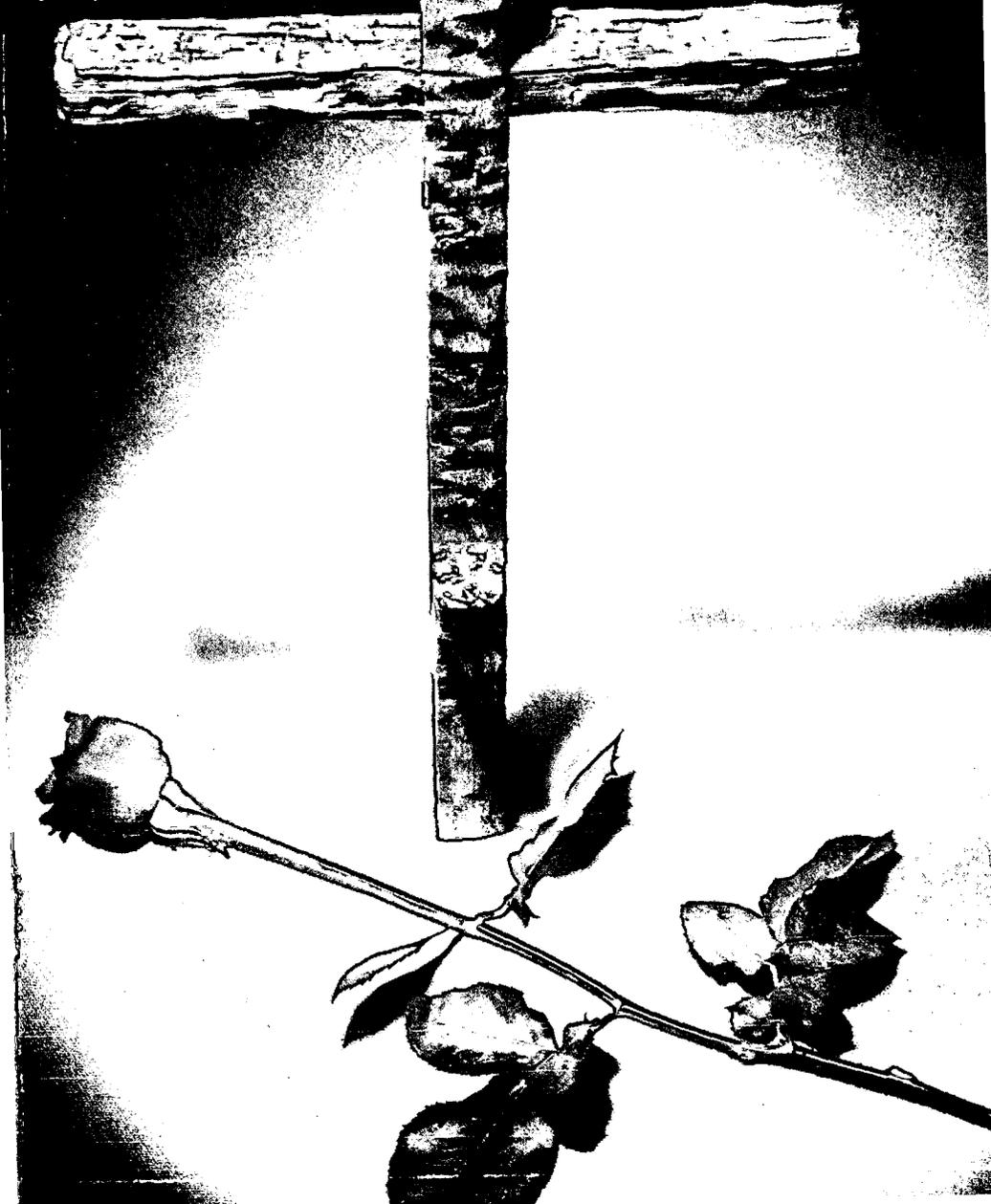


Adult Sabbath School Lessons



God's Forgiveness and Love's Response

July-September 1984



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and. Since Jesus' death on the cross, the Christian church is spiritual Israel. Jews are not saved as a nation, but as individual Christians.

QUESTION FOR THOUGHT:
Is it important to know that Jesus died for the church today, and not a nation?

For more than a thousand years, Christ was Israel's King, Protector, and Guide. When Israel refused to accept Jesus, they became

FURTHER STUDY: Romans 9 and 10.

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"It Is Finished"

Part 1—Israel's End

"They cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate said unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar." John 19:15.

It is not important to know who was responsible for the death of Jesus Christ. (See Matt. 26:24) for the Lamb of God came to die for the sins of the whole world. Every Christian confesses that *he or she* betrayed and denied by "Christian" apostles. The New Testament says that the Romans and Jews were responsible for Christ's death. But Jesus really died of a broken heart—broken by the sins of all people—Jesus came to earth to die.

When Pilate washed his hands and was innocent, what did he scream? Matt.

One of the things Jesus died for: (1) Mark 15:38; (2) John 19:30; and (3) Matt.

The cry, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15), and the death of Jesus brought the mission of Israel to an end. Since Jesus' death on the cross, the Christian church is spiritual Israel. Jews are not saved as a nation, but as individual Christians.

A QUESTION FOR THOUGHT:
Why is it important to know that Jesus died for the church today, and not a nation?

1 Sunday
January 1

unprotected

1 When Jesus said, "It is finished," a hidden hand tipped open the temple veil. "And so your Temple will be abandoned and empty" (Matt. 23:38, TEV).

2 When Christ was resurrected (returned to life), other people were resurrected (see Eph. 4:8). They called Jesus their King. The Jewish leaders were shocked and speechless. What if they were to meet the risen Christ? Never again could they sleep peacefully. —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 785, paraphrased.

3 Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70.

What happened to Israel after the cross? Rom. 11:11-26.

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**Editorial Offices: 6840 Eastern Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20012**

Lesson Author: Geoffrey Garne and James Londis
Editors: Leo R. Van Dolson and Gordon M. Hyde
Editorial Secretary: Florence L. Wetmore
Circulation Manager: Gary D. Grimes
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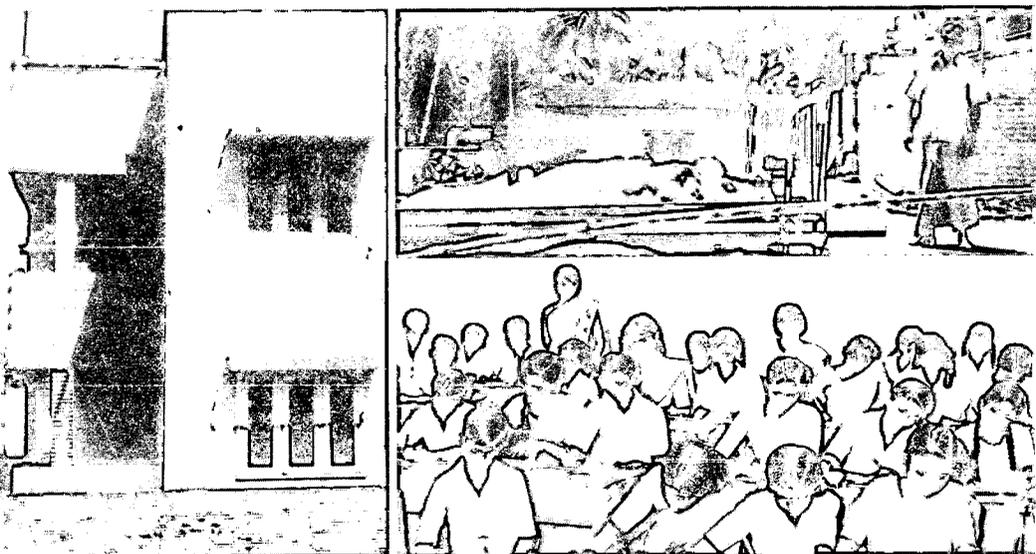
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Look What Your Mission Offering Helped Us Accomplish



Shown above are the projects you helped make a reality first quarter, 1981. They include construction at the Ruby Nelson Memorial Hospital, north India; staff housing at Lakpahanana Training Institute, Sri Lanka; and a four-classroom building for E. D. Thomas Higher Secondary School, south India. Not only do we thank you for helping us with these projects but we thank you for your prayers and support on September

29 as we plan an evangelistic center for Mizoram, a new hospital for Bangalore, and relocation of the Manipur Elementary Boarding School, all of which are located in India.

G. J. Christo, President
Southern Asia Division

**Remember: Your mission offering
helps perform miracles.**

Introduction

GOD'S FORGIVENESS AND LOVE'S RESPONSE

A knock at the classroom door interrupted a college examination being given the class on the major prophets. The professor in charge stepped into the hallway for a few minutes. When he returned he said: "The librarian is here. Apparently someone took the *S.D.A. Bible Commentary* volume on Isaiah out of the library last night. Students looking for it this morning to study for this exam could not find it. Would the culprit stand up, go get the book, and return it to the library?" The heart of a young minister-to-be began to race as he realized he had made a terrible mistake. He had been getting an "A" in the class and did not want to lose it on the final exam. The night before he had come to the conclusion that without several hours' more work with the commentary he probably would lose his "A." The commentaries that were allowed to be taken out of the library were gone; only those to be used in the library remained.

But the library was closing. He thought it would be all right to take the volume he was using home and return it the moment the library door opened the next morning. No one even would suspect it had been taken. He went to bed about 2:00 a.m., setting the clock for 6:45. But somehow the alarm did not go off when planned and he woke up at 8:30. The exam was at nine. "Too late now," he said to himself as he dressed. "I'll have to put that book back later and hope no one notices."

Sitting in the classroom, he could feel his face flushing. No one suspected him. He was a senior theology major and a student leader in religious activities. He noticed that those in the classroom had stopped writing their exams. They were waiting to see if anyone would stand up. He stumbled to his feet and left the room as quickly as possible. Some of his friends gasped in surprise. He never had been more humiliated.

That afternoon the young man learned that both the librarian and the professor were jolted to think that he was the guilty party. That made going to them for forgiveness even harder. First, he visited the librarian, who expressed his disappointment and then told him that he hoped the young man had learned something. Next, he visited the chairman of the religion department, the teacher of the class. They talked for over an hour. The professor was patient and understanding. The theology student felt forgiven but, of course, could not undo what had happened.

Ours is a world of sin and brokenness, of minor offenses as well as major holocausts. If there is no forgiveness for what we have done and still do, there is no hope. Christ came to reveal the power of divine forgiveness to us—to teach us how to be forgiven, and to forgive.

Beyond Christ's forgiveness God has provided a means of reclaiming us from sin. God's love did not stop at Calvary. Because of what was accomplished there, He reaches beyond to transform the hearts and lives of the truly penitent and to enable them to follow Him along the pathway of obedience.



1

July 1-7
Adult Lesson

God and Forgiveness

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

Some Japanese soldiers found themselves stranded on an island in the Pacific long after World War II had ended. Having been cut off from their regiment and outside communications shortly before the war ended, they had not heard the news that the war was over.

The soldiers hid for many years while living at a most primitive level. When people approached their hideout the soldiers shot at them. Even though the war had ended long before, they still were fighting imaginary enemies.

When they were informed somehow that the war was over, they thought at first that the message was a trick to get them to surrender. They believed that to be true to their emperor they had to keep on fighting. They were unaware of the fact that the war was over and a general amnesty had been declared. Their “crimes” as soldiers would not be held against them. They would not be tortured or executed. On the contrary, they now were *free* to go home and lead normal lives. There no longer was need to be hostile.

Obviously, an amnesty is not an amnesty until it is believed and accepted. In a sense, through Jesus’ death on the cross, God gave the message to the world that grace had triumphed over evil, that God was reconciling the world to Himself—or in the terms of the story—declaring a general amnesty. But it takes more than what God has done to bring about a reconciliation with and a restoration of sinners to a state of peace with God. It takes our recognition of our need and our acceptance of God’s terms.

Here are some of the questions that we will try to answer in this lesson:

1. Does God forgive a sinner regardless of the sinner’s attitude toward Him?
2. What part does confession play in receiving God’s forgiveness?
3. Are there limits to God’s forgiveness? Are there preconditions?

No other doctrine of the church is more important to understand than this. Doing so provides the key to a vibrant, joyful, growing experience with God.

Part 1 — God's Eagerness to Forgive

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them” (2 Cor. 5:18, 19, NIV).

When Jesus died on the cross, God, through Him, “was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.” In other words, God, in some sense, did provide a general amnesty for this hostile world. When we stop to think about it, God has had a forgiving attitude toward sinners from eternity. If that were not so, why would God care about redeeming us in the first place? Has He not always *wanted* to forgive us, to make forgiveness real in our lives? Jesus’ death on the cross did not change the way God feels about sinners. What it did change was the way in which it was possible for sinners to relate to God. (See Heb. 10:20.)

When we take into account the nature of sin and the demands the plan of redemption made upon God, how do we equate the principle of justice with the principle of love and mercy? Ex. 20:5, 6; Rom. 3:19-26.

There seems to have been a self-imposed limitation on God; that is, He had to forgive sinners in a “just” way. If all He had to do was “forgive,” there would have been no need for the cross. Among other things, the cross proved to the universe that God is “just” and that He has a right to forgive those who have broken his law. When the principle of justice was satisfied at enormous cost to God, the principle of love and mercy was free to operate in the fullest sense.

We need to keep in mind this concept: the distinction between God’s “attitude” toward sinners and the challenge He faced and still faces in making forgiveness a reality in our lives. If we look at the story of the Japanese soldiers again, we notice that the attitude of their former enemies toward these men was one of forgiveness. Nevertheless, as long as the soldiers refused to believe, they could not live forgiven lives. Their own actions and attitudes had nothing to do with providing the amnesty, but it had everything to do with their experiencing it in their lives. Likewise, our believing in God’s forgiveness does not *make* Him forgive or provide a basis for forgiveness; it merely enables us to experience what God already has provided and is eager for us to accept. Through Christ, God has provided us pardon, but we *do not have* to accept it.

THINK IT THROUGH: Do I feel that by doing something I can change the way God feels about me?

FURTHER STUDY: *Steps to Christ*, “God’s Love for Man,” pp. 9-15.

Part 2 — How Do We Experience Forgiveness?

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

If God’s attitude toward us is one of acceptance and forgiveness, you may be wondering why confession of sin is required. We do not confess our sins in order to appease God’s anger with us. If this was our belief, God would not differ in any way from most pagan deities in this respect. Is it more in character with God’s loving nature for us to believe that, because we already are confident of God’s forgiveness, we feel free to confess our sins?

The soldiers in our introductory story did not come out of hiding to be pardoned. They came out because they finally were convinced that they already had been pardoned and that they needed to give up their hostility and be restored to civilized life. Confession changes *us*, not God. We confess because God has announced that, as far as He is concerned, we are no longer His enemies. When we recognize how repulsive sin is to God and believe with all our hearts that God wants to forgive us and cleanse us from sin, we give evidence of that faith by freely admitting our sins, by owning up to them before God. Then—and only then—can the glorious experience of God’s forgiveness be ours. In God’s plan of restoration genuine repentance *must* precede forgiveness.

It follows, then, that our confession of sins is not for the purpose of persuading God to forgive us so much as it is to enhance our understanding of how painful sin is to God and to ourselves and how much we need the peace that comes when we accept God’s healing forgiveness in our lives.

We see these principles operating even in human relationships. Parents do not stop loving their children when they make mistakes, nor do they possess a spirit of revenge until children apologize. They do all that they can to encourage children to admit their mistakes for the children’s sakes. Forgiveness is designed to heal broken relationships. If God wants to forgive but we do not want to be forgiven, there can be no healing. That is why Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:18, 19 that after God has reconciled the world to Himself in Christ, *we* must be reconciled to God. Our part in reconciliation is to accept God’s gift of forgiveness by confessing and forsaking our sins. (See *Steps to Christ*, p. 39.)

What kind of “joy” did Christ anticipate that gave Him courage to endure the cross? Heb. 12:2.

As Jesus looked forward to the eternal results of His death on the cross—forgiven and restored human beings as well as a sin-free universe—He was motivated to endure the suffering our sins caused Him.

Part 3 — Accepting Forgiveness

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

The story of Christ’s healing and forgiving of the paralytic helps us understand the doctrine of forgiveness. Jesus knew that this man was struggling with sin and longed desperately to hear the word of forgiveness. Although the paralytic truly was sorry for his sin, his sorrow did not earn Christ’s forgiveness. The fact is, that Christ led him to repentance.

“The Saviour looked upon the mournful countenance, and saw the pleading eyes fixed upon Him. He understood the case; He had drawn to Himself that perplexed and doubting spirit. While the paralytic was yet at home, the Saviour had brought conviction to his conscience. When he repented of his sins, and believed in the power of Jesus to make him whole, the life-giving mercies of the Saviour had first blessed his longing heart. . . .

“Now, in words that fell like music on the sufferer’s ear, the Saviour said, ‘Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.’ ”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 268.

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

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

What is the purpose of the plan of salvation? Eph. 1:7-12.

Forgiveness and justification are not merely “legal actions” but God’s creative method for solving the problem we sinners have brought on ourselves. They bring us back into harmony with God and the universe.

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

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Part 4 — Forgiveness Greater Than Sin

“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2, NIV).

In the same way that God’s love is a gift that we do not earn, so is forgiveness. Only through faith can we accept it. In that sense, God has given human beings the freedom to reject His forgiveness. They cannot destroy it; they can only reject it. It is as if the death of Jesus on Calvary made me a multimillionaire. My name is on the will; only I can cash the check. However, if I refuse to do so, it never becomes mine. This has nothing to do with whether or not I deserve to inherit such a fortune. Many consider this truth to be the single most important teaching of the Bible. It radically distinguishes the Christian faith from nearly every other (if not every other) religion in the world.

For this reason the New Testament writers view God’s grace as being infinitely greater than sin and believe that the power of God’s love and forgiveness is immeasurably greater than the power of evil. For example, in Romans 5 the apostle Paul uses such phrases as “overflowing,” and “much more,” when he compares the grace of God with sin. The entire chapter sets up a series of contrasts between grace and sin.

SEARCH AND LEARN: In order to understand Paul’s emphasis in Romans 5 better, search for and list all the verses you can find where the words *much more* are used in this chapter. Indicate after listing the verse what the “much more” relates to:

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

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

Part 5 — God's Forgiveness Illustrated

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

Is there some point at which God's forgiveness can be exhausted? Write your opinion and the reason for it below:

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

Jesus' response to Peter must have startled the disciple and the rest of His hearers, for it challenged Peter's assumption about forgiveness. Peter thought of forgiveness primarily as an action that could be added up. Each time someone forgives, he keeps a record until the limit is reached. Then he can retaliate. Obviously no one would bother to keep track of sins being committed against him if he had to count up to 490. People seeking revenge would not be able to stand the agony of waiting that long.

Apparently Jesus wanted us to understand that forgiveness is not an action as much as it is an attitude or disposition that repeated mistakes cannot exhaust. But this fact should not be misapplied. “God's forgiveness toward us lessens in no wise our duty to obey Him.”—*Christ's Object Lessons*, 247.

As you read the following, note how Peter learned the lesson of God's willingness to forgive.

“While the degrading oaths were fresh upon Peter's lips, and the shrill crowing of the cock was still ringing in his ears, the Saviour turned from the frowning judges, and looked full upon His poor disciple. At the same time Peter's eyes were drawn to his Master. In that gentle countenance he read deep pity and sorrow, but there was no anger there.

“The sight of that pale, suffering face, those quivering lips, that look of compassion and forgiveness, pierced his heart like an arrow. Conscience was aroused. Memory was active. Peter . . . now realized with bitter grief how well his Lord knew him, and how accurately He had read his heart, the falseness of which was unknown even to himself.”—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 712, 713.

FURTHER STUDY: Read the chapter entitled “The Measure of Forgiveness” in *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 243-251.

Part 6 — Focus of the Week

“You have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you” (Matt. 5:43, 44).

If God commands me to love my enemies, does He not do the same? If God loves His enemies, does He love His chief enemy, Satan? Would He not have been willing to forgive even the devil if he had genuinely repented? If this is true, then the tragedy of the destruction of the wicked is that they all, including the devil, are sinners who could have been forgiven but have refused to accept the forgiveness God made available.

