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Collegiate Quarterly

2010
July-September



redemption
in romans

A Devotional Bible-Study Guide for Young Adults

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Redemption in Romans

July–September 2010

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There are times when life is more than the update on Facebook, the tweets, the IMs, and texts. Sometimes, the important times, it's about looking beyond the abridged, the instants, the clichés. It's about discovering what God is really trying to say to you.



*This Quarter's **Illustrator***



Melissa Blackmer is a registered veterinary technician, living in Southern California. She is currently working toward a master's degree in animal physiology at Loma Linda University. Melissa's love of animals has led to the rescuing and fostering of numerous dogs, cats, and other of God's creatures. Lexie, a young Staffordshire Terrier who was found wandering the streets following Hurricane Katrina, found a special place in Melissa's heart and is now a permanent member of the family.

How the Pictures Relate to the Lessons

The cover: Hope is the essence of this particular set of studies. God's grace releases us from the bonds of sin and sets us free from the penalty of death. Hope is the best attitude to have as we study the Bible, especially the book of Romans.

Lesson 1: The first lesson looks at Paul's letter to the Roman Christians in its historical context. The picture shows what that letter might have looked like.

Lesson 2: The shackles represent the bondage we inflict upon ourselves when we look to the law for our salvation. What is implied in this picture is that God, through His grace, wants to set us free from the bondage we impose on ourselves through legalism.

Lesson 3: This picture represents Ellen White's quote that "the natural heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked."¹ Though we feel that we are good, in reality, no matter what we do or how close to God we may be, our natural inclination is sinful. This makes everyone equal in God's eyes, so we cannot look to anyone as less or better than ourselves. We have only God to look to for grace and salvation.

Lesson 4: This lesson deals with justice. If we are dealt the hand we all deserve, we would be found guilty. Christ is the only One who can tilt the scales in our direction.

Lesson 5: This is a picture of what we normally see as a gift from a human contrasted with a representation of the gift that God gave us on the cross.

Lesson 6: This picture is a representation of us placed on a new footing with God. If we are standing on Christ the Rock, our place and footing are sure.

Lesson 7: This picture is a representation of overcoming sin and of having victory and freedom in Christ.

Lesson 8: This photograph represents Christ as royalty—as having the "stamp of divinity."² Many people have represented the royalty of Christ as a lion, but no one more famously than C. S. Lewis, when he symbolized Jesus as a lion named Aslan in his children's series *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

Lesson 9: This image shows a path through difficult terrain that has already been prepared for us. Jesus has prepared the path of life for us by showing us how to live.

Lesson 10: This picture deals with the battle between good and evil. Christ's death on the cross for us is the only thing that gives us salvation and takes away the rightful consequences of sin.

Lesson 11: This lesson deals with inheritance. Though we cannot gain salvation through our natural genealogy, we have gained it through Christ's birth, which makes us heirs to eternal life.

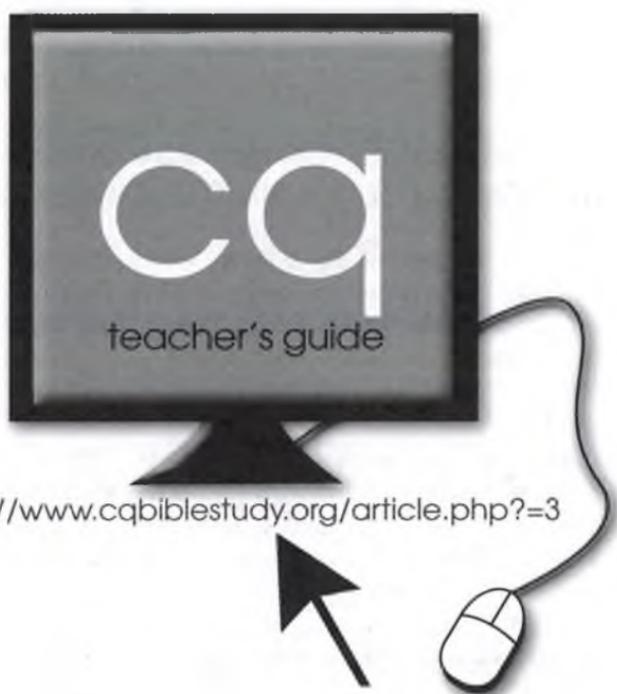
Lesson 12: This image is about the story of the woman who was brought before Jesus to be stoned for adultery. Instead of condemning her, however, Jesus wrote in the sand all the sins of those who desired to execute judgment upon her. God counts us all as sinners. It is our relationship with Him that matters.

Lesson 13: The last lesson deals with the heart, the true meaning, of Christianity. This photograph represents the story of a rabbi who was asked to give the meaning of the Torah while standing on one leg. Based on your study of Romans, how would you sum up the true meaning of the gospel in the short amount of time you could stand on one leg?

1. *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 321.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1129.

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Getting the Most Out of CQ

FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

CQ is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. CQ's purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the *Adult Bible Study Guide* find that because CQ deals with the same topics, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

About four hundred Adventist young adults contribute to CQ each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflect the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject.

Circulation of CQ is about 72,500.

POINTERS FOR STUDY

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.

2. The Bible passages on which each week's lesson are based appear in bold type in the "Logos" portion of the lesson. Read these entire passages.

3. The Bible passages for the week are usually divided into sections on the "Logos" pages. When studying these sections, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the headings.

4. Read the other sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passages.

5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the Bible study guide:

"**Introduction**" is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.

"**Logos**" is a guide for direct study of the Bible passages for the week.

"**Testimony**" presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.

"**Evidence**" approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.

"**How-To**" discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.

"**Opinion**" is a personal viewpoint on the lesson meant to encourage further thought and discussion.

"**Exploration**" provides the reader with a variety of open-ended, creative ways to explore the topic of the week's lesson.

CQ AND THE CHURCH

CQ is the General Conference-approved Bible study guide for the young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.

lesson one
JUNE 26–JULY 3

Paul and
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, NKJV).



Rom. 1:1-8

Introduction

*What Is in the Heart
of Love?*

Paul, the great apostle, missionary, and proclaimer of Jesus' gospel, had a plan and a hope dear to his own heart. This plan was that the already established Christian church would be a solid fixture in Rome and a gateway to spreading the gospel over Italy and Spain.¹

**There are messages within this ancient letter that we can
apply to our own lives.**

In Paul's time, Rome was the megacity of the known world, the desirable travel destination for all who were part of the Roman Empire. Mostly, Paul's ministry occurred in places where Christ had not been preached (Rom. 15:20) so that he would help fulfill the Scripture in Isaiah 52:15, "To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand" (Rom. 15:21, NKJV).

Yet, as he entered Corinth, Paul had time to contemplate his future plans of ministering in Rome, and it is here that he wrote the letter to the Romans with the purpose of paving the way for his future visit.² Paul wrote not only with the object of creating a partnership with the Christians in Rome but also to clearly state the main principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ and his position on the main issues of contention between the Jewish and Gentile churches of the time.

Although Paul's letter was specifically written to the Christian church in Rome, its message has astounding relevance to our own Christian walk today. The black-and-white statements within this letter explain the character of a true Christian who has been reborn of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5).

We are shown that we should "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4, NKJV), knowing that our "old man" has been done away with (verse 6). We are told that we can do this by "being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6, NKJV).

Through prayerfully reading one of the most complete statements of Paul's faith, written with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we can further open our own eyes and hearts to the fullness of life in Jesus Christ.

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 373.

2. *Ibid.*

Logos
People —
Paul's Passion

Acts 28:17–31;
Rom. 1:7; 15:14, 20–27;
Ephesians 1;
Phil. 1:12

Passion for People (Acts 28:17–31; Rom. 3:9; Romans 15)

Many believe Romans was written from “Corinth during Paul’s three-month stay in that city on his Third Missionary Journey,”¹ before Paul had visited the city. He writes to two distinct groups in Rome: Christian believers and skeptical Jews. His message, however, is the same: “Salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.”

When Paul spoke, people listened.

Paul was deeply rooted in his Hebrew heritage and had fought tirelessly against the early Christian church before his famous conversion. Once his eyes were opened not only to Christ’s love for him but for the world, his mission expanded to encompass all people. For Paul, this passion for people extended beyond Christian believers to his people, the Jews. Much of Romans is laced with a pleading to those God had earlier chosen, ordained, and set apart.

Yet on what became Paul’s final missionary journey, the Jews incited a riot in Jerusalem, accusing him of turning people away from Judaism. Paul was arrested and imprisoned. Yet his heart still yearned for his Jewish brothers and sisters: “In this letter Paul gave free expression to his burden on behalf of the Jews. Ever since his conversion, he had longed to help his Jewish brethren gain a clear understanding of the gospel message. ‘My heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is,’ he declared, ‘that they might be saved.’”²

As he traveled, Paul witnessed, served, and ministered to a diversity of people. Each time, he would point them home, to heaven and the Savior.

The Big Idea (Romans 1; Romans 8; Ephesians 1)

It doesn’t matter who you are. Christ loves you and died for you. Paul loved sharing this simple message. Yes, there were more details he discussed with those who would listen, but the big idea was simple: salvation through Jesus Christ alone. That is the idea that took him to Rome. This was the message he was preaching when a riot erupted from an angry mob of Jews in Jerusalem. This was the message he preached along his final missionary journey. Everywhere Paul went, individuals were drawn to him because of his Savior. “Through all the ages the great truth of justification by faith has stood as a mighty beacon to guide repentant sinners into the way of life.”³

Paul had the heart of a teacher. It didn’t matter who he was with, he wanted to teach them, no, *show* them Jesus Christ. He wanted this so badly that he would speak for hours—sometimes right through the night—just to explain

the big idea: God's undying love for us.

Romans contains numerous links to the Old Testament. Drawing on his Jewish roots, Paul thrives on connecting his people's history and faith to the message of Jesus Christ.

Open Doors (Rom. 3:21–31; Ephesians 1; Philippians 1)

When Paul spoke, people listened. The words he shared about Jesus Christ and the salvation offered through His blood touched hearts wherever Paul went. Everywhere he went there were open doors, obviously prepared by the Holy Spirit, through which to minister to those keen on hearing of Jesus' redeeming grace.

An important aspect of Romans is Paul's message that the gospel was to include the Gentiles. "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."⁴ Time was of the essence, and Paul wanted to make sure he made himself clear. Regardless of who might read the letter—a group of believers in Rome around A.D. 61, or you and I in the twenty-first century—his only desire was that anyone who read his letter would see the vivid picture of salvation through Christ alone and accept Him.

Mentoring the Future (Romans 16)

Although we might ask how Paul may have known so many people in Rome before he visited there, his message in chapter 16 is clear: he is part of a team. Paul's ministry involves a group of diverse individuals walking and working alongside him—each aiding the mission work and extending the message of salvation.

The church in Rome (Rom. 16:3–16) was an extension of his team, and he was thrilled at the mere idea of spending time with them. But Paul's mentoring goes further. Verses 17–20 read like a father's heartfelt concern for his children: "watch out . . . keep away from . . . full of joy over you" (NIV).

And finally, as he wraps up his letter to the believers in Rome, Paul sends greetings from those currently working alongside him (verses 21–24). Again, his words are filled with encouragement, praise, and joy—words of a true mentor and disciple maker.

Paul's every word and action are focused on developing disciples of Jesus Christ—individuals prepared to grow in Jesus Christ and further His kingdom.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 467.

2. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 374.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 373.

4. *Ibid.*

*The Miracle of Freedom*John 8:32–36;
Rom. 8:1–17

In a zoo, an animal's freedom is suppressed by a cage. The creature struggles to break free, even though it is fed and cared for. Likewise most people have the desire to be free from their sinful nature. But only Jesus can release us from this "cage." Paul discusses the subject of sinfulness and God's grace that supersedes it. Freedom from the condemnation of sin is the propositional statement in Romans 8:1–17, which he tries to explain to the church in Rome. Because sinful flesh is weak, it cannot achieve the righteous demands of the law. Condemnation is therefore inevitable (Rom. 8:1–4). He then says that God's grace is sufficient to save humanity.

Sinful nature is a cage in which humans are trapped.

"In the change that takes place when the soul surrenders to Christ, there is the highest sense of freedom. The expulsion of sin is the act of the soul itself. True, we have no power to free ourselves from Satan's control; but when we desire to be set free from sin, and in our great need cry out for a power out of and above ourselves, the powers of the soul are imbued with the divine energy of the Holy Spirit. . . .

"The only condition upon which the freedom of man is possible is that of becoming one with Christ."¹

This freedom we receive when we let Jesus take charge of our lives results in many wonderful benefits. "When Christ reigns in the soul there is purity, freedom from sin. The glory, the fullness, the completeness of the gospel plan is fulfilled in the life. The acceptance of the Saviour brings a glow of perfect peace, perfect love, perfect assurance."²

This "perfect peace" is another benefit of letting Jesus take charge of our lives; and as long as He remains in us, the wall of sinful nature remains broken. His presence in our lives weakens its power. We "are not under God's wrath; there is no condemnation upon us."³

A third benefit of letting Jesus take charge of our lives is that we are adopted into God's family (Rom. 8:14–17).

Yes, sinful nature is a cage in which humans are trapped. But Romans 8:1–17 offers us assurance of freedom in Christ.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 466.

2. *Messages to Young People*, p. 166.

3. D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 7:1–8:4: The Law—Its Functions and Limits* (Edinburgh, Great Britain: Banner of Truth, 1995), p. 260.

Evidence

Amazing Man—
Life-Giving Message

Rom. 1:1

Paul describes himself in Romans as “a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1, NIV). And so he was. He was born in Tarsus, a city near the southern coast of what is now Turkey. A trade center with various cultures mixed within its boundaries, it “was the city whose institutions best and most completely united the oriental and western character.”¹ In such a setting, Paul would have been exposed to varying cultures and worldviews. He spoke Greek, Aramaic, and Latin and was educated by the Jewish

**Throughout is repeated the theme of salvation by faith—
not by works.**

scholar and Pharisee Gamaliel. Paul was zealous for the Jewish faith, and his eagerness and quick mind provided him with an extensive knowledge of Scripture. Thus, even before his dramatic conversion (Acts 9), he seems to have been chosen and equipped by Jesus to spread the gospel to people of all walks of life.

After his conversion, Paul became fully devoted to sharing the gospel primarily with the Gentiles. The zeal that this “slave of Christ” had for Christianity and the impact he made on those around him was remarkable. (*Doulos*, the Greek word for *slave*, is also translated as “servant.”²)

Thirteen of the letters in the New Testament were written by Paul. The book of Romans was one of them, and in it can be found the most complete statement of the message he preached.³ The letter was written to the Christians in Rome to prepare the way for a visit he wanted to make to the church on his way to Spain (Rom. 15:22–25). In the letter, he outlines humanity’s need of God’s salvation, the new life in Christ, God’s plan for Israel, and Christian conduct. Throughout is repeated the theme of salvation by faith—not by works.

REACT

1. In what ways have you been called by God? What talents and knowledge do you have that you can use in His service?
2. How can we remember that we are saved through faith in Jesus?

1. William M. Ramsay, *The Cities of St. Paul* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1949), p. 88.

2. Thomas A. Davis, *Romans for the Everyday Man* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1971), p. 14.

3. *Good News Bible, Special Edition* (Canberra, Australia: Lion Publishing, 1979), pp. 1108, 1109.

How-to Faith That Shines!

Rom. 1:17;
Eph. 1:15–23

This quarter, we will learn that Paul had a faith that shone far and wide. If “faith is . . . the evidence of things not seen,” how do we make it known? (Heb. 11:1, NKJV). Jesus said, “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot

A faith discovered is a faith shared.

be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:14–16, NIV).

Have you ever been out on a dark night and spotted the warm glow of light from a distance? How did that light make you feel? How would you like to be as inviting as warm firelight on a cold, dark night? Here are at least three ways to let your light shine and put your faith into action:

Give thanks. Read Ephesians 5:20. A life of faith is believing that God through His grace has provided for all your needs. Read Philippians 4:19. Some of the riches Jesus’ grace has supplied include eternal life, love, peace, and victory over sin. We can truly hand our worries and pain to Him and thank Him every moment for what He already has provided for us, and for what He will provide.

Share your faith. When Martin Luther discovered the remedy to his overbearing guilt, nothing would dampen his fervor. His bold sharing of the riches of God’s grace meant that the spark of faith in his heart had become a fire of revival that swept the world. A faith discovered is a faith shared. Ask God to show you how to share the riches of His providence with the people around you.

Know the law’s proper place. The law shows us how much we need God’s grace. However, following the law will never save us. Only through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit can we follow the law. Read Ephesians 2:8, 9 and Ezekiel 11:19, 20. Without judging others (Matt. 7:1, 2), we should teach them that having faith in Jesus can save them and that He will restore His image in them.

REACT

1. What other steps can we take to live by faith and to claim God’s grace in our lives and the lives of people we contact daily?
2. If we are saved by faith, how should we approach keeping God’s law?

Salvation Free for All

Some Christian denominations advocate that to get to heaven people must make penance for their sins. Similarly, the Jews of Jesus' time believed that observing their customs and the law would earn their way to heaven. This misconception prevented them from seeing the law as a law of love, from believing in Christ as the Son of God, and from acknowledging that accepting Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as their own is what truly saves a person.

“Judgment looms under every steeple.”

In Romans, however, Paul gives everyone a clear picture of what it means to be saved. He states that it is impossible to wipe away our sins by observing the law or by following rules and regulations. Only through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is this possible. It is important for us to surrender to God's leading every day. Salvation can be gained only through faith in Christ's sacrifice for us. So we must be careful not to hinder other people's faith by focusing on the dos and don'ts of religion rather than on the good news that salvation comes through faith.

Jewish laws and social customs also prevented the Jews from accepting the fact that Christ came to save everyone. The Jews believed that as a chosen nation they were the only ones entitled to salvation. Consequently, they looked down on everyone else. We, too, can be led astray in this way.

The song “Does Anybody Hear Her?” paints a clear picture of how we can forget that salvation is for everyone. The song tells the story of a troubled girl, searching for acceptance, love, and hope in church. Instead, she finds that “judgment looms under every steeple,” with “lofty glances from lofty people,” who “can't see past her scarlet letter,” and who've “never even met her.”*

We should accept everyone who comes to church looking for something deeper. We should show them the true love and forgiveness God bestows on each of us. We must be careful not to judge them by the way they look, their background, or their past. We should remember that salvation is free to all who will accept Christ.

REACT

1. How can you convey the message of salvation by faith to someone who might not believe in God or who just doesn't think too highly of “institutionalized religion”?
2. Do you think that only Christians or Adventists will be saved? Explain.

* Casting Crowns, “Does Anybody Hear Her?” <http://www.sing365.com/music/lyric.nsf/Does-Anybody-Hear-Her-lyrics-Casting-Crowns/9B1D3B00309E8B5A4825707700105E6A> (accessed July 14, 2009).

Exploration
*We're All on
the Same Team*

Rom. 15:1-7

CONCLUDE

During all of Paul's ministry, we sense the urgency of his message—be unified in the salvation of Christ. Paul was a living example of the danger of putting human beliefs about following Christ above what Jesus said we should do. After his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul saw that there is no division between Jew and Gentile, that our faith needs to be spoken of throughout the whole world. He had a passion for people, and though he was deeply rooted in Hebrew heritage, the strength of his ministry was his love for everyone, just as his Master had loved all people when He walked on the earth.

We, too, have a chance to share our faith with everyone, from the mail carrier to the person who sits next to us in class. Don't wait to share what you believe. You are an important part of the team of Jesus Christ. Salvation is for everyone!

CONSIDER

- Gathering a group of friends to visit another denomination's young adult group. Find what you have in common in your beliefs about Jesus Christ's salvation and soon coming, and make plans to share your love for Jesus.
- Organizing a trip to your local soup kitchen to serve the homeless. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a conversation starter so that you can share your love for Jesus with someone there.
- Looking through a current newspaper, either in print or online, to see what type of headlines the editors give the most space. Are the headlines about how people are working together or about how people are fighting over something? Try to find a positive article about people working together for a cause.
- Writing a letter to future generations about your experience in working with others to share the gospel. Tell a few stories about some difficulties you have had and how God has given you insight to overcome those difficulties.
- Interviewing five people, asking them to define *unity*. Share the results with your family or your Sabbath School class. Come up with your own definition in the context of Romans 15:1-7.
- Using watercolors or colored pencils, draw a picture of unity that you think Paul would understand and agree with, in the context of Romans 15:1-7.

CONNECT

Max Lucado, *Life Lessons: The Book of Romans* (Nashville, Tenn.: Word Publishing Group, 1996).

Jew and
Gentile

*"The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came
through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17, NIV).*



Introduction

The Redeemer's Love

Matt. 19:16–22

One of the most frequent complaints many people have about Seventh-day Adventists is that we seem to be too rigid in obeying God's law. Indeed, it does seem that at times church members appear to be more focused on obedience than on having a relationship with their Savior. John, however, helps us to put obedience and love for Christ in their proper relationship. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). We obey, not to be saved, but because we love God. And when we love Him, we learn that His commandments are reasonable and for our own good.

They thought that doing what they wanted would make their way easier.

The following quote helps us to better understand the motives behind obedience and disobedience: "In heaven itself this law was broken. Sin originated from self-seeking. Lucifer, the covering cherub, desired to be first in heaven."¹

God told Adam and Eve that they could eat from any tree in the Garden of Eden except from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. How generous God was! But they chose instead to disobey.

Because He never changes, God is also generous with us. His commandments apply to all cultures and every facet of life. Relatively speaking, there are very few of them, and following them truly helps us to have a better life and a good relationship with our Creator.

I remember during my Pathfinder years that rules were imposed for every activity—especially for track and trail. But to some, these rules were annoying. They thought that doing what they wanted would make their way easier. So they destroyed the trail signs in favor of shortcuts they were sure would make them winners. To their amazement, however, their team came in last, because they were unaware of hidden dangers along the shortcuts. Afterward, our Master Guide leader talked to us about the path to heaven and how God's law helps us to follow that path and keep us safe.

Read Exodus 20:1, 2. Did you notice that God redeemed Israel from slavery and then gave them His law? "Likewise, through the gospel, Christ frees us from the bondage of sin (John 8:34–36; 2 Pet. 2:19) in order that we may keep His law."² This week, we will learn more about the role of God's Ten Commandment law and the role other Old Testament rules and regulations should play in our lives.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 21.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 602.

Rom. 4:3

Evidence

Reluctant Revolutionary

Paul's message was unthinkable for several reasons. First, it was the treasonous thought that the Jews could be rejected as God's chosen people. Then there was the idea that the Messiah could have come and not have been recognized by them. Finally, the thought that redemption could be based on something other than law-keeping seemed heretical.

Paul understood that faith is always pivotal.

Many Jews were not about to accept Paul's message on any level. This was not news to him. In his story, you see him as a Jew, struggling with all three aspects of his message. First there is the matter of faith. Read Philippians 3:6, 7. The "striking evidences of God's presence with the martyr [Stephen] had led Saul to doubt the righteousness of the cause he had espoused against the followers of Jesus."¹

Then there is the object of faith. Paul had to accept that Jesus was the Messiah. The revelation on the Damascus Road convinced him. "Now Saul knew for a certainty that the promised Messiah had come to this earth as Jesus of Nazareth."²

Finally, there were the people of faith. Perhaps the hardest thing to accept was the end of the Jews' special status. This explains his insistence on returning to Jerusalem late in his ministry. Read Acts 21:13.

Some members in today's Adventist Church would have us return to the trappings of Judaism, particularly to the festivals marking special sacrifices. Learning from the festivals is one thing, but using them for salvation purposes and to please God is another. Like Paul, we must separate the eternal covenant centered on God's law of love and the secondary covenant that marked a particular arrangement with a certain group of people. Focusing on (1) law-keeping and (2) ritual caused the Jews to reject the King of love. The two are not gospel. Paul understood that faith is always pivotal. "For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness'" (Rom. 4:3, NKJV). When people are tempted to return to Jewish ritual as a means of salvation, they need to examine seriously the writings of Paul, for he had lived in both Jewish and Gentile worlds.

REACT

Which mission came first, God's calling to all people, or His call of the Jews?

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 112, 113.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

The Mosaic Law and God's Adoption

Matt. 19:16–22;
Acts 15:1–29;
Gal. 1:1–12;
Heb. 8:6

Among the practices adopted and performed by God's people in the Old Testament were those written in what is known as the Mosaic law. These laws, found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, included regulations concerning the sacred services of the tabernacle, civil laws, and health laws. Circumcision is often considered a part of this set of laws, even though long before this time, the Hebrew people were instructed to circumcise male infants as a reminder of their covenant with God (Gen. 17:1–14). Like all the other Mosaic laws, circumcision was observed by each succeeding generation of Hebrews.

**The same issue arose when Paul took Titus with him
to Jerusalem.**

The Mosaic Law and Converted Gentiles (Acts 15:1–29)

Certain leaders in the church (perhaps Pharisees, see verse 5) believed that in order to be saved, Gentile converts to Christianity needed to be circumcised: “‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1, NKJV). Paul and Barnabas, however, strongly disagreed, as did Peter. Read his impassioned speech in verses 7–11. So they, along with some other believers, sought the counsel of the apostles and elders in the Jerusalem church. After some discussion it was concluded that Paul and Barnabas, along with some church members from Jerusalem, would return to Antioch with a letter outlining a short list of requirements Gentile believers should observe. These requirements included abstaining “from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality” (verse 29, NIV). Circumcision was not on this list.

