the law, is your life one in which the “righteousness of the law” is fulfilled? If not, why not? What kind of lame excuses are you using to rationalize your behavior?

Flesh Versus Spirit

“They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (*Rom. 8:5, 6*). Dwell on these texts. What basic message comes through from them? What do they say to you about how you are living your life?

“After,” here, is used in the sense of “according to” (Greek *kata*). “Mind” here means “to set the mind on.” One group of people sets its mind on fulfilling natural desires; the other sets its mind on the things of the Spirit, to follow His dictates. Because the mind determines actions, the two groups live and act differently.

What is the carnal mind unable to do? *Rom. 8:7, 8.*

To have one’s mind set on fulfilling the desires of the flesh is, in reality, to be in a state of enmity against God. One whose mind is thus set is unconcerned about doing the will of God. He or she even may be in rebellion against Him, openly flouting His law.

Paul wishes especially to emphasize that, apart from Christ, it is impossible to keep the law of God. Again and again Paul returns to this theme: no matter how hard one tries, apart from Christ one cannot obey the law.

Paul’s special purpose was to persuade the Jews that they needed more than their Torah (law). By their conduct they had shown that, in spite of having the divine revelation, they were guilty of the same sins of which the Gentiles were guilty (*Romans 2*). The lesson of all this was that they needed the Messiah. Without Him they would be slaves of sin, unable to escape its dominion.

This was Paul’s answer to those Jews who couldn’t understand why what God had given them in the Old Testament was no longer enough for salvation. Paul admitted that what they had been doing was all good, but they also needed to accept the Messiah who had now come.

Look at your past 24 hours. Were your deeds of the Spirit or of the flesh? What does your answer tell you about yourself? If of the flesh, what changes must you make, and how can you make them?

The Spirit in Us

Paul continues his theme, contrasting the two possibilities that people face in how they live: either according to the Spirit; that is, the Holy Spirit of God, which is promised to us, or according to their sinful and carnal nature. One leads to eternal life, the other to eternal death. There is no middle ground. Or, as Jesus said, “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters” (*Matt. 12:30, NKJV*). It’s hard to get plainer, or more black and white, than that.

Read Romans 8:9–14. What is promised to those who surrender themselves fully to Christ?

The life “in the flesh” is contrasted with life “in the Spirit.” The life “in the Spirit” is controlled by the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. He is in this chapter called the Spirit of Christ, perhaps in the sense that He is a representative of Christ, and through Him Christ dwells in the believer (vss. 9, 10).

In these verses, Paul returns to a figure he used in Romans 6:1–11. Figuratively, in baptism “the body of sin,” that is, the body that served sin, is destroyed. The “old man is crucified with him” (vs. 6). But, as in baptism, there is not only a burial but also a resurrection, so the person baptized rises to walk in the newness of life. This means to put to death the old self, a choice that we have to, of ourselves, make day by day, moment by moment. God does not destroy human freedom. Even after the old man of sin is destroyed, it still is possible to sin. To the Colossians Paul wrote, “Mortify [put to death] therefore your members which are upon the earth” (*Col. 3:5*).

Thus, after conversion there still will be a struggle against sin. The difference is that the person whom the Spirit indwells now has divine power for victory. Furthermore, because the person has been so miraculously freed from the slave master of sin, he or she is obligated never to serve sin again.

Dwell on this idea that the Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from death, is the same one dwelling in us, if we allow Him to. Think about the power that is there for us! What keeps us from availing ourselves of it as we should?

Adoption Versus Bondage

How does Paul describe the new relationship in Christ? *Rom. 8:15.* What hope is found in this promise for us? How do we make it real in our lives?

The new relationship is described as freedom from fear. A slave is in bondage. He lives in a state of constant fear of his master. He stands to gain nothing from his long years of service.

Not so with the one who accepts Jesus Christ. First, he or she renders voluntary service. Second, he or she serves without fear, for “perfect love casteth out fear” (*1 John 4:18*). Third, adopted as a son, he or she becomes heir to an inheritance of infinite worth.

“The spirit of bondage is engendered by seeking to live in accordance with legal religion, through striving to fulfill the claims of the law in our own strength. There is hope for us only as we come under the Abrahamic covenant, which is the covenant of grace by faith in Christ Jesus.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1077.

What gives us the assurance that God has indeed accepted us as children? *Rom. 8:16.*

The inward witness of the Spirit confirms our acceptance. While it is not safe to go merely by feeling, those who to the best of their understanding have followed the light of the Word will hear an inward authenticating voice assuring them that they have been accepted as children of God.

Indeed, Romans 8:17 tells us that we are heirs; that is, we are part of the family of God and, as heirs, as children, we receive a wonderful inheritance from our Father. We don’t earn it; it is given to us by virtue of our new status in God, a status granted to us through His grace, which has been made available to us because of the death of Jesus in our behalf.

How close are you to the Lord? Do you really know Him, or just about Him? What changes must you make in your life in order to have a closer walk with your Creator and Redeemer? What holds you back, and why?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Later English Reformers,” pp. 253–256, in *The Great Controversy*; “The Baptism,” p. 113; “At Capernaum,” pp. 253–256; “‘Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled,’” pp. 671, 672, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Like Unto Leaven,” pp. 95–98, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “Letters to Physicians,” pp. 126–129, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8.

“The plan of salvation does not offer believers a life free from suffering and trial this side of the kingdom. On the contrary, it calls upon them to follow Christ in the same path of self-denial and reproach. . . . It is through such trial and persecution that the character of Christ is reproduced and revealed in His people. . . . By sharing in the sufferings of Christ we are educated and disciplined and made ready to share in the glories of the hereafter.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 568, 569.

“The chain that has been let down from the throne of God is long enough to reach to the lowest depths. Christ is able to lift the most sinful out of the pit of degradation, and to place them where they will be acknowledged as children of God, heirs with Christ to an immortal inheritance.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 229.

“One honored of all heaven came to this world to stand in human nature at the head of humanity, testifying to the fallen angels and to the inhabitants of the unfallen worlds that through the divine help which has been provided, everyone may walk in the path of obedience to God’s commands. . . .

“Our ransom has been paid by our Savior. No one need be enslaved by Satan. Christ stands before us as our all-powerful helper.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 309.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Read again the quotes from Ellen G. White in Friday’s study. What hope can we take from them for ourselves? More important, how can we make these promises of victory real in our own lives? Why, with so much offered us in Christ, do we keep on falling far short of what we really could be?
- ❷ What are practical, daily ways you can have your mind “set . . . on the things of the Spirit” (*Rom. 8:5, RSV*). What does that mean? What does the Spirit desire? What do you watch, read, or think about that makes this difficult to achieve in your life?
- ❸ Dwell more on this idea that we are either on one side or the other in the great controversy, with no middle ground. What are the implications of that stark, cold fact? How should the realization of this important truth impact how we live and the choices we make, even in the “small” things?

The Search: Part 1

by CREPIN AGBODEDJI

I live in the country of Benin in West Africa. My father died when I was little, so my uncle raised me. He practiced voodoo and animism and wanted nothing to do with Christianity.

When I was old enough, my uncle apprenticed me to a builder so I could learn a trade. But as I neared the end of my training, my uncle became insanely jealous of me. He threatened me and cursed me. My aunt took me to a voodoo priest to perform a ceremony to protect me, but my uncle continued to persecute me.

I told my aunt that I doubted that the voodoo had worked and pointed to my friend who had studied with me. He was a Christian, and he already had his own shop and was married. I didn't even have a job. I wondered whether attending a Christian church could help me find work. My aunt warned me that if I went to a Christian church I would lose the protection that the voodoo priest had bestowed on me.

I discovered that my uncle's son had a little New Testament that he read. And he sneaked away to attend a church on Sunday. Somehow my uncle never knew. Then my cousin became seriously ill. My aunt told me, "See what happens when you sneak away and go to church?" My cousin wasn't expected to survive, but he did. Even the doctor said it was a miracle.

About that time a man came to my uncle looking for a room to rent. My uncle rented him a room in a house far from where he lived. He told me to go live in that house as well.

