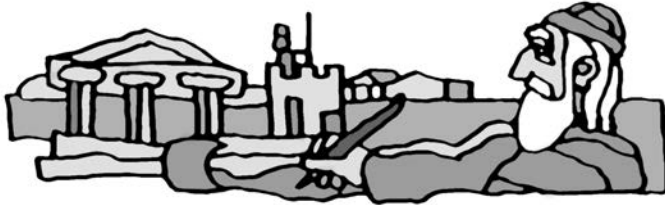


# The Apostle Paul *in* Rome



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

**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*).

It is important for a student of the book of Romans to understand the book's historical background. Context is always crucial when seeking to understand the Word of God. We need to know and understand the issues that were being addressed. Paul was writing to a specific group of Christians at a specific time and for a specific reason; knowing that reason as much as possible will greatly benefit us in our study.

Thus, let's go back in time. Let's transport ourselves back to first-century Rome, become members of the congregation there, and then, as first-century church members, let us listen to Paul and the words that the Holy Spirit gave him to deliver to the believers in Rome.

And yet however localized the immediate issues that Paul was addressing, the principles behind them—in this case the question *how is a person saved?*—are universal. Yes, Paul was speaking to a specific group of people; and yes, he had a specific issue in mind when he wrote the letter. But as we know, many centuries later in a totally different time and context, the words he wrote were as relevant to Martin Luther as they were to Paul when he first wrote them. And they are relevant to us as well today.

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

## The Apostle Paul's Letter

Romans 16:1, 2 indicates that Paul probably wrote Romans in the Greek city of Cenchreae, which was near Corinth. 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 epistle is to ascertain the date of writing. Because Paul traveled a lot, knowing his location 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 received an offering for the saints in Jerusalem near the end of his journey (*Rom. 15:25, 26*). Therefore the Epistle to the Romans probably was written in the early months of A.D. 58.

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

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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 from happening in Rome. It is believed that the Epistle to the Galatians also was written 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 which questions were agitating the Jewish and Gentile churches. Next week's lesson will address 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?**

## Paul's Desire to Visit Rome

There's no question that the personal touch is the best way to communicate in most cases. We can phone, e-mail, text, and even Skype, but face to face, flesh to flesh, is the best way to communicate. That's why Paul announced in his letter to the Romans 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 Romans 15:27 about Jews and Gentiles?

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The great missionary to the Gentiles felt constantly impelled to take the gospel to new areas, leaving others to labor in places 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 regarding the whole question of mission from the fact that Paul sought help from an established church in order to evangelize a new area?

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**Read again** Romans 15:20–27. Notice how much Paul's great desire was to minister and to serve. What motivates you and your actions? How much of a heart of service do you have?

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## Paul in Rome

**“Now 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 about the unexpected and unwanted things that so often come our way?**

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Yes, Paul eventually got to Rome, even if it was as a prisoner. How often our plans don’t come out as we anticipated and hoped for, even the ones formulated with the best of intentions.

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

**What** does Acts 28:17–31 tell us about Paul’s time in Rome? More important, what lesson can we learn from this passage?

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“Not by Paul’s sermons, 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.’ Philipians 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, you gain faith from those experiences to trust God for the things where no good seems to have arisen?**

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## The “Saints” in Rome

**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, and of faith can we take away from these words?

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*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 these two words can be left out, and the meaning will still be 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 is what 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 to understand what Paul means?

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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 that which 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.

**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?**

## The Believers in Rome

**“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 was established. The tradition that the church was founded by Peter or Paul is without historical foundation. Perhaps laypersons 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 just 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 describe the church at Rome?**

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

1. “Full of goodness.” Would people say this of us in their own experiences? 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?**

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**Further Thought:** 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.

“The salvation of humankind does not result from a divine afterthought or improvisation made necessary because of an unexpected turn of events after sin arose. Rather, it issues from a divine plan for man’s redemption formulated before the founding of this world (1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:3, 14; 2 Thess. 2:13, 14) and rooted in God’s everlasting love for humanity (Jer. 31:3).

“This plan encompasses eternity past, the historical present, and eternity future. It includes such realities and blessings as election and predestination to be God’s holy people and bear likeness to Christ, redemption and forgiveness, the unity of all things in Christ, sealing with the Holy Spirit, reception of the eternal inheritance, and glorification (Eph. 1:3–14). Central to the plan is the suffering and death of Jesus, which was not an accident of history nor the product of merely human decision, but was rooted in God’s redemptive purpose (Acts 4:27, 28). Jesus was in truth ‘the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world’ (Rev. 13:8, KJV).”—*The Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2000), pp. 275, 276.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In class, talk about the meaning of the Protestant Reformation. Think about this question especially: How different would our world be today without it?
- ❷ 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 to them?
- ❸ Dwell on the question at the end of Thursday’s study. How could your class help to improve your church’s reputation, if need be?

## Saved by the Sabbath

Andre grew up in the western Ukrainian city of Lutsk. While at school, he became acquainted with Pavel, a student who attended a Seventh-day Adventist church on Saturdays. Being a nonbeliever, Andre didn't think much about when or where people went to church, nor did he care.

After finishing their high school education, both Andre and Pavel planned to study at the Lviv National Academy of Arts, so they went to Lviv to take the academy's entrance exam. After finishing the exam, the two decided to walk around the campus.

Suddenly, a large notice on an announcement board caught their eye—there was going to be an air show commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Ukrainian Air Force's 14th Air Corps. The event would be held at the Sknyliv Airfield, just six kilometers (3.7 miles) from central Lviv.

Excitedly, Andre and Pavel scanned the notice for further details. Then Pavel noticed the date of the air show: July 27, 2002. Realizing that day was a Saturday, he decided that he would not be going to the air show after all.

"Andre, I'm going to church on July 27—would you like to come with me?" Pavel asked.

Now it was Andre's turn to carefully consider the situation. He really wanted to go to the air show, but there was something so sincere about Pavel's invitation that Andre decided to accept. He wondered what could be so special about this church that would make Pavel choose to go there rather than to the air show.

Reflecting on that first visit to a Seventh-day Adventist church, Andre later recalled, "We spent the whole day there, and I really liked the church."

What Pavel and Andre didn't know was that while they were at church, the worst air-show disaster in history was taking place at the Sknyliv Airfield. With over 10,000 spectators watching, at 12:52 P.M. a Su-27 aircraft, flown by two experienced pilots, crashed and exploded into the crowd of spectators. Seventy-seven spectators were killed, including 28 children. Another 543 spectators were injured, 100 of those injured were hospitalized and suffered head injuries, burns, and bone fractures.

When Andre heard the news the next day, he was stunned. "That event made me realize that I could have died there or could have been severely injured. I became friends with the many young people at the Adventist church, and after attending regularly for one year, I decided to be baptized."

Later, Andre decided to change his career plans and studied at the Ukrainian Adventist Center of Higher Education in Bucha, to become a pastor. In 2004, part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering helped to build a dormitory at Bucha. In 2014, the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering helped to build or expand schools in Lviv, Cherkasy, and Vinnytsia, Ukraine, and establish an educational complex in Dnipropetrovsk. Thank you for supporting this important offering.

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*Read more stories from the Euro-Asia Division in the Mission Quarterly online at [www.AdventistMission.com](http://www.AdventistMission.com).*



# The Controversy



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

The early church was composed mostly of Jews who never for a moment thought that by accepting the Jewish Messiah, Jesus, they were somehow turning away from the faith of their fathers or the covenant promises that God had made to His people. As it turns out, they were right. The issue for the early Jewish believers was whether Jews had to become Christians in order to accept Jesus. The other issue for many of them was whether Gentiles had to become Jews before they could accept Christ.

Only later, in the Jerusalem Council, was there a firm answer. They made the decision not to trouble the Gentiles with a host of regulations and laws. That is, Gentiles didn't need to become Jews first in order to accept Jesus.

Despite the decision, however, 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 (not exactly a procedure that would make joining Christianity particularly appealing for an adult). That is, they thought that these Gentiles, in order to be partakers of the covenant promises, had to abide by many of the rules and regulations that were deemed a requisite for partakers of the commonwealth of Israel.

What were the issues, and how were they to be resolved?

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

## A Better Covenant

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

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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. People could not ignore Him and expect to be saved. Only through the atonement He provided could their sins be 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 offered 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 it is of the Old Testament.

**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?

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At the same time, the entire body of ritual and ceremonial laws that were distinctly Israelite—and were distinctly tied to the Old Covenant, which all 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. Many Jews who had accepted Jesus were still not ready for the great changes that were coming.