The same issue arose when Paul took Titus with him to Jerusalem. Because Titus was a Greek Christian, some Jewish Christians there felt that he should be circumcised. Once again, however, Paul held firmly to the belief that circumcision was not necessary for salvation (Gal. 2:1–5).

Paul's Defense Against the Perverted Message (Gal. 1:1–12)

After his first missionary journey, Paul traveled to Galatia. Many Jewish Christians who believed that Gentile converts should obey certain Old Testament laws such as circumcision in order to be saved followed him there. Their outspoken opposition confused the Galatians, and as a result, many were becoming quite legalistic in their beliefs. Thus, Paul wrote a letter to them, which we now refer to as the book of Galatians.

In Galatians 1:4, “Paul again presents the great truth that Jesus, through His atoning sacrifice, has provided a way of escape for all who will accept Him. Any attempt to earn this victory over the evil of the world through one’s own efforts is not according to God’s will. . . . If the Galatians persist in their legalism, they can hope neither for deliverance from sin now nor for admission to the future, sinless world.”¹

Master Who Saves (Matt. 19:16–22; Heb. 8:6)

The rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16–22 thought he could be saved based on the good works he did. Yet when Christ told him to sell all that he had and give to the poor, he couldn’t bring himself to do so. This showed his selfish nature and that he really worshiped his wealth instead of God.

But if we are saved by grace through faith, why did Jesus tell this young man to keep the commandments if he wanted eternal life (verse 17)? “It is the will of God that man shall reflect His character, and His character may be summed up in the one word ‘love’ (1 John 4:7–12). To reflect the character, or ‘love,’ of God, we will love Him supremely and our neighbor as ourselves. . . . If we inquire as to how we are to express our love to God and our fellow men, God gives us the answer in the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20:3–17). . . . The young man professed to love God, but the real test of that love, Jesus says, is to be found in the way he treats his fellow men. . . . ‘If ye love me,’ Jesus says, ‘keep my commandments’ (John 14:15).”²

In the King James Version, the rich young ruler refers to Jesus as “Good Master” (Matt. 19:16). Indeed He is. And why, we might ask? He is loving, even toward sinners (1 John 4:8). He loves us so much that He died on the cross to save us. He is forgiving (1 John 1:9). Both His unfailing love and His forgiveness qualify Him to mediate for His people. Even now, He works as a Mediator in heaven for all who claim His grace through faith.

Regarding Hebrews 8:6, it is written that “God would have us contemplate His love, His promises, given so freely to those who have no merit in themselves. He would have us depend fully, gratefully, rejoicingly, in the righteousness provided for us in Christ. To all who come to God in His appointed way, He freely listens.”³

REACT

1. Someone you are talking with learns you are an Adventist. This person says that she (or he) has heard that Adventists believe people are saved by keeping the Ten Commandments. How would you respond? What Bible texts would you use?

2. Why is legalism so appealing to so many people?

3. What forms of legalism exist today? Other than the Ten Commandments, what other “laws” do people try to keep in order to be saved?

4. What other qualities does Jesus possess that make Him a “Good Master” (Teacher)? Explain your answer.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 938.

2. *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 457.

3. *Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 932.

Testimony
The Test

John 14:15

Similar to the Gentile Christians we have been learning about in this week's lesson, a non-Adventist couple once asked a layman about the truth concerning salvation as it is presented in the Bible. Their interest in Scriptures came about as a result of their continual searching for the truth. After extensive Bible studies, they were glad they realized the right way to use and understand the biblical truth regarding God's saving grace. They left their previous beliefs and lifestyle and accepted completely the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. They longed for their family members and friends to accept the truth as well. But not only did their loved ones reject the truth, they rejected the couple as well.

"Good works do not purchase the love of God."

Ellen White states of such situations that "God does not conceal His truth from men. By their own course of action they make it obscure to themselves. Christ gave the Jewish people abundant evidence that He was the Messiah; but His teaching called for a decided change in their lives. They saw that if they received Christ, they must give up their cherished maxims and traditions, their selfish, ungodly practices."¹

Some Christians today are still struggling with their beliefs regarding salvation by grace through faith. They wonder where obedience fits in. Do we obey to be saved, or do we obey because we are saved? Christ said, "If you love me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15, NKJV). Of this verse, Ellen White wrote, "Through the righteousness of Christ we shall stand before God pardoned, and as though we had never sinned. We will never gain strength in considering what we might do if we were angels. We are to turn in faith to Jesus Christ, and show our love to God through obedience to His commands."²

"Good works do not purchase the love of God, but they reveal that we possess that love. If we surrender the will to God, we shall not work in order to earn God's love. His love as a free gift will be received into the soul, and from love to Him we shall delight to obey His commandments."³

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 105.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1142.

3. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 283.

Gal. 1:1-12

How-to Knowing the Right Way

The world we live in today is so fast paced. Then there is all the bad news we face every time we pick up a newspaper or catch the news online. How is it possible to stay focused on God and our salvation? How is it possible to know the truth about how we are saved? Here are a few steps:

Look to Jesus only. Put all your faith in Him and Him alone.

Use a map and a compass. When traveling to a place you haven't been to before, it's wise to take a map and compass. In our journey toward heaven, our map is the Bible. It contains the directions we need to reach heaven. Our compass to help us better understand the map's instructions is the Spirit of Prophecy as given to us through Ellen White.

Follow the Master Guide. You are not the only one traveling to heaven. So do not place your trust solely in those who are traveling with you. Look to Jesus only. Put all your faith in Him and Him alone. Remember that Jesus said of Himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6, NKJV).

Beware of false directions and shortcuts. Along the way, we may encounter lots of signs and directions, but be cautious! Not all directions are right. Not all signs are correct. "There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death" (Prov. 14:12, NRSV). Follow only the directions stated on the map. These directions are summarized in John 14:15, where Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (NKJV).

Hold on to the steering wheel; keep your eyes on the road. When the journey becomes difficult, we might be tempted to give up, to take our eyes off the road. During such times, we must remember the following advice: "If we will but keep our eyes fixed on the Savior, and trust in His power, we shall be filled with a sense of security; for the righteousness of Christ will become our righteousness."*

REACT

1. Why are some Adventists easily tempted to doubt their faith?
2. Why do we tend to make the same mistakes as the early Christians who believed false teachers?

*Messages to Young People, p. 107.

Opinion
*Tinted Religious
Eyeglasses*

Gal. 1:8-12

Although we worship one God, fellowship with one another, and witness together to the world under the name Seventh-day Adventist, we come from diverse family backgrounds, countries, cultures, and denominations. Like the early church, we are a church composed of “Jews” and “Gentiles.”

Evaluating and judging others based solely on our cultural standards is unchristian.

We commend ourselves for being a diverse church. Nevertheless, such diversity can cause problems. In my home country, the Philippines, candidates for ministerial ordination traditionally wear dark suits with neckties, even when ordination services are conducted in the hot, humid summertime. While church members in the United States often express appreciation by clapping, church members in Mexico wave. While hugging and kissing on the part of both men and women is one way to greet church members in Mexico, the same acts are totally unacceptable in the Philippines.

It's tempting to view Adventists from other cultures through eyeglasses tinted by our own cultural norms and traditions, and then to label these church members as either more permissive or more conservative than ourselves. Worse yet, often the view such glasses give us makes us want to force these members to conform to our ways, and even to make certain customs a test of fellowship or a means of salvation.

However, evaluating and judging others based solely on our cultural standards is unchristian. While we are busy pointing fingers at others because their customs and traditions are not our own, there are people suffering from physical and spiritual hunger. God desires us to alleviate both of these famines; but if we are fighting amongst ourselves about the appropriateness of certain cultural traditions, some of these people will perish. The Bible says, “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you” (Rom. 12:3, NIV). To avoid sanctimonious attitudes toward others is to be aware of our own tinted religious eyeglasses. By diligently studying the Word of God and through humble prayer, we can receive new glasses that give us clearer vision concerning the true nature of His grace and salvation.

Exploration

*Playing by the Rules***CONCLUDE**

For generations the Mosaic Law defined the Jews' existence and their status in the world. It dictated their attitudes, their behavior, and even their diet. The more rules they could boast about keeping, the higher their status in the community. Their very identity was bound up in regulations. So when Paul came around preaching that Christ had nullified those laws, many Jews felt threatened.

The Christian Jews in Rome had a hard time giving up the laws that bound them. Without a detailed set of rules by which they could measure themselves, many felt robbed of their identity.

CONSIDER

- Giving up a favorite pair of jeans or a long-held opinion. Which would be harder for you, and why?
- Translating Romans 2:17–21 into another language. What theme is key to these texts?
- Baking something without using a recipe. Why is it good sometimes to follow the rules (2 Cor. 3:2, 3)?
- Making a list of five words that describe who you are. Try this in a group, with everyone making a list for each other, and then reading the lists aloud. Were others able to identify the person based on the list of descriptors?
- Reading Leviticus 19. The old Mosaic laws range from burdensome to bizarre, but there's a lot of practical Christianity too. Which are still relevant?
- Parachuting from a plane with a reputable company that provides such an activity. Because of Christ, we enjoy freedom—with the security of His parachute of salvation.
- Calculating the approximate number of generations that have passed since the time of Paul's writings to the Roman church. How has our attitude toward legalistic salvation changed over the centuries? How has it remained the same?

CONNECT

Galatians 5:6.

Clifford Goldstein, "The Henry VIII Factor," in *Life Without Limits* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2007).

lesson three

JULY 10-17

“All Have Sinned”

“All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”

(Rom. 3:23).



Rom. 2:1

Introduction

Examining Ourselves

Every single day, through good times and bad, we can enjoy and see God acting for our benefit. He supplies our every need, and we can feel His love for us all the way from heaven.

“You can’t enter this church looking the way you do!”

However, at the age of 14, Adalia’s 25-year-old boyfriend lured her into a life of prostitution and drugs. When she was 19, she left behind the city in which she was born and moved to the capital city of her country, hoping that there she could find something better for her life, an opportunity to feel loved, an opportunity to change her life.

One August morning, Adalia was walking in front of a church and heard beautiful singing that touched her heart. These were songs of hope—the hope she was looking for to help her change and reform her life.

Then one night when she was going home from her work in a bar, she went into the church where she had heard the music. She took the first step, the second step, the third step into the church lobby, but when she tried to open the door into the sanctuary, someone’s hand grabbed her arm. Then she heard an angry voice telling her, “You can’t enter this church looking the way you do! You have to be respectful of the people inside!” Immediately Adalia felt her heart break into a million pieces. Tears started falling from her brown eyes. Without looking, she ran back down the steps to the sidewalk and across the street into the path of an approaching car. She died trying to learn about Jesus.

What do we do with the love we receive from God? Where is the hand that we have to give to anyone, excluding no one, regardless of what they look like or do for a living? (See James 2:9.) Why do we hurry to judge others on how they look? (See Romans 2:1–10.) Why do we criticize others without knowing what is in their hearts? For everyone of us has sinned. We all have fallen short of God’s glorious standard (Rom. 3:23). Everyone is called to see in each person a candidate for heaven. Adalia only wanted to be loved. She was looking for an opportunity to change her life.

As you study this week’s lesson, as you consider the people in your life who are like Adalia, remember that we are all standing at the foot of the cross together, in need of God’s saving grace.

Logos
Expired Genes

Rom. 1:16–32;
2:1–11, 17–23;
3:1, 2, 9–18, 21–23

Genetics is one of the most complex branches of science. Through their genes, parents give to their children both physical and intellectual characteristics that help them to be who and what they are. Sin also comes from our parents, but don't blame your dad and mom! I'm talking about our first parents—Adam and Eve. From them we all inherit the “genes” of sin and all the consequences thereof. But don't despair! There is hope!

Don't despair! There is hope!

SPF = Super Power Formula (Rom. 1:16, 17)

Paul knew from personal experience that it was impossible for him to save himself. He also knew from personal experience who could save him. He wrote in Romans 1:16, 17: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” (NIV). The SPF formula is, therefore, God + Faith + Bible.

Who Is a Sinner? (Rom. 1:18–32)

In Romans 1:18–32, we learn how awful and far-reaching sin really is. People know what is right. They know their behavior is wrong and that they are breaking the commandments of God. They might start with so-called small sins, but such sins soon lead to more outrageous thinking and behavior until they forsake God completely in favor of “shameful lusts” (verse 26, NIV). Sadly, they take many other people with them on the way down the slippery stairs of sin. We must recognize and accept that we are sinners, no matter “how small” a sin we commit. If we do not recognize this, we cannot change our condition. Then we must recognize that our sinful thoughts and behavior are not what God wants for us. Rather, He desires that we accept His loving salvation, and that we ask for the help of His Holy Spirit to turn our lives around.

A Speck or a Log? (Matt. 7:1–5; Rom. 2:1–11, 17–23)

Romans 2:1–11, 17–23 explain how easy it is for us to see the sins other people do but how difficult it is to be aware of our own sins. In addition, they show how easy it is for people of God to assume that because they are His, they are exempt from being judged. But “sin is sin wherever and by whomever it is committed. Nor does it become less sinful by being committed in the midst of

religious privileges. The people of God have no special license to sin, as though God would not be so strict noticing the offenses of those who profess to serve Him. On the contrary, the Bible consistently teaches that the most serious sins among men are those that are committed by the professed people of God (see Isaiah 1:11–17; 65:2–5; Matthew 21:31, 32).¹

Of Matthew 7:1–5 we read, “How often so-called Christians express profound indignation at the course others have taken, or are presumed to have taken, only to have later events reveal that they themselves are guilty of the very sins of which they accuse others. . . . The Christian who discovers his brother in a fault will ‘restore such an one in the spirit of meekness,’ considering that he himself may have been tempted and may have fallen on that very point, or may do so in the future (Gal. 6:1).²

You’re Dismissed (Rom. 3:10–18, 23)

Because of the “genes” we inherited from our first parents, Adam and Eve, all of us are sinners. We have no ability of our own to share in the glory that is God’s. The only genetic engineering that will work to change us is found in Ezekiel 36:24–30. Without God’s grace and a new heart filled with the Holy Spirit, we will never be able to obey. We must give up trying to be righteous on our own and accept God’s righteousness given to us by His grace. When Christ dwells in us, we have new hearts. Then, and only then, can His law become fulfilled in us.

Yes, sin is a genetic disease. Yet we can rejoice in this fact: “He will cure it all right: but He will not stop there. That may be all you asked; but if once you call Him in, He will give you the full treatment.”³

Thanks be to God for His love for sinners like you and me!

REACT

1. Recognizing yourself as a sinner to be saved is the first step toward salvation. What else must happen?
2. Without Jesus Christ, there is no hope. Why is that?
3. Think about an experience you had when you realized your sinful condition. What did you do about it, and why?
4. What do you find yourself often accusing others of doing? How might you be doing the same things?
5. Review the quote from C. S. Lewis. What does he mean by God giving “you the full treatment” once you have called “Him in”?
6. Ezekiel 36:24–30 uses the metaphor of a new heart to describe what takes place when we are saved. What other metaphors describe righteousness by faith?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 485.

2. *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 355.

3. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper One, 2002), pp. 160, 161.

Can Working Hard Kill You?

Matt. 7:12

Much debate abounds about the role of faith and good works. Ellen White, however, is clear about how these disciplines relate to each other and to our salvation.

“A legal religion . . . is a loveless, Christless religion.”

“A legal religion can never lead souls to Christ; for it is a loveless, Christless religion. Fasting or prayer that is actuated by a self-justifying spirit is an abomination in the sight of God. The solemn assembly for worship, the round of religious ceremonies, the external humiliation, the imposing sacrifice, proclaim that the doer of these things regards himself as righteous, and as entitled to heaven; but it is all a deception. Our own works can never purchase salvation.”¹

“Priests and scribes and rulers were fixed in a rut of ceremonies and traditions. Their hearts had become contracted, like the dried-up wine skins to which He had compared them. While they remained satisfied with a legal religion, it was impossible for them to become the depositaries of the living truth of heaven. They thought their own righteousness all-sufficient, and did not desire that a new element should be brought into their religion. The good will of God to men they did not accept as something apart from themselves. They connected it with their own merit because of their good works. The faith that works by love and purifies the soul could find no place for union with the religion of the Pharisees, made up of ceremonies and the injunctions of men. The effort to unite the teachings of Jesus with the established religion would be vain. The vital truth of God, like fermenting wine, would burst the old, decaying bottles of the Pharisaical tradition.”²

Ellen White is clear that faith alone is needed for salvation. However, she also emphasizes the role of loving others and striving to be more Christlike.

“In order to fulfill the law, we are to . . . do unto others as we would have them do unto us. . . . We are to be ready to speak kind words from hearts full of sympathy and love. We are to manifest patience, revealing to the world what it means to be a practical doer of the words of Christ, ever remembering that our life is bound up with the life of Him who died for us. Christ and the child of humanity become one, so that the Spirit and character of Christ are represented in his followers day by day and hour by hour.”³

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 280.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 278, 279.

3. *Signs of the Times*, July 11, 1892.

Rom. 3:23

Evidence God's Word Is Clear

When discussing sin, it's important to understand human nature. The book of Romans helps us to do so, as do other portions of the Bible. In the recounting of many events, the Bible clearly gives us evidence as to what human nature consists of. For example, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were full of incest, sexual abuse, and drunkenness (Genesis 18; 19). The Bible shows the jealous side of sinful human nature in the story of Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37).

The Bible is clear! All have sinned! Even you and I.

The New Testament also helps us understand sinful human nature. Once again, drunkenness and inappropriate sexual activity play a terrible part in John the Baptist's death, as does anger (Matt. 14:1-12). Lying and greed abruptly ended the lives of Ananias and Sapphira as they sought to withhold some of the money they had promised to give for the work of the church (Acts 5:1-10). All these examples are evidence of sin, one of the topics in the book of Romans.

How about today? Where do we find drunkenness, inappropriate sexual activity, jealousy, greed, lying, and anger in our society? What about other sins not mentioned here?

Sin is present everywhere today. All we have to do is watch the news, read a newspaper, or surf the Internet to learn that crimes of all sorts are being committed everywhere, all the time. And the Bible is clear! All have sinned! Even you and I.

But just as the Bible clearly teaches us that all people have sinned, so it teaches us the cure for sin. When Scripture mentions that people such as Job, Noah, and Elizabeth were "blameless," "righteous," and "blessed," it is not saying that they were sinless. Rather, it is saying that they were godly people who kept His commandments through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

When we are caught in the middle of temptation and even sin itself, let us always remember this promise from God to us: He "will repay according to each one's deeds: to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life" (Rom. 2:6, 7, NRSV). Let us do battle to be victorious in Jesus' holy name!

REACT

1. Why is the wound of sin not incurable?
2. Why is there nothing we can do to be redeemed?

Roxana Lisset Cruz-Jovel, Santa Tecla, El Salvador, Central America

How-to Avoiding the Wrong Direction

Rom. 1:16–32;
2:1–11, 17–23;
3:1, 2, 9–18, 21–23

It was an amazing day in January when our family decided to go for a walk in the Costa Rican National Rainforest Park. We were walking to the picnic area, but after a few minutes we found ourselves lost. We had been distracted and missed the sign that gave directions. So we retraced our steps until we saw the small sign on a tree pointing to where we wanted to go.

There is a direct line to heaven. It's called prayer.

How many times in our lives do we think we are heading in the right way when, in reality, we are lost? Returning to our starting point can be difficult and painful. Today, we will review how to continue going in the right direction:

Calibrate your compass. Sometimes we think that the decisions we are making are good ones, when actually they are not. Our spiritual compass is not pointing to Jesus. Calibrate your spiritual compass through Bible study, meditating on the Word, and prayer.

Use the most updated map. Every time we are in an unfamiliar place, we need a good map to guide us through detours and construction (or destruction). Our spiritual map is the Bible. As a light on our way (Ps. 119:105), it is the most precise and up-to-date atlas we can have for our journey to heaven. Because human nature will remain what it is until our Savior returns, it shows us the best way around any and all sin.

Ask for directions. God is the head of His people—people who have sinned and overcome. As the head of His church, it is good to ask Him for advice. Sometimes it is also good to ask church members for advice—members who have a solid relationship with God, who know from personal experience what salvation is all about.

Call 911. There is a direct line to heaven. It's called prayer. The line is never busy. God is waiting for us and is longing to forgive our sins. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

Think positively. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16, 18. "There is always something for which to give thanks; even on the darkest day there are blessings to count. We must remember that if we face the sun the shadows will always fall behind us. . . ."*

*William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, rev. ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 207.

Judg. 2:19;
Rom. 3:23;
Rev. 7:14

Opinion

I'm Sorry, But You're Infected With CSD

First Act: The service started a half hour ago, but you've just arrived. It's not the first time you're late. You find a seat, and everything seems to be the same. You're still asking yourself: *Do I have enough faith?* You're still feeling that you're going nowhere, and you're hoping the sermon will make you feel better. This isn't the first Sabbath you've felt lonely and empty inside.

This isn't the first Sabbath you've felt lonely and empty inside.

You see a busy deacon, and you think: *I'd like to be like him. He seems so devoted. I'd like to have that kind of joy. But sin is holding me back.*

Doctors can't give us a prescription if they don't know our sickness. But the Great Physician knows about our sickness and has diagnosed us with chronic sin disease. Take a second look at Romans 3:23. Put your name in the verse: "_____ has sinned and has fallen short of the glory of God." Now read it again while thinking of a specific sin you've committed. Don't try to hide it. God knows your nature. Jesus went to the cross because He was thinking about you. He preferred to die for you rather than live without you.

Loneliness, discouragement, and sin are a result of these things: (1) we don't accept that we're sinners; (2) we despise Jesus' sacrifice; and (3) we reject His forgiveness. Let's admit that we've failed. Wouldn't it be wonderful if there was a text that said, "For all have repented and have come face-to-face with the glory of God"?

Second Act: The following Sabbath, early in the morning, a young person looks different. Put your name in the blank: _____ reflects peace, humility, and a desire to work. _____ is full of confidence and in love with his/her new best Friend—Jesus.

Take a closer look at who this person is. Why, it's you!

REACT

1. When we talk about how all have sinned, why do we seldom think of ourselves in relationship to that verse?
2. Why do we often think that people who do a lot in our churches must have holier lives than everyone else?
3. How did you feel after putting your name in the blanks above, and why?

Exploration
*Sin's Surprising
Solution*

Rom. 3:21–28

CONCLUDE

Sin. It's not so common a word these days, but its reality still shapes every facet of our lives. At its root, sin says we are sufficient in ourselves, and the earth shows the tragic and ghastly effects of life disconnected from God.

Because sin runs counter to God's selfless love, it took a sinless supreme Being willing to shatter Himself on sin to ultimately defeat it. That selfless sacrifice puts us all on the same level, yet it's still too easy to grow discouraged in our struggles or smug in our supposed superiority. The only solution is to daily remember that the God who chose our redemption no matter our infraction loves each one of us equally—and calls us to love His hurting children too.

CONSIDER

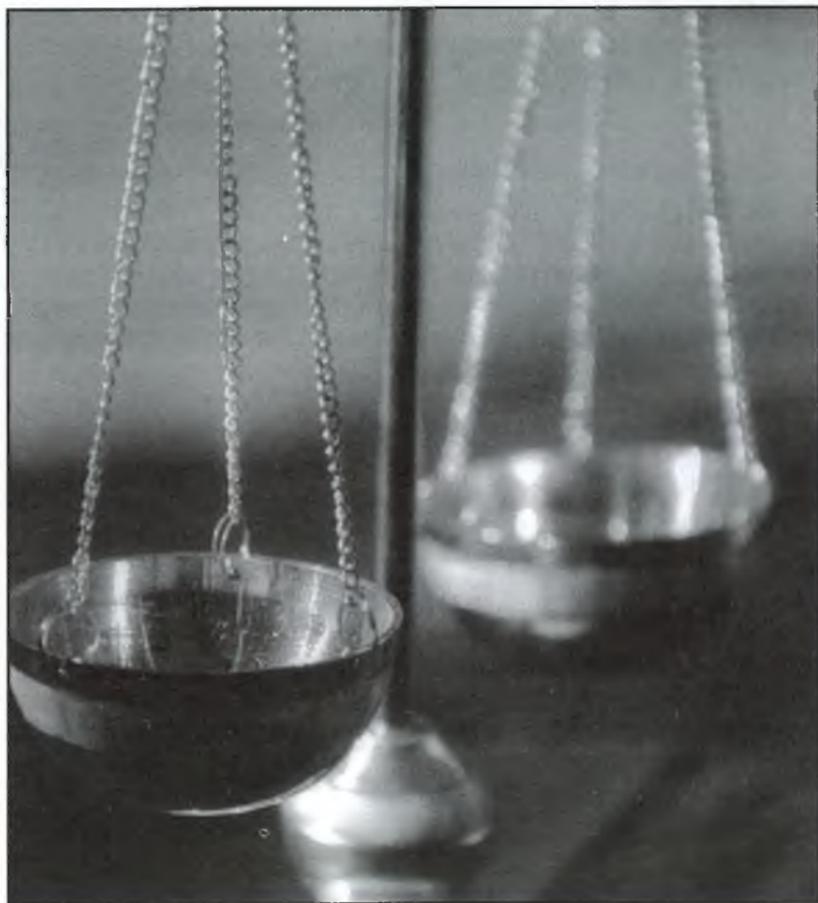
- Creating an abstract drawing of your life before and after you discovered and accepted God's work for you on the cross.
- Reflecting on how sin has warped God's ideal in human relationships and on how Christ's love can restore it.
- Hiking in a nearby park or wilderness area and meditating on how sin has impacted God's creation.
- Watching advertisements with an eye for how they play on selfish desires.
- Asking God to lead you to someone whose spiritual journey mirrors yours.
- Taking an honest personal inventory of the areas in your life where you struggle with self.