I noticed that this new renter was somehow different. He was well dressed and kept his room very clean. I often heard him talking alone in his room, but I couldn't hear what he said. I also noticed that he read a lot from a certain book. I discovered that he was a Christian.



(continued next week)

Crepin Agbodedji (left) is a builder living near Cotonou, Benin.

LESSON 10

*August 28–September 3

Redemption for Jew and Gentile



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Romans 9.*

Memory Text: “Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth” (*Romans 9:18*).

As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. . . . For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy . . . and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion” (*Rom. 9:13, 15*).

What is Paul talking about here? What about human free will, and the freedom to choose, without which very little of what we believe makes sense? Are we not free to choose or reject God, or are these verses teaching that certain people are elected to be saved and others to be lost, regardless of their own personal choices?

The answer is found, as usual, by looking at the bigger picture of what Paul is saying. Paul is following a line of argument in which he attempts to show God’s right to pick those whom He will use as His “elected” ones. After all, God is the One who carries the ultimate responsibility of evangelizing the world. Therefore, why can He not choose as His agents whomever He wills? So long as God cuts no one off from the opportunity of salvation, such an action on God’s part is not contrary to the principles of free will. Even more important, it’s not contrary to the great truth that Christ died for all humans, and His desire is that everyone have salvation.

As long as we remember that Romans 9 is not dealing with the personal salvation of those it names but with their call to do a certain work, the chapter presents no difficulties.

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

Paul's Burden

"And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel" (Exod. 19:6).

God needed a missionary people to evangelize a world steeped in paganism, darkness, and idolatry. He chose the Israelites and revealed Himself to them. He planned that they would become a model nation and thus attract others to the true God. It was God's purpose that by the revelation of His character through Israel, the world should be drawn unto Him. Through the teaching of the sacrificial service, Christ was to be uplifted before the nations, and all who would look unto Him should live. As the numbers of Israel increased, as their blessings grew, they were to enlarge their borders until their kingdom should embrace the world.

Read Romans 9:1–12. What point is Paul making here about the faithfulness of God amid human failures?

Paul is building a line of argument in which he will show that the promise made to Israel had not completely failed. There exists a remnant through whom God still aims to work. To establish the validity of the idea of the remnant, Paul dips back into Israelite history. He shows that God has always been selective: (1) God did not choose all the seed of Abraham to be His covenant, only the line of Isaac. (2) He did not choose all of the descendants of Isaac, only those of Jacob.

It's important, too, to see that heritage, or ancestry, does not guarantee salvation. You can be of the right blood, the right family, even of the right church, and yet be lost, still be outside the promise. It is faith, a faith that works by love, that reveals those who are "children of the promise" (Rom. 9:8).

Look at the phrase in Romans 9:6: "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel." What important message can we find there for ourselves, as Adventists, who in many ways play the same role in our day that the ancient Israelites did in theirs?

Elected

“It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated” (*Rom. 9:12, 13*).

As stated in the introduction for this week, it is impossible to understand Romans 9 properly until one recognizes that Paul is not speaking of individual salvation. He is here speaking of particular roles God was calling upon certain individuals to play. God wanted Jacob to be the progenitor of the people who would be His special evangelizing agency in the world. There is no implication in this passage that Esau could not be saved. God wanted him to be saved as much as He desires all men and women to be saved.

Read Romans 9:14, 15. How do we understand these words in the context of what we have been reading?

Paul is again not speaking of individual salvation, because in that area God extends mercy to all, for He “will have all men to be saved” (*1 Tim. 2:4*). “The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men” (*Titus 2:11*). But God can choose nations to play a role, and though they can refuse to play that role, they cannot prevent God’s choice. No matter how hard Esau may have willed it, he could not have become the progenitor of the Messiah nor of the chosen people.

In the end, it was no arbitrary choice on the part of God, not some divine decree, by which Esau was shut out from salvation. The gifts of His grace through Christ are free to all. We’ve all been elected to be saved, not lost (*Eph. 1:4, 5; 2 Pet. 1:10*). It’s our own choices, not God’s, that keep us from the promise of eternal life in Christ. Jesus died for every human being. Yet, God has set forth in His Word the conditions upon which every soul will be elected to eternal life: faith in Christ, which leads the justified sinner to obedience.

You, yourself, as if no one else even existed, were chosen in Christ even before the foundation of the world, to have salvation. This is your calling, your election, all given to you, by God, through Jesus. What a privilege, what a hope! Why, all things considered, does everything else pale in comparison to this great promise? Why would it be the greatest of all tragedies to let sin, self, and the flesh take away from you all that’s been promised you in Jesus?

Mysteries

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8, 9).

Read Romans 9:17–24. Given what we have read so far, how are we to understand Paul’s point here?

In dealing with Egypt at the time of the Exodus in the manner He did, God was working for the salvation of the human race. God’s revelation of Himself in the plagues of Egypt and in the deliverance of His people was designed to reveal to the Egyptians, as well as to other nations, that the God of Israel indeed was the true God. It was designed to be an invitation for the peoples of the nations to abandon their gods and to come and worship Him.

Obviously Pharaoh had already made his choice against God, so that in hardening his heart God was not cutting him off from the opportunity of salvation. The hardening was against the appeal to let Israel go, not against God’s appeal for Pharaoh to accept personal salvation. Christ died for Pharaoh, just as much as for Moses, Aaron, and the rest of the children of Israel.

The crucial point in all this is that as fallen human beings, we have such a narrow view of the world, of reality, and of God and how He works in the world. How can we expect to understand all of God’s ways when the natural world, everywhere we turn, holds mysteries we can’t understand? After all, it was only in the past one hundred fifty or two hundred years that doctors learned it might be a good idea to wash their hands before performing surgery! That’s how steeped in ignorance we have been. And who knows, if time should last, what other things we will discover in the future that will reveal just how steeped in ignorance we are today?

Sure, we don’t always understand God’s ways, but Jesus came to reveal to us what God is like (John 14:9). Why, then, amid all of life’s mysteries and unexpected events, is it so crucial for us to dwell on the character of Christ and what He has revealed to us about God and His love for us? How can knowing what God’s character is like help us stay faithful amid trials that seem so unjustified and so unfair?

Ammi: “My People”

In Romans 9:25, Paul quotes Hosea 2:23, and in verse 26 he quotes Hosea 1:10. The background is that God instructed Hosea to take “a wife of whoredoms” (*Hos. 1:2*) as an illustration of God’s relationship with Israel, because the nation had gone after strange gods. The children born to this marriage were given names signifying God’s rejection and punishment of idolatrous Israel. The third child was named *Loammi* (*Hos. 1:9*), meaning literally “not my people.”

Yet, amid all this, Hosea predicted the day would come when, after punishing His people, God would restore their fortunes, take away their false gods, and make a covenant with them. (*See Hos. 2:11–19.*) At this point those who were *Loammi*, “not my people,” would become *Ammi*, “my people.”

In Paul’s day, the *Ammi* were “even us . . . not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles” (*Rom. 9:24*). What a clear and powerful presentation of the gospel, a gospel that from the start was intended for the whole world. No wonder we as Seventh-day Adventists take part of our calling from this verse: “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (*Rev. 14:6, NKJV*). Today, as in Paul’s day, and as in the days of ancient Israel, the good news of salvation is to be spread to all the world.

Read Romans 9:25–29. (Notice how much Paul quotes the Old Testament to make his point about the things that were happening in his day.) What is the basic message found in all these verses? What hope is being offered there to his readers?

The fact that some of Paul’s kinsmen rejected the appeal of the gospel gave him “great heaviness and continual sorrow” in his heart (*Rom. 9:2*). But at least there was a remnant. God’s promises do not fail, even when humans do. The hope we can have is that, in the end, God’s promises will be fulfilled, and if we claim those promises for ourselves, they will be fulfilled in us, as well.

How often have people failed you? How often have you failed yourself and failed others? Probably more times than you can count, right? What lessons can you learn from these failures about where your ultimate trust must lie?

Stumbling

“What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith” (*Rom. 9:30–32*). What’s the message here, and, more important, how can we take this message, written in a certain time and place, and apply the principles to ourselves today? How can we avoid making the same mistakes in our context that some Israelites did in theirs?