APPLICATION: Explain why some people feel it necessary to “earn” a forgiveness that is freely given.

Some suggested answers:

- This concept seems to me to be too good to be true.
- I feel more secure when I know that I have earned something rather than its being a gift.
- It does not seem possible to me that all a person has to do is ask for forgiveness and a lifetime of evil is forgotten.
- As I grew up my parents told me that I did not “deserve” such favors or that I sometimes was so bad that I should be “punished” and that God would see to it that I would be.

THINK IT THROUGH:

- Is it easier or harder for me to admit my mistakes if I know that God’s love for me will not diminish when they are acknowledged?
- Does knowing that there is no way I can destroy God’s love or willingness to forgive make it possible for me to be more honest with God than I can be with even my own spouse, parents, or siblings?
- Do I think that accepting God’s forgiveness means that I do not have to change the way I behave—in other words, that it only changes my relationship to Him?
- Do I accept or reject the concept that the person who continues to live in sin still is able to claim God’s forgiveness indefinitely?

Some of the issues that these questions raise will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent lessons. But begin now to try to live as a Christian should whom Christ has forgiven fully. Think carefully of ways in which you can fully accept and experience God’s infinite forgiveness, and share your experience in a practical way with those about you.

“Let us place ourselves in right relation to Him who has loved us with amazing love. Let us avail ourselves of the means provided for us that we may be transformed into His likeness.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 22.



2

July 8-14
Adult Lesson

Forgiveness and Relationships

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

The Bible teaches that forgiveness is what God is in His nature, that it represents His posture of mercy toward those who rebel against Him. Were that not true, the relationship between God and sinful beings could never be restored after sin, for the sinner of himself does not desire to repent when he is in the grip of sin. Only God’s action can break sin’s hold on humanity and make each one of us capable of confession and repentance.

Many think that such a teaching can be found only in the New Testament. They picture the God of the Old Testament as being a vindictive, avenging, almost unforgiving God. In this lesson we will find that the opposite is true. Our Father in heaven possesses a forgiving nature that is so strongly disposed to cleanse us from sin that not even Israel’s repeated unfaithfulness and callous exploitation of God’s mercy was able to keep Him from repeated attempts to lure them back to Him. In a very real sense, what the Old Testament reveals to us is not only how God’s people failed to fulfill the divine hope for them, but also how God’s grace reached out to draw His people back after they had failed.

The Old Testament, therefore, testifies clearly to the overwhelming creative power of God’s forgiveness. It becomes quite evident in the narratives or stories of the Old Testament such as that of Joseph and his brothers. Theirs is a story of how forgiveness reunited a family and healed a father’s broken heart. Another story that makes this point is that of Jacob and Esau—brothers whose hatred extended over decades but whose relationship finally was healed by forgiveness.

Although the stories mentioned are not stories about God’s forgiveness but about human forgiveness, the main reason that such records are found in the Scripture is to reveal the truth about God and His love for human beings, His purpose for us, and what His forgiveness does in and through us. God the Forgiver intends to create a forgiving community in the world that will reveal the brightness of His glory.

Part 1 — Moses' Intercession

“ ‘I have seen these people,’ the Lord said to Moses, ‘and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them’ ” (Ex. 32:9, 10, NIV).

It is unlikely that there is a more remarkable incident in the Old Testament. At Mount Sinai, while God was giving instructions to Moses, the recently liberated people of Israel were committing idolatry down in the valley. God's initial declaration to Moses seemed to indicate that He intended to punish His people severely and even threatened to desert them.

Moses pleaded with God to remember His promises to this unworthy people. He reminded God that, if He deserted these ungrateful slaves after rescuing them from Egypt, the Lord would be the laughingstock of the nations. The Bible pictures God's response to Moses' intercession as that of *changing His mind*.

When Moses descended the mountain he found the people out of control. Only the tribe of Levi had refused to be caught up in idolatrous revelry. After Moses had organized the Levites to punish the people, he went back up the mountain in an attempt to make further “atonement” for Israel's sins.

How do you account for the Bible intimating that God “repented” from or changed His mind about His announced intention to “consume” Israel? Ex. 32:10-14.

“The words ‘the Lord repented’ are a feeble attempt to express the divine will in human language. Strictly speaking, God cannot change His purpose, for He knows ‘the end from the beginning’ (1 Samuel 15:29; Isa. 46:9, 10; 55:11). However, when sinners forsake their sin and turn to Him, when His children supplicate Him for mercy and forgiveness, then He does ‘repent.’ He changes from wrath to mercy, from judgment to gracious pardon (Ps. 106:44, 45; Jer. 18:5-10; 26:3; Joel 2:12-14; Jonah 3:9, 10; 4:2).”—*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 666. He puts into operation the plan He had in mind to begin with.

While praying to God in the mountain, Moses wanted assurance that God would not abandon the people, that His presence would continue with them when they left Sinai. God promised Moses that He would remain with them. Then Moses asked God something that is unprecedented in human history: He asked God to show him His glory.

God responded by telling Moses that He would allow His “goodness” to pass before His servant. As God's goodness passed by Moses, the divine voice proclaimed that God is a compassionate and gracious God, a loving and forgiving God, who, nevertheless, is a just God who punishes wickedness. This indicates that it was not Moses' intercession that persuaded God to forgive His people so much as the fact that God is merciful.

Part 2 — Questions About Forgiveness

“O Lord our God, you answered them; you were to Israel a forgiving God, though you punished their misdeeds” (Ps. 99:8, NIV).

The psalmist testifies that God is forgiving in His very being; that forgiveness and judgment blend in His attitude and disposition toward sinners. While God may be willing to forgive, those who accept or reject His forgiveness place themselves either under His forgiveness or under His judgment. There can be no excuse for rejecting God’s offer of pardon.

SEARCH AND LEARN: Ask yourself the following questions as you read the Old Testament passages indicated:

1. Under what circumstances may our requests for forgiveness be denied? (See Joshua 24:18-23; 1 Sam. 15:24, 25.)
2. What can prevent us from thinking that God grants forgiveness routinely, as if it were not very important? (See Deut. 29:10 to 30:10.)

What do some of the prophets indicate about God’s willingness to forgive in the future? Jer. 33:8; Isa. 55:6, 7.

The possibility of forgiveness does not last forever. God cannot be found at human convenience. Mercy is available at God’s discretion, not ours. We must “seek . . . the Lord while he may be found.”

Nevertheless, in the future revelation of God through Christ it would be seen more clearly than ever before that God’s character is one of love and mercy.

What question did the psalmist raise concerning the extent of God’s forgiving mercy, and how did he solve it? Ps. 77:8-12.

“His [David’s] faith laid hold of God, and he was strengthened and encouraged; although he recognized God’s ways as mysterious, yet he knew they were merciful and good; for this was His character as revealed to Moses: ‘The Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth!’

“As David appropriated these promises and privileges to himself he decided that he would no longer be hasty in judgment, becoming discouraged, and casting himself down in helpless despair. His soul took courage as he contemplated the general character of God as displayed in His teaching, His forbearance, His surpassing greatness and mercy, and he saw that the works and wonders of God are to have no confined application.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1149.

Forgiveness and Relationships

Part 3 — Healing Broken Relationships

“The Lord said to me, ‘Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites.’ ” (Hosea 3:1, NIV).

For the prophet Hosea forgiveness meant bringing his wife back to his home again and returning the family to normal. It meant healing a broken relationship. That is the reason forgiveness is necessary. To comprehend why forgiveness must be understood in terms of relationships, we must first grasp the biblical teaching that sin is a rebellion against God which destroys our relationship with Him and ultimately crumbles our relationships with each other.

Many terms are used in Hebrew and Greek to describe sin, but it always involves more than actions or external behavior. It is a corruption of the entire being in which conflict and turmoil replace harmony and peace. A person becomes incapable of trusting or being trusted, loving or being loved. *The basis for warm, loving relationships disappears.* This means that sin is intensely *personal*. It deals not just with what we do but with what we *are*, with the whole scope of our existence in the world. The plan of redemption does more for us than forgive sin.

“Through Christ, earth is again linked with heaven. With His own merits, Christ has bridged the gulf which sin had made, so that ministering angels can hold communion with man. Christ connects fallen man in his weakness and helplessness with the Source of infinite power.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 20.

THINK IT THROUGH: How long do you think your relationship to your spouse, child, or parents would exist if none of you ever forgave? An hour? A day? A week?

If we could not forgive, sooner or later everyone we were close to would be our enemy. We would live by the principle of revenge, thus driving sharp wedges between us and other people. A universe which operated upon such a premise would be terrifying. It would ultimately isolate us from everyone else who existed. We would be alone, separated from all others including God. That is why sin ultimately results in death or separation forever from God and others. This is inherent in the very nature of sin, just as healing and reconciliation are inherent in God’s forgiving nature.

PERSONAL APPLICATION: Name a person (if there is one) whom you are unable to forgive and try to identify the reason why you find it impossible. Make this exercise completely private. What can you do this week to improve this relationship?

FURTHER STUDY: *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 552-556.

Part 4 — Forgiveness, Love, and Discipline

“I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. Then I told her, ‘You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will live with you’” (Hosea 3:2, 3, NIV).

As they saw Hosea go down to the slave market and buy back Gomer for half the price of a manservant, some of the people of Israel may have realized that he was a living parable of God’s desire to redeem His adulterous people. Gomer did not expect or ask Hosea to bring her back. She took no initiative. Hosea did it all. Tenderly he brought her back to his home not uttering one condemning word. Hosea could have had her stoned according to the law. But he forgave her and redeemed her in his attempt to heal the broken relationship. Yahweh’s concern for Israel was no different. After they had “married” in the covenant at Sinai—after God’s redemption of His people from Egypt—they left Him and went chasing after other gods. In unfathomable humility and love God went after them. He wants His people back with a profound passion.

“Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt” (Hosea 2:14, 15, NIV).

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

How does God’s discipline help His people more fully appreciate and take advantage of His forgiving nature? Rev. 3:19; Hosea 11:1-9.

“Just as a fond parent teaches a child to walk, taking it up by the arms when it stumbles or falls, so the Lord had taught His son Israel (See Deut. 1:31; 33:27; Jer. 31:32). Just as a loving father patiently bears with a child who has not yet come to the age of discretion, so had the Lord borne patiently with His undeveloped people, people who were ignorant of the spiritual mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (see Deut. 32:10).”—S.D.A. *Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 921.

Part 5 — God’s Attitude Encourages Repentance

“The Father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. . . . For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry” (Luke 15:22-24).

The New Testament parable of the wayward son who was accepted as an honored son when he returned home parallels the story of Hosea. A minister recalls an incident when his daughter was quite small. While he was in the living room reading the newspaper, he heard glass shatter on the kitchen floor. In five long, quick strides he reached the sink. In front of him stood his little niece and his daughter with terror showing on their faces.

“What happened? Who did it?” he asked. Each one pointed to the other. At that moment he remembered some words of wisdom he had read in a book by Haim Ginott on raising children and said: “No one will be punished. I am sure it was an innocent mistake. I just want to know what happened and who did it so we can keep it from happening again in the future.”

Tears filled his daughter’s eyes. “I’m . . . sorry, Daddy. It was my fault.”

Her pain was obvious. The truth was out. But, because she was confident that he wanted and would do what was best for her, she felt free to admit her mistake. The father’s attitude of acceptance freed her to confess. We humans need to be sure about God’s response to our being honest about our sins before we will face them. Without the assurance that God will pardon, we would be inclined to hide from Him rather than face Him and acknowledge our rebellion. Is this not what happened to Adam and Eve?

What aspect of God’s character encourages our repentance? Ps. 78:38.

While it is true in a sense that we are forgiven because we repent, it is equally—if not more—true that we repent because we know that God is forgiving and compassionate. His attitude encourages honesty and responsibility in our relationship to Him.

THINK IT THROUGH: In Alcoholics Anonymous and in various parenting organizations the term “tough love” is used to indicate that loving, firm discipline must be used. How does firmness in discipline fit with an attitude of forgiveness?

FURTHER STUDY: Read the parable of the wayward son in Luke 15 and then read Ellen White’s treatment of it in *Christ Object Lessons*, “Lost and is Found,” pp. 198-211.

Forgiveness and Relationships

Part 6 — Focus of the Week

“The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will” (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

ASK YOURSELF THE FOLLOWING:

1. Are there people around with whom I feel completely comfortable? Why is that so? What is it in their attitude toward me that makes me feel that way?
2. Am I inclined to cover up my mistakes in my work, or do I feel free to admit them? Why?
3. Am I able to tell my spouse or my best friend about my failures in life? If not, why not?
4. Do I feel that my local church is the kind of caring fellowship that would discipline in love and forgive a public sin, or would it shun and condemn me?
5. If I were most conscious of a spouse's forgiveness for my mistakes, for example, would I be more or less inclined to make those mistakes? What does my answer reveal about me as a person?

Write your answer in the spaces provided below.

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

THINK IT THROUGH:

- The less forgiving people are toward our mistakes, the less comfortable we feel. We are most comfortable with those who support us, even like us, in spite of our faults.
- Employers who demand perfection and cannot tolerate mistakes encourage subordinates to hide those mistakes rather than learn from them by facing them openly.

PERSONAL APPLICATIONS:

- Do I desire by nature to be merciful or to get revenge?
- The last time someone hurt me, how did I respond?
- What do people learn about God from my actions and reactions?



3

July 15-21
Adult Lesson

Forgiveness and Repentance

MEMORY TEXT: “I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me” (Jer. 33:8).

Forgiveness is never routine. It must not be thought that, because God wants to forgive and forgives freely, we may therefore take His mercy for granted. There can be no compromise with the notion of what some call “cheap grace”—grace that requires little or nothing from us while asking everything from God.

It is in this way that instances of forgiveness being denied due to lack of true repentance can be explained.

When Saul—who had slain God’s priests, exiled David, and closed the communication between God and himself—appealed in desperation for God’s guidance, God refused to answer him. (See 1 Sam. 28:6.)

Confronted by those who attributed the power of the Holy Spirit to the devil (Matt. 12:24), Jesus explained what they should have known and probably did, adding: “Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come” (Matt. 12:31, 32).

In what sense, then, can it be said that God will not forgive? God’s attitude toward sinners does not change. The issue here is not that God is unwilling to forgive. But it does little or no good to tell rebellious people who do not understand the truth of their hardheartedness that they are forgiven when in fact they do not *want* to be forgiven. They have not repented, and they do not want to change. Forgiveness would serve only to reinforce their stubbornness.

It is in this light that we should understand God’s reaction to His rebellious people and to Saul. Those who have become callous about their relationship to God need to be stunned by a sense of God’s displeasure. To have genuine repentance they must realize that their attitude must change if they are to receive God’s forgiveness. Without true repentance no one can experience divine forgiveness. Consequently, when there is a lack of repentance God tells us the truth—that we are not forgiven.

Forgiveness and Repentance

Part 1 — Turning From Sin

“They shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer. 31:34).

Forgiveness is not dependent on what we do but on God’s gracious nature and the fact that, in a legal sense, Christ’s death paid the debt of sin for every sinner. But we truly accept God’s forgiveness only when we repent and allow Him to help us change the kind of people we are. Those who gratefully accept divine pardon cannot continue to be obstinate before God. Our hearts must change. Repentance includes not only godly sorrow for sin but a turning from it.

“Walking with God” is one image used to convey the concept of our intimate experience with the Lord. But the prophet Jeremiah makes it clear that no matter how long we may have walked with God, when sin breaks that walk we are out of step with Him. A knowledge of God includes far more than a mere intellectual understanding of doctrines about Him. We often talk about knowing someone with whom we have not spoken in years. In the Scriptures, however, knowledge indicates more than acquaintanceship. It points to closeness, continual association, and a feel for the other person. Sensitivity may be the most accurate idea. If you hurt a close friend and no longer speak to that person, it can be said that you no longer really know each other. That is true also of our relationship with God.

What is the implication of Jesus’ statement found in Matthew 12:30 that “he that is not with me is against me”?

The text indicates that those who do not relate fully to Jesus are not with Him. Either we have accepted His offer of forgiveness, or we remain in our sins. There are no “moderate” or “shallow” relationships with God. It is all or nothing. This should not be taken to mean that there are no ups and downs in the Christian experience or that there is no growth, only that we should know whether or not we have made a full commitment to God through Jesus Christ. In this respect it is similar to our human relationships. No one ever should say that a child has only a “shallow” relationship to his mother. That relationship may be the most meaningful of his life, even if it is a poor one. So, Jesus prayed: “This is life eternal, that they might *know* thee” (John 17:3). (Emphasis supplied.)

THINK IT THROUGH: What are some evidences that indicate when a person truly knows God?

FURTHER STUDY: *Steps to Christ*, “A Knowledge of God,” pp. 85-91.

Part 2 — David's Example of True Repentance

“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. . . . Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice” (Ps. 51:7, 8).

The records left by most of the kings in ancient times are full of their supposed exploits and heroic deeds. Imagine a psalm—a song of worship—written by an ancient king in which he not only admits sinning but asks forgiveness of God! Imagine even further that his personal confession is repeated over and over again by his people in songs. It should not be surprising, then, that Psalm 51 is the most famous prayer for forgiveness in the Scriptures. In it three terms are used to describe David's failures: “transgressions,” “iniquities,” and “sin.” The range of meanings in these terms includes willful rebellion, habitual sinning that is not really intentional so much as careless, and an innate condition of the being, a flaw in a person's character. These meanings are paralleled by three terms of forgiveness: “blot out,” “wash,” and “cleanse.”

“Blotting out” seems to refer to an “erasing” of some kind, probably from a tablet or record. (See Ex. 32:33 and Num. 5:23.) “Wash” obviously refers to scrubbing something clean. “Cleanse” may refer to removing the impurities left over when metal is being melted, but here it indicates the condition a person must be in to stand in God's presence. David seems to realize that sin completely pervades his life and that only the most thorough kind of forgiveness and restoration can meet his needs.

What did David desire beyond forgiveness? Ps. 51:10-12.

We must not think that forgiveness was an end in itself for the psalmist. In verse 10 he pleads for a “clean heart” and a new and “right spirit.” In other words, being forgiven without being changed by that forgiveness is inadequate. David cannot enjoy the blessings of God's presence without his deepest desires and motives being changed. “Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me,” he writes, because he understands that the point of forgiveness is reconciliation with God, not permission to commit the same deeds that destroyed their relationship in the first place.

To put it bluntly, we must not play games with God's forgiveness. His kindness should not be exploited. That would be a sin greater than any sin forgiven by Him. If we genuinely are grateful that our neighbor has overlooked the fact that our dog ruined his flower garden, we cannot keep allowing the dog to run through it. To do so would be to ridicule our neighbor's kindness. Continuing in sin indicates a lack of gratitude to God for the forgiveness which cost Him the life of His own Son. We should “rather die than sin.”

Forgiveness and Repentance

Part 3 — Human Forgiveness Is Limited

“To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses” (Dan 9:9).

Once broken, some things cannot be put back together. For instance, not all the genius of modern science can take a broken egg and restore it to wholeness. But though some things never can be restored to what they were originally, God’s grace is sufficient to sustain the repentant sinner.

THINK IT THROUGH: When David prayed “Create in me a clean heart” (Psalm 51:10), what was he asking God to do?

He was asking for a miracle. Once they are shattered, human-human and divine-human relationships cannot be restored without being recreated. Breaches of love and trust are repaired only by the creative power of forgiveness. Because relationships are so important in bringing meaning and happiness to life, a breakdown in universal relationships means that the universe itself is put out of joint. That is why the Bible writers speak about the cosmos being broken by sin. God’s intention is to unite all things in Christ (Eph. 1:9, 10) through the power of His forgiving grace.

Human history is a landscape filled with the debris of lives twisted by physical and emotional suffering caused by broken promises, greed, and all the other sins. Only an all-powerful God can take the pieces and make the world whole again.

What does the experience recorded in Luke 9:51-56 teach us about how forgiveness can be limited even among followers of Jesus?