**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?**

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## Jewish Laws and Regulations

As time allows, skim through the book of Leviticus. (*See, for instance, Leviticus 12, 16, and 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?

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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 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 they also 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 of 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.

## As the Custom of Moses

**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.

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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 confidence 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?

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“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 to do, independent of the larger body?**

## The Gentile Believers

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

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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 Acts 15:10 the way in which 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 from the blessings they were meant to be 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 rules?

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Although Jewish believers weren’t to impose their rules and tradition 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 on people burdens that are not necessary but are more from tradition than divine command? If so, how? Bring your thoughts to class on Sabbath.

## Paul and the Galatians

However clear the council, 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 the importance of this question?

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As stated before, it was the Galatian situation that 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. Some Jewish believers 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 Paul is speaking of ceremonial or moral laws in Galatians and Romans. Historically, the argument was whether or not Gentile converts should be required to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. The Jerusalem Council already had 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 the keeping of 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 an issue 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 does not compromise the integrity of the gospel?**

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**Further Thought:** 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*.

No doubt, our church faces times of controversy and dissension. But this is nothing new. Satan has always been at war with the church. Even in the earliest days of Christianity, dissension and controversy arose in the ranks of the believers. And there was one controversy that, if not resolved, could have destroyed the church in its infancy.

“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 if we really are doing these things? Or might we be in danger of going too far the other way? That is, how can we recognize if we have become too lax in our lifestyles 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 that people 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 arguments so wrong, and why in many cases do those who make them not really live as if they believe the Ten Commandments are no longer binding?
- ❸ Read again Galatians 1:1–12. Notice how uncompromising, how dogmatic, and how fervent Paul was regarding his understanding of the gospel. What should that tell us about how we must stand absolutely unwaveringly on 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?
- ❹ In class, talk about the issues that brought about the Protestant Reformation. What basic differences have not been resolved?

## One Year in Mission: Part 1

Anna was certain that God led her to study at Saratov State University, located beside the famous Volga River in Russia. Now she was graduating with a degree in biology, but as she searched for a job, nothing could be found.

“God,” she prayed, “I don’t know why I can’t find a job. But I know You provided this education and that You have something in mind for me.”

God did have plans for Anna—much bigger than she imagined. One day, the youth director of the Volga Conference asked Anna if she would be interested in serving in the One Year in Mission (OYIM) program, a special General Conference initiative to give young adults opportunities to participate in the Mission to the Cities outreach.

“Yes, I really want to do something for God,” Anna responded.

She soon learned that she was chosen to represent the Euro-Asia Division in the OYIM program launching in New York City in 2013. Anna arrived in New York on January 24, 2013, and immediately joined the 13 other young adults representing all divisions and attached fields of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The young people received leadership training in community service, evangelism, medical missionary work, and communication. After New York, they took their practical experience and training back to their divisions and trained a team of ten volunteers coming from each union of their division. In this way, the missionary effect would multiply.

“We used Christ’s method alone—mingling with people, understanding their needs, giving Bible studies, and inviting them to follow Jesus,” Anna said.

Every day, the OYIM missionaries knocked on doors. “Hello, we’ve recently moved here and just wanted to greet you. We’re your new neighbors,” they said. Most of those visited were from India or Nepal, and some invited the missionaries in for a chat.

“When we talked together, they became our friends,” Anna said. “We asked if they wanted to study the Bible, and many agreed. Often we prayed with them.”

“Sometimes I made blinis [thin Russian pancakes] and delivered them to the neighbors, telling them I just wanted to let them know God loves them.”

In addition to her neighborhood activities, Anna was assigned to work in an Adventist church located in a Spanish-speaking community. Many of the residents wanted to learn English, so Anna and others started free English classes at the Adventist church.

“People were so happy,” Anna says. “We began every lesson with a Bible verse, explaining the grammar and the meaning of the verse. After the lessons, we invited them to come to the evening evangelistic programs. We made many contacts this way!”

*To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.*



# The Human Condition



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rom. 1:16, 17, 22–32; 2:1–10, 17–24; 3:1, 2, 10–18, 23.*

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

Early on in the book of Romans, Paul seeks to establish a crucial truth, one central to the gospel—the sad state of the human condition. This truth exists because, from the Fall onward, we have all been contaminated by sin. It's wired in our genes as is the color of our eyes.

Martin Luther, in his commentary on Romans, wrote the following: “The expression ‘all are under sin’ must be taken in a spiritual sense; that is to say, not as men appear in their own eyes or in those of others, but as they stand before God. They are all under sin, those who are manifest transgressors in the eyes of men, as well as those who appear righteous in their own sight and before others. Those who perform outwardly good works do them from fear of punishment or love of gain and glory, or otherwise from pleasure in a certain object, but not from a willing and ready mind. In this way man exercises himself continually in good works outwardly, but inwardly he is totally immersed in sinful desires and evil lusts, which are opposed to good works.” —*Commentary on Romans*, p. 69.

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

## The Power of God

**“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 does Romans 1:16, 17 say to you? How have you experienced the promises and hope found in them?**

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Several key words occur in this passage:

1. *Gospel*. This word is the translation of a Greek word that means 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 that means “Messiah”). The good news is that the Messiah has come, and people can be saved by believing in Him. It is in Jesus and in His perfect righteousness—and not in ourselves, or even in God’s law—that one can 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 that are translated as *believe* and *faith* (*KJV*) in this passage are the verb and noun forms of the same word: *pisteuo* (believe) and *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? On what are they based? 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?**

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## All Have Sinned

**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?

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Amazingly enough, some people actually challenge the idea of human sinfulness, arguing that people are basically good. The problem, however, stems from a lack of understanding of what true goodness is. People can compare themselves to someone else and feel good about themselves. After all, we can always find someone worse than ourselves to compare ourselves with. But that hardly makes us good. 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.

Romans 3:23 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 humans. Sinful humans fall 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?

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As bad as we are, our situation is not hopeless. The first step is that we 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?**

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## Progress?

At the turn of the twentieth century, people 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. Through the right kind of education and moral training, it was thought that humans could greatly 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 that were written in the first century being manifested today in the twenty-first century?**

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We might need faith to believe a lot of things in Christianity: among them, the resurrection of the dead, the Second Coming, and a new heaven and a new earth. But who needs faith to believe in the fallen state of humanity? Today, each of us is living the consequences of that fallen state.

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

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## What Jews and Gentiles Share in Common

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, had fallen into the most degrading of 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?

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“After the Apostle has shown that all heathen are sinners, he now, in a special and most emphatic way, shows that also the Jews live in sin, above all because they obey the Law only outwardly, that is, according to the letter and not according to the spirit.”—Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 61.

Often it's so easy to see and point out the sins of others. 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 would have none of that. He warned his countrymen not to be quick to judge the Gentiles, for they, the Jews—even as the chosen people—were sinners. In some cases they were 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 are righteous, none of us meet the divine standard, and none of us are innately good or inherently holy. Jew or Gentile, male or female, rich or poor, and 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 often do you, even if only in your own mind, condemn others for things that you yourself are guilty of? By taking heed to what Paul has written here, how can you change?**

## The Gospel and Repentance

**“Despisest thou the riches of [H]is 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 in regard to the whole question of repentance?**

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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 people 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 to repent and not others? Repentance must be an act of the free will, responding to the movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Yes, repentance is a gift from God, but we have to be ready and open to receive it—a choice that we alone can make for ourselves.

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

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In Romans 2:5–10, 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 Romans 2:7, salvation is described as coming to those who seek for it “by patient continuance in well doing.” Although 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 over.

**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?**

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**Further Thought:** “Thus the biblical terminology shows that sin is not a calamity fallen upon the human unawares, but the result of an active attitude and choice on the part of the human. Further, sin is not the absence of good, but it is ‘falling short’ of God’s expectations. It is an evil course that the human has deliberately chosen. It is not a weakness for which humans cannot be held responsible, for the human in the attitude or act of sin deliberately chooses a way of rebellion against God, in transgression against His law, and fails to hear God’s Word. Sin attempts to pass beyond the limitations God has set. In short, sin is rebellion against God.”—*The Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2000), p. 239.

“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:

- ① What answer do you give to those who, despite all that has happened, insist that humanity is improving? What arguments do they give, and how do you respond to them?
- ② Look at the quote from Ellen G. White above. If you see yourself in it, 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 who 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*)?
- ③ 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? What errors can a false understanding of our true condition lead us into?
- ④ Think about the untold numbers of Protestants who chose to die rather than give up the faith. How strong are we in the faith? Strong enough to die for it?