CONNECT

Kim Allan Johnson, *The Gift* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2000); Keavin Hayden, *Saving Blood* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2000).

Justified by
Faith

*“We hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works
prescribed by the law” (Rom. 3:28, NRSV).*



Introduction
*Following
the Rules*

Rom. 4:3-8

A few years ago, A. J. Jacobs, a self-declared agnostic, decided to “live the Bible for a year.” For 381 days, he tried his best to literally follow every law written in Scripture. This included refusing to shave his beard and wearing only single-fibered, biblical-style robes. Once, he even “stoned” an adulterer by throwing a pebble at a man he met in the park.

When asked why he tried this experiment, he answered, “[I wanted to] see

There are times when we all grow tired of trying to follow the rules.

what—if anything—I was missing by having no religion in my life.”* As he progressed through the year, he found it difficult to follow all the rules all the time. Sure, there was value in some of the principles, but there was no way he could ever become perfect. In the end, although he developed a certain regard for people who do try to follow biblical law, Jacobs concluded that he wasn’t missing out by not being religious and returned to his former life. There was no point in trying the impossible.

There are times when we all grow tired of trying to follow the rules. Why bother? It’s so difficult. Isn’t there another way to achieve righteousness? The answer lies in a crucial point that Jacobs failed to include in his experiment: God’s great love for us. Knowing that we could never achieve righteousness through the law because of our sinful natures, God loves us enough to have provided another way for us to attain righteousness. He sent His Son Jesus Christ as an atoning sacrifice, so that through faith in Him, we might be saved.

This week’s lesson will focus on the fact that, although the law has its place in our lives, righteousness is obtained only through faith in Christ’s sacrifice. We cannot hope to save ourselves unless we live a life of faith in the power of the Cross.

We all have days when we feel that we can’t do anything right. But don’t give up trying to be a righteous person, like Jacobs did. As you ponder the daily lessons presented this week, think about how you can exercise your faith in Jesus Christ. Then you will be on your way to becoming a truly righteous person.

* “A Conversation with A. J. Jacobs,” <http://www.ajjacobs.com/books/yolb.asp?id=guide#conversation> (accessed April 22, 2009).

Rom. 3:28

Evidence
*Is It Fake
or the Real Thing?*

The Jews prided themselves as being The Chosen. They had the Law of Moses, and they were proud of their magnificent temple. They developed a vibrant economy based on their sacrificial system. However, just like any other group of people, they continued breaking the law. This resulted in hardships, captivity, and the Diaspora. So they created even more stringent laws to safeguard the original ones. Still they fell short. So they eagerly anticipated Messiah to deliver them from bondage.

He was just an ordinary man, from Nazareth, of all places.

But Jesus came instead. He was just an ordinary man, from Nazareth, of all places. He had no formal education, yet He astounded religious leaders with His authoritative interpretation of Scriptures. He never condemned anyone but forgave freely. He respected authority but had the audacity to chase from the temple those who had turned it into a marketplace (John 2:16).

Eventually the high priests collaborated with the Roman authorities to charge Jesus with blasphemy. But He died, rose again, and ascended into heaven after giving the command to share the good news and the promise that He would return to take us home.

From then on, all of His disciples have experienced life transformation, even when facing opposition. Saul, the zealous Pharisee who opposed the new Christian movement, terrorized believers. But a personal encounter with Jesus changed everything about him, even his name. And the same Saul, now Paul, began preaching the gospel to Jews and Gentiles alike.

The good news spread like wildfire—just by “word of mouth” and letters that took days or weeks to be delivered. There was no telephone or e-mail to verify the credibility of the message or its source. It was in this environment that Paul wrote to the Jews in Rome, to a people still wondering whether to believe that Jesus, who had been crucified, arose from the grave and ascended into heaven. To them, Paul’s message was revolutionary: “We hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law” (Rom. 3:28, NRSV). To accept God’s grace was to upset the entire Jewish economy and open the door for the Gentiles!

REACT

How would you respond to a message from an unofficial source that challenges the traditional teaching of many centuries?

Wesley James, Loma Linda, California, U.S.A.

“An Unmerited Favor”

Rom. 3:19–28

The church in Rome comprised opposing groups of people—Jews and Gentiles. This put Paul in the precarious position of presenting the gospel in a winsome way to a split congregation. Another difficulty was that he didn't have the luxury of meeting with them face to face. He couldn't take questions, divert arguments, or fully engage the young church in meaningful discourse. All he had was parchment and quill. Yet with these, he created the most comprehensive exposition of the gospel. To the Gentiles, he painted a picture of an inclusive, impartial God. To the Jews, he highlighted the futility in seeking salvation through works.

God offers us a second chance.

We Are All Sinners (Rom. 3:23)

Before addressing the Roman church as a cohesive congregation, Paul had to unite the fragmented groups. So he pointed out their common bond—their inherent sinfulness. This commonality became the basis of his argument for justification by faith—the assertion that we are all sinners, all guilty under the law. He supports this in Romans 3:10–12 by quoting Psalms 14:1–3; 53:1–3; and Ecclesiastes 7:20.

He underscores our sinfulness again in Romans 3:23—“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (NIV). It becomes clear that, as sinners, we cannot on our own reflect His image. On our own, we will never fulfill the requirements of the law. Paul illustrates this in its most basic sense—“the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

This can be a disheartening realization—no matter what we do, no matter how hard we try, we will always fall short of God's glory.

Hope Through Faith (Rom. 3:21, 22)

God, in His infinite mercy, offers us another way, “the righteousness from God, apart from the law” (verse 21, NIV). He offers us a second chance. He offers us grace. By accepting Jesus' selfless sacrifice, we are judged not by our sinful nature, but by the perfection of Christ. He is our only true path to righteousness, the way to be justified in spite of our intrinsic sin.

What Is Justification? (Rom. 3:24–26)

“The Greek word that is translated ‘to justify’ is *diakioun*. All Greek verbs that end in *-oun* mean, not to *make* someone something, but to *treat*, to *reckon*, to *account* him as something. If an innocent man appears before a judge, to

treat him as innocent is to *acquit* him. But the point about a man's relationship to God is that he is utterly guilty, and yet God, in his amazing mercy, treats him, reckons him, accounts him as if he were innocent. That is what justification means."¹

This leaves no room to boast about our works. We are justified only by the grace of God; we are justified by what E. G. White calls an "unmerited favor."²

"Paul is insisting that nothing we can ever do can win for us the forgiveness of God; only what God has done for us can win that; therefore the way to a right relationship with God lies, not in a frenzied, desperate, doomed attempt to win acquittal by our performance; it lies in the humble, penitent acceptance of the love and the grace which God offers us in Jesus Christ."³

Live Accordingly (Rom. 3:19, 20, 27, 28)

So how can the knowledge of our justification transform our lives? It is crucial that we fully realize that there is absolutely no way for us to achieve freedom from sin on our own. The penalty of sin, what the law demands, can be fulfilled only through God and the gift of His Son. Paul, having personally experienced and accepted this gift, assures us that though we may stumble in our walk with Christ, we're still saved. It is only through His infinite grace that we are saved (Eph. 1:7).

What are the implications of God's grace in our Christian walk? James 1:22 urges us: "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (NKJV). Being Christian doesn't mean receiving a free ticket to heaven. The gift of grace is a wonderful, beautiful thing, yet it is just one part of Christianity. Christianity is more than an acceptance of God's Word; it is a lifestyle that strives to reflect Christ. Jesus has commanded us to share the good news of His grace, to go make disciples of all the nations (Matt. 28:19). Paul tells us to "be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you" (Eph. 5:1, 2, NASB).

REACT

The theme of justification by grace is prevalent throughout Romans. Paul says we are "free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2) and "not under law but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). If we are saved by grace alone, what does it mean to be a Christian? Why strive to be more like Jesus? Are we still saved, despite our complacency?

1. William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: The Letter to the Romans*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia, Penn.: Westminster Press), p. 57.

2. *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 331.

3. Barclay, p. 59.

Testimony
The Mystic Ladder

John 3:16

“God is the life-giver. From the beginning, all His laws were ordained to life. But sin broke in upon the order that God had established, and discord followed. So long as sin exists, suffering and death are inevitable. It is only because the Redeemer has borne the curse of sin in our behalf, that man can hope to escape, in his own person, its dire results.”¹

“The vilest sinner . . . may have the attributes of the Saviour.”²

“After the enemy had betrayed Adam and Eve into sin, the connection between heaven and earth was severed, and had it not been for Christ, the way to heaven would never have been known by the fallen race. . . . Christ is the mystic ladder, the base of which rests upon the earth, and whose topmost round reaches to the throne of the Infinite. The children of Adam are not left desolate and alienated from God, for through Christ’s righteousness we have access unto the Father.”²

“When the sinner comes to him [Jesus] he takes his load of sin, and gives him his righteousness. The vilest sinner may claim all that was provided in the plan of salvation through the merits of Christ. He may have the attributes of the Saviour. He may go forth to tell of a living Saviour, and to win men to the truth; for he knows what it is to lay hold of Christ by living faith. He has taken the requisite steps in repentance, confession, and restitution, and he can teach others the way of salvation. He can present Christ as one who left his royal throne, who clothed his divinity with humanity that he might save fallen man. He can present him as one who was rich and yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich.”³

REACT

1. God’s plan of salvation was uniquely designed for the human race; it is a plan that even the angels will never be able to fully comprehend. How can this truth enable you to overcome the stress and difficulty of real-life scenarios (for example, learning that you have a terminal illness)?

2. Ellen. G. White calls Christ “the mystic ladder” connecting us to the glory of heaven above. How does this connection stretch beyond our salvation to affect the choices we make today? How can you fully utilize this connection in your life?

1. *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 73.

2. *That I May Know Him*, p. 82.

3. “The Christian’s Commission,” *Signs of the Times*, September 2, 1889.

Rom. 3:19–28

How-to How to De-Funkify the Funk

BBBBBBBBBBBBBB! I fell out of bed, threw on my sweatshirt, slid into my shoes, and shuffled outside. Fire alarms and the joy of living in the dorm! As I stood under the stars, I looked at the other girls. Half of them I barely recognized! Some of the most put-together girls by day were the biggest wrecks by night. So I began to think about the irony of the beauty they promote all day and the disaster they hide at night. Their sneaky way of being beautiful is to pile on the makeup until they have no “them” left. The reality is, wash your face, take care of your skin . . . and you will be more than superficially beautiful. You will be real.

Don't chase the dirt down the sink.

Here's how you can be real with God:

Look in the mirror (the law/character of God). The law shows us what we really look like. So acknowledge that you are dirty. Read Romans 3:20.

Ask for help (grace). Rubbing your reflection in the mirror will not make it clean or more beautiful. The only way to qualify for grace is to recognize that we can't save ourselves, and that we don't deserve it. Read Romans 3:23.

Reach for the water and soap (faith and righteousness). Accept that the only way your face is going to get clean is if you wash it. Faith is more than saying, “That's nice.” Faith is saying, “That's for me!” Christ's righteousness is our soap and water—it wipes away the grime of sin. We need to remember not to let our soap and water get too far away from us. Read Romans 3:22.

Realize that your face will get dirty again. However, there's plenty of soap and water for the next wash. Don't chase the dirt down the sink. We have to walk away from the sin that we hand over to God. If we keep trying to hold on to all of our dirt, we just get grossed out. But if we give it to God and let Him hold it, He will clear us up. Read Romans 8:1, 2.

Learn to be comfortable being clean. Christ has wiped away our impurities. This is true justification. “When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us.”*

REACT

Why is it so difficult to reach out and admit that we need help?

**The Desire of Ages*, p. 668.

Breaking the Law, Getting the Reward

Rom. 3:19–28

If you're a "good" person, it's easy to avoid breaking laws established by your government. However, all of us have, at one time or another, weighed our salvation with our sinful behavior and thoughts (Rom. 3:23). It may almost be impossible to go an entire day following each of God's laws without sinning in the slightest. Fortunately, He understands that humans are going to struggle with sin on a daily basis. Some personal worries I've had myself include questioning my own "goodness." I find myself wondering if the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the right church, if there is such a thing as the right religion, if I really am a "good enough" Christian, and if that's enough for God on judgment day.

I find myself wondering if the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the right church.

Martin Luther did all he could to abide by the law, and even he was unsure of his salvation. When I shared my fear of falling short of God's grace with my husband, he directed me to Romans and the same text that brought relief to Luther. I felt a peace sweep through me as I read, "We hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law" (Rom. 3:28, NRSV).

However, righteousness by faith is not an excuse to live the way we want to. As we become more like Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we will become examples to the world around us. As this growth occurs, be prepared for your faith to be tested. Your faith may waiver, but with the Holy Spirit's guidance, your relationship with Christ will grow stronger.

One thing I know for sure—Jesus Christ is my Savior. He died for my sins. This certainty of faith brings me peace that on my dying day I will sleep in Jesus until He returns. Those who are repentant and believe in Him can be assured of their salvation. They can be assured that as they grow in Christ, they will become more like Him.

"Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal. 3:24, NKJV).

REACT

1. Obedience does not save us. So, what role does obedience play in the Christian life?
2. What do you think will happen to those who may not believe in God but who lead a life of service and good will? Will there be room for them in heaven?

Candice Qualls, Pleasant Hill, California, U.S.A.

Rom. 3:19–28

Exploration

Justification by Faith Is Just the Beginning

CONCLUDE

All of us have sinned. Therefore, none of us on our own can fulfill the requirements of God's righteous law. However, when by faith we accept the righteousness of Christ and the sacrifice He made on our behalf, we will be washed clean of sin. Then we can start, also through faith, the transformation process of developing a loving character like His. This is how we become "imitators of God" (Eph. 5:1, NIV), so that when others see Him in us, they also will desire to be justified and made right by Him.

CONSIDER

- Searching for ways the Internet is helping to spread like wildfire the good news of justification by faith. Which sites seem to be the most effective, and why? Develop your own Web site the way you think the apostle Paul might have if he had had this technology available to him.
- Creating a mathematical equation that would explain Romans 3:28.
- Writing a modern-day scenario depicting what today's world economy might look like if God's grace were to upset the current status quo. (Review Sunday's lesson.)
- Comparing the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly to what happens to people when they are justified by faith.
- Drawing or sculpting the concept of Christ as the mystic ladder, which appears in the second paragraph of Tuesday's lesson.
- Asking some of your friends how being justified by God's grace (and not their own works) could transform their life.

CONNECT

Steps to Christ, "Faith and Acceptance," pp. 49–55.

Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . ., 2nd ed. (Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), pp. 136–144.

lesson five
JULY 24—31

Justification and the
Law

*“Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly
not! On the contrary, we establish the law”*

(Rom. 3:31, NKJV).



Gen. 15:6;
2 Samuel 11; 12;
Rom. 3:20–23, 31; 4:1–17;
Gal. 3:19;
1 John 3:4

Introduction

The Verdict: Life Sentence

It wasn't at all like a real courtroom. There was no prosecuting counsel preparing to make a final speech or defense attorney seeking to make one last appeal to the jury. There were just two men—David and Nathan: one powerful and well connected, the other a simple prophet with a verdict from God. David listened to all the evidence and heard the full extent of the charges. His conclusion was harsh: this serious offense deserved nothing less than the death penalty. What a shock, then, to learn that *he* was the guilty man.

**It is a promise from God with a lifetime guarantee
and no strings attached.**

Jerusalem's worst-kept secret was out! David's cunning attempts to hide his adultery with Uriah's wife led him to commit murder, then to attempt to pass off his victim as a casualty of war. What could he say in his defense? Caught red-handed, he couldn't even think about pleading ignorance. He knew that under God's law, adultery and murder were punishable by death. He was guilty as charged. All he could do was admit his sin and await the divine sentence.

However, the sentence was life, not death. "Nathan said to David, 'The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die' " (2 Sam. 12:13, NKJV). How could God put away David's sin? How could He speak a sentence of life when the law demanded death? Like David, we have all sinned. We all have ignored God's law and failed to meet His standards of righteousness. Consequently, we all face eternal death. Yet God can declare us righteous when we accept the death of His Only Son, Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away all sin. Our sin is now part of *His* story. That's why in Psalms 32 and 52, David speaks of the joy and sheer relief he felt when he experienced the undeserved blessing of forgiveness.

Could *you* use that sort of blessing? It is a promise from God with a lifetime guarantee and no strings attached. Sometimes when we feel far from God, we can think that our situation is hopeless. We stop trusting God's mercy. When God made Abraham a promise that seemed too good to be true, Abraham believed God, and God counted this faith as righteousness. That's how justification works. As a sinner expecting divine judgment, believe what God has promised and listen for the verdict: a sentence of life.

As you study this week's lesson, listen for God's voice declaring your righteousness in Him.

Logos
*Justification
and the Law*

Gen. 15:6;
2 Samuel 11; 12;
Rom. 3:20–23, 31; 4:1–17;
Gal. 3:19;
1 John 3:4

During Bible times, it was evident that a wealthy and important citizen would not be treated in a court of law the same way as an insignificant person. This was sometimes written into the statutes. For example, the ancient Code of Hammurabi stated that if a man knocked out the tooth of another citizen who was his equal, his own tooth should be knocked out. But if a man knocked out the tooth of a freed man, he is to pay a fine. If the victim was a vassal, it sufficed to pay a small fine.¹ Nobody expected strict justice in human tribunals, but the biblical writers were sure that God is a God of justice. Throughout the Bible, justice is a category of fundamental importance.²

The analysis of our human circumstance ends on a note of hopefulness.

The Problem (Rom. 3:24)

The problem in all religion is “How can sinful people be just (justified) before a holy God?” According to *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*, *justification* is a “forensic term, opposed to condemnation. As regards its nature, it is the judicial act of God, by which He pardons all the sins of those who believe in Christ, and accounts, accepts, and treats them as righteous in the eye of the law, [that is] as conformed to all its demands. In addition to the pardon of sin, justification declares that all the claims of the law are satisfied in respect of the justified. It is the act of a judge and not of a sovereign. The law is not relaxed or set-aside, but is declared to be fulfilled in the strictest sense; and so the person justified is declared to be entitled to all the advantages and rewards arising from perfect obedience to the law (Rom. 5:1–10).”³

Faithful Solution (Rom. 3:24–28; 4:2–4)

The first three chapters of Romans argue that all people are guilty before God. No one who relies on his observance of the law will be declared righteous in the divine court. The law, as a moral revelation of righteousness, offers no hope; it testifies against us “so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God” (Rom. 3:19, NRSV).

Yet the analysis of our human circumstance ends on a note of hopefulness. God has found a way to accomplish the mission of making us right before God, a righteousness that is separate from the law (Rom. 3:21, 22, 28).

Paul therefore insists that people are not justified by what they themselves do. He points to the example of Abraham, the great forebearer of the Jewish race, as one who was not justified by works (Rom. 4:2, 3). And of course, if

Abraham was not justified by works, then who could possibly be? Explicitly Paul says, "A man is not justified by observing the law"; indeed, "by observing the law no one will be justified" (Gal. 2:16, NIV; see also 3:11).

God's Solution and the Condition of the Promise (Rom. 4:1–17)

"Faith is the condition upon which God has seen fit to promise pardon to sinners; not that there is any virtue in faith whereby salvation is merited, but because faith can lay hold of the merits of Christ, the remedy provided for sin. Faith can present Christ's perfect obedience instead of the sinner's transgression and defection. When the sinner believes that Christ is his personal Saviour, then, according to His unfailing promises, God pardons his sin and justifies him freely."⁴

The Law in Its Rightful Place (Rom. 3:31)

Paul is quick to remind us that just because we are justified by faith, we cannot think to do away with keeping the Ten Commandments (the law). In fact, it is because we are now right before God (justified) that we are more than willing to live our lives according to God's precepts, which are now written in our heart rather than on stones. Read Ezekiel 36:24–27.

"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."⁵

An Apparent Problem? (James 2)

Is there a problem, however, between Paul and James, in that, whereas Paul says quite plainly that justification is by faith and not by works, James holds that "a person is justified by works and not by faith alone" (James 2:24, NRSV)? Both Paul and James comment on Abraham's act, but James chooses Abraham and Rahab as examples of people who were justified by works (James 2:21, 25).

"Paul and James agreed on justification by faith. While Paul addressed the fallacy of obtaining justification through works, James dealt with the equally dangerous concept of claiming justification without corresponding works. Neither works nor a dead faith lead to justification. It can be realized only by a genuine faith that works by love (Gal. 5:6) and purifies the soul."⁶

1. L. W. King, trans., *The Code of Hammurabi*, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/ancient/hamframe.asp> (accessed August 31, 2009).

2. Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1996).

3. M. Easton, *Easton's Bible Dictionary* (Oak Harbor, Wash.: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1897).

4. *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 366, 367.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 367.

6. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, 2nd ed. (Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), p. 137.

"If a man could save himself by his own works, he might have something in himself in which to rejoice. . . . All that man can do without Christ is polluted with selfishness and sin; but that which is wrought through faith is acceptable to God."¹

"The law and the gospel are in perfect harmony."

"Without the law, men have no just conception of the purity and holiness of God or of their own guilt and uncleanness. They have no true conviction of sin and feel no need of repentance. . . . The hope of salvation is accepted without a radical change of heart or reformation of life. Thus superficial conversions abound, and multitudes are joined to the church who have never been united to Christ.² As a result, "Many try to break the mirror which reveals their defects, to make void the law which points out the blemishes in their life and character."³

In not fully beholding the law (which is God's very character), we make the law void. To make void means to take away the legal force of the law. But it does not stop there. If we make the law null and void, we reject everything that salvation offers us: God's love, His grace, justification, and Jesus' righteousness.

"Satan is continually at work to lessen man's estimate of the grievous character of sin. And those who trample the law of God under their feet are doing the work of the great deceiver; for they are rejecting the only rule by which they can define sin, and bring it home to the conscience of the transgressor."⁴

"The law and the gospel are in perfect harmony. Each upholds the other. In all its majesty the law confronts the conscience, causing the sinner to feel his need of Christ as the propitiation for sin."⁵

"Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His."⁶ Through faith in Him, we are Justified. . . . Just as if I'd never sinned.

REACT

Why does justification by faith require us to fully behold the law?

1. *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 364.
2. *The Great Controversy*, p. 468.
3. *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 219.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 240, 241.
6. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 25.

Rom. 3:21–31

Evidence

Faith and Obedience—A Present Continuous Tense

Within Christianity there seems to be a tug-of-war between salvation through faith and salvation through keeping the law. Many argue that the law was nailed to the cross and that we are saved by grace alone. This is seen in the fact that many Christians no longer worship on the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday) but on Sunday. But then other people are so caught up in keeping the law that they miss the necessity of God's grace.

Love is lived out in actions.

The Bible is our primary source of evidence regarding this issue, and in Romans 3:21–31, it states that we are made righteous through faith in Christ. It also states us that although we are saved through faith, the law is still valid.

Further evidence that law and faith go together is found in John 3:16. Take time to read it now. This verse has been called by many the ticket to heaven, because it states the one thing we must do to be saved. To understand this verse more fully, let's consider it in its original language. In Greek, verbs have a present continuous tense—to "go on doing." So the word *believes* here means "to keep on believing." We see another example of this in John 20:31.

In the Gospels, we read about the many miracles Jesus performed. John refers to these miracles as signs (John 2:11). This suggests that the miracles have a greater meaning, for signs point to something beyond themselves. One of these signs is found in John 2, where Jesus turned water into wine. At first, we just see a miracle. But there is more to it than that. Jesus asked the servants to fill clay jars with water, jars whose water was used for ritual purification of the body. He then asked them to draw the water (which had turned to wine) from the jars. By this sign Jesus showed that He came to cleanse us from sin, that we are saved from the penalty of law (which is death), and that the law is not abolished. Throughout the Bible, the law establishes a need for grace; but now, in our lives, through our faith, we establish the law by keeping it. "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15, NKJV). Throughout the Scriptures, love is lived out in actions. Yes, we are saved by grace through faith. However, we need to live out our faith by showing our love for God through our actions.

REACT

1. How do we find the right balance between law and grace?
2. What does it mean that Jesus fulfilled the law?

How-to Passing the Test With God

John 15:16

Performance reviews. Evaluations. Exams. Our value seems to be determined by how much we can achieve, deliver, pass, and perform. Is it any different with God? It is true that God expects His people to deliver “results.” In fact, He has commissioned us to go and make disciples of all the world. But does this make us valuable to God?