“The people who professed to be His followers received Him not, because His face was toward Jerusalem. . . . They gave no sign that they really desired Jesus. The disciples knew that He designed to tarry there that night, and they felt so keenly the slight thus given to their Lord that they were angry, and prayed Jesus to show proper resentment and call down fire from heaven to consume those who had thus abused Him. But He rebuked their indignation and zeal for His honor, and told them that He came, not to visit with judgment, but to show mercy.

“This lesson of our Saviour’s is for you and for me. No resentment must come into our hearts. When reviled, we must not revile again. . . . We must be less proud, less sensitive, have less self-love, and be dead to self-interest. Our interest must be submerged in Christ and we be able to say: ‘I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.’ ”—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 566.

FURTHER STUDY: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 460.

Forgiveness and Repentance

Part 4 — God Reconciles “All Things”

“In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:19, 20, RSV).

Humans may reach limits beyond which they cannot bring themselves to forgive others, but God’s forgiveness includes all possible crimes and sin.

SEARCH AND LEARN: Study the references listed below to the book of Ephesians; then list the ways in which God will “reconcile” all things. Ask yourself who or what mentioned in these verses is being reconciled by the grace of Christ.

- 1:10 _____
- 2:13, 14 _____
- 3:6 _____
- 4:25 to 5:5 _____
- 5:21-28, 31 _____
- 6:1, 5-10 _____

“One ray of the glory of God, one gleam of the purity of Christ, penetrating the soul, makes every spot of defilement painfully distinct, and lays bare the deformity and defects of the human character. It makes apparent the unhallowed desires, the infidelity of the heart, the impurity of the lips. The sinner’s acts of disloyalty in making void the law of God, are exposed to his sight, and his spirit is stricken and afflicted under the searching influence of the Spirit of God. He loathes himself as he views the pure, spotless character of Christ.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 29.

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

FURTHER STUDY: *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, “The Beatitudes” (Matt. 5:6), p. 21.

Forgiveness and Repentance

Part 5 — Forgiveness Takes Sin Seriously

“In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved his holy Spirit; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them” (Isa. 63:9, 10, RSV).

Forgiveness does not overlook sin but takes it seriously. Sin must be faced in honesty. This means that sin, which destroys love relationships, must go. To refuse to let sin go at the same time we ask to be forgiven of it is hypocrisy and dishonesty. In doing so we make God who is afflicted in our affliction into our enemy; for the One who forgives must, if *He* is to be honest, bring judgment against us.

God’s forgiveness must be our major concern, for mere human forgiveness barely touches the problem. All through the Old Testament this insight is reinforced. Adam and Eve brought all of us into their folly, and David’s lust brought suffering to the whole nation. Most—if not all—of our sins have consequences far beyond ourselves that we cannot rectify. Often childhood relationships with parents have so affected some people’s personalities that by the time they are mature enough to understand why they are so unhappy it is almost too late to undo the damage. They may find reconciliation with their parents and learn to cope with their limitations, but they have been hurt in a way that never can be completely healed until God makes “all things new” in the new earth. On the other hand, divine forgiveness involves more than applying a patch. God restores the wounded being fully to His image.

What biblical examples, other than those of Adam and Eve and David, can you recall in which someone’s sins had unexpected consequences?

It is because so much damage has to be undone that God’s forgiveness must be understood in relation to His creative power. Without such power, the doctrine of salvation becomes rather hollow. The life and dignity that humanity has lost because of evil can be restored only by bringing to an end history as we know it and the creation of an entire new world. The salvation from sin bestowed at present is our first taste of the full redemption that is yet to come when even death—the truly dark side of sin—is taken away.

THINK IT THROUGH: In the light of what we have studied, how would you understand the teaching that humans do not recognize fully their sin except when it is forgiven?

FURTHER STUDY: Read Psalm 130.

Forgiveness and Repentance

Part 6 — Focus of the Week

In Psalm 51, the psalm of repentance and forgiveness, nouns describing sin and verbs describing forgiveness are mentioned—six in all. Please list these below and ask yourself how they might apply in your own life. (For a brief analysis of what the terms might mean, see part 2 of this week’s lesson.)

Notice in verses 10 to 12 and 16 and 17 of this psalm the contrast between the inner desires of the heart and the external actions of worship.

In the context of Psalm 51, why would the writer list a “broken and contrite heart” as the most acceptable sacrifice to God?

What activity does verse 13 indicate will be true of the truly forgiven, re-created sinner?

PERSONAL APPLICATIONS:

- Is that activity true in my life and experience right now?
- Am I more comfortable walking with God through various activities in the Christian life than I am in times of meditation and study? If so, why?
- If a person I have wronged will not forgive me and I am persuaded that God has forgiven me for what has happened, do I still carry guilt over the incident?
- Do I find it more difficult to pray when I want to confess specific sins? What reasons can I find for feeling reluctant to confess to God?
- Three qualities in the repentant and forgiven David of Psalm 51 that I admire and would like to emulate are these:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



4

July 22-28
Adult Lesson

Forgiveness and Its Results

MEMORY TEXT: "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29).

The Old Testament teaching about a forgiving God is given increased prominence in the New Testament. In Mark's and Luke's Gospels the burden of John the Baptist's preaching is "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:3, NIV) through the ministry of the "Lamb of God." God's willingness to forgive was the special message that characterized the ministry of the Messiah. When Christ died, the new covenant was ratified. All who accept God's gift of forgiveness are given a new inner being in which the law is written on the tables of the heart (Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10).

John the Baptist's "words were plain, pointed, and convincing. Many believed him to be one of the prophets risen from the dead. The whole nation was stirred. Multitudes flocked to the wilderness.

Ordinarily, only Gentiles were required to be baptized (as well as offer a sacrifice and be circumcised) if they wished to become converts to Judaism. The Baptist insisted that even Jews needed to be baptized, that they could not rely on their lineage to Abraham to be saved. They must repent inwardly and be converted.

Sin had imposed an almost unbearable load of guilt on the sensitive consciences of the people. Their meticulous concern for the law did not give them the assurance they sought. Because an essential ingredient was missing, their legalism magnified their sense of guilt before God.

John's preaching made it clear that we have a part in the forgiveness transaction. Forgiveness can be effective in the life only when a person cooperates with God and accepts His offer. God will not force us to receive His forgiveness. Nevertheless, when we do accept it, faith is awakened in a powerful way. Time and time again in the ministry of Jesus, God's grace broke the power of evil in sinners' lives.

"No repentance is genuine that does not work reformation. The righteousness of Christ is not a cloak to cover unconfessed and unforsaken sin; it is a principle of life that transforms the character and controls the conduct. . .

"It is when Christ is received as a personal Saviour that salvation comes to the soul."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 555, 556.

Forgiveness and Its Results

Part 1 — God’s Agent of Forgiveness

“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21, NIV).

Sending His Son to be our Saviour indicates God’s intention to deal decisively with sin. Through His ministry, death, and resurrection, Jesus of Nazareth was to be God’s agent of forgiveness and judgment in the world. In one way or another everything Jesus did fulfilled His mission to be God the Forgiver in human flesh.

Mark makes this point by indicating that the paralytic who came to Jesus for healing received *forgiveness first*. (See Mark 2:3-5.) Using the typical Jewish understanding of the relationship between sin and sickness, healing and forgiveness, Jesus proclaimed God’s new kingdom by both forgiving and healing this man. The fact that Jesus would presume to announce forgiveness of sins indicated to the Jewish mind that He believed He possessed divine authority. Those who were there were so shocked that they exclaimed, “We have never seen anything like this!” (Mark 2:12, NIV).

What events followed the healing of the paralytic in Mark, and what is their significance in the light of Mark’s discussion of forgiveness? Mark 2:13-17.

“In the total structure of Mark, it is important to note that the complaint is made immediately after this account that Jesus eats with sinners (v. 16). Little wonder, for the people were not able to comprehend how Jesus could be so free to meet with sinners. They had tried separation from them, and this seemed to be the best solution Judaism had toward sin. But Jesus by his approach shows that forgiveness no longer makes one afraid to meet and eat with sinners, because one has something to offer them that is better.”—William Klassen, *The Forgiving Community* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), p. 117.

THINK IT THROUGH: How is it possible to associate freely with sinners without being affected by them in a negative way? List at least three ways that you or the members of your church maintain some aloofness from the non-believing world.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Ask yourself whether these are ways of protecting yourself that needlessly cut you off from sinners or whether they are necessary to preserve your Christian experience and integrity.

Part 2 — Christ's Forgiveness Restores a Sense of Self-worth

“Jesus said to Simon, ‘Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men’ ” (Luke 5:10, NIV).

Of all the Gospel writers, Luke seems to be the most interested in how Jesus dealt with the “sinners” of Jewish society, how He interacted with individuals whose self-image was so poor that they literally despised themselves. Not only were they rejected religiously and socially as outcasts, but each day numerous verbal and nonverbal messages made them feel filthy and unworthy. Included in this group were the peasants who did not keep the law in all its details. Simon Peter was one of these. If you read Luke 5 with this social background in mind, you will notice something rather unusual.

Jesus performed a miracle in filling the disciples’ nets with fish. Simon reacted to this demonstration of divine power by saying, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” (Luke 5:8, NIV). Then Jesus told him that he should not be afraid. “From now on you will catch men.”

THINK IT THROUGH: Why would Jesus give Simon Peter a task to do rather than tell him that he is forgiven?

“Perhaps his lack of self-esteem is removed by the new and greater task assigned to him by Jesus. As Peter becomes a fisher of men, at least he will find power to overcome his own sense of sin as he spends his life rescuing others from its bondage.”—William Klassen, *The Forgiving Community*, p. 124.

This is one of God’s goals in forgiveness, that we begin to respect ourselves as His children and feel *good* about who we are by His grace. Perhaps this explains how important it is for each church member to become involved in some kind of faith sharing. *The work of forgiveness may not be complete until the sinner who has felt helpless and worthless not only gets help for himself but is able to give that help to someone else.*

What significance do you see in the way this principle was illustrated in the life of Matthew? Luke 5:27-32.

After leaving his lucrative profession to follow Jesus, Matthew gave a banquet in Christ’s honor to which he invited a large crowd of his tax-collector associates (whom the Jews regarded as sinners). Unable to understand why Jesus attended, the Pharisees complained. Jesus, of course, understood that Matthew, in his own way, was *witnessing*—he was attempting to help his former associates gain what he had.

Part 3 — Jesus' Concern for Our Self-acceptance

“I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:32, NIV).

After accepting Jesus as Lord, Peter enjoyed great victories in his life, emerging as one of Christ's closest and most loyal disciples. He arrived at the point where his affection for Jesus was so strong that he was certain he would never dishonor Him in any way. Peter even bragged about it when Jesus warned him that he would deny Him. With so sensitive a conscience, any failure was bound to plunge Peter into depression caused by overpowering guilt.

As is true of most of us, Peter had overestimated his strength to resist temptation. He denied his Lord. But the Lord's glance of compassion at first crushed Peter but then brought him back to the place where he could stand upright as one of Christ's followers again. Nevertheless, he needed something more. His feeling of forgiveness did not completely rid him of his guilt. Jesus sensed Peter's anguish and trusted him to “feed my sheep” (John 21:15). That simple act of giving Peter an important responsibility restored him spiritually.

“Peter did betray his Lord, after which Luke tells us, ‘The Lord turned and looked upon Peter’ [Luke 22:61], and Peter remembered the warning and went out and wept bitterly. It is a remarkable tribute to the early church that it never held this betrayal against Peter. The raw material used to build the church consists, not of perfect people, but of people who are sensitive to their failures and who have the capacity to weep over their sins. For such forgiveness is always available, and to such the commission is given: ‘Feed my lambs’ and ‘Strengthen the brethren.’ ”—William Klassen, *The Forgiving Community*, p. 125.

What is demonstrated by the fact that this was not the last time Peter needed to be forgiven for his actions? Gal. 2:11-21.

Whereas the Bible never allows us to believe that we can continue indefinitely in our sins and be forgiven, it does tell us that we are forgiven for repeated failures. Our growth in grace never is instantaneous. What matters to God is whether or not we still genuinely *care* about being freed from our sins and truly are growing into His likeness.

THINK IT THROUGH:

- Does my forgiving someone who has hurt me mean that I trust that person again? Should it?
- How should the principle of restoration be put to work in our own relationships and in our churches?

Part 4 — Even on the Cross Jesus Forgave

“He [Jesus] said to him, ‘Truly, I say to you, . . . you will be with me in Paradise’ ” (Luke 23:43, RSV).

Only Luke informs us that on the cross Christ prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34, RSV). This is consistent with Luke’s strong emphasis on Christ’s ministry of forgiveness. When one of the thieves hanging next to Jesus heard Him cry to God forgiving His tormentors, it confirmed what he already suspected: Jesus indeed was the Messiah. Hope lighted a flame in his heart.

“He calls to mind all he has heard of Jesus, how He has healed the sick and pardoned sin. He has heard the words of those who believed in Jesus and followed Him weeping. . . . The Holy Spirit illuminates his mind. . . . In Jesus, bruised, mocked, and hanging upon the cross, he sees the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 750.

In what way did the forgiven thief help relieve Christ’s suffering on the cross?

The thief’s faith comforted Jesus as He died. If a hardened criminal could understand the nature of His mission, His suffering would accomplish its purpose. Even Jesus’ last moments on earth were spent in the company of sinners, speaking words of forgiveness to them.

“For long hours of agony, reviling and mockery have fallen upon the ears of Jesus. As He hangs upon the cross, there floats up to Him still the sound of jeers and curses. With longing heart He has listened for some expression of faith from His disciples. He has heard only the mournful words, ‘We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel.’ How grateful then to the Saviour was the utterance of faith and love from the dying thief!”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 750.

Anyone who does not feel Christ’s forgiveness in his or her life should think a great deal about this incident on the cross. It might not hurt to feel even gently rebuked by it. When the Lord tells us that there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents, how can we even *think* that *we are an exception*? Actually, the question is not of thinking (intellect) so much as it is one of feeling (emotions). Of course, we could not feel unforgiven if we thought it appropriate to be left unforgiven. But we also need to remember that if Jesus could forgive a dying thief He certainly can forgive any who repent. He says He will, and that should settle the matter in our thinking and feeling.

THINK IT THROUGH: When someone is dying, how sincere can his or her desire for forgiveness be if that person has known the truth about God throughout life?

Part 5 — Forgiveness Leads to Victory

“Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again’ ”
(John 8:11, RSV).

The story of the woman caught in adultery may be one of the New Testament’s best-known. Because we have read or heard it so often it strikes us as being a rather straightforward account of a sinner forgiven by Jesus. But when we “peel the wrapping away” and look beneath the surface some rather startling truths appear. For example: How can a *woman* be caught in adultery without a *man* being caught as well? What happened to him? Did her husband play any part in catching her in the very act?

Students of the Bible point out that in Jewish law it was almost impossible to prove that adultery occurred. Requirements of evidence were so strict that someone would almost have to be set up to be caught. Proof demanded several witnesses who had no prior knowledge or suspicion that the act would be committed. This obviously was difficult to arrange, for the law also stipulated that if anyone even believed someone else was going to break the law, he or she had to do all within his or her power to prevent the transgression. In other words, catching one in the very act must be completely accidental. There could be no plotting to ensnare someone in sin.

However, the fact that the man caught with the woman was not accused when she was brought to Jesus indicates that the whole thing had the earmarks of an entrapment.

Jesus “read the heart, and knew the character and life history of everyone in His presence. These would-be guardians of justice had themselves led their victim into sin, that they might lay a snare for Jesus. Giving no sign that He had heard their question, He stooped, and fixing His eyes upon the ground, began to write in the dust.

“Impatient at His delay and apparent indifference, the accusers drew nearer, urging the matter upon His attention. But as their eyes, following those of Jesus, fell upon the pavement at His feet, their countenances changed. There, traced before them, were the guilty secrets of their own lives.”—*The Desires of Ages*, p. 461.

Jesus did *not* excuse the woman, even though she was the victim of entrapment. She *had sinned*; and, while she was forgiven, He admonished her not to do it again. “Go, and do not sin again” were the Lord’s words. This shows that His forgiveness is designed to eliminate sin from our lives.

SEARCH AND LEARN: Study Romans 8 and answer the following:

1. Who is no longer condemned?
2. What change takes place in the minds and lives of those freed from condemnation?
3. What agency is provided to enable us to live victoriously?

Part 6 — Focus of the Week

How can families suffering from wounded or broken relationships express forgiveness and manifest trust in concrete ways? Answer this question in relation to the following hypothetical incidents:

1. A child who lies about where he is going and what he will be doing on a Saturday night.
2. A spouse who refuses to allow the other partner to have any knowledge about money and finances and apparently will not trust the other in this respect.
3. A brother or sister who continually borrows your things—even your car—without permission.

Are there instances when genuine forgiveness occurs but the public loss of confidence in a person may mean that he or she cannot be trusted with an important responsibility any longer? If so, how does that square with Jesus' method of uttering a word of trust after a word of forgiveness? See the following passages for some help with this question: Num. 20:1-13; 2 Sam. 12:1-14.

PERSONAL APPLICATIONS:

1. List below some of the “consequences” you have observed (a) when failing to seek forgiveness, and (b) when you have been forgiven:

- a. _____

- b. _____

2. How willing am I to forgive, and how does such willingness relate to the picture I paint before others of the forgiving Christ?

3. What victories have I gained by the power of the Holy Spirit as a result of freely accepting God's forgiveness and desiring to “go, and sin no more”?



5

July 29 through August 4
Adult Lesson

Forgiveness and Guilt

MEMORY TEXT: “I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants” (Luke 15:18, 19).

One of the most common problems Christians have is separating what they believe in their minds from what they experience in their hearts. A person may spend years thinking about God’s forgiveness, but never live free of guilt. In many cases, when a person finds it difficult to believe that God has forgiven him, this inability indicates that the person has not forgiven himself. In the parable of the prodigal son the father gave every evidence of forgiveness. But what if the son had insisted on being a servant in the father’s house rather than being restored to sonship? What if he had felt *so* undeserving of his father’s graciousness that he refused it? Would that not indicate that the son could not forgive himself?

Another way to look at it is to suggest that such a person believes it is appropriate for him or her to be punished in some way. He has been *so* bad that he should not be forgiven freely. As long as we are more comfortable being punished for what we do wrong than being forgiven, we will find it difficult to accept God’s grace—difficult to forgive ourselves.

Guilt blown out of proportion becomes what can be called “neurotic guilt.” Instead of dealing decisively and quickly with their guilt, neurotics grovel in it. True, all of us are guilty before God and stand alienated and hostile in relation to Him. But because guilt was designed to help us sense our need of His grace, once we do accept God’s forgiveness, guilt should disappear. Guilt that persists after forgiveness can be either self-imposed or imposed on us by others. When as children we repeatedly hear the message that we are worthless, bad, or hopeless, we cannot help but believe it. The guilt that comes from such messages gets mixed in with the convicting work of the Holy Spirit later in life. As a result, when the Word of God tells us that we are forgiven and should be free of guilt, we feel just as condemned as ever. Jesus came for the purpose of freeing us from inordinate guilt and bringing peace, happiness, and assurance to those who are willing by His grace to put sin away.

Part 1 — Mary Finally Forgave Herself

“When Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils” (Mark 16:9)

Only God can forgive sins; but in order to accept His forgiveness, we need to forgive ourselves. Reading between the lines, Mary apparently felt that, as bad as she was, she could not be accepted and forgiven. But Jesus led her to accept full pardon and restoration.

“Mary had been looked upon as a great sinner, but Christ knew the circumstances that had shaped her life. He might have extinguished every spark of hope in her soul, but He did not. It was He who had lifted her from despair and ruin. Seven times she had heard His rebuke of the demons that controlled her heart and mind. She had heard His strong cries to the Father in her behalf. She knew how offensive is sin to His unsullied purity, and in His strength she had overcome.

“When to human eyes her case appeared hopeless, Christ saw in Mary capabilities for good. He saw the better traits of her character. The plan of redemption had invested humanity with great possibilities, and in Mary these possibilities were to be realized. Through His grace she became a partaker of the divine nature.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 568.

Notice that, in spite of her despair, Mary kept returning to Christ for pardon. Are we as persistent?