In words that cannot be misunderstood, Paul explains to his kinsmen why they are missing out on something God wishes them to have, and more than that, on something they were actually pursuing but not achieving.

Interestingly, the Gentiles whom God had accepted had not even been striving for such acceptance. They had been pursuing their own interests and goals when the gospel message came to them. Grasping its value, they accepted it. God declared them righteous because they accepted Jesus Christ as their Substitute. It was a transaction of faith.

The problem with the Israelites was that they stumbled at the stumbling stone (*see Rom. 9:33*). Some, not all (*see Acts 2:41*), refused to accept Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah whom God had sent. He did not meet their expectations of the Messiah; hence, when He came, they turned their backs on Him.

Before this chapter ends, Paul quotes another Old Testament text: “As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed” (*Rom. 9:33*). In this passage Paul shows, again, just how crucial true faith is in the plan of salvation (*see also 1 Pet. 2:6–8*). A rock of offense? And yet, whoever believes in Him shall not be ashamed? Yes, for many, Jesus is a stumbling block, but for those who know Him, and love Him, He is another kind of rock, “the rock of my salvation” (*Ps. 89:26*).

Have you ever found Jesus to be a “stumbling block” or a “rock of offense”? If so, how so? That is, what were you doing that brought you into that situation? How did you get out, and what did you learn so that, one hopes, you never find yourself in that type of contrary relationship with Jesus again?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Later English Reformers,” pp. 261, 262, in *The Great Controversy*; “Faith and Works,” pp. 530, 531, in *The SDA Encyclopedia*; Ellen G. White Comments, pp. 1099, 1100, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1.

“There is an election of individuals and a people, the only election found in the word of God, where man is elected to be saved. Many have looked at the end, thinking they were surely elected to have heavenly bliss; but this is not the election the Bible reveals. Man is elected to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. He is elected to put on the armor, to fight the good fight of faith. He is elected to use the means God has placed within his reach to war against every unholly lust, while Satan is playing the game of life for his soul. He is elected to watch unto prayer, to search the Scriptures, and to avoid entering into temptation. He is elected to have faith continually. He is elected to be obedient to every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, that he may be, not a hearer only, but a doer of the word. This is Bible election.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 453, 454.

“No finite mind can fully comprehend the character or the works of the Infinite One. We cannot by searching find out God. To minds the strongest and most highly cultured, as well as to the weakest and most ignorant, that holy Being must remain clothed in mystery. But though ‘clouds and darkness are round about Him: righteousness and judgment are the foundation of His throne.’ Psalm 97:2, R.V. We can so far comprehend His dealing with us as to discern boundless mercy united to infinite power. We can understand as much of His purposes as we are capable of comprehending; beyond this we may still trust the hand that is omnipotent, the heart that is full of love.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 169.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Certain Christians teach that, even before we were born, God chose some to be saved and some to be lost. If you happened to have been one of those whom God, in His infinite love and wisdom, preordained to be lost, then no matter the choices you make, you are doomed to perdition, which many people believe means burning in hell for eternity. In other words, through no choice of our own, but only through God’s providence, some are predestined to live without a saving relationship with Jesus here in this life, only to spend the next one burning forever in the fires of hell. How does that view contrast with our understanding?
- 2** How do you see the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its calling in the world today paralleling the role of ancient Israel in its day? What are the similarities and the differences? In what ways are we doing better? Or are we doing worse? Justify your answer.

The Search: Part 2

by CREPIN AGBODEDJI

I was happy to learn that Alexander, the man living in my uncle's house, was a Christian. I asked him many questions about God, and we began praying together. I was careful not to let my uncle know of my interest in God, fearing he might kill me.

One night I dreamed that a man with an animal's face was trying to choke me. I tried to call on Jesus, but I couldn't speak. But when I said "Jesus" in my heart, the wind blew this man away. I woke up. When I told Alexander my dream, he said that God was calling me. "You must give your life to God," he said. But I was afraid—afraid of my uncle and afraid of the devil.

Then I broke out with hives all over my body. I thought I got the hives because I was praying, so I stopped praying. But the hives got worse. My aunt took me to a voodoo priest to be cured, but he wanted money, and I had none. I returned home unhealed.

"Why do you go to the voodoo priest?" Alexander asked. "Let's pray to God. He will heal you for free." We prayed, and the next day the hives were gone.

The evangelist invited me to go to church with him, and I agreed, though I was still afraid. The church was different from any I had visited, and I told my cousins about it. They wanted to attend the next Sabbath, so we all went together.

My uncle was furious when he found out that we had gone to church. He warned me that the voodoo gods would punish me. But suddenly I was no longer afraid. I told my uncle, "Let me try the Christian religion," I suggested. "If I fail, I will come back to voodoo."

"OK," he said. "But when you suffer, don't come to me." I continued worshiping with Alexander and attending church with him. Within six months I was baptized.

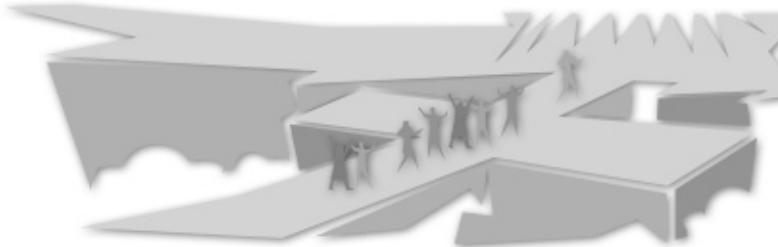
My uncle had warned me that I wouldn't be able to find work unless I worked on Saturday too. But after my baptism I found more work than I could handle.

My uncle doesn't bother me about my faith anymore. He sees that God is blessing me. He won't let me speak to his sons though, or let them visit the Seventh-day Adventist church with me. So I show them through my life that I am a happy Christian.

Your mission offerings are helping free the people of Benin from the devil's control. Thank you for all that you do.

Crepin Agbodedji shares his faith in Cotonou, Benin.

The Election of Grace



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Romans 10, 11.*

Memory Text: “I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin” (*Romans 11:1*).

This week’s lesson covers Romans 10 and 11, with a focus especially on chapter 11. It’s important to read both chapters in their entirety in order to continue to follow Paul’s line of thinking.

These two chapters have been, and remain, the focal point of much discussion. One point, however, comes clear through them all, and that is God’s love for humanity and His great desire to see all humanity saved. There is no corporate rejection of anyone for salvation. Romans 10 makes it very clear that “there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek” (*Rom. 10:12*)—all are sinners and all need God’s grace as given to the world through Jesus Christ. This grace comes to all—not by nationality, not by birth, and not by works of the law but by faith in Jesus, who died as the Substitute for sinners everywhere. Roles may change, but the basic plan of salvation never does.

Paul continues with this theme in chapter 11. Here, too, as stated earlier, it’s important to understand that when Paul talks about election and calling, the issue isn’t one of salvation but one of the role in God’s plan for reaching the world. No one group has been rejected for salvation; that was never the issue. Instead, after the Cross, and after the introduction of the gospel to the Gentiles, particularly through Paul, the early movement of believers—both Jew and Gentile—took on the mantle of evangelizing the world.

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

The End of the Law

Read Romans 10:1–4. Keeping in mind all that came before, what's the message here? How could we, today, be in danger of seeking to establish our "own righteousness"?

Legalism can come in many forms, some more subtle than others. Those who look to themselves, to their good deeds, to their diet, to how strictly they keep the Sabbath, to all the bad things they don't do, or to the good things that they have achieved—even with the best of intentions—are falling into the trap of legalism. We must every moment of our lives keep before us the holiness of God in contrast to our sinfulness; that's the surest way to protect ourselves from the kind of thinking that leads folk into seeking their "own righteousness," which is contrary to the righteousness of Christ.

Romans 10:4 is an important text that catches the essence of Paul's entire message to the Romans. First, we need to know the context. Many Jews were "going about to establish their own righteousness" (*Rom. 10:3*) and seeking "the righteousness which is of the law" (*Rom. 10:5*). But with the coming of the Messiah, the true way of righteousness was presented. Righteousness was offered to all who would fix their faith in Christ. He was the one to whom the ancient ceremonial system had pointed.