## One Year in Mission: Part 2

As members in the local Seventh-day Adventist churches watched the enthusiastic One Year in Mission (OYIM) young people, they understood that they, too, could do something special for the community and began to follow the example of reaching out to their neighbors.

“I can tell you honestly,” Anna said, “that I didn’t used to think much about working in the big cities—I didn’t see what the real problems were. And it’s easier to go to a village. But after being involved with this project, I understand that we really, really need to be here.

“When I came back to my home church in Russia, I saw it with different eyes. I realized that we need to work differently—we need to be real Christians. Something in my mind had changed; I understood how we need to live and how to work.

“I was so inspired in New York, I began praying about what could be done in my home division of ESD [Euro-Asia Division],” Anna recalled.

In June 2013, hundreds of leaders, pastors, and evangelists from around the world descended on New York City to participate in the General Conference International Field School of Evangelism. The program included classes in the day and practical experience in evening evangelistic meetings held across the New York metropolitan area.

Leonid Rutkovsky, a pastor from the ESD, gave presentations at the Ukrainian and Russian churches in New York. When he wasn’t in class or meetings, Leonid and Victor Kozakov, the Adventist Mission director for ESD, talked about how they could do something similar in their division.

“We decided that if people were preaching in New York, and having good results, then why not in our territory?” Leonid said. “If it can happen in New York, then it can happen in Moscow or Kiev.

“The field school gave us clear direction for reaching the big cities. Now we were focused, we had a purpose in mind and a goal to reach.”

When Anna met Leonid, she was excited to hear about the developing plans. “We have a goal to knock on every door in Kiev,” he told her. “There are seven hundred thousand doors in Kiev, and we want every one. We will have special maps showing every street, every block, and every house.”

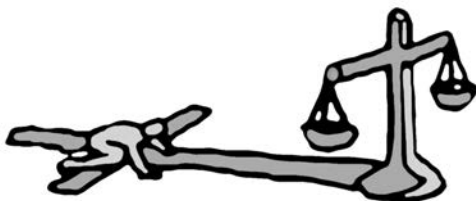
Anna was delighted. “I could see that God was leading, and I knew I needed to go to Kiev. He has His wonderful plan—we just need to follow it.”

As the Mission to the Cities director in Kiev, Leonid provides training in preaching for church members and oversees the work of Bible and literature workers and medical missionaries, who provide simple remedies to the community—including 16 classes on such topics as smoking cessation, cooking and weight loss, alcohol recovery, and mother and child health.

*To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.*



# Justification *by* Faith



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## 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 great truth that, more than any other truth, brought about the Protestant Reformation. And, despite all the claims to the contrary, Rome has no more changed regarding this belief now than it did in 1520, when Pope Leo issued a papal bull condemning Luther and his teachings. Luther burned a copy of the bull because if there were one teaching that could never be compromised, justification by faith was and is it.

The phrase itself 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. By accepting the substitute, the criminal now stands before the judge, not only cleared of his guilt but also 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.

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

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

## The Deeds of the Law

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

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Paul is using the term *law* in its broad sense, as the Jew in his day understood it. By the term *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, when 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.

Whichever 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 us than the symptoms of a disease can 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?**

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## The Righteousness of God

**“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?**

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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.**

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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.

## By His Grace

**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?

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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 *dikaionoma*, “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 unaccepted; the next moment, following justification, the person is inside, accepted, and righteous.

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?**

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## The Righteousness of Christ

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 as “mercy seat.” As used in Romans 3:25 to describe 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 meaning “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 Christ has paid the penalty for all people’s sins by His death. Anyone, therefore, who has “faith in His blood” can have his or her sins remitted, for Christ has already died for him or her (*1 Cor. 15:3*).

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

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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, likely, expected God to destroy the world after it sinned; instead, God 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?**

## Without the Deeds of the Law

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

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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, that person could not be justified if he or she failed to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

Romans 3:28 is Paul’s conclusion to his claim that the law of faith excludes boasting. If a man is justified by his own actions, he can 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 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 up 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 Thought:** 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*.

“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.

“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.

“When the Apostle says that we are justified ‘without the deeds of the law,’ he does not speak of the works of faith and grace; for he who does such works, does not believe that he is justified by doing these works. (*While doing such works of faith*), the believer seeks to be justified (*by faith*). What the Apostle means by ‘deeds of the law’ are works in which the self-righteous trust as if, by doing them, they were justified and so were righteous on account of their works. In other words, while doing good, they do not seek after righteousness, but they merely wish to boast that they have already obtained righteousness through their works.”—Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 80.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ 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.
- ❷ Read Luther’s quote above. Why would such a truth like this have spurred him on as it did? Why is what he said such a crucial point to understand even for us today?
- ❸ “Seventh-day Adventists see themselves as heirs of and builders upon the Reformation insights into biblical teaching on justification by grace through faith alone, and restorers and exponents of the fullness, clarity, and balance of the apostolic gospel.”—Ivan T. Blazen, “Salvation,” *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2000), p. 307. What reasons do we have to believe about ourselves based on what is written here?

## One Year in Mission: Part 3

“Here we have done even more than we could in New York,” Leonid said.

One hundred fifty missionaries came to Kiev—all were specially chosen by their unions or conferences. In addition, a youth team was formed, with 18 members from across the Euro-Asia Division. During the nearly six-month training program, the missionaries worked alongside Bible workers and medical missionaries and helped in the health stores. Additionally, 400 pastors came during two-week rotations to prepare for similar programs to be held in other cities throughout the division.

Anna, who led the youth group, was involved in several facets of the program. “We went prayer walking and walked close to the doors of the houses where we would be returning. At each house we prayed, ‘Please God, give us this house. Give us these people. Prepare them for us.’”

The next day team members went two by two, with one speaking while the other prayed. “First, we talk with the person about events happening in the world,” Anna describes. “Then we ask if they have ever read the Bible and if they think there is a connection between spiritual life and health. We try to continue the conversation and become acquainted with them.”

“What works in this method,” adds Leonid, “is not our faces or our questions. It’s that God prepares a special person for us, to hear what we have to share. This is very important.”

After just two weeks of going door-to-door, the team rejoiced that 26 new people came to church. Additionally, the health program participants were delighted to learn how to live longer and better and were enjoying being with the missionaries. “You have such a wonderful team,” they told Leonid and Anna. “We want to be with you. We like what you are doing.”

Anna is especially pleased with the effect the project is having on the youth. “I’m so happy when I hear them say, ‘You know, we feel like we’re in heaven. We feel like we’re really living here.’ At home, they have other worries, but here they feel the love of Jesus. When we work with Jesus and for Him, it’s real life.”

“Our youth program is part of the larger Mission to the Cities project,” Leonid said. “Here we’re all involved in one project—one mind, one spirit, and it’s really great!”

“This project is the result of a lot of prayers,” adds Anna. “Our entire world church has been thinking about how to reach people in the cities. If we’re all together, we can do wonderful things—and Jesus will come!”

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*ANNA GAVEL0, 23, represented the Euro-Asia Division (ESD) in the pilot program of One Year in Mission (OYIM). She, along with 13 other young adults, worked in New York City as part of the church’s Mission to the Cities outreach.*



# The Faith of Abraham



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 15:6; 2 Samuel 11; 12; Rom. 3:20, 31; 4:1–17; Gal. 3:21–23; 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 and to the heart of what began the Reformation. Indeed, 500 years ago this week it all began with Luther, and faithful Protestants have never looked back.

By using Abraham—the paragon of holiness and virtue—as an example of a person who needed to be saved by grace without the deeds of the law, Paul was clear. If Abraham’s works and law-keeping didn’t justify him before God, what hope do we 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 (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 quotes Genesis 15:6: “Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (*NIV*). Here’s justification by faith in the first book of the Bible.

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 4.

## The Law

**Read** Romans 3:31. What’s Paul’s point here? Why is this point important to us as Adventists?

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In this passage Paul states emphatically that faith does not make void God’s law. But 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?

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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 about how we in the church should treat those who have fallen?**

## Debt or Grace?

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 expand here on the theme of justification by faith?

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“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 is 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?**

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## The Promise

It was 500 years ago this day that Martin Luther hung his Ninety-Five Theses on the door of the Wittenberg church. How fascinating that the subject for today also gets right to the heart of salvation by faith.