Even though she had failed Him again, He inspired hope in her for pardon and a new acceptance. She began to see herself as Jesus saw her—someone pure, noble, and full of possibilities. This is what it means to “forgive oneself.” To the extent we do not, we slow down the process of acceptance and victory. What we *believe* we are we tend to become. If we truly believe that we are forgiven sinners, we will live as forgiven people; as Mary did when, after much effort on Christ’s part, she was freed from domination by the powers of evil.

THINK IT THROUGH: List the names of three Bible characters who found it difficult to forgive themselves:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

FURTHER STUDY: *Steps to Christ*, “Faith and Acceptance,” pp. 49-55.

Part 2 — “I Give Up”

“Will the Lord spurn for ever, and never again be favorable? Has his steadfast love for ever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?” (Ps. 77:7-9, RSV).

Something seems to have kept the psalmist (at least at the moment of writing) from enjoying the benefits of a deep faith. When this happens, most of the time it is caused by guilt.

Christian counselors make a distinction between real guilt and emotional guilt. Real guilt is the result of an actual moral rebellion or mistake, rather than a nagging feeling, and it lasts only until the guilty person repents. Emotional guilt often has no genuine source in a person’s life-style or behavior, and it persists far too long. Whenever guilt is not handled properly, we start playing “games” to deal with it, games such as these: (1) “I give up” (which leads to discouragement or depression); (2) rebellion against authority; (3) “I’m not bad after all”; or, (4) superficial confession and dishonesty about our need which leads to no change in our basic relationship with God and with others. The experience of alcoholics shows how the “I give up” game works. Such people—because of their broken promises, their ruined relationships, their shattered self-worth—suffer from profound guilt. Their lives repeat this pattern in a cyclical fashion, which makes them feel all the more guilty. Very often their response to this vicious set of circumstances is depression—combined with even heavier drinking—which sometimes leads to suicide.

Christ’s solution to guilt avoids “games.” Because He is God, when He speaks the word of forgiveness, of new beginnings, people receive a new motivation to challenge life. They cease rebelling against authority because they recognize that the highest authority in the universe is on their side, and they face their weakness honestly.

In the light of what we have just studied, what encouragement is found in 2 Corinthians 5:17?

Emotional problems are not necessarily spiritual ones. When we are battered by tragedies or suffering from physical disease or loneliness, we often experience depression. But this is not necessarily spiritual depression. Emotional depression does not last beyond the existence of the cause; or, in the case of grief over a loved one’s death, it does not persist so long that it forever cripples our effectiveness to live whole lives again. For example, although she spoke strongly against unnatural depression (see *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 64), Ellen White tells us that her struggle with periods of depression did not destroy her faith. David knew depression as well. Even when occasions of spiritual depression do befall us as Christians, thank God there is hope. Review the experience of Peter.

Part 3 — Rebellion

“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4, RSV).

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

The story of Cain illustrates this point. Notice that Cain (1) became angry and committed the murder of his brother, (2) experienced guilt as a result, and (3) dealt with his guilt by rebelling against God’s authority that condemned him. (See Gen. 4:16).

Failure after failure while trying to be perfect without a close experience to Christ often produces an explosion of throwing all values away and leaving the church in an attempt to gain some peace of mind. High standards are essential, as long as the gospel is their center. But without the balance of love for Christ as the basis of high standards, church members can experience frustration that leads to rebellion.

What kind of emphasis will help Adventist parents, pastors, and teachers avoid imparting an unhealthy guilt to young people? 1 John 4:7-12.

Behavior is important to the extent that it affects our relationships with God and other people. Life-style standards, while important, must never be allowed to become more important than people. Often adults do not *listen* enough to young people. Listening to and building better relationships with the youth often leads them to decide to straighten out their actions. Gently and kindly parents are to lead their children in the path of obedience, recognizing that doing so will ensure true happiness. “A sacred duty rests upon parents to guide their children into paths of strict obedience. True happiness in this life and in the future life depends upon obedience to a ‘Thus saith the Lord.’ Parents, let Christ’s life be the pattern.”—*Child Guidance*, p. 80.

What does Ephesians 6:4 mean when it admonishes parents to bring up their children “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord”?

“Strict discipline may at times cause dissatisfaction, and children will want their own way; yet where they have learned the lesson of obedience to their parents, they are better prepared to submit to the requirements of God. Thus the training received in childhood influences the religious experience and molds the character of the man.”—*Child Guidance*, p. 85.

Part 4 — “I’m Not Bad After All”

“When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, ‘Is it you, you troubler of Israel?’ And he answered, ‘I have not troubled Israel; but you have, and your father’s house, because you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and followed the Baals’ ” (1 Kings 18:17, 18, RSV).

Another destructive way to deal with guilt is to trivialize it by convincing ourselves that we really are not guilty. We sometimes call this “rationalizing.” It may take the following forms:

1. Compared to what others have done, this act is nothing; or, compared to other people, I am a saint.

2. My actions are not really wrong. It is morality that is wrong.

3. It is not my fault. Others are to blame.

This last reaction characterized Adam and Eve after they had sinned. Adam blamed God for giving him Eve and Eve blamed the serpent. Our introductory text tells us that Ahab blamed Elijah for his problems, and in 1 Samuel 15 we learn that Saul blamed the people for his disobedience. Shifting the blame is a universal practice. It is painful to admit that *we* broke a promise or lied—so painful that we will do almost anything to avoid confronting our mistake. Adam and Eve, having no other humans to blame, attempted to excuse their actions by blaming the serpent, and, indirectly, God. Some people who indulge their sexual appetites in violation of the law blame God for creating them that way.

How varied are the excuses we are prone to make? Luke 14:18-20.

When we make excuses, most of the time we blame other people such as our parents or our spouses or our economic situation. There are occasions when the way in which we were raised and our financial difficulties are factors, but we can never (at least *almost* never) hold other people or conditions ultimately responsible for what *we* decide to do. That is a denial of our dignity and freedom as self-determining creatures. Perhaps this is why Ellen White constantly reminds us that we underestimate the power of the will.

THINK IT THROUGH: List three people in Scripture besides those already mentioned who tried to ignore their guilt by blaming others.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

FURTHER STUDY: *Patriarchs and Prophet*, pp. 52-62.

Part 5 — Superficial Confession

“I have sinned this time; the Lord is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones. Make supplication to the Lord, for there has been enough of God’s thunder and hail; and I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer” (Ex. 9:27 28, NASB).

This text is quoted in *Freedom From Guilt*, by Narramore and Counts, to illustrate what they call the most clever and deceptive guilt “game” of all, played to perfection by Pharaoh in relation to Moses.

“When we feel guilty, we feel miserable: we like ourselves less, feel a sense of alienation from God, and fear his punishment or retribution. The guilt becomes so painful that we admit we’re wrong to get relief, ask forgiveness, and wait for the pain to go away. Often this confession works like a magic wand—in no time at all the guilt seems to vanish and we feel good about ourselves, accepted by God and free from punishment.

“But what was the motive for confession? Were we concerned about the person we hurt? Were we sorry about doing wrong? Or were we just trying to rid ourselves of unpleasant guilt feelings? I think we will have to admit that much of our confession is done more to relieve the pangs of guilt than to alter our behavior for the good of others. Don’t we often ask God’s forgiveness when we know we will do the same thing again? And aren’t our prayers for forgiveness often just a routine, conscience-clearing endeavor?”—Bruce Narramore and Bill Counts, *Freedom From Guilt* (Santa Ana, Calif.: Vision House Publishers, 1974), p. 32.

How can we know that we truly have repented? 2 Chron. 7:14; Isa. 55:7.

“Repentance includes sorrow for sin and a turning away from it.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 23. These well-known words contain profound depths. To the extent that sin causes suffering (and it always does), true repentance always senses how much others and God suffer because of our sins and turns away from them for *that* reason. Confession and forgiveness which is focused only on relieving our own suffering will not lead to victory over sin.

“The exceeding sinfulness [of sin] can be estimated only in the light of the cross.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 31. Those Christians most conscious of how sin causes the suffering Jesus endured on the cross are the ones who learn to hate it with intense passion and turn away from it in disgust. Once this happens, we no longer play “guilt games”; instead, we face honestly the greed and lust and pride within ourselves and confess it. Once faith in God’s eternal forgiveness has been exercised by us, we can truly believe that, because of Jesus’ death on the cross, it is no longer appropriate for us to feel guilty over sins we have placed on Him.

Part 6 — Focus of the Week

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Prov. 28:13).

When we make excuses for our sins we give evidence that we still cherish them. On the other hand, it is not enough to confess sincerely. Genuine confession must be accompanied by the desire to forsake sins, an attempt to make amends whenever possible, and by successful resistance of temptation through the strength and power that God promises. (See Phil. 2:13; 1 John 3:6-8.) If God were to forgive and bless those who cling to sin, He would perpetuate all the evil that sin has brought.

PERSONAL APPLICATIONS: This week we have studied “games” people play that enable them to deal with guilt other than God’s way. Check the “games” list below to see if you can identify which “games” you have used recently to avoid confessing and forsaking sin.

1. “I give up” (and give in to depression and neurotic guilt).
2. Rebellion against authority (throwing standards and values away).
3. “I’m not so bad after all” (shifting the blame to someone else).
4. Superficial confession (“I said I’m sorry, so forget it”).

THINK IT THROUGH: Study the following quotation; then summarize the quoted material in one comprehensive sentence that you can share with those who need it:

“Confess your sins to God, who only can forgive them, and your faults to one another. . . .

“Those who have not humbled their souls before God in acknowledging their guilt have not yet fulfilled the first condition of acceptance. If we have not experienced that repentance which is not to be repented of, and have not with true humiliation of soul and brokenness of spirit confessed our sins, abhorring our iniquity, we have never truly sought for the forgiveness of sin; and if we have never sought, we have never found the peace of God. . . . Confession of sin, whether public or private, should be heartfelt and freely expressed. It is not to be urged from the sinner. . . .

“True confession is always of a specific character, and acknowledges particular sins. They may be of such a nature as to be brought before God only; they may be wrongs that should be confessed to individuals who have suffered injury through them; or they may be of a public character, and should then be as publicly confessed. But all confession should be definite and to the point, acknowledging the very sins of which you are guilty.”—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 37, 38.

Summarize: _____



6

August 5-11
Adult Lesson

Forgiveness and the Church

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

From time to time the church is confronted with the problem of erring members whose behavior brings shame to the community of believers. These are the most delicate and painful moments in the life of the church; for, if we would follow Jesus, we may need to call these members to accountability in order to elicit their repentance if at all possible. When members do not admit they are in the wrong and the church is forced to rebuke them for dishonesty as well (as Peter did Ananias and Sapphira), the most extreme measure alone can communicate the pain of the church over this failure of one member in the body. Yet we need to administer this discipline in love and in order to redeem.

People being disciplined usually feel the punishment far more than the forgiveness of the church. Pastoral counselors see many who feel only hostility and rejection from the church for what they have done. They find it difficult to believe that God forgives them when church members apparently cannot. If, from the beginning, the church had been a loving and caring community, a place where they could have risked confessing their struggles before being overwhelmed by them, such people might have been able to avoid the mistakes for which they *must* be disciplined. The church cannot avoid its Christ-given responsibility of disciplining. And the church must not deal with overt sin lightly.

How can the church surround a disciplined member with love without making it appear that the sin is trivial? One answer may be found in 2 Corinthians 2. There Paul urges the congregation to extend forgiveness to an offender the *moment* the first sign of repentance is seen. This is the way we relate (or should relate) to each other in our families. At times we must mix firmness and softness in loving and caring for others. On some occasions we need to insist on accountability, and on others we should forgive irresponsibility. We gauge our approach by the response we receive from the one we love. Of course, in cases of public scandal the church must remain firm in discipline while being as loving and acceptant as possible to the one being disciplined. God has promised the church heavenly wisdom as it deals with its members in justice and love.

Part 1 — Discipline and Forgiveness

“Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother . . . trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him” (Luke 17:3, 4).

What lay behind the anguish Paul expressed to the Corinthian church in 2 Corinthians 2:1-5?

“Among the more serious of the evils that had developed among the Corinthian believers, was that of a return to many of the debasing customs of heathenism. One former convert had so far backslidden that his licentious course was a violation of even the low standard of morality held by the Gentile world. The apostle pleaded with the church to put away from among them ‘that wicked person.’ [See 1 Corinthians 5.]”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 303, 304.

“The case had been aggravated by the open toleration of this offender and by the stubborn refusal, for a time, to deal effectively with it. This passage (2 Cor. 2:5-11) reveals that the church had by now complied with Paul’s instructions and had disfellowshipped the offender. This course of action had evidently led him to genuine repentance. Paul here counsels his restoration and reinstatement in the church.”—*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 837.

What can the church today learn from Paul’s counsel in 2 Corinthians 2:6-11?

Church discipline is intended to be remedial rather than vengeful. Yet the church has the responsibility of upholding God’s commandments, maintaining church order, safeguarding church members, and protecting the reputation of the church.

Paul’s instruction was intended to encourage the Corinthian church in its corporate capacity to bind up the wounds and receive the repentant brother back into church fellowship. “There must be no evidence of continued rejection or disdain by church members, lest excessive grief overwhelm him and drive him back into sin.”—*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 838.

This delicate balance between discipline and forgiveness is the aim of the church in all its dealings with members under rebuke. But if there is any doubt, the gospel seems to suggest that we “err on the side of mercy rather than justice.”

FURTHER STUDY: *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 805, 806; *Gospel Workers*, pp. 496-502.

Forgiveness and the Church

Part 2 — Public Confession and Forgiveness

“Any one whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, to keep Satan from gaining the advantage over us; for we are not ignorant of his designs” (2 Cor. 2:10, 11, RSV).

What are the implications of Paul’s instruction to the Corinthian church to demonstrate its forgiveness to this disciplined member? 2 Cor. 2:6-8.

The disciplined member was to be restored to full fellowship. Just as the church in a public session had condemned him, the church in a public way must restore him. The apostle was calling for a *formal* action to assure this member of the congregation’s love. In that way no question as to his full restoration could be raised in the future.

While this may have been a case of unusual discipline in the early church, something of critical importance is involved in Paul’s counsel. And that is that once someone has been exposed in public as a sinner and has subsequently given evidence of repentance, it is imperative that the church make clear in just as open a manner that the person involved is forgiven and accepted as a member of the family again. What is condemned in public cannot be erased in private.

What can a more “public” confession and forgiveness accomplish for the church that strictly “private” confession cannot? James 5:16.

Belonging to a congregation that feels safe confessing its faults one to another (not secret sins) means that each member is free to risk being truthful and vulnerable about what is happening in his or her life. It means that confessing “one to another” arouses support from other members rather than withdrawal and thus encourages a church member to be more honest about his or her spiritual needs.

Nothing said here is intended to encourage sensitivity-type sessions in which exposing a person’s private life is treated almost like a fetish; rather it is to encourage instead a gradual developing of trust within a spiritual family that comes as a result of making right all the little hurts and wrongs that are bound to occur among members of a close-knit family. Secret sins are to be confessed to God and to those wronged, not openly exposed in the church.

THINK IT THROUGH: Is there anyone in your church to whom you can go when you are struggling spiritually or emotionally? Do you belong to a caring group that devotes itself to study, prayer, and encouragement? Have you thought about starting one?

Part 3 — Forgiveness Frees People to Be Honest

“Behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he [Jesus] was sitting at table in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment” (Luke 7:37, 38, RSV).

Why was this woman so grateful to Jesus? Luke 7:47.

She loved much because she was forgiven much. How much insight is contained in that thought!

Each of us has a personality, an outer self that we wear, because we fear that should others know the full truth about us we would lose their affection and respect. We tell ourselves that “no one could love the real me.” So, rather than not being loved at all, we tend to settle for being loved as we appear. It may be that we consider a certain amount of this “personage” necessary for social survival, but our great Example was genuine and not overly concerned about being misunderstood. At its worst we come to think we are unloved because we are unlovable, when in reality we can have absolute assurance of love only when someone who loves us knows all there is to know about us. In a sense the truth is that we are *unlovable* because we are *unloved*. Until she met Jesus, Mary probably never had felt truly loved for herself as a person by anyone—at least not for some time. In His presence she knew that she could be honest about her life without risking His rejection. He could be told about her darkest deeds, and He would not turn away.

Why did Simon react so negatively to Jesus’ encouragement of Mary? Luke 7:39.

Simon’s condemnation was an act of supreme hypocrisy, for he had led Mary into sin. When Simon realized that Jesus knew all about him and his secret sin, he began to appreciate Christ’s compassion for this woman because Jesus did not expose Simon as he deserved. “Simon was touched by the kindness of Jesus in not openly rebuking him before the guests. He had not been treated as he desired Mary to be treated. He saw that Jesus did not wish to expose his guilt to others, but sought by a true statement of the case to convince his mind, and by pitying kindness to subdue his heart. Stern denunciation would have hardened Simon against repentance, but patient admonition convinced him of his error. He saw the magnitude of the debt which he owed his Lord. His pride was humbled, he repented, and the proud Pharisee became a lowly, self-sacrificing disciple.”—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 567, 568.

Part 4 — Security in Christ

“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (John 13:13-15, NIV).

Because of the bickering and competing going on among His twelve disciples, Jesus realized that, before they were ready to face the world without Him, they had to come to new levels of closeness with one another. In washing their feet our Lord was gently reminding them of their weakness. Peter acted impulsively when he told Jesus that he would never allow Him to wash his feet. He was trying to be humble, but Jesus understood Peter. He knew that Peter seldom—if ever—wanted to expose his true feelings and his insecurities. Naturally aggressive and good-natured, Peter was a born leader. But in the service of Christ, only those who first and foremost are *servants* can be leaders.

Jesus’ disciples were a group of hardened, tough men who found it difficult to admit they had weaknesses and needed forgiveness—especially from each other. However, after Christ’s death and resurrection, these same men wept over their sinful pride and confessed their weaknesses to one another. In this atmosphere the Holy Spirit led them into a closeness and unity that they had never enjoyed before. When we are secure in Christ we can be secure with one another.

What can we learn from the fact that Jesus did not depend on those about Him for His sense of security and self-worth?

Because Jesus’ life was centered in His relationship with God, He did not depend on others for His sense of self-worth. There was no personal need for Him to defend Himself from the attacks and criticisms of His peers. As followers of Christ we should do all we can to enhance one another; but taking self off the throne and making God the center of our lives, we find a happiness and sense of security that is far beyond anything we can experience as the result of human enhancement.

“Nothing is apparently more helpless, yet really more invincible, than the soul that feels its nothingness, and relies wholly on the merits of the Saviour. By prayer, by the study of His word, by faith in His abiding presence, the weakest of human beings may live in contact with the living Christ, and He will hold them by a hand that will never let go.”—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 182.

THINK IT THROUGH: Is the church to blame if some of its members do not have a sense of security and self-worth? What can we as church members do to help those about us gain such a sense?

Part 5 — When Forgiving Is Forgetting

“I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more”
(Jer. 31:34).

How God can remember our sin no more is beyond our ability to speculate about with much profit. But to understand how we might forget what others have done is essential to a proper understanding of forgiveness within the church community.

How is it possible for us to forget that which has happened?

Some people have good “forgetters,” but even they cannot forget some of the things that have happened in the past. The people we have hurt, the lies we have told, and the various ways we might have stolen from others often form our most vivid memories. Furthermore, nothing can ever be done to change the *fact* that certain events occurred in our past. What *can* be changed when we are forgiven is the *meaning* of those events and how the events have affected our relationships with others whom we have hurt. If people had feelings of anger toward us because of our mistakes, they may remember the mistakes but no longer feel the anger. If we asked forgiveness and been forgiven, the events of the past no longer affect the way people feel about us or we feel about ourselves at present.

“The church’s point that forgiving is forgetting has a strong side. On occasion, people say that they are tired of forgiving. They tell you that for ten or fifteen years they have tried to be forgiving with their partner in business or in marriage, but now they are tired of that approach and they are going to try a different one. As you listen to these people over a longer period of time, you discover that they have in fact not been forgiving at all. Indeed, they have perfected the art of remembering every little injustice done to them. Every insult is vividly etched in their memories. . . . Their failure to forgive is made most obvious in their desire now to even the score.”—William Klassen, *The Forgiving Community*, pp. 210, 211.