Even if one includes in the definition of law here the Ten Commandments, this doesn't mean that the Ten Commandments were done away with. The moral law points out our sins, our faults, and our shortcomings and thus leads us to our need of a Savior, our need of forgiveness, our need of righteousness, all of which are found only in Jesus. In that sense, Christ is the "end" of the law, in that the law leads us to Him and His righteousness. The Greek word for "end" here is *teloēs*, which also can be translated "goal" or "purpose." Christ is the final purpose of the law, in that the law is to lead us to Jesus.

To see this text as teaching that the Ten Commandments—or specifically the fourth (what folk really mean)—are now nullified is to draw a conclusion that goes against so much else of what Paul and the New Testament teach.

Do you ever find yourself proud about how good you are, especially in contrast to others? Maybe you are "better," but so what? Compare yourself to Christ, and then think about how "good" you really are.

The Election of Grace

Read Romans 11:1–7. What common teaching does this passage clearly and irrevocably deny?

In the first part of his answer to the question, “Hath God cast away his people?” Paul points to a remnant, an election of grace, as proof that God has not cast away His people. Salvation is open for all who accept it, Jew and Gentile alike.

It should be remembered that the early converts to Christianity were all Jews—for example, the group that was converted on the Day of Pentecost. It took a special vision and miracle to convince Peter that the Gentiles had equal access to the grace of Christ (*Acts 10; compare Acts 15:7–9*) and that the gospel was to be carried to them, as well.

Read Romans 11:7–10. Is Paul saying that God purposely blinded to salvation the part of Israel that rejected Jesus? What’s wrong with that idea?

In these verses, Paul quotes from the Old Testament, which the Jews accepted as authoritative. The passages that Paul cites represent God as giving to Israel a spirit of slumber, preventing their seeing and hearing. Does God blind people’s eyes to prevent them from seeing light that would lead them to salvation? Never! These passages must be understood in the light of our explanation of Romans 9. Paul is not talking of individual salvation, for God rejects no one group *en masse* for salvation. The issue here, instead, as it has been all along, deals with the role that these folk play in His work.

What is so wrong with the idea that God has rejected *en masse* any group of people in terms of salvation? Why is that counter to the whole teaching of the gospel, which at the core shows that Christ died to save all human beings? How, for example, in the case of the Jews, has this idea led to tragic results?

The Grafted Branch

Read Romans 11:11–15. What great hope does Paul present in these verses?

In these verses, we find two parallel expressions: (1) “their [the Israelites’] fulness” (vs. 12), and (2) “the receiving of them [the Israelites]” (vs. 15). Paul envisioned the diminishing and the casting away to be only temporary and to be followed by fullness and reception. This is Paul’s second answer to the question raised at the beginning of this chapter, “Hath God cast away his people?” What appears to be a casting away, he says, is only a temporary situation.

Read Romans 11:16–24. What is Paul saying to us here?

Paul likens the faithful remnant in Israel to a noble olive tree, some of whose branches have been broken off (the unbelieving ones)—an illustration he used to prove that “God hath not cast away his people” (vs. 2). The root and trunk are still there.

Into this tree the believing Gentiles have been grafted. But they are drawing their sap and vitality from the root and trunk, which represent believing Israel.

What happened to those who rejected Jesus could happen also to the believing Gentiles. The Bible teaches no doctrine of “once saved, always saved.” Just as salvation is freely offered, it freely can be rejected. Though we have to be careful of thinking that every time we fall we are out of salvation, or that unless we are perfect we aren’t saved, we need to avoid the opposite ditch as well—the idea that once God’s grace covers us, there is nothing we can do, no choices we can make, that will take the provision of salvation away from us. In the end, only those who “continue in his goodness” (vs. 22) will be saved.

No believer should boast of his or her own goodness or feel any superiority over his or her fellow human beings. Our salvation was not earned; it is a gift. Before the Cross, before the standard of God’s holiness, we all are equal: sinners in need of divine grace, sinners in need of a holiness that can be ours only through grace. We have nothing of ourselves to boast about; our boasting should be only in Jesus and what He has done for us by coming into this world in human flesh, suffering our woes, dying for our sins, offering us a model for how we are to live, and promising us the power to live that life. In it all, we are completely dependent upon Him, for without Him we would have no hope beyond what this world itself offers.

A Mystery Revealed

Read Romans 11:25–27. What great events is Paul predicting here?

Christians have been discussing and debating these few verses for centuries now. A few points, however, are clear. For starters, the whole tenor here is that of God reaching out to the Jews. What Paul is saying comes in reply to the question raised at the beginning of the chapter, “Hath God cast away his people?” His answer, of course, is no, and his explanation is (1) that the blindness (Greek *porosis*, “hardness”) is only “in part,” and (2) that it is only temporary, “until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.”

What does “the fulness of the Gentiles” mean? Many see this phrase as a way of expressing the fulfillment of the gospel commission, in which all the world hears the gospel. “The fulness of the Gentiles” has come in when the gospel has been preached everywhere. The faith of Israel, manifested in Christ, is universalized. The gospel has been preached to all the world. The coming of Jesus is near. At this point, then, many Jews start coming to Jesus.

Another difficult point is the meaning of “all Israel shall be saved” (vs. 26). This must not be construed to mean every Jew will by some divine decree have salvation in the end time. Nowhere do the Scriptures preach universalism, either for the entire human race or for a particular segment. Paul was hoping to save “some of them” (vs. 14). Some accepted the Messiah, some rejected Him, as it is with all people groups.

Commenting on Romans 11, Ellen White speaks of a time “in the closing proclamation of the gospel” when “many of the Jews . . . will by faith receive Christ as their Redeemer.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 381.

“There is a mighty work to be done in our world. The Lord has declared that the Gentiles shall be gathered in, and not the Gentiles only, but the Jews. There are among the Jews many who will be converted, and through whom we shall see the salvation of God go forth as a lamp that burneth. There are Jews everywhere, and to them the light of present truth is to be brought. There are among them many who will come to the light, and who will proclaim the immutability of the law of God with wonderful power.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 578.

Take some time to think about the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. How could a selective study of the Jewish religion help you better understand your Christian faith?

The Salvation of Sinners

Paul's love for his own people is clearly apparent in these verses. How hard it must have been for him to have some of his countrymen fight against him and against the truth of the gospel. And yet, amid it all, he still believed that many would see Jesus as the Messiah.

Read Romans 11:28–36. How does Paul show God's love, not just for the Jews but for all humanity? How does he here express the amazing and mysterious power of God's grace?

All through these verses, though a contrast is made between Jews and Gentiles, one point stands clear: God's mercy and love and grace are poured out upon sinners. From even before the foundation of the world, God's plan was to save humanity and to use other human beings, nations even, as instruments in His hands to fulfill His divine will.

Read carefully and prayerfully verse 31. What important point should we take from this text about our witness, not just to Jews but to all people with whom we come in contact?

No doubt, through the centuries, had the Christian church treated the Jews better, many more might have come to their Messiah. The great falling away in the early centuries after Christ, and the extreme paganization of Christianity—including the rejection of the seventh-day Sabbath in favor of Sunday—certainly didn't make it any easier on a Jew who might have been drawn to Jesus.

How crucial, then, that all Christians, realizing the mercy that has been given to them in Jesus, display that mercy to others. We can't be Christians if we don't (*see Matt. 18:23–36*).

Is there someone to whom you need to show mercy, who perhaps doesn't deserve it? Why not show this person that mercy, no matter how hard that might be? Isn't that what Jesus has done for us?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, "Before the Sanhedrin," pp. 77–79; "From Persecutor to Disciple," pp. 112–114; "Written From Rome," pp. 474, 475, in *The Acts of the Apostles*; "Reaching Catholics," pp. 573–577, in *Evangelism*; "What to Preach and Not to Preach," pp. 155, 156, in *Selected Messages*, book 1.

"Notwithstanding Israel's failure as a nation, there remained among them a goodly remnant of such as should be saved. At the time of the Saviour's advent there were faithful men and women who had received with gladness the message of John the Baptist, and had thus been led to study anew the prophecies concerning the Messiah. When the early Christian church was founded, it was composed of these faithful Jews who recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the one for whose advent they had been longing."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 376, 377.