If your friends aren’t interested in God, do you dump them and move on?

What would it be like to have a performance review with God? We may find that there’s only one question we need to answer: Do you believe that God has chosen you, and not you who has chosen God? (See John 15:16.) A “yes” answer changes everything. It changes your perspective from one in which you have to earn God’s love to one in which He just simply loves you—full stop. It takes you from a position in which you can do something to make your relationship right with God to one in which only God has, is, and will do something to restore your relationship with Him. Finally, you acknowledge that it is not your performance that has anything to do with it, but rather God’s performance.

So how can you live a life that reflects this perspective? It may be useful to ask these questions:

How many non-Christian friends do you have? Jesus was surrounded by people who were not considered to be religious. Can we say the same of our social network?

Do you make friends with people just to convert them? Friendship evangelism is becoming popular, but if your friends aren’t interested in God, do you dump them and move on? Jesus extended friendship to Judas knowing that he would betray Him. Do you set the same example in your friendships?

Do you judge others and their relationship with God based on your own expectations? The early church argued over what people had to do to be true followers of Jesus. Generally the answer was based on their own expectations rather than on God’s love and grace. Are we quick to judge others by our standards rather than by God’s?

REACT

God’s love and grace can seem unfair in a world that expects us to do something to get something. How can you show this same kind of grace and love to others?

Murray Harvey, London, United Kingdom

Opinion
*Positively Vain***2 Cor. 3:18**
James 1:23–25;

It's no accident that the Bible likens the law of God to a mirror. A mirror cannot change the way we look. It doesn't hold opinions, and it can't make judgments. Its function is just to show things as they are. It is therefore no surprise that when we desire to look our best, the first place we often go to is a mirror. Looking into a mirror, we consider our appearance, reflect on our demeanor, and ponder how others will perceive us. Having looked into the mirror, we come to recognize that in order to be our best, certain changes will need to be made. Here is where difficulty begins. We cover our blemishes, hide our imperfections, and worry about what people would think if they saw what we really look like.

The mirror of God's law . . . shows us . . . what we can be.

Sometimes it's exactly the same with the mirror of God. Often we genuinely desire to be what He wants us to be. But having looked in the mirror of His law, we are occasionally discouraged by the fact that we just don't measure up to His standard. We try to make ourselves clean, but on our own we can't remove the dirt left by sin. We try to mask our deficiencies, but the rain of life's hardships always washes our mask away. Looking in the mirror, we realize what we truly are—sinners in desperate need of a Savior.

But then there's the beauty of the gospel. Christ is willing to do for us that which we cannot do for ourselves. He has the power to justify us (make us right in the eyes of God), to make us new creatures where it really counts—on the inside. The mirror of God's law does not just show us as we are. It shows us (through the grace and power of Christ) what we can be. God's law tells us that He is merciful, forgiving, gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. His law shows us that by faith, this is how we can also be (Exod. 34:6, 7). God's law reveals not only our own character but, most important, reveals His; for only through His character, a character that endured the cross, can we be made right again. While the Bible counsels against vanity, the irony is that perhaps as Christians we *need* to look in the mirror. God's mirror, that is, and not our own.

REACT

1. What does justification and the law mean to you?
2. How can you apply God's law to your life without being legalistic?

Exploration
*How to Be
Right With God*

Rom. 3:21–31;
4:1–17

CONCLUDE

Human righteousness is all about God's work in us. It is not about what we do to be right with Him. Our Creator is our Redeemer taking upon Himself the act of reconciling and re-creating into His image sinful humans who repel His very nature. The law, then, is set before us to reveal a holy God and to mirror our own sinful image back to us—showing us how painfully short we fall from His image and hopes, and that we deserve His wrath. The law is also a moral compass pointing us to the intersection of God's saving grace through the sacrificial offering of Christ—His life for ours. That is how we are right with God—through His work *for* us and *in* us—if we put our faith in Him, and not in ourselves.

CONSIDER

- Doing a word study on the following: *justification, righteousness, transgressions, forgiveness, atonement, faith, and hope*. Use several sources, such as a regular dictionary, a Bible dictionary, and a Greek lexicon. Record your findings and keep them as you move through the next steps.
- Reading through Romans 3 and 4. Write down all the things we can do to be right with God. How many did you find? What are they? What characteristics has God described all of us as having? What standing, then, do we have with God? What attributes and actions does God consider as righteousness in us?
- Reflecting on your own relationship with Christ. What drew/draws you to Him? How did you come to know Him? How close and personal are you with Him? Is your relationship with God something personal, or is it related exclusively to your religious upbringing: attending church, following the rules and lifestyles of fellow Adventists—being traditionally and culturally a Christian Adventist, but without a personal, daily commitment to listening and responding to God?
- Journaling your personal experience of coming to know about Christ, falling into a relationship with Him, and how that relationship impacts you and is expressed in your life today.
- Creating a graphic artwork featuring one of the words from the word study (such as *hope, faith, forgiveness*) and putting that word together with one of the verses in Romans 3 or 4 that stood out for you.

CONNECT

Steps to Christ, "The Sinner's Need of Christ," pp. 17–22.

Expounding the
Faith

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:1, 2, NKJV).



Introduction
The Peace Child

Jer. 23:6

In my country, there is a famous legend about Magere, an ancient warlord who could not be killed by spears during the tribal wars because he possessed a spear-proof body. Because of this, he was a champion for his tribe.

Over time, opponents of Magere and his tribe tried to discover the secret behind his spear-proof body. They offered him one of their best daughters for a wife, and Magere accepted. In the meantime, peace was restored for quite a while. But Magere's new wife was busy trying to learn her husband's secret. One day, Magere fell sick, and his wife discovered that her husband's strength resided in his shadow. This solved the mystery, and a few weeks later, Magere was killed by his opponents in a bloody battle.

“All were silent except the Sawi chief's wife.”

This story reminds me of Don Richardson, an American anthropologist and missionary who spent several frustrating years in New Guinea, hoping to bring the Christian message to the tribes of that country. His appeals, however, always fell on deaf ears, and having grown tired of his fruitless efforts, he decided to return home.

“Just before Richardson left, the Sawi and their deadly enemies, the Haenam tribe, staged an elaborate ceremony in front of his home. It was their final effort to convince him to stay. The entire village gathered to watch the event. All were silent except the Sawi chief's wife. She screamed loudly as the chief seized their six-month old baby from her arms and held him high in the air. The chief then carried his son to the enemy chief and gave him to his enemies. A member of the tribe explained to Richardson that the Haenam tribe would rename the baby and rear him as one of its own.”* Now that the child from the Sawi tribe lived with the enemy, there would be peace between the two tribes, because both tribes loved the child and would not want him to be killed in a war. Because peace was restored through this child, he was their peace child.

Christ is the peace child between heaven and earth. God gave to our sinful world His only Son to bridge the gap brought about by sin. When we believe in Jesus' sacrifice for us, we gain forgiveness and pardon for our sins along with eternal life and peace. Such is the faith we will learn more about this week.

* “A Modern Peace Child,” *Insight*, 2000.

Luke 7:9

Evidence

Faith That Brings Hope

In the aftermath of post-election violence that recently rocked my country, it was recommended that those who planned, funded, and initiated anarchy should be taken to the International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague in the Netherlands. Once there, it was hoped by many that these people might receive a death sentence, because their actions led to the loss of many lives.

The thought of appearing before the ICC must have sent chills down the spines of the top-level government officials who perpetrated the violence. For fear of ending up on death row, they expressed a desire to go before a local tribunal whose members might give them a lighter sentence.

Now we must have faith in Christ that He will heal us. . . .

In Luke 7:1–10, we read about a top-ranking government official whose servant was sick unto death. The official quite possibly had checked all the available options for healing within his reach as an important person. However, nothing helped. Then he must have heard about how Christ was healing people and wondered if He would do the same for his dying servant. The official's faith so impressed Christ that Christ said to those around Him, "I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" (Luke 7:9, NKJV).

When sin entered the perfect order of God's creation, it brought sickness and death. There was nothing in the world that could put us right again. "The broken law of God demanded the life of the sinner. . . . Since the divine law is as sacred as God Himself, only one equal with God could make atonement for its transgression. None but Christ could redeem fallen man from the curse of the law and bring him again into harmony with Heaven."*

Now we must have faith in Christ that He will heal us both physically and spiritually. Only He can redeem us from sin and give us peace again with our heavenly Father. When we accept Him as our personal Savior, Christ becomes the bridge over which we cross from death to life. When He justifies us, and when through the process of sanctification we become like Him, He makes us eligible for the rewards of heaven. We must choose to accept Him and live or to reject Him and die forever.

* *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 63.

The Problem and the Solution

Romans 5

Justification by Faith (Deut. 32:4; Rom. 5:6–8)

Paul's letter to the Romans explores why we continue to exist after sin entered the world. Adam and Eve could well have died the very day they sinned. However, God in His mercy devised a plan by which fallen humans could be saved.

Pardon for the human race could be made only through a righteous member of the Godhead. So "God was to be manifest in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19, NKJV). In faith and repentance, "the fallen children of Adam might once more become 'sons of God.' 1 John 3:2."¹

"The love of God the Father was displayed in the death of Christ. This vital

The coming of Jesus Christ to live and identify with sinful humans in a sinful world is an indication of God's perfect love.

fact must be recognized for a correct understanding of the atonement. . . . Christ did not die to appease His Father or to induce Him to love us. It was divine love that conceived the plan of atonement and salvation in the beginning, and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have all worked together in perfect harmony to effect it."²

Death and Life Contrasted (Rom. 5:12–14)

The original environment God created for us to live in was perfect. In writing to the Romans, Paul discusses how sin changed this perfect beauty and order. Before sin, Adam and Eve enjoyed face-to-face communion with God. This communion was the most beautiful of all. That ended, however, when Satan succeeded in tempting Adam and Eve. But because God's love did not end, He chose His only Son to become a human and to live and die on earth so that we might be delivered from the penalty of death. When we accept this sacrifice, we are put on a new footing with God. In Romans 5, Paul explains that through Adam, death reigned, but that through the death of Christ, humans could experience new life through faith in Him.

Also in Romans 5, "Paul is emphasizing . . . that as sin and death, as a principle and power, proceeded from Adam to the whole human race, so righteousness and life, as a counteracting and conquering principle and power, proceed from Christ to all mankind. And as death has been passed on to all men who

participate in Adam's sin, so life is passed on to all those who participate in the righteousness of Christ."³

Marvelous Union (Rom. 5:15-21)

The coming of Jesus Christ to live and identify with sinful humans in a sinful world is an indication of God's perfect love. Had Christ not come, there would be no pardon and thus no hope. The chasm between sinners and God could have existed forever or until sin simply destroyed everything in its path.

Paul ends Romans 5 by emphasizing "the position that Christ holds as the mediator in the work for man's redemption. Through His death the believer is justified, and through union with Him from then onward the Christian receives that vitalizing and sanctifying power that transforms his present life and assures him of eternal life to come."⁴

REACT

1. Think of a time when you felt far from God. How did your faith in Christ bridge that gap?

2. What do you think would have happened if Christ had not come to die for us?

3. The world is full of so many different cultures. Are we all saved by grace through faith in the same way? Explain.

4. Put your name in the blanks of the following quotation that appeared in the last section of today's article: Paul ends Romans 5 by emphasizing "the position that Christ holds as the mediator in the work for _____ redemption. Through His death _____ is justified, and through union with Him from then onward _____ receives that vitalizing and sanctifying power that transforms [his or her] present life and assures [him or her] of eternal life to come."

How did putting your name in this quote make you feel, and why?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 64.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 527.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 529, 530.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 533.

Testimony
*The Plan of
Redemption*

2 Cor. 5:19

“The angels could not rejoice as Christ opened before them the plan of redemption, for they saw that man’s salvation must cost their loved Commander unutterable woe. In grief and wonder they listened to His words as He told them how He must descend from heaven’s purity and peace, its joy and glory and immortal life, and come in contact with the degradation of earth, to endure its sorrow, shame, and death. He was to stand between the sinner and the penalty of sin; yet few would receive Him as the Son of God. He would leave His high position as the Majesty of heaven, appear upon earth and humble Himself as a man, and by His own experience become acquainted with the sorrows and temptations which man would have to endure. All this would be necessary in order that He might be able to succor them that should be tempted. Hebrews 2:18. When His mission as a teacher should be ended, He must be delivered into the hands of wicked men and be subjected to every insult and torture that Satan could inspire them to inflict. He must die the cruelest of deaths, lifted up between the heavens and the earth as a guilty sinner. He must pass long hours of agony so terrible that angels could not look upon it, but would veil their faces from the sight. He must endure anguish of soul, the hiding of His Father’s face, while the guilt of transgression—the weight of the sins of the whole world—should be upon Him. . . .

“All this would be necessary. . . .”

“Christ assured the angels that by His death He would ransom many, and would destroy him who had the power of death. He would recover the kingdom which man had lost by transgression, and the redeemed were to inherit it with Him, and dwell therein forever. Sin and sinners would be blotted out, nevermore to disturb the peace of heaven or earth. He bade the angelic host to be in accord with the plan that His Father had accepted, and rejoice that, through His death, fallen man could be reconciled to God.

“Then joy, inexpressible joy filled heaven. The glory and blessedness of a world redeemed, outmeasured even the anguish and sacrifice of the Prince of life.”*

* *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 64, 65.

Ps. 27:1

How-to Steps to Salvation

This week we have been studying Paul's words concerning how Christ's sacrifice on the cross brings justification to those who accept Him as their personal redeemer. The repercussions of Adam's sins are deadly, but by faith in Christ, we can be forgiven and forever pardoned. Our salvation and peace with God is guaranteed as long as we accept Christ's blood that was shed at Calvary. "When the tide of iniquity overspread the world, and the wickedness of men determined their destruction by a flood of waters, the hand that had planted Eden withdrew it from the earth. But in the final restitution, when there shall be 'a new heaven and a new earth' (Revelation 21:1), it is to be restored more gloriously adorned than at the beginning."*

By faith in Christ, we can be forgiven and forever pardoned.

All who are justified look forward to the day of final liberation. However, it all depends on the steps we take toward salvation. Following are some of these steps, which, when taken, deliver us from sin.

Suffering. From the very first instant it happened, sin brought suffering. Sin continues unabated to this day. However, Christ our Redeemer is able to give us power through the Holy Spirit to help us withstand pain and suffering while we wait for His second coming.

Perseverance. As much as we may experience pain and suffering in this world, we are called to endure in the footsteps of the disciples and of Christ Himself. Pain and suffering are a test of our faith, and our ability to persevere is a measure of our faith and Christ's ability to save. As we wait for the final day, perseverance against pain and suffering will be a part of our Christian life.

Character. Perseverance helps us develop a Christlike character. This is a life-long process that occurs as we allow the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts.

Hope. Hope strengthens our faith. A life full of hope is one full of service for others. Our salvation will ultimately come in proportion to the faith and hope we exert to obtain it.

REACT

1. What other steps can you think of that one must take to be delivered from sin?
2. Which steps are the most difficult for you to take, and why?
3. Which steps are you taking right now? What part of Christ's character are these steps developing in you (see Galatians 5:22, 23)?

**Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 62.

Opinion
The Big Picture

Rom. 3:22–24

Judging by what is happening in society today, we would do well to pay less attention to much of the news. With each passing day, around the entire world, corruption is on the rise as are moral and spiritual decadence. Which direction do we take as children of God? Satan would like nothing better than to get us to make our own decisions without involving Christ.

However, the Bible assures us that by leaning on Him who is our Redeemer, we are able to overcome sin. “There are not many ways to heaven. Each one may not choose his own way. Christ says, ‘I am the way: . . . no man cometh unto the

Let Christ take control of our lives.

Father, but by Me.’ Since the first gospel sermon was preached, when in Eden it was declared that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head, Christ had been uplifted as the way, the truth, and the life. . . . Christ was the way by which patriarchs and prophets were saved. He is the way by which alone we can have access to God.”¹

This assurance should make us strong in our stand against sin. Sometimes, I feel miserable and hopeless when I imagine what it would be like to face life without the mercy of Christ. However, at the thought of Him as a Redeemer for the whole world, I receive strength, courage, and hope. With Christ surrounding me, I am strengthened not to follow the deceits of my human heart. It’s time for us to acknowledge the justification given to us by Christ and to learn that we cannot succeed in our own righteousness. Let Christ take control of our lives, because it is only through His sacrificial intervention on the cross that we can be justified.

“From the days of Adam to our own time, our great enemy has been exercising his power to oppress and destroy. . . . All who are actively engaged in the cause of God, seeking to unveil the deceptions of the evil one and to present Christ before the people, will be able to join in the testimony of Paul, in which he speaks of serving the Lord with all humility of mind, with many tears and temptations.”²

Today it is our privilege to join Paul in proclaiming the saving grace of our Savior, who has brought justification for all who accept Him regardless of color or national origin.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 663.

2. *The Great Controversy*, p. 510.

Rom. 6:23

Exploration

Bridging the Divide

CONCLUDE

God created us in His image. This must have been an intensely personal project for Him. The existence He desired for us was one of perfection—free of pain, full of joy, and in constant communion with Him, our Creator. Yet when we introduced sin into the world, a chasm was formed between our Designer and us. The sickness of sin infiltrated all aspects of humanity. Now we are doomed to a life of suffering and inevitable death. Thankfully, God, in His infinite wisdom and mercy, had another plan. He stretched out His hand and, with incomprehensible grace, bridged the divide sin had created. The sacrifice of His Son paid the price for our transgressions. And through faith, we are justified/saved.

CONSIDER

- Listing examples of times in your life when the assurance of salvation gave you hope and strength to endure through a trying time.
- Painting Jesus' second coming as you imagine it.
- Celebrating your relationship with Christ with other church members.
- Envisioning life in heaven without sin.
- Observing examples of God's grace in nature.
- Memorizing your five favorite Bible verses about salvation.
- Studying another denomination's understanding of redemption and comparing it to the Adventist interpretation.

CONNECT

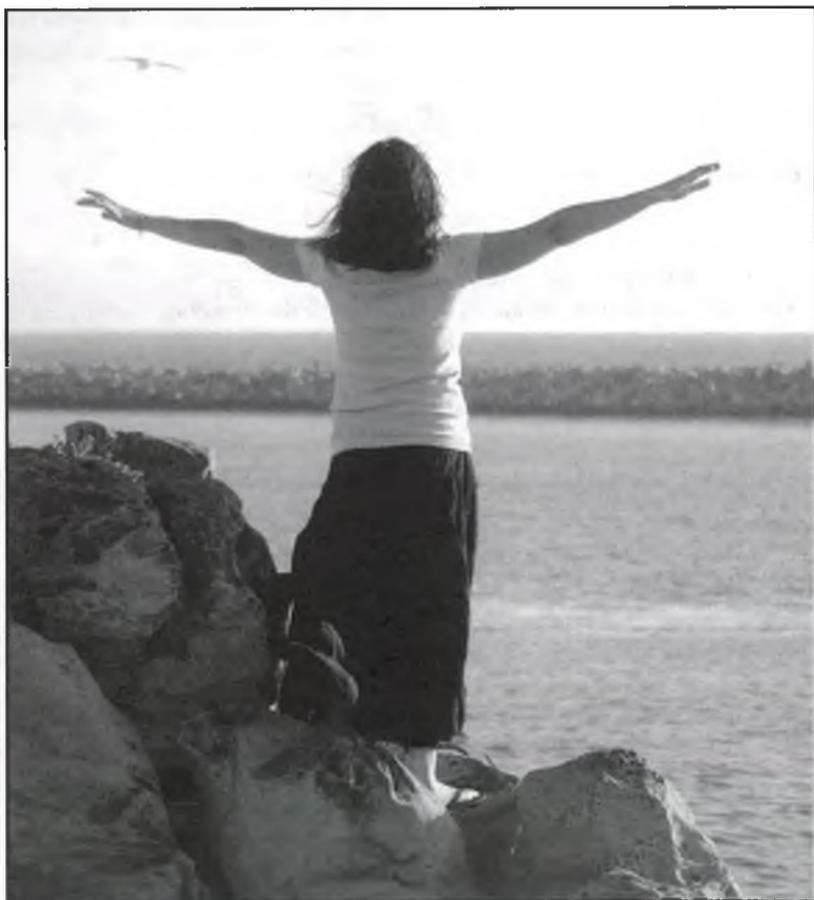
Selected Messages, book 1, pp. 396–398.

Angel Manuel Rodriguez, "Justification in Romans 3:21–24." <http://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/documents/justificationRom%203-21-24.htm> (accessed August 14, 2009).

lesson seven
AUGUST 7-14

Victory Over
Sin

“Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace” (Rom. 6:14, NKJV).



Rom. 6:5

Introduction

Why Not Break Loose From Sin?

It's as vivid as if it were yesterday. When I was going to school, track was my passion. I would practice faithfully up to the day of the big event. During the event I would stand face to face with the reality that *now* I was supposed to prove myself to my school and my friends. Would I be worthy? I would put out

He did not consent to sin in either thought or deed.

all the energy I had, and it paid off. I was so proud of myself because of what I accomplished.

Jesus wants us to put all our effort into being totally committed to Him. Feeling proud is what Jesus feels when we are victorious over sin through the help of the Holy Spirit. Sin is an offense committed against God, and there is a price to pay for it if we continue to live in sin. That is why Jesus paved the way on earth in human form to show us that even though we are living in a sinful world, there is hope. He did not consent to sin in either thought or deed. He came to show us how to live. He came to die on the cross so that we may have victory over sin through Him. If we put our faith in Him, wonderful things will happen. "Christ's love for His children is as tender as it is strong. And it is stronger than death; for He died to purchase our salvation, and to make us one with Him, mystically and eternally one."*

According to Romans, Jesus wants us to have victory over sin by giving our hearts to Him. And why would a person not want to give his or her heart to the Lord? When we do, we have a true Friend indeed.

Romans 6:4 teaches us that part of the process of giving our heart totally to God is to die with Him in the watery grave of baptism. This symbolizes cleansing from sin and our desire to walk with Him. In addition, Romans 6:5 promises that "if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection" (NKJV).

This week we will study in depth how we can have victory over sin. What difference will such a victory make in your life?

**Messages to Young People*, p. 110.

Logos
Overcoming Sin

Romans 6;
1 John 1:8–2:10

The Symbol of Victory Over Sin (Rom. 6:1–11)

No other symbol better describes the burial and the death of the old sinful life than the rite of baptism. Christian life is dying, for in the dying there is living. Dying to the old sinful self will result in a transformed attitude toward living. Through the death of the old self, we are freed from sin to walk in the newness of life because we are no longer slaves to sin. However, we must die daily (1 Cor. 15:31). Hence, baptism is not the end. It is only a beginning of our growing relationship with Christ. One notices that in Romans 6:1–11, Paul repeatedly mentions the phrase “with Christ.” “We were buried with Him” (verse 4), “died with Christ” (verse 8), “live with Him” (verse 8, NKJV). This suggests that victory over sin is a continuous process and can be attained only through Christ.

When we sin, Jesus does not love us any less.

The Demonstration of Victory Over Sin (Rom. 6:12–14)

Because victory over sin is a continuous process, it should be demonstrated in a concrete way. An example mentioned in this section’s text relates to our physical bodies. We are encouraged not to sin with our bodies. Paul exhorts us to use them wholly and completely for the glory of God. After being assured of our salvation, we might be inclined to abuse God’s grace. Either we might stop growing in Christ, or we might become discouraged. But God promises that we can persevere through His grace. We should obey Him not out of fear but out of love. And when love is the governing principle of our obedience, it is easy to use our bodies for God’s glory.

Another Analogy of Victory Over Sin (Rom. 6:15–23)

In this section’s text, we read about victory over sin in terms of the relationship between a slave and his master. Being set free from sin is equal to being slaves to righteousness. Those who are victors over sin are considered slaves of God. Slaves are at the disposal of their master. The process of being slaves to God leads to sanctification (verse 19). And sanctification ultimately will bring us to eternal life (verse 22) in Christ Jesus. There is no other way to receive eternal life except through the merits of His death and grace. We must be connected to Jesus Christ. In Him, the gift of eternal life is certain (verse 23). Being

slaves of God also means being freed from sin (verse 22). This idea appears to be contradictory, because being a slave implies a loss of freedom. But the type of freedom promised is the freedom to obey God from the heart (verse 17). It is a liberating experience to obey someone not because we are forced to but because we love to. It is also a liberating experience in contrast to the disheartening life of being slaves to sin. Such a life only leads from one sin to the next (verse 19). Thus, it is far better to be a slave to God.

Christ's Role in Our Victory Over Sin (1 John 1:8–2:10)

Sin is universal (Rom. 3:23; 5:12). Everyone is a sinner. This may paint a negative picture of one's ability to have victory over sin. However, there is good news. First John 1:8–2:10 describes the character of Christ—who He is in relation to sin and sinners. It also tells us how Christ deals with our sin. But as sinners, we also have a role to play. We must confess our sins to Christ. Confessing is not simply asking God's forgiveness in general. It also involves acknowledging before Him the particular sins we have committed. Then, because Jesus is faithful and just, He can faithfully fulfill His promise of forgiveness to us.