THINK IT THROUGH: Are the rewards of forgiveness greater than harboring a grudge? What are some of those rewards?

SEARCH AND LEARN: What do the texts that follow teach us about God’s willingness to forgive and forget?

1. Ps. 103:12— _____
2. Isa. 43:25— _____
3. Micah 7:18, 19— _____

Forgiveness and the Church

Part 6 — Focus of the Week

“Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matt. 6:12).

Once someone has been warmed by the love of a forgiving church, that person will become enthusiastic about Christianity. When we find people who are fed up with religion, it frequently turns out they never have experienced authentic Christian caring and acceptance. The Lord’s Prayer could be considered a charter for the life of the church; not only are we forgiven by God as we extend forgiveness to others, but we also extend forgiveness to others because we are forgiven by God. This is not easy to achieve. Sometimes it takes many months, even years. The church is composed of people who both need and give forgiveness.

PERSONAL APPLICATIONS: Name three people you can talk to about *anything* that might be troubling you with confidence and assurance that they will stand beside you regardless of what it is.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

How many of these just named are members of your local church? If there is none, why? What can you do to help your church become a more caring community in Christ?

Some suggestions to consider:

1. Hold a weekend retreat for groups no larger than twelve. Ask someone experienced in conducting such retreats to help you plan and conduct it.
2. With your pastor’s approval, start a small fellowship group in your church by inviting six other people to make an eight-week commitment (it can be renegotiated later if they wish) to meet for sharing, study, and fellowship one night each week. If you are unsure about what to do in your groups, read a book of the Bible together and share your thoughts and feelings. Most especially, when you read a text that tells a story, put yourself in the story and find God’s message for you personally in it. Example: In the story of Mary and Martha, which kind of person are you? Why? What interferes (if you are Martha) in your life with the time you need to spend sitting with Jesus to be taught?
3. Start keeping track of major events in the lives of five people in your church and five people in your neighborhood such as their birthdays, anniversaries, and anniversary of the loss of a special loved one. Let them know personally that you appreciate them and wish them God’s blessing on that important day.



7

August 12-18
Adult Lesson

What Follows Forgiveness?

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

For six weeks our lessons have brought us the ever-deepening and widening assurance of God's willingness to forgive us for our sins so that we can be accepted in Christ our Lord. And now that we have received Him anew—or even for the first time—Jesus as our loving, forgiving, justifying Lord grants us the privilege of stepping beyond forgiveness and walking with Him. This quarter's emphasis now moves to the exploration of what it means to walk with the Lord in the various aspects of our lives.

There is a spiritual and practical connection between having forgiveness recorded, on the one hand, and walking with the Lord on the other. "God's forgiveness . . . is not only forgiveness *for* sin, but reclaiming *from* sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 114.

Even a casual reading of Paul's letters to the churches shows the pattern of the assurance of forgiveness or pardon—justification by faith in Christ's righteousness—being followed by earnest, pastoral concern for the way in which Christians should then walk hand in hand with Jesus.

To walk with Jesus means the personal claiming of all the "exceeding great and precious promises" of Christ. Such a process results in actually receiving from Christ the rich endowments of His "divine nature." (See 2 Peter 1:4.)

For the balance of this quarter we will study what it means to walk with Jesus in certain areas and aspects of our lives—remembering that our prayers, our praises, our obedience all need the incense of Christ's righteousness added to them to make them fully acceptable to God. (See *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 344.)

In this lesson we shall consider the roles of love and loyalty in their effect upon our walk with the Lord.

What Follows Forgiveness?

Part 1 — The Supreme Motive

“The love of Christ constraineth us” (2 Cor. 5:14).

Notice how this text reads in some of the other versions:

“Christ’s love compels us” (NIV).

“The love of Christ leaves us no choice” (NEB).

How would you summarize the concept being emphasized in these versions?

“Christ must be revealed to the sinner as the Saviour dying for the sins of the world; and as we behold the Lamb of God upon the cross of Calvary, the mystery of redemption begins to unfold to our minds and the goodness of God leads us to repentance. In dying for sinners, Christ manifested a love that is incomprehensible; and as the sinner beholds this love, it softens the heart, impresses the mind, and inspires contrition in the soul. . . . The sinner may resist this love, may refuse to be drawn to Christ; but if he does not resist he will be drawn to Jesus; knowledge of the plan of salvation will lead him to the foot of the cross in repentance for his sins, which have caused the sufferings of God’s dear Son.—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 26, 27.

What inspires us to give God all our love? 1 John 4:8-10, 19.

During the time when the buying and selling of slaves was practiced, a young man was put up for auction. He could not help wondering whether the man who bought him would be cruel or kind. Because the youth was healthy and strong, he brought a high price on the slave market. When the successful bidder came to claim his purchase, instead of a command to get down and go home with the buyer, the slave was startled to hear his new owner say “Go! You are free. I paid to set you free.” The young slave dropped to his knees and said, “Oh, sir, let me serve you as long as I live, no longer as your slave but in gratitude to you for my freedom.”

THINK IT THROUGH: Which of the following human love relationships do you think comes closest to expressing the kind of love we should have for God and for Jesus? That of a child for its parent? That of a wife for her husband? That of a servant for his or her kind and gracious master? That of a subject for his or her benign sovereign? That of a brother for his brother? That of a friend for his or her friend? That of a slave for his or her liberator?

FURTHER STUDY: *Steps to Christ*, “God’s Love for Man,” pp. 9-15.

What Follows Forgiveness?

Part 2 — Loving Leads to Obeying

“He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked” (1 John 2:4-6).

“This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3).

“If we abide in Christ, if the love of God dwells in us, our feelings, our thoughts, our purposes, our actions, will be in harmony with the will of God as expressed in the precepts of His holy law.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 61.

“Obedience is not a mere outward compliance, but the service of love.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 60.

Walking with Jesus in loving obedience is not a matter of mere outward conformity to a set of rules and regulations. It involves our feelings, thoughts, purposes, and motives—those areas of our lives that are the spring of our actions and behaviour.

Summarize Jesus’ evaluation of and emphasis on the relationship between love and obedience. John 14:15; 15:14.

When love is our incentive for obedience, the Ten Commandments will no longer be to us a set of “thou shalt nots.” For us they will then read:

1. *Loyalty*—God must be first.
2. *Worship*—We need regular seasons of loving interrelationship.
3. *Reverence*—Our conversation, affections, and sympathies are in heaven.
4. *Sanctification*—The Sabbath is the outward sign of our delight in doing God’s will.
5. *Respect for authority*—We honor God at home and in all our relationships.
6. *Love*—God’s kind of love takes the place of anger, hate, and strife.
7. *Purity*—Passions, appetites, and will are brought under God’s control.
8. *Honesty*—This trait marks our relationship to God and those about us.
9. *Truthfulness*—Integrity characterizes our lives.
10. *Contentment*—This is the result of our lives being centered in God whom we trust completely.

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

What Follows Forgiveness?

Part 3 — Walking in Love

“If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Ex. 19:5, 6).

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

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

“God made man perfectly holy and happy. . . . It is transgression of God’s law—the law of love—that has brought woe and death.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 9.

“He [the Creator] desires that man, the crowning work of His creative power, shall reach the highest possible development. He sets before us the height of blessing to which He desires to bring us through His grace. He invites us to give ourselves to Him, that He may work His will in us. It remains for us to choose whether we will be set free from the bondage of sin, to share the glorious liberty of the sons of God.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 44.

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

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

SEARCH AND LEARN: Do you see a possible relationship between the Ten Commandments declared by God on Mount Sinai and the Beatitudes proclaimed by Christ on the Mount of Blessing? Compare Exodus 20:3-17 with Matthew 5:1-48 and see whether you can find similar principles there. Is one possibly the photographic negative and the other the photographic positive of the same picture of God’s will?

What Follows Forgiveness?

Part 4 — A Law of Love

“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. . . . Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.” (Ps. 19:7-11.)

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

“. . . All heaven is interested in the happiness of man. Our heavenly Father does not close the avenues of joy to any of His creatures. The divine requirements call upon us to shun those indulgences that would bring suffering and disappointment, that would close to us the door of happiness and heaven. . . . He requires us to perform only those duties that will lead our steps to heights of bliss to which the disobedient can never attain.”—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 46, 47.

SEARCH AND LEARN: After reading the Bible passages which follow, describe the happiness and blessing which come from obedience to God’s law.

1. Deut. 11:13-15 _____
2. Prov. 7:1-5 _____
3. Isa. 48:18 _____
4. Jer. 7:23, 24 _____
5. 1 Peter 1:14-16, 22 _____

Every commandment given by God was given for the good and happiness of God’s children, both in this life and in the life to come.

THINK IT THROUGH: Jesus introduces each Beatitude with the word “blessed” or “happy.” Turn to Matthew 5:3-11 and consider the opposite of the principle Jesus was enunciating (for example, Happy are the peacemakers; miserable are mischief-makers). Then contemplate the picture that emerges.

What Follows Forgiveness?

Part 5 — Walking in Righteousness

“What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.”

“Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom. 7:7, 12.). (Compare James 2:10-12; 17-26.)

“Jesus proceeded to show His bearers what it means to keep the commandments of God—that it is a reproduction in themselves of the character of Christ.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 55.

The law of God is as holy as He is holy. Therefore righteousness is defined by the standard of God’s character as it is revealed in the ten precepts given on Sinai. Those who claim that Christ did away with the law at Calvary overlook this fact.

“The mission of Christ on earth was not to destroy the law, but by His grace to bring man back to obedience to its precepts.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 48.

What is the relationship between faith and obedience in the formula of salvation? Ps. 40:8; Isa. 51:7; Rom. 1:5; 3:31.

Notice the expression “Grace . . . for obedience to . . . faith,” in Romans 1:5. (Emphasis supplied.) “Instead of releasing man from obedience, it is faith, and faith only, that makes us partakers of the grace of Christ, which enables us to render obedience.

“We do not earn salvation by our obedience; for salvation is the free gift of God, to be received by faith. But obedience is the fruit of faith. . . . If we abide in Christ, if the love of God dwells in us, our feelings, our thoughts, our purposes, our actions, will be in harmony with the will of God as expressed in the precepts of His holy law.”—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 60, 61.

John Wesley said: “We are, doubtless, justified by faith. This is the corner-stone of the whole Christian building. We are justified without the works of the law, as any previous condition of justification; but they are an immediate fruit of that faith whereby we are justified. So that if good works do not follow our faith, even all inward and outward holiness, it is plain our faith is nothing worth; we are yet in our sins. Therefore, that we are justified by faith, even by faith without works, is no ground for making void the law through faith, or for imagining that faith is a dispensation from any kind of degree of holiness.”—*The Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), vol. 5 (sermon 35), pp. 453, 454.

FURTHER STUDY: *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, “The Spirituality of the Law” (Matt. 5:19, 20), pp. 51-55.

What Follows Forgiveness?

Part 6 — Focus of the Week

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

“The *moral law*, . . . which relates to the regulation of the *manners* or *conduct* of men . . . was *established* by the doctrine of salvation by faith; because this faith works by love, and love is the principle of obedience: and whosoever receives salvation through faith in Christ, receives power to live in holy obedience to every moral precept; for such are God’s workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus, unto good works; in which they find it their duty and their interest incessantly to live.”—Adam Clarke, *Commentary on Romans 3:31*.

A person who says, “I am saved; I don’t need to walk in the footsteps of Jesus and keep God’s commandments,” does not understand what being saved is all about. Citizenship in God’s kingdom and living the law of God’s kingdom go together; they belong together. We will lovingly, joyfully walk in the pathway of His law, not to purchase citizenship, which Christ already has done for us, but because as citizens of the kingdom we are happy to do whatever our King asks. What it boils down to is that keeping God’s law is not so much a matter of *doing* but of *being*; it is a matter of the heart.

“I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts” (Jer. 31:33). “Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings” (Isa. 51:7).

PERSONAL APPLICATIONS: Can I respond from my heart as the psalmist did? Ponder these selections from Psalm 119: “O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day” (verse 97). “Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart. I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end” (verses 111, 112). “Deal with thy servant according to thy mercy, and teach me thy statutes. I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies” (verses 124, 125). “Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me” (verse 133). “Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; and teach me thy statutes” (verse 135).

• After praying a prayer such as this, do I need to match my words with my actions? If so, what kind of actions?



8

August 19-25
Adult Lesson

Love and Loyalty

MEMORY TEXT: “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matt. 7:13, 14).

Jesus portrays the way of salvation as a difficult and perilous path that we take to the kingdom. Today it is popular in many places to talk about salvation using the slogan “only believe.” As in our study of forgiveness, the importance of believing cannot be overemphasized or overestimated. Receiving Jesus as our personal Saviour must form the basis of a genuine religious experience. “As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12).

But Jesus also makes it clear that “believing” does not consist of mere submission or judicial forgiveness. Genuine faith motivates to action. Saving faith prompts to obedience. Unless it does, it is a counterfeit. Jesus made this clear when He uttered some of the most solemn words of warning recorded in Sacred Scripture: “Not every one that *saith* unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that *doeth* the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). (Emphasis supplied.)

Notice that it is not *saying* but *doing* that constitutes the *test* of the genuineness of our relationship with Jesus. We take one of two ways—either the way that leads to life or the way that leads to death. We cannot travel both. To walk along the narrow way means to renounce and turn away from that which pertains to the broad way. It means to walk in obedience to God’s will as revealed in the precepts of His holy law. And if we truly comprehend what our forgiveness and acceptance cost God, we will do so. While we cannot earn salvation by obedience, obedience is a principle of the kingdom of God. We demonstrate our citizenship in God’s kingdom by our loving obedience to the laws of the kingdom. The underlying principles contained in each of the precepts of God’s law are involved in our walk with Jesus. The first of these is loyalty. Our study this week is devoted to a consideration of this important principle as it is outlined in the first of the Ten Commandments.

Part 1 — The Principle of Loyalty

“I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:2, 3).

In one respect the Ten Commandments may be likened to a flight of stairs that lead from earthliness to holiness. We have to climb the stairs step by step in the order in which God has given them to us. The order is not accidental. Each one has been given its appointed place in the precepts of God as part of a divine design. God had a reason for enumerating each commandment in the order in which He did. “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” is the first step. It is the gateway to spiritual life. This commandment ushers the soul into fellowship with God. As long as any other god claims the affection of our hearts; as long as we endeavor to divide our allegiance between the God of heaven and the gods of this earth; as long as any darling idol, pet vice, or cherished sin is permitted to share the throne of our hearts with the only True God; we will deprive ourselves of the kind of religion which is a *force* and content ourselves with a religion which is a *form*. Our times abound with such forceless, formal religion because ours, in essence, is an idol-worshipping age.

What is the significance of the way Jesus reiterated this principle in His preaching? Matt. 6:24.

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

THINK IT THROUGH: List some of the idols that people tend to worship today, including those particularly tailored for Christians by the arch-deceiver.

FURTHER STUDY: *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, “True Motive in Service” (Matt. 6:24), pp. 93-95.

Part 2 — Wholehearted Allegiance

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

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

What is the real root of idol worship? (See Matt. 16:24; Gal. 2:20.)

When you really stop to think about it, all sin is a form of self-worship. Self-love was Lucifer’s downfall. Read Isaiah 14:12-14 and count up the number of times “I” occurs. It is easy to see that the moral disease that had crept into Lucifer’s life was “I trouble.” His first onslaught on the human race followed the same line, that of self-exaltation. “Ye shall be as gods” (Gen. 3:5).

Jesus taught that the price of discipleship is to deny self. Walking with Jesus means giving up *our* way and walking in *His* way. “Denying self” does not mean the destruction of our personality or our individuality. It does not call for the annihilation of our minds or our talents. It means placing these at His disposal and being willing to serve Him instead of pleasing ourselves. The real test of whether we are His disciples or are self-worshippers is to sincerely answer this question: Who comes first in my life—Jesus or myself?

SEARCH AND LEARN: The words of Jesus in Matthew 16:24 are repeated in Luke 9:23, but Luke adds something that does not appear in Matthew. Discover what it is and write it in the space below:

-
- What does this discovery teach us about what we have to contend with in keeping self under the sovereign control of the Lord Jesus Christ?

FURTHER STUDY: *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, “Spirituality of the Law” (Matt. 5:30), pp. 60-62.

Part 3 — Idols That Hinder Loyalty

“Behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions” (Matt. 19:16-22).

“This man was tied to earth by the cords of his wealth. They did not hinder him from keeping the commandments, for he had no temptations to murder, or adultery, or theft, or neglect of parents. But they did hinder him from giving his whole self up, and from regarding eternal life as the most precious of all things. . . . The one thing needful for entrance into life is at bottom self-surrender, and the casting away of all else for its sovereign sake. . . . The hands must be emptied of treasures, and the heart swept clear of lesser loves, if He is to be grasped by our hands, and to dwell in our hearts. More of us than we are willing to believe are kept from entire surrender to Jesus Christ, by money and worldly possessions; and many professing Christians are kept shrivelled and weak and joyless because they love their wealth more than their Lord.”—Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1975), p. 52.

Why did Jesus describe in the way that He did a person who makes a god of his possessions? Luke 12:15-23.

Both the rich young ruler and the rich fool were probably respectable citizens who were held in high esteem in their community. There was nothing wrong with the fact that they were rich. What was wrong was that they placed *things* before God. They had their priorities twisted. Sinful human beings naturally are covetous. God has to weed that tendency out of our nature today.

THINK IT THROUGH: How can we make the principles contained in the stories found in Matthew 19 and Luke 12 relevant to our modern materialistic society?

FURTHER STUDIES: *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 518-523; *Christ's Object Lessons*, “Gain That Is Loss,” pp. 255-259.

Part 4 — “With All Thy Heart”

“What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?” (Deut. 10:12, 13). (Compare Deut. 6:4-6; Eccl. 12:13; and Jer. 9:23, 24.)

The key expressions in Deuteronomy 10:12, 13 and Deuteronomy 6:4-6 are “with *all* thy heart and with *all* thy soul” and “*in* thine heart.” The word *heart* means the intellect, mind, emotions, personality, affections—the inner being. It is possible for a person to make a god of his or her intellect, talents, abilities, accomplishments—even of the very capacity to love and serve.

“So long have men worshiped human opinions and human institutions that almost the whole world is following after idols.”—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 186.

The arrogance of the human heart leads people to worship intellect as a god instead of to regard it as the vestibule into the audience chamber of the King of kings. Professor E. W. Hengstenberg of Bonn became a decided rationalist under the impact of the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and formulated the principles of rationalism for his university. But God touched his heart through a simple study of the Bible. He became a firm believer in the gospel. In his first lecture after taking up the post of professor of Oriental languages at Berlin, he declared, “It matters not whether we make a god out of stone, or out of our own understanding, it is still a false god; there is but one living God, the God of the Bible.” Years later, at the end of a fruitful life, Hengstenberg’s last audible words were these: “That is the nothingness of rationalism: the fundamental thing is Christ.”

In view of the unchanging human tendency to worship our own abilities and attainments, what do we need to keep in mind? Jer. 9:23, 24.

If technological advancement from the beginning of human history to the beginning of World War II were to be plotted on a graph the height of this Sabbath School lesson quarterly, then to plot the technological advancement from then onward *using the same scale*, we would need a graph the height of a sixteen-story building. Modern achievements are impressive indeed! Yet God says we are not to glory in these things. Why should we, when the intellectual power with which we accomplish these marvels is not our own but is a gift from God?

THINK IT THROUGH: If the prophet Jeremiah were writing today, would he add such modern achievements as space shuttles, computers, and satellite telecommunication, to the list of things in which we should not glory?

Part 5 — The Choice That Faces Us Today

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

The expression “men shall be lovers of their own selves . . . lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” portrays aptly the pattern of life of the majority of earth’s inhabitants in our day. When people live to satisfy the senses rather than to please God, pleasure becomes degrading and depraving. The Bible does not condemn pleasures as such. In fact, it declares, “In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Ps. 16:11). God wants His people to enjoy genuine pleasure. We can be sure that all pleasure that is in harmony with His will only elevates and ennobles.