"Among the Jews are some who, like Saul of Tarsus, are mighty in the Scriptures, and these will proclaim with wonderful power the immutability of the law of God. . . . As His servants labor in faith for those who have long been neglected and despised, His salvation will be revealed."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 381.

"In the closing proclamation of the gospel, when special work is to be done for classes of people hitherto neglected, God expects His messengers to take particular interest in the Jewish people whom they find in all parts of the earth. As the Old Testament Scriptures are blended with the New in an explanation of Jehovah's eternal purpose, this will be to many of the Jews as the dawn of a new creation, the resurrection of the soul. As they see the Christ of the gospel dispensation portrayed in the pages of the Old Testament Scriptures, and perceive how clearly the New Testament explains the Old, their slumbering faculties will be aroused, and they will recognize Christ as the Saviour of the world. Many will by faith receive Christ as their Redeemer."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 381.

Discussion Questions:

- ① In the last days, as God's law and especially the Sabbath come into sharp focus, is it not reasonable to think that the Jews—many of them as serious about the Ten Commandments as Adventists are—will have a role in helping to clarify some issues before the world? Discuss.**
- ② Why should, of all churches, the Adventist Church be the one most successful in reaching out to Jews? What can you or your local church do in seeking to reach Jews in your community, if any?**
- ③ What can we learn from the mistakes of many in ancient Israel? How can we avoid doing the same things today?**

Hearing God's Voice

by ERICKA SAUNIER

I've often heard people testify that God had spoken to them, led them, and guided them. I thought that I'd never heard the Holy Spirit's voice and wished I could have this experience.

I preferred to help with the younger children's Sabbath School rather than attend my own. When I was in Primary, I helped in Cradle Roll. When I was a teenager, we moved to another church, and I didn't want to go. My father insisted, so I asked the Cradle Roll teacher to let me help. But she didn't need help. However, the Primary class needed someone, and I volunteered. I became a Primary class leader and eventually took the job of director of children's ministries.

When I heard the pastor appeal for children to have their own small groups, I couldn't get his call out of my mind. When I told my mom this, she said, "The Holy Spirit is talking to you." Her comment shocked me. Was I really hearing the Holy Spirit and didn't even know it?

I asked the conference children's ministries leader how to start a children's small group. She told me what I needed, and I bought the material. I asked two people to help me. One was a man who was not yet baptized. I chose to work with children ages 4 to 11, and we decided to meet on Wednesday evening while the adults were in prayer meeting.

The small group was so successful that attendance at prayer meeting increased when children begged their parents to go! The man who was helping me was a teacher, so he helped teach the Bible story. Then the children did the related activities in their workbooks. We had great fun, and even some older children wanted to join the group.

The program lasted a year, and then we started over again. The man who helped me was baptized and now teaches an adult Sabbath School class.

I now realize that the Holy Spirit was guiding me all along. He asked me to use the gifts He had given me—working with children. I now understand that God asks us to do things that we are naturally inclined to do, and usually it's something we enjoy. I'm so glad God has called me and can use me to lead others to His feet.

Your mission offerings help provide programs such as the small group ministries of the South American Division.



Ericka Saunier shares her faith in Manaus, Brazil.

LESSON 12

*September 11–17

Love and Law



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Romans 12, 13.*

Memory Text: “Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (*Romans 12:2*).

However much Paul was seeking to disabuse the Romans of their false notions of the law, he also calls all Christians to a high standard of obedience. This obedience comes from an inward change in our heart and mind, a change that comes only through the power of God working in a person surrendered to Him.

Romans contains no hint that this obedience comes automatically. The Christian needs to be enlightened as to what the requirements are; he or she must desire to obey those requirements; and, finally, the Christian should seek the power without which that obedience is impossible.

What this means is that works are part of the Christian faith. Paul never meant to depreciate works; in chapters 13 to 15 he gives them strong emphasis. This is no denial of what he has said earlier about righteousness by faith. On the contrary, works are the true expression of what it means to live by faith. One could even argue that because of the added revelation after Jesus came, the New Testament requirements are more difficult than what was required in the Old. New Testament believers have been given an example of proper moral behavior in Jesus Christ. He and no one else is the pattern we are to follow. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (*Phil. 2:5*).

The standard doesn't—*can't!*—get higher than that.

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

Living Sacrifices

With chapter 11, the doctrinal part of the book of Romans ends. Chapters 12 through 16 present practical instruction and personal notes. Nevertheless, these concluding chapters are extremely important, because they show how the life of faith is to be lived.

For starters, faith is not a substitute for obedience, as if faith somehow nullifies our obligation to obey the Lord. The moral precepts are still in force; they are explained, even amplified in the New Testament. And no indication is given, either, that it will be easy for the Christian to regulate his or her life by these moral precepts. On the contrary, we're told that at times it could be difficult, for the battle with self and with sin is always hard (*1 Pet. 4:1*). Christians are promised divine power and given assurance that victory is possible, but we are still in the world of the enemy and will have to fight many battles against temptation. The good news is that if we fall, if we stumble, we are not cast away but have a High Priest who intercedes in our behalf (*Heb. 7:25*).

Read Romans 12:1. How does the analogy presented here reveal how we as Christians are to live? How does Romans 12:2 fit in with this?

In Romans 12:1, Paul is alluding to Old Testament sacrifices. As, anciently, animals were sacrificed to God, so now Christians ought to yield their bodies to God, not to be killed but as living sacrifices dedicated to His service.

In the time of ancient Israel, every offering brought as a sacrifice was examined carefully. If any defect was discovered in the animal, it was refused, for God had commanded that the offering be without blemish. So, Christians are bidden to present their bodies "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God." In order to do this, all their powers must be preserved in the best possible condition. Though none of us are without blemish, the point is that we are to seek to live as spotlessly and as faithfully as we can.

It's always so easy to come up with excuses for our sins and faults, isn't it? What's your common excuse for falling into the same thing again and again? Isn't it about time to start putting away the excuses and claim the promises, for isn't God's power greater than your excuses?

Thinking of Oneself

We have talked a great deal this quarter about the perpetuity of God's moral law and have stressed again and again that Paul's message in the book of Romans is not one that teaches the Ten Commandments are done away with or somehow made void by faith.

Yet, it's easy to get so caught up in the letter of the law that we forget the spirit behind it, and that spirit is love—love for God and love for one another. While anyone can profess love, revealing that love in everyday life can be a different matter entirely.

Read Romans 12:3–21. How are we to reveal love for others?

As in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13, after dealing with the gifts of the Spirit, Paul exalts love. Love (Greek *agape*) is the more excellent way. "God is love" (*1 John 4:8*). Therefore, love describes the character of God. To love is to act toward others as God acts and to treat them as God treats them.

Paul here shows how that love is to be expressed in a practical manner. One important principle comes through, and that is personal humility, a willingness of a person "not to think of himself more highly than he ought" (*Rom. 12:3*), a willingness to "give preference to one another in honor" (*vs. 10, NASB*), and a willingness not to "be wise in your own opinion" (*vs. 16, NKJV*). Christ's words about Himself, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart" (*Matt. 11:29*), catch the essence of it.

Of all people, Christians should be the most humble. After all, look at how helpless we are, look at how fallen we are; look at how dependent we are, not only upon a righteousness outside of ourselves for salvation but on a power working in us in order to change us in ways we never can change ourselves. What have we to brag of, what have we to boast of, what have we in and of ourselves to be proud about? Nothing at all. Working from the starting point of this personal humility, not only before God but before others, we are to live as Paul admonishes us to in these verses.

Read Romans 12:18. How well are you applying this admonition in your own life right now? Might you need some attitude adjustments in order to do what the Word tells us here?

Relationship to Government

Read Romans 13:1–7. What basic principles can we take from these verses about how we are to relate to the civil power of government?

What makes Paul's words so interesting is that he wrote during a time when a pagan empire ruled the world, one that could be incredibly brutal, one that was at its core corrupt, and one that knew nothing about the true God and would, within a few years, start a massive persecution of those who wanted to worship that God. In fact, Paul was put to death by this government! Yet, despite all this, Paul was advocating that Christians be good citizens, even under a government like that?