In Romans 4:13, “promise” and “law” are contrasted. Paul is seeking to establish an Old Testament background 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 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.*

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As we said in the beginning, it’s important to remember to whom Paul is writing. These Jewish believers were immersed in Old Testament law, and many had come 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 argues 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 is referring here 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 says, 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 through the very thing that leads to condemnation. 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—the truth that ultimately led to the Protestant Reformation.

## Law and Faith

As we saw yesterday, Paul showed that God's dealings with Abraham proved that salvation comes 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?**

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

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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 can give life, not even God's, 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 people 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?**

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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?”—*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, then the definition of sin must be changed too. Or if God's law was done away with, then 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, it 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 to understand why God's law is still in effect? What has been your own experience with the consequences of violating God's law?**

**Further Thought:** 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*.

“To him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt (4:4). The Apostle here explains the quoted passage (*Gen. 15:4–6*) to conclude and prove from it that justification is by faith and not by works. This he does first of all by explaining the meaning of the words ‘it was *counted unto him* for righteousness.’ These words explain that God receives (*sinner*s) by grace and not because of their works.” —Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 82.

“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, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Sept. 3, 1889.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Why is it so important to understand salvation by faith alone without the deeds of law? What kind of errors can that knowledge protect us from? What dangers await those who lose sight of this crucial biblical teaching?
- ❷ What other reasons can you give for the continued validity of God’s law, even though we understand that the law and obedience to it are not what save us?
- ❸ The basic issue at the core of the Reformation is *how are we saved*? What are ways in which we can openly and forthrightly talk about the difference between Protestants and Catholics on this important topic, while not making personal attacks on anyone?
- ❹ As justified sinners, we have been made the recipients of grace and undeserved favor from God, against whom we have sinned. How should this fact impact how we deal with others? How full of grace and favor are we toward those who have wronged us and don’t really deserve our grace and favor?

## From Mafia Men to God's Messengers: Part 1

Although his grandfather was an Imam, and many relatives were Muslims, Igor had a secular upbringing. Excelling in sports, he soon became a leader, respected—and feared—by the other boys on the street.

That leadership, respect, and fear followed Igor into adulthood, where he became highly involved in the mafia. Big guns, big money, and big deals became an integral part of his life. But in spite of the thrills and excitement his fast life was delivering, Igor felt that something was missing. There was a hole that he just couldn't seem to fill, so he went searching.

First, out of curiosity, he visited the Hare Krishna people. Then he went to the Russian Orthodox Church and then to the mosque, but still Igor didn't find the elusive "something."

One day, a friend told Igor that he knew a man who owned a Bible. Intrigued, Igor wanted to know more, so the friend put the two in touch. "Do you know," the Bible owner asked Igor, "that in the Bible you can read about unclean foods—and how you aren't allowed to eat pork?" This was new to Igor; he thought only the Quran taught such things.

Over the next few months, Igor called this believer, who always patiently explained things from the Bible, numerous times. Finally, the believer invited Igor to attend church with him.

"I'll never visit your church," Igor rudely responded. But the Bible believer didn't lose heart and continued keeping in contact with this tough mafia man. Six months later, he again invited Igor to visit his church, and this time Igor accepted.

On Sabbath, Igor got into his car (after following his usual routine of checking for any hidden explosive devices) and drove to the church.

The church group met in a small, rented facility that didn't look like much; nevertheless, Igor felt drawn to the place. Some church members eyed the mafia man with suspicion, but Igor continued attending. As he learned more from the Bible, Igor compared it with the Quran.

"I was fairly well acquainted with history," Igor recalled, "and I could compare the teachings of the two books. Eventually, it was the truth of the Bible that won me over."

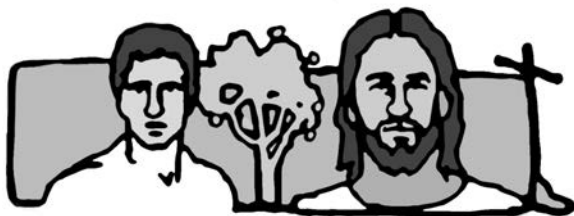
Before his baptism, Igor studied the Bible with the Seventh-day Adventist pastor, peppering him with questions during each meeting. Then a prominent evangelist came to Kazan, and at the end of those meetings, Igor was baptized—at the age of 35.

"When I was baptized, I understood that I could no longer take part in things that happened on the streets. But even though I didn't do those bad things anymore, I was still a hooligan," Igor admits.

*To be continued in next week's Inside Story.*



# Adam *and* Jesus



## 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 steps back to look at the big picture—at what caused sin, and suffering and death, and how the solution is found in Christ and what He has 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. By faith in Jesus, the record of their sins and the punishment due for 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 showing 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, November 11.*

## Justified by Faith

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

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“Being justified” is literally “having been justified.” The Greek verb represents the action as being 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 as “glory” in Romans 5:3 is the one translated as “rejoice” in Romans 5:2. If it also is translated “rejoice” in Romans 5:3 (as in some versions), the connection between Romans 5:2 and Romans 5:3 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 Romans 5:3–5.

1. *Patience.* The Greek word thus translated as *hupomone* 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 thus translated, *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?**

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## While Yet Sinners

**Read** Romans 5:6–8. What does this passage tell us about the character of God, and why is it so full of hope for us?

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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?

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On the eve of their departure from Egypt, the blood on the doorposts of the Israelites in Egypt protected the firstborn from the wrath that befell Egypt’s firstborn. In the same way, 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 people 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.*

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Some commentators have seen in Romans 5:10 a reference to the life that Christ lived on earth, during which He wrought a perfect character that He now offers to credit to us. Although 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. Romans 5:11 continues with the reasons that we have to rejoice in the Lord, and that’s because of what Jesus has accomplished for us.

## Death Through Sin

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?

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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 sins? People have tried to get the answer to that question from this text, but 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 that is the only way that we will realize our need of a Savior. Here Paul 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 hope in something greater than ourselves or greater than anything this world offers?**

## From Adam to Moses

**Read** Romans 5:13, 14. What is Paul teaching us here about the law?

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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 before then? Of course they were.

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*.

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The instruction given at Sinai included the moral law, although 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 to 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.

**How do the laws in your own country reveal to you a human conception of right and wrong? If human laws can do that, then what about God’s eternal law?**

## Jesus, 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?**

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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 behalf of humans. 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?

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

It is fascinating, too, that the word *gift* occurs five times in Romans 5:15–17. 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 it, and in this case, we claim this gift by faith.

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

**Further Thought:** 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.”—Page 360.

“*Who is the figure of him that was to come* (5:14). How is Adam a figure of Christ? As Adam became a cause of death to his descendants, though they did not eat of the forbidden tree, so Christ has become a Dispenser of righteousness to those who are of Him, though they have not earned any righteousness; for through the Cross He has secured (*righteousness*) for all men. The figure of Adam’s transgression is in us, for we die just as though we had sinned as he did. The figure of Christ is in us, for we live just as though we had fulfilled all righteousness as He did.”—Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, pp. 96, 97.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How do we understand this Ellen G. White quote: “There is need of a much closer study of the word of God; especially should Daniel and the Revelation have attention as never before in the history of our work. We may have less to say in some lines, in regard to the Roman power and the papacy; but we should call attention to what the prophets and apostles have written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God.”—*Evangelism*, p. 577.
- ❷ 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?
- ❸ Just as Adam’s fall imposed a fallen nature on 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 some back from reaching out and eagerly claiming it? How can we help those who are seeking to better understand that which Christ offers and that which He has done for them?

## From Mafia Men to God's Messengers: Part 2

Every week, Igor brought his gun to church, keeping it securely on his lap. One Sabbath, a church member told him that he shouldn't bring his gun. "Let your hold be on God, not guns," he said.

The following week, Igor left his gun at home, but he found it difficult to come to terms with being unarmed. Returning home, he saw a dark silhouette following him. Deciding not to be afraid, Igor turned toward the silhouette—only to find a man carrying a sack of potatoes!

As his faith grew, Igor told others about the truth he had found. Igor's wife and sister started visiting the Seventh-day Adventist church, and after a year they were baptized. His niece and nephew also came to church—and many more with whom he shared his faith.

One day, Igor was sharing with a friend things he had learned from the Bible, but the friend wasn't interested. However, a man standing nearby was listening and wanted to learn more.

Vasily, who had been eavesdropping on Igor's conversation, had been living a very hard life. He was involved with the mafia, and crime had taken its toll. Scars and disfigurement marked where enemies had used broken glass to cut deep gashes all over his head, face, eyes, and an ear. Other scars showed where bullets had grazed his scalp without inflicting fatal wounds.