J. Wilbur Chapman is said to be the source of a simple rule designed to help us decide which are safe paths for our feet to follow. Anything that dims our vision of Christ, takes away our taste for Bible study, cramps our prayer life, or makes Christian work difficult is wrong for us; and we must, as Christians, turn away from it.

How does their response to the final, urgent call given in Revelation 14:6-12 to judgment-bound idolaters to worship the one true God, the Creator of heaven and earth, affect the lives of those who respond to it?

THINK IT THROUGH: Notice the contrast between the life-style of “lovers of their own selves” (2 Tim. 3:1-5) and those who “fear God, and give glory to him . . . and worship him” (Rev. 14:7.)

List below some genuine pleasures that we Christians can enjoy that will not obscure our vision of God or lead us away from Him.

Part 6 — Focus of the Week

“Elijah came unto the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him” (1 Kings 18:21).

The reformatory message of Elijah in his day—and the call of the Elijah message in our day—is to turn from the worship of false gods to the loyal worship of the true and living God.

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

We can summarize the principles involved in walking with Jesus that we have studied this week as follows:

1. Walking with Jesus means walking with Him in the strait and narrow way (Matt. 7:13, 14).

2. Loyalty means loving God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind (Matt. 22:37).

3. The rich young ruler and the rich fool were idolaters because they attached more importance to things than to God. Christ’s remedy for this spiritual disease is found in Matthew 6:33. He tells us, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

4. Possessions are not the only false god that can take the place of God in our lives. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God appeals to us not to glory in wisdom nor in might nor in riches, but to glory in the fact that we know Him as a God who exercises “lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth” (Jer. 9:23, 24).

5. God’s last call to mankind in this judgment-hour period is to fear Him, worship Him and give glory to Him (Rev. 14:7).

PERSONAL APPLICATION: Can I make the following response to this week’s lesson? “If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).



9

August 26 to September 1
Adult Lesson

Reverence

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

Love and loyalty increasingly characterize the life of a person who continues to walk in fellowship and service with Jesus. Reverence is another characteristic—reverence for holy things, reverence in the presence of holy realities.

A name is of great importance, even in human relationships. My name stands for everything that is *me*: my personality, my reputation, my character, my heritage, my very being—all are wrapped up in my name. Even ordinary people such as ourselves expect our names to be treated with respect. We feel slighted when our names are misspelled, mispronounced, misrepresented, or besmirched. However, when the name involved is that of an important personage, such as someone who holds high office or a position of responsibility—a monarch, president, prime minister, governor, mayor, or other dignitary—he expects that his name shall be treated with special respect.

But how much greater is the offense involved in offering insult to the holy name of the Almighty! His name stands for His sovereignty, His eternal nature, His authority, His character, His life-giving power. Everything associated with God Himself is wrapped up in His name.

That includes the Sabbath. What makes the Sabbath so important is that, by keeping it, we acknowledge the fact that God is the Creator of heaven and earth. When God completed His creative work, He wrote His signature on time by instituting the Sabbath. To remember the sign of the Creator’s authority is to remember and thus reverence the Creator. To forget His memorial is to run the risk of forgetting the God whose memorial it is.

The Sabbath may be thought of as God’s flag. He has hoisted it on earth as the symbol of His sovereignty, the sign of His government. To His people, the Sabbath is the badge of citizenship in His kingdom.

Let us seek this week to deepen both our reverence for our God and our understanding of the Sabbath’s significance as an outward sign of our love and respect for our Creator.

Part 1 — A Sense of God's Holiness

“Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground” (Ex. 3:5).

“There are those who address the great and all-powerful and holy God, who dwelleth in light unapproachable, as they would address an equal, or even an inferior. There are those who conduct themselves in His house as they would not presume to do in the audience chamber of an earthly ruler. These should remember that they are in His sight whom seraphim adore, before whom angels veil their faces. God is greatly to be revered; all who truly realize His presence will bow in humility before Him, and, like Jacob beholding the vision of God, they will cry out, ‘How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.’ ”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 251, 252.

What led to the young prophet Isaiah's recognition of the holiness of God? Isa. 6:1-5.

Nothing will so rapidly and completely give us a sense of our sinfulness and unworthiness as will a realization of God's holiness. The reason that people today have sunk to such a low level of degeneration is the fact that they no longer stand in awe of God. The world needs a fresh revelation of the majesty of God.

It is noteworthy that God's revelation of His holiness was not intended to devastate Isaiah. God reveals Himself to us in order to *humble* us but never to *humiliate* us. There is a difference. When we are humbled we sense our need and seek to have that need supplied; we feel *helpless* but not *hopeless*. When we are humiliated we feel devastated and beyond hope. The revelation of God's holiness never devastates. It brings healing.

How was God's healing love manifested to Isaiah after he humbled himself? Isa. 6:7, 8.

It is significant that the vision of God's holiness did not *disqualify* Isaiah but rather *qualified* him to fulfill God's purpose. This always is God's purpose in revealing Himself to humans.

THINK IT THROUGH: Although I may never meet Him at a burning bush as did Moses or have a vision of Him as did Isaiah, has God given me other adequate evidence of His holiness? How?

FURTHER STUDY: *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 307-310.

Part 2 — “Fear God”

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

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

To “fear God” in the biblical sense does not mean to be afraid of Him. It is true that we tremble as we approach His holy presence. But the passages call us to hold Him in reverence. Three verbs are used in succession in Revelation 14:7—“fear,” “give glory,” and “worship.” Ecclesiastes 12:13 adds “keep His commandments” to the words “fear God.” The injunction to “fear God” thus is a call to worship. True worship results in our glorifying Him in our lives and obeying Him. The sequence of the verbs reveals that to “fear God” is not a negative experience, else it would not result in the powerful positives of exalted living, worship, and obedience. God does not wish to frighten us into serving Him. Rather, through His Word He gives us a sense of His holiness. This should result in our reverencing and obeying Him. Obedience to God must come from our realization of His supreme holiness. (See Lev. 20:26).

What significance do you see in the words the prophet Jeremiah uses to express the sense of holy awe that comes from contemplating God’s greatness? Jer. 10:6, 7, 10-12.

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

SEARCH AND LEARN: What is involved in learning to “worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness”?

1. Ps. 29:2 _____

2. Ps. 96:8 _____

3. Ps. 100:4 _____

4. James 4:8 _____

Part 3 — His Holy Name

“After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name” (Matt. 6:9).

“To hallow the name of the Lord requires that the words in which we speak of the Supreme Being be uttered with reverence. . . . We are never in any manner to treat lightly the titles or appellations of the Deity. In prayer we enter the audience chamber of the Most High; and we should come before Him with holy awe. The angels veil their faces in His presence. The cherubim and the bright and holy seraphim approach His throne with solemn reverence. How much more should we, finite, sinful beings, come in a reverent manner before the Lord, our Maker!”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 106.

How is it possible to profane the name of God even in prayer? Matt. 6: 7, 8.

In the sixth chapter of Matthew, the chapter in which the prayer aspect of Christ’s Sermon on the Mount is recorded, the word *God* occurs only three times (verses 24, 30, 33). But terms such as *your Father*, *thy Father*, *our Father*, *your heavenly Father*, occur twelve times (verses 1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 14, 15, 26, and 32). It is obvious that the favored title by which Jesus taught us to address God is *Father*. Addressing Him this way does two things for us. First, it reminds us that the God to whom we come in prayer is loving, merciful, and gracious, as earthly fathers should be toward their children. Second, we acknowledge that we are His children. We cannot call Him Father without acknowledging our sonship and daughtership. Doing so creates in us the desire and determination to be worthy of that high honor.

“When you pray, ‘Hallowed be Thy name,’ you ask that it may be hallowed in this world, hallowed in you. God has acknowledged you before men and angels as His child; pray that you do no dishonor to the ‘worthy name by which ye are called.’ James 2:7. God sends you into the world as His representatives. In every act of life you are to make manifest the name of God. This petition calls upon you to possess His character. You cannot hallow His name, you cannot represent Him to the world, unless in life and character you represent the very life and character of God. This you can do only through the acceptance of the grace and righteousness of Christ.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 107.

SEARCH AND LEARN: What can you learn about praise and reverence from Psalm 103, David’s poem of praise to his heavenly Father?

Part 4 — The Sign of God's Sovereignty

“God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made” (Gen. 1:31; 2:1, 2).

Note that the record says God ended His work on *the seventh day*, not the sixth. Even though “the heavens and the earth were finished” by the end of the sixth day, God’s creative work was not completed until He had created the Sabbath. The Sabbath institution therefore was as much a part of the Creator’s work of creating as was the creation of the cosmos, vegetation, and animate life.

When a manufacturer has completed his article—whether it be a machine, a piece of clothing, or a can of food—the last thing he does before it leaves his factory is to stamp on it his trademark or put his label on it. That trademark or label identifies him as its maker. The Creator of heaven and earth wrote His trademark upon His handiwork by writing His signature on time. As long as time lasts, the Sabbath, as it continues to come around at the close of each weekly cycle, declares that God is the Creator of sea and sky, of the earth and everything upon it.

Summarize in your own words God’s clearly stated reason for giving the Sabbath to His people? Ex. 31:17; 20:8, 11.

“The Sabbath, as a memorial of God’s creative power, points to Him as the maker of the heavens and the earth. Hence it is a constant witness to His existence and a reminder of His greatness, His wisdom, and His love. Had the Sabbath always been sacredly observed, there could never have been an atheist or an idolater.

“The Sabbath institution, which originated in Eden, is as old as the world itself. It was observed by all the patriarchs, from creation down. During the bondage in Egypt, the Israelites were forced by their taskmasters to violate the Sabbath, and to a great extent they lost the knowledge of its sacredness. When the law was proclaimed at Sinai the very first words of the fourth commandment were, ‘Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy’—showing that the Sabbath was not then instituted; we are pointed back for its origin to creation. In order to obliterate God from the minds of men, Satan aimed to tear down this great memorial. If men could be led to forget their Creator, they would make no effort to resist the power of evil, and Satan would be sure of his prey.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 336.

FURTHER STUDY: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 111-116.

Part 5 — Badge of Loyalty

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God. . . . For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Ex. 20:8-11).

“The first and simplest meaning of the word *sanctification* is ‘separation.’ That which is taken out of its surroundings, by God’s command, and is set aside or separated as His own possession and for His service—that is holy. This does not mean separation from sin only, but from all that is in the world, even from what may be permissible. Thus God sanctified the seventh day. The other days were not unclean, for God saw all that He had made and ‘behold it was very good.’ But that day alone was holy, which God had taken possession of by His own special act.”—Andrew Murray, *The Power of the Blood* (Fort Washington, Pa.: Christian Literature Crusade, 1965), p. 42.

The seventh day of the week is the only day to which the Bible gives a name. All the others are identified simply as “the first day,” and so on. (See Luke 23:54 to 24:1.) But when it comes to the seventh day it is called the Sabbath, the rest day—the name God Himself gave it.

Through what means did God underline the fact that He had set aside the Sabbath as a special day? Ex. 16:4, 5, 14-31.

The specific identity of the seventh day as the Sabbath persists throughout the New Testament. (See Luke 4:16; Matt. 24:20; Acts 18:1-4.) The Gospels were written many years after the events recorded took place. If there had been any change of Sabbath sacredness, there would have been ample opportunity for that change to be both observed and noted by the New Testament historians. Instead, they continue to refer to the seventh day as “the Sabbath,” and the first day merely as “the first day.” (See Acts 13:42; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4; 20:7; Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1, 2; Luke 23:56; 24:1; John 20:1.)

Only one day is known as the Sabbath in both the Old and the New Testaments. No matter how ardently people might observe another day, they are not keeping the Bible Sabbath. God alone has the power to create a Sabbath. The only day that He recognizes as the Sabbath is the day that He designated and set aside as the Sabbath.

FURTHER STUDY: *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 281-289.

Part 6 — Focus of the Week

“You shall not make wrong use of the name of the Lord your God; the Lord will not leave unpunished the man who misuses his name” (Ex. 20:7, NEB).

As we sense anew the high responsibility that rests upon us as disciples of Jesus to represent God aright in deeds and words and not misuse His name, we must determine, by His grace, to “shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9). We will want to be the kind of persons He desires His people to be “in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God.” We will look “according to his promise . . . for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” and will “be diligent” in order that we “may be found in him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (2 Peter 3:11-14).

VALUE CLARIFICATION: It is important to have a clear idea why we keep the Sabbath. The following questions are for you to define why you do and how much meaning the Sabbath has for you:

1. Am I happy in my Sabbath keeping? How happy?
2. Am I willing to make sacrifices to keep the Sabbath? To what extent?
3. Am I confident that in keeping the Sabbath I am following God’s will? How certain am I of this?
4. Do I feel so good about keeping the Sabbath that I would not want to give up doing so?
5. Am I embarrassed when others ask me about my keeping the Sabbath, or do I respond enthusiastically? Why do I feel the way I do?
6. What is my basic motive for keeping the Sabbath? Is it the right motive?
7. Will I always keep the Sabbath? Why?



10

September 2-8
Adult Lesson

Love in Home and Community

MEMORY TEXT: “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:4).

The fifth commandment underscores the importance of parent-child and child-parent relationships. The importance of this relationship cannot be overemphasized or overestimated because on it depends the quality of our relationship to society, to the church, and even to God. The attitude of children to their parents will affect, either adversely or favorably, their attitude toward the people and the world around them. If they grow up with an attitude of irresponsibility or disregard toward their parents, it is extremely unlikely that they will reflect a different attitude toward those with whom they brush shoulders along the pilgrim way.

This week we study those commandments that have much to do with human relationships. The sixth commandment includes more than just the act of murder. This is evident in Jesus’ enlargement of it in the Sermon on the Mount. (See Matt. 5:21, 22.)

“The spirit of hatred and revenge originated with Satan, and it led him to put to death the Son of God. Whoever cherishes malice or unkindness is cherishing the same spirit, and its fruit will be unto death.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 55, 56.

The seventh commandment teaches us that purity of heart and life is a priority for the disciple who walks closely with Jesus. The Bible does not mumble and mutter in its challenge to followers of the Master to be pure in thought, word, and deed. To the psalmist’s question, “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?” the answer comes back loud and clear, “He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart.” (Ps. 24:3, 4). No one would seriously question that this call to purity includes and involves sexual purity. While it is *not limited to* sexual purity, it goes without saying that without that kind of purity no purity is possible.

The religion of Jesus enters into every sphere and relationship of the believer’s life. This includes the believer’s professional, business, and vocational life. A Christian should be the most honest person in his community. Such words as *cheating*, *bribery*, and *corruption* should never be used to describe the actions of those who walk with Christ.

Part 1 — The Family Circle

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth” (Eph. 6:1-3).

The fifth commandment, “Honour thy father and thy mother,” makes it clear that in God’s scheme of things there are to be two parents and that they are meant to be equals in the partnership of parenthood. The commandment states that both are worthy of honor. To dishonor either is as much a transgression of the commandment as to dishonor both. Children were intended to grow up happy in the security that belonging to a family circle brings.

“Parents are entitled to a degree of love and respect which is due no other person. God Himself, who has placed upon them a responsibility for the souls committed to their charge, has ordained that during the earlier years of life, parents shall stand in the place of God to their children. And he who rejects the rightful authority of his parents is rejecting the authority of God. The fifth commandment requires children not only to yield respect, submission, and obedience to their parents, but also to give them love and tenderness, to lighten their cares, to guard their reputation, and to succor and comfort them in old age. It also enjoins respect for ministers and rulers and for all others to whom God has delegated authority.

“This, says the apostle, ‘is the first commandment with promise.’ Ephesians 6:2. To Israel, expecting soon to enter Canaan, it was a pledge to the obedient, of long life in that good land; but it has a wider meaning, including all the Israel of God, and promising eternal life upon the earth when it shall be freed from the curse of sin.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 308.

How does disobedience to parents relate to the other signs of the last days outlined in 2 Timothy 3:1-5?

This catalog describes last-day conditions and lists social ills that stem directly from the breakdown of the home and the dissolution of the family. In Romans 1:28-31 disobedience to parents is itemized as one of the marks of apostasy and rebellion against God.

What is promised to youth who heed the instruction of their parents? Prov. 1:8, 9.

THINK IT THROUGH: Why does the commandment say “honour”? Why does it not use such words as “obey,” “respect,” or “revere”?

Part 2 — Loving Our “Enemies”

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:43-45).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“God, we saw, was honouring us by allowing us to share in His labours . . . for the world He loves.”—*Miracle on the River Kwai*, pp. 163, 164.

Part 3 — Healing in Reconciliation

“If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” (Matt. 5:23, 24).

Although the principle expressed in Jesus’ statement could include anyone who has something against us, the term “brother” particularly designates those who are closest to us. Before we can be reconciled with God we must make things right with those around us. Reconciliation is more important than is practicing the forms of religion.

What gifts enable a disciple of Christ to achieve victory over enmity and strife? Heb. 12:14; 2 Tim. 2:22-24.

“The love of God is something more than a mere negation; it is a positive and active principle, a living spring, ever flowing to bless others. If the love of Christ dwells in us, we shall not only cherish no hatred toward our fellows; but we shall seek in every way to manifest love toward them.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 58.

SEARCH AND LEARN: Study 2 Corinthians 5:17-20 and answer the following:

1. What experience alone makes reconciliation possible?

2. What steps did God take to reconcile us to Him?

3. As a consequence, what ministry has been given to us, and by what means do we accomplish it?

4. What high office and responsibility is assigned those who minister reconciliation in Christ’s stead?

“Christ’s ambassadors . . . are distinguished for their fidelity (1 Cor. 4:1, 2; 1 Tim. 1:12), their zeal, their personal understanding of an experience with the great truths of the gospel, and their diligence in study, in prayer, in soul winning, and in building up the church.”—*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 869, 870.

Part 4 — How God Views Immorality

“The Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. . . . Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. . . . The Lord, the God of Israel, . . . hateth putting away: . . . therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously” (Mal. 2:14-16).

In order to get a view of how God views immorality we need only consider the emphasis placed on the subject in both the Old and New Testaments. A sample of the forceful statements God has given His people through the ages makes His position clear.

1. Lev. 20:10—Adultery was a transgression that was punishable by death in Israel.
2. Jer. 5:7-9, 14—God’s judgment was pronounced unequivocally against adultery.
3. Jer. 29:23—Notice how adultery was called “villany in Israel.”
4. Rom. 1:26-29—Homosexuality and fornication were condemned.
5. 1 Cor. 6:18—We are to flee fornication.
6. Eph. 5:3—Fornication and uncleanness should not so much as be named among God’s people.
7. Eph. 5:5, 6—Whoremongers have no inheritance in God’s kingdom.
8. 1 Thess. 4:3—It is God’s will that we abstain from fornication.
9. 1 Thess. 4:7—God has called us to holiness, not uncleanness.
10. Heb. 13:4—God will judge adulterers and whoremongers.
11. Jude 7—Sodom and Gomorrah are examples of God’s judgment on immorality.

The obvious reason the Bible has so much to say on the subject of sexual immorality is that, in bestowing on humanity the privilege of intelligently reproducing their own kind, God has endowed us with a power akin to that of the Creator. This fact surrounds marriage with an aura of sanctity that nothing must be permitted to rob. Is it any wonder then that God’s adversary does everything he can to tear down the institution of marriage? He well knows that if he can succeed in eroding the soil in which this sacred institution is rooted, he can accomplish his purpose of dehumanizing the race and obliterating the image of God.

In two direct encounters with transgressors of the seventh commandment Jesus demonstrated His tender, loving concern for the guilty and His willingness to forgive. Read about these in John 8:3-11 and John 4:5-10, 15-19, 28-30, 39-42.

“Christ hates the sin, but loves the sinner. This will be the spirit of all who follow Him. Christian love is slow to censure, quick to discern penitence, ready to forgive, to encourage, to set the wanderer in the path of holiness, and to stay his feet therein.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 462.

Part 5 — Honesty at Work

“Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God” (1 Peter 2:12).

“Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men” (2 Cor. 8:21).