Yes. And that's because the idea of government itself is found throughout the Bible. The concept, the principle of government, is God-ordained. Human beings need to live in a community with rules and regulations and standards. Anarchy is not a biblical concept.

That being said, it doesn't mean that God approves of all forms of government or how these governments are run. On the contrary. One doesn't have to look too far, either in history or in the world today, to see some brutal regimes. Yet, even in situations like these, Christians should, as much as possible, obey the laws of the land. Christians are to give loyal support to government so long as its claims do not conflict with the claims of God. One should consider very prayerfully and carefully, and with the counsel of others, before embarking on a path that puts him or her in conflict with the powers that be. We know from prophecy that one day all of God's faithful followers will be pitted against the political powers in control of the world (*Revelation 13*). Until then, we should do all that we can, before God, to be good citizens of whatever country in which we live.

"We are to recognize human government as an ordinance of divine appointment, and teach obedience to it as a sacred duty, within its legitimate sphere. But when its claims conflict with the claims of God, we must obey God rather than men. God's word must be recognized as above all human legislation. . . .

"We are not required to defy authorities. Our words, whether spoken or written, should be carefully considered, lest we place ourselves on record as uttering that which would make us appear antagonistic to law and order. We are not to say or do anything that would unnecessarily close up our way."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 69.

Relationships to Others

“Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law” (*Rom. 13:8*). How are we to understand this text? Does it mean that if we love, we have no obligation, then, to obey the law of God?

As Jesus did in the Sermon on the Mount, Paul here amplifies the precepts of the law, showing that love must be the motivating power behind all that we do. Because the law is a transcript of the character of God, and God is love, to love, therefore, is to fulfill the law. Yet, Paul is not substituting some vague standard of love for the precisely detailed precepts of the law, as some Christians claim. The moral law is still binding, because, again, it is what points out sin—and who is going to deny the reality of sin? However, the law truly can be kept only in the context of love. Remember, some of those who brought Christ to the cross then ran home to keep the law!

Which commandments did Paul cite as samples to illustrate the principle of love in law-keeping? Why these in particular? *Rom. 13:9, 10.*

Interestingly, the factor of love was not a newly introduced principle. By quoting Leviticus 19:18, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” Paul showed that the principle was an integral part of the Old Testament system. Again Paul appealed to the Old Testament to support his gospel preaching. Some argue from these texts that Paul is teaching that only the few commandments mentioned here are in effect. If so, does this mean, then, that Christians can dishonor their parents, worship idols, and have other gods before the Lord? Of course not.

Look at the context here. Paul was dealing with how we relate to one another. He was dealing with personal relationships, which is why he specified the commandments that centered on these relationships. His argument certainly shouldn’t be construed as nullifying the rest of the law. (*See Acts 15:20, 1 Thess. 1:9, 1 John 5:21.*) Besides, as the New Testament writers point out, by showing love to others, we show our love to God (*Matt. 25:40; 1 John 4:20, 21*).

Think about your relationship to God and how it is reflected in your relationships with others. How big a factor is love in those relationships? How can you learn to love others the way God loves us? What stands in your way of doing just that?

Nearer Than We Believed

“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed” (Rom. 13:11).

As we have stated all quarter, Paul had a very specific focus in this letter to the Romans, and that was to clarify for the church at Rome, especially the Jewish believers there, the role of faith and works in the New Covenant context. The issue was salvation and how a sinner is deemed righteous and holy before the Lord. To help those whose whole emphasis had been on law, Paul put the law in its proper role and context. Though, ideally, Judaism even in Old Testament times was a religion of grace, legalism arose and did a lot of damage. How careful we as a church need to be that we don’t make the same mistake.

Read Romans 13:11–14. What event is Paul talking about here, and how should we be acting in anticipation of that event?

How fascinating that Paul here was talking to the believers, telling them to wake up and get it together because Jesus was coming back. The fact that this was written almost two thousand years ago doesn’t matter. We must always live in anticipation of the nearness of Christ’s coming. As far as we all are concerned, as far as our own personal *experiences* go, the Second Coming is as near as the potential for our own death. Whether next week or in 40 years, we close our eyes in death, and whether we sleep only 4 days or for 400 years—it makes no difference to us. The next thing we know is the second coming of Jesus. With death always potentially just around the corner for any of us, time is indeed short, and our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.

Though Paul doesn’t deal much in the book of Romans with the Second Coming, in the Thessalonian and the Corinthian letters he covers it in much more detail. After all, it’s a crucial theme in the Bible, especially the New Testament. Without it, and the hope it offers, our faith is, really, meaningless. After all, what does “*justification by faith*” mean without the Second Coming to bring that wonderful truth to complete fruition?

If you knew for certain that Jesus was coming next month, what would you change in your life, and why? Now, if you believe you need to change these things a month before Jesus comes, why shouldn’t you change them now? What is the difference?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “An Explanation of Early Statements,” pp. 66–69, in *Selected Messages*, book 1; “Practical Godliness,” pp. 540, 541, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5; “Our Attitude Toward the Civil Authorities,” pp. 394, 395, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6; “The Tabernacle and Its Services,” pp. 352, 353, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “The Spirituality of the Law,” pp. 49–51, in *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*.

“In the Bible the will of God is revealed. The truths of the Word of God are the utterances of the Most High. He who makes these truths a part of his life becomes in every sense a new creature. He is not given new mental powers, but the darkness that through ignorance and sin has clouded the understanding is removed. The words, ‘A new heart also will I give you,’ mean, ‘A new mind will I give you.’ A change of heart is always attended by a clear conviction of Christian duty, an understanding of truth. He who gives the Scriptures close, prayerful attention will gain clear comprehension and sound judgment, as if in turning to God he had reached a higher plane of intelligence.”—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 24.

“The Lord . . . is soon coming, and we must be ready and waiting for His appearing. Oh, how glorious it will be to see Him and be welcomed as His redeemed ones! Long have we waited, but our hope is not to grow dim. If we can but see the King in His beauty we shall be forever blessed. I feel as if I must cry aloud: ‘Homeward bound!’ We are nearing the time when Christ will come in power and great glory to take His ransomed ones to their eternal home.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 253.

Discussion Questions:

- ①** In class, go over the question at the end of Thursday’s lesson. What were the answers folk gave, and how did they justify them?
- ②** The question of how we are to be good citizens and good Christians can at times be very complicated. If someone were to come to you seeking advice about standing for what he or she believed was God’s will, even though it would put him or her in conflict with the government, what would you say? What counsel would you give? What principles should you follow? Why is this something that we should proceed on only with the utmost seriousness and prayerful consideration? (After all, not everyone thrown into the lions’ den comes out unscathed.)
- ③** What do you think is harder to do: to keep strict adherence to the letter of the law or to love God and love others unconditionally? Or, could you argue that this question presents a false dichotomy? If so, why?

The Enthusiastic Converts

by G. DEVADASS

When a group of believers wanted to start a new church plant in a suburb of Chennai (formerly Madras), India, several church members paired up into twos and went visiting from house to house in that neighborhood. During our visiting, we met Elkana and Jeba-Kumari.

Elkana and his wife were devoted Christians and active members of a charismatic church. They operated a hostel (home) for poor children, supported by donations from other believers. But they were willing to listen as we read from the Bible and explained the fundamental beliefs of Adventists.

We visited with Elkana and Jeba-Kumari every week, and they began attending the Adventist church. In time they were baptized into the Adventist family of believers.

This dedicated couple told their family members of their decision to become Seventh-day Adventists. They shared what they were learning from the Bible that they hadn't known before, and some of their relatives began attending church with them.

The pastor invited Elkana and his wife to share their faith in their own part of town, and they agreed. For six months the pastor trained them how to share God's word and urged them to invite people to the church. Then they went out on their own.

Elkana and Jeba-Kumari took up their new commission with energy, and within 10 months 28 more people from the neighborhood were attending the Adventist church. This group of new believers formed the core of a new congregation that now numbers more than 30 people. They have no church in which to worship and must meet in a rented room.