When we sin, Jesus does not love us any less. His forgiveness is still available, as is His desire to cleanse us. When we ask for forgiveness, Jesus will plead to the Father on our behalf. That is the meaning of His work in the heavenly sanctuary. With faith in Him as our High Priest in heaven, forgiveness of sins is guaranteed. At times, we might become discouraged because we cannot on our own keep the law and because sin is so pervasive. But our God gave us a Savior who not only can save us from the guilt of sin but also empower us to overcome sin. What a great Savior and Redeemer!

REACT

1. Explain how sin does not have dominion over us because we are not under law but under grace (Rom. 6:14).

2. Is it an abuse of God's grace when a person repeatedly commits a specific sin, yet always asks for forgiveness? Why or why not?

*Triumph Over Sin*Rom. 6:12-14;
1 John 1:8-2:1

Satan bombards us with evil, but let “every Christian stand on guard continually, watching every avenue of the soul where Satan might find access. He must pray for divine help and at the same time resolutely resist every inclination to sin. By courage, by faith, by persevering toil, he can conquer. But let him remember that to gain the victory Christ must abide in him and he in Christ.”¹

“There is hope for man.”

“Satan seeks to draw our minds away from the mighty Helper, to lead us to ponder over our degeneration of soul. But though Jesus sees the guilt of the past, He speaks pardon; and we should not dishonor Him by doubting His love. The feeling of guiltiness must be laid at the foot of the cross, or it will poison the springs of life. When Satan thrusts his threatenings upon you, turn from them, and comfort your soul with the promises of God.”²

“There is hope for man. Christ says, ‘To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne’ (Rev. 3:21). But let us never forget that the efforts we make in our own strength are utterly worthless. Our strength is weakness; our judgment foolishness. Only in the name and strength of the Conqueror can we conquer. When we are pressed with temptation, when un-christlike desires clamor for the mastery, let us offer fervent, importunate prayer to the heavenly Father, in the name of Christ. This will bring divine aid. In the Redeemer’s name we may gain the victory.”³

“When one is fully emptied of self, when every false god is cast out of the soul, the vacuum is filled by the inflowing of the Spirit of Christ. Such a one has the faith that purifies the soul from defilement. He is conformed to the Spirit, and he minds the things of the Spirit. He has no confidence in self. Christ is all and in all.”⁴

REACT

1. Take an inventory of your life. What sins are “reigning” in your body?
2. What are some ways we can guard against sin?

1. *The Adventist Home*, p. 403.

2. *Messages to Young People*, pp. 109, 110.

3. *Ye Shall Receive Power*, p. 358.

4. *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 212.

Rom. 6:15

Evidence

What Shall I Do to Inherit the Kingdom?

“Those who have put on Christ by baptism, by this act showing their separation from the world and that they have covenanted to walk in newness of life, should not set up idols in their hearts. Those who have once rejoiced in the evidence of sins

If we do away with the commandments, how can we know what sin is?

forgiven, who have tasted a Saviour's love and who then persist in uniting with the foes of Christ, rejecting the perfect righteousness that Jesus offers them and choosing the ways that He has condemned, will be more severely judged than the heathen who have never had the light and have never known God or His law.”*

Many people today believe that once we accept Christ, it is all right to keep sinning, because we are no longer under the law but under grace. But what is grace if not the unmerited (undeserved) favor of God? It is a common misconception that the commandments were only for the Jews. But if we do away with the commandments, how can we know what sin is? Sin is the transgression of the law. If there is no law, there is no transgression (Rom. 4:15). If there is nothing to transgress, there is no sin. If there is no sin, there is no need of a Savior. And if there is no Savior, there is no grace.

In his letter to his Christian friends in Rome, Paul tried to make clear the idea that grace was not a reason to go on sinning. The aim of Paul's letter was to teach how we might be made righteous. Even though Paul was addressing the Christian church in Rome at that time, his words ring true today. He found it necessary to repeat himself in an attempt to reiterate his point that if we have received Christ, we are new creatures (Rom. 6:4).

Victory over sin comes in knowing that Christ has given us power to overcome sin (Rom. 6:6). That power comes through God's grace as it resides in our hearts through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. For if you have received Christ, you are free and are no longer a servant of sin but a servant of righteousness.

REACT

Read Matthew 19:16–22. The rich young ruler kept all of God's commandments from when he was a child. However, Jesus saw that his wealth was his god. What do you treasure today? Are you willing to give it up for Christ?

* *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, pp. 365, 366.

How-to Gaining the Victory

1 John 1:8–10

Our world today is full of evil, hurt, and pain. No one is exempt from the devil's attacks. He has all the gadgets he needs to make you succumb to the temptations of this world. Often, people sink so deep into sin that they have no hope of victory. They give up without a struggle. But there is hope. God has made provision for everyone to have victory over sin. Following are some steps to achieving this victory:

When God forgives your sins, He . . . remembers them no more, so don't go looking for them.

First acknowledge that you have sinned. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Admit your guilt and recognize that God does not lead us into sin.

Confess your sins. God knows you have sinned. So why should you confess them? When you confess, you are showing God that you are aware of your sins, that you are sorry for them, and that you no longer want to live in sin.

Pray and ask for forgiveness. It is not enough just to confess your sins. You must ask for forgiveness. God is just and fair, so He is willing to forgive us if we ask Him to. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, NIV). Pray that you will not fall into temptation.

Accept God's forgiveness. When you pray for forgiveness, leave your request and your burdens at the foot of the cross. When God forgives your sins, He buries them as it were in the deepest part of the ocean and remembers them no more, so don't go looking for them. Don't keep thinking about them.

Go and sin no more. To resist temptation, you must keep God's Word in your heart. "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Ps. 119:11, NIV). When God's Word becomes an integral part of your life, it gives you the strength and vigor you need to overcome temptation and sin.

REACT

1. Why is it necessary to accept forgiveness of your sins?
2. What is confession? How important is it in the life of a true Christian?
3. Is it all right to ask others to forgive us for something we are not sure we are guilty of?
4. What does Galatians 5:19–26 teach us about certain attitudes and emotions in regard to sin?

The Beautiful Conjunction

In English, the word *but* is a conjunction. Generally speaking, whatever follows the word *but* negates what was said before it. “That was a pretty good attempt, *but* you should see how *my* child does that.” This is the way it works in the last verse in our chapter of study for this week. If we were to read the first portion of this verse on its own, we would be in despair. “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

Surrender is the key to victory.

Then, however, comes the beautiful conjunction: “*but* the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23, emphasis added).

As fallen beings, we are surrounded by sin and its effects. On our own, there is no way to avoid it, and the Bible tells us that everyone has succumbed to temptation (Rom. 3:23; 5:12). Our verse of study for today indicates that the penalty for that sin is death. Each of us has been found guilty and has been handed a death sentence. The good news is that Jesus conquered death and sin, and He offers us that same victory. We simply have to know how to access it.

Author Shelley Quinn wrote, “I must recognize my absolute, total dependence upon Jesus Christ to perform a work in me that empowers me to walk in the commandments of God.”¹ Our role is to “let go and let God.” There is nothing so simple and yet so difficult at the same time. We find ourselves trying valiantly to achieve our own victory over sin by attempting to be good. This only serves to ensnare us more in the net of sin, because “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6).

Surrender is the key to victory. “The consistent surrender of all . . . thoughts, feelings, and, yes, our actions comprises freedom in the Christian life.”² God desires us to have a full life (John 10:10), not to be trapped in sin. The victory is ours if we desire to claim it. As we reflect on the study for this week, may our song be, “O victory in Jesus, my Savior forever!”³

REACT

1. What, if anything, is stopping you from claiming victory over sin?
2. Do you believe that the victory over sin is instantaneous, or do we gain victory over various sins at different times? Explain your answer.

1. Shelley Quinn, *Exalting His Word* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2006), p. 50.

2. Jim Hohnberger, *Empowered Living* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2002), p. 32.

3. Lyrics by Eugene Monroe Bartlett.

Exploration
“To the Victor
Go the Spoils”

Romans 6;
1 John 1:8–2:10

CONCLUDE

The title of this Exploration article refers to the practice of giving favors to loyal members of the political party in power. It also can refer to the practice of winning armies taking whatever they wanted from the people they conquered or when a winner of a contest receiving the benefits of having won, for example—a title, prize, or award. When Christians become victors over sin through faith in Christ and by abiding in Him, they receive a host of rewards, none of which they earned! Just a few of these rewards include peace, love, joy, and eternal life.

CONSIDER

- Painting or sketching what victory over sin feels like to you.
- Analyzing one biblical character who had victory over sin and one who did not. As you review the lives of both, compare and contrast the choices and actions each one made. Then compare and contrast their choices and actions to yours. Which person are you the most like? Based on this exercise, what changes do you need to make to have victory over sin?
- Getting together with some friends or family members to celebrate victories each of you have personally experienced in your walk with God. Share a light meal, sing a few songs, and enjoy each other's fellowship.
- Reflecting upon one or two personal behaviors that might be keeping you from having a deeper relationship with God. Envision your life without these behaviors. Consider some things you can do that will help you to change, and daily ask God to give you the victory.
- Composing music for this week's memory verse: "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace" (Rom. 6:14, NKJV). Sing it whenever you feel that you are being tempted to sin.
- Learning how to say "victory over sin" in sign language. Go to the following Web site and search for the words *victory* and *sin*: Sign languages seldom use prepositions, so don't bother with the word *over*. http://www.valleybible.net/DeafMinistry/ASLDictionary/asl_dictionary.php.

CONNECT

Steps to Christ, pp. 98–104.

Biblical Research Institute, "How Perfect Is *Perfect* Or Is Christian Perfection Possible?" <http://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/documents/How%20Perfect%20Is%20Perfect.htm>.

The Person of
Romans 7

“But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter” (Rom. 7:6, NKJV).



Introduction
Former Captives!

Rom. 6:14

The human tendency is to try to live the Christian life in the flesh, by works, by our own human effort and striving, by trying and struggling, by making resolutions, by attempting to follow rules and regulations and schedules, and so on. However, the more we try, the more we struggle and fail. We must keep in mind the statement Paul made in Romans 6:14, "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace." This implies that if we were under law, then sin would have dominion over us.

The devil means us no good.

God has certain holy and righteous demands that He places upon us. That is law. Now if law means that God requires something of us for their fulfillment, then deliverance from law means that He no longer requires that from us, but He Himself provides it. Law implies that God requires us to do something for Him, while deliverance from law implies that He exempts me from doing it, and that in grace He does it Himself. The trouble in Romans 7 is that in the flesh, we try to do something for God. As soon as we try to please God that way, we place ourselves under law, and the experience described in Romans 7 begins to get personal.

The devil means us no good, and if it were left to him, we would all be living in fear and torment with a dark and gloomy future. The price that was greater than any sacrifice supersedes and nullifies all other sacrifices. Our loving Maker took upon Himself the role of our Redeemer by paying the ultimate price. Therefore, our lives are not our own. Let us thank Him each day and seek His divine grace to live with Him and for Him. Let us always remember where our priorities should lie. Let us always keep in mind the sacrifice He made.

This week's lesson is concerned with the struggle Paul describes in Romans 7. As you study this conflict, remember that he is writing about "a conflict that is more or less experienced by every soul confronted by and awakened to the spiritual claims of God's holy law."* As you personally face this struggle, remember 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).

REACT

What does *grace* mean and what does *law* mean?

* *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 553.

Ps. 19:7;
Jer. 31:33;
Matt. 7:21–23;
Rom. 3:20; 7:24, 25

Evidence “Wretched Man That I Am!”

In cyberspace, there are many videos assaulting peoples’ belief in Christ. Many of these videos are created by skeptics, atheists, and agnostics who believe that a Christian’s conversion is delusional, psychosomatic, or emotional. Generally, these accusations are followed by statements suggesting that most Christians are hypocrites. Therefore, it’s important to ask, “What is the evidence that one is truly converted?” We may claim to be Christians and act as if we are, but even Jesus said in Matthew 7:21–23, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven. . . . I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (NKJV).

“What is the evidence that one is truly converted?”

Read Psalm 19:7 and Romans 3:20. These verses help us to understand that rather than being the source of sin, the law reveals what is sinful in our lives. The law is a mirror, showing to us all of our soul’s warts and blemishes. Then when we recognize certain of our behaviors and attitudes as sin, we can cry out as Paul did, “O wretched man that I am!” (Rom. 7:24, NKJV). (*Wretched* is defined in the *American Heritage Dictionary* as “a deplorable state of distress or misfortune; miserable.”)

Next, Paul asks, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” Why does he ask “who” rather than “what” or “how”? He recognizes that he is sinful by nature and therefore has committed acts of sin for which he has earned eternal death. The only way out of his predicament lies totally outside of himself. That answer is Jesus Christ (Rom. 7:25).

Evidence of true conversion consists of at least three factors: (1) We should experience a strong sense of wretchedness after facing ourselves in the mirror of God’s law. (2) Then we must have an aversion to sin in general and to our sins specifically. This aversion calls us to repent, to turn away from sin. (3) Finally, we must trust Jesus to deliver us from sin.

REACT

1. If it’s been awhile since you’ve examined yourself in the mirror of God’s law, take time to do so now. What warts and blemishes do you find? Take whatever time you need to walk through the three factors involved in true conversion.

2. Like Paul, how do you struggle with your wretchedness? Is it ever a good thing to cease this struggle? Why, or why not?

Logos
*Delivered From Law and
From Sin*

Romans 7

The Commonality of Sin and Law (Rom. 7:7)

In Romans 7:7 Paul asks, “Is the law sin?” He answers emphatically, “Certainly not! On the contrary . . .” (NKJV). Still, we wonder what led him to ask such a question. He knew that his exposition of our relationship to sin in Romans 6 had many similarities to his exposition of our relationship to the law in Romans 7. Thus he was compelled to prevent his readers from adopting a false conclusion based upon faulty reasoning; namely, if we are delivered from sin and from God’s law, then law and sin must be one and the same. Of course, nothing could be farther from the truth, but let’s take a look at how someone might arrive at such a conclusion:

**The law is like a faithful friend or teacher
who leads us to Christ.**

- We have died to sin (Rom. 6:2).
- We have died to the law (Rom. 7:4).
- We are freed from sin (Rom. 6:7).
- We are released from the law (Rom. 7:6).
- Because we have died to sin, we are united with Christ (Rom. 6:5).
- Because we have died to the law, we are joined to Christ (Rom. 7:4).
- Because we have died to sin, we walk in the newness of life (Rom. 6:4).
- Because we have died to the law, we serve in the newness of the Spirit (Rom. 7:6).
- Because we have died to sin, we have fruit for God (Rom. 6:22).
- Because we have died to the law, we bear fruit for God (Rom. 7:4).

The Human Solution (Rom. 7:1–3)

Paul uses God’s law regarding marriage as an illustration of how we try to maneuver out of our proper relationship to God’s law. In this illustration, the husband represents the law of God and the wife represents us. In these verses, Paul’s “major point is that death dissolves legal obligation. Therefore, as death frees the wife from the claims of the marriage law, so that she may properly marry another, so the Christian’s crucifixion with Christ releases him from the dominion of sin and law, so that he may enter into a new spiritual union with risen Saviour.”¹

The Divine Solution (Rom. 7:2–6)

In Romans 7:2–6, Paul reveals that the death of the husband frees his wife

from the law so that she can marry again. Likewise, “it is the death of the old sinful self that releases the believer from the condemnation and dominion of the law and frees him to be joined to Christ.”² It is He who has walked in our shoes when He lived on earth. Therefore, He understands our weaknesses. Moreover, He is able to impart to us His strength because He has experienced every type of temptation we experience, but without sinning. He will never leave us or forsake us (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5); because of His love and His death on the cross, He totally and eternally identifies Himself with us.

Giving Credit Where Credit Is Due (Rom. 7:7–13)

Romans 7:7–13 begins “one of the greatest of all passages in the New Testament; and one of the most moving; because here Paul is giving us his own spiritual autobiography and laying bare his very heart and soul.”³

Now that Paul has led us into a proper understanding of our relationship to God’s law, he identifies the real problem—sin in all its ugliness. Sin is an opportunistic deceiver that desires to control us (Gen. 4:7; Rom. 7:11). The law does its job dutifully by pointing out sin to us (Rom. 7:7) and by holding us accountable to God (Rom. 3:19). In fact, the law is like a faithful friend or teacher who leads us to Christ (Gal. 3:24), so that through God’s grace, we can truly defeat sin in our lives (Rom. 6:14–18). In this way only can it be seen that the law truly is “perfect, converting the soul” (Ps. 19:7, NKJV).

The Ensuing Struggle (Rom. 7:14–25)

Paul has identified sin as the source of death and the killer of humankind (Rom. 7:11, 13). Now he exposes the depths of the sin problem. He explains that sin is not just an act, but also a principle that comprises our fallen human nature (Rom. 7:14, 21, 23). The law is also now rightfully understood (Rom. 7:12, 14) so that we no longer try to do away with it. Instead, we joyfully accept its elevated ideals and character (Rom. 7:22). We also willingly submit to its authority (Rom. 7:25). However, the conflict Paul depicts in Romans 8:6, 7 becomes a source of daily conflict for the Christian (Rom. 7:15, 16, 18, 21–23) and drives us once again to our only source of hope and victory (Rom. 7:24, 25; 8:1).

REACT

1. How many times are personal pronouns *I* or *me* used in Romans 7: 7–25?
2. How many times is the Holy Spirit mentioned in these same verses?
3. What do these numbers imply about our ability to subdue the flesh in our own strength?
4. Is your spiritual autobiography similar to Paul’s? What would it say about your struggle to be free of sin and your attempts to obey God’s law?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 547.

2. *Ibid.*

3. William Barclay, *The Daily Bible Study Series: The Letter to the Romans*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia, Penn.: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 94.

Testimony
**Am I Awake
Spiritually?**

Isa. 6:5

I was guilty of driving while drunk, crashing my car into a telephone pole, and killing the passenger with me—my brother. I had broken not only civil law but God's law. Now here I was, face down on a prison cell floor. Crying in a fit of rage, I was demanding that God tell me why He had allowed me to live. This was a question only He could answer. For the first time in my life, I truly saw His holiness; and for the first time in my life, I truly saw my powerlessness. Who was I to demand an explanation from the Almighty? I saw God high and lifted up, and as I lay there trembling, I thanked Him for His grace toward me and for not treating me as I deserved. That day, I rose to my feet and praised Him with all my might, with no fear of the other prisoners who might have been listening.

As I lay there trembling, I thanked Him for His grace toward me.

You don't have to go through what I went through to learn about God's grace, but you also must have a personal spiritual awakening. And like Paul in Romans 7, we must all face the true nature of sin. Ellen White wrote that when Paul "looked into the holy mirror [of the law], he saw himself . . . as God saw him. . . . He did not go away from the mirror and forget what manner of man he was, but he exercised genuine repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. He was washed, he was cleansed. . . .

"Sin then appeared in its true hideousness, and his self-esteem was gone. He became humble. He no longer ascribed goodness and merit to himself. He ceased to think more highly of himself than he ought, and he ascribed all the glory to God. He was no longer ambitious for greatness. He ceased to want to avenge himself, and was no longer sensitive to reproach, neglect, or contempt. He no longer sought earthly alliance, station, or honor. He did not pull others down to uplift himself. He became gentle, condescending, meek and lowly of heart, because he had learned his lesson in the school of Christ. He talked of Jesus and His matchless love, and grew more and more into His image."^{*}

REACT

1. Think about your spiritual awakening. How does it make you feel as you remember the day you came face to face with both your true nature and with Christ?

2. Why do we often question our salvation when we struggle with the flesh?

^{*}Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1076.

Ezek. 36:26, 27;
Eph. 2:8–10;
Phil. 2:12, 13

How-to *I Do It—Or Do I?*

From the time we were toddlers, we have said, “I do it.” That attitude resulted in shoes on opposite feet and misaligned buttons on shirts and blouses. As teenagers, we rebelled against our parents and others in authority, which often resulted in consequences hard to bear. As young adults, we often refuse the advice of those with more experience, assuming they don’t understand current trends and practices. Only later do we realize that often they were right.

If you can’t save yourself, who can?

Neither does the “I do it” attitude work well when it comes to our relationship with God. So what is our part in living as victorious Christians?

See ourselves realistically. We are all hopelessly lost sinners. Romans 7:18 reminds us that we have nothing good dwelling in us, that even though we desire to do what is right, we fail every time. We are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked (Rev. 3:17).

Admit our need. David expressed his need well when he pleaded with God to create in him a clean heart, renew a right spirit within him, and blot out his transgressions. Our transgressions are ever before us. We come from a long line of sinners, hopelessly unable to save ourselves (Ps. 51:1–3, 5, 10).

Realize who can help. If you can’t save yourself, who can? Just as one who is drowning must surrender to the lifeguards, so we must by faith surrender our will to God. We have nothing with which to recommend ourselves to God. His salvation is a gift. He loves us, and if we don’t resist, He will draw us to Himself and re-create us through the power of the Holy Spirit. Then we can be transformed to exhibit the same qualities Christ has (Gal. 5:22–25).

Choose to obey and follow Christ. By practicing the presence of God throughout the day and meditating on the life of Jesus, we will be enabled to follow and obey Him and reflect His image to those around us.

REACT

1. Some people feel they are not good enough to come to Christ. Why is this thinking incorrect? What texts can you use to refute this thinking?
2. How can you spend a part of each day practicing God’s presence and meditating on Jesus?
3. Why is it so difficult to see ourselves realistically when it comes to our sinful nature?

Opinion

Redemption Through Christ!

Ps. 1:1, 2; 19:7; 86:5;
John 1:14–17;
Rom. 3:24; 7:6–8, 12

I find Paul to be a very different type of an apostle. His conversion to Christianity is an amazing testimony. His experiences in life catch our attention and draw our interest. But the important thing here is what God is trying to tell each one of us through Paul—that God’s love is unconditional. Paul persecuted Christians. But then what does he do? He accepts Jesus as His Savior and dedicates the rest of his life to spreading the gospel. He could not have done that without believing in and claiming for himself the grace of Jesus Christ.

Paul persecuted Christians. But then what does he do?

The book of Romans is a presentation of God’s salvation for Jews and Gentiles. What we learn about in Romans 7 is the extreme unconditional love of Christ and His unceasing efforts to save us all. We learn that we are saved by grace through faith, and that as a result, we are enabled by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to obey. Romans 7 also explains the meaning of the Cross for the believer’s life and shares with us critical aspects of sin and righteousness, faith and works, and justification and election.

When we realize the sins we have committed, it’s sometimes even hard to forgive ourselves. But that’s just what Satan wants us to believe, so we just continue to sin. But in Romans, Paul urges us to confess our sins, to ask forgiveness so that we can receive the gift of grace, to put on the righteousness of Christ, and to be filled with the Holy Spirit so that God will view us with favor. Paul shows us through his life that we can claim God’s forgiveness through Christ and begin a new life in Him. All we need to do is to walk in His footsteps and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide us.

God’s law is good. It points out our sins so we can mend our ways and achieve the gift of eternal life through Christ, who loves us and died for all. If we did not have the law, we would not have known our sins. Christ’s sacrifice on the cross proves God’s love for us—that He wants each and every one of us to be saved. He did not give us His law to condemn us but to condemn sin and to save us. The problem is not with the law but with the flesh, which is sinful in nature.

REACT

How would you explain the importance of God’s law to a friend who does not believe in Him?

Shelly Stephen Naik, Taylor, Michigan, U.S.A.

Rom. 7:7–8:9

Exploration

Two Choices; Two Laws; One Savior

CONCLUDE

It is human tendency to use our own efforts to follow God's law. However, when we do so, we fail to let God's righteousness work within us. We are falsely led to believe that we are weak Christians, and therefore we must work harder to do good works and make God proud.

Romans 7 teaches us that there are two laws, the law of God and the law of sin. We must choose to follow Jesus Christ and accept the law of God if we are to cut our bonds to the slavery of selfish desires. When we make this choice, we become free to follow God and His laws. Sin is something that is present in our human nature, so that in our own power we cannot escape it. But by the grace of Jesus Christ, by accepting His death on the cross, and by allowing the Holy Spirit to live in our hearts, we will be able to follow the law of God.

CONSIDER

- Memorizing Romans 8:1–4 and explaining to a friend what it means. By teaching someone else what you have learned, you cement that knowledge into your own understanding.
- Writing a letter to yourself that reminds you what to do when you feel overwhelmed by sin and your sinful nature. Be sure to include a few Bible verses from Romans 7 and 8 in your letter. Keep it in your Bible where you can always find it when you need it.
- Making a list of excuses that people have given about why they aren't good enough to follow Christ. Next to each excuse, write a biblical response from the book of Romans.
- Debating both sides of the argument that we are sinful and must follow our sinful nature.
- Observing several children playing together, noticing how they might give in to their sinful nature. Think of ways you might explain to them how God's righteousness can work in their lives.
- Taking a series of photographs that exemplify Romans 8:6.
- Singing the song "Amazing Grace" and reflecting on God's law, which is written in your heart.