Vasily was involved with big money. He worked in a company that created contracts worth millions of Russian rubles. Trained as a bodyguard, Vasily spoke with company leadership in code. He had expensive equipment that allowed him to eavesdrop into closed rooms. People who wanted to ruin this company recognized that Vasily was a key player in winning the big contracts, and because he was an obstacle, they tried to kill him—twice.

The first time was when he went to the outdoor market with his daughter. Although viciously attacked, he survived.

During the second attempt, Vasily was shot multiple times. Running to his apartment, he collapsed on the floor. Fearing he was about to die, he begged his mother to forgive him, but she assured him that he was going to live. With renewed hope, Vasily began fighting for his life. He was quickly taken to the hospital where he received treatment and was eventually released.

One day, Vasily met a Baptist man who asked him, "Do you want to kill the guys who did this to you?"

"Of course!" Vasily replied.

"Don't do it," the man said. "Forgive them. If you kill them, you can never live peacefully."

*To be continued in next week's Inside Story.*







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# Overcoming Sin




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## 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*).

If works can't save us, why bother with them at all? Why not just keep on sinning?

Chapter 6 is Paul's 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. The word *sanctification* appears only twice in Romans. It appears in Romans 6:19, 22 as the Greek word *hagiasmos*, which means “sanctification.” In English, it appears in these two texts as the word *holiness*.

Does this mean that Paul has nothing to say about what commonly is understood by sanctification? Not at all.

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, November 18.

## Where Sin Abounded

In Romans 5:20, Paul makes a powerful statement: “But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” His point is 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 we’re tempted to feel that our sins are too great to be forgiven! In Romans 5:21, Paul shows that although 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 Romans 6:2–11, does he respond to that kind of thinking?

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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. 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.*

“From this we clearly see what the words of the Apostle mean. All such statements as: 1. ‘We are dead to sin,’ 2. ‘We live unto God,’ etc., signify that we do not yield to our sinful passions and sin, even though sin continues in us. Nevertheless, sin remains in us until the end of our life, as we read Galatians 5:17: ‘The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other.’ Therefore all apostles and saints confess that sin and the sinful passions remain in us till the body is turned into ashes, and a new (*glorified*) body is raised up which is free from passion and sin.”—Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 100.

## When Sin Reigns

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

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The word *reign* shows that “sin” is here represented as a king. The Greek word here translated as “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 as “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 Romans 6:12 is important. It goes back to that which has been said before, specifically to that which has been said in Romans 6:10, 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, he or she 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, and 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?**

## Not Under the Law but Under Grace

**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?

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Romans 6:14 is one of the key statements in the book of Romans. And it's one we often hear 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? 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 would suddenly say, "The moral law—the Ten Commandments, which define 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 Romans 6:14 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 by 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 that which Christ has done in you? What areas are you refusing to let go, and why must you let them go?**

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## Sin or Obedience?

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

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Paul comes back to the point again that the new life of faith does not grant liberty to sin. The life of faith makes victory over sin possible; 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 or 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 Romans 6:16?

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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,” assisted in the Romans becoming “servants of righteousness” (*Rom. 6:18*). 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 does this passage help us to understand what it means to be a follower of Christ and yet still be subject to falling?**

## Free From Sin

**Keeping** in mind what we have studied so far in Romans 6, read Romans 6:19–23. 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, what issues are at stake here?

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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 is capable of when left on its own. 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 lives and however much we must claim daily 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 Thought:** 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:

- 1 Although 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, of just how sinful we are, and of just how corrupt our hearts can be. Is there a contradiction here? Explain your answer.
- 2 In class, give a testimony as to what Christ has done in you, as to the changes you have experienced, and as to the new life you have in Him.
- 3 However important it is that we always remember that our salvation rests only in that which Christ has done for us, what dangers arise if we overemphasize that wonderful truth to the exclusion of the other part of the salvation: that which Jesus does in us to transform us into His image? Why do we need to understand and emphasize both these aspects of salvation?

## From Mafia Men to God's Messengers: Part 3

One day, while walking in the forest, Vasily saw one of the men who had tried to kill him. Glancing at his potential killer, Vasily quietly breathed, "OK, I will forgive him."

Six months later, Vasily learned that the man died of a drug overdose. The second person who tried to kill him became permanently disabled and the third was shot and killed.

As the new year drew near, Vasily geared up for the big parties that would take place—two weeks of drinking vodka and smoking.

But this year, it wasn't the same. Vasily no longer enjoyed the partying. At the end of two weeks, he had had enough. *Was I born for such a dirty life?* he asked himself. The answer was a decided, *No! I need a new life!*

Falling to his knees, he prayed that God would help him. Somehow he was able to obtain a Bible, and with the Bible in hand, he went to each of his friends, inviting them to come with him to the forest for three days. Two friends decided to join him.

"We went to the forest, where we were quiet for three days, just reading the Bible," Vasily said. He prayed, asking God to "give me one month to live this new life." And He did. Then Vasily asked God for a second month of clean living, and it was given to him. He asked his wife for forgiveness, and by God's grace, he is continuing to live a clean life.

When Vasily and Igor met, they realized that they had much in common. "In every place there are some people who like the truth," Vasily said.

Vasily and Igor are now close friends who work together spreading truth through a special newspaper that is delivered throughout the region of Kazan. The newspaper is filled with information about how to obtain better health and offers spiritual insights. It is one of the most popular newspapers in Russia. The two former mafia men also work together finding sponsors so that thousands of Seventh-day Adventist books can be ordered and distributed around Kazan. "Our stories seem to be terrible," Vasily said. "But actually it is our world. Igor and I just want to help people find a better way."

The two former mafia men are delighted to have a new church and center of influence in the center of Kazan, made possible in part through your generous Thirteenth Sabbath Offering in 2014. Thank you for supporting this important offering.

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# Who Is *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 [Romans 7:14–25] 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. [Romans 7:7–11]; . . .). [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 his 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, November 25.

## Dead 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?

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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 (*Rom. 7:3*).

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

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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 interpret Romans 7:4, 5 as teaching that the fourth commandment has been abolished or superseded or replaced with Sunday is to give them a meaning that the words were never intended to have.

## Sin and the Law

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?

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God revealed Himself to the Jews, telling them in detail what was right and 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." Sin is the violation of the revealed will of God, and 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?**

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## The Law Is Holy

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

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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—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 come to us by faith, can.

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

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In Romans 7:13, 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]” (*Rom. 7:8*). The law is good, for it is God's standard of conduct, but as a sinner Paul stands condemned before it.

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

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*Carnal* means “fleshly.” 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 their need of the Messiah. He had pointed out already 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 here?**

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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 already had made did he repeat for emphasis?  
*Rom. 7:18–20.*

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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 loath 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?**

## Saved From Death

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

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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 Rom. 7:10, 11, 13*). Hence, his body—as it functioned 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 in which we find ourselves? *Rom. 7:24, 25*.

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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 has 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 *Romans 7:24, 25* 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—although 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 to surrender to Christ for you. You alone can make that choice. There’s no other way to attain for yourself the victories that are promised us in Jesus.



**Further Thought:** “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 sin-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 Question:

① “In 7:25 the Apostle writes: ‘With the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.’ This is the clearest passage of all, and from it we learn that one and the same (*believing*) person serves at the same time the Law of God and the Law of sin. *He is at the same time justified and yet a sinner (simul iustus est et peccat)*; for he does not say: ‘My mind serves the Law of God’; nor does he say: ‘My flesh serves the Law of sin’; but he says: ‘I myself.’ That is, the whole man, one and the same person, is in this twofold servitude. For this reason he thanks God that he serves the Law of God and he pleads for mercy for serving the Law of sin. But no one can say of a carnal (*unconverted*) person that he serves the Law of God. The Apostle means to say: You see, it is just so as I said before: The saints (*believers*) are at the same time sinners while they are righteous. They are righteous, because they believe in Christ, whose righteousness covers them and is imputed to them. But they are sinners, inasmuch as they do not fulfill the Law, and still have sinful lusts. They are like sick people who are being treated by a physician. They are really sick, but hope and are beginning to get, or be made, well. They are about to regain their health. Such patients would suffer the greatest harm by arrogantly claiming to be well, for they would suffer a relapse that is worse (*than their first illness*).”—Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, pp. 114, 115. Can we agree with what Luther wrote here or not? In class, give reasons for your answers.