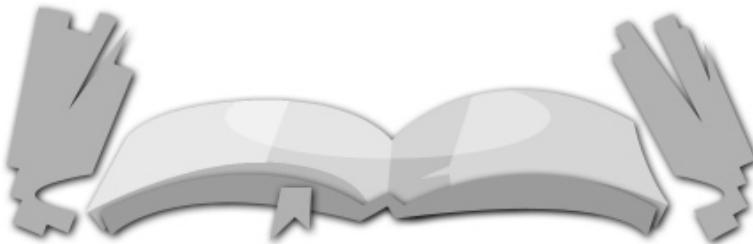
Jeba-Kumari is an especially gifted soul winner, and the couple continues to share their faith with those they meet. They hope to find land and build a church for their little congregation soon, knowing that when they do, their membership will grow.

Meanwhile, the members of the original church who first visited Elkana's neighborhood have moved on to a new community to claim more souls for Christ. In this way the work in the great city of Chennai is flourishing.



G. DEVADASS (center, with Jeba-Kumari and Elkana) is a pastor in Chennai (Madras), India.

All the Rest Is Commentary



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Romans 14–16.*

Memory Text: “Why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (*Romans 14:10*).

Someone approached a famous rabbi of antiquity and asked him to explain the whole meaning of the Torah while standing on one leg. “Do not do to another,” the rabbi said on one leg, “what seems to you to be hurtful; that is the whole Torah. All the rest is commentary.”

Whether or not one agrees with the rabbi’s statement, he does have a point. Some aspects of our faith are foundational and others mere “commentary.” This week’s lesson looks at some of that “commentary.” What this means is that all that came before focused very much on the foundational principles of salvation. What is the role of the law—be it the whole Old Testament system or just the Ten Commandments—in the area of salvation? Paul needed to define clearly what are the grounds upon which God accepts a person. Perhaps the whole thing could be summarized by the pagan jailer’s question, “What must I do to be saved?” (*Acts 16:30*).

With that explained, Paul now engages in some “commentary.” Though very strong on some points, Paul takes a much freer attitude regarding other things. That’s because these things are nonessentials, “commentary,” as it were. Yet, at the same time, though the issues themselves might not have been crucial, the attitude the Christians had toward each other in dealing with these issues was.

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

The Weak Brother

In Romans 14:1–3, the question was the eating of meats that may have been sacrificed to idols. The Jerusalem council (*Acts 15*) ruled that Gentile converts should refrain from using such foods in their diet. But there was always the question as to whether meats sold in public markets had come from animals sacrificed to idols (see *1 Cor. 10:25*). Some Christians didn't care about that at all; others, if there were the slightest doubt, chose to eat vegetables instead. The issue had nothing to do with the question of vegetarianism and healthful living. Nor is Paul implying in this passage that the distinction between clean and unclean meats has been abolished. This is not the subject under consideration. If the words “he may eat all things” (*Rom. 14:2*) were taken to mean that now any animal, clean or otherwise, could be eaten, they would be misapplied. Comparison with other New Testament passages would rule against such an application.

Meanwhile, to “receive” one weak in the faith meant to accord him or her full membership and social status. The person was not to be argued with but given the right to his or her opinion.

What principle should we take, then, from Romans 14:1–3?

It's important, too, to realize that Paul in verse 3 does not speak negatively of the one “weak in the faith.” Nor does he give this person advice as to how to become strong. So far as God is concerned, the overscrupulous Christian (judged overscrupulous, apparently, not by God but by his or her fellow Christians) is accepted. “God hath received him.”

How does Romans 14:4 amplify what we've just looked at?

Though we need to keep in mind the principles seen in today's lesson, are there not times and places where we need to step in and judge, if not a person's heart, at least the actions? Are we to step back and say and do nothing in every situation? Isaiah 56:10 describes watchmen as “dumb dogs, they cannot bark.” How can we know when to speak and when to keep silent? How do we strike the right balance here?

With What Measure You Mete

Read Romans 14:10. What reason does Paul give here for us to be careful about how we judge others?

We tend to judge others harshly at times, and often for the same things that we ourselves do. How often, though, what we do doesn't seem as bad to us as when others do the same thing. We might fool ourselves by our hypocrisy, but not God, who warned us: "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?" (Matt. 7:1–4).

Of what significance is the statement from the Old Testament that Paul introduced here? Rom. 14:11.

The citation from Isaiah 45:23 supports the thought that *all* must appear for judgment. "Every knee" and "every tongue" individualizes the summons. The implication is that each one will have to answer for his or her own life and deeds (vs. 12). No one can answer for another. In this important sense, we are *not* our brother's keeper.

Keeping the context in mind, how do you understand what Paul is saying in Romans 14:14?

The subject is still foods sacrificed to idols. The issue is, clearly, not the distinction between the foods deemed clean and unclean. Paul is saying that there is nothing wrong per se in eating foods that might have been offered to idols. After all, what is an idol anyway? It is nothing (*see 1 Cor. 8:4*), so who cares if some pagan offered the food to a statue of a frog or a bull?

A person should not be made to violate his or her conscience, even if the conscience is overly sensitive. This fact the "strong" brethren apparently did not understand. They despised the scrupulosity of the "weak" brethren and put stumbling blocks in their way.

Might you, in your zeal for the Lord, be in danger of what Paul is warning about here? Why must we be careful not to seek to be the conscience of others, no matter how good our intentions?

Giving No Offense

Read Romans 14:15–23 (*see also 1 Cor. 8:12, 13*). Summarize on the lines below the gist of what Paul is saying. What principle can we take from this passage that we can apply in all areas of our lives?

In verses 17–20 Paul is putting various aspects of Christianity into proper perspective. Although diet is important, Christians ought not to quarrel over the choice on the part of some to eat vegetables instead of flesh meats that might have been sacrificed to idols. Instead, they ought to focus on righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. How might we apply this idea to questions of diet today in our church? However much the health message, and especially the teachings on diet, can be a blessing to us, not everyone sees this subject the same way, and we need to respect those differences.

In verse 22, amid all this talk about leaving people to their own conscience, Paul adds a very interesting caveat: “Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves” (NIV). What warning is Paul giving here? How does this balance out the rest of what he is saying in this context?

Have you heard someone say, “It is none of anyone’s business what I eat or what I wear or what kind of entertainment I engage in”? Is it really? None of us lives in a vacuum. Our actions, words, deeds, and even diet can affect others, either for good or for bad. It’s not hard to see how. If someone who looks up to you sees you doing something “wrong,” he or she could be influenced by your example to do that same thing. We fool ourselves if we think otherwise. To argue that, well, you didn’t force the person is beside the point. As Christians, we have a responsibility to one another, and if our example can lead someone astray, we are culpable.

What kind of example do you present? Would you feel comfortable with having others, particularly young people or new believers, following your example in all areas? What does your answer say about you?

Observance of Days

In this discussion about not judging others who might view some things differently than we do, and not being a stumbling block to others who might be offended by our actions, Paul brings up the issue of special days that some want to observe and others don't.

Read Romans 14:4–10. How are we to understand what Paul is saying here? Does this say anything about the fourth commandment? If not, why not?

About what days is Paul speaking? Was there a controversy in the early church over the observance or nonobservance of certain days? Apparently so. We get a hint of such controversy in Galatians 4:9, 10, where Paul berates the Galatian Christians for observing “days, and months, and times, and years.” As we noted in lesson 2, some in the church had persuaded the Galatian Christians to be circumcised and to keep other precepts of the law of Moses. Paul feared that these ideas might harm the Roman church, as well. But perhaps in Rome it was particularly the Jewish Christians who had a hard time persuading themselves that they need no longer observe the Jewish festivals. Paul here is saying, Do as you please in this matter; the important point is not to judge those who view the matter differently from you. Some Christians, apparently, to be on the safe side, decided to observe one or more of the Jewish festivals. Paul's counsel is, Let them do it, if they are persuaded they should.

To bring the weekly Sabbath into Romans 14:5, as some argue, is unwarranted. Can one imagine Paul taking such a laid-back attitude toward the fourth commandment? As we have seen all quarter, Paul placed a heavy emphasis on obedience to the law, so he certainly wasn't going to place the Sabbath commandment in the same category as folk who are uptight about eating foods that might have been offered to idols. However commonly these texts are used as an example to show that the seventh-day Sabbath is no longer binding, they say no such thing. Their use in that manner is a prime example of what Peter warned that people were doing with Paul's writings: “As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3:16).