CONNECT

Steps to Christ, pp. 18, 19, 30, 51, 63, 64.

George R. Knight, *Walking With Paul Through the Book of Romans* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2002), pp. 175–199.

lesson nine
AUGUST 21-28

Freedom in **Christ**

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1, NKJV).



Rom. 8:9

Introduction

How Do You Plead?

I used to get excited when I got mail. Nowadays though it's almost always bills, and I'm not so eager to open them. In fact, I dislike bills so much that I usually let my wife open any mail I get; and I can judge by her reaction as to just how big the bill is. So when she gave a groan and handed me the letter, I knew it was bad. From the moment my eyes glanced upon the header, I knew I was in trouble. The logo of the Western Australia Police Department was proudly emblazoned at the top of the page.

There could be no doubt. The evidence had been provided.

My mind immediately started to process the situation. It wasn't me! Can I deny it? Maybe it was a mistake. I don't break the law! I'm a good Christian! As I unfolded the rest of the infringement, my heart sunk. There, plain for all to see, was my car in a photo. There could be no doubt. The evidence has been provided.

Romans 8 tells us that there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. As I read this text, I felt a sense of perspective. It didn't matter in the scheme of things. God still loves me and forgives me. I'd pay the fine, and life would move on. Well, that is what my self-justifying nature clung to. However, as I read on, I learned that we "are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you" (Rom. 8:9, NIV).

When we submit to the Spirit of God, we experience a change in our lives that manifests itself in real and tangible ways. Through the journey of life, we experience spiritual highs and lows, often influenced by periods of intense worship. We soar through the highs and then wonder what happened when we scrape through the lows. Often the lows come when we lose focus on the Spirit of God and wander off on our own, with results quite like when Eve wandered away from Adam and encountered the devil alone.

As we study this week's lesson, we need to examine ourselves and determine whether we're being controlled by our sinful natures or by the Spirit of God. Do we spend more time lamenting lack of time for ourselves, planning our career path through life, or partying like there's no tomorrow? Or do we submit ourselves to God and follow His will for our lives? Are we too busy to listen for the words and will of the Spirit?

“In Christ” Makes All the Difference (John 3:16–21; Rom. 8:1–5; Phil. 2:5–11)

Paul’s resounding statement that there is “no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1, NIV) is the best news there is. The person who lives in Christ is considered innocent and therefore judged not guilty. The good news is that God has a solution for a person who “inevitably gets stuck in the mud of sin and only spins the wheels in deeper when law comes along.”¹

The law has no power to get humanity out of the mess in which it finds itself.

The law has no power to get humanity out of the mess in which it finds itself. The solution is provided by the God of love who sent His own Son to earth with the same human life that others use for sin. Jesus, however, lived a flawless life while living in our humanity. His unique life on this earth—facing temptation without giving in to sin—was a living denunciation of sin. In His death on the cross, He paid for our sins. God the Father used Jesus (who was simultaneously divine) to defeat evil.

Testing. Testing. One, Two, Three? (Rom. 8:5; Eccles. 2:1–11)

As a king, Solomon had at his disposal wealth, power, and knowledge. He surrounded himself with pleasures of the flesh so that he “might see what was good for mortals to do under heaven during the few days of their life” (Eccles. 2:3, NRSV).

Despite an exhaustive search of all the pleasures and fantasies available to a king, Solomon came to the conclusion that more is required than is available “under the sun.” Something else was required not of this earth.

King Solomon, recorded as the wisest human being to ever live, discovered that fulfilling the desires of the flesh was as satisfying as swallowing a mouthful of air (verse 11).

A New Bias in the Spirit (Rom. 8:6–8; Ezek. 36:26–28)

Humanity has a terrible bias toward sin. It’s as if we can think only of what we want. This bias is against God and wants nothing to do with His law. Paul makes it clear that this bias leads to alienation from God, destruction of others and self, and ultimately death.

However, when a believer takes a stand in Christ, there is something that happens that gives that person a new bias, a new direction of life and peace.

This is true power that goes beyond even the written law of God. The Holy Spirit directs us to God and His law.

This is consistent with the prophetic vision of the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel, who saw the era of the Holy Spirit.² “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God” (Ezek. 36:26–28, NIV).

The Spirit of Life (Rom. 8:9–13; John 14:15–27; Eph. 1:13, 14)

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life brings true life, energy, and power. When the Spirit lives in us, Christ is also present (Rom. 8:9, 10), as indeed we understand from John that the Father is present. All the resources of heaven are made available to the humble believer. When the Holy Spirit lives in a believer, spiritual deadness is banished, and vitality and life become a reality. Indeed, we cannot be a follower of Christ unless the Spirit of Christ lives in us. The indwelling presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit is the birthright of all believers and a sign of their redeemed status, a guarantee of their inheritance of eternal life.

Sin still causes physical death. But this is not the end of the story. Just as Jesus rose from the grave, so believers can be certain of their own resurrection.

Living in God's Family (Rom. 8:13–17; Gal. 4:6)

Paul describes an opportunity to become intimate with God the Father through the Spirit of adoption. When we accept God's Holy Spirit, we become His children, and He becomes our Father.

As children of God, we are able to come to Him in an intimate and confident way, calling Him our “Abba.” “Abba” is a transliteration of the Aramaic term for *father*, implying great familiarity and intimacy.

Sin seeks to enslave through fear and separation from God. Believers, however, receive the Holy Spirit and thus are able to draw nearer to a loving Father, “as heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (verse 17, NKJV).

REACT

1. According to this lesson, what should you do the next time your own desires conflict with God will?
2. List all the ways your desires might conflict with God's, and ask Him to help you grow by following His desires for your life.
3. In what ways have you experienced the Holy Spirit letting you know that you are God's child?
4. What promises do you find for the Christian in Romans 8:16? How do these promises speak to your faith?

1. John C. Brunt, *The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier, Romans* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1996), p. 156.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

Where Is the Power?

Rom. 8:14

“It is impossible for us, of ourselves, to escape from the pit of sin in which we are sunken. . . . Education, culture, the exercise of the will, human effort, all have their proper sphere, but here they are powerless. They may produce an outward correctness of behavior, but they cannot change the heart. . . . There must be a power working from within, a new life from above, before men can be changed from sin to holiness. That power is Christ.”¹

“Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature.”

“The Spirit was to be given as a regenerating agent, and without this the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail. The power of evil had been strengthening for centuries, and the submission of men to this satanic captivity was amazing. Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world’s Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church.”²

“‘When He [the Spirit of truth] is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.’ . . . Only when the truth is accompanied to the heart by the Spirit will it quicken the conscience or transform the life.”³

“The redeemed will be welcomed to the home that Jesus is preparing for them. . . . Every sinful tendency, every imperfection, that afflicts them here has been removed by the blood of Christ. . . . They are without fault before the great white throne, sharing the dignity and the privileges of the angels. . . . And there is joy in heaven in the presence of God and the holy angels over one soul redeemed, a joy that is expressed in songs of holy triumph.”⁴

1. *Steps to Christ*, p. 18.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 671, 672.

4. *Steps to Christ*, p. 126.

Rom. 8:1, 2

Evidence
No Condemnation

The early church exploded with growth and experienced times of persecution (Acts 2; 8:1–3; 12:1) and peace (Acts 9:31). It encountered heresies and open sin (Rom. 16:17). Paul experienced many of these issues firsthand. Divisions (1 Cor. 1:10), immorality (1 Cor. 5:1, 2), and lawsuits between believers (1 Cor. 6:1) were but a few of the issues. Thus, he writes to encourage the church in Rome and to outline the importance of life and faith in Christ. Because there was ongoing confusion over the role of the law, Paul seeks to clarify the role of the Holy Spirit.

[Many] people feel that . . . you can do whatever you want, ask forgiveness, and still be saved.

The law condemns us. Because it is holy (Rom. 7:12), it shows that we are guilty of disobeying its precepts and are therefore worthy of death. Earlier, some Jewish converts were purporting that converted Gentiles observe a Judaist form of Christianity by keeping all the laws, including circumcision (Acts 15:5). For the Gentiles to hear that the law condemned them to death if they disobeyed it was *not* good news. After having written other letters to some of the other new churches, Paul now writes to the Romans to emphasize what freedom in Christ really means.

Therefore, his leading statement in Romans 8:1, 2, is indeed good news to this young church. The message that those “in Christ,” through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, are changed from the inside to become new beings, freed from the penalty of sin (death), heirs of the promises, and children of God (Rom. 8:16, 17) is encouraging.

Today, however, people feel that freedom in Christ means you don’t really have to change your way of life. You can do whatever you want, ask forgiveness, and still be saved. Others teeter between this view and that of having to be “good enough” on their own, hoping that sufficient “good deeds” will earn them entrance to heaven.

Romans 8 is equally good news for us. Paul explains that Jesus has paid the ultimate price for sin (Rom. 8:3). His death (the price of our sin) can be imparted to us if we believe and accept Him. That, however, is not the end of it. If we are truly connected to Christ (Rom. 8:12, 13) and work at maintaining that connection, our mindset will be changed (Rom. 8:8–10), our characters will be modified, and we will be transformed both here and for eternity (Rom. 8:11), no longer bound by this body of sin (Rom. 8:13)! This, indeed, is good news for all and true freedom!

How-to We Are the Temple of God

Gal. 5:19–23

We often hear that our bodies are the temple of God. Romans 8:9 teaches us that the spirit of God dwells in us. When we pollute our bodies with alcohol, drugs, or other inhibiting factors, we lose our ability to differentiate between right and wrong.

Have a daily relationship with Jesus. Let Him be your best Friend.

Paul encourages us to live according to the Spirit and not the flesh. He refers to a lifestyle that encourages others to be Christ's children. We are to be "dead" to the body but alive to the Spirit. Many times the Bible discusses such a situation. Read John 6:63, 1 Timothy 5:6, and 1 Peter 2:11.

How can we be alive in the Spirit? How should His presence affect our daily lives? Below are some ideas.

Focus (Phil. 4:8). You might want to be dressed in the most fashionable clothes, have the coolest car, or want to be a member of the popular crowd. These desires cannot only cause us to fall but also create jealousies, which can cause others to fall. Focus instead on the Holy Spirit and His fruit. Read Galatians 5:22, 23. These are all qualities Christ displayed when He was here on earth. He is our inspiration.

Pray (Col. 4:2). Have a daily relationship with Jesus. Let Him be your best Friend. As with your other friends, spend quality time talking with Him and listening to Him. One of the great things about Jesus is that He understands everything and will always care about you. He won't leave unless you ask Him to. When we spend time with people, we pick up their habits and actions. So when we spend time with Jesus, we will become like Him.

Study (Ps. 119:15, 16). The more time you spend learning about your friends, the better the chance that the friendship will last. God's Word needs to be a part of our lives, obvious in all that we do and say. God gave us the Bible so we could understand His personality.

REACT

1. What can you do if your family doesn't understand your desire to live in the Spirit?
2. How do you explain living in the Spirit to a friend who has little or no knowledge of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and God?

John 4:13;
Rom. 8:6

Opinion

Keep Focused on God

To achieve a goal, it is important to stay focused. What we focus on has a dramatic influence on the decisions we make. Obstacles will arise, hazards will present themselves, but it is essential to stay focused on what we hope to achieve if we hope to be successful.

What is most important to you? What consumes your thoughts during the day? What occupies your dreams at night? Is it spiritual things or your own self-

To want is not the problem.

ish desires? The things you focus on act like a ship's rudder. Your thoughts steer your life in the direction of their focus.

Read Romans 8:6. To have our minds and lives focused on physical things is death. This is a blunt statement, to say the least, but the rest of the text reads, "To be spiritually minded is life and peace" (NKJV). That is good news. *Life and peace are achievable if we are spiritually minded.* So we have a very clear choice to make. Do we want life, or do we want death? Do we want life more abundant and full or a life that continuously chases the next selfish thing only to replace it in a few months with the next fad?

To want is not the problem. It is necessary to want. The issue is, what do we want for? Do we want for the things of the world, or do we want for a closer relationship with our redeemer and Savior Jesus Christ?

In chasing our selfish desires for the world, we receive small satisfactions; but we are continually moving on, looking for the next cheap thrill. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst" (John 4:13, 14, NKJV). Jesus says that if we drink what He is offering, our desires will be satisfied. Maybe by drinking this water we can refocus our lives on the things that will bring life and peace.

Try to stay focused on spiritual things in order to steer your life away from the world and toward the life and peace of Jesus Christ.

REACT

1. What things in life are steering you away from a closer relationship with Jesus?
2. How can we be spiritually minded?
3. What is the water Jesus offers?
4. How can you drink this water that Jesus is offering?

Exploration Freedom Fighters

John 8:36

CONCLUDE

The Jews were confused. They were being offered freedom from legal bondage, and they didn't know how to handle it. Instead of accepting the good news Paul brought them, their solution was to blend a mix of new and old—Christ's salvation plus a few good old Jewish laws. They fought against Paul's assurance that Christ's sacrifice had set them free from "the law of sin and of death" (Rom. 8:2, NASB). Because of Christ, we are not imprisoned by the necessity to earn our salvation by following a list of rules. We, too, have been set free.

CONSIDER

- Flying a kite and contemplating how the kite symbolizes our freedom in Christ.
- Offering freedom to someone else by volunteering for a program that helps to free people, whether it's from domestic violence, drugs, religious intolerance, illiteracy, or a life without Christ.
- Listening to Michael W. Smith's *Freedom* album.
- Reading about other freedom fighters in the Bible, about when people were reluctant to accept the gift of freedom, such as the stories of Noah, the Israelites in Egypt, and others.
- Explaining to someone the difference between the freedom that Christ offers and the world's definition of personal freedom. If we are free indeed, why can't we do whatever we want?
- Taking photos of anything that symbolizes the freedom you experience because of your relationship with Christ. Share your shots with a friend, explaining their significance.
- Building an altar and offering God your tendency to hold on to worldly freedom. Accept His gift of true freedom in Christ.
- Spending an hour or two with your legs shackled. Consider how the Jews allowed old laws to hobble their faith.

CONNECT

Colossians 2:6–10.

Morris Venden, "Lawrence and Christina," in *Modern Parables* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1994), pp. 70–73.

Redemption for Jew and
Gentile

*“God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens
whom he wants to harden” (Rom. 9:18, NIV).*



Introduction
*A New Member
of the Family*

Rom. 9:25;
2 Pet. 3:9

My wife has a real heart for animals. She's especially partial to dogs. She hates to see them mistreated or neglected. About a month ago, she called me at work and said, "Don't get upset with me, but . . ." She had found a puppy wandering on the road near our house. She didn't want it to get hit by a car, so she picked it up. She checked with the surrounding houses, but none of the neighbors claimed it. In fact, one of the neighbors said that the puppy had been in that area all day. So my wife took it home and fed it, as it obviously hadn't eaten for a while. The next day, she took it to the vet, who gave it a clean bill of health.

We tried to find the puppy a good home.

We tried to find the puppy a good home. I took it to the Humane Society so it could be adopted, but they turned it down because we lived outside the city limits. My wife tried to give the puppy away, and at one point thought she had found a good home for it. But the people weren't very responsible, and a mutual decision was made that they just weren't ready for a dog, especially a puppy. By then, my wife had named the puppy Lily. And so now we have three dogs instead of just two.

At first, I wasn't all that excited about having a new dog, but she is cute. And I can tell that my wife thinks she's special. Lily appears to be a border collie mix, and we hope she will be a medium-sized dog, similar to the ones we already have. But even though my wife loves dogs, she wouldn't have taken just any puppy home. There are certain breeds that, while she would have gone to great lengths to save, would not have ended up at our house as a permanent family member. Tiny dogs or big, aggressive dogs would not have received that special adoption.

From the very beginning, God wanted to save everyone (2 Pet. 3:9). But He had the right to choose a select group for His special purpose. For about fifteen hundred years, the Hebrews were that group. Unfortunately, they hardened their hearts and chose not to remain true to the calling He had for them. So God chose the Gentiles to fill this role.

God's redemption is for all—Jews and Gentiles alike—but His special calling is for but a few. This week, let us study Romans 9 with an open mind and an open heart.

Rom. 9:6–8

Evidence
“Jewishness”
and “Gentileness”

Many countries have experienced traumatic times caused by wars. African countries, especially, appear to be prone to violence fanned by ethnic differences, as was the case in Rwanda (1994) and Kenya (2008). Many people were killed, maimed, raped, and otherwise humiliated. Property was destroyed on a massive scale. All because of being born in one ethnic group and not the other.

Ethnic identity is not a choice somebody makes. We acquire membership into ethnic communities by birth. Unfortunately, this membership comes with

The new birth is accomplished by God as a gift received.

baggage—prejudices, stereotypes, and other partisan interests that antagonize other groups and threaten the integrity and well-being of society. These evils are so deeply rooted that not even education, political programs, or superficial religious practices can remedy them. They therefore defy any natural means of eradication. What is needed is a divine birth. John 1:12, 13 distinguishes between being born naturally and being born of the Spirit. Redemption for Jew and Gentile has to do with this divine birth.

This divine birth is accomplished by God Himself the moment one accepts Jesus as Savior and Lord. This birth defines membership in God’s family and marks a permanent shift from earthly interests and entitlements to divine concerns and duties. When one is born of God, she or he sees people as God sees them. Divine citizenship and its attendant privileges and obligations override earthly citizenship and its rights and duties. Redemption for Jew and Gentile through divine birth redefines “Jewishness” and “Gentileness.” For instance, people from different cultural backgrounds who are not born again may regard themselves as different from and even opposed to one another, yet spiritually, they are all the same. They are all under the curse of sin. Similarly, those who are born again are one in the Lord despite their diverse cultural backgrounds. What counts is the new creation (Gal. 6:15).

The new birth is accomplished by God as a gift received. It is retained by active faith in Christ. It must make a difference in our present life even in the midst of crisis. It must prevail over the first birth. Finally, it commits us to focus on making all people God’s children.

REACT

1. What determines your way of life—your earthly or divine birth?
2. How do the two births play out in your life in times of crises?
3. How can your divine birth triumph over the earthly one?

Paramnesia (Rom. 9:1–5)

When He made His covenant with Israel, God gave them everything they would need to fulfill His plan. Continuous reminders of His glorious presence were visible to them in the wilderness and in the temple. They were given God's handwritten "first edition" of the Ten Commandments. The sanctuary services were designed to help them learn the principles of righteousness by faith. There was no shortage of prophets sent to warn and guide them. Repeatedly God sent them promises of a coming Redeemer and a wonderful future if they remained faithful. Ultimately, the very Son of God shared their ethnicity. Yet despite every advantage, the vast majority of them broke their covenant with Him and rejected His Son.

Whether or not to accept salvation is an individual's choice.

In the mid 1800s, God had a special work to be accomplished for the world at the end of time. He chose a handful of faithful believers, including Methodists and Baptists, and equipped them with special blessings for their mission. He guided them to form a new denomination whose tenets combined a clear understanding of the investigative judgment with the doctrines of righteousness by faith, the Sabbath, and the second coming of Christ. He gave them a true prophet to help them better understand how to avoid Satan's deceptions; and He blessed them with a worldwide ministry so they could faithfully accomplish the gospel commission. During the last century and a half, He has given them a steady supply of faithful leaders to keep them focused on their task. But just like the Jews in the time of Paul, many members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church have begun to define their beliefs and mission in light of what *they* think is relevant. In so doing, they have begun to separate themselves from God.

Earth's Genetics Versus Heaven's Promise (Rom. 9:6–13)

God had kept His promise to Israel—He sent His Son to die the second death of eternal separation from God—the death we die if we are not saved. When redemption was thus provided, there was no need to continue the traditional sanctuary service, and it was time to get rid of the traditional view of God's chosen people. Everyone needed to understand who His people really were—and always had been.

The Jews were especially proud of their forefathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As the original recipient of God's promise, Abraham was truly a giant of faith (Heb. 11:8–12). But only a subset of his descendents were identified as God's children. Ishmael's birth was Abraham's choice; Isaac's birth was God's choice. Regardless of

the choices made by man, God's plan moves forward, and He will be victorious.

Jacob was born grasping his brother's heel. When Jacob was older and wiser, tired and injured from a long night of struggle, he once again grasped Someone. This time he wouldn't let go. God changed Jacob's name to Israel that morning, and this is the "Israel" that represents God's children.

Assuming that being a third-, fourth-, or even fifth-generation Adventist or the child of the head elder or a relative of the conference president makes us well-equipped to be saved, many of us have slumbered and let our lamps run out of oil. Many mistakenly believe that if they are a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, are able to recite the 28 fundamental beliefs, faithfully deposit money in the offering plate, and murmur "Amen" at the right time during the sermon, their redemption is "locked-in." However, the Bible makes it clear that only those who grasp hold of Christ and refuse to let go will be "chosen" by God.

A Fair Deal? (Rom. 9:14–24; John 12:44–50)

Although the Ishmaelites and the Edomites (sons of Esau) were not called to act as guardians of God's truth, they certainly were not excluded from salvation. Pharaoh was given ten opportunities to admit God's sovereignty and yield to His will before his fate was sealed. God does not choose who will be saved and who will be lost. Whether or not to accept salvation is an individual's choice.

"Every soul is elected who will work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. He is elected who will put on the armor and fight the good fight of faith. He is elected who will watch unto prayer, who will search the Scriptures, and who will flee from temptation. He is elected who will have faith continually, and who will be obedient to every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. The *provisions* of redemption are free to all; the *results* of redemption will be enjoyed by those who have complied with the conditions."*

By Faith Alone (Rom. 9:25–33)

Some might have a little trouble with Paul's reference to Christ as a "stumbling block." But Paul knew from experience that encountering Christ's love and mercy would result in one of two actions: (1) believing in and accepting Christ as your Savior; (2) rejecting Christ in favor of your own plan of salvation. Frequently quoting from Scripture, Paul made it clear that God's plan of redemption always had been open to everyone. Failure resulted from thinking one could work out his or her own salvation. Success could only come from surrendering one's will and believing that righteousness was attained only by faith in God's grace.

REACT

1. What do you need to change in your life to avoid repeating the mistakes of the Jews in regard to salvation?
2. If denominational affiliation is not required for salvation, why be a Seventh-day Adventist?

* *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 208.

Testimony

Saved by Royal Ancestry?

Rom 9:8

Paul clearly states that he was set aside by God to be the apostle to the Gentiles. He nevertheless had a great burden for the Jews. This is clearly revealed in verse 3 when he says, "I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh" (NRSV).

"The great Teacher rolls back the curtain."

Paul is burdened because, although the people of Israel had great privileges as a nation, they did not fulfill God's singular purpose for them. "Had Israel been true to God, He could have accomplished His purpose through their honor and exaltation. If they had walked in the ways of obedience, He would have made them 'high above all nations which He hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honor.' 'All people of the earth,' said Moses, 'shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord; and they shall be afraid of thee.' 'The nations which shall hear all these statutes' shall say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' Deut. 26:19; 28:10; 4:6. But because of their unfaithfulness, God's purpose could be wrought out only through continued adversity and humiliation."¹

"In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the great Teacher rolls back the curtain, showing that God is the foundation of all faith, all goodness, all mercy. . . .

"The Jews claimed to have descended from Abraham, but by failing to do the works of Abraham, they proved that they were not true children of his. Only those who are spiritually in harmony with him are reckoned as true descent. Christ recognized the beggar [Lazarus] as one whom Abraham will take into the very heart of friendship, although he belonged to a class looked upon by men as inferior."²

Obedience to God's will is what made Abraham God's friend, and nothing less is required of modern day sons and daughters of Abraham. "Abraham's unquestioning obedience was one of the most striking instances of faith and reliance upon God to be found in the Sacred Record. . . . Just such faith and confidence as Abraham had the messengers of God need today."³

REACT

Like literal Israel, has God given us any special privileges and responsibility as the Seventh-day Adventist Church? If yes, what are they?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 28.
2. *This Day With God*, p. 183.
3. *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 133.

Rom. 9:30–33

How-to God's Plan Versus Choice

When God created Eden for Adam and Eve, He wanted them to enjoy eternal bliss. Unfortunately, Adam and Eve chose to allow sin into their home by disregarding God's command. Read Genesis 6:5, 6.

The choices we make daily determine our destiny.

Although God was saddened by people's choices and even allowed the Flood to destroy the earth, He did not completely cast off humankind. He appropriated a certain number of them to Himself. Through Abraham, He chose the Jews. He chose them because He loved them, not because they were the greatest in number (Deut. 7:7). He chose Israel because of the covenant He made with their ancestor Abraham, the father of faith. Through faith and obedience, Israel was to be the source of blessing to the whole world. Read Acts 13:47. God's choosing did not guarantee salvation, and neither did it exclude the Gentiles (read "everybody else"). His choice is accompanied by a personal choice. Perhaps no chapter in the Bible makes this reality of salvation plainer than Romans 9. Especially note verses 30–33. Even today, God is inviting young and old alike to be "His own special people" (1 Pet. 2:9, NRSV). The choices we make daily determine our destiny. So how can we make choices that will enable us to accept God's invitation? Following are six questions that can help us:*

1. How will my choice help me to witness for Christ? (1 Cor. 9:19–22).
2. Which choice will help me to do my best? (1 Cor. 9:25).
3. Which of the choices I face go against God's commands or principles? (1 Cor. 10:12).
4. Which choices show loving concern for others? Which are selfish? (1 Cor. 10:28–31).
5. Which choice will glorify God? (1 Cor. 10:31).
6. Will my choice cause someone else to sin? (1 Cor. 10:32).