## “Find the Book”

Gahida\* was born into a Muslim family, in a country of the former USSR. For decades, she followed the religion of her family. One day as she was praying, Gahida saw an angel who told her to “Find the Book . . . Find the Book.” Gahida wondered what “the Book” was.

Five years later, she received the answer. A Seventh-day Adventist evangelist came to her city, and Gahida decided to attend the meetings. There she saw a Bible for the first time and was able to buy one.

“When I began reading the Bible, I realized that this was ‘the Book’ that the angel told me to find,” recalls Gahida. She soon found many parallels between her Bible and the Quran.

Although she enjoyed the meetings, Gahida didn’t immediately become an Adventist. She was afraid that God would punish her. The evangelist, however, was praying for her, and Gahida decided to visit the church “just once.”

“The sermon was about the Samaritan woman in John 4. I knew it was me,” recalls Gahida. “I was like that Samaritan woman, searching for something better. When I fell in love with Jesus, I understood that He is the best—I don’t need anything but Christ!”

Gahida was baptized and, after a while, wanted to find a way to share her new faith with those who were still in her former religious community. She decided to write a book about her own spiritual journey and compare some elements of her previous faith with Bible teachings. She prayed much about publishing the book and received enough donations to print 1,500 copies.

Unafraid, she hand delivered her book to hundreds of religious leaders of her previous faith. “You need to think about what you believe in, and I think you’ll find this book helpful,” she said.

Gahida also has translated several books by Ellen G. White into her native language, but one book, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, almost wasn’t published.

“When the central press received my translation files, it was a time of great political unrest. Someone tried to kill the country’s president, and immediately all publishing houses were closed. Government agents checked every publishing house, looking for controversial material. When the agents came to the central press, the chief editor wasn’t able to switch on one of the computers. It was the only computer that had the translated files for *Patriarchs and Prophets*. After the government agents left, the computer easily turned on and they were able to print the book.

“It would have been very expensive to publish,” Gahida recalled, “but we didn’t have to pay anything. The chief editor told us, ‘This is a great work that you’re doing—we can’t take any money from you.’”

Gahida is thankful for the special ministry that God has given her. “Many are very grateful to receive these materials,” she said, “and through her writings, Ellen White has become my best friend.”

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\*Not her real name.

# No Condemnation



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## 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*).

**R**omans 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 that your flesh won't allow.

Paul continues, explaining that this freedom was purchased at infinite cost. Christ the Son of God took on humanity. It was 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” (*Rom. 8:3*). As a result, the righteous requirements of the law can be fulfilled in us (*Rom. 8:4*). In other words, Christ made victory over sin—as well as meeting the positive requirements of the law—possible for those who believe, not as a means of salvation but as the result of it. Obedience to law had not been, nor ever can be, a means of salvation. This was Paul's message and Luther's message, and it must be ours as well.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 2.

## In Jesus Christ

**“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?**

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“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 (*Rom. 7:11, 13, 24*). He or she serves the “law of sin” (*Rom. 7:23, 25*). This person is in a terrible state of wretchedness (*Rom. 7:24*).

But then the person surrenders to Jesus, and 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*.

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“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?

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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 simply means 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 Romans 8:4 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?**

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## The Flesh or the 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 the way in which you are living your life?**

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“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 their minds on fulfilling natural desires; the other sets their minds 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.**

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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 if you are 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 that 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?**

## Christ in You

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 natures. One leads to eternal life, the other to eternal death. There is no middle ground. Or as Jesus Himself 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 be plainer, or more black and white, than that.

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

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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 (*Rom. 8:9, 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” (*Rom. 6:6*). 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 in whom the Spirit dwells 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?**

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## The Spirit of Adoption

**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?

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The new relationship is described as freedom from fear. Slaves are in bondage. They live in a state of constant fear of their master. They stand to gain nothing from their long years of service.

Not so with those who accept Jesus Christ. First, they render voluntary service. Second, they serve without fear, for “perfect love casteth out fear” (*1 John 4:18*). Third, adopted as children, they become heirs 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*.

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The inward witness of the Spirit confirms our acceptance. While it is not safe to go by feeling merely, those who have followed the light of the Word to the best of their understanding 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 Thought:** “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, every one may walk in the path of obedience to God’s commands. . . .

“Our ransom has been paid by our Saviour. 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 to 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?
- 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 the ways in which we live and the choices we make, even in the “small” things?

## From Cigarettes to Castles: Part 1

I grew up in a secular Ukrainian home. My father said that the world would end in the year 2000, and I was certain there was no hope for the future.

Since my parents seemed to always be giving more attention to my sisters, I felt free to do whatever I wanted to do. From a young age, I was constantly smoking, drinking, and trying drugs. Life for my parents became very hard, as I started stealing within the family and outside. My parents became deeply concerned.

When I was away for military service, a Seventh-day Adventist evangelistic series came to our city, and my father was baptized. After returning home, I started living an even more intensely wild life. My mother became so ill with rheumatoid arthritis that she became an invalid, and my parents' lives became a nightmare because of me.

My father asked the church to fast and pray. I could even hear my mother, who wasn't a church member, praying for me in another room. Since the church didn't have a place of its own, members often gathered at my house. During the service, I would leave.

But slowly, my interest was awakened. A group of young people—literature evangelists (LEs)—came to our city to distribute Adventist books, and my father invited me to meet them. There were hardly any young people in my father's church, and I thought that only old or sickly people who didn't have any purpose attended the church.

Nevertheless, I felt some sort of emptiness within my heart, so I decided to meet these young people. I imagined that they would be strange, sickly, or lacking something. But when I met them, I saw nice, strong, healthy-looking young people who were smiling. I saw happiness in their eyes. I heard cleanliness of speech. Suddenly I realized, *It isn't them who aren't fitting in—it's me.*

I clearly could see two groups of young people in my mind: (1) my old friends, who were always cursing, drinking, and smoking; and (2) this group, that was pure and honest, that didn't curse or swear, and that didn't drink. I could say only positive things about them.

The LEs invited me to distribute literature with them, even though I had cigarettes in my pocket! They teamed me up with a responsible man, and when we went door to door, I sometimes walked away to smoke and wouldn't open my mouth because I didn't want anyone to smell the cigarettes.

I started coming to church. Sometimes my new friends invited me to youth meetings in other cities, and as my vision broadened, the warped picture I had in my mind was completely destroyed.

*To be continued in next week's Inside Story.*

# Children of the Promise



## 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 off no one 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 that everyone have salvation.

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

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 9.

## 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,” Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 290. “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 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?

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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 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 still 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 roles in our era 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 that 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 to be saved.

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

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Again Paul is 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 roles, and, although they can refuse to play those roles, 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.

**As if no one else even existed, you yourself 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! All things considered, why 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?**

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## 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?

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By 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 171 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 will we discover in the future that will reveal just how steeped in ignorance we are today?

**Certainly 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 to stay faithful amid trials that seem so unjustified and so unfair?**

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## *Ammi*: “My People”

In Romans 9:25 Paul quotes Hosea 2:23, and in Romans 9:26 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 that 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 Revelation 14:6, “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” (*NKJV*). Today, as in Paul’s day, and as in the days of ancient Israel, the good news of salvation is to be spread throughout 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 this passage? What hope is being offered there to his readers?

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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 others? Probably more times than you can count, right? What lessons can you learn from these failures about where your ultimate trust must lie?**

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## 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 that was 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?**

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In words that cannot be misunderstood, Paul explains to his kinsmen why they are missing out on something that 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, they turned their backs on Him when He came.

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? 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 to Jesus again?**



**Further Thought:** 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 unholy 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 happen 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. What’s wrong with that picture? How does that view contrast with our understanding of these same issues?
- 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.

## From Cigarettes to Castles: Part 2

One day at church an invitation for baptism was given. Whoever wished to be baptized was given materials, including a review of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's fundamental beliefs.

This whole spiritual experience happened very rapidly for me—in less than two months. With cigarette in hand, I began filling out the baptismal request form. As I continued reading, I read about abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs. I didn't know how I was going to quit.

In February 1997, I was baptized. While I stopped drinking right away, I still struggled with tobacco. I tried everything to quit smoking, but nothing worked. Finally, I prayed, "Lord, please take it away from me." And He did.

My aunt, who lives in another village, invited me to help her around the house for a week. There was only one store that sold cigarettes, and it wasn't close. When I arrived, I told my aunt that I was now a Christian and was no longer the person I was used to be. But she didn't know I still struggled with smoking. Every day she gave me work to do. Four days passed without cigarettes. The fifth day, I came back home and still hadn't smoked a cigarette. Now I see that being at my aunt's was like a rehab center for me. I'm amazed at God's wisdom and how He found a way for me to quit smoking.