Explain how this inspired counsel from the pens of Peter and Paul relates to the following real-life situations:

- Paying my debts promptly and fully.
- Returning what I have borrowed.
- Rendering an honest report of my income to tax authorities.
- Returning to a cashier excess change which has been given me in error.
- Leaving tools, equipment, and spare parts belonging to the firm for which I work instead of slipping them into my overall pocket and rationalizing that “they don’t pay me what I deserve anyway.”

(See 2 Corinthians 13:7; Rom. 12:17; 1 Thess. 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:2; Heb. 13:18.)

Did you notice that the same principle is repeated in all these passages of Scripture? The frequency with which honesty is mentioned by Bible writers tells us something about the importance God attaches to this virtue in the life of those who profess to be His followers. God realized how easily the dishonesty of the world around us could rub off onto even devout disciples unless we are constantly on our guard against it.

Why was honesty considered an essential qualification for appointment to leadership in the New Testament church? Acts 6:3.

It is interesting that in the selection of the first seven deacons, honesty, the infilling of the Holy Spirit, and wisdom were regarded as the three essential qualifications needed, and that of the three, honesty is listed first. Significant also is the fact that they were not only to be honest men but men who were *known* for their honesty—men of “honest report.” Their reputation was to be above reproach in order to glorify the Lord they served.

THINK IT THROUGH: Is it conceivable that God could have a lower standard for those who are elected to office in His church today than that He upheld in the days of the early church?

FURTHER STUDY: *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 87-96.

Part 6 — Focus of the Week

“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

If ever a Christian’s love is put to the test, it is in the relationships with others at his place of daily work. God’s Word does not condemn people for being rich. In fact it teaches that riches often are the result of God’s blessing (Prov. 10:22). However, it does condemn becoming rich through dishonest means or selfish practices. God hates *any act* which benefits one person at the cost of taking advantage of someone else. “A false balance is abomination to the Lord; but a just weight is his delight” (Prov. 11:1).

Summarize the counsel God gives in His Word to those among His disciples who are employees. Eph. 6:5-8. (Compare Col. 3:22-24; 1 Tim. 6:1, 2.)

In New Testament times most followers of Jesus came from among the laboring class. Many of the injunctions of the New Testament writers are addressed to employees or slaves. They are encouraged to render faithful service even when unjustly treated by their non-Christian employers or masters. Believers are admonished to place their case in the hands of the Judge who ultimately will set the record straight. (See James 5:7, 8.)

It is possible for an employee, while deploring the fact that his employer defrauds him in the matter of wages, to defraud his employer in the matter of time and productivity. Shortchanging *in time* is just as much dishonesty as shortchanging *in money*. Christian employers also have been given the responsibility of not defrauding their employees.

PERSONAL APPLICATIONS: This week we have studied what it means to walk with Jesus in home and community by applying in some specific ways the principles outlined in the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth commandments. Now we need to apply these in a personal way in our thoughts and actions during the week to come. Here are some suggestions for doing so:

- If there has been some strain in home or family relationships, why not do whatever can be done to make the matter right. Take time to talk over the problem with the person(s) involved or write or telephone a reconciling message. Do not act defensive. Be friendly and forgiving.
- If there also has been some sort of strained relationship with a friend or neighbor, take positive action to ease the problem.
- If something you are watching, reading, seeing, or hearing suggests impurity in thought, word, or deed, ask God to help you break away from such activities permanently.
- Go out of your way to be honest and transparent in all your dealings in the home and community so that no one can suspect you of dishonesty or lack of integrity in anything you say or do.



11

September 9-11
Adult Lesson

Christians in Word and Thought

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

The ninth commandment has to do with our witness. The primary intent of the commandment, “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour,” is to prohibit giving an untrue testimony against our neighbor that would cause him to suffer loss, either of his rightful property and possessions, or of his reputation and good name. In one sense covetousness—in violation of the tenth commandment—also can be recognized as giving birth and life to false witness or slander.

The total testimony of the Scriptures makes clear that the ninth commandment has a wider application than to the misrepresentation of a fellow human in a court of law or before a tribunal of his peers. The Bible has much to say about our words and their potential for being a blessing or a curse. There can be no doubt that God intended the ninth commandment to embrace the entire sphere of our spoken words. In the light that shines on God’s law from the gospel, it is clear that God intends the speech of His people to be not only strictly truthful but also kind, helpful, and edifying. Here the thoughts and motives play key roles. Of Jesus, the prophet says, “He will magnify the law, and make it honourable” (Isa. 42:21). This applies to those aspects of God’s law of love that govern our conversation in all spheres of our daily lives.

If, as we believe, it is out of the heart that the mouth speaketh (see Luke 6:45), then it is the thought that is father to the word. The motive—the underlying reason for what we do—likewise influences both the thought and the word. Of those who stand as overcomers upon the sea of glass someday, the Scriptures say, “In their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God” (Rev. 14:5). And James tells us, “If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man” (James 3:2). How important, then, our words are! The study of this week’s lesson should lead each of us to exclaim with Isaiah: “Woe is me! for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips” (Isa. 6:5).

Those who are aware of how great a price Heaven has paid to provide forgiveness of our sins and weaknesses will develop tenderness and graciousness that will give blessedness and tenderness to every thought and word.

Part 1 — Content and Discontent

“Put them in mind . . . to be ready to every good work, to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men.”

“But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and striving about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain” (Titus 3:1, 2, 9).

In no other way is the barometer of our internal “climate” more readily revealed than by the looks on our faces, the tones and volumes of our voices, and the intent of the words that flow from our mouths so effortlessly.

In 1 Timothy 6:6-8 Paul spoke of having learned to be content no matter what the circumstance in which he found himself—and he had been in some extremely difficult circumstances. Our words indicate the levels of our internal content/discontent ratio.

In contrast to the supremely valuable virtue of contentment, what assessment does inspiration place on a common source for discontent: greed for riches? 1 Tim. 6:9-11.

“Faith in God’s love and overruling providence lightens the burdens of anxiety and care. It fills the heart with joy and contentment in the highest or the lowliest lot. Religion tends directly to promote health, to lengthen life, and to heighten our enjoyment of all its blessings.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 600.

As implied in Paul’s words to Titus and Timothy, much in the way of negative emotions often is brought to bear upon religious and theological controversies. It is sad when such matters cannot be considered in a climate of contentment, mutual trust, and respect. To be able to do so is a hallmark of truly forgiven and forgiving souls.

SEARCH AND LEARN: Consider thoughtfully some of the examples the Bible records of the outworking of covetousness and envy in human lives:

1. Cain (Gen. 4:3-8).
2. Achan (Joshua 7:1).
3. Gehazi (2 Kings 5:20-24).
4. Miriam (Num. 12:1, 2).
5. Judas (Matt. 27:3-5).
6. Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5:1-10).

FURTHER STUDY: James 3:14-18; Gal. 5:24, 25.

Part 2 — The Power of Words

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

Read the entire passage that deals with the power of speech in James 3:2-13. What James says under inspiration about the power of speech is true not only of the spoken but also of the printed word. How many people have been destroyed by the attack of a malicious press! How many, on the other hand, have been boosted by a friendly press that has set out to build up their image and create a favorable reputation for them in the public mind! People in public life are dependent on a supportive press to bolster their image and are fearful of an antagonistic press that could injure their image irreparably. As a result they constantly attempt to keep on “the right side” of the press. The Bible employs such words as “fire,” “unruly evil,” “deadly poison,” “blessing,” and “cursing” to describe the power of the spoken and written word.

SEARCH AND LEARN: In Proverbs, Solomon uses some interesting expressions to describe the influence of our words. List these below after chapter and verse in which they are found:

12:25 _____

15:26 _____

18:4 _____

25:11 _____

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

THINK IT THROUGH: If words were rationed and my allocation were about twice as many as on this page of print for the day, what would I say? What would I leave unsaid?

FURTHER STUDY: *Christ's Object Lessons*, “Talents” (Speech), p. 337.

Part 3 — Words As Mischief-Makers

“Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people” (Lev. 19:16).

By contrast with this divine warning against mischief-making, notice the beautiful commendation in Psalms 15:1-3 that is pronounced upon the person who refrains from sinning against his or her neighbor in this respect.

How much tragedy would be averted if we always made sure of the facts before “repeating the story”! The incident that follows bears out this truth: Bob started the story at school that Bill, the new boy, was a thief. The evidence was incontrovertible. He had been caught red-handed stealing milk from Bob’s doorstep. In no time Bill was labeled and snubbed as a thief. The facts of the case were that Bill’s neighbor, whose house was identical to Bob’s, was going away on vacation for two weeks. Knowing that Bill’s mother was a widow with a large family of children, and that they were new to the neighborhood, he decided that, rather than cancel his milk supply, he would ask Bill to collect the milk from his doorstep while he was away. Bill, unfortunately, confused the two identical houses and took the milk from the wrong porch by mistake.

Summarize the golden counsel that the Bible gives in regard to repeating information we receive. Prov. 17:9.

The notion that is applied almost universally is that when we “know something about someone” it is our duty to tell someone in authority what we have learned or observed. But, strange as it may seem, this is not the principle which is to govern the life of a Christian. Instead we should follow the Bible teaching found in Matthew 18:15 and Galatians 6:1, 2.

According to this principle the first person to whom we should speak when we know that he or she has done wrong is to that person himself. Then he or she should be given the opportunity to make the wrong right or even demonstrate that our observation was mistaken in the first place. If the person with whom we discuss this wrong course of action in a spirit of loving concern displays a spirit of genuine repentance, we have achieved our purpose. It is not our business then to say another word about the matter to anyone. That responsibility rests on the person to whom we have spoken. If he or she persists in evil, Jesus tells us to take a witness with us; perhaps the person involved will listen to *two* persons when he or she would not give heed to *one*. Only when this has been done and the person still refuses to heed the counsel given, should we take the matter further—and to the church, at that. How much lingering harm would have been avoided if this divine blueprint always had been faithfully followed!

Part 4 — Truthful Words

“Speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.”

“Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.”

“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Eph. 4:15, 25, 29).

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

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

What contrast in truthfulness is drawn between those who are saved and those who are lost? (Compare Rev. 14:5 with Rev. 22:15.)

In what terms does God express His ideal for His people? Zech. 8:16.

Despite the long history of lying and falsehood that characterizes the human race, God makes it possible, through the new birth, for His people to meet His ideals and to be truthful and honest in their dealings and words. This trait particularly sets the Lord’s people apart from those who cannot practice truthfulness because of having yielded their lives and hearts to the father of lies.

THINK IT THROUGH: “Life’s best things—simplicity, honesty, truthfulness, purity, integrity—cannot be bought or sold. They are as free to the ignorant as to the educated, to the humble laborer as to the honored statesman.”—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 198.

FURTHER STUDY: *My Life Today*, p. 331.

Part 5 — Covetous Thoughts and Motives

“Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens” (Ex. 18:21).

In God’s estimation, covetousness in church leaders is a noxious weed to be uprooted from the life wherever and whenever it appears. (See 1 Tim. 3:3.) God’s insistence that leaders in His church be men and women who know the meaning of personal victory over this evil does not mean that He is not concerned about its manifestation in the lives of ordinary Christians. We must never lose sight of the fact that by virtue of our high calling all of us are spiritual leaders in our community, whether we hold office in the church or not. The Bible calls all who are followers of Jesus (whether we stand in the pulpit or sit in the pew) “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people: that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9). So the same high ideal that God sets for the leaders in His church—that they be “able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness” (Ex. 18:21), “not greedy of filthy lucre . . . , not covetous” (1 Tim. 3:3)—applies to all the members of His church, inasmuch as they are the spiritual leaders in contemporary society.

It surely must be clear that a church leader who is under the control of covetousness cannot be making recommendations, thinking thoughts, or speaking words that result from the movings of the Holy Spirit. The same must be true, although with some possible decrease in responsibility and blame, for one who is not a leader. Self-motivated words and actions do not come from the truly and fully forgiven heart.

How does freedom from covetousness, which God holds up as an ideal for His people, contrast with the social conditions that will represent a sign of the last days? 2 Tim. 3:1-5.

On one hand stands a group of people who are just as prone to covetousness as the second, but who, instead of letting it gain control of their lives, are allowing God to expel it from their lives. They do not *cherish* covetousness. By contrast, the people portrayed in 2 Timothy 3:2 allow covetousness to run amok and control their lives. In the case of the social conditions cataloged in 2 Timothy 3:1-5, the evil inherent in sinful human nature has reached epidemic proportions.

FURTHER STUDY: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 382-385.

Part 6 — Focus of the Week

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:5-8).

In Isaiah 14:12-14 Lucifer is pictured as saying, “I will be like the most high.” Jesus “was made in the likeness of men,” Lucifer said, “I will *ascend* above the heights.” Jesus *descended* as low as He possibly could, even to dying “the death of the cross”—the death reserved for the lowest of criminals. In the equation of salvation, Christ’s *humbling* of Himself had to outweigh Lucifer’s *exaltation* of himself. To the degree that Lucifer’s rebellion stemmed from covetousness and self-interest, Jesus, to secure our salvation, needed to manifest a spirit which was the very antithesis of covetousness and self-interest.

Even when Lucifer was attempting to deceive, there was a natural and marked contrast between the manner and style of conversation of our beloved Lord and the arch-deceiver. Those whose primary interest is personal gain use words as tools by which to gain their coveted goals. Truth and kindness are sacrificed to achieve a selfish end.

Just as real as battles fought on earthly fields between opposing armies is the battle between the power of Christ and Satan for the loyalty of the human heart. According to the loyalty chosen, the motives and thoughts give birth to words of life or words of death. Primarily it is covetousness that leads to falsehood and lying.

PERSONAL APPLICATIONS: There are more ways of being untruthful than telling outright lies. Here are some other ways that we can “bear false witness”:

- *Exaggeration*—adding to the story; embellishing the facts; embroidering the story with details that are figments of the imagination.
- *Distortion*—making it appear that what happened was to some extent different from what actually happened.
- *Wishful thinking*—reporting some sensational experience that happened to someone else, as having happened to us.
- *Pretense*—making believe that we are good Christians or that we support a certain position or person when we do not; doing what we do for the sake of making a good impression, when our hearts are not in it.
- *Misrepresentation*—advertising an article—an auto or a house for instance—and not revealing defects.
- *Innuendo*—a damaging hint, insinuation, or indirect suggestion.
- *Silence*—keeping quiet when something is said that is injurious to another person’s reputation, and by such silence giving the impression that it is so, when a word or two could save that person from being defamed.



12

September 16-22
Adult Lesson

Selfless Service

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

Two closely related sins are exposed by the tenth commandment: discontent and selfishness. Stated positively, there are two traits of character that God longs to see developed in the lives of His people: contentment and unselfishness. In a certain sense it is difficult to separate the two because they overlap and merge into each other. Yet they can be identified clearly enough to be able to discuss and study them separately. This is why the previous lesson and this one touch upon the tenth commandment.

The story in Luke that follows the memory text for this week—the story of the rich fool—illustrates the fact that discontent and selfishness go hand in hand. Not satisfied with what he had already, the rich farmer declared: “I will pull down my barns and build greater” (Luke 12:18). But his desire to build bigger and better barns did not come from an unselfish motive such as having more to share with others. On the contrary, Jesus says that he laid “up treasure for himself” (verse 21). That was the crux of the problem. The Bible does not condemn a person for being rich. It only condemns a rich man for spending his wealth on himself instead of using it to bring blessing to others. What matters to God is not what a person possesses, but what he or she does with it.

This holds true of all talents God gives us—whether intellect, ability, special endowments, physical strength, or social and spiritual advantage. God could not hold it against us for possessing many talents. He is their Source. (See Mat. 25:14-30.) But He will judge severely those who use their talents to serve their own interests instead of recognizing them as a sacred trust with which to bring blessing to those about them.

The question that we need to come to grips with is whether we are living to serve ourselves or to serve others. What is the focal point of our lives—ourselves or those about us? This is the question we must ponder carefully in our lesson this week. Let us allow the Holy Spirit to guide us into “all truth”—including the truth about ourselves.

Part 1 — The Motives of the Master

“In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat. But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him ought to eat? Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work” (John 4:31-34).

“As His words to the woman had aroused her conscience, Jesus rejoiced. He saw her drinking of the water of life, and His own hunger and thirst were satisfied. The accomplishment of the mission which He had left heaven to perform, strengthened the Saviour for His labor, and lifted Him above the necessities of humanity. To minister to a soul hungering and thirsting for the truth was more gratifying to Him than eating and drinking. It was a comfort, a refreshment, to Him. Benevolence was the life of His soul.”—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 190, 191.

Christ’s total dedication to the service of mankind is reflected in His announcement of His mission to the townspeople of Nazareth among whom He had spent His youth. (Read Luke 4:18, 19. Here Jesus quoted a portion of Isaiah 61:1-3. Compare Isaiah’s statement with Luke 4:18, 19, and note the additional lines of service Isaiah mentions that also were true in Christ’s ministry.)

In the way of life that Christ bequeathed His church, how significant are “things” in relation to interests that pertain to the kingdom of God? Matt. 6:24-34.

“Jesus does not release us from the necessity of effort, but He teaches that we are to make Him first and last and best in everything. We are to engage in no business, follow no pursuit, seek no pleasure, that would hinder the outworking of His righteousness in our character and life. Whatever we do is to be done heartily, as unto the Lord.

“Jesus, while He dwelt on earth, dignified life in all its details by keeping before men the glory of God, and by subordinating everything to the will of His Father. If we follow His example, His assurance to us is that all things needful in this life ‘shall be added.’ Poverty or wealth, sickness or health, simplicity or wisdom—all are provided for in the promise of His grace.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 99.

THINK IT THROUGH: Is it possible to follow Christ’s example of service today, or do modern restrictions, such as professional requirements and liability make it impracticable?

FURTHER STUDY: *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* “True Motive in Service,” pp. 93-101.

Part 2 — The Spirit of Discipleship

“Jesus called them all together and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the heathen have power over them, and the leaders have complete authority. This, however, is not the way it shall be among you. If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest; and if one of you wants to be first, he must be your slave—like the Son of Man, who did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life to redeem many people’” (Matt. 20:25-28, TEV).

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

Christ’s handling of the situation reveals that He regarded all of them as sharing in the guilt of the two. He called together the entire group and addressed to all the words of loving rebuke found in Matthew 20:25-28.

Christ’s words make it clear that inordinate ambition is a form of covetousness. The ambition His servants should have is that of making an important contribution rather than that of being important people.

What was the significance of the unforgettable object lesson Jesus gave His disciples at their last meeting prior to His crucifixion? John 13:1-17.

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

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

Part 3 — Giving Instead of Getting

“The people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise” (Luke 3:10, 11).

John the Baptist was involved in a head-on collision with the spirit of the world, whose motto was “get.” “Get all you can out of life; get all you can for yourself.” John was saying in effect, “This is the spirit of Satan; this is the spirit of fallen human nature. You must make an about-face; you must repent and be converted. God must give you a new spirit. The evidence of this change in your life will be that instead of your motto being ‘Get,’ it will now be ‘Give.’ This is the spirit of the Master.”

How is the divine principle implicit in John’s words illustrated in the plan of salvation? John 3:16; Rom. 8:32.

Summarize how, in both the Old and the New Testament, the Lord earnestly entreats His people to reveal this spirit of giving. Isa. 58:6-11; Matt. 25:31-45.

Both these challenging and heart-searching passages of Scriptures reveal that the spirit of giving does not consist merely of giving money, food, and clothing. It involves the giving of *ourselves*—of our time, our talents, our compassion, our love, and our tender concern. It means caring. It means sharing. It calls for suffering with and feeling for those who need our love and care. It calls for us to forgive as we have needed to be forgiven.

In Christ’s story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) the injured man needed more than sympathy. He needed someone’s time; someone’s tender, loving care. The priest and the Levite were too selfish to give time and attention. They were too busy performing—even “religious activity.” The Good Samaritan has been immortalized for the fact that he took the time and the trouble to do what needed to be done for a fellow human.

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

Part 4 — Needs, Not Wants

“My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19).

“Let us not be always thinking of our wants and never of the benefits we receive. . . .