God's power of knowing the future and fashioning His purposes accordingly may leave us feeling we have no personal choices to make. Nothing could be further from the truth. Well before they were born (Rom. 9:11), God knew that Esau would sell his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of soup. Esau took his blessings for granted and refused to wrestle with God's way for his life. They both had choices in the matter that informed the outcome of their lives. God's salvation is for all; but accepting His salvation is a personal choice, which only you can make.

*Life Application Study Bible, NIV (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1991), p. 2079.

Opinion
The Puppet King

Rom. 9:18;
Exodus 7–12

I think Pharaoh got the short end of the stick. Romans 9:18 makes me think he was an unsuspecting pawn held fast in the clutches of God, forced like a marionette to play his role in continuing to enslave the children of Israel no matter what plagues the Lord brought to his land. Pharaoh didn't really have a choice. Or did he?

Read Exodus 9:13, 17. God knew that Pharaoh's heart was hard. Before the plagues even began, He told Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is unyielding" (Exod. 7:14, NIV). God chose to use Pharaoh's unrepentant spirit to allow His glory and power to be known throughout Egypt. Pharaoh had the choice to use his powerful position for good, but he refused. God used him in spite of this, but not in a way Pharaoh liked.

Pharaoh didn't really have a choice. Or did he?

God is infinitely wise and powerful. He uses this power and wisdom to convey His glory in order that all might be saved. The Bible reminds us that God "is not slow in keeping his promise. . . . He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9, NIV). He gives all of us the opportunity to come to Him for salvation. "In the past we also were foolish. We did not obey, we were wrong, and we were slaves to many things our bodies wanted and enjoyed. We spent our lives doing evil and being jealous. People hated us, and we hated each other. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior was shown, he saved us because of his mercy. It was not because of good deeds we did to be right with him. He saved us through the washing that made us new people through the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:3–5, NCV).

Like Pharaoh, some of us harden our hearts and decide to go our own way. God loves us and desires all to be saved, but He will not force us to give our hearts to Him. Once we truly decide that His way is best, He will "break" the hardness of our hearts (Ezek. 11:19; 36:25–27; Ps. 51:17) and fill us with His spirit, so that we can obtain His gift of salvation.

REACT

1. What does it mean for God to have sovereign power?
2. How has your viewpoint of Romans 9 changed from the beginning of the week to now?
3. Explain how we really have a choice in our destiny.

Romans 9

Exploration *Salvation and Identity*

CONCLUDE

Salvation. Redemption. There's nothing we can do to earn them; and there's nothing about any one of us that entitles us to them. Indeed, salvation is only possible because our Creator loved us and chose us, despite our brokenness. If we ever think that our relationship with God makes us better than another struggling sinner, we run the risk of God someday telling us, "Sorry, I never knew you." God's love should ever humble us and make us eager to share the truth and love we have found in Him.

CONSIDER

- Writing a letter to God expressing your gratitude for what He's done for you and your commitment to serve Him according to your gifts.
- Creating a "spiritual genealogy" by tracing how your ancestor's spiritual lives and the spiritual lives of others who've impacted you have shaped your own life.
- Playing the hymn "Redeemed!" on your favorite musical instrument.
- Meditating on the cost Jesus paid for our redemption and on why He'd focus His attention on such unsatisfactory subjects.
- Throwing a party to celebrate what God has done in your life.
- Painting a picture of the story of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet (Luke 7:36–50).
- Listing some of the misconceptions about salvation.
- Meditating on what has made Jesus a "stumbling stone" (Rom. 9:30–33) to so many people.

CONNECT

George Knight, *Walking With Paul Through the Book of Romans* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2002); Woodrow Whidden, *Ellen White on Salvation* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1995); Jacques Doukhan, *The Mystery of Israel* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2004).

lesson eleven
SEPTEMBER 4-11

The Election of
Grace

*“I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not!
For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe
of Benjamin” (Rom. 11:1, NKJV).*



Matt. 28:19, 20;
Rom. 10:12; 11:17, 18

Introduction

Forgetting the Main Mission

There was a rich man living in a remote village. He had several children, each with very different characters. This man was a caring person. He taught all of his children how to work, and he helped each one to develop good character traits.

One of his sons, Joe, was especially talented. Joe became the man's favorite son. One day the rich man planned a business trip. He told Joe that he was electing him to be responsible for helping his brothers do well while he was gone.

Roles may change, but the plan of salvation never does.

Unfortunately, however, Joe did not do what his father expected him to do. Instead, he separated himself from his siblings. Rather than helping his brothers, he did things that would make himself look good when their father returned. In fact, when one of his brothers would do something wrong, rather than help that brother, Joe said he would tell their father what a bad person he had been.

When their father returned from his trip, all of his children welcomed him home. However, when he learned that Joe did not do what he had asked him to do, he became sad and told Joe that he would now have to spend more time with his brothers than with Joe.

While all parables, such as this one, break down at some point, this one teaches us that our heavenly Father loves all of us, even though in the past He had chosen one nation in particular to teach the other nations about His love. However, this nation that God named Israel became so caught up with being His favorite "son" that they segregated themselves from the rest of the world. They became so proud of their chosen status that they forgot *why* God had chosen them—to share the good news of righteousness by faith.

When Jesus came to earth, He helped them and us to understand that "there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek" (Rom. 10:12), that all are sinners and in need of God's grace as given to the world through Jesus Christ. This grace comes to all, not by nationality, or birth, or works, but by faith in Jesus, who died as the Substitute for sinners everywhere. Yes, roles may change, but the plan of salvation never does.

This week we will learn what it means to be chosen or elected by Christ, who does not differentiate between people, especially when it comes to salvation. Today, He also urges us to take the gospel to all nations (Matt. 28:19, 20), not just to a select few.

God's Second Chances ... and Third ... and Fourth ... and ...

Romans 10; 11

Paul's Compassion (Rom. 10:1–8)

The salvation of Israel—God's chosen people—is both a hidden agenda item and the main goal of Paul's ministry among the Gentiles in Rome. At the beginning of chapter 8, he expresses his desire for the salvation of the Jewish leaders. They had knowledge and legalistic discipline, but these did not lead them to humility and complete dependence on God.

God never withdraws His hand of mercy and grace.

However, also in Romans, Paul is bringing the gospel to the Gentiles. He hoped that doing so would cause the Jews to envy them and thus be prodded to accept God's mercy. The Jewish leaders were, instead, drawn to keeping every detail of the law, because boosting their ego was more fulfilling. In so doing, they rejected the simple experience of having faith in Jesus and protected their pride by not admitting that they were incapable of saving themselves.

Evangelism: More Than a Calling (Rom. 10:14–21)

When people accept Jesus' gift of salvation, a natural consequence is to want to help others find grace and hope in Him too. Verse 14 asks thought provoking questions to compel Christians to share the gospel. In a devotional book on Romans, George R. Knight shares a new perspective on verse 14 in a quote from well-known Christian speaker, John Stott: "The essence of Paul's argument is seen if we put his six verbs in the opposite order: Christ sends heralds; heralds preach; people hear; hearers believe; believers call; and those who call are saved."* Even today, we are inspired by the truth of this message: How will people around us hear if we don't share with them?

But those who hear about Jesus must believe in Him and continue to have faith in His ability to save them from their sins. Israel had heard, but they did not believe. In verse 19, Paul asks a redundant question, "Did Israel not know?" Of course they knew! However, their knowledge of God had become their god. They worshiped this knowledge and lived a form of godliness that was unacceptable in His sight.

God's Unfailing Love (Rom. 11:1–12)

The Jewish religious leaders and followers rejected Jesus as the Messiah. However, God never rejected them. Paul emphasized this point when he wrote, "I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew" (Rom. 11:1, 2, RSV). God

never withdraws His hand of mercy and grace. It is we who do the rejecting.

God could see that the Jews were trying to live their role as His chosen people. They upheld their customs and ceremonial practices religiously. It was never an issue of whether or not they were trying to be godly—they were simply taking the wrong route. The correct route is seen in John 14:6, “Jesus said . . . , ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’ ”(NKJV).

Salvation for Gentiles (Rom. 11:13–26)

Paul continues this by describing a tree that has natural branches, broken branches, and grafted branches. When the Jews rejected God’s plan of salvation, their lack of faith in Jesus caused them to break away from God’s tree. Their absence made room for the wild shoots of the Gentiles to become part of the family of God as they accepted the gospel. The tree illustration reminds us that the Jewish faith is still at the root of Christianity.

Although the Israelites had broken away from God, He had not burned them up or thrown them away. Rather, “As far as the fallen branches, unless they are obstinate in their unbelief, they will be grafted in again. Such a restoration is by no means beyond the power of God” (verse 23, Phillips).

God’s Mercy to all Humankind (Rom. 11:29–36)

Chapter 11 concludes with a tone of celebration, worship, and adoration for God’s unending grace and unconditional love. Paul states that God is still pleading with the Jews to accept His mercy, humble themselves, and be saved by faith. Love and acceptance, as is the case of all sinners, is not what they deserve. Jews had prevented the spread of the gospel, had persecuted the missionaries, and were responsible for crucifying Christ. Still, God wanted them to be saved—if only they would believe and give up their self-glorifying habits and have faith in Jesus as their Savior.

We can be thankful that disobedience is never the end, but rather the exact thing Jesus came to deliver us from. He is the only one who can be perfectly obedient to God’s law. His ways are far beyond us. Anything we can give God does not come anywhere close to paying for all He has done for us. The Jews were proud of their ability to keep the laws in great detail. However, they did not realize how terribly they were failing. All glory goes to God. Only by His grace can we be saved.

REACT

1. What kind of relationship do you think Paul had with the Jewish leaders among whom he used to live and whose legalistic practices he used to follow?
2. How does the way God offers grace to stubborn, prideful, fanatical people make you feel? Have you ever felt like rejecting someone with these self-absorbed attitudes and tendencies?

* George R. Knight, *Walking With Paul Through the Book of Romans* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2002), p. 256.

Testimony
Election Results

John 15:4;
Rom. 11:4–6;
2 Pet. 1:3–11

“If we comply with the conditions the Lord has made, we shall secure our election to salvation. Perfect obedience to His commandments is the evidence that we love God, and are not hardened in sin.

“Christ has a church in every age. There are in the church those who are not made any better by their connection with it. They themselves break the terms of their election. Obedience to the commandments of God gives us a right to the privileges of His church.”¹

“No one need be lost.”

In John 15:4 “are the most precious jewels of truth for every individual soul of us. Here is the only election in the Bible, and you can prove yourself elected of Christ by being faithful; you can prove yourself the chosen of Christ by abiding in the vine.”²

“God elects those who have been working on the plan of addition [2 Pet. 1:5–8]. The explanation is given in the first chapter of Second Peter. For every human being, Christ has paid the election price. No one need be lost. All have been redeemed. To those who receive Christ as a personal Saviour will be given power to become the sons and daughters of God. An eternal life insurance policy has been provided for all.

“Whom God elects, Christ redeems. The Saviour has paid the redemption price for every soul. We are not our own; for we are bought with a price. From the Redeemer, who from the foundation of the world has chosen us, we receive the insurance that entitles us to eternal life. . . .

“ . . . This is not an insurance policy the value of which some one else will receive after your death; it is a policy that assures you a life measuring with the life of God—even eternal life.”³

REACT

1. How do the following texts help us to define “perfect obedience”? Exod. 20:1–17; Isa. 58:5–9; Mic. 6:8; Matt. 22:34–40; 25:31–46.
2. God has elected everyone in the sense that He sent His Son to the world not to condemn the world, but so that the world could be saved through Him (John 3:16, 17). How do people, perhaps even you, break this election?

1. Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1079.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 944.

Rom. 10:16–21

Evidence

Lessons From the Israelites

In today's text, we find Paul quoting the words of the prophet Isaiah to contrast the difference between the nation of Israel's ultimate rejection of righteousness by faith and the "unexpected faith" of the Gentiles. So that we do not make the same mistake as Israel did, it is important for us to know the condition of the Israelites when Isaiah was serving as God's prophet. Isaiah emphasized the unwillingness of Israel to hear God. He stressed the nation's disobedience and rebelliousness.

"The Israelites fixed their hopes upon worldly greatness."

But let us go back to before Isaiah's time to when the Israelites escaped from Egypt and wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. Then we find numerous other times when they lost faith in God and His promise of salvation. From the onset of their journey, they grumbled and complained about what they perceived to be the quality, or lack thereof, of God's care for them. Note how they grumbled about their God-given diet in Numbers 11:4–34 and their lack of water in Exodus 15:22–24 and Numbers 20:1–13. Then there was the time when the Israelites convinced Aaron to build a molten calf while Moses was meeting with God on their behalf (Exod. 32:1–6). When they first left Egypt, their hearts must have been filled with joy and faith. But how quickly they forgot.

We read that all this and more caused the Israelites to eventually lose "sight of their high privileges as God's representatives. They forgot God and failed to fulfill their holy mission. The blessings they received brought no blessing to the world. All their advantages they appropriated for their own glorification. They shut themselves away from the world in order to escape temptation."¹

"The Israelites fixed their hopes upon worldly greatness. From the time of their entrance to the land of Canaan, they departed from the commandments of God, and followed the ways of the heathen. It was in vain that God sent them warning by His prophets. In vain they suffered the chastisement of heathen oppression. Every reformation was followed by deeper apostasy."²

From the Israelites, we can learn that no matter how much we claim to be God's elect, if we do not nourish our faith, we lose our standing with Him. The Israelites failed because they consistently strayed from God, seeking the "food" and "water" of other gods they deemed more attractive.

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 14.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 28.

How-to Sustaining Our Selection

Rom. 10:9; 11:17-24

Paul shows us that salvation is based on God's grace and justification by faith, and that all people are elected to receive salvation if they accept Christ's sacrifice for them. When unbelieving Jews rejected Christ, His kingdom was given to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:17-24). (This doesn't mean that salvation for individual Jews has been totally closed.) Paul depicted this situation by comparing it to a branch being broken from an olive tree and another wild branch being grafted to the tree in place of the one it had lost. Anyone today who accepts Christ through faith is part of that graft and, therefore, part of the tree. So how should we live up to the salvation that Christ has given to us?

"The 'antis' continue to tear apart Christ's church."

Recognize that there is no salvation apart from the tree. Paul continually teaches us that we cannot have hope, peace, and salvation unless we maintain a faith relationship with God through Christ. There is nothing we can do to earn salvation. It can be achieved only through God's grace when we accept Christ's sacrifice for us.

Avoid pride. We must be careful about spiritual pride (Prov. 16:18). "Paul's warning about not feeling superior to others is just as meaningful today as it was 2,000 years ago. . . . Some may not be anti-Jew, but they may be anti-Black, anti-White, anti-Hispanic, anti-Asian, or anti-everyone else who doesn't believe like them or appreciate the same music as they do. The 'antis' continue to tear apart Christ's church. The only solution for those with superior thoughts of themselves is to meet Jesus at the cross."^{*}

Maintain a relationship with Jesus. Our salvation is maintained as long as we have a strong relationship with our Savior. Part of this maintenance includes doing God's will. Read Matthew 7:21. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (NRSV). We also need to pray, study God's Word and meditate on it, and be of service to others.

REACT

1. What lessons can we learn from Israel's failure to accept Christ?
2. What does the Bible say about the nature of God's will? Galatians 1:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7; 5:1-22; 1 Peter 2:15; 2 Peter 3:9. What else do you think is included in God's will? Support your answers with Bible texts.

^{*}George R. Knight, *Walking With Paul Through the Book of Romans*, p. 272.

Rom. 10:9–21

Opinion

Leaving the Comfort Zone

By making themselves so separate from the world, the Israelites were unaware that they had built a barrier between themselves and the Gentiles, therefore failing to declare the message to others. As Christians, we, too, are often trapped by barriers we have created. When we find comfort in a particular church family, we tend to neglect healthy fellowship with other citizens in our neighborhoods and towns. This prevents us from sharing the gospel with others.

We have tremendous opportunities to witness for God.

God does not reject people based on customs or ethnicity. He does not favor one nation over another. Rather, He grants salvation to all (John 3:16, 17). We must leave our comfort zone and share the gospel in one way or another with everyone we meet.

The gospel cannot be separated from the words *mission* and *service*. “Christ’s followers have been redeemed for service. Our Lord teaches that the true object of life is ministry. Christ Himself was a worker, and to all His followers He gives the law of service—service to God and to their fellow men. . . . The law of service becomes the connecting link which binds us to God and to our fellow men.

“He gives ‘to every man his work.’ Each has his place in the eternal plan of heaven. Each is to work in co-operation with Christ for the salvation of souls. Not more surely is the place prepared for us in the heavenly mansions than is the special place designated on earth where we are to work for God.”*

Through mission and service, we have tremendous opportunities to witness for God. Because the Israelites as a nation refused God, He opened the doors for everyone to be His witnesses. Christians today must always keep their eyes on the overall plan offered by God—salvation for every man, woman, and child. When we shut ourselves off from the world both at large and right around us, God may also reject us and use others to declare His truth, even nature itself (see Psalm 19:1–4).

REACT

Why do we as Christians often lose our focus to the point of feeling too comfortable with our religion? What can we do to shatter the barrier and reach out to others?

* *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 326, 327.

Exploration
Election Time

Romans 10; 11

CONCLUDE

Many countries, states, provinces, and cities hold costly elections to determine who will govern their part of the world. The outcome of these elections can be disastrous or beneficial, depending on who is elected and the voter's point of view. But there is one election process we can be sure of—God's election of His people. Their qualifications for election include their faithfulness, which is also proof of their election. God has paid all the bills for this election through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ. As long as we abide in Him, our election is guaranteed.

CONSIDER

- Reading all of John 15:1–17 and researching the cultivation of grapes. Compare this cultivation to the election of God's people and their growth process as Christians.
- Studying the history of the Christian church to see when God had a people who obeyed His commandments.
- Creating an equation that depicts the addition process found in 2 Peter 1:3–10. What would the equation look like if you were to subtract?
- Listing ways you can use your talents to be of service to your community. Then find pictures that depict the items on your list. Make a collage out of these pictures. Based on this week's lesson, what title would you give your collage?
- Networking with three or four people who share some of the same talents you have. Together, make and implement a plan that uses these talents for the good of your community.
- Composing a song whose lyrics consist of at least three of your favorite Bible texts dealing with faith. As you write and perform your song, remember that it is faith in God that makes us His elect.

CONNECT

George R. Knight, *Walking With Paul Through the Book of Romans*, pp. 261, 273.

Love and
Law

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2, NKJV).



Introduction
*The Coexistence
of Law and Love*

Romans 12; 13

“No, please, don’t take me! Please leave me alone,” the woman cried. A new and promising day had arrived, but for her it was dark and dismal. She never had anticipated actually getting caught in the act of adultery. Now the Pharisees and teachers of the law were bringing her before Jesus. Her heart pounded as she awaited her punishment, which in those days was death by stoning. She heard one of the teachers ask Jesus this question: “Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?” (John 8:4, 5, NKJV).

The woman knew what she did could have cost her her life, yet she did it anyway.

The moment of silence before Jesus responded must have seemed like an eternity to the woman. She was too ashamed to look up, and unbeknown to her, He had begun to write something in the dirt. He was writing the sins of those condemning her for all to see.* The Pharisees and teachers were becoming agitated and continued questioning Jesus, trying to get a response. Then He said, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first” (John 8:7, NKJV).

As the words Jesus was writing in the dirt became clear, the Pharisees and teachers began to depart, each one knowing that he was not free from sin. After another eternity, the woman heard these soft words spoken, “Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you? . . . Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more” (John 8:10, 11, NKJV).

What a marvelous example of unconditional love! The woman knew what she did could have cost her her life, yet she did it anyway. She was spared death only through the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ and His unfailing love for humanity. Without condoning her sin, He relieved her from her punishment according to the law. One would hope that she walked in the light of Jesus’ love the rest of her life.

In our own lives we need to be slow to condemn just as Jesus was. This week, we’ll learn how we too can learn to coexist with both law and love.

* *The Desire of Ages*, p. 461.

Rom. 12:9–13

Evidence
Glued to Goodness

As humans in a fallen world, our natural tendency is to do evil. Without Christ working through us, even our love is self-serving and false. So to help us out, God has given some instructions on how to live and love. Christians are to “hate what is evil; cling to what is good,” and keep their “spiritual fervor, serving the Lord” (Rom. 12:9, 11, NIV). But what exactly does this mean?

Have you ever accidentally superglued two things together?

The word *abhor*, translated from *apostugeo*, is a verb that is only found here. It means “to hate violently.”¹ That is a strong command. It isn’t enough just to ignore evil, or shy away from it. We are to actively and violently hate it! This order contrasts directly with the next sentence: “Cling to what is good.” “Cling” is the translation of the word *kollao*, “a term that means ‘to glue, weld or cement’ ourselves to something.”² Again, this is vivid imagery. Have you ever accidentally superglued two things together and then tried to separate them without the proper solvent? Or have you tried to smash apart two bits of metal that were welded together? It’s very difficult, if not totally impossible! Likewise, Christians should be so closely bound to what is good that it is all but impossible to be separated from it.

The chapter continues, by rephrasing the golden rule, telling how to go about being cemented to goodness: put others first, be kind, treat everyone with the love of God, and serve the Lord. *Zeo*, the word translated “fervent,” “literally meant to boil or to seethe.”³ We should be so on fire for Christ, so ready to serve and obey, that we are boiling over. Jesus’ love should fill our hearts so that we diligently do all He asks, growing closer to Him every day.

As Romans 12:9 says, “Let love be without hypocrisy” (NASB). Christians are to be different from the rest of the world. We are to love with a love that is pure rather than self-serving. When Christ lives in our hearts, we will find evil so awful that it will be hateful to us, and we will try to make goodness an inseparable part of our lives. Our hearts and minds will be full of God’s love, and we will be so excited to serve Him that His laws will be a joy to us.

1. Brad Price, *Living by Faith: A Commentary on the Book of Romans*, pp. 261, 263.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

This week's lesson looks at a smaller part (Romans 12, 13) of a greater part (Rom. 12:1–15:13). It should be understood that in the greater part, Paul was writing about the attitude and conduct expected of Christians in the city of Rome. All of this is in relationship to the law and love. With that in mind, let's dive into the Word and see what Paul has to share with us.

You've just lost your "store" to a thief. How is one to pray at a time like this?

Consecrating the Body and Mind (Rom. 12:1, 2)

Since sin entered the world, human nature tends to gravitate to that which *appears* to feel or look good, and which *appears* to provide "fun." In these opening verses, Paul is calling for a complete presentation of oneself to God. He makes a distinction between the worldly and the heavenly, the profane and the holy.

"Here we have a most significant thing. True worship is the offering to God of one's body, and all that one does every day with it. Real worship is not the offering to God of a liturgy, however, noble, and a ritual, however magnificent. *Real worship is the offering of everyday life to him*, not something transacted in a church, but something which sees the whole world as the temple of the living God."¹

Using God's Gifts With Humility (Rom. 12:3–8)

In verses 3–8, we see that all members are part of one body, and that there are many parts to that body. God gives each member different gifts, such as prophecy (verse 6); ministry and teaching (verse 7); exhorting, generosity, administration, and mercy (verse 8).

Exemplifying Christian Character Traits (Rom. 12:9–21)

For a Christian living in Rome during Paul's day, this unit of verses would provide quite a challenge. Especially for the new Christian, some of these traits would be a "cause for pause." Try this one on for size: "Love one another with mutual affection" (verse 10, NRSV). Yeah! That's right! Someone just stole your favorite stall down at the market. You've had that same spot for the past 14 months! How dare he! But verse 12 says, "Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer" (NRSV). Well, you surely don't feel like praying right now. You've just lost your "store" to a thief. How is one to pray at a time like this?

Paul goes on to say in verse 14 to “bless those who persecute you” (NRSV). The last thing you plan to do is “bless” this man! (Maybe tell him where to go, but surely not bless him!) Paul, however, doesn’t let up. “Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all” (verse 17, NRSV). And then he has the nerve to say in verse 18 that “if it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (NRSV). Don’t miss the picture; right beside the spot, the one you’ve had for the past 14 months, is another open spot.

If . . . if you can jump down to verse 21 and abide by it, maybe, just maybe you can try the new spot for one day. “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (NRSV). Oh, yes, don’t miss that thing about vengeance being up to God and feeding this person who has stolen your property (verses 19, 20). If this Christian thing really works, maybe your “market day” will turn out all right.

Honoring Authority (Rom. 13:1–7)

Let’s twist the above story just a little further and say that the authorities get involved. Now you’re dealing with more than the crazy man who just took your market stall of 14 months. Your Christian interaction one on one has just been challenged, but now the “public” is going to see how a Christian relates to authority. Paul admonishes us in verse 7, “Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due” (NRSV).