When I was planning to be baptized, my sisters told me that I should ask my parents for forgiveness. Both of my parents were crying with happiness. That's when I realized that you can have all sorts of victories with God.

One thing that amazed me was that as we started to build a church, people brought offerings to the church such as gold and jewelry, and, knowing my past, they commissioned me to sell it. I was amazed and touched with that kind of trust.

Later I became a literature evangelist (LE) and youth leader. It was during a gathering of LEs that I met my future wife, Bogdona!

We now have three lovely daughters, and I'm an elder in our church. I'm just amazed at how God was able to turn me around and give me this life that I never even dreamed of. In a way, my dad was right—the end did come in 1999; the end of my former life.

There is one thing I regret—the years of my youth that were spent in vain. They were completely empty years—no purpose, no meaning, no satisfaction, and no direction. I understand now that it's better to live with God. You can have all kinds of victories in your life when you're with God, when you pray sincerely to Him.

*To be continued in next week's Inside Story.*

# The Elect



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## 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*).

**T**his 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 clearly 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. As stated earlier, it's important to understand here that when Paul talks about election and calling, the issue isn't one of salvation; the issue is 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, December 16.*

## Christ and 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”?

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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. Every moment of our lives, we must 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 people 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, it doesn’t mean that the Ten Commandments were done away with. The moral law points out our sins, our faults, 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 *teloes*, which also can be translated as “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 commandment (what these folks 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 of 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.**

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## The Election of Grace

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

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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’s population that rejected Jesus? What’s wrong with that idea?

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In Romans 11:8–10, 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, as it has been all along, deals with the role that these people 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?**

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## The Natural Branch

**Read** Romans 11:11–15. What great hope does Paul present in this passage?

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In this passage, we find two parallel expressions: (1) “their [the Israelites’] fulness” (*Romans 11:12*) and (2) “the receiving of them [the Israelites]” (*Romans 11:15*). 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?

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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 uses to prove that “God hath not cast away his people” (*Rom. 11:2*). 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. Although we have to be careful of thinking that every time we fall we are out of salvation, or that we aren’t saved unless we are perfect, 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” (*Rom. 11:22*) 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 was 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.

## All Israel Shall Be Saved

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

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Christians have been discussing and debating Romans 11:25–27 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 fullness 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” (*Rom. 11:26*). This must not be construed to mean that 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” (*Rom. 11:14*). Some accepted the Messiah, and some rejected Him, as it is with all people groups.

Commenting on Romans 11, Ellen G. 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.”—*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.”—*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 to better understand your Christian faith?**

## The Salvation of Sinners

Paul's love for his own people is clearly apparent in Romans 11:25–27. 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 express here the amazing and mysterious power of God's grace?

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Through Romans 11:28–36, although 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.

**Carefully** and prayerfully read Romans 11:31. 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?

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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 cannot be Christians if we do not (*see Matt. 18:23–35*).

**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 to do. Isn't that what Jesus has done for us?**

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**Further Thought:** 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.”—Page 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.”—Page 381.

## Discussion Questions:

- ① As God’s law, and especially the Sabbath, comes into sharp focus in the last days, 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? After all, when it comes to Sabbath keeping, Adventists, in contrast to the Jews, are “the new kids on the block.” Discuss.
- ② Of all churches, why should 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?
- ③ What can we learn from the mistakes of many in ancient Israel? How can we avoid doing the same things today?

## From Cigarettes to Castles: Part 3

Whenever I have difficulties in life, God reminds me of the first steps of faith—to pray and rely on Him.

I'm now a small-business owner. I sell toys, and I have some bounce castles that are set up in various parks around the city of Vinnytsia. Every client who comes to our business receives a free Seventh-day Adventist magazine filled with good health and spiritual information.

The most popular days for people to go to the park are Saturday and Sunday. The central city park belongs to the city administration, so when my business does well, they receive a good percentage. But the challenge is that I don't work on Saturdays. In the beginning, we had some challenges with the city over that. They tried to force me to be there, but I was firm—either I don't work on Saturday, or I don't work at all. They could see that I was firm, and they could see that we worked properly. They appreciate our work and know that we are people of principle.

Sometimes I visit the cemetery where my mom is buried. As I walk past the graves, I see the names of my friends buried there. I'm especially sad when I see three names, because when I became a Christian, I talked with those guys. I invited them to come to church and to follow the path that I had taken, but now their names are at the cemetery.

The last time I was home, my wife was given the opportunity to see how horrendous my former life was. As we were walking, we saw some of my old friends who are still alive sitting on a bench. When one of my old friends saw me, he ran to me, fell on his knees, and started crying, saying, "I'm tired of the life I'm living!"

I told him that not long ago, on that very spot, I had told our friend, who was now in the grave, to go to church. And now I was telling him, "Go to church!" but he wouldn't listen to me either.

He said, "I'm going to have the same fate as the guy in the grave."

I pled with him, "It's much easier to go to church than to the cemetery. Look at me now—here are my wife and children."

He looked at them. "You can start a new life," I assured him. But he just turned back to his friends, back to drinking. He didn't have a family. He didn't have anything. He just spent every day looking for another bottle of booze.

As we walked away, my wife whispered, "Now I see what you used to be in the past."

"Yes," I whispered back, "and I was the worst one of them all."

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M. LEOVARTOVICH *lives with his family in Vinnytsia, Ukraine, where he runs a children's bounce castle and toy business.*

# Overcoming Evil With Good



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

**Memory Text:** “Be not conformed to this world: but be ye tranformed 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 is 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, shows the pattern we are to follow. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in [not Moses, not Daniel, not David, not Solomon, not Enoch, not Deborah, not Elijah] Christ Jesus” (*Phil. 2:5*).

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

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 23.

## Your Reasonable Service

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?

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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. Although none of us are without blemish, the point is that we are to seek to live as spotlessly and as faithfully as we can.

***“Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2). In this way the Apostle describes (Christian) progress; for he addresses those who already are Christians. The Christian life does not mean to stand still, but to move from that which is good to that which is better.”—Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, pp. 167, 168. What does it mean to move from good to better in the Christian life?***

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## To Think Soberly

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 that 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?**

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As in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13, Paul exalts love after dealing with the gifts of the Spirit. 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” (Rom. 12:10, *NASB*), and a willingness not to “be wise in your own opinion” (Rom. 12:16, *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 also 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?**

## The Christian and the State

**Read** Romans 13:1–7. What basic principles can we take from this passage about the ways in which we are to relate to the civil power of government?

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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 that 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 all 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 in whichever country 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.

## Love One Another

**“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?**

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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 examples that illustrate the principle of love in law-keeping? Why these in particular? *Rom. 13:9, 10.*

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Interestingly, the factor of love was not a newly introduced principle. By quoting Leviticus 19:18, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” Paul shows that the principle was an integral part of the Old Testament system. Again Paul appeals 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 is dealing with how we relate to one another. He is dealing with personal relationships, which is why he specifies the commandments that center 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, and 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 with 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?**

## Now Is Our Salvation

**“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. Although, 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?**

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How fascinating that Paul was talking here 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 deaths. Whether next week or in 40 years we close our eyes in death, and whether we sleep only four 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.

Although 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 in 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? 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 Thought:** “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 study. What were the answers that people gave, and how did they justify them?
- ② The question of how we are to be good citizens and good Christians can be very complicated at times. 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 toward only with the utmost seriousness and prayerful consideration? (After all, not everyone thrown into the lions’ den emerges 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?
- ④ As we near the end of this quarter, talk about, in class, what you have learned from the book of Romans that helps us to understand why the Reformation was so important. What has Romans taught us about what we believe, and why we believe it?

## Saved in the Sky: Part 1

**Editor's Note:** *Pastor Nikolai Zhukaljuk has served the Seventh-day Adventist Church for more than 40 years as a pastor, writer, publisher, and former president of the Ukrainian Union Conference. In the story below, he shares a pivotal moment from his time in the Soviet military.*

My time for mandatory service in the Soviet army was nearly finished. One of my responsibilities was to serve as a journalist for the military newspaper. My superiors were pleased with my work and wanted me to continue as senior editor. They offered me an apartment in Leningrad, which during that time was very difficult to obtain. There was just one condition—I would have to become a Communist. During Soviet times, a person couldn't work in such positions without being a Communist.