“Our God is a tender, merciful Father. His service should not be looked upon as a heart-saddening, distressing exercise. It should be a pleasure to worship the Lord and to take part in His work. God would not have His children, for whom so great salvation has been provided, act as if He were a hard, exacting taskmaster. He is their best Friend, and when they worship Him, He expects to be with them, to bless and comfort them, filling their hearts with joy and love. The Lord desires His children to take comfort in His service and to find more pleasure than hardship in His work. He desires that those who come to worship Him shall carry away with them precious thoughts of His care and love, that they may be cheered in all the employments of daily life, that they may have grace to deal honestly and faithfully in all things.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 103.

What simple, basic philosophy kept the apostle Paul going through the many trials and privations that he endured as a pioneer missionary of the gospel? Phil. 4:11-13.

When we talk about sacrifice, we generally think about giving up our *wants* rather than our *needs*. When we complain of the “sacrifices” we are called upon to make for the cause of God, we generally are concerned about the luxuries and extras that we might have to forego. How many of us ever have been called upon to give up for God something that we really needed?

David Livingstone is said to have declared, “People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be called a sacrifice which is simply paid back as a small part of the great debt owing to our God, which we can never repay? Is that a sacrifice which brings its own reward in healthful activity, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, and a bright hope of a glorious hereafter?

“Away with such a word, such a view, and such a thought! It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege. Anxiety, sickness, suffering or danger now and then, with a foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life, may make us pause and cause the spirit to waver and sink; but let this only be for a moment. All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall hereafter be revealed in and for us. I never made a sacrifice. Of this we ought not to talk when we remember the great sacrifice which He made who left His Father’s throne on high to give Himself for us.”

Part 5 — Apostolic Christianity

“All that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need” (Acts 2:44, 45).

“Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need” (Acts 4:34, 35).

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

THINK IT THROUGH: Could this be part of what is involved in the prediction that “before the final visitation of God’s judgments upon the earth there will be among the people of the Lord such a revival of primitive godliness as has been witnessed since apostolic times” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 464)?

Why was special attention given to the example that is cited of a member whose love for the cause prompted him to lay everything he had on the altar of service? Acts 4:36, 37.

The sale of his property was his first step into full-time service. As often happens, the dedication of his means led to the dedication of his life; Barnabas became one of the early church’s first foreign missionaries, accompanying Paul on his first missionary journey, and later branching out on his own. How often this still happens today! Sometimes the only thing that keeps people from accepting the call of God into His service is earthly encumbrances. Once these ties are cut, the Spirit of God is given a free hand to guide and direct into rewarding and successful service for the Master. As we near the final stages of the conflict we will see this happening more and more in all parts of the world.

“If you give yourself to God’s service, He who has all power in heaven and earth will provide for your needs.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 99.

FURTHER STUDY: *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 70, 71.

Part 6 — Focus of the Week

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

Christ’s statement forms the climax of an address in which He briefed the twelve disciples before sending them out on their first missionary journey or evangelistic crusade. His words must be read and understood against this background. By urging us to take up our cross and follow Him, Jesus indicates His desire that we identify ourselves with Him in His mission of service for those who are lost.

By the statement “he that findeth his life,” Christ is referring to the tendency of fallen nature to seek to evade and escape paying the price of such a commitment. But to those who do dedicate themselves in total self-abandonment to minister to the lost, Jesus promises that they shall not be the losers in the end. It may appear to those who see things through the natural eye that they have “washed their lives” or “thrown their lives away,” but Christ assures us that in the light of eternity it will be seen that they have not lost, but gained.

PERSONAL APPLICATIONS:

It might be argued that today we live in a different kind of world from that in which the gospel was launched and thus not be expected to live as they did; our entire cultural system has completely changed. The argument is a valid one. Nevertheless the underlying principle remains unchanged: *outward material resources should never become a substitute for inward spiritual resources*. Inner wealth can compensate for outer poverty, but outer wealth can never compensate for inner poverty. The key thought in Christ’s instruction to the Twelve is *simplicity*. (See Matt. 10:9-11.) What can we do to make it the keynote of our lives today? Here are a few suggestions:

- Find someone who is troubled. Discover that person’s need. Devise some service to meet that need, then render it.
- Find someone in need of a meal and provide for the needy person at a cost to yourself. Do this either by giving this person the food you planned to eat or giving cash to cover the cost of the meal. Then go without that meal.
- Provide clothing to someone who needs it more than you do instead of buying an item you planned to purchase for yourself.
- Find a possession that has special meaning to you. Sell it and use the money in some way to advance the work of the Lord in your area.
- Take some of the time you planned to use in leisure activities and use it to help someone in special need. Perhaps you might take a shut-in for a ride into the country or go shopping for a senior citizen who finds it difficult to shop.



13

September 23-29
Adult Lesson

Walking All the Way With Jesus

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

The purpose of our lessons this quarter has been to develop the relationship between forgiveness and the changed life. The keeping of “the commandments of God” must be combined with “the faith of Jesus.” This emphasis particularly is needed in an age that is distinguished by two dominant characteristics: *lawlessness* and *hypocritical profession*. There never was a time in human history when lawlessness was so rampant, so blatant, as it is today.

Strangely though, there also never was a time when there was so much *religious profession* as there is today. Thousands of people profess to be followers of Jesus. Many claim to have the Holy Spirit and even *boast* of receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit. “Born again” is a popular expression not only in religious but social and political circles in the United States. We indeed are witnessing the fulfillment of the Pauline prediction that one of the signs, or marks, of the last days would be a generation “having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” (2 Tim. 3:5).

While it is not our prerogative to pass judgment on the religious experience of others, God has given us unmistakably clear guidelines as to how we can differentiate between the genuine and the counterfeit for ourselves. Any doctrine that, while posing as being Christian, undermines or denies the authority of God’s law as an absolute standard is untrue no matter how impressive it may appear to be. (See Matt. 5:19; 7:21-23; 1 John 2:3-6.)

“The law is but a transcript of the character of God. Behold in your heavenly Father a perfect manifestation of the principles which are the foundation of His government.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 7.

The Ten Commandments contain deep and broad principles of righteousness that must become the basic ingredients of Christian experience. Contrary to there being any conflict between discipleship and obedience, discipleship will lead us into the cultivation of these character traits. The deeper our sense of gratitude and unworthiness for God’s forgiveness the greater our dedication to walk with the Lord in joyous obedience to His will.

Part 1 — Walking in Joy

“Blessed [happy] is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Ps. 1:1, 2).

How tragic it is when Christians give the impression that walking with Jesus in loving obedience is a burdensome and joyless experience! The message that Christians should proclaim to the world is that the path of obedience is the path of happiness. This should be proclaimed by their lives more than by their words. All the misery that has descended upon the human race is the result of transgression. How different the lot of humanity would have been if we had never departed from the path of obedience! Holiness brings happiness.

“God made man perfectly holy and happy. . . . It is transgression of God’s law—the law of love—that has brought woe and death.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 9.

“After his sin, he [man] could no longer find joy in holiness, and he sought to hide from the presence of God. Such is still the condition of the unrenewed heart.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 17.

The joy of holiness can be ours in full measure if we allow God to take over in our lives and restore us to full harmony with His desires for us.

SEARCH AND LEARN: How does the Old Testament uphold the principle that holiness brings happiness?

1. Ps. 16:8-11 _____
2. Ps. 40:8 _____
3. Prov. 16:20 _____
4. Prov. 29:18 _____

How does the New Testament endorse the Old Testament principle that obedience to God’s requirements is a joyous experience?

1. John 13:17 _____
2. Gal. 5:22 _____
3. 1 John 5:2, 3 _____

THINK IT THROUGH: How can my life better demonstrate to those around me that being Christ’s disciple is a joyful experience?

Part 2 — Walking in the Light

“If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

Notice the twofold blessing promised to those who walk in the light: fellowship with our brethren and cleansing from sin.

This text speaks volumes. It reminds us that disharmony generally results from rejecting light and walking in darkness. Harmony with fellow believers is one of the blessed bonuses of walking in every ray of light that God causes to shine upon our pathway. We need never fear that when walking in the light we will walk alone. The same light of truth that God graciously causes to shine onto our path also shines on the paths of fellow pilgrims. As we walk in the light that shines upon our path and they in the light that shines on theirs, we will walk together in fellowship and harmony. The second blessing is that of forgiveness of sin. There can be no forgiveness when we stubbornly resist the light God causes to shine on our path. Such resistance is tantamount to rebellion. And for God to pardon rebellion when we persist in it, would amount to His condoning it, which He cannot do. (See 1 Sam. 15:22, 23; Heb. 10:26.)

What channel does God use to shed light upon our path? How do we take advantage of it? Ps. 119:105.

How does Isaiah 50:10, 11 illustrate what happens when people do not respond to the light that He sends?

In this pointed passage of Scripture the Lord likens those who turn from obeying His voice to human sophistries and accept human standards to people who turn away from genuine light to walk in sparks of their own kindling. The sparks soon go out, leaving them in darkness.

What will be our experience when we do respond to the light He graciously sends? Prov. 4:18.

“The conditions of eternal life, under grace, are just what they were in Eden—perfect righteousness, harmony with God, perfect conformity to the principles of his law. The standard of character presented in the Old Testament is the same that is presented in the New Testament. This standard is not one to which we cannot attain. In every command or injunction that God gives there is a promise, the most positive, underlying the command. God has made provision that we may become like unto Him.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 76.

Part 3 — Walking in Penitence

“As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Eze. 33:11).

Repentance means turning from the way that leads to death to walk in the path that leads to life.

The call to repentance and the assurance of forgiveness are the dominant themes of the Old Testaments. “Thus saith the Lord God; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations” (Eze. 14:6). “Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin” (Eze. 18:30).

Messages such as these come to us over and over again through God’s prophets. (See Prov. 1:22, 23; Hosea 12:6; Joel 2:12.)

The message of John the Baptist was a call to repentance. (See Matt. 3:2) Jesus came to “call . . . sinners to repentance” (Matt. 9:13). The resounding call of the Spirit-baptized church after Pentecost was, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). The call of the resurrected Lord to His church on earth to the end of time is a loving entreaty to repent (Rev. 3:19).

What beautiful promise can we claim when we respond to God’s call to repentance? Isa. 55:6, 7.

Verse 6 challenges us to claim God’s mercy and pardon while the door of mercy still stands open. Stubborn rejection of God’s mercy could lead eventually to making it impossible for us to respond to the pleadings of the Holy Spirit. But verse 7 indicates that, when we feel the pleadings of the Holy Spirit, the opportunity still remains for us to take advantage of God’s willingness to “abundantly pardon.”

How do we go about accomplishing this? This is the answer that God gives:

1. We must be willing to forsake our wicked ways.
2. We must be willing to give up our unrighteous thoughts.
3. We must “return unto the Lord.”

THINK IT THROUGH: Do you understand repentance to be a once-for-all experience, or is it an ongoing attitude of heart and mind? Can there be genuine repentance without a change in heart and mind? Are you aware that your heart and mind have been changed through the work of the Holy Spirit?

FURTHER STUDY: 2 Chron. 7:14; Job 11:14; Matt. 9:13; Acts 3:19.

Part 4 — Walking in Trusting Obedience

“His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it” (John 2:5).

We would do well to make the words of our text the keystone of our lives. Notice the wealth of meaning contained in these simple yet profound words:

“*Whatsoever*”—When it is clear that God is speaking we should not stop to consider whether what He says seems reasonable or practical to the human mind. Trust God enough to believe that He would not ask you to do the impossible or anything that would not be in your best interest, no matter what it is that He asks you to do and no matter what the cost.

“*He*”—It does not matter what anyone else says, whether relative, friend, preacher, or teacher. In matters of spiritual truth, there is only one thing we need to be sure of—that it is God who is instructing us from His Word. (See Isa. 8:19, 20; John 10:2-5.)

“*Saith*”—When God speaks, He reveals His will so clearly, so plainly that, if we are attuned to His voice, we can know beyond any shadow of doubt that He has spoken.

“*Unto you*”—We are not required to look around and see what others are doing or what God is instructing others to do. Whatever He requires of us we must do, regardless of whether someone else obeys or is required to obey.

“*Do it*”—We are to act without waiting to know all the reasons and answers. To obey God is to trust Him; to trust Him is to obey Him.

Summarize what Jesus said about religious profession being no substitute for implicit obedience to God’s requirements. Matt. 7:13, 14, 21-23.

“Obedience is the test of discipleship. It is the keeping of the commandments that proves the sincerity of our professions of love. When the doctrine we accept kills sin in the heart, purifies the soul from defilement, bears fruit unto holiness, we may know that it is the truth of God. When benevolence, kindness, tenderheartedness, sympathy, are manifest in our lives; when the joy of doing right is in our hearts; when we exalt Christ, and not self, we may know that our faith is of the right order.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 146, 147.

Translating the Bible into a native tongue, a missionary had difficulty finding the word for *obedience*, a virtue seemingly never practiced by the people involved. As the translator headed home one evening, his dog remained behind in the village. But the translator’s whistle brought the dog running at top speed. “Your dog is all ear,” observed one of the villagers, using a native expression. The dedicated worker took hold of that expression at once and found he had a beautiful word for obedience. If we will be “all ear” to our Lord we will find that this is the way to peace.

Part 5 — Walking Toward Holiness

“This is the will of God, even your sanctification” (1 Thess. 4:3).

“It is only through Christ that we can be brought into harmony with God, with holiness.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 23.

Sanctification is a word that bothers many because it sounds complicated to them. Yet it is neither complicated nor frightening. It simply represents the process whereby God makes us holy. Holiness is not something to be feared, as though it would turn us into fanatics. It means having the image of God, which has been defaced by sin, restored in our characters—being transformed into the likeness of Christ. What a wonderful privilege!

What is the extent of the sanctification that God makes possible for us? 1 Thess. 5:23, 24.

The evidence in Scripture that God has called His people to holiness is almost inexhaustible. (See, for example, these passages: Rom. 6:19, 22; 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 4:24; 1 Thess. 3:13; 4:7; 1 Tim. 2:15; Titus 2:3; Heb. 12:10, 14.)

While it is impossible for us in our human frailty to reach this standard, what precious assurance does God give us that helps us realize that He is able to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves? Jude 24, 25.

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

SEARCH AND LEARN: Analyze the following expressions in the context of 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24:

“The very God of peace” _____

“sanctify you wholly” _____

“be preserved blameless” _____

“He . . . will do it” _____

Part 6 — Focus of the Quarter

“Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14).

An alternate rendering to this text, reflected in most modern English translations, is “Blessed are they that washed their robes.” Whichever translation we accept, the message remains basically the same: those who enter the kingdom of God will be those whose characters have been purged from impurity; those who have renounced sin, which is rebellion against God—transgression of His law. (See 1 John 3:4; Rev. 21:27.)

“The condition of eternal life is now just what it always has been,—just what it was in Paradise before the fall of our first parents,—perfect obedience to the law of God, perfect righteousness. If eternal life were granted on any condition short of this, then the happiness of the whole universe would be imperiled. The way would be open for sin, with all its train of woe and misery, to be immortalized.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 62.

What does the Bible teach about using our own strength to attain to the standard of obedience which will qualify us for entrance into the kingdom of God? John 15:5; Phil. 4:13.

Notice the complementary statements in these two verses:

“WITHOUT CHRIST NOTHING”

“WITH CHRIST EVERYTHING”

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

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

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

PERSONAL APPLICATION: The lessons this quarter have been designed to help us understand how much God longs to forgive us and to restore us to His image. It is not enough to understand this intellectually. We must experience it personally. And when we do, the clouds of frustration and despair will lift from our minds and the joyous sunshine of Christ’s love will fill our beings with the desire to belong to Him—to allow Him to live out His kind of life within us.

Lesson for Fourth Quarter, 1984

Sabbath School members who have not received a copy of the Adult Lesson for the fourth quarter of 1984 will be helped by the following outline in studying the first two lessons. The title of this series is "Jesus Our Mediator."

First Lesson

THE GREAT GULF

Memory Text, Isa. 59:1, 2

1. *The Holiness of God (Isa. 6:2, 3)*
2. *My Thoughts Are Not Your Thoughts (Isa. 55:8, 9)*
3. *We Are Sinners (Ps. 51:5)*
4. *Rebels (Rom. 8:7)*
5. *A Moral Man (John 3:1-3)*
6. *Focus of the Week (John 3:14, 15)*

Second Lesson

THE GO-BETWEEN

Memory Text, 1 Tim. 2:5

1. *The Trinity—One God in Three Persons (2 Cor. 13:14)*
2. *The Second Person of the Godhead (Rev. 5:6)*
3. *Before the World Was (Titus 1:2)*
4. *Between God and Us (John 14:6)*
5. *Between Humans (Eph. 2:16)*
6. *Focus of the Week (Heb. 10:5-7)*

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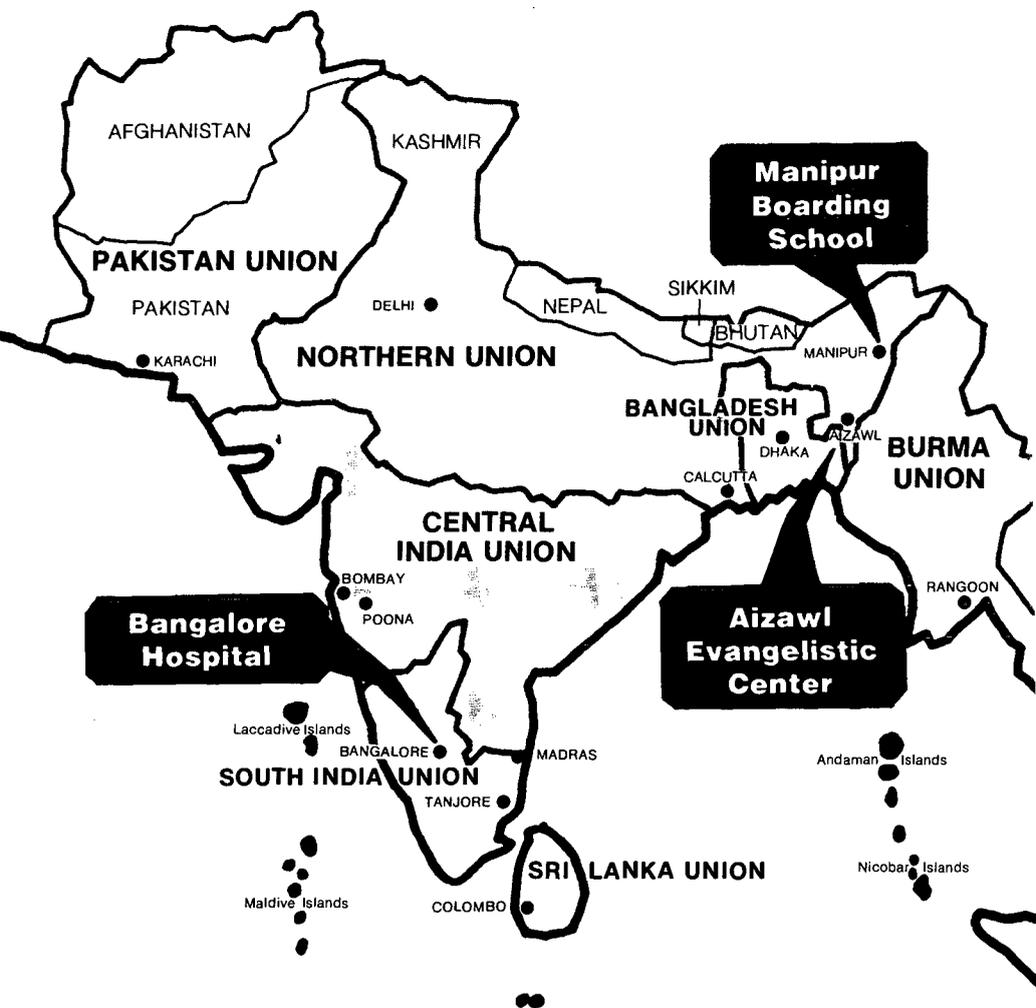
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Burma Union	34,980,600	108	8,555	11,077
Central India U.	182,525,134	268	35,022	42,382
Northern Union	402,613,218	179	23,821	32,476
Pakistan Union	81,000,000	45	4,567	8,986
South India U.	112,391,632	345	50,687	50,856
Sri Lanka Union	14,859,295	23	1,460	1,546
Division Total	923,369,879	996	128,256	153,550