Walking in Love (Rom. 13:8–14)

This set of verses would have helped the victim in our story. If he had approached the market that morning realizing that no one owed him anything, but that he owed everyone love, maybe his morning would not have been so bumpy. I like how verse 14 closes out this section: “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (NRSV). Here “Paul exhorts believers to display outwardly what has already taken place inwardly—including practicing all the virtues associated with Christ.”²

REACT

1. Why is it so hard to yield completely to Christ?
2. How does one discover the “good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God”?
3. What would our story in this lesson look like today? The marketplace could be a mall, or something similar could take place if someone slips into a parking space you wanted. Use your imagination and make the story relevant to where you live and what you do.

1. William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letter to the Romans*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia, Penn.: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 157.

2. Kenneth Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1985), p. 1727.

Testimony *Loving the Law*

Rom. 13:10

“The law of God, from its very nature, is unchangeable. It is a revelation of the will and the character of its Author. God is love, and His law is love. Its two great principles are love to God and love to man. ‘Love is the fulfilling of the law’” (Romans 13:10).¹

“Christ dwelling in the soul is a spring that never runs dry.”

“Righteousness is holiness, likeness to God, and ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:16). It is conformity to the law of God, for ‘all Thy commandments are righteousness’ (Psalm 119:172), and ‘love is the fulfilling of the law’ (Romans 13:10). Righteousness is love, and love is the light and the life of God. The righteousness of God is embodied in Christ. We receive righteousness by receiving Him.”²

“God is Himself the source of all mercy. His name is ‘merciful and gracious’ (Exodus 34:6). He does not treat us according to our desert [what we deserve]. He does not ask if we are worthy of His love, but He pours upon us the riches of His love, to make us worthy. He is not vindictive. He seeks not to punish, but to redeem. Even the severity which He manifests through His providences is manifested for the salvation of the wayward. He yearns with intense desire to relieve the woes of men and to apply His balsam to their wounds. It is true that God ‘will by no means clear the guilty’ (Exodus 34:7), but He would take away the guilt.

“The merciful are ‘partakers of the divine nature,’ and in them the compassionate love of God finds expression. All whose hearts are in sympathy with the heart of Infinite Love will seek to reclaim and not to condemn. Christ dwelling in the soul is a spring that never runs dry. Where He abides, there will be an overflowing of beneficence.

“To the appeal of the erring, the tempted, the wretched victims of want and sin, the Christian does not ask, Are they worthy? but, How can I benefit them? In the most wretched, the most debased, he sees souls whom Christ died to save and for whom God has given to His children the ministry of reconciliation.”³

REACT

Is it possible to be totally conformed to the law of God? Describe a person who would be in conformity with God’s law.

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 467.

2. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 18.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Romans 12; 13

How-to Serving, Sharing, and Submitting

In Romans 12, Paul reaches the pinnacle of his message about love, law, and grace. He makes an appeal in light of all that he has just said, in view of God's mercies, to present ourselves to God as living sacrifices. As a result of offering ourselves to God, we will then be able to carry out His perfect, good, and pleasing will. Let's look at Paul's practical applications of his message to implement in our lives:

There is a certain vulnerability or risk in being a part of a community.

Serve the community of believers. Paul was writing to a group of believers who worshiped together and who most likely lived near each other. He instructed them to serve the body by using their spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:6–8). In the same way, as believers, we are to serve the community of Christ by offering our spiritual gifts, as well as our time and energy. If you are unsure of where your spiritual gifts lie, take a spiritual gifts inventory or think about the things you naturally excel at and enjoy. Offer those things to God and to serving the community of believers.

Share your life with others. Paul encouraged fellow believers to share their lives with each other. In Romans 12:9–16, we are told to rejoice and grieve with each other, practice hospitality, and to live in peace with one another. These are just some of the ways we share our lives with other believers. There is a certain vulnerability or risk in being a part of a community, but this is one of the ways we can remind ourselves of God's redemptive work in our lives and in the lives of others.

Submit to authorities. While we are to submit and defer to each other in the body of Christ, Paul also writes in Romans 13 that we are to submit to those in authority over us. There are many who serve in positions of authority, whether it is in our local church or in our nation's government. We should respect government officials, pray for them, and as far as our conscience allows, cooperate with them. We also show our submission to authorities when we are fiscally responsible in paying our taxes, respect local laws and governance, and of service to the town and country in which we live.

REACT

1. Are you currently engaged in a community of believers? If not, how do you think you could become involved?
2. How could you better serve the community of believers?

The Law in Action

Rom. 13:9

You've seen them. Vacant eyes from billboards stare down upon your car as you pass by. Haunting eyes from the gaunt forms of children on television look your way. Do you look back? Do you try to help these starving, underprivileged children get the help they need? Or do you merely turn your eyes elsewhere as you are about to do from this page right now because I'm getting personal?

Somehow she always finds a way to help just one more child.

The movie *Slumdog Millionaire* awakened many people to the grim conditions of the youth in Mumbai, India. After that movie came out, many of the actors in that film went back to the same life of poverty that they had known before.

In 1999, a Scottish nurse named Gillie Davidson came eye to eye with India's youth and their poverty. And she chose never to turn back. Gillie was inspired to take children who had been forced into prostitution, begging, and life on the streets and help them to live a better life. She didn't want them to repeat the lives of their parents who had died of AIDS, been murdered, or committed suicide. She reaches down to those in the lowest social castes and protects them from abuse and prejudice.

To help change their lives, she provides food, clothing, shelter, and education. She calls the organization she has started Scottish Love in Action. Youth show up at her center from various nightmares. One day, a boy arrived after walking for miles with his younger brother and sister. Their mother had died of heart disease, and their father, who was a policeman, had been murdered.

Another child came to the center at the age of 14. She had been abandoned by her father after he had a nervous breakdown. This happened to him because his own family had murdered his wife, the child's mother, because she was of a lower caste.

Unlike many of us, Gillie cannot just turn away. The pleading, beckoning eyes of India's future penetrate her soul, and somehow she always finds a way to help just one more child. Truly she fulfills the law Paul speaks of in Romans 13: "The one who loves another has fulfilled the law" (Rom. 13:8, NRSV).

REACT

1. How is the law of love in action a part of your life? How would you teach it to a child?
2. In what ways could you reach out and show the law in action?

Ron Reese, Canton, North Carolina, U.S.A.

Romans 12; 13

Exploration *Inside-Out Living*

CONCLUDE

The gospel has the power of rescuing us from sin's control, thus putting us in a right relationship with God. It also has the power to transform the way we live our lives. The work of the Holy Spirit is first done in our minds; and from there it is carried on through our wills, affections, and conversations, until our entire lives reflect Christ's character. This is what Paul calls true worship. It is the daily giving of ourselves as an offering to God. It is the submitting and committing ourselves to the Holy Spirit so He can continually perform that work of grace in us that reflects God's love to a world in need of the hope that we have (Rom. 12:1–3).

CONSIDER

- Journaling for a week how you spend each day from the time you wake up until you go to bed. Live without giving deliberate thought to the exercise of journaling. Just go about the day as you always do—but record your plans, thoughts, activities, and interactions. After your first three days, notice what you've recorded about your life. Did you find any patterns that surprised you? What importance did you give to yourself? To others? To God? For the rest of the week, deliberately ask yourself as you journal your days, "Is worshiping God through my life a reality that I live out daily?"
- Praying, asking God to open your heart and mind to His word and to draw you into His transforming presence.
- Reading Romans 12 and 13 and listing the characteristics of a transformed Christian community.
- Making a collage that represents your Christian community as the body of Christ living out His love to each other and to your community. To compile your collage, check with the church secretary or an elder to see what photos they have of your church in different scenarios. Put it all together, and share it with your church. If you don't have photos, begin your own project of photo-journalism to make a visual record of your church living out Christ's love.
- Brainstorming with a group of friends about how you can reach out in your church and community to offer help and hope in places of need. Then spearhead the charge and do it!

CONNECT

Steps to Christ, chapter 7, "The Test of Discipleship," pp. 57–65.

Fritz Ridenour, *How to Be a Christian Without Being Religious*, rev. ed. (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 2002).

Jean Kellner, Columbia, Maryland, U.S.A.

lesson thirteen

SEPTEMBER 18-25

The Heart of **Christianity**

“Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God” (Rom. 14:10, NRSV).



Rom. 14:17–19

Introduction

The Potluck Debacle

I remember it as if it were yesterday. Although I was about six years old at the time, I was still capable of sensing the tension in the air. My church family was gathered in the church hall, waiting to partake of one of our famous potlucks. You see, our church was renowned for the delicious feasts we lovingly prepared on a monthly basis. In fact, one of the best indications that it was “lunch day” was the obvious swell in the size of the congregation! People came from everywhere just to enjoy the curries, pastries, sandwiches, and other varieties of the best vegetarian cuisine available.

It was horrific! Shocking even!

But, on this particular day, something wasn't quite right. The ladies responsible for heating the food appeared a bit flustered. I saw one of them emerge from the kitchen and whisper something in the ear of one of the elders. He quickly stood up and accompanied her back to the kitchen. Being a curious child, I quickly scuttled across the room and followed them. I had to see what was happening!

Can you guess what the confusion was about? It was horrific! Shocking even! It turns out that someone had actually dared to bring a dish of noodles—laced with finely chopped pieces of meat—to our sacred potluck lunch! I giggled to myself—the look on the ladies' faces was priceless!

To tell you the truth, I'm not quite sure how that situation was eventually dealt with. I can only assume that it was handled in a tactful and gracious manner. In Romans 14–16, Paul provides some useful instructions about how to deal with such situations. In these beautifully crafted chapters, he encourages us to always strive to maintain harmony with each other. Instead of focusing solely on minor differences of opinion, he tells us to accept each other, as Christ first accepted us.

As Seventh-day Adventists, the issue of health and diet is close to our hearts. But sometimes, we become so focused on the minor details that we forget to look at the big picture. In Paul's day, for example, Rome was populated with a mixture of many different ethnic and religious groups. Similarly, the world we live in is filled with different ethnicities, beliefs, and ways of life. In order to reach the many segments of our society with the wonderful message of the gospel, we must listen to what Paul has to say about unity, harmony, and love. That's what we will be focusing on in this week's study.

If someone were to ask you, “What does it mean to live a Christian life?” what would your response be? Would you rattle off a list of things Christians do, or would you go to the very heart of Christianity—Christ Himself? These are the issues Paul addresses in the final section of his letter to the Roman Christians. How do we interact with others, and most important, as His ambassadors, do we reflect Christ’s image in our own lives?

His lifestyle was the strongest witness.

Passing Judgment (Rom. 14:10–12; 16:17–19)

In the first few verses of Romans 14, we see that the issue unfolding is one of passing judgment on another. Time and again the issues of quarrelling due to differences of opinion crop up. Paul says that no matter how well intentioned we are, we should avoid quarrelling about comparatively inconsequential issues. Specifically, he mentions people arguing about what food to eat and about what days should be esteemed as being more important than others. He specifically advises people whose faith has enabled them to leave behind the observance of all ceremonial holy days that they should not despise those whose faith is not as strong.¹ We are all responsible to God for our actions. He expects us to be fully convinced personally on the things the Holy Spirit has convicted us of. However, we should strive to create unity rather than division and obstacles.

The Key to a Righteous Life (Rom. 3:23; 14:4; 2 Cor. 5:10)

All are to appear before the judgment seat of Christ to account for their deeds, whether good or evil. So rather than looking at each other’s faults, we are to be aware of our own circumstances and surroundings, not being proud lest we fall, which we will, due to our sinful nature. We do, however, have hope, and that hope is Jesus! He enables us to stand. So what is the key to a righteous life? It’s not looking at each other, or even at ourselves. Only by fixing our eyes on Jesus will we have the power to overcome our sinful nature. This, however, doesn’t imply that we are saved by our works. Even though we are all under the law, it is through the gift of Christ’s grace that we have salvation. “He, the Sinless One, was treated as we deserve, that we, fallen and sinful, might be treated as He deserved.”²

Lest They Stumble (1 Cor. 8:13)

Therefore, as ambassadors of Christ, we must be very careful what we do, so that we do not cause others to fall, be confused, or be offended. We don't know how great the effect of our actions can be on someone who is observing. Although we aren't accountable for another person's conscience, we are responsible for their welfare. We should be prepared and willing to give up our freedom in these comparatively inconsequential matters rather than causing another believer to fall.

The Aim of a Christian's Existence (1 Cor. 9:19)

The aim of our existence is not merely a matter of what we do. Rather, it is our submission to the Lord, doing all to His glory and according to His will. However, we are not His slaves! It is only when we accept and submit to Him that we are truly free. "Among Christ's followers there is to be no force, no compulsion. A spirit of love and sympathetic tolerance is to prevail at all times. . . . There is no room for self-righteous criticism."³

I like to recall the time when my father told me his testimony. From a very early age, he always had been passionate about automobiles. At the age of 7, he already was driving his father's truck. As he grew older, his love for cars grew stronger. Soon after turning 18, when he could finally compete, my father became the first Montenegrin⁴ to become the champion of the former Yugoslavia in motor sport. However, all this time, he and his two brothers were unable to be baptized because they competed on the Sabbath. Many pastors tried to pressure them into giving their lives to the Lord, but this just pushed them further away. It wasn't until another pastor moved next door to them that things began to change. His approach was drastically different from the others'. He spent time with them as they worked on their cars; and when their races weren't on Sabbath, he would attend them. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:19, "For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them" (NRSV). Like Paul, this pastor never chastised my father and his brothers. His lifestyle was the strongest witness. We also are to live that way. Then others will see Christ in us and be drawn to Him.

REACT

1. Is there something in your life you need to give to the Lord today, in order to be more like Him?
2. Is there someone you may have grieved in the past to whom you need to apologize?
3. What can you do to make your church more harmonious?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 636, 637.

2. *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 268.

3. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 637.

4. A person from Montenegro, a region of southeast Europe bordering on the Adriatic Sea.

Testimony
*The Better Way
Is Better Lived*

Rom. 14:1-13

“In this country [Australia] there is an organized vegetarian society, but its numbers are comparatively few. Among the people in general, meat is largely used by all classes. It is the cheapest article of food; and even where poverty abounds, meat is usually found upon the table. Therefore there is the more need of handling wisely the question of meat eating. In regard to this matter there should be no rash movements. We should consider the situation of the people, and the power of lifelong habits and practices, and should be careful not to urge our ideas upon others.”¹

“Teach by example.”

“Do not watch others in order to point out their faults or errors. Teach by example. Let your self-denial and your victory over appetite be an illustration of obedience to right principles. Let your life bear witness to the sanctifying, ennobling influence of truth.”²

“It is of little use to try to reform others by attacking what we may regard as wrong habits. Such effort often results in more harm than good. In His talk with the Samaritan woman, instead of disparaging Jacob’s well, Christ presented something better. ‘If thou knewest the gift of God,’ He said, ‘and who it is that saith to thee, Give Me to drink; thou wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water.’ John 4:10. He turned the conversation to the treasure He had to bestow, offering the woman something better than she possessed, even living water, the joy and hope of the gospel.

“This is an illustration of the way in which we are to work. We must offer men something better than that which they possess, even the peace of Christ, which passeth all understanding.”³

REACT

1. We cannot gain salvation through what we eat or drink. Why is it then that as Seventh-day Adventists we are encouraged to consume a vegetarian diet? In what circumstances would it not be practical to consume a vegetarian diet?

2. Jesus revealed more truth to His disciples only when He knew they were ready (John 16:12, 13). Should we follow Jesus’ method?

1. *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 462.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 465.

3. *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 156, 157.

Rom. 14:1–5, 13–15, 21

Evidence *When Your Tummy Rumbles and Someone Stumbles*

The first generation of Christians was made up of Jewish and Gentile converts. Most of the Gentile converts, especially those addressed in the book of Romans, were of pagan background. Both classes of the early Christians had unique customs, traditions, and cultures; and here lay the root of misunderstanding.

Romans 14 is not a new divine license to now eat any type of animal flesh.

The Jews observed many ceremonial holy days throughout the year. These pointed to the coming of the Messiah and were separate from the seventh-day Sabbath of the Ten Commandments. When Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins, these ceremonies were no longer necessary because they had met their fulfillment in Him. Many Jews recognized the fulfillment of those holy days, but others insisted that they still be kept. The latter unfairly urged them upon the Gentile Christians.

Meanwhile, the Gentile Christians who had worshiped idols now realized the error of their ways and were repulsed by even the food that had been sacrificed to false deities. They questioned the integrity of the Jewish Christians who would eat such food. The Jews, however, felt that “concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one” (1 Cor. 8:4, NKJV).

Romans 14 is not a new divine license to now eat any type of animal flesh, canceling the health and hygiene principles that God gave in detail. It is not a letter permitting the arbitrary change of the seventh-day sacredness to any other day of the week. In this chapter, Paul is writing to the Christians in Rome, giving them godly council. I can imagine Him saying, “Don’t judge one another. Some of you understand more than others, so don’t try to coerce or manipulate your brother if he understands something a little differently than you. And don’t be a stumbling block to your sister, needlessly offending her conscience by doing something she isn’t comfortable with.” Paul introduces this idea in Romans 13:10, “Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (NKJV). The crux of his message is, “Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another” (Rom. 14:13, NRSV).

REACT

Discuss the link between Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 10:31–33.

How-to Judging Appropriately

Rom. 14:4, 10–12, 20

Judgment is the act of assessing a situation, event, or circumstance, and then coming up with a conclusion. When talking about judgment in a biblical sense, many of us see ourselves standing in front of God while He assesses everything we've done. If we've accepted Christ's righteousness as our own and live according to the wooing of the Holy Spirit, we need not fear God's judgment. Here are some questions concerning what we might or might not be doing to prepare for God's judgment.

You also should be careful that what you do does not cause someone else to sin.

Whom are we to judge? (Rom. 14:4). During judgment, laws or beliefs are used as a guideline to judge what is right and what is wrong. Today, many people have their own guidelines that they've created themselves. At times, these people also might acknowledge other laws that they think are right and true. However, it is not up to us to judge them. Read James 4:11, 12.

How do your actions impact the world? (Rom. 14:15, 16). What example are you setting for others? What are you eating? What are you drinking? What things do you talk about? Your answers to these questions give you and others a picture of your true character and the god you follow. If you claim to be a Christian, what you eat, drink, and talk about should reflect your relationship with Christ so that others will be attracted to Him. You also should be careful that what you do does not cause someone else to sin.

What things do you value? (Rom. 14:20, 21). There are so many things a person values. We must always ask ourselves, Am I valuing the right things? Do the things that I value help me to grow spiritually? Do they show that I walk with God and value a relationship with Him?

Who is the perfect judge? (Rom. 14:10). Many people wrongly set themselves up as judge. They take great delight in condemning others because it makes them feel "holier." However, the Bible states clearly that there is only One who is qualified to judge. There is only One who is fair and just—Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior (2 Cor. 5:10).

REACT

1. What specific things happen when we set ourselves up as judge?
2. Rather than judging one another, what should we do?

Mic. 6:8;
Matt. 7:1–5;
Gal. 5:1, 13–26

Opinion *Living in Christian Freedom*

As Seventh-day Adventists Christians, it is important for us to have beliefs that define us. Even by our name, we declare as a group of diverse individuals that Jesus is the Christ. Some other elements that unite us are the doctrine of salvation through Christ, belief in His resurrection, the Sabbath, and living a life that reflects His character. All too frequently, however, we make the mistake of believing that our personal opinions also should be universal. This is apparently not a new problem, as Paul spends a sizeable amount of time arguing for the so-called law of liberty in Romans. As he reminds us, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Micah 6:8 does not say, . . . “Do not surf the Internet on the Sabbath.”

Who are we, then, to judge another of God’s servants according to our standard? Our opinions are certainly not doctrine. We forget that all that is asked of us is to “do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic. 6:8, NKJV). Notice that Micah 6:8 does not say, “Do not wear jeans to church,” “do not wear jewelry,” “do not surf the Internet on the Sabbath,” or “do not eat meat.” Even Paul points out that our salvation is not determined by what we eat or drink, but that it is a gift from God. Therefore, we are not to judge another for whom Christ has died.

On the other hand, while there is no “thou shalt not smoke,” we are to remember that because both our time on earth and the bodies we inhabit are gifts from God, we are to take care of our health and set a good example for those who might be struggling. It is one thing to say “Liberty! Liberty!” and quite another to forget about love for God and for our fellow humans.

We are meant to be Christ’s representatives. It is no good to be a legalist or an anarchist. Instead, we are to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and temperance. These are the hallmarks of Christ’s character. And against such there is no law.

REACT

1. What beliefs and practices are essential to our faith as Seventh-day Adventists? How well has your own young adult group assimilated these practices into their daily lives?

2. What beliefs and practices are nonessential to our faith as Seventh-day Adventists? Why then do we promote these beliefs and practices?

Michelle Luo, Perth, Western Australia

Exploration
Judgey McJudgey

John 7:24

CONCLUDE

We are all born with inherent abilities and propensities. Created in the likeness of God, we are naturally gifted with talents that enhance life, the church, and society in general. However, born into sin, we are naturally inclined to behave in ways that are detrimental to others. Sin has programmed us to be self-centered, self-righteousness, and opinionated. The natural desire to sit in righteous judgment of everything from television commercials to people stems from this flawed nature; but that's not an excuse to be Judgey McJudgeys, otherwise known as know-it-alls. We all have the same choice: to be filled with the Holy Spirit so we can become like Jesus or to give in to our propensity to be evil.

CONSIDER

- Observing and listening during church potluck and then creating a graph or chart that illustrates the number of judgmental comments you heard people make.
- Composing a psalm that asks the Holy Spirit to give you the resolve to be less judgmental with each new day.
- Developing an action plan for when you are in a situation that tempts you to make judgmental statements.
- Writing and performing a short satirical skit on judging within the context of Adventist health principles.
- Starting a money jar where every bill represents a judgmental thought you had or judgmental comment you made. (Use the lowest denomination bill of your country's currency or a middle-range coin.) Do this for about two weeks. When finished, count your money, remembering as you do how it got in the jar. Donate the money to a favorite charity and pray that God will help you to be less judgmental and more complimentary.
- Having an accountability partner—someone you can confide in, get encouragement from—to aid you in your fight against being judgmental.

CONNECT

Herbert Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, chap. 42 (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1998); Laurie Beth Jones, *Jesus, Life Coach: Learn From the Best* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2004); Max Lucado, *Just Like Jesus: Learning to Have a Heart Like His* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2003).

Background Characters in the Old Testament

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for fourth quarter 2010, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1 Story and History

Logos: Gen. 39:6–12; Josh. 3:9–17; 1 Sam. 24:1–6; 1 Kings 12:1–16; Job 1:1–12.

Memory Text: “Every Scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the person dedicated to God may be capable and equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17, NET).

Though most folk harbor no great love for the study of history itself, most people do love a good story. Every civilization has a rich repertoire of stories that explain (or claim to explain) the origins, values, relationships, and structures of its culture. These stories, told over generations, are often teaching tools.

In the modern age, storytelling was downplayed: people looked for facts and scientific answers to explain life. However, facts alone could not answer life's most important questions. Today, a new generation, often dubbed “postmodern,” has rediscovered the power of stories.

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

Every story needs a setting. This week we will explore different settings and their historical contexts in order to understand better the characters we'll be studying all quarter.

Lesson 2 Caleb: Living With the Wait

Logos: Numbers 13; 14; Joshua 14; Judg. 1:12–15.

Memory Text: “My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning. Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption” (Ps. 130:6, 7).

He saw the best of times and the worst of times. Caleb knew what slavery was like. He had been there when the Lord had led his people out of Egypt with a mighty hand. He had seen the sea open before Israel and swallow the Egyptian chariots and army. He had been with Israel at Mount Sinai and had seen Moses descend from the mountain with God's law. He was one of the first to see the land of Canaan. And through no fault of his own, he had to spend his best years wandering in the desert with the Israelites. He watched all of his generation die there too. At last, as an old man, he is able to enter into the land of Canaan. Even then he shows courage and faith in God.

Caleb is a leader who seems to work more behind the scenes than in front of the audience. This week we will learn from his gentle leadership style. We will get to know a great leader willing to take risks and to lead by example; someone who is generous and encourages leadership in younger people. But beyond the many positive character traits of Caleb, we will study a story relevant to us, who live at the end of earth's history as we wait to cross over into the heavenly Canaan.

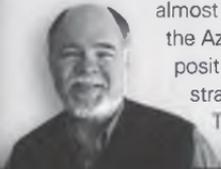
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Redemption in Romans

This book answers, in a simple, satisfying way, common questions about Romans.

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Redemption in Romans is a commentary on this letter of Paul's to the Christians who were living in Rome. But it's not a heavy, detailed, verse-by-verse commentary. Instead, it picks up the main ideas of the letter, gives us the important background information, helps us understand those ideas, and shows how they lead us to Paul's main point—the reason he wrote the letter.



JOHN BRUNT has served the Seventh-day Adventist Church for almost forty years, both in his current position as senior pastor of the Azure Hills Seventh-day Adventist Church and in his previous positions, including that of vice president for Academic Administration at Walla Walla University. He holds a doctorate in New Testament from Emory University.

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