In a few days, I was invited to meet with the general. He told me, "You can continue with military service. We'll give you officer rank, and you can stay with us. You will have business trips, travel to different places, and work with the military district. You can stay in the army and work here."

So now I had two proposals—to become a chief editor or a military officer. This was a great temptation—I was thinking of what it would mean to become an officer and of all the things I would get. On the other hand, to have an apartment in Leningrad was a dream for me! I seriously considered accepting one of these offers, even though it would mean renouncing my faith in God and becoming a Communist.

At that time, I also served as a military skydiver and had participated in about 80 jumps. One day, as we prepared for another jump, the chief commander told me, "I'll go first, and you will be the last one to jump. We will have 15 soldiers in between." The parachutes of all the soldiers ahead of me would open automatically, but I would need to open mine manually. I thought this would be fine, *I'm brave, I'm very experienced, I've done this many times before.*

I jumped last. After a brief free fall, I pulled the rip cord. Nothing happened. Trying not to panic, I reached for the emergency cord and pulled. Again, no parachute appeared. There was nothing but blue sky above and the ground coming up fast below. I understood that this was the end. The feeling that overwhelmed me at that point is something only someone who has been in the sky can fully understand.

*To be continued in next week's Inside Story.*

# Christian Living



## 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*).

**W**e are now in the last part of our study of Romans, the book from which the Protestant Reformation was born—the book that more than any other should, indeed, show us why we are Protestants and why *we must remain that way*. As Protestants, and especially as Seventh-day Adventists, we rest on the principle of *sola scriptura*—the Bible alone as the standard of faith. And it is from the Bible that we have learned the same truth that caused our spiritual forefather, centuries ago, to break from Rome—the great truth of salvation by faith, a truth so powerfully expressed in Paul’s epistle to the Romans.

Perhaps the whole thing can be summarized by the pagan jailer’s question, “What must I do to be saved?” (*Acts 16:30*). In Romans, we got the answer to that question—and the answer was not what the church was giving at the time of Luther. Hence, the Reformation began, and here we are today.

In this, the last section, Paul touches on other topics, perhaps not as central to his main theme, yet important enough to be included in the letter. Thus, for us, they are sacred Scripture as well.

How did Paul end this letter, what did he write, and what truths are there for us, the heirs not just of Paul but, indeed, of our Protestant forefathers?

\* *Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 30.*

## Weak in Faith

In Romans 14:1–3, the question concerns the eating of meats that may have been sacrificed to idols. The Jerusalem Council (*Acts 15*) ruled that Gentile converts should refrain from eating such foods. 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?

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It's important, too, to realize that in Romans 14:3 Paul does not speak negatively of the one "weak in the faith" in Romans 14:1. 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?

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Although 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 his or her 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?

## Before the Judgment Seat

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

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We tend to judge others harshly at times, and often, for the same things that we do ourselves. 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*).

**What** is the significance of the statement from the Old Testament that Paul introduced here? *Rom. 14:11*.

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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 (*Rom. 14:12*). 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?

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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 in not seeking to be the conscience of others, no matter how good our intentions?**

## 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 life?

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In Romans 14:17–20, Paul is putting various aspects of Christianity into proper perspective. Although diet is important, Christians should not quarrel over some people's choices 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 in the same way, and we need to respect those differences.

**In** Romans 14:22, 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?

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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 that so? 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 you didn't force the person is beside the point. As Christians, we have responsibilities 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, follow your example in all areas? What does your answer say about you?**

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## Observance of Days

In this discussion about not judging others who might view some things differently from the way 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?**

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Which days is Paul speaking about? 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. Apparently some Christians, 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 people who were 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?**

## Final Words

**Read** Romans 15:1–3. What important Christian truth is found in this passage?

**In** what way does this passage 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,” *hupomone*, means “fortitude,” “steadfast endurance.” The word for “consolation” may be translated as “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.

**After** numerous personal greetings, how does 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.

We know that Paul was inspired by the Lord to write this letter in response to a specific situation at a specific time. What we don’t know are all the details regarding what the Lord had revealed to Paul about the future.

Yes, Paul did know about the “falling away” (*2 Thess. 2:3*), although how much he knew, the text doesn’t say. In short, we don’t know if Paul had any inkling of the role he and his writings, especially this letter, would have in final events. In one sense, it doesn’t matter. What matters is that in these texts Protestantism was born, and in them those who seek to stay faithful to Jesus have had and will have the scriptural foundation upon which to base their faith and commitment, even as the world wonders “after the beast” (*Rev. 13:3*).



**Further Thought:** 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.”—*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.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 163, 164.

## Discussion Question:

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

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

## Saved in the Sky: Part 2

I opened my heavy coat and tried using it to break my free fall. Then I began praying the most earnest prayer I have ever prayed, believing it was probably going to be my last:

“God, there’s nothing I can do to save myself, but I really want to see Your hand at this moment.”

I realized that the worst thing I had ever done was deciding to leave God. What would happen to me now? An apartment in Leningrad and all the military honors in the world didn’t matter anymore.

Looking below, I could see the open parachute of my commander. All of a sudden, some wind came and pushed me right into his parachute!

But you can’t stay on top of a parachute for long. As I slid off, my commander grabbed me with his strong hands and held on with an iron grip! We were falling fast, and he told me how to hold my feet so we could land as safely as possible. After landing, we were taken to the hospital with only minor injuries.

The next day, a story appeared in the newspaper about this extraordinary experience. Everyone recognized that things such as this don’t just happen. It was a miracle.

From then on, my prayers were different from what they had been before. Two weeks later, when I had my appointment with the general, my answer was ready.

As I walked into his office, he looked at me and smiled. He was quite sure that I would agree right away to his proposal.

“Sir,” I told him, “I have thought about your generous offer, and I have decided not to stay in the army.”

Shocked, he asked, “What will you do?”

“Well, sir, I will follow the call of the party. I’m going to go to new places and cultivate new territory.” At that time, the Communists wanted to develop land in Siberia and were encouraging people to settle there.

The general stared at me. “Well, soldier, I’ve seen many crazy people, but you are the craziest of them all!”

*After his time in the military, Pastor Zhukaljuk secretly worked as a pastor and organized the underground work of publishing religious books and materials for the Seventh-day Adventist believers in the Soviet Union. He and his wife, Yevgenia, were imprisoned for this work and later released. They have been married for 63 years.*

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As Christians, we need to recognize our sinful condition before we see a need for change. That change can come only through Christ working in us. One expression of His work in us is in the area of stewardship. The first quarter guide entitled *Stewardship: Motives of the Heart*, by John H. H. Mathews, aims to teach us what our responsibilities as stewards are and how we can, through God's grace, fulfill those responsibilities, not as a means of trying to earn salvation but instead as the fruit of already having it.

Though stewardship encompasses many different aspects of the Christian's life, we will define it now, broadly, as managing tangible and intangible possessions to the glory of God. Stewardship is the daily practical expression of what it means to follow Jesus; it is an expression of our love for God, a means of living out the truth that we have been given in Christ. We are stewards because God first loved us. It is our hope that this quarter will teach us about how to live as God would have us live—which includes freedom from the love of the world, in all its manifestations.

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## Lesson 1—The Influence of Materialism

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The God of This World** (1 John 2:16, 17)

MONDAY: **Filling the Barns** (Luke 12:15–21)

TUESDAY: **The Allure of Materialism** (Matt. 6:22–24)

WEDNESDAY: **Love of Self** (Rom. 12:3)

THURSDAY: **The Ultimate Futility of Materialism** (Deut. 7:6, John 15:5, Gal. 2:20)

**Memory Text**—Romans 12:2, NKJV

**Sabbath Gem:** God tells His people not to “be conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2). The world conveys the idea that the good life, the abundant life, can be found only in money. Money's greatest achievement is instant gratification, but in the end it cannot answer our deepest needs.

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## Lesson 2—I See, I Want, I Take

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Prosperity Gospel** (2 Cor. 8:7)

MONDAY: **Blurred Spiritual Eyesight** (2 Cor. 4:18)

TUESDAY: **The Steps of Covetousness** (Gen. 3:1–6)

WEDNESDAY: **Greed—Having Things Your Way** (Isa. 56:11)

THURSDAY: **Self-Control** (Gal. 5:22–25)

**Memory Text**—Matthew 13:22, NKJV

**Sabbath Gem:** The Word of God gives us guidance on how to avoid the spiritual trap of materialism.

**Lessons for the Visually Impaired** The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audio CD 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 for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; e-mail: info@christianrecord.org; Web site: www.christianrecord.org.