What has been your experience with the Sabbath? Has it been the blessing it was meant to be? What changes can you make in order to experience more fully what the Lord offers you in the Sabbath?

Fitting Benediction

Read Romans 15:1–3. What important Christian truth is found in these texts?

In what way do these texts capture so much of what it means to be a follower of Jesus?

What other verses teach the same idea? Most important, how can you, yourself, live out this principle?

As Paul brought his letter to a close, what varied benedictions did he utter? *Rom. 15:5, 6, 13, 33.*

The God of patience means the God who helps His children to endure steadfastly. The word for “patience,” *hypomone*, means “fortitude,” “steadfast endurance.” The word for “consolation” may be translated “encouragement.” The God of encouragement is the God who encourages. The God of hope is the God who has given hope to humankind. Likewise, the God of peace is the God who gives peace and in whom one may have peace.

What a fitting benediction in a letter whose dominant theme is righteousness by faith—encouragement, hope, peace! How sorely our present world needs these.

After numerous personal greetings, how did Paul bring his letter to a close? *Rom. 16:25–27.*

Paul ends his letter in a glorious ascription of praise to God. God is the one in whom the Roman Christians, and all Christians, can safely put their trust to confirm their standing as redeemed sons and daughters of God, justified by faith and now led by the Spirit of God.

Paul is thrilled to be the herald of such glorious news. He calls this news “my gospel.” What he means is the gospel he proclaims. But what he preaches has been confirmed by the preaching of Jesus and by the messages of the prophets. It was kept secret, not because God did not want humanity to know, but because people refused light from heaven, preventing God from giving them further light. Moreover, there were some aspects of the plan that people would be unable to grasp until the Messiah came in human flesh. He gave a demonstration, not only of what God is like but also of what humanity may become by laying hold of divine power. The new kind of life would be one of “obedience of faith”; that is, obedience springing from faith in the Lord, who through grace justifies sinners by the righteousness given to all who claim it for themselves.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Unity and Love in the Church,” pp. 477, 478; “Love for the Erring,” pp. 604–606, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5; “Helping the Tempted,” p. 166, in *The Ministry of Healing*; p. 719, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6.

“I was shown the danger of the people of God in looking to Brother and Sister White and thinking that they must come to them with their burdens and seek counsel of them. This ought not so to be. They are invited by their compassionate, loving Saviour to come unto Him, when weary and heavy-laden, and He will relieve them. . . . Many come to us with the inquiry: Shall I do this? Shall I engage in that enterprise? Or, in regard to dress, Shall I wear this or that article? I answer them: You profess to be disciples of Christ. Study your Bibles. Read carefully and prayerfully the life of our dear Saviour when He dwelt among men upon the earth. Imitate His life, and you will not be found straying from the narrow path. We utterly refuse to be conscience for you. If we tell you just what to do, you will look to us to guide you, instead of going directly to Jesus for yourselves.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 118, 119.

“We are not to place the responsibility of our duty upon others, and wait for them to tell us what to do. We cannot depend for counsel upon humanity. The Lord will teach us our duty just as willingly as He will teach somebody else. . . . Those who decide to do nothing in any line that will displease God, will know, after presenting their case before Him, just what course to pursue.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 668.

“There have ever been in the church those who are constantly inclined toward individual independence. They seem unable to realize that independence of spirit is liable to lead the human agent to have too much confidence in himself and to trust in his own judgment rather than to respect the counsel and highly esteem the judgment of his brethren.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 163, 164.

Discussion Questions:

Given some of the themes of this week, how do we as Christians find the right balance in the following cases:

- ① Being faithful to what we believe, yet not judging others who see things differently from the way we do?
- ② Being true to our own conscience and not seeking to be the conscience for others, while at the same time seeking to help those whom we believe are in error? When do we speak, and when do we keep silent? When are we culpable if we do keep silent?
- ③ Being free in the Lord and yet at the same time realizing our responsibility to be a good example for those who might look up to us?

Reunited in Christ

by KRISTINA MUELHAUSER

Juma was just a boy when war separated Juma from his family. His mother had traveled to their grandparents' home with her children while their father remained in Juba, Sudan. During the war Juba was captured by the military, and Juma's family couldn't return home. Juma grew up not knowing his father.

But finally peace has come to southern Sudan, and families are reuniting. Meanwhile the city is struggling to rebuild.

It's a time of spiritual rebuilding as well. Recently Seventh-day Adventist pastors, evangelists, and Bible workers from Sudan, the Middle East Union, and the Trans-European Division held city-wide evangelistic meetings to share God's love with the people of Juba.

The truck carrying the evangelists, pastors, and lay evangelists bounced along the dirt road toward Juba. Its wheels stirred up huge clouds of gray-brown dust that settled on everything and everyone nearby. The truck lumbered to a stop in a rubbish-filled open area near the city that would be the site of one of the evangelistic meetings. The evangelists would have to clear the rubbish before they could set up the tent to hold the meetings. Then they would visit the people and invite them to attend.

And the people would come. They are thirsty—not just for physical water, but for the Water of Life the team had come to bring them.

The teams braved heat, dust, and flies as they shared God's love with the people of Juba. When the meetings began and singing filled the air, the people came. They listened to health talks, heard children's stories, and learned of God's love.

The devil tried to destroy the meetings. When high winds blew up just as the pastors began to speak, church members grabbed the tent poles to prevent the tent from blowing away. The wind died down, and rain poured from the sky, although it was the dry season. In another location the tent was almost empty when the meeting was scheduled to start. But the sudden rain sent people to the tent for shelter, and a full house heard the message that night.

So far 45 have been baptized in Juba, including Juma's father. Many more are preparing to join the family of God in this region that has been cut off from the gospel and from the outside world. Please pray for the people of southern Sudan as they seek to reconnect with their families and learn to love their Savior. And praise God for the mission offerings that helped make the Juba evangelism possible.

KRISTINA MUELHAUSER and her husband, Darrel, work as missionaries in the South Sudan Field.

2010 Bible Study Guide for the Fourth Quarter

History—both secular and sacred—is often told through stories. Next quarter’s Bible study guide, *Background Characters in the Old Testament*, by Gerald and Chantal Klingbeil, looks at some of the overlooked and forgotten figures in the Old Testament. The lives of these characters might not seem so important, a feeling most of us can identify with. As we study them, let us remember the power of our own lives and examples. Our stories can become powerful tools in our witness to others about what God has done for us. As with these background characters, we become part of the great story of salvation, even if we might not be the main characters in the grander scheme of the cosmic drama that unfolds around us.

Lesson 1—Story and History

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: People and Plots (*Job 1:1–12*)

MONDAY: Where and How? (*1 Sam. 24:1–6, Gen. 39:6–12*)

TUESDAY: From Victory to the “Dark Ages” (*Josh. 3:9–17*)

WEDNESDAY: Of Kings and Princes (*1 Sam. 8:3–20*)

THURSDAY: Rehoboam’s Folly (*1 Kings 12:1–16*)

Memory Text—*2 Timothy 3:16*

Sabbath Gem: The Bible is so contemporary because it is full of stories. Not legends, not “cleverly devised myths” (*2 Pet. 1:16, ESV*), but historical and personal stories that reveal truth about God and His interaction with fallen humanity. These stories describe real people, battling with real-life problems and interacting with the living God, who offers answers to these problems.

Lesson 2—Caleb: Living With the Wait

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: “The Facts” (*Num. 13:26–14:2*)

MONDAY: Standing Tall When It Counts (*Num. 13:30*)

TUESDAY: Claiming God’s Promises (*Joshua 14*)

WEDNESDAY: Passing on the Legacy (*Ps. 92:12–15*)

THURSDAY: Giving Freely (*Judg. 1:14, 15*)

Memory Text—*Psalm 130:6, 7*

Sabbath Gem: Caleb exhibits strong courage and faith in God. He is a great leader who is willing to take risks and to lead by example. His story is relevant for us as we wait to cross over into the heavenly Canaan.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired

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